



Train Your Dragon to **FETCH**

Be Evangelistic

Key Scriptures

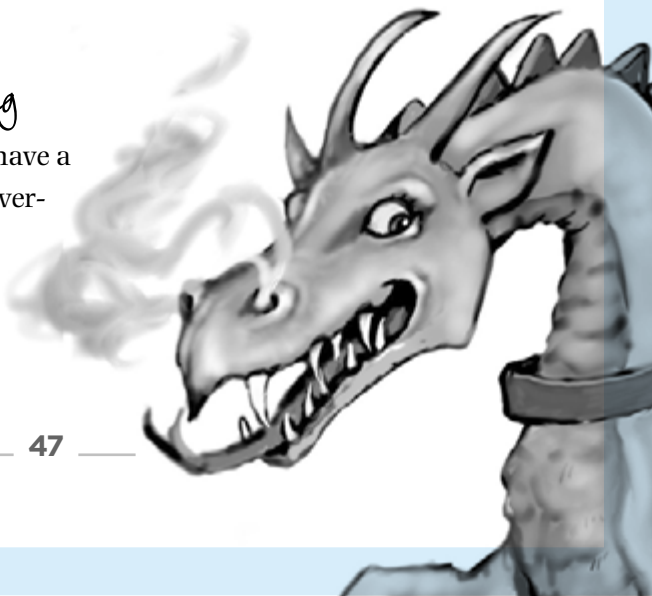
Romans 3:23; Acts 8–9; Luke 15:10;
Matthew 16:26; John 4

I've never had a dog that brought a newspaper or a tennis ball or a Frisbee back when I threw it. I have had dogs that brought dead rodents up to my door, or clothes from the neighbor's line, or the garbage I put by the side of the road. But I do know that more sophisticated fetching dogs exist because I see them on TV. They've been trained to fetch, and once they have, they somehow find it so rewarding that they can't stop.

It's the same for our dragons. Learning to fetch what has been tossed away—the human soul—becomes so rewarding that once we have fetched that first person, brought her to the Master she was separated from, the joy is so immense that we want to do it again and again.

Conquer the Fear of Fetching

Most of our dragons, untrained, have a fear of fetching. The task seems overwhelming. The world population is over seven billion, and all of them need the gospel (Romans 3:23). It's a number I can't even



comprehend, much less begin to approach with a Bible study. Imagine if you were trying to train a pet to fetch, and you threw out seven billion balls. It would be too overwhelming; nothing would be accomplished, other than perhaps making it into the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the largest ball drop and the most confused dog. We don't start with seven billion in fetching lessons. We don't even start with seven. We start with one.

God has a fascination with one. As humans, we overlook one for the big numbers. No one ever had an itch to drive a car that will go one mile an hour. No one wants a device with only one gigabyte of storage, we're not interested in flying one foot above sea level, and no one makes the cover of *Fortune* by having a one-dollar bank account. Consequently, in our churches, we want to see the numbers on the board, and they had better be big ones.

Yes, like everyone else, I do hope and pray the number of converts and faithful Christians multiplies. We do want to see a big number, but the way a number enlarges is by the addition of one, and one, and one more. In God's eyes, each soul alone is valuable enough to cause the voluntary bloodshed of His only Son.



So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11 NKJV).

Fetching Focus

In training our dragons to fetch, we must focus their attention on one. In Acts 8 an angel of the Lord directs Philip, who had just drawn a large crowd while preaching in Samaria (8:5–6), toward Gaza, a desert place (v. 26). Where's the crowd now? He was further instructed by the Spirit to catch up to one chariot, and when he did, he climbed up in it for a Bible study with one man. It probably wouldn't be the strategy most churches would invest in—one person on a road in a desert, one person en route to an important job, one person who was puzzling over one passage. The

result was one person immersed into Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, and we know that “there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

In the very next chapter, the Lord does the very same thing again. This time he sends Ananias to look for one, Saul of Tarsus. Really? One? Especially that one! Saul of Tarsus was the one strongly opposed to Christianity, ravaging the church (Acts 8:3), breathing threats and murders against the followers (9:1). He was on a manhunt, prepared to tie up anyone associated with this religious movement (9:2).

Ananias’ hesitancy was understandable but not excusable. We have those around us who are strongly opposed to religion, calling the church phony and threatening to involve authorities if we don’t quit it with all this literature. They’re the ones we pray for. They’re the ones we keep looking for ways to show kindness to and open the doors of their sealed-up desperate hearts.

Aren’t we glad that God had the wisdom to direct Ananias to just one person? Especially that one! My New Testament sure would be a lot skinnier if it were missing the thirteen books written by Paul, that one who used to be Saul—before Ananias showed up. He taught, guided, and strengthened the churches of the first century, and His inspired words are still teaching, guiding, and strengthening me today.



What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? (Luke 15:4).

Dragon Essential for Fetching

So where do we start? One thing is sure. We can’t do it without our dragon. The tongue gets so much attention in sermons and lesson books because of its propensity to explode, but the amount of good our tongues can do is immeasurable. The value of a soul is beyond compare (Matthew 16:26), and it blows my mind to think that a nearby soul is teetering on the brink of eternal destruction or eternal life and can be affected by the

words I say . . . or don't say. We sing hymns that plead "Will you not tell it today?"; "You never mentioned Him to me"; and "Ring the message out"; all attesting to the golden opportunity and responsibility of our tongues.

Our dragons, like the well-trained dog, ought to be fetching one precious soul at a time, rather than bringing up garbage, dragging up the neighbor's dirty laundry, and reviving rodents that are supposed to be dead.

We've looked at a couple of conversion episodes in the New Testament that illustrate the value of *one*. It didn't begin and end there. For the next couple of thousands of years, God has been using the same strategy to bring souls to redemption: one of His sheep fetching one of His lost. And just as a symphony orchestra consists of individuals focusing on one instrument, God's orchestration has used these sole-fetched lives to impact the entire symphony. Take a look at some examples.

Examples of Fetching "One"

Diane

Diane was divorced and struggling to raise her seven-year-old son, who had a "best friend" at school named Nathan. One day, Nathan's mother, Kay, invited the friend to come to church with their family, and also asked if Diane would like to join them. She did. When Diane was given the opportunity to fill out a visitor card, she checked a little box next to "Would like to study the Bible." A few weeks later, she was baptized into Christ. Today, she is a dorm mom to hundreds of girls at a critical time of their lives at a Christian college. The seven-year-old, now thirty-four, worked the past twelve years in the publication of a Christian periodical circulating to over a million homes. Who knew?

Brian

Brian nervously asked his high school crush to the prom. She thanked him for the invitation but said that dancing didn't fit with the convictions of her faith. He had never heard anyone say that, and when he found out that she attended worship twice each Sunday and Bible class each Wednesday, he thought that was radical, and yet her personality was not radical at all. As he became more curious about what made her

tick that way, he found himself immersed in study not only with her but also her parents. A short time later, he was baptized into Christ. Though he and she eventually parted ways, the more he studied, the more he determined to attend a Christian college to prepare him for ministry, and he continues to preach today, along with his two sons and a son-in-law. Who knew?

Clifford

The local doctors had done all they could do for Clifford. The year was 1944, and it was time to board a northbound train from a small town in Alabama. If anyone could perform the needed surgery, it was the medical staff at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. It would make history as the largest head surgery to date. As the day drew near, Clifford's wife grew nervous and his parents walked the floor. But there was that nice couple at the church of Christ who offered to babysit Clifford's toddler son.

A year earlier, Clifford's mother, Mattie, had been invited to come along one night when one of her relatives was headed to church. She learned the gospel within a short time and was immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of sins and added to His church.

Now that this medical crisis was at hand, her new church family was rallying in support. It impacted Mattie's family, so her sons, in-laws, and daughter ultimately decided to give their lives to Christ as well, followed by her husband who became an elder in the church.

Today, at least fifteen of their descendants preach the gospel. Who knew?

Tami

Tami took a job at the discount store. She noticed the guy who stocked in the department was kind of cute, but she noticed something else. When all the other employees were on break, their language was pretty much identical, laced with curse words and off-color humor attempts.

Who was this one guy who seemed to talk as much as the rest of them, was full of laughter and fun, only without needing to be bleeped? I guess she glanced his way a little extra to see if he ever let his guard down, because pretty soon she saw him glancing back. Conversation eventually led to dating scenarios where she became fascinated

with the scriptures that underlay his Christian behavior. Today they raise five children together in the Lord as he works in ministry and self-employment. Who knew?

Troy

Troy opened the doors of his low-rent apartment to see twelve people on the ground, handcuffed. He had been a little annoyed that his video gaming was interrupted by the kicking in of the door next to him, and voices yelling, “Get on the ground!” But he was not too surprised. There had been two murders there before. It was the life he knew. He had not been to church for years, mostly because the sermons he remembered hearing as a child didn’t make sense to him. But now his apartment butted up against church property. He’d go in and give it a try; why not? It wasn’t exactly the sermon you would handpick for a visitor that day, but sometimes God in His providence is involved in the picking. It was an explanation of the miraculous age, its purpose, and its completion. It made much more sense to Troy than anything he had heard before, so it was bait to come back. The sermon was working on his reasoning, but it takes more than a preacher dragon to work with a soul. There were several dragons who spoke to Troy, but one bold one looked past Troy’s rough-edged exterior and asked him to study. That’s all it took. Troy was soon baptized and is now active in teaching, leading singing, and interpreting sermons in sign language for the deaf. Who knew?

Paul and Uschi

No one was home when the teens knocked on Paul and Uschi’s door. Not only that, but they lived on top of a mountain, and the campaigners had climbed the long driveway in the July sun. Oh well, at least they had a literature packet to leave before walking away disappointed. A year passed, and the campaigners returned once again to help the congregation distribute invitations to a gospel meeting. They climbed the long ascent again, and this time there was an answer to the knock at the door. “Oh yeah,” Paul said, “did you come last summer and leave a packet like this? We read it. When’s the meeting again? We’ll see if we can make it one night.” Lots of people promised as much, but Paul and Uschi delivered. They were so fascinated with the truths they were finding in the

scriptures that they came back the next night, and the next, until on the final night of the meeting, Uschi knew without a doubt she wanted to be baptized right then for the forgiveness of her sins. Paul pondered and studied a few weeks more before arriving at the same decision. It was only one house, and so far up the hill, and no one was even home. Who knew?

Kathy

Kathy, who had grown up in a children's home, struggled with loneliness. And her husband's new job had landed them in unfamiliar territory. Though full of wit and exuberance, she found herself leery of initiating friendships in this new town, far from any family and many miles from her comfort zone. But she took a bold step; she decided to join a bridge club for a little social interaction. One of those bridge players was a New Testament Christian who decided to use her dragon for more than just a bridge game.

Kathy answered the phone one evening to hear the following: "Hey, Kathy, we have Bible study on Wednesday nights and I really think you'd like it. I'll be there to pick you up in five minutes." And then there was a click. It was a great breed of dragon. One who knew the importance of boldness paired with brevity. It reminds me of the Samaritan woman's dragon in John 4. She said "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did," and I think some people were there in five minutes.

Fast forward a few decades. I sat in Kathy's home where she changed the furniture out every few months so she could give young couples "new" and nice things. She was an elder's wife now, her home was a hub of fellowship and activity. She taught and served, and had a monthly section of her budget simply called "give away." She was one of the kindest, most generous, and fun people I knew. We were laughing and talking when the phone rang, and after a brief conversation, she came to me dead serious and said, "Make yourself at home. We have a young couple in crisis that needs our help and prayers. We've got to go." And she was gone. Kathy embodies the kind of Christian I want to be, influencing countless numbers along her path. And it all started with a brave little dragon from a bridge club. Who knew?

Scotty

Those bus workers of the seventies were exhausted. They had canvassed the entire subdivision when they entered the yard where a little boy was playing. “Would you like to ride our bus to church tomorrow morning?” “Let me ask my mom,” he answered and ran into the foyer. Mom met the bus workers and decided it would be okay for her son to attend. Scotty continued to ride the bus for a few years until the bus had seen better days, and the program was discontinued. The congregation, not wanting to let any souls slip through the cracks, made sure that all the children who still wanted to come would have a ride. So Sharon and her family swung by in their station wagon to get Scotty three times a week. I don’t know much more about her, if she’s living or where she’s living. But if I did, I’d go and personally hug her neck, because now Scotty preaches at my home congregation and teaches inside my home where he is husband and father. Who knew?

Clint

Clint was an altar boy in the Catholic church. But like any other little boy in his hometown, he spent many hours in the popular game room and hamburger joint. One of the regulars there was a man named Danny, a preacher in the area. Not only did he play games and shoot pool with them, but he also took a keen interest in their problems and gave them good moral counsel in those critical years. Time passed. Clint moved away, and as the pressures and transitions of the teen and early adult years brought with them every form of temptation, Clint pursued every pleasure, and yet still came up empty. “There has to be something more than this,” he whispered one morning as he came to himself, much as the prodigal son in Luke 15, only without being sure of the clear path to the Father. He met with a religious leader or two, but human doctrine began to muddy things instead of making them clearer. From the recesses of his memory, game room discussions were pushing their way to the front. By providence much more than by chance, Clint was back in his hometown one day when he ran into Danny. They talked, they studied, and Clint was invited to church where a high schooler, Jeremie, was preaching just the lesson Clint needed to hear. Clint was baptized a few weeks later, and

eventually went to preaching school. The rest is still unfolding as he, his wife, and their sons—the first of whom is named Jeremy Daniel—faithfully and prayerfully bring others to Christ in their work. Who knew?

Tyler's Parents

Tyler was veering off the path where her parents had been holding her hand at the downtown festival. “Where are you going, sweetheart?” The child was drawn to an *Apologetics Press* magazine, *Discovery*, because there was a fascinating dinosaur pictured on its cover. The dinosaur was silent, but there were dragons in the free literature booth that got busy. They made friendly conversation as they handed the mother a flyer about their upcoming ladies day. She attended it, as well as worship the next day. And the Sunday after that. Soon, not only was she baptized into Christ, but also her husband and son. We hope the same for Tyler as she nears an accountable age. It was only a dinosaur picture and a few friendly dragons. Who knew?



And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him (Luke 15:20).

God Knew

Who knew about the American soldier who spoke to the young German girl? Who knew about the survivor of the alcoholic father, about the lady who chewed on one lesson for thirty years before making a decision? Who knew about the radio station programmer who listened just a little more closely to the one-minute spots he was rotating than anyone realized? What about the couple in a hotel breakfast room who were casually invited to go to morning worship on the spot? Who knew?

The answer is, “God knew!” None of us knows before our dragon gets involved, whether that one sentence, those few words of kindness, that quiet invitation, or that chance round of dialogue is really more than chance. And while there are scores of people who ignore, politely change

the subject, or even rudely reject attempts at reaching their souls, the truth Satan does not want us to remember is that we cannot know when one seed will germinate, producing an immeasurable harvest. And some seeds grow beans in a hurry, but some grow pumpkins from the seeds we scattered long ago and forgot about.

Bottom line: It's up to our dragons. God could communicate the message to the lost through mystic revelations and in theatrical ways, but He chose me instead. He chose you. Second Corinthians 4:7 says, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."

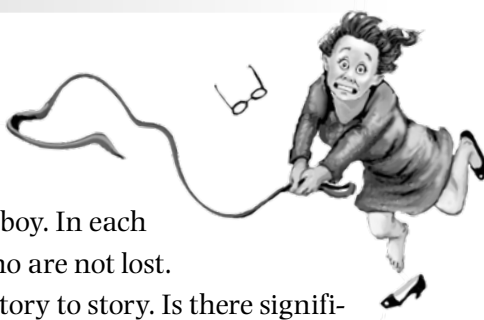
Millions are in need of the gospel. Get your dragon to fetch one of them.



Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matthew 13:8).

TRAINING POINTS

1. In Luke 15, there is a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy. In each case, there are also those who are not lost. But the ratio changes from story to story. Is there significance to the fact that when we get to the boy, he is one of two? If so, what is the significance?
2. If you have tried, on more than one occasion and with more than one person, to conduct a one-on-one Bible study, how does the response vary from person to person? Do you think that there is any dynamic that determines that response other than the recipient himself? If so, what?
3. Think about the community you live in. In what one event, like the downtown festival mentioned, might you set up a booth? Begin



planning now to be part of that event, to have a variety of colorful literature available, to station the most personable people there, and to pray for a harvest of at least one honest seeker. (Free water or lemonade is often a draw that helps event coordinators accept you as an exhibitor.)

4. Have you ever dropped seeds that you forgot about, and then some vegetable or plant sprouted out later? Similarly, have you ever known someone who obeyed the gospel because of an encounter with someone years ago? If so, share both cases.
5. What one person could you call or text, as the bridge player did, and say, "I think you'd love our Bible study class on Wednesdays. I'll be by to pick you up." What's stopping you from making that call or text right now?
6. What is your secular job? If you don't hold one now, what has it been? Do you generally work with millions of people at one time, or does your job focus on one individual at a time? If you were the only person involved in this field, would there be any hope for reaching the masses with your service? How do the answers to these questions help us realize that the gospel initiative is not too overwhelming for our involvement?
7. You can fish with a line hoping for one fish, or you can fish with a net hoping for many. This chapter has focused on the line philosophy, but what are the most effective ways of reaching masses of people with the gospel message?
8. Several of the true stories included in this chapter involve children. Is there a greater or lesser importance in focusing on children rather than adults? Give reasons for your answer.

9. We all experience days that seem to be huge exercises in futility. Share a humorous personal story in which a lot of effort was expended, after which things only seemed to get worse. It can be anything from a cooking mess to a road trip. Considering the exhausting mountain climb, and the impending long-term results of Paul and Uschi, how are our futility days sometimes less futile than we may realize?
10. Did you or your parents ever pick up a child to take to church? Where is he or she now?
11. Troy was a seeker who could have gone unnoticed against the backdrop of a sketchy scene. Do you think churches are trending toward safe neighborhoods and growing subdivisions and away from less desirable areas where lost and hurting souls abound? How can we better ensure that no segment of society is evaded by the hope of the gospel?
12. Much of this chapter focuses on stories of one person reaching out. But in each case, we can also see that it's a two-way street. In each case, there is a point where the lost individual takes initiative to also be a seeker. Find that point in each of the instances given.
13. We all have regrets of opportunities missed. Bring to mind a time you wish you had said something and pray that you can use this memory to wake your dragon to action at the very next opportunity.
14. Almost every instance given includes loneliness, hurting, or even despair on the part of the person ultimately reached with the gospel. What does this teach us about pain and the providence that goes along with it?

THE TAIL END



And Speaking of Rodents and Campaigners . . .

Few things in life are scarier. There is that one ride at the theme park that dangles you four hundred feet above the hot dog stand, but aside from that, nothing comes even close. It's the suspenseful moment when you find yourself on the outside of a stranger's door with a bag full of brochures that say, "The Church of Christ. Who Are These People?" It suddenly occurs to you that there is a possibility that someone may actually answer the door.

For generations, we have called it "going door-knocking," a phrase so ingrained in us that we think it's a verbatim quote from scripture just as surely as "forsake not the assembling" or "shun the very appearance."

The entire reason we are standing there is simply because someone needs the gospel, and yet our heart beats as if we are expecting a troll to come to the door, pick us up by the collar, and poke us in the eyeball. That rarely happens.

My friend Jim was awaiting just such an encounter at a campaign years ago when a huge man came to the door of the mobile home. Jim, small of stature and standing in the giant's shadow, swallowed hard and then opened the following conversation.

"I was wondering if you would like to study the Bible." Jim winced.

"Yes, I would."

"You would?"

"Yes."

"You would?"

"Yes."

I'm convinced this would have gone on for several more stanzas and refrains had it not been for Larry. It was because of workers like

Jim that the term “personal work partner” was invented, and Larry fulfilled that role that day, coming through when the other partner neither knew what to say nor how to stop saying it.

And so goes the round-up for the prospects. We come back to an air-conditioned building, a turkey sandwich, and a dry-erase board at lunch. Everyone reports how many doors were knocked, how many signed up for a correspondence course, and how many—get this—“film strips” or “cottage meetings” were set up. Somehow we all know what that means. It really means someone has agreed to watch a Bible DVD (that’s the “film strip”) or someone has agreed to study the Bible in their home (that’s the “cottage meeting”). Even though many of us weren’t even alive to experience the film strip days when bulbs burned out or overheated on the cottage coffee table, or projector operators dozed off and were now one frame behind manually turning the knob every time the audio went “ding,” somehow we still know that this DVD we hold in our hand will forever be called a film strip by sixty percent of the membership. It must be in the Bible somewhere. We know, even though we have never used the word *cottage* in a sentence without the word *cheese*, exactly what the term *cottage meeting* implies. We also know, if we have ever watched these “film strips” more than once, that if anyone ever stops and asks us how far it is from Utah to Florida, we will know it is 1840 miles.

All the reports at lunch give us courage to face the afternoon. All of the reports, that is, except for Eulan’s, who reported he had “six suspects.” Had there been a homicide, and we had missed it?

We had always imagined there would be. On the heels of the morning devotional, there is, after all, usually an admonition to watch where you step, not to pet a strange dog (which is all of them), and to shy away from anyone waving a weapon. In Greenwood, Mississippi, we had been thus warned, and so it was fresh on the minds of two of our teen girls, one of whom bumped loudly into a lawn chair on the porch, and the other of whom screamed violently, sure she had just been shot at.

Yeah, door-knocking adventures are memorable, and I can't think of anything I'd rather do, once I get over the initial stage fright. It's fun across the street from your church building, but there's something even better about making a trip out of it. We pile on a bus and go four hundred miles away to help a church knock doors, and then later we host a group coming from even farther to help us do the same thing. Somebody could save some gas money.

But it would kill something valuable. When we knock in our own backyard, we get waylaid with schedule conflicts by day, and the routine settling in at our homes at night. On the road, there are no schedule conflicts. No coaches try to throw in an extra practice, no receptionist reminds you of your dental cleaning tomorrow, and there is certainly no settling in at night. We spend the nights executing all the plans we have saved up for "campaign week." They include huge pairs of underwear hung on campground clotheslines, "For Sale" signs on the RVs, and "Just Married" painted in shoe polish on the Peterson's minivan who are unsuspectingly playing a round of 1:00 AM Uno. They also include a lot of picking and grinning. It's an important part of the bonding that goes on that week—so important one of our elders remembered to bring his mandolin, but forget to bring his heart medication.

After the industrial nights, we are glad the next day that there are no manual controls on the "film strips" anymore. For me, the loss of sleep and tension crescendo about mid-week. Where some get emotional or irritable, I tend to be a laugher. This is bad news in door-knocking. I hate to bring it up, but a few years back, Robbie and I were taking turns "doing the talking" at the doors we knocked. Tragically, it was my turn, and somewhere between, "We're having a gospel meeting this week" and "We're also just offering some free Bible studies," I lost it. Completely. That's when the personal work partner idea came in handy. After several rounds of hysterical laughter in which no one was participating but me, and

an unsuccessful attempted recovery, Robbie broke in. My only sober thought was, “What took you so long?”

The woman who answered that door was the only one who signed up for a “cottage meeting” that day. I guess there’s something about that kind of joy that people want a slice of.

While that’s a little embarrassing, I have nothing on Laura. Laura sat in a “cottage” watching the “film strip” with one eye, and a parade of mice with the other. The Pied Piper himself must have stopped overnight at this cottage on his way out of Hamlin and left half his luggage. Praying and remembering her purpose here, Laura was able to make it through the study. Almost. Almost and until one of the mice actually touched her hand on the couch. Laura jumped up and screamed in the middle of the Bible lesson. While everyone stared at her, what could she do now? Explain that it was the mice at the risk of embarrassing the homeowners? Make something up at the risk of endangering her own soul? Besides, what could anyone make up that would suffice here? There they were, even the mice’s jaws hanging open. Laura did what any of us would do. She straightened her skirt, smiled at the strangers, sat back down and said, “I’m so sorry. I don’t know what came over me.”

Um, I think it was a mouse.

There are new kinds of campaigns now: medical campaigns, devastation recovery campaigns, and homebuilding and repairs. The goal is the same. The message is the same. The sandwiches and hot dogs and spaghetti are the same, and so are the underwear pranks. Only the methodology has changed.

I hope I get to do all of these in the future, but I hope I never forget the good old bag of brochures and awaiting the unknown on an unfamiliar porch.

I met Valerie and Gloria and Otoolie this way. They became my sisters in Christ (one of them in heaven now) because I knocked on their door.

And they spur me on when the trolls loom and the mice scurry.