

# "From Street Kid to Kingdom Kid" *by Reverend Tim Tyree*

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"Humble beginnings" would describe the obscure roots from which I came. My father (a former runaway, ex-convict, and alcoholic) left home and siblings resulting in a lost ancestry for his children. Dad met my mother (a divorced waitress) in 1955 and started a family on income earned as a dairyman. So, in a small Northern California town, we began in poverty to uneducated parents without assets and no relatives. Our interpersonal relationships among each other were our strength. Thank God, because we changed our residence on a greater than annual average. We had only each other and were happy.

As the story goes, my father was evading the authorities and took flight across the country until we ended in Tampa with 13 cents left. We lived as renters in various places as Dad found work as a dairyman, mechanic, and cook. Mom stayed home and raised us three boys single handedly. Eventually, Dad's unfaithfulness in marriage gave us a "half-brother" who was born a month apart from my kid sister. After the divorce, Mom put the four of us on a Greyhound bus and headed back to California for a new start. Twelve hard years had been spent there in Florida with not much to show for it at the end. Dad and the boy (Jeff) stayed behind in Tampa to live near Jeff's mother.

An unusual chain of events happened next. The moving van line overcharged for transporting our belongings which were subsequently auctioned off. At this point, we were living in an unfurnished apartment without our bedding, kitchenware, clothes...nothing. I recall eating nightly at the corner drive-in and bringing home the plastic ware, salt, ketchups, etc. Mom collected hardware from the gutters as we walked along. She didn't drive, so we walked or took the bus everywhere we went. Our only income was the welfare check from there on out. The assistance which was originally promised by my mother's first husband was cancelled because she wouldn't cohabit with him. Then, after only a month passed, Dad showed up in San Francisco with Jeff after the long bus ride. Jeff's mother did not ever come for him and Dad couldn't watch him while working so he stayed with us. Before long, my mother "adopted" Jeff and we have never been sorry! He was raised as a twin to my sister.

Our neighborhood (part of the Spanish ghetto) was referred to by the local police precinct as "The Devil's Triangle". The name derived from the boundaries of three distinct crime-ridden and oppressed areas which converged there. The usual scenery included all types of sexual perverts, drug addicts, homeless, drunkards, runaways, gangs, and so forth. Growing up near housing projects and attending rough schools made life in the inner-city eventful to say the least. I was "jumped" a couple of times and threatened with weapons several times. In about a ten year span, I held a dead baby in my building, saw a toddler killed by a car, rescued a toddler from the same fate, lost a nine-year-old neighbor who was killed crossing in front of our place, experienced the death of several classmates, helped a best friend recover from being shot in the chest, knew juveniles who were murderers, found a youth shot in the back outside our place, witnessed a gang incident at my intersection where a youth almost lost his arm to a razor attack, saw three adults shot in the head at the same time where I was working, saw a woman dead under a car, saw a man run over in front of me, saw a drunk driver kill another driver in our intersection, saw three die in a car which came off the overpass at our intersection, saw my neighbor land on his head by jumping from our fourth story window, and the list goes on. As an unbeliever, I didn't know how to process these shocking episodes or what to make of them. I didn't know anyone else who had witnessed as much. When my father worked at a mortuary I would see corpses fresh from crime scenes and being prepped for autopsy. I probably gained a perspective of the transitoriness of life that few had. I also felt the pressure of impending death. A certain insecurity characterized my life at that time.

Besides all this, I was no angel. A failure at high school, and a compulsive thief, I was busy getting into daily mischief. I stayed occupied between burglaries and getting high for over a thousand days straight! My nickname in the neighborhood became "Dust King" due to my overuse of PCP ("crystal", "angel dust"). What a dangerous drug! But then, I had no sense of concern - I was a gambler, a risk-taker. Marijuana, hashish, mescaline, paper acid, beer and liquor...all these were part of a regular "menu" not to mention experimentation with prescription drugs. My lifestyle was immoral overall. Occasionally, I would sell certain drugs to other youth at a playground. Once, I was searched and handcuffed as 14 police officers looked for evidence on me of a crime which I had committed. I had to run from police many times as I participated publicly in assaults and thefts. All these experiences were carefully kept from my mother who was teaching me right while I was doing wrong. Thankfully, she was a praying Mom who had a good connection with God.

Dad never was keen on going to church, but now it was Mom's choice -she found a nearby Baptist church which we could walk to. We boys would go just to please her. I remember going to "puppet practice" while under the influence

of LSD. In fact, my brothers and I would take drugs in the church lobby before entering the worship service. There, at the church, was a businessman who had an entry level position open at his small business. I took the job on the day after finishing high school and stayed with his firm for the next eight years. During that time, I completed an apprenticeship and became a journeyman silk-screen printer, a field in which I would spend nearly twenty years.

It was there as an eighteen-year-old, where I was impacted by the example and friendship of my Christian boss, Howard Bolton. I knew he had only been a believer since age 35 and had a history that I could identify with. I also understood that the gospel of Jesus Christ had transformed his life. All of this brought great conviction upon me as I sensed God was beginning to knock on my heart's door. While those around me were praying faithfully for me and as I constantly felt the "finger of God" seeking a commitment from me, I wanted nothing to do with Him. My prayers as a sinner were like, "Leave me alone, God - go away from me, You're like a monkey on my back... come back later in life when I'm 'ready' for religion!". Instead of "answering" that request He only remained persistent and His Spirit seemed to confront me daily as if to say, "I want you."

Finally, I gave in, wondering what it could hurt me to receive Him. After praying a prayer of decision with the pastor one afternoon, I was a different man. Something radical happened within me. I realized immediately that a change had taken place. I suddenly saw life and circumstances through different eyes. I felt a spiritual presence and power in my life. There was the assurance of forgiveness of my sin and the gift of eternal life. God amazed me with His grace by making "arrangements" for my salvation and overcoming my resistance towards Him. I did not want to be immoral anymore. I never used drugs again and I quit stealing. My foul mouth cleaned up. Emptiness and fear were replaced by understanding and joy. My lack of ambition turned to motivation. My new conversion brought reactions throughout the neighborhood: some disassociated with me, others wanted to know more. But to be sure, they had never seen me this happy and emotionally healthy.

After several years, I had an experience which I interpreted as a call to full time ministry. I have tenaciously pursued that calling and laid aside any other ambition in order to satisfy His direction for me. Pauline and I were married in 1985 and moved to Sacramento to begin Bible school. She has been a tremendous benefit to my life in God and is herself gifted in ministry. Our plans have been sidetracked or subverted many times. Except for a couple of part time ministry stints (served as Intern Pastor under Dave Marken, and as Singles Pastor under Lloyd Jacobsen, [Bethel Church](#), San Francisco), I remained in a secular work force far longer than I had wished. But finally, after becoming licensed to preach in 1995, doors began to open. That year, I will never forget how close I came to abandoning all hope of a career in the Lord's service. The frustration I felt was as if God were standing before me beckoning me while, at the same time, standing behind me holding me back. I had become so miserable with making a living the way I always had that I just felt my spirit wanting to wither. Instead, I chose to believe God and to be stubbornly faithful to what He had affirmed for me over and over: I belonged in full time ministry.

When [Pastor Carl Johnson](#) gave us a call from New York, we couldn't have known where it would lead. However, after spending a certain week with our future church family, we felt assured that this was the right place as well as the right time. We accepted the invitation to serve here and are very fulfilled in the pastorate. We feel effective in our relationships and believe the Father is refining us to better glorify Him. One never knows what the future holds, but obedience and faithfulness will always lead to a happy place.

Over the years, my faith (and faithfulness) has been sorely tested. Like others, I have seen personal hardships such as unemployment, business failure, tragedy, home foreclosure, illness, stress in the work place, marital stress, accidents with our children, AIDS in the family (twice), and no less than six bereavements close to me. I have been mad at God, at times, in need of emotional recovery. The Lord has been very patient with me, even granting me inner healing as I have needed it more than once! Survival seemed to be a primary concern at times, yet, through renewal in the Spirit, I have found not just survival, but vigor and vision for the future. Satan has failed to spoil my "first love" and God is able to keep those He saves. His word is the foundation for every life lived to become fruitful and endure to eternal life. I thank Him for His mercy and look forward to dwelling in His presence one day.