

## **The Lost is Found**

by Josh Martin

I guess to truly give my testimony I need to start from the beginning. I came from a broken home and never really knew my dad. My mom remarried and a few years later we moved to Florida. It was then that I realized things weren't right for me. I was an outsider in my own home and lived in constant fear. I spent a lot of time alone, friends were hard to make because they too were afraid to be at my house.

As the years passed so too did the fear, but it didn't just dissolve and the problem didn't go away instead the fear turned to anger and pain. Eventually the pain turned into rage. I learned at a very young age how to handle pain and conquer fear, these became very dangerous attributes. By the time I reached high school I found myself engulfed in this constant inner struggle, I felt unimaginable rage, the kind that can't be contained and I was growing tired of trying. I wasn't sure who I was mad at or why I felt so angry, but I took out my angst on any and every figure of authority I could find. I began to travel down a very destructive road and those friends I did have quickly abandoned ship and left me once again alone but this time I was ready and alone was exactly how I wanted to be.

Alone was easy: it meant there was no one to disappoint me and if no one got close then no one could ever hurt me again. I supposed it was a natural progression, a survival instinct so engrained that it took over and initiated itself without any true cognitive thought. It did however have an adverse effect on my behavior. I began to make new friends, the kinds of kids who understood my anger who too came from imperfect homes that lacked structure and parental guidance. These new friends who shared my same interest and could relish my reckless behavior would prove to be a terrible addition to my new way of life. They were however far less an influence as they were enablers.

By the summer of my sixteenth birthday I had begun to experiment with multiple drugs and my recklessness had taken on a whole new level. I wanted to die I challenged the universe dared it if you will to bring me down. I indulged in excess everywhere possible and by the start of my sophomore year had become an official menace, I was in Land O Lakes public enemy number one. People in the high school and the Pasco County Sheriff's Department had all taken note and began to watch my every move. If something bad happened around town they came to see me.

My first sophomore year was rather troublesome. I attempted at least three times a week to attend school but for all the wrong reasons and by the second semester the faculty had seen enough and I could scarcely step foot in the school when the walkie talkies would begin to chirp. They waited impatiently for me to break any rule, the slightest infraction now led to my immediate removal. By my second sophomore year I had perfected my delinquency and was considered by most to be a ring leader in a group of rather troublesome teenagers. It was at this time that I began to have certain dreams and for years I dismissed them as a side effect of my drug use.

In the early spring of 1994 I was watching my world come unraveled, I was tired of the constant fighting and the hate had made me more than a little jaded. Some of the kids closest to me began to get popped and this wasn't kid's stuff anymore it was serious and it carried stiff

penalties. One of my best friends caught a three year bid as a juvenile and another was sentenced to five as an adult at seventeen. I knew it was only a matter of time before I was arrested myself and I wasn't going to be looking at community service or probation this time.

At the urge of my girlfriend at the time I decided to call my uncle in Missouri and take him up on his offer to come and live with him. I bought a Greyhound ticket on Tuesday and left Thursday morning. I slowly began to change my life, though the drugs remained a constant. I preferred to stay numb; the pain was still fresh and the anger still in there somewhere.

During the next two years God had a plan for me, but I didn't know it yet. I began to suppress the anger through poetry and it was during this soul searching that I realized what I truly wanted was a family: someone to love me, someone who cared. I wanted someone to know the real me, the kid who cried at Lassie and E.T.

My dreams continued the same dreams over and over again. There was one where I was standing in a field covered with a low layer of fog. Out of the fog came the Devil and he challenged me to a race. He informed me that he wanted my soul but I had to freely give it to him, he had to win it from me. With the swipe of his arm the fog disappeared and in front of us was a large pond. I will race you around this pond, you will start here he pointed to a spot on the moist ground, and when you get there (he pointed this time to the middle of the pond) I will start. "Sound fair?" he asked. "Sure," I said. "If I catch you or you fall into the pond I get you soul." We shook on it and he slowly bowed pointing towards the pond, "When you're ready," he said.

I started to run and true to his word he waited until I was half way around the pond before he started to run. He was slow too in his suit and dress shoes he was hardly dresses for a run. Lap after lap I ran and quickly noticed that he was not getting any closer, but I also realized that we had never set a lap limit, would I have to do this for ever? At the realization that I had been tricked I could hear the evil laughter of the devil it was as if he could hear my thoughts and knew I had figured out his little game. All this thought caused me to slow and he was gaining ground, while I was looking back nervously at the devil I began to drift towards the pond. When I turned back it was too late the bank was slick and I lost my footing and slid into the muddy, murky water.

I laughed at the depth of the water, it was barely waist high; I thought that I could just walk out. The harder I fought the deeper I sank; the bank was muddy and constantly gave way under my weight. I continued to fight until the black water sucked me down, and in those final moments I realized I didn't want to die, in the darkness I could still hear the devils sardonic laughter.

It was at a friend's house the following summer of '95 that I found my angel. Looking through his year book I saw the most beautiful face I had ever seen. I can't explain but something came over me and I knew I wanted her, wanted to love her and her to love me. So for the first time in a long time I bowed my head in private and asked the lord to send me my angel. It would take him all summer long but at the precise moment when the time was right our paths would crossed and for unknown reasons the girl who had everything fell for the boy who had nothing.

I wish that I had recognized the gift God had given me sooner. She stayed by me as I constantly pushed her away; she married me even though everyone she knew said it was destined to fail. Though what I wanted most was a family, I angrily refused every effort her family made to welcome me and tried my best to alienate myself from the growing number of people at my wall, a wall I had built to protect me. It would take years of hard work and a million angels' tears to save this soul and replant my roots in fertile soil.

I know that I didn't deserve her but God doesn't keep score. He has a plan for all of us and his plan for me was to build a life and start a family with this amazing woman. I hear people say all the time that they don't believe in angels or that angels don't walk among us, I say they aren't looking, at all. I have seen an angel and I have felt her love! The list of things she has done for me is far too long to recite here and now but the three best things come are sitting here with us today. If you would have told me twenty years ago that I was going to be married to the most amazing woman, I would have three amazing kids and that I would actually have a relationship with my parents I would have laughed you out of the building. I was lost and now I'm found, I was dirty and now I'm cleansed by the love of our God almighty and the angel he sent to save a wretch like me!