

TONY MONACO ON MEETING PIANIST BOBBY CORWIN

It was 1975 and these were miracle days. Pastor Kenn Gulliksen, who brought together two Bible studies, both meeting at the houses of singer/songwriters Larry Norman and Chuck Girard, was just founding The Vineyard Christian Fellowship. I was not there at the time. The Lord's script wouldn't author my entrance until months later. However, to me it was like walking with the disciples who had seen Jesus and had been with Him.

An incredibly talented young man (that I described as John the Baptist) was emerging out of the follower's on piano. Anyone whoever met Keith Green and heard him sing the songs he and his wife Melody wrote, knew something specially anointed was going on. Hal Lindsey was leading worship and teaching with Pastor Kenn at Will Rogers State Beach, lifeguard station fifteen. Kenn, his wife Joanie and their children, along with Brent Rue and Associate Pastor Bill Dwyer and his wife Christy were taking care of the literature. And we were all singing, dancing if it moved us, and watching the children making sand castles as we looked out over the ocean imagining what it was like for the disciples to see Jesus walking towards their boat on the churning ocean waves. We all had something in common: In one way or another we knew that we knew Jesus lived and walked among us.

While I am writing this 33 years later, I can still see it all before me, and can almost smell the salty air. So, of course, the actual disciples at that time could never forget it. I was journaling everyday. So were Keith and many others. Then along came Arnold, (his Jewish name was Aaron) Fishkind, bringing with him a zombie-looking friend, Bob "Bobby" Corwin. Arnold was a Jazz bass player who had played with famous Jazz bands. His son, Todd, was a close friend and co-writer on some songs with Keith and Melody Green. I didn't know it, but Arnold had just been "saved," while praying with Todd and members of their Bible group to embrace his long awaited Messiah. Getting back to the zombie-looking friend, Bobby was someone in a daze. I was too wrapped up in my own exhilarated, miracle-like experiences with Jesus to be too aware of what anyone else was experiencing, but Bobby was in bad shape, physically. He was heavily overweight, very slow to answer any questions, and didn't offer anything about himself on his own. Arnold did all the talking for him. I don't like to admit that I was impatient with anyone who didn't converse at my speed, which was a quick and sometimes manic kind of pace.

I didn't realize it, but prior to Christ in my life, I was a daily drinker from childhood. But after my conversion, beer, my favorite beverage, had turned into vinegar in my mouth at a cast party on a TV show I had worked on for several years, and I was running around telling everyone about my miraculous experience. I didn't know Bobby was a heavy drinker and drug user and had just come out of a psychiatric treatment center. "Well I've gotta' get going," I said to Arnold, almost like Bobby wasn't really there. "Tony, would you mind praying for Bob?" Arnold asked in that gentle, humble way I had become used to him speaking. He was so childlike and innocently trusting, I couldn't refuse, as much as I selfishly wanted to. "Sure, Arnie. I'd be glad to," I lied. "Let's just step over here under this tree." The Vineyard was renting a space on Riverside Drive near Woodman Avenue in Sherman Oaks, CA, and we had just finished the Sunday service. We bowed our heads and the minute I closed my eyes to pray I saw a vision of a moving picture of someone conducting an orchestra in a tuxedo. These visions happened for seventeen days straight

from the day I prayed with a crewmember on the set of '70s hit TV detective drama Barnaby Jones to receive Christ, but every time I had these visions I never expected them, and I didn't quite know what to do. All the time I was praying aloud I kept seeing that conductor waving his baton. I had never seen a vision like it before, or since for that matter.

When we finished our prayer, which in essence was for Bobby to be healed and protected, I asked him a direct question. "Bob," I asked slowly, "is there someone in your family who is a music conductor?" He just gave me that glazed look. Nobody said anything. "I ask because I saw this vision of someone conducting an orchestra all during our prayer." Bobby looked at me as if I was speaking another language. Arnold said softly, "Bob plays piano, Tony." There was a piano in the studio in the building we were renting, and our space was rented to a hoedown dance group that held Country dances at night. I had a sickening feeling that Arnold was going to ask me to hear Bobby play.

At this point, the way Bobby looked, I would think it was a miracle if he could even play chopsticks. "You ought to hear him play, Tony. There's a piano in the church studio." I looked at my watch. I was always late for lunch or dinner and my wife, Carol, was really trying to be patient. "Hey, I promised Carol I wouldn't get side-tracked, but maybe just for a little bit." Looking into Arnold's eyes was like looking into the eyes of a baby lamb. "Sure, Tony, I understand. We won't be long. C'mon Bob," he said, taking Bobby by the arm. "Where are we going?" Bobby asked, dazedly. "Just come on, Bob. We're going to the piano." "Oh, okay." He answered obediently.

I'm sure I lost all track of time, and my getting back to the house late once again with another incredible story of what Jesus was doing was sandwiched in between Christopher and Nicole (who were seven and five at the time) hearing another angry Mom and Dad repeating the same argument. They asked to be excused from the table, making a hurried exit.

Frustrated and hurt, Carol said, "Your word doesn't mean anything, Tony. The last time this happened you promised me you'd be home at meal times. Now the children have finished. I'm too upset to eat anything, and the special lox and bagels I got for you are practically stale. I have to put it back in the refrigerator. If you want any you'll have to help yourself. I'm going out to see my sister." I pleaded, "But Carol, you have to hear this guy play. First, he is one of the most noted pianists in the country. He has played for Sinatra. He's Peggy Lee's accompanist and works with Anita O'Day and..." Carol went on, "I don't care if he played for the Queen of England. Don't you understand? You're never here! There's always some vision you're getting, or some Bible study you have to be at, or some new song you've got that you can't find anyone to write out for you!" "Well, maybe that's why God sent Bobby to me," I said. Then Carol let me have it with, "It's crazy, Tony, and you're making me crazy with all this talk about Jesus talking to you or giving you another vision, or you have to hear all of Keith Green's music, or bringing them over to me so I can get saved. If I knew all this was going to happen I never would have married you! What about your own career? Maybe the reason God gave you all this talent is so you could become the star you could have been instead of being a Dialogue Director (for Buddy Ebsen in "Barnaby Jones") for someone else!" "Carol," I reasoned, "I don't know, maybe this Bob

Corwin is a part of all that. His father-in-law is Johnny Mercer, one of the most talented songwriters..." She shot back, "You don't have to tell me who Johnny Mercer is. I'm not stupid!" I continued to explain, "Well did you know that Johnny Mercer couldn't read or write music either, and that Bob would notate all the music he created, and Bob would put it down on paper just like I need done for the songs I hear in my head?" Carol was quiet a moment as she cleaned off the kitchen table. Then she said, "I don't know. You've always got some great excuse. I need a cigarette. Let's talk about this some other time. The children are waiting to see you. They're in the den."

There were countless times like that. And no matter what my pastor or other people in our church were trying to tell me, I couldn't resist obeying what I thought was God's direction when some outstanding experience happened like meeting Bobby Corwin and Arnold Fishkind. All I know is God honored it even if it really wasn't His perfect direction. The Scripture in Romans 8:28 (KJV) that the former Rabbi Saul of Tarsus wrote after he was converted on the road to Damascus and took the name of Paul the Apostle became so meaningful; "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." It's track 13 on my "I Saw A Miracle" album, the first CD introducing *Tony M & The Jazz Sounds of Salvation*.

Bobby Corwin became a walking "miracle" with an insatiable thirst to replace drugs and alcohol with the Bible and prayer. I watched him heal and receive what Jesus preached to His disciples in Matthew 11:27-29 (KJV); "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Bobby's talent rekindled "with the heart of a child," and the Lord's Holy Spirit honored his "Born Again" commitment.

Bobby moved to Palm Springs where his musical talent was quickly revitalized and sought after by other well-known singers and bandleaders. But he was more interested in playing music in churches, which he did on Sundays. Not as easy as it sounds after playing until early in the morning at the Palm Springs Spa the night before. Many top singers that appeared at the McCullum Theatre in Palm Desert along with George Burns and Henry Mancini were delighted to know Bobby was available for their shows. Then, too, there was always music for a CD that *Tony M and The Jazz Sounds of Salvation* needed Bobby to write out and arrange, or suggest an arranger when he got too busy.

Today Bobby Corwin has the desire of his heart fulfilled in being able to dedicate all his time to making arrangements for services at St. John's Lutheran Church in Palm Desert, CA, where he and his wife, Samantha, have been singing and playing for the past ten years or more.

In Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony M", written in a cursive, flowing style.