



VOICES FROM PRISON AND *THE EDGE*

ISSUE #17
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I loved the streets more than I loved myself.

CONVERSION

GREETINGS IN THE NEW YEAR! MAY YOU BE HEALTHY AND HAPPY. MAY YOUR FAITH BE STRONG. MAY YOUR FRIENDSHIPS BE REAL. MAY YOUR LOVE OF GOD BE WARM TO WARD AWAY THE COLD. TO OPEN OUR WINTER ISSUE, WE OFFER YOU A BEAUTIFUL PRAYER WRITTEN BY ONE OF THE INMATES AT THE PHILADELPHIA PRISON.

DEAR LORD, HELP THIS LOST SHEEP FIND HIS WAY BACK TO YOUR SIDE. SO YOU CAN LEAD ME AND PROTECT ME AS YOU HAVE BEFORE I WAS LOST. LEAD ME DOWN THE PATH OF RIGHT AND HONOR THAT YOU PLANNED FOR ME. SHOW ME TO WATER SO I MAY DRINK, AND TO GREEN GRASS THAT I MAY EAT. KEEP ME IN THE LIGHT, AND PROTECT ME FROM THE EVIL IN THE DARKNESS. THANK YOU FOR BEING MY SHEPHERD AND TAKING ME BACK ONCE MORE. AMEN.

WHAT A TOUCHING MESSAGE! I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD, WOULD NOT HEAR AND ANSWER THIS. IT COULD BE A LETTER FROM ANY ONE OF US, COULDN'T IT? IT LEADS US INTO THE THEME OF THIS NEWSLETTER: CONVERSION. READ ON TO HEAR HOW ANOTHER YOUNG MAN, "DOMINIC," RAN IN THE STREETS FROM A YOUNG AGE, YET STILL EXPERIENCES GOD TRYING TO REACH HIM, FIND HIM, TURN HIM AROUND.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY GRANDMOTHER AND MOTHER ASKED ME WHAT I WANTED TO BE WHEN I GREW UP. WITHOUT HESITATION, I SAID, "AN ASTRONAUT OR PRIEST." MY FAMILY LAUGHED AND SAID "PRIEST? DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR FATHER IS? HE IS A CRIMINAL GENIUS AND LOVED MANY WOMEN!" SO PRIESTHOOD WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION. I LOVED GIRLS ALREADY AT THREE YEARS OLD. BUT I BEGAN TO DRAW PICTURES OF JESUS EVERYWHERE I WENT, ALL THE TIME. I NEVER THOUGHT MUCH OF IT UNTIL MY MOTHER SHOWED ME STACKS OF DRAWINGS I DID. 90% OF THEM WERE OF JESUS. THROUGHOUT MY LIFE IN SOUTH PHILLY, I BEGAN TO FIGHT A LOT. AND ANYONE FROM THE CITY KNOWS YOU HAD TO KNOW HOW TO FIGHT GROWING UP IN THESE STREETS. I GOT CHASED HOME BY A BUNCH OF GUYS ONCE, AND I WAS SO OUT OF BREATH I SAID I WOULD NEVER RUN AGAIN. "I'D RATHER FIGHT." AND THAT I DID! I RAN AWAY FROM HOME AT ELEVEN TO LIVE WITH MY FATHER. (HE WAS INCARCERATED WHEN I WAS YOUNG). I RAN THE STREETS RAMPANT. BUT FOR SOME REASON I ALWAYS FELT PROTECTED. I FELT SAFE AT TIMES WHEN I SHOULDN'T HAVE. I WAS CRITICALLY WOUNDED WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN. MY DAUGHTER WAS BORN A FEW MONTHS EARLIER. I WAS STABBED MULTIPLE TIMES AND HIT IN THE HEAD WITH A BAT, BUT NEVER FELL OR STOPPED FIGHTING. A MAN THAT I MET ONCE HAPPENED TO BE DRIVING BY AND SAVED ME. HE DROVE ME TO THE HOSPITAL. I WAS CHOKING ON MY OWN BLOOD AND ALL I KEPT SAYING WAS, "I CAN'T DIE. I JUST HAD MY DAUGHTER." HE SURELY SAVED ME. I REMEMBER WAKING UP IN THE HOSPITAL AND ONE OF THOSE MIDDLE-OF-THE-NIGHT CHRISTIAN PROGRAMS WERE ON. I COULDN'T HELP



BUT THINK HE WAS TALKING DIRECTLY TO ME. A WEEK AFTER I GOT OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, I GOT TO THANK THE MAN WHO SAVED ME. A WEEK AFTER THAT HE COMMITTED SUICIDE! I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HOW YOU COULD SAVE A LIFE AND THEN TAKE YOUR OWN. BUT I ALSO STILL DIDN'T LEARN MY LESSON.

I LOVED THE STREETS MORE THAN I LOVED MYSELF. I JUSTIFIED IT BY THINKING I COULD REPAY GOOD WITH EVIL! I SOLD DRUGS, I ROBBED, I HUSTLED, I SCHEMED AND MANEUVERED ANYWAY I COULD. I HAD MULTIPLE WOMEN. I'D STAY UP FOR DAYS AND PARTY. BUT MY HEART NEVER FELT RIGHT. I COULDN'T GRASP WHAT IT WAS. I BEGAN TO HAVE CRAZY DREAMS. I BEGAN TO TAKE MORE PILLS THAN EVER. REALITY WAS BRUTAL FOR ME. THE DEVIL WAS USING MY GIFT OF GAB AND STREET FIGHTING SKILLS TO DO MORE WRONG. BUT MY SPIRIT EARNESTLY FOUGHT AGAINST IT. I WOULD GO HOME AND TAKE A SHOWER AND JUST CRY AND CRY BECAUSE OF THE PAIN I FELT. I HAD AN ARGUMENT WITH THE MOTHER OF MY CHILDREN, AND MY FIVE YEAR OLD DAUGHTER SAID TO ME, "I DON'T LIKE GOD, DADDY." I CRIED SOOO HARD AND RAN OUT THE DOOR TO THE NEAREST CHURCH. EVERY DOOR WAS CLOSED EXCEPT THE CHAPEL BELOW. I GOT ON MY KNEES AND BEGGED GOD LIKE I HAVE NEVER BEGGED BEFORE FOR HELP. I HAD STRANGE VISIONS AT THAT MOMENT THAT I WON'T DISCUSS, BUT I DEFINITELY HAD AN EPIPHANY. THE NEXT DAY I WAS ARRESTED! I DID A YEAR IN JAIL, BUT I STARTED TO LEARN ABOUT MYSELF. YET I CAME HOME AND STILL RAN THE STREETS EVEN WORSE THAN BEFORE. I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MY LIFE YET. BUT I KEPT HAVING PREMONITIONS. THIS CONTINUED FOR YEARS AND SO DID JAIL. I DID THREE DIFFERENT STATE SENTENCES.



THERE WAS A WOMAN (GIRL) I MET WHEN I WAS TEN. WE HAD A QUICK FOUR OR FIVE DAY FLING, THEN SHE LEFT ME. I WAS SO HEART BROKEN AT TEN! PUPPY LOVE, I THOUGHT. AND I WOULD SEE HER THROUGHOUT MY LIFE ON A HI AND BYE NOTE. I WAS IN THE STREETS DEEP. IN THE PAST YEAR OF MY LIFE, MY PUPPY LOVE FOUND ME ON FACEBOOK. I LAUGHED WHEN I SEEN WHO 'FRIEND' REQUESTED ME. SHE WAS RECENTLY DIVORCED, AND I WAS A FREE MAN RUNNING WILD IN THE DRUG AND CLUB SCENE. WE MET UP AT A LOCAL BAR FOR DRINKS. WE LAUGHED AND HAD FUN, JOKING ABOUT OUR PAST AND HOW DIFFERENT WE BOTH TURNED OUT. I WAS A CRIMINAL AND SHE WAS A NURSE. SHE SAVED PEOPLE AND I HURT PEOPLE. I WAS HONEST FOR THE MOST PART AND TOLD HER THAT I WAS SEEING MULTIPLE WOMEN, AND THAT I LIVED A LIFE THAT WOULDN'T BE FAIR TO HER. SHE RESPONDED THAT SHE DIDN'T CARE. SHE



BEGAN TO TEXT ME CONSTANTLY AND TELL ME SHE KNEW I WASN'T SUPPOSED TO LIVE "THIS LIFE." SHE CAME TO THE BAR CONSTANTLY AND DIDN'T CARE WHAT WOMEN I WAS WITH. NOW WE'RE TALKING ABOUT A GORGEOUS SUCCESSFUL WOMAN THAT MADE IT OUT OF THESE SAME ROUGH STREETS. SHE DIDN'T HAVE TO SUBJECT HERSELF TO MY NONSENSE. SHE TOLD ME, "I NEVER PUT MYSELF THROUGH THIS FOR ANY MAN. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THIS FEELING IS, BUT I BELIEVE THAT GOD SENT ME TO YOU." (THIS WAS STRANGE FOR HER BECAUSE SHE WASN'T RELIGIOUS.) I GOT THE CHILLS AND FELT MY BODY SHIFT. MY HEART DIDN'T WANT TO BE IN THE BAR ANYMORE WITH MULTIPLE WOMEN AND CHAOS!"

SHE INSISTED ON BEING PERSISTENT. I WAS FIGHTING A CASE FOR THREE YEARS, SO I USED THE EXCUSE THAT I WAS GOING BACK TO JAIL NOT TO CHANGE MY LIFE. BUTS SHE WASN'T CONVINCED. SHE KEPT COMING TO ME; SHE KEPT TEXTING ME; SHE KEPT TELLING ME, "YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO LIVE LIKE THIS." BUT I STILL WASN'T CONVINCED. I

WENT DOWN THE SHORE WITH MY FRIEND FOR MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND. I STARTED HAVING CRAZY VISIONS. I REMEMBER HEARING THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VOICE IN MY HEAD TELL ME, "IT'S TIME. YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO DO THIS ANYMORE." I WAS FREAKED OUT. SO WHEN I WENT HOME I CALLED HER UP AND TOLD HER TO COME AND GET ME. SHE KEPT TELLING ME TO TAKE HER HAND, BUT MY FLESH WAS STILL FIGHTING MY SPIRIT. "THE 'STREET GAME' STILL HAD ME. BUT SHE STOOD BY ME AND TRIED TO DRAG ME FROM THE DEPTHS OF HELL. SHE DID WHAT I WANTED TO HUMOR ME AND PLEASE ME, BUT SHE KNEW SHE HAD A MISSION. SHE'S A VERY STRONG-MINDED WOMAN FROM THE SAME HARD STREET. I DON'T BELIEVE ANY OTHER WOMAN WOULD HAVE PUT UP WITH MY NONSENSE. BEFORE LONG THOUGH, I SELF-DESTRUCTED AGAIN. I GOT INTO SOMETHING AND WAS PLACED UNDER ARREST. SHE HAPPENED TO PULL UP ON THAT VERY BLOCK AT THAT VERY MOMENT AND SAW ME GETTING INTO THE PADDY WAGON. SHE SAID THEN THAT SHE KNEW SHE HAD TO STAND BY ME. I WAS COMPLETELY BROKEN. I ALWAYS PRAYED FOR KNOWLEDGE. I ALWAYS KNEW THE BIBLE, BUT I DIDN'T "KNOW" THE BIBLE. I OPENED IT THE DAY AFTER OUR PHONE CALL A WEEK AFTER I WAS LOCKED UP. I FELT SOMETHING I NEVER FELT OR JUST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE BEFORE. I NOW KNOW IT WAS THE HOLY SPIRIT. NOTHING ELSE MATTERS MORE THAN JESUS NOW. I UNDERSTAND MY CALLING. MY GIRL FRIEND IS A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN NOW AND STRIVES TO BE THE BEST PERSON SHE CAN BE FOR THE LORD. AND I FEEL IT'S TIME TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL TO THOSE THAT ARE AS 'I AM.' (1 COR. 1:26). I HAD TO BE WHO I WAS TO BE 'WHO I AM.' I HAD TO BECOME STREET TO KNOW THE STREETS, TO DO GOD'S WILL AND SPEAK TO THE STREETS. GOD SENT ME A GIRL AT TEN YEARS OLD SO I CAN REMEMBER HER AT THIRTY-THREE YEARS OLD IN ORDER TO BE SAVED! THERE ARE PLENTY OF SIGNS. WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEM. HOW DID I KNOW AT THREE YEARS OLD THAT I'D SPREAD 'THE WORD?'"

WHAT CAN ONE SAY TO SUCH A GUY? IT SEEMS LIKE HE IS ALMOST ADDICTED TO BEING CHASED—BY THE LAW, BY SATAN EVEN, AND EVENTUALLY BY THIS GIRL HE FELL IN LOVE WITH AT TEN YEARS OF AGE. IS SUCH PERSON TEMPTING GOD? TESTING GOD? TESTING OTHERS (THE GIRL FRIEND) TO SEE IF THEY CAN OUTLAST HIM IN HIS LOVE OF THE "STREETS"? WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO HIM? DO YOU FEAR THAT AS HIS PAST SHOWS HE WILL BE IN THE JAIL-CYCLE AGAIN AND AGAIN? WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THE GIRL-FRIEND. IS SHE ADDICTED TO SAVING THIS GUY? PERHAPS THE KEY POINT HERE IS THAT THE GOOD SHEPHERD DOESN'T GIVE UP ON US, AND HE WILL USE ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING TO CHASE US DOWN AND FIND US. BUT DOES THE GOOD SHEPHERD EVER GET EXASPERATED AND WANT TO SCREAM? DO YOU SEE ANYTHING LIKE THIS PATTERN IN YOUR LIFE? EITHER HIS STYLE OF PLAYING ON THE EDGE OF CHAOS, OR HERS OF WANTING TO SAVE THOSE WHO ARE? SOMETIMES IT FEELS LIKE THAT TO THOSE OF US IN THIS MINISTRY. DON'T FORGET NOW. JUMP INTO OUR CONVERSATION ON THIS CONVERSION TOPIC. GO TO WWW.FACEBOOK/ADEODATUSMINISTRY.COM AND SAY A WORD OR TWO. WE NEED YOUR VOICE FROM "THE EDGE." WE DISTRIBUTE THE NEWSLETTER TO 12 PARISHES AND 20 REHAB CENTERS IN PHILADELPHIA. A DONATION OF \$5 OR \$10 DOLLARS WOULD GREATLY HELP THIS MISSION. MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO ADROP/ADEODATUS AND SEND TO: ADEODATUS PRISON MINISTRY, 2130 S. 21ST St. PHILADELPHIA, 19145. OR, GO TO WWW.RIGHTSOFTHEPOOR.ORG AND PRESS "DONATE" BUTTON. FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS.

FR. PAUL MORRISSEY OSA



ADEODATUS VOLUNTEER PROFILE

JIM BLONSKY

I THINK IT WAS THE SMILE THAT FIRST CAPTURED ME. IT WAS PURE, REAL, A GENUINE WINDOW OF A SOUL WALKING WITH JOY THROUGH THE BELOVED STREETS OF HIS VISITATION PARISH IN KENSINGTON. THE WORLD OF HIS YOUTH WAS GONE. FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, SHARED CORE VALUES OF FAMILY, GOD AND CITIZENSHIP ALL GONE. HE WAS THE LAST OF HIS TRIBE. NOW



THERE WERE ABANDONED HOUSES, GRAFFITI, DRUGS AND PROSTITUTION. THE IRISH OF MODERATE MEANS HAD LEFT, REPLACED BY A CULTURAL MOSAIC OF HISPANIC, ASIAN AND POOR WHITE PEOPLE, ALL STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE IN A VERY DANGEROUS PLACE. JIM'S WORLD HAD DIED OR FLED, LOOKING BACK IN ANGER AT WHAT HAD BEEN LOST. NEVERTHELESS, THE APOCALYPTIC TIDAL WAVE NEVER TOUCHED HIM. HE JUST SWEEPED THE CRACK VIALS, BEFRIENDED THE NEAR ABANDONED CHILDREN AND WON BOTH THE LOVE, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE PROTECTION, OF THE DRUG DEALERS. JIM WAS EVERYWHERE WITH THAT SMILE OF HIS. HE DROVE THE WEAK AND VULNERABLE TO CHURCH EVERY DAY. HE CHAIRED OR PARTICIPATED IN SO MANY PARISH COMMITTEES THAT WE CALLED HIM THE UNOFFICIAL NON-ORDAINED PASTOR OF VISITATION.. HE KNEW EVERY NAME, ALL OF THE HISTORY AND

WHERE ANY MISSING KEY COULD BE FOUND. AS A BOY HE HAD ONCE EVEN WASHED THE CHURCH FLOORS. IT WAS A PENANCE FOR THE "SIN" OF CURIOSITY THAT HAD LED HIM TO VISIT PROTESTANT HOUSES OF WORSHIP. IN THOSE PRE-VATICAN II DAYS JIM AND OTHER GUILTY GUYS WERE REQUIRED TO PRAY THE ROSARY ALOUD AS THEY SCRUBBED THOSE ALREADY ANCIENT STONE FLOORS. AND IT WAS JIM WHO CHEERFULLY MODERNIZED THE HAIL MARY BY TEACHING THE BOYS TO ABBREVIATE THE PRAYER BY THE SIMPLE CHANTING OF "ETCETERA" IN PLACE OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE PRAYER. AFTER ALL THERE WAS STILL TIME TO PLAY STICKBALL ON THE STREETS BEFORE DINNER. YEAH THAT WAS JIM. WHEN I INVITED HIM TO JOIN OUR NEW PRISON MINISTRY GROUP, ADEODATUS, HE HAD ALREADY SPENT 15 YEARS WRITING TO PRISONERS HE NEVER MET, BEING SURE THEIR LONELINESS WAS TEMPORARILY ERASED. ONE DAY RECENTLY, A STRONG YOUNG NEIGHBORHOOD KID CLIMBED INTO JIM'S FRONT SECOND FLOOR WINDOW AT THE URGING OF NEIGHBORS. JIM HAD NOT MADE HIS DAILY 8:00 AM MASS RUN. THE STREET INSTINCTIVELY KNOWS WHEN SOMETHING IS WRONG. THEY DISCOVERED THAT JIM HAD DIED PEACEFULLY IN HIS BED WITH THAT GREAT SMILE ON HIS FACE. AT HIS FUNERAL THEY WERE ALL THERE, ALL THE AGES, LANGUAGES, RACES AND CULTURES OF THE NEW KENSINGTON. JUST AS HE HAD ABBREVIATED THE HAIL MARY, WE HAVE REWORKED THE CANONIZATION PROCESS. WE CONFIDENTLY DECLARED HIM OUR "SAINT OF THE STREETS". THE WASTELAND HAS A CELESTIAL ADVOCATE NOW. RIP DEAR JIM, AND PROTECT US.

GEORGE MUNYAN

WHERE DO WE MEET?

WE ARE ADEODATUS, A SUPPORT GROUP FOR EX-INMATES AND ANYONE WHO CARES ABOUT THEIR REINTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY. WE MEET ON THURSDAY NIGHTS (7:30 TO 9:00 P.M.). ON THE FIRST THURSDAY OF THE MONTH, WE MEET AT THE BEVILACQUA CENTER AT KENSINGTON AND LEHIGH AVES, PHILADELPHIA. ON ALL OTHER THURSDAYS WE MEET AT ST. RITA OF CASCIA RECTORY, 1166 S. BROAD STREET (AT ELLSWORTH), PHILADELPHIA. THROUGH PRAYER, THE GOSPEL AND CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP WE OFFER STRENGTH TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE IN THIS WORLD. SINCE 2007, WE HAVE HOSTED THIS WEEKLY SUPPORT GROUP FOR EX-INMATES AND OTHERS "ON THE EDGE." THAT'S ABOUT 350 MEETINGS! IT IS A SPECIAL TIME WHERE OUR CORE GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS IS GRACED AS MUCH AS ANY OF OUR WEEKLY VISITORS. PLEASE JOIN US. CALL 215-925-3566 AND LEAVE A MESSAGE FOR ADEODATUS IF YOU WISH.

