

The Accident Which Changed My Life.

Expo 86 came to Vancouver in 1986. At the time I was President of the Vancouver Chapter of The Association for Multi Image. Well before Expo started, I addressed the members and warned that while we would all be very busy during Expo, we must remember it was a six month event and that we should be sure to service our present customers, whom we would need after Expo.

However I don't think any of us really realized how big Expo would be for our industry. Once set up got underway we were all swamped. Our tiny company worked day and night setting up exhibits. We had the complete responsibility for setting up the Audio Visual component for the Australian pavilion, with multiple screens and over 100 projectors, plus to the PEI, and the American and Expo's own Pavilion. We also had small jobs at several other pavilions including NASA and the UN. We worked long hours for well over six weeks.

Once it opened we were still responsible for the technical side of the American, PEI and Expo's Pavilions plus some aspects of both NASA and UN. On top of this, visitors flocked to Vancouver we had house guests every night, for the entire six months. It was a wonderfully busy time.

When the Expo finally closed we still had a massive amount of work to dismantle the equipment we had set up. All in all while it was a hectic time it was also a great experience, full of great memories.

One of the fun projects was a large automated parrot in the UN pavilion. As man kind's achievements were displayed on a screen behind him, he would jump up and down shouting. "It can't be done." The one I remember best was the invention of flight. Two weeks before the Kitty Hawk's first flight, one of the top physics scientists, in the US, published a large paper proving the heavier than air flight was impossible. After the Kitty Hawk flew, his reaction was. "So that tiny thing got off the ground for 100 yards, what possible difference can this make to mankind?" As he said that a Concord and 747 flew across the screen and, of course Percy the parrot bounced up and down shouting, "It can't be done, it can't be done"

Percy had a pocket on the front of his chest. The first day we put a small bottle of whisky in it. The type you get served on a plane. It was stolen! From then on it was our duty to put and new bottle of colored water in Percy's pocket every morning. Of course it was stolen every day.

After Expo Percy was moved to UN's head office in New York. After six months I got a phone call that Percy wasn't working. First I asked if he was getting his bottle of whiskey every morning. When the answer was no I said Percy always refused to work until he had his nip. Then we started trouble shooting and I never heard from them again. I wonder if Percy still exists.

I also had a great time with the young staff at the PEI pavilion, which had more visitors, per square foot than any pavilion in Expo. The hosts were a great bunch of college and university students.

The pavilion had been designed to accommodate 5000 visitors per day. I dropped past just as they were closing up two weeks into the fair. The staff was ecstatic; over 9000 visitors had gone through that day. I told them if they ever got to 10,000 I would buy them a bottle of Champagne. The very next night I again went past just before closing and the whole staff was coaxing more people in – they made the 10,000. The crowds kept growing and it cost me a bottle of Champagne again at 15,000, at 20,000 and the last day of Expo at 25,000!

When Expo and the work after finally came to an end I realized I had not followed my own warnings. We were going to have to start building our business once again, from the ground up. Marjorie, 10 year old grandson Michael and I drove to Alberta for several reasons. We were looking for a break after Expo, plus a time to plan our future. We had sold a pile of equipment to a fellow in Edmonton who planned to open a children's theatre restaurant, then declared bankruptcy, before it opened. Problem was he had not paid for the equipment. We bought it back from the bankruptcy auction so needed to pick it up. Marjorie's niece Amy was being married in Rock Mountain House.

We planned to drive straight home the day after the wedding. When we got up early to leave we found the temperature had dropped to -30 C over night. Rather a shock as it was only November 10th. Weather was better as we drove west and we stopped in Salmon Arm and picked up some apples. We stopped to eat dinner in Kamloops and while we were eating it started to snow. By the time we got to Merritt it was a real blizzard, so we stopped at a motel.

We woke up to brilliant sunshine but lots of snow on the road. It was November 11 and Remembrance Day was always important to our family and we hoped to celebrate in Hope. It was dry snow until we got down the big hill about 30 kilometers out of Hope, where it changed to deep slushy snow. Just as we got down to where the river was on our right the van suddenly swerved, I thought I had just hit a patch of ice and tried to straighten it out, however it now swerved violently and we were heading off the road and toward the river. We found out later we had run over a bottle and it had gone right through the treads of our left rear tire.

We had left the road and there was a sudden big bang and the van flew into the air. We did a complete roll in the air at the same time turning end over end. An apple appeared between me and the windshield and seemed stationery while the world did a circle around it. That was the last thing I expected to see on this earth.

Then we came crashing down in the river, we were on our wheels backwards. It was the only way we could have landed and lived. There was a lot of heavy equipment in the back and if we had landed forward we would have been mincemeat.

Water was up to the van window. Michael was on the front seat next to me. He had seen movies where vehicles blow up and was trying to get the door open, but the water pressure prevented this. I looked at him and saw that his eye had come out of the socket and was aimed sideways. Marjorie, in the back seat said she was ok. I looked up and could only see cliff. I reasoned if I can't see the road they can't see us and I needed to get up to the road to get help.

We rolled Mike's window down and he helped me crawl through it. I expected to be able to wade to shore but the river was rushing and I found myself being pushed downstream and I had to swim hard to get to shore. Where I landed there was a rock higher than my chest. I looked downstream and it looked like a better place to climb a bit downstream.

I was afraid of hypothermia so rather than go back in the river I put my hand on the top of the rock and pulled myself up. I then climbed back to the road. Just as my head got level to the road a car came almost to a stop and then drove on. They must have seen my skidded marks and decided not to get involved.

The first time I realized I had a very sore back is when I stood up on the road. A light truck was approaching, across the meridian, heading north. I waved like mad and he stopped. The driver was a real "go to" guy who recognized the whole situation immediately. He grabbed some webbing that was holding down a load in the back of the truck and headed for the river. When he got there I heard him talking to my wife. He asked her to open the door a crack and take hold of the webbing he was tossing to her. He advised if the van started to move in the current to grab Michael and hang on to the webbing and he would pull them out.

About this time a camper, who was driving south, stopped. It was a man, his wife and their 16 year old boy. While the man and son went down to the river the lady shepherded me into the camper and gave me dry clothes.

The driver of the first truck flagged the next car down and told them to drive to Hope as fast as was safe. Contact 911, and tell them he had a van with two in it, under a 20 foot cliff, in 4 feet of water, 15 feet out from the shore and that the driver was safe in a camper. He said to ask for an ambulance with three attendants, a tow truck and a rescue team. I realized then that this guy knew what he was doing.

As we waited for further help I found that he was a former RCMP officer who had quit the force after attending a very similar situation on the Fraser River. In that case there were two young boys, in a van, in the river and before the rescue group arrived the van rolled and both boys drowned. That incidence had bothered him so much he quit the Mounties. Now here he was, one river over, with the same situation.

Just under an hour later the ambulance arrived. The ex-Mountie asked how close the rescue crew was behind and the ambulance attendant told him they were waiting for his report to dispatch it. The air turned blue when the ex-Mountie talked to the dispatcher, then he calmly told Marjorie and hang on, help was on the way.

20 minutes later, when they arrived, the rescue crew and the 16 year old formed a human chain and pulled Marjorie and Michael out of the van. Thank you Lord! As soon as Mike was in the ambulance an attendant put on rubber gloves, put his palm over Mike's eyeball and there was a loud pop and it went back into the socket. They examined Marjorie and stopped the bleeding on a small cut just under her hairline.

I got the contacts of the ex-Mountie and family. Much later we went to their homes and thanked them. The family told us that prior to the accident their son had been a rebellious teenager and being part of the rescue had done wonders for him. The ex-Mountie said that this successful rescue cancelled the nightmares of the previous one. Once again we saw the truth of Romans 8:28, my life verse.

We headed for Hope in to ambulance. They were waiting for us when we got there, with oven warmed blankets. I will never forget how good those felt. They cleaned up Marjorie's small cut, checked Mike over. When they asked me where I hurt it was in one finger and my back. They x-rayed my finger and checked my reflexes, which were ok.

I then made the hardest phone call of my life. It was to Mike's dad telling him how close we had come to killing his son and asking him to come to Hope and pick us up. Marjorie and I discussed our feelings during the accident. We were both sure we were about to die and both of our prayers were. "Please God – not Mike". God's response was to save us all and he wasn't finished yet.

On the way home the pain in my back got worse. We got home and Marjorie helped me to bed and I went to sleep. I awoke in the middle of the night with terrible pain from a muscle spasm. My knees would fly up to my chest. Marjorie had our family doctor's home phone number, (those were the days). He asked what pain killers we had in the house. When it was Tylenol 3s, he told her to give me two and if it didn't help call an ambulance and he would meet us at the hospital. If it did settle down he would be over early in the morning.

He came in the morning and when he examined me, he told me he thought my back was broken, but not a bad break. He said bed rest was what I needed with pain killers and to come to the hospital on Friday, (this was Wednesday) and he would meet me for an x-ray. He did and they found that vertebrae T12 had been crushed by a ¼ inch and that while there was no direct nerve damage, there was pressure on the nerves. I was to spend most of the time on my back for the next week and to expect a lot of pain for at least 8 weeks. After that, probably, arthritis for the rest of my life.

Mike went to an ophthalmologist the next morning and they could find nothing wrong with his eye. Except for some aches and pains Marjorie and Mike had no ongoing physical problems. All three of us had recurring nightmares as our minds relived the experience.

At the time I was doing volunteer work for Operation Eyesight and I had made two commitments for the coming Sunday. I found I could sit, or stand, for short periods of time without too much pain. I was to speak at a church Sunday morning. I phoned them and told them the situation and asked for an exact time so I could come, say my bit and go home. They agreed and it went well.

The second was at Dr. Gullison's house. Ben was suffering from cancer but was coming home for a day, to be with family and close friends. All went well except one of his grandsons accidentally bumped me and I almost passed out from pain. An interesting side note, I had visited Ben, in hospital, just before leaving for Alberta. The family day was already being planned and as I said goodbye, Ben said, "I'll either see you at my house, or in heaven, whichever." Little did we know that it could well have been me who would go first. It was a sobering reminder of the fragility of life.

Early the next morning I awoke in pain with muscle spasms. By this time I had learned how to move around to take pressure off. I did this and the pains subsided. I looked at our digital clock and it read 12:30 am. I don't know if it was a dream or vision but for exactly one hour I had a remarkable experience.

I found myself sitting on one side of a narrow table, across from me was a person who had done something nice to be in my life. This person was the age the event happened, as was I. I would thank them for whatever they did, then they would disappear and another person would be sitting across from me. This happened many times.

Finally I relived something that had happened three weeks earlier. I had been doing an audio visual staging with Darwin Dewar at UBC. Darwin was an evangelist heading up a campus ministry. As we were carrying the equipment back to the car I asked Darwin what happened to get him to be an evangelist.

Darwin was a big strapping fellow and he told me that he had been the captain of the UBC wrestling team. During a match he landed on his head and woke up in the hospital. His head was firmly strapped in place and there were weights on his feet. A voice, which seemed far away, informed him that his upper body would be paralyzed for life and they were not sure if he would be quadriplegic.

Darwin had recently become a Christian, directly under the ministry of Bill Bright from Campus Crusade. Campus Crusade mounted a worldwide prayer chain for Darwin and a week later he walked out of the hospital, with no medical intervention. Darwin became a full time evangelist, first at UBC and then at The Church on 99 in Edmonton. Regrettably years later Darwin developed a brain tumor and although myself and many hundreds others prayed for him, God took him home.

I relived Darwin's and my conversation very vividly. It had been on a cold night and I woke up shivering from a cold breeze, seemingly coming from the ocean. Then, for the only time in my life, I heard God's voice. He said, "Stuart, I have the same thing for you". I rolled over and my back didn't hurt! I got out of bed and walked around the house, no pain. The time was 1:30am.

I woke Marjorie up and told her my back was healed. Then I dressed and went for a long walk. I found myself singing, at the top of my voice, "Alive, Alive My Jesus is Alive". If anyone heard me they probably thought I was drunk. Maybe I was, but in the spirit.

At 9:30 am I phoned my doctor and told him I was cured. He sounded rather skeptical and asked me to come to the office. When I got there he looked me, straight in the eye, put his hand behind me and pressed on the crushed vertebrae. He was wide eyed as he said, "My God it doesn't hurt." My answer was, "You are right, on both counts".

The next day some pain was back, but never severe again. My back was weak for another two months. Also for the first month my body demanded a great deal of rest. I found myself napping several times a day.

I took therapy from Dr. Gordon Stokes who told me that I had come down so hard that it had driven out the lubrication from between every vertebrae. Each session he would press hard on a vertebrae top and bottom. There would be instant severe pain and then relief. I thank God for Gordon.

I promised God that day I was healed that I would concentrate on Christian work and go wherever he wanted to send me.

One year later daughter Illa and I were going on a tour of other religions. The guide for the Hindu and Sikh religions was John Garrison, who had spent many years as a missionary in India. We got to talking and when I told John I was doing volunteer work with Operation Eyesight he said, "About a year ago one of your fellows had a broken back, how is he now?" I told him that was me and told him what happened. He then told me a story.

John was on the executive of Missions Fest in Vancouver and Operation Eyesight had a booth. A couple of days after the accident John called me with some instructions. Marjorie said that I couldn't come to the phone because I had a broken back. That Sunday night, the church he attended, University Chapel, had an evening service and at the end of the service John had several stay behind and pray for me. They prayed until exactly 12:30 – the same time as my vision started. Later I visited the group to thank them. They said they felt like the ones who were praying for Peter when he knocked on the door. They had prayed that night and then forgot about it, it was a year later that they found God had answered their prayers

I should mention one other incident during this religion tour. It was in a Hindu temple and they did a great job of mind manipulation. The first speaker stammered and was unsure of himself, and had the audience feeling sorry for him. Then they brought out a very polished speaker whose day job was medical hypnotism. He was finishing his talk by mentioning that most of the audience was Pentecostal. They were from a Pentecostal college and their bus was there. He went on to say that they would put a lot of weight on speaking in tongues. When they said, "Yes", he went on to say that their St Paul declared that tongues were the least of the gifts.

I had just finished reading 1 Corinthians 14 so I challenged him with the fact Paul went on to say that he spoke in tongues more than any of them. I went on to ask him about the Hindu belief in reincarnation and he explained that with good karma one could go through many incarnations and finally become part of the God-head. I asked him what happened after that and he said, "I guess it all starts over again". My reaction was, "My God I hope not, I couldn't take another round".

We were surrounded by a ring of young people in saffron robes who immediately started chanting and the audience was over.

As we went to leave I was drawn to put my hands on one young man's head and prayed that he would find truth. I looked up and realized my daughter was crying and she told me that this young man was a friend of hers and that his family was trying to rescue him from the cult. A week later he was back with his family and back on track. God is good, all the time!

God had one more test for me before He started to train me for what was to become His major calling on my life. I had promised God I would concentrate on Christian work; however our company did one more large secular job.

It was to put a large audio visual display into one of the Expo buildings, to promote later use of the site. We did the job, but the client kept stalling us on payment. Finally, after about three months, we got the cheque. I immediately paid off some bills, which were due and overdue. Then I got a call from my bank, the cheque had bounced. I phoned the client and found they had skipped the country.

I went to the bank and found that the loans manager, I had been working with, had been transferred. The new one took the attitude if people in our industry were writing bad cheques, he better call my line of credit. He demanded me to come back the next day when he would put a mortgage on our house and give me a schedule of payments.

Marjorie and I went together and prayed just before going in and were at peace with the idea we might lose our house. The loan manager gave us a list of very high payments which I was sure would bankrupt us. The bank manager came in and said. "Mr. Spani we are not trying to bankrupt you". My reply was, "Maybe not, but these payments will." He then slightly modified the payments, but they were still pretty heavy. The next day I went to another bank and got much better terms.

I just got home from the second bank and I got a phone call from a group in Toronto, I had worked with earlier. They had a large rental for me, in fact almost exactly the amount that I had lost on the installation. I said, "Thank you Lord" and slept very well that night.

Three days later I was driving home, across the Second Narrows Bridge, listening to the radio. It said that the Hyatt Hotel was trying to cancel an event for Rev. Moon, of the Moonies and the Moonies were threatening to sue. Then they gave they date of the event. It was the same date and venue of my large rental!

As soon as I got back home I phoned my client in Toronto and asked them if it was really for Reverent Moon. They said it was and I told them I wouldn't do it. They said Moon would sue and I told them they could line up right behind the bank, but that there was no way I would stage a show for this cult.

It turned out that a couple of fellows, who had got into the AV rental business by picking up used equipment after Expo, got the job. They then staged for the Moonies, all over the Pacific Rim. Six months later they both died of a drug overdose. We have never become rich but, from that moment on, we never missed a bank, or any other, payment and I have traveled the world. I have been blessed!

