



SURVIVING GOLIATH

**A Story of Eminent Domain
and Divine Intervention**

FINALLY OVER

Over the past 18 years now, Beth and I have been strung along by unfulfilled expectations, shallow promises, gross impositions, false assumptions, changing personnel, miscalculated dates and all the other uncertainties, indecisions and injustices that can accompany Eminent Domain condemnations. Consequently, I have inadvertently strung you along also. You, too, have been patiently waiting to hear all the details concerning our odyssey with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and how it plays like another case of “What the devil meant for evil, God meant for good”—as I’ve been saying it would. But, it’s over now. We’ve finally settled our case with the GDOT. It never got to trial. As far as the settlement goes, I really can’t add anything more than what I’ve already written in last month’s newsletter. We didn’t exactly slay Goliath; but, we survived him. It truly is a Proverbs 30:9 thing. If you need more details—we’re an open book—just contact us and I’ll be glad to share everything with you in detail. I just don’t feel this is the venue for that. Beth and I couldn’t be more grateful for your patience and understanding with us over the years—a time that has handcuffed us from being able to share too much information about this case. Now that it’s over, I’m considerably more free to do so. And, though it’s never been my intention to sensationalize anything in any of our newsletters over the years, what you’re about to read truly is—in no uncertain terms—sensational!

A SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENON

This is the account of how God has taken an apparent calamity and injustice and turned it into a glorious triumph. Sometimes mere survival is, in itself, a glorious triumph—perhaps even a miracle. This is the culmination of all I’ve been telling you would happen after all these suspense-filled years. It’s as if I had already seen the end from the beginning; yet, of course, I didn’t. And, I certainly could’ve never guessed or imagined the process. I can only explain it as a supernatural phenomenon. I could call it an un-heard-of series of incredible coincidences; but, doing so would betray what I know, in my heart of hearts, to be true. Not everything that’s true can be proven. I can’t prove to you God did these things. But, I can’t prove to you that He exists either. Some truths have to be taken by faith. When putting these events together for you, I was reminded of just how good, powerful and faithful our God truly is! He operates on a totally different economy than us. At times, He almost seems abusive; but, those who truly know him know He’s not. Those who doubt and slander God, and mock those who trust Him, fail to realize the bigger eternal perspective. I hope this will encourage you in your walk with the Lord and whet your appetite to faithfully serve Him.

STARTING IN THE MIDDLE

This thing is so convoluted I barely know where to begin. Many of you are already somewhat familiar with our story from SHA’s beginning; so, with the exception of a brief setup, I’ll start from when the highway first became an issue for us back in 1999.

If you'd like to review our entire story from A–Z, you can invite me to your church, where I'd be glad to share it. Or, you can hear a more detailed audio version of our story by going to myshepherdshill.org/miracles. This offers listeners our story from the beginning to when SHA first opened its doors to our first group of students. What you'll read below takes over from there. The other option is that you can wait for me to finish the book, *The Miracles of Shepherd's Hill*; but, God only knows when I'll get it done. The book will give a much more comprehensive experience into all that God has done for, with and through Beth and I over these many years. Now that this GDOT thing, and all that's gone with it, is over with, perhaps I can finally get it completed. It's beyond remarkable!

A BRIEF LOOK BACK

In May of 1994, while completing our 3rd year at Toccoa Falls Bible College, and after a long series of circumstantial miracles, Beth and I, somehow, acquired the dilapidated remnant of a 60 acre abandoned farm that we now call Shepherd's Hill Academy. We did it with God's grace, \$200 and a handshake! Only God could know what that \$200 and a handshake would eventually produce. What was crazy is that we knew we were supposed to have this property a year and a half before it was even for sale! But, because it was all tied up in the legal system, it couldn't be sold. Not only was it the former hub of a big-time drug dealing operation, but a 3-party murder/suicide as well. Not long after acquiring the farm, we erected an 8 foot cross on Shepherd's Hill to commemorate the very place where we would come out and pray as a family during that year and a half before the property would come up for sale. After God orchestrated the events that led to us actually acquiring the farm, the next 7 years were spent carving out an existence, keeping the bills paid and laying the groundwork for SHA. It was a brutally difficult time for Beth and me. For the kids, however, when they weren't helping me roof houses in 8 different states, like migrant workers, it was an adventure.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

The GDOT fiasco began in late summer of 1999. Beth was pregnant with our 5th child, Asa. That's when she and I discovered an aerial photograph of our farm on the front page of our local newspaper. The picture had a dotted line running through the center of it charting the GDOT's newly proposed "Martin Bypass". Because the GDOT had never officially contacted us, we had to contact them. That's when they verbally confirmed to us that a 4-lane divided highway was, indeed, coming through the middle of all we had so diligently worked for and endured up to that point—over 5 years at that time. We were both physically sick. I mean that in the literal sense. This was especially true for Beth. I have good reasons to believe that this ultimately affected Asa in utero; but, of course, I could never prove it

FOOL'S PARADISE?

In addition to the 2 years it took preparing for our move from the Chicago area and looking for just the right college—along with 3 years of actually attending Toccoa Falls College—Beth and I had put virtually every ounce of our energy, time, prayer, money, blood, sweat and tears into the farm, doing what we truly believed God had inspired us to do. But, that verbal confirmation from the GDOT, and that aerial picture in the newspaper, were both gnawing reminders that I may have led my wife and kids into a decade-long fool's paradise. It caused doubt and fear—both of which the enemy exploits to destroy the faith of so many—and almost our own. With the exception of finishing the rehabbing of our old farmhouse, for almost two years we put a halt on building anything else for SHA, lest we be toiling for nothing.

A PAINFUL EDUCATION

After much complication, Asa was born two months premature on a snowy January 27th, 2000. After a miserable, albeit educational, 10 1/2 months, Asa went to be with the Lord on another snowy night in the wee hours of November 19th, 2000. We buried him at the foot of the cross on Shepherd's Hill—the very place our family regularly prayed to receive this property. We did this for no other reason than we were flat broke and had no other options. We also had no idea that we would be burying him on future GDOT land. In fact, his grave was on the GDOT's original highway alignment. But, God knew things we couldn't begin to understand. Over time, however, I believe I've come to grasp at least some of them. Our son's birth, life and death would become the impetus for a globally-recognized ministry.

JUST ENOUGH

After a series of meetings and letter-writing campaigns over the next several months and then years, the GDOT finally agreed to move the highway alignment off Asa's grave and away from our home and the SHA main campus. And, though it was only about a 100 yard move, it would be just enough to keep the grave on our property. We couldn't know it at the time, but it would also be just enough to allow us to continue operating once the GDOT's construction stage began in 2013. But, without this seemingly insignificant move, SHA would have likely ended the moment construction began.

TRADING DIRT FOR DIAMONDS

Keep in mind, construction didn't begin until 12 years after SHA opened for residential students—taking our first student in August of 2001. A whole lot happened in those 12 years. From 1999 to just recently, in 2017, a series of mind-numbing, financially-burdening, time-wasting and frustrating emotional roller coasters has been our lot. Yet, in the midst of these 18 years, God could not have proven to be more omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient and faithful! Like the cross on Calvary, He was taking a physical calamity, injustice and apparent disaster—and using it for our ultimate good and for His ultimate glory. We just had to convince our constituency of that; because, all the evidence appeared to support the contrary.

BUILDING AN ARC IN THE DESERT

From 1999 to 2001, before we took our first residential student, the devil tried everything he could to keep us from opening our doors to our first group of students. With the road hanging over our heads, we were constantly between a rock and a hard place. Do we open knowing a road is coming? Do we wait? Do we re-locate? How? We were broke—and stuck where we were planted. We didn't know it then; but, the grace of God was working in the midst of all this. Then, we, basically, felt the Lord say, "Start building; open up anyway; and, leave the rest to Me." We had no idea how things were going to go down. But, we knew God knew. And, as always, when we obeyed the light God gave us—despite dissension from many well-meaning people—He gave us more light. So we forged ahead, knowing that the GDOT could take years to actually get started on building a highway. After all, it was still our land. The GDOT hadn't officially condemned it until 2010. It was like building an arc in the middle of a desert. So, with absolutely nothing to do it with, but faith in God's Word, we did it anyway. The first thing we felt we had to do was finish our house. We needed a home.

A SEVEN YEAR REHAB

After 7 years in the works, it wasn't until the summer of 2001 that we finished rehabbing the old farm house. Today, that house is now the Boy's Next Step House. So, basically, the entire time we lived in it, it was a construction project. But before I could install the final pieces of siding, we felt strongly that God was telling us to move out of it. And, like so many other times when we felt God was speaking to us, it didn't seem to make sense at the time. However, we obeyed. Consequently, the house wasn't officially finished until we actually moved out of it. So, there it stood—finished and empty. For the next two months I fielded questions from friends and family as to why we would do such a thing. Other than "God said so" I had no answers for them. People wanted to rent it; yet, the Lord wouldn't allow it. I'm sure folks thought I had lost it—especially with all we were going through at the time. And, though, I was definitely searching, I hadn't lost anything. Because, all I was searching for was the perfect will of God.

THE MEETING

Consequently, Beth and I refinanced the farm and acquired a brand new double-wide mobile home. We got it for a song; because, the manufacturer was going out of business. We put it out on Shepherd's Hill, where we still live today—not because our son, Asa, was buried out there; but, because it had a beautiful view of the Blue Ridge mountains. Then, one evening, after an incredible time alone with God in that empty farmhouse, I felt led to walk back over to our new double-wide mobile home, gather Beth and the kids around our dinner table—though we weren't eating dinner—and tell them this: "I want all of you to remember this time and date. Never forget it. Because, what I'm about to tell you I strongly sense came from the Lord. If you will remind me to praise God and to thank Him for all we're going through right now (Asa, the highway, no work, ministry confusion, lack of funds, etc) this ministry and this

family are about to be blessed beyond our wildest imaginations. We're going to finally know exactly why we're here and where we're to go from here. It may be in a couple of days, a week, but no longer than a month. But, always remember what I've told you this day." They were all on board. About a week later, I got a phone call from the headmaster of a boarding school in Atlanta. It was prayer—and my statement to my family—fulfilled! It would launch the beginning of the ministry we now know as SHA.

A DIVINE GIFT

One other circumstantial miracle I needed to mention before going any further was the fact that during this same time I felt the Lord was wanting us to acquire the 20 acres on our western border. This had to be a joke—right? We were flat broke; and, when I approached him, the owner wasn't even close to wanting to sell his property. Yet, in God's perfect timing, he capitulated, stating, "I've been watching you and your family from a distance. Whatever you're doing over there, your God is in it!" He then agreed to sell his property to us for just what he paid for it over five years earlier. Real estate prices skyrocketed in those 5 years! In his honor, we still call the property "Cliff's Hill" to this day. And, because we got it for a song too, and had never been late on any mortgage payments, our banker loaned us the money to acquire it. Again, it made no sense; but, God had a brilliant plan for it. Interestingly, a decade later, a different neighbor would approach me with another 20 acres to sell us east of the gravel road (Price Rd.). He, offered to sell it to us for just what he owed on it—and in perfect timing!

A VISION BEGINS

After that phone call from the headmaster in Atlanta, he started sending us troubled teens from his boarding school. This was August of 2001. We were called Shepherd's Hill Farm back then. God's purpose for us abandoning the old farmhouse was now being realized; because that empty, but completely rehabbed, old farmhouse just became a residence, offices, a schoolhouse, a shower house, and a cafeteria for that first group of kids! God knew what He was up to! We just had to hear Him and trust Him. Then, the second boy to walk through the door was named Asa! This is only one of many circumstances, over the years, that God would use to affirm that He was in the work of SHA. And once the kids started coming, we would then transform ourselves into an outdoor therapeutic wilderness-style program and school, morphing the farmhouse, again, into our Boy's Next Step Program. Funny thing: Because of the lay of the land, woods, streams, waterfalls and proximity to main campus, that 20 acres we believed God for and then purchased from our neighbor—the property we call Cliff's Hill—it would become the ground on which our first girls' and then boys' campsites were built! Again, God knew it all ahead of time. All we had to do was obey!

HEAD GAMES

Over the next decade or so, while continuing to minister to the students that kept coming to SHA, we dealt with regular threats from the GDOT—ever increasingly stating that the condemnation of our property was just around the corner. It would be a long corner! Rumors were also constantly being circulated by neighbors and people associated with the project. Government and GDOT officials and their subcontractors would also randomly show up on our property looking to do certain things with regards to the highway. Over the next several years we'd occasionally get notices in the mail with dates and times for meetings that would routinely get postponed or cancelled altogether. But, we kept forging ahead.

DIVINE PROVISION

Just between 2001 and 2010—despite the impending GDOT condemnation of our land—and with the help of God and His people—the following was either installed, built, moved or rebuilt—not in any particular order: underground power lines, above ground power lines, water lines, septic systems, driveways, roads, fences, a basketball court, a swimming pool, 6 supply sheds, a computer network and phone system, a riding arena, an RV park, a pavilion, 3 bridges, 2 gazebos, multiple walkways, 2 carports, 4 school buildings, a chapel, a shower house, a cafeteria, several administration offices, therapy offices, an equine therapy office, an animal barn, a hay barn, 3 tack rooms, a maintenance shop, an exercise room, a woodworking shop, the Boy's and Girl's Nextstep houses, multiple decks and sitting areas, the Embry home, a library and media center, a guest house, a radio studio, a cabin for Beth's dad, a cabin for staff housing, a dog pen, and 4 different wilderness campsite communities. All in all, in addition to all the infrastructure acquired and installed, we've either acquired, moved, built or rebuilt 26 buildings in that same 9 year time period—and with virtually no SHA funds! Every building has it's own story! It truly is a God thing! How else can you explain it? I have to give a shout out to an organization called RVICS. It was their members' willingness, experience, diligence, toil and godly character that helped us get so many essential construction and maintenance projects completed here at SHA over the years. Beth and I—and everyone associated with SHA—will never be able to repay them. We love you guys!

CONDEMNED

Eventually, over time, a consistent condemnation date of March 13th, 2010 kept coming to us through the mail. That's when we decided to secure a lawyer. It was a merry-go-round of stress. Then, when March 13th, 2010 finally arrived, the GDOT officially informed us that they were now the new owners of 14 acres of land just outside our back door. This meant our boys and girls had to trespass on GDOT land just to get to their campsites each evening. But, it wouldn't be too long before the GDOT attorneys would legally put a stop to that through some kind of cease and desist order. We were in deep trouble.

VISITING "ANGEL"

But, again, in God's perfect timing, shortly before GDOT's official taking of our land through Eminent Domain on March 13th, 2010, one of our neighbors showed up on my front porch. It was the first time in 16 years of living on the farm that he had ever come to our house! He asked me if I was interested in buying his 20 acre tract across the gravel road (Price Rd) from SHA before putting it on the market! Knowing condemnation was imminent and that I had nowhere to put our kids, of course, I jumped at it—especially when he told me we could have it for just what he owed on it! Again, the bank saw a good deal; and, we saw God's provision and a means of survival! So, even though we cringed at the thought of more debt, and knowing that Dave Ramsey would have killed us, we refinanced again—praying we were the exception to a biblical principle. We closed on that 20 acres on March 10th, 2010—just 3 days before condemnation!

A RACE BEGINS

We got busy moving the girl's camp and rebuilding it in the woods just off the east side of the highway alignment—that 14 acre swath that used to be ours and would soon be a highway. We had no time to let the girls do this themselves. Many of our male staff worked overtime and double-time to get it all done. Tearing down the site was sad; because, it was our very first campsite at SHA. I led the construction of it and even slept down there with our first group of boys back in the day. Using the timber from it and walking it a hundred yards northeast to rebuild it was the easiest and fastest way of making the move. We did this reluctantly, knowing that in a couple of years we'd just have to move it again once traffic started on the highway. It would be much harder to move the boys; since they were deep into the woods on the other side of Cliff's Hill on the west side of the alignment. It was a race to abandon their site and build a new site across Price Rd on the new 20 acres before the GDOT's restraining order kicked in and/or construction on the road actually started. And nobody could tell us when that would actually begin. It was a scary, busy and uncertain time to run SHA. Any remnant of certainty was in God alone. I couldn't get past the fact that God didn't call us here from the Chicago area only to allow a highway to shut it all down. Yet everything we were dealing with spoke otherwise; so, over the next decade, I felt I had to constantly keep my eye out for other properties in the surrounding areas. But, they all felt like bad blind dates.

A MEANS OF ESCAPE

After condemnation in 2010, the GDOT paid \$154,000 for the 14 acres they took from us. Beth and I never saw a cent of that money. \$15,000 went to our first attorney, while the balance went straight to the bank. We never thought to adjust our mortgage payment, nor did we adjust any of the terms or anything else. We were simply too busy working with kids and families and trying to survive to even think about it. So, without realizing it, we were actually trimming a decent chunk off the principle of our mortgage balance every month for the next two and a half years. This would

end up to be a very good thing. I've shared this story in a previous newsletter; so, I'll try to be concise. The bottom line to this part of the story is that, while going on one of my mind-clearing motorcycle rides, I discovered a mountain-top 2 acre lot in Tallulah Falls, GA. It was only 35 minutes from SHA. From this lot, you could clearly see 3 different states! Though it would serve no immediate purpose for SHA, when I brought Beth back to see it, she fell in love with it. We fell in love with it. Our only intent was to build a small deck on it and put some lawn chairs out there once in a while to meet God and each other—to purge our minds of troubled teens and the stress of ministry. It would become our therapy. We hadn't lived without kids and staff in and around our yard, since 2001. Before that, we lived in a 7 year construction zone.

AN OFFER WE COULDN'T REFUSE

The previous owner of this lot had acquired it for \$120,000 in 2008, intending to flip it for a quick profit. After seeing the lot, even that sounded like a good deal. But, then, with the recession, everything and everyone got turned upside down. The bottom line was this: Beth and I were able to acquire that lot for \$48,000! And, in 2012, when our banker crunched the numbers, he told us that, because of the GDOT's condemnation payment and Beth and I not changing our monthly payments, which ate away a good chunk of our principle, we could refinance again, build a decent house on it, furnish it and garnish it with all the trimmings (furniture, appliances, dishes and silverware)—all while making our new monthly payment \$600 less than it was before!! We saw this as Divine intervention. But, this story is just getting started!

ANOTHER DIVINE GIFT

Clayton, GA is 14 miles north of Tallulah Falls, GA and about 50 miles from SHA. On the top of Black Rock Mountain State Park in Clayton is a lighted 100 foot tall cross. At 12 o'clock, straight off the back deck of the mountain house, we have an impressive view of that cross that's 14 miles away. It stands above smaller mountains in the foreground. Every time I see it, it's as if God is saying, "Remember where this came from." Keep this story in mind; because, like I've been telling you all these years now, it's going to get even better!

PREPARING FOR EXODUS

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we were busier than three-headed woodpeckers trying to carve out and build a new—albeit temporary—site for our boys on the newly acquired 20 acre tract across Price Rd. We knew it would be temporary; because, it had no streams near the site; it was way too close to campus; and, nobody really liked it when comparing it to the old sites that had streams and waterfalls and all-around better therapeutic auras to them. But, we had to get this done before the GDOT arrived with their road construction equipment; because, we were soon to have no place to put our boys. This was actually heart-breaking for everyone; because, the boys and staff had put in years of work into that old site. The same was true for the girls. The sites were like small Swiss Family Robinson-like cities down there. I call them Gilligan's Island in the woods. Our kids took pride in them—they were their accomplishments and home..

ELEVENTH HOUR REVELATION

As the boys and their staff got close to getting the cabins habitable at the new temporary site, we were sensing we were running out of time. But, it was Beth who actually had a revelation that we needed to move out of the old site and into the new one on the last weekend of September in 2013. And though this would be the same week we needed to prepare for our bi-annual parent conference, she felt strongly that not to move that particular weekend would be a huge mistake. So, the last Friday in September of 2013, our weekend staff were directed to make the move. With beds, stoves, tools and myriad other supplies, the move took all weekend. Then three days later, on Monday in late September of 2013, what she sensed was correct! With no notice from the GDOT, the big yellow machines arrived. And what an incredible amount of carnage did they evoke on our forest in a very short time. Though that part of the forest wasn't actually ours anymore, it's impossible to describe what it felt like to watch it all come down. All our parents were about to see a yellow war zone in our back yard as they arrived for parent conference on Friday. SHA's tranquility had gone away.

HARD TO WATCH

Alexa was 15 at the time and inconsolable as we just sat on our back deck together watching what appeared to be our entire history vanish in a day. I don't think Beth could watch it. I'm not sure where she even was. Much of this was happening within yards of where we moved the girl's new temporary site. We knew we'd eventually have to move them again; but, for now, we didn't have any place to move them to. The 20 acre tract across Price Rd. was mostly pasture and had only enough woods to facilitate one site—and the boys had just occupied it. We were going to quickly need even more land to keep our doors open for both a boy's and a girl's facility. We needed another miracle. But, by now, we were almost expecting them.

COINCIDENCE OR CONFORMATION?

God has always been faithful to give us little indicators that He is at work. I'm sure that if we all looked and listened more closely, more of us would see God in virtually all of our circumstances. We just have to slow down enough to see Him and hear Him. This has always been one of my struggles. But, it wasn't long after that terrible day that Alexa and I spent together on our deck that, one night, she was praying in our back yard for understanding about all this. After praying, she looked up and noticed a star on the northwest horizon. Before the GDOT arrived, that area was all forest. There was no horizon per se. But, with the void now created by the GDOT's machinery, distant horizons and new mountains could now be seen that couldn't be seen before. For some reason she decided to put binoculars on that little star, which ended up not being a star at all. It was a cross—that same 100 foot cross in Clayton that we see 14 miles away from our deck on the back of our mountain house!

Other than Clayton, GA and our house in Tallulah Falls, I've never seen that cross anywhere else—until this third location, straight off our back deck here at SHA. But, here, the cross was 50 miles away! I used to tell everyone it was 40 miles away; but, upon further investigation, it's actually closer to 50 miles away. We took this as a sign from God that everything was going to be OK; and, that in the midst of heartache and struggle, God's blessings and faithfulness will continue to sustain us. And, as you'll read, I think He's given us plenty more evidence that everything truly will be OK. The process, however, can either make you or break you—and often times both at the same time.

EUREKA!

A coincidence of crosses on the horizon wasn't quite enough hope to outweigh the obvious predicament we were in, in the eyes of most people. I had to keep looking for more property—preparing for the worst, while praying for the best. While running an errand in town, I decided to take a detour for some reason—probably because I was on my motorcycle and needed the extra 5 minutes of therapeutic time. While on Pleasant Hill Road, I passed a tract of land that I've been admiring, now, for well over 25 years. From the front of Pleasant Hill Rd., I've admired it for its beautiful rolling hills, green pastures and mountain views. From the rear, I've been admiring it's beauty from my office at SHA—a mile away. This time, however, the property had a "For Sale" sign on it. Thinking this could possibly be another "God thing", I stopped and called the number from my cell phone. I was discouraged when the realtor told me the price of this beautiful 64 acre tract. Hearing disappointment in my voice, the realtor asked if I had considered the other property he had listed down the road. I didn't know there was another property for sale down the road; but, I was willing to look at it, since he told me the asking price was nearly a quarter of what that beautiful property was going for! When I went to check it out, I still couldn't find it. Then, we both realized someone had taken the sign down. From the road the property looked ugly and had a little house on it. Then the realtor clarified to me that the actual property he was talking about only had a 50 foot easement connecting it to Pleasant Hill Rd. That little house was in front of the 70 acre tract that was actually for sale. So, I traveled northwest and took the third of a mile trek down the 50 foot easement, past the little house, over two different cattle gates, through a third cattle gate, where I finally approached the base of a huge pasture. From the base of the hill of this pasture I could see only sky above it. As I approached the high ground of this huge open pasture, I started to see the horizon; and, I couldn't believe what I was looking at! Never underestimate God!

BLUE RIDGE BEAUTY

Atop the high ground of that pasture I could see several distant pastures, hills, dales and woods. Some of them actually belonged to SHA a mile away! But, above this beautiful foreground, was an even more beautiful panoramic view of the Blue Ridge Mountains—spanning the northern sky from the northwestern to the northeastern horizon! And this was one of those clear days that made you feel like you could reach out and touch them. The view dwarfed any view we had at SHA. In fact, the

splendor of this property rivaled the splendor of the property that bordered it—the property I had admired for 25 years—the property that was nearly 4 times the price! My mind raced. This property had everything we needed for a new and improved SHA with no highway! It even had the perfect spot for Beth and I to move to some day. If we couldn't afford to build, I envisioned moving our mobile home out to this very spot—a great place to get off the highway ourselves.

PERFECTLY HIDDEN AND PRESERVED

The crazy thing is that in over 20 years of living within a mile of it, I never knew this property even existed—but, God did! And, I believed, right then and there, that this hidden gem—a property that had been virtually sequestered from civilization on all 4 sides—had been preserved by God for SHA for such a time as this! But, even if we could somehow acquire it, how could we ever afford to just pull up stakes and orchestrate the tremendous undertaking of moving everything a mile away? We didn't have a clue; but, we knew God knew.

HAVING OUR CAKE AND EATING IT TOO

When we first told the GDOT the dollar figure that we knew we needed to move, which would include the acquisition of this 70 acres, the GDOT wanted to take our current SHA campus, and everything on it, including our home, to mitigate an exchange for what we were asking for in compensation. But, surrendering our current property would have meant death to SHA—not to mention it being a very poor business decision on our part. Not only did we need our current property and campus to keep our doors open to serve our families, but we needed to preserve our staff as well. Beth and I also had some deep sentimental reasons for not surrendering it. All we had built and worked for over the years was here. Our son's gravesite was here. Beth was convalescing her father, whose cabin was here. And, until the highway opened for traffic, all that we needed to stay open was here. To the GDOT, it looked like we wanted to have our cake and eat it too. In fact, even Governor Deal saw it that way; and, he conveyed that to me when I met with him in Atlanta. But, even the governor didn't grasp the depth and underlying complexities of this case. It would be another two years before even the GDOT attorneys would begin realizing what they were really up against. But, "having our cake and eating it too"—to put it in their terms—would eventually be exactly what was going to happen! It was the frosting on that cake that we were going to have to miss out on—even though, when asked—both off and on the record—all the professional witnesses agreed that we were owed the frosting too! But, that was not something the "powers that be" at the GDOT were going to sign off on. At that time, we still had no idea how all this was going to play out. This was late summer of 2014; and, there still didn't seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel toward settling with the GDOT. All I was sure of is that I had to, somehow, secure that 70 acres. And we needed it to be sooner than later.

EAST OF EDEN

Only once had I ever been east of our latest 20 acre tract across Price Rd. where our boys were now living—and certainly not east enough to ever know about that beautiful 70 acre tract. All I knew is that a very eccentric man lived just east of SHA; but, overgrowth on our east end never allowed anyone to get through to the other side. You had to drive down his eery quarter mile driveway that went all the way around the north and east sides of our 20 acre tract to get to his house. This man's two sons used to routinely scream "Hail Satan!" from their trucks as they passed SHA on Price Rd. So, other than confronting this man several years ago about his kids doing this, I had no reason to return to his 28 acre piece of the world. But, it wouldn't be long until I forced myself to visit him again.

BAD COUNSEL

After firing our attorney for trying to get us to settle our case under ridiculous terms, we hired our current attorney. Confirmation about this came when Beth woke up at 3:00 a.m. one night. Concerned about our attorney situation, she Googled "Eminent Domain law" and stumbled upon our current attorney. Then, she saw an email from one of our out-of-state student's parents recommending this very same attorney. Our new attorney advised me not to acquire this 70 acre tract of land for legal and strategic reasons. But, not to do so would have meant we'd likely have to shut down with nowhere to go. And since Beth and I knew shutting down wasn't an option for us, having someplace to go—even though we couldn't afford to move—still seemed like the will of God to me. Our attorney then capitulated—understanding, and even respecting, our conviction. But, he now had to shift gears and approach our case from a much more complicated, albeit less profitable, legal perspective. Over time, however, I think even he began to see the supernatural components in this case. He even offered to adjust his company's fees so that Beth and I might at least have something left over to help mitigate some of the costs involved in securing the additional properties needed to keep our doors open. Though shutting down would have, no doubt, brought us a much better settlement, we knew that wasn't the will of God. Our mission has never been about money; it's been about obeying Him. And that meant doing what we were called to do—right where we were called to do it. So, sticking our neck out for another 70 acres, when we could have likely retired, was another big and scary risk—even if we actually could have refinanced again. Undoubtedly, all this has spoken to our staff in that they certainly now know we have their backs and that God is miraculously working at SHA. Their faithfulness has been amazing; and we respect them greatly for it. Thank you staff!

SIGNING OUR LIVES AWAY

By the end of 2014, Beth and I had put everything on the line to secure that 70 acres. We had just enough equity to do it. And though this property had all the qualities we needed for an outdoor therapeutic program—several streams, woods, huge pastures, mountain views, etc.—we still had no way to get to it without traveling several miles out of the way to Pleasant Hill Rd.—even though we could see it across the fields only a mile away. And, there was one other little snag. It was zoned for agriculture—

not for a therapeutic school. So, now that we had it, we still couldn't use it. Practically speaking, it was little more than a financial drain as we kept hoping, praying and preparing for a solid and "sooner-than-later" trial date with the GDOT—anticipating that a jury would surely justly compensate us for this purchase and adequately mitigate what the highway had done to us.

ALL AVENUES CLOSED

Though we could never know we were still 3 years away from an actual trial date, traffic on the soon-to-be-completed highway was right around the corner; and, we still had no place to put our girls—with the exception of one wooded location that may have sufficed in a pinch. Though it was good to have it, it would be just be another temporary fix once traffic began. We even considered bussing our boys to the new 70 acre property and giving our girls the boys' temporary site. But, this was a problem for 4 reasons. 1. We didn't have a campsite there. 2. If it rained or snowed, we were stuck; because, the easement wasn't a paved or even a gravel road. 3. It wasn't properly zoned. 4. The old guy who lived in that little house hated us for using the easement and threatened legal action if we did. Though he would have lost in court, one legal battle at a time was all the time and energy we could muster. And, we still had SHA to run.

HELP ME IN MY UNBELIEF

This 70 acre acquisition had me regularly second-guessing myself. I continually asked God for confirmation; because, even though we got it for nearly a quarter of the price that the property right next to us was going for, the financial drain was still monumental. Did I jump the gun? Did I simply fall in love with it? But, how could this not be God? It was so close to SHA. The price was so right. It had all the beauty and attributes needed for an outdoor therapeutic program. I've learned that faith always comes with some element of doubt. Even "Doubting Thomas" got his need for confirmation honored by Jesus himself. So, I asked the Lord to do the same for me. One clear winter night, about midnight, I decided to go out and meet God on those 70 acres and pray for the confirmation that I felt I needed. So, I jumped in the van and made the drive to Pleasant Hill Rd. I would then eek my way down the long and dark easement without getting shot by the old guy who lived in that little house. I then made it back to the high ground of the pasture—the very spot Beth and I are dreaming about building a house or moving our mobile home to someday. After turning off my headlights, I exited the van and soaked in an eery dark silence. Lifting my eyes and hands to God and the heavens, I saw the stars as bright as I've ever seen them anywhere. After praying, I focused north and noticed a few tiny lights twinkling in the distance on what looked to be the horizon. I then grabbed my binoculars. The very first little light I focused on sent a supernatural chill of peace and joy through my body. Clear as a bell, what I was seeing was that 100 foot lighted cross in Clayton, GA—51miles away! If we can ever build or move our mobile home out there, that cross will be 12 O'clock off our back deck—again! You may think I'm nuts; but, I needed that kind of confirmation to muster the courage to pull off God's next trick as still more circumstantial miracles and confirmations were on the way.

REVIEWING THE LANDSCAPE

Just to pause and summarize: SHA was originally 60 acres. Then we acquired Cliff's Hill—the 20 acres that housed the original boys' and girls' campsites. This gave SHA 80 acres. When the GDOT condemned 14 acres right through the middle of us, that left us with 20 unusable acres of Cliff's Hill on the west side of the four lane highway and 46 acres on our main SHA campus east of the 4-lane. Then, to mitigate the fallout of this condemnation, we acquired our neighbor's 20 acres across the gravel road (Price Rd.) to our east, giving us a total of 86 acres, but divided into 3 pieces. So we now had Cliff's Hill's unusable 20 acres on the west side of the 4-lane; SHA's 46 acre main campus between the 4-lane and Price Rd. and the new 20 acres east of Price Rd. At first glance, 86 acres seems like plenty of land; but, cut up the way it was—and with the pasture-to-woods ratio being as it was—we had no choice but to acquire more land. And this is not to mention the consequential impact of the highway, by itself. That's the predicament the GDOT had us in. Hence, we once again we were able to refinance against the equity in the farm and acquired those 70 acres. And, every bit of it was secured with that original \$200 and a handshake! And, still, there was more to come!

A DIFFERENT VIEW

After looking at an aerial photo of SHA and the 70 acre tract we'd acquired, I noticed something incredible. We were only 28 acres—or really only about 150-200 yards at the closest point—from SHA actually being connected to the newly-acquired 70 acres! Until then, I was looking at these 70 acres as possibly being the future and separate whole of SHA. For me, this changed the game field; because, now, with Divine intervention, I saw a way to make SHA contiguous, one mile deep, off new highway! But, it almost seemed too good to be true. God would truly have to pull even more rabbits out of the hat. And, of course, He did!

BRIDGING THE GAP

The eccentric man who owned that 28 acre tract east of us was about to get another visit from me. Though, his place wasn't for sale, and Beth and I were already financially leveraged to the max, I navigated his long eery driveway once again and knocked on his door anyway. I told him our situation and asked if he'd be willing to sell his 28 acres. He wasn't excited about it, telling me that he liked his remote location. Then I told him that it wouldn't be long before only a stream to his east would separate him from troubled teenagers living in sites all along that same stream—the same stream that he and I now both mutually shared, even as I spoke. That's when he changed his tune. I offered to help him look for another location and even showed him Cliff's Hill and the old boy's campsite with it's streams and waterfalls. It was still too close to civilization for him, thanks to the highway. This process of him finding just the right place took almost a year. It was just as well, since we were financially tapped out and the 70 acres was still zoned agricultural.

But, he didn't know that. All I knew was that God was going to get this all worked out—if we obeyed Him. A more attractive property to adequately meet his needs is what God had to provide this guy. And he would!

STUMPED!

We needed another circumstantial miracle; and, we got it. But, as usual, it always happens in a way that, at first, looks like a disaster. Remember that small tract of wooded land I talked about earlier that would be the only possible place to move our girls off the highway—albeit temporarily? Well, another neighbor—believe it or not—“accidentally”—cut it all down! Does anyone, but me, see a spiritual battle going on here? This neighbor happens to be one of the guys who's allegedly responsible for the highway coming through SHA in the first place! Now, having money woes of his own, which is likely why he “accidentally” clear-cut the back of our 46 acre campus, it appeared that he'd just ruined any chance of us buying any time to help mitigate what he helped get started in the first place! For days we heard the machinery; but, we just assumed it was the GDOT's road construction noise. Had it not been for, yet, another neighbor alerting me to this, who knows what all we might have lost. But, in God's economy, even this was going to eventually work out for our good!

A DIFFERENT KIND OF SETTLEMENT

A new Georgia law had just been enacted to stop this kind of thing. Our neighbor now owed us 3 times the timber value of the trees he took from us and then sold. But, again, I didn't need anymore legal battles to fight; and, you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip. We could've had him arrested, but, chose otherwise. After months and months of being avoided, I finally got the revelation to have him call his home owner's insurance. After months of getting the run around, I began dealing with his insurance company myself; and, after even more headaches, aggravation and avoidance, somehow we eventually came to an agreement. That settlement gave us the cushion we needed to muster the audacity to ask our banker for, yet, another refinancing of the farm. We needed another loan to secure that 28 acre land-bridge to our new 70 acres from our eccentric neighbor. The time it took to discover our deforested property and negotiate a settlement with my neighbor's insurance company was about the same time it took for our eccentric neighbor to shop for properties until he finally found just the right one—nearly a year. He was happy; and we were happy! I assured him, from the beginning, that when he found just the right place to move to, we would give him his asking price. Yet, the only thing I was truly sure of was God and His Word.

IN GOD'S ZONE

I genuinely believed God would make a way—and He did. Believe it or not, our banker agreed to one final refinancing! And, though I'm sure it helped that we'd never been late making a farm payment (22 years at that time), I think perhaps even our banker was seeing a Divine component to all this. And, in the summer of 2016 we owned a total of 185 acres—165 of which now runs one mile deep off the highway and

all the way to Pleasant Hill Rd!!! Our next trick was jumping through all the right hoops to get all this property re-zoned and ready to be used. And, by the grace of God, the brilliant tactics of our attorney, our county's appreciation for what we do at SHA, and a multitude of friends, family and staff appearing at the county meetings with us, re-zoning was actually a snap!

WORK CLOTHES

After our payments and debt had just gone up significantly once again, now all we needed was favor with a jury to mitigate that debt and pay for our move. But, as it came closer to the opening of the highway for traffic, we were still losing our race to get our girls' site off the edge of the 4-lane. The good news was that we now had the property to do it. So, in the heat of the summer of 2016, I got on my work clothes and led our staff and students in a summer-long construction campaign. Fortunately for me, the father of one of our girls, who had construction experience, volunteered to help out midway through the building campaign and did a fabulous job of leading our boys toward getting their sites constructed. This allowed me to catch back up with all that was lost by way of myriad other duties. Then, there was the trial to prepare for—something we'd been working on in the midst of all else for years already.

ALMOST PERFECT TIMING

You may have already read about some of our journey preparing for trial in previous newsletters; so, I'll just cap it off as succinctly as I can—which, as you can probably already tell, isn't easy for me. But there are a few more details that may interest you. We ended up being 5 days late getting our girls off the highway. When traffic actually began, we mysteriously only had 5 girls in our program. God had that figured out too! This was just enough to fit them all into the Girl's Next Step House. So, for those 5 days—until we got the new boy's site finished enough to be inhabited—the girls enjoyed time in the Next Step House.

HEADWAY

Once the boys moved out of their temporary site on the 20 acre tract across Price Rd, the girls then took it over and have been there ever since. Our goal is to get them a new site on the other end of the same stream the boys are now on. Currently, we have cabins, and many other primitive buildings for the boys, on both sides of the stream. Since last year, the boys have been doing an amazing job of getting things done. They've also built a network of several roads, pathways and bridges that course throughout the new properties. It's really shaping up to be a tremendous therapeutic environment. It's more than we could have imagined! But, of course, there's still a ton of work ahead—especially figuring that we still need to get many of the buildings on campus off the highway and onto the east side of Price Rd.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF TRUST FUND

As I was scouting future planning options one day, I ran across one of our new neighbors near our property line on the new 70 acre tract. Upon this seasoned farmer's inquiry, I shared with him all the land that SHA was now occupying. When I told him exactly where these 5 different tracts were located, he was visibly moved. Then, he said to me, "Do you realize you now own every parcel of land that Paul Tapley paid cash for to launder his drug money?" I had no idea! When I told him I didn't have a cent more than \$200 and a handshake invested in all of it, I don't think he really believed me—minus our monthly payments, of course. But, I now realize that God's credit is more valuable than the devil's cash! So, here's the way I've got it figured: For giving "credit" to God, God has given "credit" to us that's better than cash in any economy. It comes from "investing" in "trust" funds that too few people have any "interest" in "investing" in. This is sad; because, God pays huge "dividends" as we actually make huge "withdrawals" from this Divine "trust" fund. A "trust" in God's economy can grow any economy!

WHAT WE EXPECTED

As far as our settlement with the GDOT is concerned, it's everything I wrote about in last month's newsletter and a bit more. We got what we expected—but it's not the wherewithal we'll need to move—that icing I was talking about earlier. The past several months, which, occupied the bulk of our summer, we spent preparing for a trial that never happened. But, in the eternal scheme, I don't believe it was time wasted; because, I'm sure all this has impacted the lives of many others in unimaginable ways. In the course of our legal proceedings, when people heard our story and discovered how SHA is transforming kids, families and the world from this remote little corner of the earth called Martin, GA—and I'm talking professionals and legal personnel representing all parties in this case—they were blown away! We made friends with our supposed enemies and earned the respect of people who may or may not know Christ. For the lukewarm in Christ, I think all this may have, not only stirred, but heated their pots.

HE NOTICED

One of our expert witnesses—a non-Christian, who figured the cost of moving SHA to the new property—made an incredible statement while under oath. He said something like this: "Before opening my appraisal business 40 years ago, my mentor told me that I would never be involved in a GDOT case where the parties owning the condemned commercial property will ever mitigated their own case." In other words, when the GDOT condemned corporate land, the landowners could never stay in their same location and continue operating what they had been operating to the same extent or degree they had been operating it prior to condemnation. I assume this is because they were unable to acquire more property adjacent to what was left of their own property to adequately resume their business. Confusing, I know. But, prior to our case, property owners have always had to move to accomplish this. There has never

been a seamless transition like our case (trust me, we're still feeling the seams in that "seamless" transition!). He went on to say, "In over 40 years of working for and against the GDOT, my mentor proved himself to be right--until this case! But, the Embrys didn't accomplish this feat with just one property acquisition. That would have been miraculous enough. They had to do it with 3 different properties! But, what's even more incredible than that is that we aren't talking about mitigating their situation with the acquisition of 3 different mere lot-sized parcels; or even one, two or three 1-acre or 2-acre parcels. They did it with 3 different significantly-sized tracts of land--tracts of 20 acres, then 70 acres and then 28 acres respectively! That is unheard of! And the fact that the 28-acre tract was the last "meat in the sandwich" tract that brought them to the place of now being 1 mile deep contiguously off the GDOT's highway, so that they could continue--without shutting down, mind you--operating as an outdoor therapeutic school--well, that can only be Divine intervention!" Having lived through it, I couldn't agree more!

A SOUL AFTERALL

There were many more elements to this case that had people scratching their heads. I'll never be able to share them all here; but, if you didn't read last month's newsletter, please do. In it, I mentioned that even the GDOT's legal team was beginning to mourn their position against us. What I didn't mention was that while I was being deposed by the GDOT's lead attorney, he asked me about our story and why the highway was actually the death knell to SHA that we were claiming it to be. About midway through my testimony he got to the point where he could barely get the questions out of his mouth--all while leaning down and to the side to occasionally cough--then sniffing, snorting, clearing his throat and wiping his eyes and nose. Then, all of a sudden--in one shocking motion, he abruptly leapt out of his chair and choked out a weak, but direct, "excuse me" and bolted out the door and into the hall to have a well-deserved cry. He proved to me that attorneys could be human after all. It was very hard to watch.

GOING NUTS OVER DIVINE RECOMPENSE

While I'm thinking about it, here's another thing you might find interesting. The GDOT took 3 very large pecan trees from us when they came through with their highway. That was hard to watch too. To my way of thinking, that was free food for as long as those trees lived. Just recently, I was admiring our maintenance man's handy work on the 20 acres right across Price Rd. Before we acquired it, I always thought it was an ugly piece of property--even though it had a pond on it. But, as Jason has been trimming back brush and small trees and slowly manicuring it into a beautiful place--a 20 acre disk golf course, actually--I noticed that it had some pecan trees on it. In fact, I counted 30 of them! Since 2010, when we acquired it, I never noticed any pecan trees over there. How did I miss 30 of them? It's because this year was the first year that some of them are mature enough to actually bear pecans. Is that a coincidence too? And, isn't it just like God to give us back exactly ten-fold what was taken from us? In addition, we've also discovered several black walnut trees and other species. He is so faithful!

ASK YOURSELF THIS:

For those of you who are still skeptical about God's role in all this, ask yourself this: How could we know that just the right land would come up for sale at just the right time, in just the right place, with all the right attributes, for just the right price—especially when we never knew that the 70-acre tract even existed?! How could we know that our neighbor was going to walk over to our house and offer to sell us his 20 acres at just the right time for just what he owed on it? How did we know our other neighbor was going to chop down our trees and that it could actually benefit us? How could we know that Georgia had just passed a brand new timber law that benefited someone in our position? We didn't put those streams and pastures and woods and mountain-views on those 70 acres—making it a perfect piece of therapeutic property for SHA. Most properties around SHA have no streams or mountain-views. And it wasn't me who priced it at nearly a quarter of the price of the property right next door. We never went looking for, basically, a “free” house on a mountain top—it found us. We never asked for a \$600 monthly rebate for owning it either. We never asked for a 100 foot lighted cross to stare us in the face at 12 O'clock off our back deck—and not just from the mountain house, but from a total of 4 former, current and future homesteads that now have our names on the deeds. Because, in fact, as I write, I just remembered that you can also see that same cross from a 4th location—a 5th if you count where it actually exists in Clayton, GA. And, once again, it's 12 O'clock off another one of our back decks—our old farmhouse—the current Boy's Next Step house! Other than these 4 locations, we've never seen that cross anywhere but in Clayton, GA. So, get this: We have lived, do live, can live and eventually will live in each location, where off our back deck at 12 O'clock, we can see that same lighted cross in Clayton, GA! And, we certainly never thought that the same \$200 and a handshake, over 23 years ago, could have ever secured 5 different tracts of land and a mountain top house for doing the Lord's work! And to think that those very same tracts of land were all once owned by a drug dealer who, while working for the devil, couldn't keep them—even after paying cash for all of them! If, after you finish reading this, you still have more belief in random chance, coincidences or luck than belief in our Creator God, you've got way more faith than I could ever have!

OVERVIEW

So, after 18 long years of character-building experiences dealing with the GDOT, here's where we're at: We now have a third of a mile of 4-lane highway frontage to expose and promote SHA—and a wonderful place to sell our pecans BTW! We now have land that extends a mile deep contiguously off the highway to maintain our therapeutic integrity, while practically and legally keeping our doors open to current and future SHA families. We don't have to close! The 28 acre tract came with a nice double-wide mobile home that now provides a convenient on-campus spread for our daughter Allison, our son-in-law Joshua and our granddaughter Lilliana.

And, because they moved out of their cabin on main campus this side of Price Rd., our daughter Alexa, found that the cabin works perfectly for her new life as an independent adult. Beth and I now have hopes of moving off the highway ourselves and onto the high-ground of the 70-acre tract. All 50+ staff members still have their positions and can now breathe easy. We have nearly 3 times the land we had before, with room to grow and room to roam (185 acres). With the additional property, we can now legally serve 3 times as many students as we did before; or, we can diversify our ministry options if we felt led to—or both. Our gears are already turning. And, though we still have to find a way to move some things that still need to be moved across Price Rd. and away from the highway, the GDOT settlement did cover the cost of the additional 3 tracts of land (about 120 acres)—even after attorney fees are paid. So, we hope to have our mortgage payment reduced to a manageable sum, again, once the settlement is dispersed. And, finally, the thing that has certainly always concerned Beth the most—we get to keep all our original property! And, not just while we transition things across Price Rd. either. We get to keep it forever! Thank you Lord!

AN ISSUE OF FAITH

All that Beth and I have been through over the years has been exhausting and heartbreaking to say the least. But, it's been way more rewarding than either. We wouldn't have traded it for the world. I don't think it's a stretch to say that—humanly speaking—it's been impossible. Without your help, and help from the Almighty, there would be no SHA right now. Because, as I've told you before, I don't believe Beth's and my prayers are forceful enough, on their own, to sustain a work like SHA. This is a deeply spiritual endeavor. Again, the events described in this newsletter give evidence to what I've been telling you, by faith, would happen over these many years now. Yet, I had no idea about the process. That was not given to me—only the result. I want this story to encourage you in your own faith and spur you on to the abundant life in whatever God has called you to do. If you're called to be a butcher, baker or candlestick maker, God will walk you through that process too. Whatever you are called to do can be a ministry for the Kingdom of God if you're led by faith. But, faith is not presuming God is going to back your plan just because you believe in Him. Faith is pursuing God, Himself—to the point of Him giving us His plan and we heed it—regardless of how foolish it might make us look to the world. This is what Proverbs 19:21 is referring to, “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.” Whatever we think we may need or want, when our first goal is pursuing Him—getting to know Him—those needs and wants will be proved legitimate or illegitimate by His Spirit living in us. He either gives us the green light or He checks us and redirects our desires to align with His perfect will for us. He never makes our good the enemy of His best. But, we must always have the eternal perspective in mind; because, His perfect will and success for us can sometimes look like disaster to us and to the world (i.e. the cross). All this is how Jesus can say, “Ask me for anything, and I'll give it to you.” Because He Who lives in us prompts us with desires for the things He desires for us. Before SHA, I never wanted to work

with troubled kids! I had my own ideas and agenda; but, felt secure in none of them. Now, my passion for troubled kids and their families is off the charts! Why? Because I pursued God's perfect will and made it preeminent in my life. He even allows me to do other things I like to do; yet, my life's purpose is now clear. But, because I'm a slow learner, it took years for me to get clarity on these things. But, it doesn't have to be that way. Pursuing Him should be our first priority--delighting in doing His will. I know this can be difficult in a loud and busy and tempting world. But, to the degree we fail in disciplining ourselves in overcoming the world and exercising real faith, I believe we also struggle finding true peace, joy, contentment, fulfillment, blessing and adventure in life.

FAITH IS NOT PROOF

I could never scientifically prove to you that faith actually produced anything that you just read about. You'll have to weigh that out for yourself. Then, by faith, decide whether God was in this thing or not. Either way, you're exercising faith. But, I couldn't scientifically prove to you that I actually love my wife either. Hopefully 37 years of marriage is evidence enough for you. There's an argument that almost nothing can actually be proven in this world--only evidenced and/or experienced. Whether that's true or not, all I can tell you is that I'm not smart enough to orchestrate the circumstances you just read about; yet, they happened. I'm not even smart enough--or creative enough--to craft a whopper of a lie this complex. I am, however, stupid and/or naive enough to believe that God was leading us the whole time. How else is one moved to make decisions that virtually nobody else can accept or agree with--or that make no common sense? Oswald Chambers said, "Faith is not common sense and common sense is not faith; they stand in the relation of the natural and the spiritual." We are not fundamentally human beings that occasionally have spiritual experiences; we are fundamentally spiritual beings having a human experience. Therefore, we have to make a conscious choice to tap into our fundamental spiritual makeup and listen to the Author of our being--in whose image we are made. Had Beth and I listened to well-meaning people over the Spirit of the living God, SHA, if it came to be at all, might be an "Ishmael" instead of an "Isaac"--a product of human creation instead of a product of God's promise. Though we can sometimes miss it, we want to be used by God to help produce other sons and daughters who understand the significance of being born of the promise. And I believe that happens here at SHA. The evidence for everything I've been telling you is here for you to see and challenge if you want to visit us. And, I encourage you to do so. But, the greatest miracle you'll see here are the kids, themselves. Their parents will certainly attest to this. Other than an extremely unlikely series of coincidences, how else can you explain these things without at least entertaining the idea of the supernatural?

WE STILL NEED YOU!

Beth and I are so thankful and honored that you would stand with us and believe in this work all these years. These past 23 years at SHA have definitely not been easy; but, they've been glorious! The past 18 years have been, no doubt, as uncertain and frustrating for you to hear about as they've been for us to endure. I'm not a glutton for punishment; but, I am excited about what God will do next. Now, we enter an exciting new season of life and ministry. And, though we know there will be new mountains to climb and obstacles to overcome, we now enter this new season with high expectations. You've read only some of what God has done here already—only some of it! And our journey isn't over yet. Far from it. So, please continue to prayerfully support this ministry, co-laboring with us for the sake of His Kingdom. This is a team effort involving all of us. And, like a mighty river that benefits multitudes of people who are hundreds of miles down stream, without ever seeing the river's source, I can't help but believe that God is smiling on all of you selfless people who pray and financially support this therapeutic work. Yet, most of you will likely never meet the kids and families that you are so effectively helping transform into the image of Christ. Beth and I also know that we will likely never meet all the people that our SHA kids and families will ultimately affect after they've left SHA either—at least not this side of heaven anyway. I want to, again, remind you that we wholeheartedly believe that your prayers, over the years, have helped move God to orchestrate the incredible events that you've just read about. I, for one, would like to experience even more of God's handiwork; because, seeing God at work is what helps keep us going. It's our Divine fuel for therapeutic ministry. So, we need you, now, more than ever; because, the work ahead of us is daunting. As I said earlier, this 18 year odyssey with the GDOT was something the devil meant for evil; but, God meant it for good. When you think about it, though, this same principle can be applied to virtually all circumstances in life. And, since this is a ministry that's on the frontline of a volatile spiritual battlefield, there will, undoubtedly, be more spiritual artillery fire to deal with in the days to come. As we close out this chapter on SHA and begin a new one, we're now just beginning our part of the total-makeover forced upon us by the GDOT. We are about to enter a whole new level of ministry; so, we hope you are as excited with anticipation for what God is yet to do through SHA as we are. Please, never forget, you are an integral part of this team! So, as we continue to go down "the well of hope and transformation" for kids and families, please continue to hold the ropes for us! Blessings to all of you who help make SHA work. Amen!