

# LASTORY



A Kingdom Pictures Release "BRAVEHEART" A KINGDOM NEWS NETWORK PRODUCTION  
Featuring: CORY & MEGAN BLACKWELL • JIM & DONNA BLOUGH • SCOTT & LYNNE GREEN  
ARGO & ANU LIPS • RICH & KAREN NURT • BOB RICKER • JERRY & ERLYN SUGARMAN

PRODUCED  
BY AL BAIRD

DIRECTED  
BY ROGER LAMB

SCREENPLAY  
BY MARCIA LAMB, MARYANN ROSE & ROBIN FAWCETT

PRODUCTION  
DESIGNER EMILY BRINGARDNER



Church of Christ

KNN

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# Editorial

by Al Baird

## BRAVEHEART

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Luke 4:18-19

Freedom fighters capture our attention and spark our imagination. *Braveheart*, the theme for this issue of *LA Story*, was the title of an Academy-Award-winning movie about a 13th century Scottish rebel warrior who fought to overthrow a tyrant English king. Jesus Christ is the ultimate freedom fighter. He issued his declaration of independence at the beginning of his ministry in Luke 4. Freedom fighters come and go, but Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, has been leading the fight for freedom against Satan for 2,000 years. Through the centuries many have fought valiantly and died under the spiritual banner of Lord Jesus. We, his modern-day disciples, have also answered his call to battle (Matthew 28:18-20). Because the present chapter of this fight is only a few years old, starting in Boston in June 1979, our honor role of men and women who have died in battle as heroes is still small. Today, I want to add a name to that distinctive list, the name of Bob Ricker.

Bob Ricker was a bravehearted, freedom fighter from the day I first met him in Boston in the early part of the 1980's. He was a college student with a single-minded purpose: make disciples. He really believed that the whole world could be evangelized in just one generation. He wanted to do his part and he did. For instance, Bob met a young nurse, Carol Best, and invited her to church. She came and brought her boy friend, John McGuirk. Both Carol and John became disciples, married, and became missionaries in Paris and Brussels. John converted his sister, Sue. Sue married Steve Shoff, and they went into the full-time ministry. At UCLA, Sue met and converted Candice Figueras. Candice now leads the women of the church in Istanbul, Turkey. John McGuirk also met and

converted Brian Homet in Boston. Brian and his wife Caryn went on to lead the church in Budapest, Hungary, and to oversee all of the churches in the Eastern Block countries. Brian



▲ Disciple Bob Ricker fulfilled his purpose and is now at home with God

met and converted Dr. Dean Farmer from Harvard, who also went into the full-time ministry and now leads all of the churches in Germany. In 1997, Carol McGuirk met a couple who was baptized and has already converted 17 of their family members. And the chain of conversions goes on and on.

Bob went to Harvard, receiving his Masters Degree in Theology in 1986. He wanted to be on the cutting edge of world evangelism, so he went as a part of the church planting to Seattle, sent from Boston in 1989. Then he moved to San Diego, married his wife Jayne, returned to Harvard and earned his Ph.D. in Biblical Counseling. Back in San Diego, Bob and Jayne led the Children's Ministry with more than 1,000 children and were

responsible for that ministry in all of the Southwest family of churches. Also, he was in charge of writing the curriculum for the first and second grades of the long-awaited, soon-to-be released Kingdom Kids Curriculum which will influence our children for years to come.

About a year ago, Bob was diagnosed with cancer. The previous 37 years of Bob's life had been a model of how to live for God. The final year would show how to die with God. To the end he was consumed with his purpose of making disciples. He took up golf, and he converted his golf pro. By December, cancer had conquered his body, but not his spirit. Brain lesions affected his breathing and his speech. Finally, December 5, 1997, God took Bob home to glory. Satan had destroyed his body; God took his soul. Even in Bob's final words to Jayne, he got in his last shot at the Enemy. Bob and Jayne had shared their faith

at every opportunity at the hospital. One particular therapist, Tyrone, was on Bob's heart. The last words that Bob ever said to Jayne were, "Jayne, you have to get Tyrone to church!" Such is the heart of a

true freedom fighter. Several doctors and nurses have started visiting the church.

Several thousand of us attended Bob's funeral in San Diego on December 11. It was a victory celebration. One of God's mighty warriors, only 38 years old, had fulfilled his purpose and God had called him home. Yes, it will be hard on Jayne and their two young children. But Bob has left them (and us) a legacy that will live on and will sustain them. He showed us what it means to live and die with the true purpose of God. Bob Ricker was a *Braveheart*. ■

KINGDOM MILESTONES	
COUNTRIES PLANTED	140
NUMBER OF CHURCHES	329
SUNDAY ATTENDANCE	151,066

LA SUNDAY ATTENDANCE		
1/11	11,284	1/25 12,147
1/18	11,725	2/1 13,030



▲ Bob Ricker with wife Jayne and their two children

# BECAUSE OF MY CHAINS

by Maryann Rose

**“Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.” Philippians 1:14**

**W**hile Jesus calls his disciples to give up everything and follow him, the vast majority of us have not had to sacrifice our personal freedom or fear for our lives for the cause of Christ. Following are two stories of the harrowing experiences of disciples in two nations where religious freedom is rare. No names or exact locations are given to protect disciples in those areas:



## China

About a year and a half ago, 20 government police stormed a Sunday worship service of disciples in a major Chinese city, arresting the whole assembly. The nationals were released after questioning. The 10 foreign-mission team members were interrogated for 28 hours. The house of the team leader was ransacked for information and all foreigners were deported after being given an hour to pack.

That evening, the remaining young disciples gathered for communion which had been interrupted earlier that day. Fearful, but full of faith, they calmly appointed new Bible Talk Leaders. Two of the newest staff members now rose up to lead the church. Government officials sent “approved” denominational ministers to meet with the disciples to re-educate them, but the effort failed because the Christians did not back down from their convictions about the gospel.

The government struck again and arrested the new church leader. His belongings confiscated, he was taken to a hard labor prison with convicted felons and interrogated constantly. Prison conditions and harsh treatment resulted in a serious liver disease, but the courageous brother remained faithful. Finally, guards dropped him off, half dead, in the center of the city with his only remaining possessions – his prison clothes. Weak from his illness, this young man wandered the area in search of disciples until he encountered some brothers and sisters sharing their faith. Shocked to see his condition, they immediately took him to the hospital where he remained for

two and a half months. Despite permanent liver damage, this church leader continues to work hard to spread the gospel. Today, by the power of God, this church is a solid rock of faith. Disciples maintain one-for-one Bible studies with non-Christians and three new disciples were baptized in December of 1997.

## Middle East

In a Middle Eastern country, a disciple leading a fledgling church and another brother were brought in to the police for questioning. Because of the large number of people meeting regularly at the disciple’s house, the government felt they could pose a threat. Though no crime had been committed, police fabricated a charge and sent the two brothers to prison. The church leader’s wife was also brought in frequently for hours of questioning for several months. Finally, she was permitted to leave the country with her three small children. Though she has not spoken with her husband since his arrest, a prison informant affirmed to her that her husband is still alive. However, no one has seen or heard a single word

from the other brother in prison. Disciples in that country fear for his life. Still, they are convinced of the power of God and their mission to spread the gospel. This small, committed band of disciples continues to share their faith and baptize. The church continues to grow.

Just as Paul’s chains motivated the early disciples, these powerful stories of courageous faith must challenge and spur today’s Christians to never give up the pursuit of winning souls to Christ. ■

**Editors Note:** *The church leader in the Middle East has just been released from prison and has returned home to his family. While in prison, he suffered beatings and abuse. There is still no word regarding the brother who was imprisoned the same day. Continue to pray for his physical and spiritual well-being and the church in that city.*

# BRAVEHEARTS IN ESTONIA

by Marcia Lamb

**“But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Matthew 7:13**

**D**ramatic points of decision and action brought Argo and Anu Lips into the Kingdom, an adventure neither ever dreamed possible. Argo and Anu were young people in love in the country of Estonia. Like most of their countrymen, they resented Russia for taking over their homeland and making it part of the old Soviet Union. Argo’s military assignment in the Russian army sent him to Siberia. His musical talent

Bible and was baptized. Finding true joy, she called Argo and shared the good news with him repeatedly. Her only feedback from him for three months was sarcasm and negativity. After coming to a worship service, he could not resist God any longer. He made the decision to study the Bible, and five days later on March 19, 1993 he was baptized as a disciple.

After only a couple of months as disciples, they met Andy and Tammy Fleming, Geographic Sector Leaders for the Former Soviet Republics, Baltics and, at the time Scandinavia. The Flemings challenged Argo and Anu to

move to Moscow for ministry training. The Flemings had hopes that the Lips would build the church in Estonia. Leaving their worldly dreams, they chose poverty in a land they once feared.

On June 6, 1994, after ministry training in Moscow, Argo and Anu moved to the new independent country of Estonia as leaders of the church planting. Their romantic adventure culminated with a January, 1995 wedding in Tallinn. The Lips are now Geographic Sector Leaders over the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Narrow escapes, love and daring decisions led to their finding new life in Christ. The adventure continues. ■



BAND GALICIAN

▲ Argo and Anu Lips are newly appointed Evangelist and Women’s Ministry Leaders of the church in Tallin, Estonia

gave him the opportunity to travel in the Russian Military Band.

While touring with the band in Finland, Argo saw his opportunity and defected. He had to travel on foot overland to Stockholm, Sweden to find safe asylum. After a few months, Argo sent word to his beloved Anu to join him. Making a difficult decision to face an unknown future, Anu followed him.

The two found new lives and new freedoms. Anu was trained by one of the leading opera singers in the region and Argo went to law school. They were living in the center of a beautiful city, financially secure and doing things they only dreamed about in Estonia.

However, their hearts remained discontented. Assuming the problem was their relationship, they broke up and Argo moved out. Anu began finding new friends and eventually met disciples. Within months she studied the



# BRAVE BEYOND HER YEARS

**“Our God will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.” Isaiah 40:28**

by Argo Lips, Evangelist, Tallin, Estonia

The prayers of a frail, dying 80-year-old woman from Estonia were heard. Parents of Heiki, a disciple in Tallinn, Estonia, were taking care of their relative, Selma, who was dying from stomach cancer. Unable to eat, Selma’s condition worsened and medical treatments were stopped. One day, Selma told Heiki she was praying to find God. Faithfully, Heiki introduced Selma to a group of disciples that could visit and study the Bible with her. Although her physical condition was weak, her mental and spiritual desire was strong. Selma responded to God’s Word humbly, thankfully, and decided to make Jesus Lord.

After the baptism, Selma said she had never been so happy and exhilarated in her whole life. Her decision to live her remaining days as a disciple is undeniably strong as she continues to share her faith daily with those who visit. God will always answer the prayers of those who bravely turn to him with hope. ■



▲ Selma, 80 years old, becomes a disciple through the faith and love of Heiki

Visit the ICOC website at <http://www.icoc.org> for the story of a disciple who won the title “Mrs. Estonia.” She recently converted the woman who was runner-up.

# FAITH IS THE VICTORY

**“Women received back their dead, raised to life again.” Hebrews 11:35**

by Jean Morales, Tallahassee International Church of Christ

Since June of 1993, Doug and Jennifer Lambert, leaders of the church in Tallahassee, Florida, have poured their hearts into God’s dream to baptize spouses of disciples. They have prayed extra prayers, and planned special dinners and devotionals. Today, we have seen 12 couples united in Christ as spouses have been baptized and restored. The most amazing thing is that eight of these have occurred since January of 1997. The amount of time these men and women have remained faithful to God with the dream of converting his or her spouse is truly faith building: from four months to 17 years. Here is the list. It is inspiring to see God glorified in such an amazing way!

J.R. Hanamean	His wife Sabine was a faithful disciple for five years before JR was baptized. She drove two and a half hours each way to come to midweek, Bible Talk and Sunday Service. They are now in Germany.
John LaMendola	His wife Kelly was a faithful disciple for 14 years before John was baptized. They were separated for eight months prior to his baptism. They are now both committed disciples and have a teen who is a disciple.
Gene Branagan	His wife Judi was faithful for 15 years before Gene was baptized. Their teen daughter is also a faithful disciple.
Toni Ford	Toni fell away for one year, and her husband Eric remained faithful. They now lead a married Bible Talk and our music ministry.
Jose Valdes	His wife Verna remained faithful for four months before Jose was baptized in 1997.
David Schluck	His wife Wendy remained faithful to God for six months before he was baptized in July, 1997.
Aldrea Richardson	Aldrea fell away for one year. Her husband Dan remained faithful. She was restored last year.
Mike Newman	Mike fell away in Orlando for two years. They moved to Tallahassee where his wife Stacey remained faithful. He was restored in Tallahassee last year.
Rodney Atherton	His wife Linda was faithful for 11 years before Rodney was baptized in February, 1997. They are now Sector Leaders and Linda sings with our group, <i>Side By Side</i> .
Ernest Adams	His wife Dot remained faithful for nine years before Ernest was baptized in April, 1997. They have since converted their best friends, Logan and Mary Castle. Their daughter and teen son are also disciples. They will be a part of our new prime time ministry.
Aaron Footman	His wife Mary remained faithful to God for 17 years before Aaron was baptized in October, 1997. They will be a part of our new prime time ministry.

Finally, Jaime Morales has very special significance to me – he is my husband. We were baptized in March of 1991. We were ministry interns, and worked closely with Doug and Jennifer – they became our best friends. Jaime fell away in September of 1995. They never gave up hope that he would be restored, and even allowed me to be promoted from church secretary to church administrator. Jaime and I were separated from January 29, 1997 until Easter Sunday, 1997. But because of Doug and Jennifer – their hearts, their total commitment to God, their deep love for Jaime and me, their unending prayers, and their undying hope – my husband was restored Sunday, March 30th, Easter Sunday, 1997. (Gene Branagan, one of the husbands mentioned above, was instrumental in bringing Jaime back.) We now work together to build God’s Kingdom and have been blessed to lead the teen ministry.

God is using Doug and Jennifer in amazing ways. They have loved us, changed our lives, treated us as only Jesus himself would. God has given us back our dreams, and taught us to overcome even the biggest challenges we face. We now look forward to uniting all of the spouses in the church and passing on what God has taught us to many other disciples. ■

# LOVE ON WHEELS

**A beautiful wedding for a physically challenged couple in the Boston Church of Christ**

**R**ich Nurt, the son of a World War II concentration camp survivor, was left paralyzed and legally blind by polio at age six. Rich became a disciple 13 years ago while in his mid-twenties.

Karen Tuohy was energetic and active as a child but began to notice some strange symptoms as a teenager. She was soon diagnosed with Frederich's Ataxia – a rare and progressive form of muscular dystrophy. Now in her early 30's, Karen is in a wheelchair and needs assistance in order to dress, eat and prepare for bed. She became a disciple several years ago.



▲ Rich and Karen Nurt

It would have been easy for Rich and Karen to think they would never be married, but in the Kingdom of God miracles happen and all kinds of challenges are overcome. On September 6, 1997 Rich and

Karen were united in marriage by Tom Jones, an Elder in the Boston Church who oversees the physically challenged ministry. No bride was ever more beautiful than Karen as she came down the aisle in her wheelchair to meet Rich waiting for her in his wheelchair. Many non-Christians present at the wedding were deeply moved. One began to study the Bible immediately. Another, Karen's personal care attendant, also began studying a few days later. When Rich and Karen returned from their honeymoon cruise, her attendant was baptized into Christ after only 12 days of studying the Bible.

Rich and Karen's relationship is an inspiration not only to the physically challenged ministry but to the entire Boston Church and reminds us all that nothing is impossible with God. ■

# "WHATEVER IT TAKES"

by Jim Blough

**I**n 1987, shortly after we moved to Bombay, India to plant the church, our youngest son, Joel, was diagnosed with epilepsy. He had frequent seizures, unpredictable and violent behavior. Dealing with this situation while trying to lead the church in India was an incredible challenge, but looking back we see God wanted to show us he could use weakness just as powerfully as strength.

Drs. Greg and Shelley Metten were also in the Bombay ministry and they helped us to identify Joel's condition.

Two other disciples, a special educator and an occupational therapist, along with Jim's mother, Jan Blough, a retired schoolteacher, came to India to help with Joel and the ministry.

The only pediatric neurologist in all of India was Dr. Bernard D'Souza, former Chief of Pediatrics at Duke who had decided to move back to India to help his people. For two years he lived less than a mile from us, and treated Joel free of charge. Ironically, six weeks after we moved to England, Dr. D'Souza died of a heart attack. We believe that God moved this prominent physician halfway around the world, just to help one small boy.

After our move to England in 1989, Joel's case was re-evaluated. We faced the difficult decision of placing him in a residential school. We learned of Sunfield Children's Home near Birmingham, England, and called for an appointment. We had prayed for God to give us an answer by the end of February, and the only available day to visit was February 28th! God answered our prayers and gave us the confidence to entrust our son to his care.



▲ Donna, Jim, Jesse, and Joel Blough (clockwise from left)

In 1993, we moved to Washington, DC. We were extremely reluctant to move Joel, and learned that the most desirable residential school in the DC area required a personal interview with Joel before enrollment. Amazingly, the school's Deputy Director of Special Education was going to be in England for vacation. When he visited Joel at Sunfield, he was able to evaluate and admit him to the Fairfax school even before Joel arrived in the States.

Through it all, Joel's brother Jesse has become an awesome disciple and God has raised up our family to serve in the Eldership, lead in the ministry and work in administration. We have seen first hand God's incredible love and concern for the weak and needy. Truly, he is willing to do "Whatever It Takes." ■

*[For more details surrounding this story, see the article "Whatever It Takes" by Jim and Donna Blough, World Sector Administrator, British Commonwealth, in DPI's HOPE for a Hurting World.]*

## International Churches of Christ

*Churches Planted in November and December 1997*

Monrovia, Liberia  
Luanda, Angola  
Blantyre, Malawi  
Bissau, Guinea-Bissau  
Bangui, Central African Republic  
Dakar, Senegal  
Antananorivo, Madagascar  
San Salvador, El Salvador

Managua, Nicaragua  
Las Palmas, Canary Islands  
Belgrade, Yugoslavia  
Ljubljana, Slovenia  
Fort de France, Martinique  
Baku, Azerbaijan  
Dushanba, Tajikistan  
Rostov on Don, Russia

# NORTH REGION ELDER APPOINTED

On January 4th, Jerry Sugarman DDS, with a smile nearly as big as his heart, was appointed as an Elder of the North Region of Los Angeles Church of Christ. He, along with his wife Erlyn, lead a married's zone in the North Valley Sector which is led by Ron and Renee Quint.

The Sugarmans live in Northridge, California and Jerry drives an hour each way to his successful dental practice in Lancaster. Their son Jeremy is an architectural student at Woodbury University, where he leads a Bible Talk.

Jerry and Erlyn are best known in the LA Church for their fast-growing family group. In June 1997, *LA Story* published an article by the Sugarman's called "Putting 'Family' in Family Groups" which highlighted their convictions about building strong, growing, spiritual groups in the church. Their example speaks for their credibility: one Bible Talk of six disciples has grown to over 40 disciples in two groups in just two years.

Jerry was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts into an orthodox Jewish family. His family moved to Lancaster, California where Jerry and his family

were converted in the traditional Church of Christ. After attending Pomona College, he went to the University of the Pacific Dental School in San Francisco. Erlyn was born in the Philippines, where she grew up in the Mormon church. She received her degree in Biology from Brigham Young University in Hawaii. After meeting and being married in 1978, they both became members of a mainline church in the Antelope Valley of Southern California.

In 1983, the Sugarmans heard about how God was blessing the Boston Church of Christ and longed to become part of that ministry. Over the next few years, a serious search for the truth led them, along with 42 other men and women who wanted to become true disciples to meet with the San Diego Church of Christ. The group, led by the Sugarmans often drove three and a half hours each way to San Diego to meet with disciples on Sunday mornings. When the LA Church was planted in 1990, Kip and Elena McKean, Marty and Chris Fuqua and Jerry and Terry Jordan studied the Bible with Jerry and Erlyn who were baptized as true disciples on January 21, 1990.



▲ Jerry Sugarman, here with his wife Erlyn, was recently appointed as an Elder for the North Region of the Los Angeles Church led by Mark and Connie Mancini

Since then, their son Jeremy, Jerry's parents Jordan and Ruth, his brother-in-law and sister Phil and Sandra Paez and their daughter Maleah were baptized as disciples in the Antelope Valley Sector of the North Region.

Jerry and Erlyn are great examples of disciples who have sought God and

allowed him to give direction to their convictions, marriage and family. As a result, he has used them and their shepherds' hearts to have an eternal impact on his Kingdom. ■

## CURRENT RELEASES

### Athens, Georgia

Campus Bible Talk Leader Neal ("Tripp") Sessions, a Junior at the University of Georgia, is known to almost 80,000 people a week as "Hairy Dawg," the Georgia Bulldog mascot. After a grueling audition and interview process, Tripp landed the spot as part of the cheerleading squad and appears at every varsity football and basketball game for the school.



▲ University of Georgia mascot "Hairy Dawg," also known as disciple Neal Sessions

### Paris, France

On December 14, 1997, the Paris Church of Christ had a historic attendance of 1,000. The Campus Ministry, with 81 disciples, brought 90 visitors to this special Sunday service, and had its best autumn ever in 1997.

### The Next Generation

Los Angeles: On January 4, the rainy weather cleared up just in time for the moving Pacific Ocean baptism of Tiffany Webber, daughter of Dr. Doug and Joanne Webber (National Director and National Director of Development for HOPE for Kids\*). An excellent student and member of the West Coast Classical Ballet Company, Tiffany is now part of the inspiring teen ministry in South Central Los Angeles.



▲ Tiffany Webber, baptized January 4, 1998

Boston: Two Boston teens were added to the Lord from the same family this year! God blessed World Sector Administrator Dan Bathon and his wife Julie as they baptized son D.H. and daughter Grace into the Lord. D.H. was elected to student council

and he recently played the lead in the annual holiday play for the church, performing before a crowd of 7,000. He helped to baptize one teen, and is now studying with another. Grace is a straight-A student, active in sports, Vice President of her class, and actively reaching out to other teens.

### Triangle, North Carolina

Alan R. Hall of *The Chapel Hill News* compared the Triangle Church production of "A Little Christmas Spirit" to the best professional shows he has seen in the area. The church is led by Sam and Geri Laing and the play featured an all-volunteer cast. Directed by church staff member Kevin Darby, the show is based on Charles Dickens' classic, "A Christmas Carol." Impressed by the talent and audience appreciation of the show, Hall wrote: "There is no doubt that the 3,000 people who saw this show were bowled right over by a company dedicated to what they do, and put their all into doing it."

\*HOPE for Kids is a service mark for HOPE worldwide, ltd

# LA CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dr. Gregory Metten  
Dr. Jerry Sugarman  
Bruce Williams  
Dr. Martin Wooten

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Kip McKean

## Super Region Leaders

Cory Blackwell  
Marty Fuqua  
Bruce Williams

## Leader of Women's Ministry

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