



# Ladysmith News

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## Annual meeting held

# Chamber leaders cite new business growth in area

By Luke Klink

Rusk County and neighboring areas saw several new manufacturers and businesses open and some longtime owners change hands last year.

At the same time Ladysmith completed updates to portions of five streets and underground utilities as well as a state resurfacing of a major highway through the city.

Those were the messages as the Rusk Area Chamber of Commerce held its annual meeting last Thursday, with about 75 business leaders in attendance.

Chamber Board President Sue Farrell thanked present board members, calling them a "phenomenal group."

"We have had some great discussion and a lot of like-mindedness at our meeting, and it has been great," Farrell said. "They have been involved. They felt the community is important to them. It has been a great group to be part of."

Three new chamber board members were announced after on-line and in-person votes were tallied, succeeding those who had expiring terms.

New businesses included Lois, Lann & Bean Boutique; Shinabery Cycle Sales, Tranquil Harmony and Northwoods Nexus. Changing hands were the renamed Miner Station and Rainbow Floral, both downtown.

Other highlights announced were centennial celebrations for Tee Away Golf & Supper Club and Clark's Auto.

New tenants in the Ladysmith In-

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**BUN IN THE OVEN** — Guests evacuate Cobblestone Hotel & Suites in Ladysmith Saturday morning as fire alarms sounded and smoke filled the halls. It was initially not known where the smoke was coming from at the time of the call at 11:45 a.m., Jan. 22. According to city police, the smoke was caused by a person using a microwave to heat up a bun placed on a paper plate. The Ladysmith Fire Department, Ladysmith Police Department and Rusk County Ambulance Service responded. Firefighters cleared the scene at about noon, returning to the fire hall after about 15 minutes.

— News photo by Luke Klink

## Ryan Korver: "The Lord had spoken"

# Hostage describes plan to escape gang in Haiti

By Luke Klink

Part 2 of 3 parts. One month has passed since an Ohio Christian mission agency announced its members, including a Rusk County family of four, successfully escaped from armed captors in Haiti.

Ryan and Melodi Korver and their children, Andre, 3, and Laura, 10 months were among the hostages taken on Oct. 16 as part of a missionary group from Christian Aid Ministries of Ohio. The family, who was in Haiti for the first time and 6-1/2 months total, attends Shiloh Mennonite Church southwest of Conrath.

The captive families were from Amish, Mennonite and other Anabaptist communities in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Ontario, Canada. Two were released last November and three more were set free on Dec. 5, but most of the hostages spent almost two months in captivity before being flown out of the country on Dec. 16.

Since, then Ryan is speaking publicly about their captivity, enduring faith and deliverance.

Ryan recently addressed the Shiloh Mennonite Church congregation, speaking for 2-1/2 hours. A recording of his account was obtained by the Ladysmith News. Part 1 appeared in last week's newspaper.

### The first night in captivity

The hostages kidnapped by the Haitian 400 Mawozo Gang sat as captives in their tiny room. They kept the children close. They sang. They prayed. The evening was hot. The night wore on.

Group members started to realize, "They are planning on us spending the night here."

An English speaking translator, the hostages would begin to call, Santa Claus, due to his squat appearance and willingness to deliver items to the group, was brought in.

"He spoke English like a New York gangster would," Ryan said. This translator told the group he was

## Part 2 of 3 parts, captivity to freedom



**IN HAITI** — The Christian Aid Ministries site in Haiti is where missionaries left last October to travel to an orphanage where CAM does outreach work. A group of 17 was taken hostage by armed Haitian gang members while returning to the CAM base. The last 12 in captivity escaped their captors several days before Christmas. Many of the group are now speaking publicly in their hometowns, offering first-hand accounts of events. Among them are Ryan and Melodi Korver, who attend Shiloh Mennonite Church southwest of Conrath.

*All of a sudden I knew what God wanted, and it was exciting because we had sat there for so long. We felt like there was nothing we could do, and all of a sudden God was speaking. It felt like God had been silent for so long.*

— Area resident Ryan Korver, one of 17 taken hostage

there to help, offering to bring them anything they needed.

"We told him we just wanted to go home," Ryan said.

Instead of letting the group go, gang members brought meals of rice, beans and vegetables individually packed into 17 foam boxes.

"We looked at that stuff, but there was no way we were eating that. It was good food, but we were in no condition to be

hungry," Ryan said.

The hostages still weren't sure what was going to happen to them.

From Creole, the gang's name loosely translates to "400 simpletons," or "400 inexperienced men." Haitian police issued a wanted poster for the Mawozo's alleged leader, Wilson Joseph, nearly a year ago, according to the Associated Press. He faces a string of charges that include murder, attempted murder, auto

theft, hijacking of goods and kidnapping. Joseph goes by the Creole nickname "Lannò Sanjou," roughly meaning: "Death doesn't know which day it's coming."

The translator told the group he was a business owner only cooperating with the gang because he had no choice, adding, "When Lanno Sanjou says, 'Come. You come.'"

The hostages were given bathroom breaks, but were mostly confined to the house.

### The others next door

Hostages settled into their room, eventually noticing activity in the next room. Between the rooms was a door-way covered by a piece of sheet metal with a 4-inch gap at the bottom, and the hostages first thought this movement was made by their kidnappers.

"Actually they had 11 other hostages there. Some Dominicans. Some Haitians," Ryan said.

The hostages continued to sing. The other hostages began to sing back softly in Creole.

"It was a blessing to hear that. They were Creole songs we learned in church," Ryan said.

As the hostages sang between rooms, there was also a large commotion by the guards who were drinking, laughing, talking and carrying on.

The guards remained diligent about their duties, according to Ryan.

"They also were very faithful, checking on us every half hour or so. They would come and shine their very bright light in our eyes. They would pretty well wake up the children," Ryan said.

The other hostages had been instructed not to communicate with the missionaries, according to Ryan.

"We would talk to them through the crack under the door, periodically, but they were instructed not to talk to us. So, when they came out to use the restroom and the showers they would hardly even look at us," Ryan said. "I think they were

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**BIG GAME IN BRUCE** — Bruce High School 1949 graduate and past basketball team member Darrold Wisherd stands beside the famed "Cream Can" that went to the winning school when Bruce played against Cameron, starting with the 1936-37 school year. The rivalry is being renewed and the trophy is being brought out of retirement for a January rematch between the teams. The game will be played at 6:30 p.m., Friday Jan. 28. All Bruce games are livestreamed on the Bruce School Facebook page, and there is a link on the Bruce School website on the right side. Hover over a button, and it says livestream. Cameron was the last team to win in the series so they own the trophy that has been on display all year in the Bruce Historical Museum. It should be a good game both teams are playing well.

— File photo

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# Cream rises to the top in Bruce, Cameron basketball rivalry Area teams tip off this Friday in comeback for coveted trophy

By Luke Klink

When Bruce and Cameron boys basketball teams took to the court years ago to play for the Abbott's Basketball Trophy, the cream always rose to the top. For parts of eight decades, the winner of these classic matches took home the coveted "Cream Can" that represented not only winning the game but also the lengthy dairy heritage of these two nearby communities.

Between 1936 and 2007, the Bruce and Cameron high school boys basketball teams competed on the court. To the victor went not only bragging rights until the teams met next time but also the coveted Cream Can trophy to proudly display at school.

Darold Wisherd became the starting center on the Bruce High School boys basketball team in 1946, during his sophomore year. He recalls playing for "The Cream Can" six times with three of those games in Bruce and three others in Cameron before his 1949 graduation.

"That damn can. We fought hard trying to keep that Cream Can in Bruce. It was the trophy, and the winner got the can," said Wisherd, now 90 years old.

Wisherd, who still proudly carries himself on a fit, lanky frame, won the center position because he stood 6 feet, taller than most other boys on the team. He needed little extra motivation in those games against Cameron. For him, there was one incentive to win.

"Because it was Cameron," Wisherd said.

The honor of taking home the Cream Can added an extra incentive to the rivalry between the two nearby schools. Unofficially, the teams played 103 games with Cameron victorious in 55 contests versus 48 wins for Bruce.

School officials want to renew their rivalry, despite the schools now playing in different conferences. They also want to bring back a piece of history. The Raiders and the Comets take the court again at 6:30 p.m., Friday, Jan. 28, at Bruce High School, when possession of the Cream Can will again be on the line.

## The long way back

The Cream Can trophy originated about 85 years ago, when Abbott's Dairy in Bruce was managed by Bob Schultz and the Abbott's Dairy in Cameron was managed by Ted Schultz. To generate enthusiasm in the rivalry between the nearby dairies, schools and communities, the brothers came up with the idea for a basketball series and donated the trophy to the schools. During the years that followed, the winners names became forever etched into trophy's gleaming exterior.

"They must have come up with this neat idea of having this traveling trophy," Bruce resident Mike Newman said.

The first game in the Cream Can rivalry was during the 1936-37 school year with Bruce defeating Cameron in the first game, 18-11, and Cameron taking the second game, 17-14.

For decades that followed, the teams continued to tip off with the Cream Can on the line.

Bruce Class of 1969 graduate John Carr played varsity basketball and went on to coach the Raiders for many years. He believes the Cream Can is one of the longest running traveling trophies in the state.

"Things heated up in the 1960s with some strong athletes in both programs," Carr said.

The last time the schools competed for "The Cream Can" was in 2007, when Cameron took home the trophy after a narrow 57-56 victory.

Renewing the rivalry was no small feat, as it took two years just to track down the whereabouts of the Cream Can that went missing after the last game. The trophy eventually was discovered, tipped over and hidden behind a picture in a display case at Cameron High School.

## How Abbott's got its name

George Abbott began his dairy business in 1876 from his farm in Salem County, N.J., initially selling bottled milk to locals and then to tourists on the Jersey Shore.

The popularity of the milk was its "freshness," Abbott's key principle was linked to health. In the same year Abbott started his business, he supplied milk to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, testimony to the quality of his dairy milk. Abbott pioneered ways of keeping milk cooler as well as developing bottles with lids to package the product.

Routine pasteurization of milk was becoming widespread in the 1920s to minimize contamination and reduce human illnesses. It was deemed a crucial breakthrough in public health. In 1924, Grade A pasteurization became recommended federal policy and dairy companies such as Abbotts advertised their pasteurized milk accordingly.

Abbott quickly expanded his business and relocated to Philadelphia Within a short period, he opened 16 milk stores within the city center area. They were named Abbotts Alderney Dairies Milk Stores, and business boomed. The name "Alderney" originates from a breed of cattle from the British Channel Island of Alderney.

By 1900, Abbott's Alderney Dairies had corporate offices in Philadelphia, with branches in Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey. The company grew.

In 1919, Abbotts acquired a large



**DAIRY SUPERIORITY** — The Abbott's Basketball Trophy went to the victor of the boys basketball games between Bruce and Cameron, starting in the 1936-37 school year. The trophy will be on the line again for the first time in 15 years when the teams tip off at 6:30 p.m., Friday, Jan. 28, at Bruce High School.

ice cream business and the 1927 consolidation with Dolfinger Dairies gave way to the shortened company name of Abbotts Dairies, Inc. In 1950, the company merged with Fairmount Foods of Omaha, Neb., and the Abbotts name continued into the mid-1980s. The Abbotts dairies hit lean times during the mid 1980s and this signaled the end of the Abbotts name and its rich association with the dairy industry.

## Dairy runs in village's veins

The history of Bruce would not be complete without the story of the village's largest manufacturing plant in its day, Abbotts' Dairies. Started as the Farmers' Cooperative creamery, it was bought by Abbotts in 1929. In 1931, the new, modern plant was built. Not counting truck drivers, who were their own employers, 31 men were working for the plant. The plant received milk sent by 380 patrons.

Their main product was "80 percent cream," which was shipped to eastern states and used for the manufacture of ice cream by Abbott plants there. They also shipped "45 percent cream" used for bottling and non-fat dry milk solids.

Pioneering in the area in quality milk, they handled Grade A milk exclusively since 1931. According to Bob Schultz, longtime plant manager and employee, there were 41.24 million pounds of milk processed in 1950. Farmers in the area received \$1.52 million for that milk, of which \$77,457 was a premium because the milk was Grade A.

The former Abbotts Dairy in Bruce is now home to Dairy Farmers of America DairyConcepts, which continues to be a major employer in the area, producing cheese and dairy powders.

## The main event

Game day became known as Red Raider Day in Bruce.

The Cream Can was carried to the middle of the gym floor prior to the varsity basketball game while the teams warmed up. It was placed on a milking stool at center court, where the teams would tip-off to start the contest. If the trophy was residing in the Bruce trophy case, it was prominently displayed at the pep rally held the afternoon before the game. It was capped with a dance afterward.

Gordie Malaise played forward for Bruce during the 1940s.

"Every game whether here or away was a good game, and we took them all seriously. Every game has fond memories. I made some good friends, even from Cameron. Those were good times," Malaise said.

For Malaise, the games also had a little extra incentive.

"Oh, yes," Malaise said, "That was the game of the year."

The team was always trying harder in these games with Cameron, according to Malaise.

"Our team took it seriously," Malaise said.

## It's in the books

Unofficially, there were 103 Cream Can games played between the two teams based on scores permanently etched into the exterior of the trophy. Cameron emerged victorious 55 times and Bruce in 48 of the games. In question is the 1971-72 season when both scores listed on the trophy are exactly the same with Bruce winning, 70-49. A review of a Bruce yearbook shows the teams played only one game that year with Bruce winning, 70-49. Records also show no scores between 1976-83.

Cameron was the last school to take possession of the trophy after eking out a 57-56 win during the 2006-07 school year. As the last winner in the series, Cameron has retained possession of the trophy ever since.

## One for the history books

With the Bruce Historical Society seeking to renew interest in the Cream Can series as part of a summer exhibit at its museum in the village's downtown, Cameron school officials agreed to an overture to donate the trophy for the historical society's display.

With the trophy now on loan, historical society members also sought to revive the rivalry. They began making

phone calls to officials at both schools to secure their involvement.

Newman added strong local interest in the dairy industry and as a major local employer also helped revive interest in the Cream Can.

"We got to thinking, well there is the Cream Can," Newman said.

## Break in the action

The teams continued to play at least one game every year with the only notable breaks in the action between 1976 and 1983 and the current hiatus.

In the mid-1970s, Cameron was really good and Bruce was average. At that time, there were a few really good teams in this area, including Prentice, Prairie Farm, Colfax and Cameron.

About this time, a really good Cameron team came to Bruce to face its rival that was struggling, according to Carr, who coached Bruce from 1986-2002, including numerous Cream Can contests.

"There was a smoke bomb or a stink bomb that was set off in the gym in the middle of the game. Cameron was ahead by a solid amount," Carr said. "They cleared the gym of spectators for an hour or so, according to legend and hearsay."

When players finally were allowed to return to the gym, Bruce stormed back and beat Cameron, 72-67.

"And Cameron was outraged and refused to play Bruce. That was the reason for the hiatus to my understanding," Carr said.

The series resumed from 1985-2007 when the Cream Can was finally put out to pasture.

David Gerber has a unique perspective, having graduated from Bruce High School in 1982 and has taught or been the athletic director in Cameron since the 1990-91 school year. He has experienced the rivalry from both sides of the court.

Gerber grew up in Exeland and entered Bruce School in the seventh grade. He vividly remembers the excitement leading up to the Cream Can game, seeing the trophy for the first time.

"I was surprised at how plain and small it was," Gerber said. "I guess I just expected it to be much larger and more decorated because I had heard so much about it."

Gerber now realizes the rivalry wasn't so much about the trophy as it was about the tradition and history of the teams.

"It was about more than just winning a game as it was about bragging rights for a year. It was a sense of accomplishment and pride," Gerber said. "I remember Bruce people often saying that anytime Cameron won it was an upset. The Cameron people talk about how it was often frustrating to play Bruce because Bruce always had their best game of the season against them."

Wisherd called Cameron "a good adversary" for those Bruce teams he played on 75 years ago, noting the Cream Can was only a basketball trophy, no other sport.

"I think we played them pretty even most of the time. Cameron was a good adversary for us," Wisherd said.

Wisherd will be rooting hard for a Bruce victory.

"We gotta win it back to keep it here," Wisherd said.

## A good fit

Wisherd proudly wears his red letterman's sweater with his signature sewn into the lining. He credits his daughter, Kathryn Chapman, of Ladysmith, for keeping the garment "well preserved" all these years.

Wisherd notes the strong stitching and lining of the fabric. Three stripes on the sleeves note how many years he lettered at school.

"It's a beautiful sweater. No moth holes or nothing," Wisherd said.

Wisherd expects to attend the Cream Can game in-person with his red letterman's sweater on full display. He'll be rooting for a Bruce victory.

"I got to be," he said. "It's Cameron."

— Editor's note: A longer version of this story appeared in the *Ladysmith News* edition dated July 15, 2021.

# Haiti: Hostage describes the call to escape

Continued from Page A1

usually tied up, tied hand and foot, and kept inside night and day. It seemed like they had it a lot worse than we did."

## The next day

After the hostages refused to eat the first set of meals delivered to them, on the second day they were offered Haitian spaghetti. When there were no takers the guards grew concerned, according to Ryan.

"They really wanted us to be eating. They wanted us to be able to stay there as long as necessary for them to get their desires met. So it really bothered them we weren't eating their food," Ryan said.

The gang members next brought steak and pizza, but the hostages were only interested in going home, he said.

Later, the hostages were given potato chips, ice cream, cookies and other snacks.

"By then we were getting pretty hungry, and we tore into that pretty hard," Ryan said.

Next came a huge ice chest filled with ice, soda and juice. Hostages also were provided with two couches, fans and a generator. They were given fresh clothes, toothbrushes and laundry soap.

"It seemed they were happy to spend some money on us," Ryan said. "As time wore on their generosity definitely dwindled a lot, but at first it seemed like we could have asked for just about anything and gotten it."

The hostages continued to be given meals twice a day and other necessities by a "runner" they described as "more cleaned up" and "looking less like a gangster."

Barrels of water were brought in. The hostages took showers, pouring buckets of water over their heads. They washed clothes.

## The group

Cheryl Noecker, 48, was taken hostage with five of her nine children, Brandon Noecker, 16, Kasandra Noecker, 14, Courtney Noecker, 18, Sheldon Noecker, 6, and Cheryl Noecker, 27. Matt Miller, 29, was taken hostage with his wife, Rachel Miller, 26.

Ryan and Melodi Korver were taken hostage with their children, Andre, 3, and Laura, 10 months.

Kay Yoder, a woman working at the CAM base, was taken hostage.

Sam Stoltzfus, a CAM missionary from Pennsylvania, was taken hostage.

Austin Smucker, 27, a construction worker who went to Haiti in October to rebuild homes after the August earthquake, was taken hostage.

Dale Wideman, a Canadian missionary, was taken hostage.

Wes Yoder, a mechanic there at least 3 years, was taken hostage.

They remained strong in their faith.

Stoltzfus would stand close to the room where the other hostages and guards were and would speak gospel tracts out loud as possible, according to Ryan.

"Sam was very faithful in preaching to these men. They speak Haitian Creole that we were working on learning. We had a few rudimentary phrases down," Ryan said.

## Prayers answered

The group settled into a routine that included meals morning and night, taking showers and washing clothes. They sat on the couches. They walked in circles for exercise.

Cheryl Noecker became sick and in pain, needing medical attention, but the gang didn't sense the emergency, according to Ryan.

After several days of praying and suffering, Cheryl reported her condition was improving.

"It seemed like she had a complete recovery. That was a blessing to see that," Ryan said.

After a little more than a week, the missionaries were once again handed a phone to call Grant in CAM's Haiti office. They reported the group was together and OK. What the hostages heard from Grant was an uplifting message many around the world were praying for them. The call was quickly ended, and it was one of the last calls to Grant, according to Ryan.

## Light in the dark

Ryan said gang members cursed, did drugs and listened to "terrible music."

"They were just hard as hard could be," Ryan said. "They worship Satan. They give Satan power. It was a very dark place that way with smoking and drugs. The battle between light and dark was very clear and very obvious."

After about 1-1/2 weeks, the group was relocated to a new site. Guards rounded up mattresses, bedding, fans and couches before coming back for the hostages on the second trip. The new house was a building with an abandoned appearance and shutters nailed shut on the outside. All around were working farm fields.

Farmers took regular breaks around noon. A little boy brought out 7 goats each day. Others led through cows and horses. Turkeys and chickens with their chicks wandered about. Donkeys were taken to market. School children went to school.

"It was a beautiful setting," Ryan said. "In different circumstances I could have lived there. It was a nice climate. It looked like fun out there, growing things. There was nice soil. No rocks in it for a change. Haiti is a very rocky



**LOCAL FAMILY** — Ryan and Melodi Korver and their children, Andre, 3 years, and Laura, 10 months, were among the hostages.

— Christian Aid Ministries photo

country, but that valley we were in was just really nice beautiful farmland," Ryan said.

One of the farmers had the look of a pastor, passing by one Sunday with a Bible in his hand. The hostages took a chance, writing a letter, asking the man for a phone. The farmer took the note discreetly, without stopping. On the way back, he did stop, but not for long.

"He just shook his head, which we took to mean he couldn't help us. They would kill him if he did," Ryan said. "Even though these people were sympathetic, and it seemed like most of them were, they were too afraid of the gang to do anything for us."

Guards collected coconuts from nearby trees.

Ryan got to work on the home. He removed sticks nailed over the shutters, which raised the ire of the guards. So did knocking over a water barrel placed in front of a side door one night.

"The next day the door was nailed shut. Later on, I took a pry bar and pried the latch shutter open. Pried that door open. Then I really got chewed out," Ryan said. "It seemed like there was a fine line between doing what you needed to do to survive and trying to be a Christian."

Ryan got the impression the guards were limited to yells and threats as they continued to show concern for their hostages' safety and comfort.

## Return trip

After 3-1/2 weeks at the second site, the group was moved back to the first home where they were held.

Matt Miller became extremely sick, and he was allowed to go home with his wife, Rachel. They were the first to be released in November.

"It was a challenge for us. We wanted to go. We wanted to leave," Ryan said.

Cheryl again became sick with large open sores on her feet and ankles that spread to other parts of her body. Eventually, she could barely walk.

Kay Yoder also developed sores.

"They were suffering quite a lot, and it didn't seem like anything was forthcoming," Ryan said.

After a few nights, the gang agreed to release Kay and Cheryl and her son, Sheldon, 6. Cheryl left behind four older children after a contentious battle between the hostages and guards over allowing Cheryl's youngest son to also be allowed to go. Their departure left the group with able bodies, all of which were able to walk on their own. Their departure created a new opportunity.

## An opportunity presents itself

Hoping to avoid another contentious scene of a family being separated as had happened when Cheryl and her son were released, Ryan approached the remaining hostages the next day.

"Can we talk about escape?" he said to the group. "Up to that point there were people who were for escape, some who were against and some who were just scared."

Escape never seemed to be really discussed in depth, according to Ryan.

"It seemed like we just sat there, day after day, week after week, in this evil environment," he said.

A guard once threatened if one of the hostages got away the others would be shot, according to Ryan. Over the weeks, the hostages had developed relationships with the guards and gained their trust somewhat, he added.

Ryan began believing there were times when some of them could have gotten away.

"We had decided to stay together as a group, and they seemed to understand that. They had gotten really lax in their guarding," Ryan said.

Ryan, who was now the elder of the group and the only married man, polled each hostage individually.

"I specifically asked if we were still there three days before Christmas, would you be willing to consider running?" Ryan said. "It seemed like everybody was willing to entertain the idea."

This sign was a sign of light at the end of the tunnel, according to Ryan.

## Lingering doubt

They noticed two planes regularly circling overhead for hours and made cardboard signs. One stated, "SOS." One read, "We Need Help."

On the second day, a plane turned back and swooped low over the house.

"It felt good to know they knew where we were," Ryan said.

No rescue came, and questions still lingered about what to do and when.

One night, in a pouring rain, the hostages considered escaping.

"Some just were not at peace about it," Ryan said. "They were willing to go along with it, but they didn't really feel good about it. So we laid it down that night. We decided we wanted stronger support than that because this could be a life or death experience. We didn't want to pressure people into something they are not at peace about in circumstances like that."

The next morning, because of the rain, guards moved a power strip away from near the bottom of a door. The guards no longer had a reason to sit outside the door to charge their phones each night. The door would become the hostages' path to freedom.

"It seemed like maybe the Lord was working on our behalf," Ryan said. The group had considered digging a tunnel, standing still or simply seeking the salvation of the Lord by walking away and leaving any details up to God.

Eventually, the group gave up talking about escape as those who didn't want to do it didn't even want to talk about it.

But now the door was left mostly unguarded.

## Seeking guidance

Yoder snuck into nearby brush, hoping to find a trail. He was gone several hours.

"I really wanted to run away. I just prayed, 'Lord if you don't want us to run away, send Wes back out of the bushes just discouraged about the whole idea. It isn't going to work. It is just too dangerous,'" Ryan said.

When Yoder returned, "He's got this silly little grin on his face, and he said, 'That mountain isn't that far away,'" Ryan said.

Yoder thought an escape plan might work.

"He was one to not take chances, so that was encouraging," Ryan said.

The hostages talked. They prayed. They walked loops in the yard.

Suddenly, Ryan felt strongly God was telling him personally what to do, that God was telling him to get himself and his family out of that place.

"It was encouraging to know the Lord was in it. That was the main thing we didn't have before," Ryan said. "All of a sudden I knew what God wanted, and it was exciting because we had sat there for so long. We felt like there was nothing we could do, and all of a sudden God was speaking. It felt like God had been silent for so long."

The time for asking for signs had stopped, according to Ryan. It was time for him and his family to go.

"The Lord had spoken," he said.

—Part 3 of 3 next week: A final signal, the path ahead, was ransom paid and home and safe.