

# The Impossible Dream

By Judy Howard

In September, 2003, after twenty-seven years of selling antique quilts in Oklahoma City, I moved my shop home to do web business. For the next eight months of feeling useless without a shop to open, I prayed for God to give me new purpose and direction.

In April after starting Beth Moore's *Believing God* Bible study, God revealed his new dream for me—write a book of quilt stories of how women have pieced their brokenness into beauty by believing God. Using my own intellect and abilities, I knew this dream was absurd.

My teachers in the 1950s and 60s cataloged me as a half-wit and socially retarded because I was so shy. Now educators have a kinder expression—severe dyslexia and socially disadvantaged. I struggled through high school and college, graduating only because of my bull-dogged tenacity. I nearly flunked typing classes taught on those

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wonderful old Underwood manuals because my letters always came out reversed. It's a miracle I graduated with a business degree, since typing, shorthand and ten-key practice filled the majority of my hours. Now at age sixty, I enrolled in my first computer and writing classes and prayed for divine intervention.

God provided a compassionate writing teacher, Chalise Miner. She patiently instructed me by critiquing every word I submitted. With such intensive hands-on encouragement, I slowly learned a few principles. Still the writing came hard for me. The computer classes contributed only adrenal stress and migraines. After attending a few writing conferences which left my head reeling, and enrolling in several not-so-helpful non-fiction classes, I began doubting God's dream. Or had I simply heard Him wrong?

As my despair turned to near hopelessness, God graciously provided me with one more nudge, a circular quilt appliquéd with grapes titled "A Winter's Harvest."

"What do you harvest in winter?" I asked my husband.

"Absolutely nothing. Everything's dead in the winter. It would take more than an act of faith to believe in a Winter's Harvest," he replied, burying his head in the newspaper.

The next day I solved the puzzle while studying Beth Moore's "Believing God to Get to your Gilgal." Gilgal means circle and is the first place the children of Israel camped after

they crossed the River Jordan into their Promised Land flowing with milk, honey and grape clusters so large it took two men to carry one cluster.

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The Israelites set up their twelve memorial stones to commemorate their place of crisis, their spot of decision— whether to return to wandering in the wilderness for another forty years, or cross over in belief to their promised land. My Winter's Harvest

quilt is my stone of remembrance that with God all things are possible. #####

Eleven months after God revealed His dream to me, my first book rolled off the press. Seven months later I'd sold 6000 books and was reprinting another 5000 books, and had received seven awards, been interviewed by ABC, NBC, CBS, PBS, COX, CNN, Oklahoma radio, newspapers and magazines—and was half finished with a second book.

After writing the first book, I thought the tough part was over. Was I ever wrong! Being self-published and a first-time author, the challenges had just begun. Instead of paying a publicist \$10,000 each month, I now faced the horror of promoting myself.

Born and bred a wall-flower with an overwhelming fear of people discovering what a fool I am, I now was forced to give speeches, programs, live TV and radio interviews and be a super saleswoman at book signings every week. With each test I cried out to God, "No way. I can't do this. Send me an Aaron to be my spokesman."

But God merely answered, "Trust me. If you'll give me all the glory, I'll give you the words so you can be my witness. I choose the lowly and ignoble to show the world My power through them. Then there can be no doubt that this book and any success came from Me."

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"I'm sorry . . . I have bad news for you on reprinting your books," the printer told me. "Your job will be bound today—but we found a mistake on the Title Page—your publishing company name is misspelled. What do you want to do?"

Hobby Lobby and others were desperate to get their backordered books in time for Christmas sales. With six book signings scheduled and only a few books on hand, what could I do but accept the mistake? "I'll call this my Devil's Eye—my act of humility because only God can create perfection," I told my husband through tears. "The quilters will understand."

I was wrong when I thought nothing more could go wrong. After the computer crashing and waiting patiently for the photographer's cover photo for the second book, I

discovered that the shot wouldn't work after all. It didn't convey the heartwarming focus I wanted. I was exhausted and disheartened and ready to give up.

"Where are you, God?" I screamed in anger and frustration.

Desperate for diversion from my solitary imprisonment in front of my computer, I escaped Saturday morning to search estate sales. At the first sale, I found Master Artist of the Five Civilized Tribes, Bob Annesley's portrait of "Mary's Sunshine." Mary was the ninety-year-old Cherokee woman who earned her living selling handmade quilts on the

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Cherokee Indian Capitol Building steps in Tahlequah each weekend. Bob graciously agreed to color Mary's portrait and quilt with her trademark sunshine yellow background for my book cover.

After waiting endless weeks for the artwork, I found that it wouldn't work either since it reminded people of the caricature of the Arkansas hillbilly quilting and rocking on her log cabin porch and smoking her corn cob pipe. What a blow! I didn't have the time or energy to start over again. Sinking into deep despair, I fell to my knees and pleaded for a new idea. God graciously brought to mind several friends with homes designed as 1700s colonial masterpieces. After a few more futile photo attempts sending me on emotional roller-coaster rides, God finally provided the perfect quilt and fireplace to cover His book at Darlene and Charlie Rook's home.

Daily I'm forced to give God's dream back to Him with no strings attached. Then I pray for strength, guidance and wisdom to cope with each obstacle as it knocks me over.

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In the midst of frantic deadlines trying to pull the book together, I was invited to sign books, exhibit Murrah Memorial quilts and hold a continuous slide show presentation of historic quilts at the 2006 OKC Winter Quilt Show at the downtown Cox Convention Center. After three days of sitting across the aisle from the Men of Biblical Proportions exhibit of 22" quilts that Ruth Harris rents out for shows nationwide, God nudged me with an idea: Why not hold a Centennial Quilt Contest so children and adults can show their pride in Oklahoma. Then exhibit the winning 22" quilts for centennial celebrations statewide.

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Everyone loved the idea and encouraged me to publish a book of the quilt exhibit along with other quilt stories that would tell Oklahoma's unique history. With such a limited market for Oklahoma for the year 2007, I calculated that the contest deadline would have to be April 30<sup>th</sup> and the books would have to go to press in August to be available for Christmas sales in 2006.

I had to devote full time promoting and publicizing the contest at the same time I was scheduling book signings, programs and speeches to promote the release of the second

book. In the midst of finalizing contest details, mailing out entry forms to libraries, schools, quilt guilds and shops statewide, I hit a roadblock with the Centennial Commission. Because I had used the words “Oklahoma Centennial” in the contest title, they dropped my application from their quarterly docket for approval for the contest and the book as official Centennial projects. Without their stamp of approval and listing on their website, the projects were as good as dead because I had no advertising money or contacts to publicize it statewide.

Devastated and exhausted, I again screamed out to God for help. After four months of testing my faith and patience, God finally intervened and the Centennial Commission approved the projects.

Determined to get the Centennial book to the printers before my family arrived for a big reunion in August, I again faced a major setback. The printer emailed me the day before company arrived that all photos had to be 300 dpi resolution. Mine were only

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72 dpi. I rushed out and bought an expensive camera and began reshooting the quilts in my make-shift studio in the bedroom. When the new photos tested to be only 72 dpi as well, I felt totally defeated. The only option was to engage a professional photographer to spend another three months reshooting 200 quilts, the majority of which I didn’t even have in my possession.

Desperate for help to salvage the book, I again cried out to God. Fatigued and downcast, I was ready to ditch the whole project. But how could I face those eighty quilters I’d promised to publish their quilts. Eight relatives were arriving any moment and Gayla my layout and graphics artist was scheduled to leave town the next week. Everything looked impossible to say the least. I tried to put the book out of my mind and muster up enough energy to fix nine meals to my extended family. God miraculously supplied me with the strength and peace to enjoy the reunion.

After the company departed, I picked up the mail to discover that I was faced with a copyright lawsuit over a widely used saying on the back cover of my second book. It was submitted to me as anonymous and I assumed the well recognized quote was in the public domain. Wrong! Renee Baker had a copyright on the poem and was earning her living suing sixty other people like me. After checking with the insurance company, I discovered that our umbrella policy had not been renewed and that our homeowner’s insurance didn’t cover a business liability.

The attorney explained that my potential extent of liability was a cool ten million dollars, plus additional monthly charges, since we had violated her copy write 10,000 times. Though I had difficulty counting my trials all joy as James 1:2 commands, I

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desperately clung to God like saran wrap and to His promise to work everything out for my good. I even forced myself to pray for Renee and forgive her and ask God to soften her heart and pour out His love into her heart. I cast all my cares on God and surrendered

the book, my dreams and work to Him many times, only to pick them up again to fret and worry.

In the midst of final book proofing, the lawyers asked me to submit a list of names and addresses and contact all 1200 people I'd sold or given books to. Here's the email I shared with my attorney:

“After soliciting stories, writing, editing, publishing, selling, publicizing and promoting three books in seventeen months, holding a quilt contest, giving programs, book signings and putting together quilt shows, I'm exhausted, sleep-deprived and totally stressed to the breaking point. I'm a one-man show with very low IQ—only bull-dogged tenacity. I'm not even charging off salary or overhead against the book profits which all go to non-profit organizations that provide quilts for orphans, sick babies and victims of disasters—all those most in need of the touch of God's love and comfort that quilts represent. The books are God's mission, directive and plan that He be glorified and His Word goes forth to draw people to Him—no other motivation. I'd much prefer never having to make a public appearance, and giving the books away.”

I received word through the attorneys that Renee took pity on me and she would be satisfied if I placed stickers on the back of each unsold book reading “© RBaker 1989. Used with permission.” and mailed out 1200 stickers for those books already distributed.

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What a miracle and answer to prayers. God has proven faithful once again in winning a huge victory and delivering me from my trials.

Today I'm rejoicing and wondering why I continually destroy myself by fretting and not trusting God to come to my rescue. His grace indeed is sufficient and He delights in answering prayers super abundantly more than I could dream or imagine. Thanks be to God who leads us in victory in all things.

As a result of notifying the book owners, I also received a certified, registered letter from one of the disgruntled story contributors threatening a lawsuit of her own if I didn't withdraw all 8800 books and replace them with a corrected version of her story.

In the meantime, Gayla cancelled her trip. After two more days of dialoging with the prepress techs at the printing company, we ultimately resolved the resolution problem electronically and mailed the book to the printers only one week late.

Next major undertaking was to schedule book signings and plan a big event to jump start the new book sales. Eureka! The idea came—from God, of course, while singing my prayers in the showers: *Throw a big party to honor the contributors by having them share their stories and show their quilts for a Centennial Celebration to kick off Oklahoma's Birthday.*

After receiving the printer's guarantee that the books would be delivered the first week of October, I rented The McMurray Center that seats 500 at the cost of \$500 for October 7<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m. and started emailing and snail mailing invitations.

October 1<sup>st</sup> I got a phone call that devastated me. “We're sorry. The printing presses broke down and your books won't be ready by October 7<sup>th</sup>.” After I prayed,

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pleaded and cajoled, the President of the company finally agreed to hand deliver 200 of the 5000 books to the McMurrain Center the morning of the party I'd spent thousands of dollars advertising and six weeks of work planning.

The morning of October 7<sup>th</sup>, Murphy's Law prevailed. I arrived at 7 a.m. and no one was there to help. Only two of the nine workers appeared finally at 8 a.m. to hang the quilts. Barely prepared at 10 a.m. to start my program being taped by a professional videographer for a marketable DVD, I was six minutes into my power point presentation when it abruptly ended. The sound man had downloaded the wrong program. One courageous woman adlibbed for the ten minutes it took to reboot the photos of the quilts to display on the big screen as the contributors shared their stories.

During the book signing afterwards, besides running out of books, I discovered that something was dreadfully wrong with the book covers—the lamination had bubbles along the spine which were growing by the minute.

What more could go wrong? Plenty as it turned out. I had scheduled two quilt show/story telling/book signings each week for the next two months and had to cancel and reschedule events for the next two weeks since the book covers had to be reprinted and case bound. I had backorders stacked up by the caseload plus I had to replace the 200 flawed books with perfect ones at my shipping expense.

Now, twelve weeks later, we've sold more than half the books and are concerned we won't have enough to last through the centennial year.

God works in mysterious ways, sometimes stretching my faith to the breaking point. It's my prayer for you that you never give up. Keep trusting God for the victory

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He promises when you commit your work to Him. He'll give you new eyes to see His unchanging love and eternal perspective. He does it for me time and time again in sometimes very surprising and last minute ways. He often reminds me: *“My grace is sufficient for you, My strength is made perfect in weakness . . . Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* 2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJ