

Alaska!

Robert Brown
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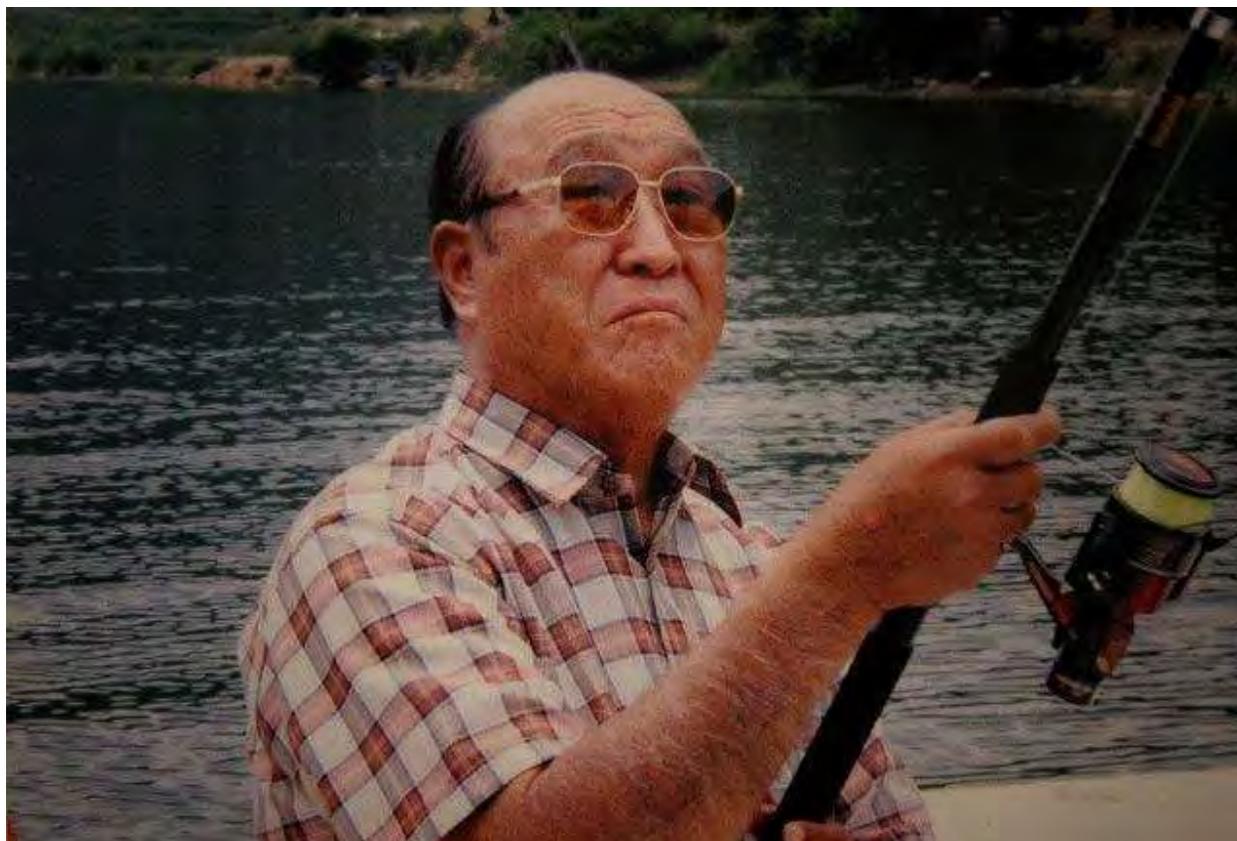


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In 1976 after the Yankee Stadium rally I was a MFT captain and had my team in Utah. One morning as I was about to put the team out our Japanese team mother said that I had to call Commander Yono before I put the team out for the day. So while the team was in a MacDonald's I called the Commander. He said, "Uh, I want you to fly to San Francisco this morning and pick up a van in the parking lot and drive to Alaska."

"OK, who is going to take my team?" I asked rather stunned.

"Another brother is flying out today." He responded.

So I did just that. I found the van in the long-term airport parking lot with the key hidden on a rear tire. The van was full of granariums and candy. I had to get to Alaska before the next fundraising competition started in three days. Mr. Yono joined me for the drive from Portland to Seattle, but had to leave before entering Canada as he couldn't enter on his visa. He wasn't much of a conversationalist but I appreciated his joining me for the few hours.

The Alaska Highway through Canada, as it was known then included going through two private lumber company roads and I had to be wary of the big trucks on mostly dirt roads. I was driving as fast as safely possible and hit one turn too fast and slide on the dirt mountain curve, I slowed briefly but was soon back up to full speed. I saw a couple of black bear cubs in the woods, but not the mom, as I zipped by. At one point going through a river bottom I blew a tire, right next to this beautiful deeply blue glacier that was slowly cascading into the river bottom. To my surprise, on this mostly empty road, a ranger pulled up next to me and changed my tire for me. Sometimes we entertain angels unaware and I was on a mission for God.

I drove through Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, where in 1982 I would be Blessed to Penny, a Canadian who was born in Whitehorse. After two days in Canada, as soon as I hit the Alaska border the road was paved again, no more dirt roads.

I drove to Anchorage and that evening picked up Tony O'Neal at the airport. The competition began the next morning, so we found a place that sold small safes and had them weld the safe we bought on the van floor.

The first day fundraising turned out to be my best day of the competition with \$843. After an hour or so we put the candy away and just focused on the granariums. Everything in Alaska cost more and we would stare at a menu trying to figure how to only spend \$5 or less on food. Finally I said to not worry about the

food cost since our results were so good. We were the first MFTers to go to Alaska and it was golden territory. There was a church center in Anchorage and we stayed there while around Anchorage.

This was the time of the building of the pipeline from Prudhoe Bay at the top of Alaska to Valdez, a southern port, where it would be loaded on oil tanker ships. So in the bars would be all these men with rolls of hundred dollar bills in their pockets. These men came from all over leaving their wives, girlfriends and family for months to make their fortune. It was hard and dangerous work, especially in the colder months and the farther north in the wilderness.

It was extremely sad to see some of the native peoples in the bars though. You would see some who were so wasted on their drink they would fall off their chairs and lie on the floor unaware of anything around them. I had seen similar in the many native American reservations that I sold in, in the lower states, but this was even worse. Another destroyed people.

For that competition I was number one in the country and got my first white pin (Father created an award system, besides the signed photos many of us received, he created pins: green pin, pink pin, white pin and gold pins based on your gross results, not on your place in a competition.) But I knew that after us sisters would be sent up to Alaska and they would humble our results.

After that competition another brother, Bob Russo joined us. Bob was a high energy guy, who when you were doing a bar together, you would hear several times from around the bar Bob enthusiastically proclaiming, "Relax, it's your lucky day!" as he would pop in front of someone to sell to them. We went down to the capital, Juneau, and all the towns along that southern strip that stretches down along Canada.

Tony did all the island towns, hopping on planes and boats to go to each island, while Bob and I drove the van down the peninsula. We sold in Ketchikan that has the highest rainfall average in the U.S. with over 200 inches a year. It rained all the day we were there. Bob and I did one town in Canada, Prince Rupert in British Columbia where everyone had a British accent, or at least it seemed to me. From there we took the ferry back up to Haines, Alaska.

Back in Anchorage, one Sunday that we had off, the church center asked if I could pick up a sister who was selling something at the state fair. So I drove in the dark up a mountain road to the fair. All these cars were coming the other way leaving the fair with their lights on making it hard to see. Suddenly there was a big silhouette in front of me, then wham, I hit the brakes almost swerving into the oncoming traffic. I had hit a moose. Fortunately it was a female, as a male with his rack would have demolished the van. I got out, as did others who had stopped coming down from the fair. Her neck was broke. A man came up shot her in the head and threw the body in the back of his pickup. Dinner for his family for a month.

We drove up to Fairbanks passing the highest mountain in the United States, then called Mt. McKinley, now called Denali, a beautiful 20,310 foot high mountain that rises up alone from the plain. It is called the weather-maker by the natives, creating its own weather system.

At one point Commander Yono flew up and visited us. We went and walked on a glacier near Anchorage. Then Mr. Yono had us draw straws to see which towns we would each fly to alone that had no roads to them. Tony got Barrow, the farthest town North in the United States, Bob got Nome, and I got Kozebue, above the arctic circle. In Kozebue I had lunch with an Eskimo couple where they served duck cooked in seal oil, seal meat and wild berries. For dinner, a white minister invited me to join his family and we had moose liver among other things. At night I sleep on the sand on the beach. Since I was above the arctic circle the sun never set, but just went around the horizon, going a little higher during the day. Tony later shared how the villagers had killed a whale and were on the beach cutting it up to share with everyone. All the houses had various animals bodies hanging up, drying the meat.

When we left Alaska, as I was driving to the airport, I was stopped at a train crossing when a man, not paying attention, slide and hit me with his car from the back. It punctured my gas tank. He promised to pay for it but I had to drive the rest of the way leaking gas. I put the van in a shop and then we flew to Washington D.C. to join in the Washington Monument rally. The next captain would have to pick up the van from the shop.

After the rally, Mr. Yono sent me to Hawaii with three sisters for a challenge team. We were the second MFT team to work in Hawaii. What a fun life!