

BOBBY THE BIBLE BEAR

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, an interdenominational praise and worship group called Shekinah traveled through upstate New York ministering in many churches and making professional tapes of original music. Under the direction of Anna Behrens, the group had 27 members from as many as 8 different churches in several denominations.

In winter of 1991, they were asked to travel some distance to Greene, NY, to minister to a Catholic religious education session which met after school on a weekday afternoon. Because of the distance and timing, they had to schedule the event when most of the members' children had the week off from school due to spring break, and the children had to be brought along. The event provided an opportunity to involve the children in a short play as part of the ministry session. The play was well-received, and "Shekinah Kids Drama Troupe" was born.

One of the members of Shekinah, Linda Smith, was VBS (Vacation Bible School) director for the non-denominational "New Testament Church" of Rome, NY, and proposed that a new play be written which could be done by the Drama Troupe involving kids from the VBS, which was to happen in July. Little advance information about the VBS program theme was available, and about all that was known was that a bear was to be a central character, and that the VBS program was built around the verse Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Anna's husband Ken began setting the verse to music, and the play's final song was born in an hour. Brainstorming about how a bear could be "saved" resulted in the list of "bearly" possible puns that became the opening song of Bobby's biography. Anna began writing a script, and the plot of the lost boy with three "trials" and evangelist bear with 3 animal friends came next. Choreography design demanded an extra animal, and the story of the "unknown small animal" was born. Ken finished the salvation song, Anna went shopping for craft materials to design the costumes and scenery, and the play was ready for rehearsal in a couple weeks, and debuted at the VBS as planned.

Then God took over. The play was unbelievably successful as a motivating tool for children. The "Shekinah Kids Drama Troupe", and added friends, began playing evangelist with their dolls, and this lasted for 6 months. Ken and Anna added the play to the Shekinah ministry repertoire, divided the cast into two, added the "I'm Mean" song and continued rehearsals. In two years, the play traveled to nearly a dozen venues, and got nearly a 100% response from the audience of children, as "the Bear" led scores of young people to salvation together with the lost boy "Michael." Ultimately, a professional tape/coloring book set, with art by Anna's son, James Feliciano, was marketed.

The play would have died as children got too old to keep playing small animals and lost boys, had it not been for Mark Rudd. Mark had been a member of Shekinah for several years, and had asked to play the Bear in the first cast. He recognized the potential, and felt a distinct call from God to continue the character and the evangelistic opportunities

the “Bear” seemed to enjoy with children. He purchased cases of Bibles which he “autographed” with a paw print, got backup tracks from Ken and Anna, and went on the road in 5 states singing the music, telling the story, leading children in the sinner’s prayer, and giving them souvenir Bibles for 12 more years.

And then came Internet. Now Bobby’s on the web, courtesy of Mark Rudd, the real incarnation of the “Bear who knows Jesus.”