

TED KLUCK & DALLAS JAHNCKE

Dallas and the Spitfire

AN OLD CAR, AN EX-CON,
AND AN UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIP



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Introduction

The Kid Ain't Right

There's a coffee shop in our city called Biggby's. It's the kind of place that always has a fashionable college girl with a pseudo-rebellious nose ring and one or two tattoos working behind the counter. It's the kind of place that always has one or two skinny guys with hip glasses typing on Macs, desperately hoping somebody will ask them what they're working on.¹ It's the kind of place that has Michael Bublé music piped in the background, and where the pseudo-rebellious girl is contractually obligated to make pleasant chitchat with you in a way that makes it seem that even though you know (and she knows) that she's obligated to make the chitchat, she sort of enjoys it. All that to say, it's every coffee shop in every suburban strip mall in every city in America. It's where I'll meet Dallas Jahncke for the first time.

Our church—a smallish² Reformed church in East Lansing, Michigan—is big on people meeting with other people. This

1. This never happens.

2. When I first started brainstorming this book, and meeting with Dallas, the church was smallish . . . but now the church is well on its way to huge-ish.

is called discipleship, which is a term that has always made me a little uncomfortable, even though I know it's biblical and therefore shouldn't make me uncomfortable. I just don't really feel qualified to disciple anyone. I have lots of friends—I feel qualified to have friends and have relationships with people—but when it comes to the practice of giving spiritual advice, I feel a little lacking. Granted, on paper, I'm different enough from Dallas to be able to give him advice; I've been happily married for thirteen years and have a couple of kids, a house in the suburbs, and semi-gainful employment.³ But I have bouts of depression, long stretches of spiritual apathy, and a seriously nasty sarcastic streak. And I've had a ridiculously bad year so far. Two thousand ten has seen the dissolution of an international adoption that we'd been working hard on and paying through the nose for, and the falling-through of two business (read: book) deals that seemed like slam dunks. Everything I've touched in 2010 has turned into a huge pile of garbage. Hence my trepidation at “discipling” young Dallas. As much for him as for myself.

Another thing that makes me feel weird about the evangelical “people meeting with people” culture is the idea that when you meet with someone, you can't make a life decision of any kind without running it by them first. The Discippler becomes a de facto Life Coach. And while this “people meeting with people” phenomenon has been mostly good for our church, there are still a lot of college guys walking around who don't have the backbone to have a cup of coffee with a girl without running it by six elders and reading four books by dead puritans first. I think this is ridiculous.

3. Though anyone who has ever worked as a writer knows how precarious and flimsy this statement is. It feels like a miserably hopeless racket sometimes.

All of this is running through my head as I prepare to meet with Dallas. I've heard some things about this kid. I know he lives in the Lansing City Rescue Mission. I know he's been in and out of jail a few times. I know he was a drug addict. And I know I was tabbed for this job because I have experience dealing with rough people, i.e., I watch boxing, have written a book about Mike Tyson,⁴ and played semi-pro football with all manner of formerly incarcerated men. I have the bruises and scars to prove it, and I don't so much walk into the coffee shop as painfully shuffle. As any football player knows, this is the chronic pain that comes from being in-season.

I order a tall, skinny decaf mocha from the girl with the quasi-rebellious tattoo.⁵ When Dallas enters, he is covered from head to toe in tattoos of his own—and these aren't the kind you get with a friend on spring break after a night of drinking. They're not even the typical "I watch UFC and am a tough-guy-wannabe" tats.⁶ And they're definitely not the Christian hipster "Bible verse in Greek" tats. These are the Serious Issues kind of tats.

"I did most of these myself," he explains. His voice is a mixture of mid-South (he spent some time in Tennessee) and Midwest. He's a white guy, probably around five feet eleven, but stocky, around 230 pounds. Apparently, as the story goes, when he first got to the mission he weighed about three hundred pounds and had a long, Jim-the-Anvil-Neidhart⁷ goatee

4. Who, himself, wrote the book on being a rough person (see: prison, see: facial tattoos).

5. It's a cross with a little loop on the top part, on the inside of her wrist. I make a mental note to look up the meaning of this when I get home, but I know I won't.

6. See: barbed wire around bicep.

7. This is a reference you'll only get if you watched wrestling in the '80s or early '90s. If you haven't done so already, you should Google-image (verb) Jim "the Anvil" Neidhart.

that stretched down to mid-chest. A real bad-looking dude. Now, he's clean shaven with a face that is sort of cherubic—which is a fancy way of saying it's round and friendly looking. In fact, all of the tattoos look kind of incongruous beneath such a friendly and young-looking face. This kid has lived a lot of life for a twenty-one-year-old.

His knuckles, each bearing a letter, read “Aint Right” (sic). I consider asking him why he didn't devote a whole finger to an apostrophe, but instead ask him the story behind the tats.

“My dad started getting me drunk when I was eight years old,” he explains. I try to hide my shock. “And when he would get drunk, he would get violent. . . . He smacked us around quite a bit. And he always used to tell me that I ain't right. So I wrote it on my fingers.” Dallas's mother and father are deceased. Both had issues with substance abuse. He has two brothers whom he loves dearly, and whom I can quickly tell is loyal-to-the-grave-to, but both of them are in various stages of the penal system, and both struggle with similar addictions. He is, in terms of practical “making it” purposes, alone in the world. That is, aside from the auspices of the Lansing City Rescue Mission⁸ and his friends at University Reformed Church.

His neck reads “No Regrets,” though, ironically, he would admit that he has lots of them. “I did this one night after my girlfriend broke up with me,” Dallas explains. “I went home and drank an entire bottle of tequila, ripped the mirror off

8. Since 1911, the Mission has existed to meet physical needs to bring those with spiritual needs to Jesus Christ. Their ministries reach out to men, women, and children in the capital area, and they provide food, shelter, and clothing to those who are homeless or low income. Thomas and Emily Dolton founded the Mission as a faith ministry, and it continues to rely solely on the gifts of compassionate individuals, churches, and organizations.

the wall, and tattooed my own neck.” I probably couldn’t write out the words “no regrets” on a piece of paper, stone sober, as legibly as they’re written on Dallas’s neck.

Each wrist bears a picture of a razor blade breaking the skin to commemorate his suicide attempts. It was the last of three suicide attempts that landed him in the Lansing City Rescue Mission, a small residential rehab facility in downtown Lansing that sits right next to a piano bar. He lives on the second floor of the Mission, in a barracks-style room with all manner of other Lansing-area homeless guys and drug addicts. The Mission orders his time these days, and he spends it going from AA⁹ to CR¹⁰ meetings, Bible studies, and the gym. Before landing in the Mission, Dallas was homeless, often sleeping in tents or barns, and drinking himself to sleep.

“After I attempted suicide the third time, they wouldn’t release me from the hospital unless I agreed to go into some kind of residential rehab,” he explains. “My caseworker called all over, and the only place that would take me was the Mission.” The executive director at the Mission, Mark Criss, made it clear that they were a Christian program and that they would only take men who were willing to live by their standards and at least make an attempt to study the Bible. “My caseworker said, ‘That sounds exactly like what he needs.’”

“People had tried to share the Gospel with me in prison before,” Dallas explains. “But I was never ready for it. I always ignored them because I didn’t want to change the life I was living.” As Dallas talks, he doesn’t act like someone who is excited to be the center of attention. He doesn’t find anything

9. Alcoholics Anonymous.

10. Celebrate Recovery.

inherently exciting about his life. He speaks softly, with his head down or his eyes on something else. He seems tired.

Because he had no choice, he began attending Mission Bible studies and found himself moved by the message of the Gospel.

“What I was doing wasn’t working,” he says.

Dallas cut an imposing figure in the Mission, whose culture is not entirely unlike that of a prison. Fights are frequent. Theological discussions often turn violent, ironically. The longer he’d been there, however, the more likely it was that he could be found sitting in a common area reading Scripture or a book on theology.

“I’ve read both of your books on the church,” he says matter-of-factly. “But I really want to read the book on Tyson.” We talk about fighters for a long time. He remembers purchasing some of the Tyson pay-per-views with friends. We both love boxing for its violence and aggression, but also for its respect and self-control.

“I’ve got some anger issues,” he says, in what may be the understatement of the year. He still has outstanding warrants for aggravated assault in the court system, although sitting here today, that’s hard to imagine. The man in front of me is gentle, soft-spoken and, well, *new*.

● IN THE WORDS OF DALLAS . . . ●

So I graduated from the Lansing City Rescue Mission transformational program¹¹ on Thursday, and I’m adjusting to being back in society. Life is a lot different for me now; it seems surreal at

11. This is a one-year drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. There are twelve beds available, and the Mission provides biblical counseling, classes, food, hygiene items, and other necessities at no charge.

times. After having an extreme amount of accountability and little personal authority over my schedule, being able to decide almost completely how I want to spend my time has been a drastic change. When I'm not working, I spend a lot of time walking around aimlessly and hanging out at the library. I have also learned quite a bit about temptation in the last couple of days. It's everywhere.

This is the longest I've been sober since I started using and abusing. I gotta say it feels good to be sober, but it also feels kind of weird. Life is definitely much better now that I'm actually experiencing it with all my senses.

I have had to really rely on God to keep me strong lately. Being in the Mission, I was protected from a lot of things because of the ever-present authority of the Mission. But things are much different now; there is still authority around (I'm in transitional housing), but not like before. It's been a huge test of integrity, but my relationship with God is steadily growing stronger. Every time I'm faced with a temptation or struggle, I am forced to turn to God because I know I don't have the power on my own to make the right decision.

A good friend once gave me the best advice, and oddly enough it was in Scripture form: "Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall" (2 Peter 1:10). I received this advice almost a year ago, and it has helped me immensely to become a stronger, God-glorifying man. I'm not perfect, but that Scripture has shown me just how important it is to seek after God and to mortify that old man. It's also a promise from God that He will never abandon me, but I still have to work to live a righteous life.

Critical to this process are all my friends and church family. They've "been there" for me in my times of need, provided me solid biblical advice, and listened when I needed to talk. They

have been—and continue to be—better friends than I deserve. I love them. I appreciate their genuine care for me.



Shortly into our latte-sipping session it occurs to me that neither Dallas nor I are really the latte-sipping types. I tell him, offhandedly, that I have a boxing ring in my basement left over from another book project. His eyes light up. “Really?” he asks. Really. And with that, we are waving good-bye to Art School Confidential behind the counter and are soon standing in the ring in the basement. Dallas has the gloves on and I’m wearing target mitts, moving around the ring and teaching him the basics of a difficult sport. Dallas has been in more street fights than he can remember, but he looks awkward and out of place in the ring. He’s having the time of his life learning how to throw a jab followed by a left hook, hearing the satisfying *thwack* of a punch well-thrown. “That was sick,” he says afterward. *Sick* being a compliment.

Other things that are sick (good): watching fight films in my basement; eating Kristin’s (my wife) cooking; hanging out with our family; hip hop;¹² our church; our pastor, Kevin DeYoung.

I find out later that Dallas is a talented artist. He has painted murals in the Mission based on scenes from “Pilgrim’s Progress.” And he’s great at working on cars. We hatch a plan. As we get to know each other, it’s clear that we’ll need a reason to get together besides just drinking coffee and sharing our feelings. Reading a book together is played—we both read a bunch on our own.

12. We both like Eminem, 50 Cent, and Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic*, which may be the greatest hip-hop album ever, top to bottom, even though it’s about pot.

“Let’s work on a car,” I suggest. Again, eyes light up.

“That would be sick,” he replies.

I’m terrible at working on cars. In fact, check that, I’ve never worked on a car. I get nervous at Jiffy Lube when they ask me to pop the hood. I literally have to look around for the latch that does this. That’s how not-often I pop the hood, of my own volition. Dallas’s dad, in addition to getting him hooked on drugs and alcohol, was also an above-average mechanic, and before his death taught Dallas all he knew. Dallas knows his way around a vehicle, and what’s more, he likes doing this stuff.

I’ve also never had a car that’s remotely cool. The Official Car of University Reformed Church is a silver Honda Odyssey minivan with a patina of dried milk and Cheerio residue coating the interior. My own car, a Pontiac Vibe, has the same gross patina. While children are a blessing, there’s something patently uncool about being a parent. The stereotype bugs me.

We turn to eBay in our quest for a sick¹³ ride. Our plan is to spend less than \$2,000 on an old European convertible that we can restore in my garage. Since I’ll spend all the money upfront, the car will be mine, but Dallas will be able to use it as often as he likes. The idea of doing this makes me both excited and also sick¹⁴ with anxiety. I can see failure written all over it.



It occurs to me, watching Dallas’s baptism in a small Lansing church just days after our first meeting, just how clearly God drew Dallas to himself. On paper this story is impossible.

13. His words.

14. The real sick this time.

But in real life, it's proof that despite its problems, church is good, preaching is important, Scripture has unbelievable transformative power, and—despite the fact that programs like the Lansing City Rescue Mission have unbelievably high failure rates—they work sometimes.¹⁵

I always cry at adult baptisms. I cried at my own. And it has nothing to do with the drama or lack of drama in a person's testimony. My testimony is delightfully boring. I grew up in a household where both parents loved each other and loved the Lord. It wasn't without issues, but I had parents who I knew had my best interests at heart. I also grew up in a little blue-collar town with lots of Dallases: lots of kids who didn't have it nearly as good as I did.

Our church doesn't have a baptismal, so we had to borrow the church down the street. It's always weird visiting other churches. They all have their own distinctly institutional smells, which is something like hymnal pages/bindings mixed with the remnants of potluck dinners. This one is no different. It's a strange room filled with a strange assortment of people. Our associate pastor is on the piano, leading us through hymns. The seats are filled with a smattering of guys from the Mission, who themselves are in various stages of recovery. Also present are all of the folks in our small group—a theoretical mathematician, a technology guru and his family, Kevin's wife and kids, and us.¹⁶

After Dallas's testimony, he and Kevin disappear down a tunnel for a minute, and then reappear wearing shorts and

15. Dallas has shared that he feels like "The Great White Hope" at the Mission, because it's so rare that stories turn out as well as his. In fact, he feels a lot of pressure because of this, which is something we'll get into later.

16. As a group, we've decided that in the fall we're going to drive Dallas up north, where he'll be attending a small Baptist Bible college. Since he has no parents, we'll be dropping him off at college. Some of the guys and I are even going to dress "Dad," i.e., plaid pants, etc., in order to make him feel as uncomfortable as possible.

T-shirts. Dallas's shirt is sleeveless, revealing all of his tats. Kevin explains the sacrament to Dallas before dunking him in the baptismal pool. Watching this happen elicits a lot of emotions. It forces me to consider my own salvation—something that, honestly, I take for granted most days. Seeing Dallas's life change, and seeing the church and the Bible through his eyes, has been instructive, to say the least. It's powerful to see the work that Christ does in the life of sinners, of which (like Paul), I am the worst. Romans 3 is one thing when it's espoused from the pulpit for the thousandth time by a preacher;¹⁷ it's another thing to see it standing in front of you in a baptismal pool.

In that moment, I feel blessed beyond words.

I'm also struck by how hard this is going to be. For a recovering addict, each day is not only an exercise in the typical problems of life—things like bills, girls, and work—but also a daily battle to flee temptation and stay sober. The days ahead aren't going to be easy. The thought that discipleship is more than a bi-weekly cup of coffee momentarily freaks me out. So I'm glad we have the car, but I also fear failure—failure to turn it from a heap of metal into something drivable, and also my failure to be a good friend to Dallas, to be what he needs, which is part dad and part brother.

After the baptism, Dallas finds us waiting for him in the lobby. I'm wiping away tears because crying isn't really appropriate for a tough guy writer/baller of my stature. He sees right through it. We embrace.

"For the first time in my life," he says, "I feel like I have a family."

17. Reformed preachers seem contractually obligated to exposit the book of Romans, without stopping, for at least a year or two.

1

Loaded Like a Freight Train

I always tell the truth. Even when I lie.

—Tony Montana, *Scarface*

● DAYS OF ADDICTION—BY DALLAS ●

Masochism: pleasure produced by being abused or dominated. This is how I define my addiction. I knew it was destroying me, I even knew it was killing me, but I enjoyed it so much that I never wanted it to end. With every drink, snort, and puff, I brought myself closer to destruction and death; and yet regardless of my knowing this, the whole time I wanted more—I needed more. Besides, I could quit whenever I wanted, right? But the lust of the flesh is never satisfied, so the vicious circle continued until the game was no longer fun. By then I was too far gone to help myself. It started out as a packed party, but in the end I was alone dancing with the devil.

I was eight years old when I first tried drinking and smoking pot. My mom was dying of cancer and wasn't tuned in to reality

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because of the combination of painkillers, chemo, radiation treatments, and the pressure on her brain from the baseball-sized tumor growing within her skull. My dad was always away at work, trying to support us and chip away at the massive debt accumulating from my mom's hospital bills. When he was around, he also chemically numbed himself to escape what was going on. My two brothers and I grew up fast. We had to raise ourselves on our own from an early age, and we didn't always make the best decisions. I found a sweet release from my problems and worries by drinking and drugging. With every hit and drink, my troubles seemed to dissipate; the only thing that was real was the moment I was in and the buzz I was enjoying.

At the age of ten, my mom's inevitable death came, and my world seemed even darker than I thought imaginable. All I wanted to do was escape from the heartache and pain in my life. Suicide seemed like the logical answer to all my problems. My thought process was selfish and twisted: If you don't like life, take yourself out of it. So after a bottle of liquid courage, I tried exactly that. I thought I did my math right: 1 rope + 1 branch + 1 tired and lonely kid = escape from reality. Luckily for me I've never been that great at algebra, because I didn't take into account the x factor. God intervened and the rope broke. Now, if you think about how depressed you have to be to try to commit suicide, think about how you would feel if you tried but couldn't even get that right. Since I couldn't remove myself from reality, I did the next best thing; I completely numbed myself to it.

Fast-forward five years. What started out as a way to escape my problems became a problem in and of itself. The thing about addiction is that the longer you use, the less effect the substance has on you. So I went from a stoner and a drunk to a complete junkie within a few years. The pot and alcohol just wasn't giving me the feeling I needed anymore, so I turned to whatever else I could get my hands on. This created more problems in

an already hostile environment. I was always fighting with my dad—and when I say fight, I mean fight: walls were destroyed, knuckles were broken, and there were bruises, blood, and hot tempers. This is the world I lived in. We were so much alike, so stubborn and unwilling to change or show any emotion toward each other except anger. Eventually we both became tired of each other. He wanted me out and I was much too happy to oblige. So at fifteen I became homeless, and oddly enough I felt liberated. I dropped out of school and off the face of the earth.

Michigan winters are brutal if you're living on the streets.¹ I knew I had to get out of the cold or I would be dead soon, so I did what I had to do. I broke into abandoned houses to sleep, and I occasionally stayed with people I got high with. Existing like that gets old real quick. So I made some calls, and before long I was hitchhiking my way to southwest Detroit to stay with some people I barely knew. Life in Detroit is a lot of fun if you're into complete chaos and wondering if you're going to get shot on your way to the liquor store. When you live in an area similar to a war zone, you have two options: be the victim or be the aggressor. I chose to take the world hostage and confiscate everything that I thought should be mine.

I started doing dirt (in thugster terms, dirt is Ebonics lingo for crime and street justice) as soon as I got to Detroit. The people I stayed with gave me the lay of the land, and I hit the ground running like a seasoned vet. I needed to support my habits, and to support habits as bad as mine, I needed money—and lots of it. I robbed houses, stole cars, and mugged people; you name it, I probably did it. I'm not proud of those times, but at the time all I was worried about was myself and getting high. I started running with some really shady and dangerous people in the pursuit of my next high. This is when I made my connection

1. From Ted: They're brutal—physically and emotionally—even if you're not living on the streets.

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with the Folk Nation, a street gang that originated in Chicago and has spread its roots of destruction all across the nation. With them I found a new family and a new love: cocaine. I had tried coke before, but I might as well have been snorting baby aspirin compared to this stuff. It was love at first snort. This coke took me higher than I'd ever been before, and I did whatever it took to stay in the embrace of my new lover.

If you have ever romanced coke yourself, you know she's a high-maintenance girl. She demands all your time, money, and attention. I started spiraling out of control, selling coke and doing dirt on the side, but I always seemed to come up short when all was said and done. This is when I broke the number one rule of drug dealing: Never get high on your own supply. Once I crossed that line, I could never go back. I started shorting everybody on the deals I made and ripping people off within the Family (the gang). I might as well have pinned a bull's-eye on my back; before long, even the people closest to me wanted me dead. I knew it was time to leave when the house started getting shot up.

So the people I was staying with and I made our journey to southern Ohio, running away from the madness I helped create. Wilmington was the definition of small-town USA: white picket fences, parades, families with their 2.5 kids . . . It was the American dream in one tightly knit community. I tried to make a new beginning for myself there. I got a legit job cooking at a restaurant and was starting to save money, but demons have a way of following you wherever you go. Who knew there would be so many drugs in such a backwoods town? I noticed there was a lot of traffic coming and going from the house across the street from mine. Curiosity got the best of me, so I introduced myself to the man who happened to be one of the biggest importers of cocaine in the area. It didn't take long before we struck up a business deal, and my infatuation with coke was inflamed again.

I started out as his driver when he made runs to Dayton to re-up, then I moved my way up to becoming a handler, selling to the people he connected me with. He not only sold powder, he also showed me the art of how to cook and sell crack too.

I couldn't resist the urge to try smoking crack. With that first hit I was wired for sound—it was like a train roaring full-speed through the inside of my head. Smoking crack and snorting powder are two completely different types of highs. Crack makes you paranoid and fiendish, searching the carpet for that long-lost rock you think you might have dropped. It definitely wasn't for me. Who knew a junkie could have standards? I preferred the real deal, the high you can only get by snorting some pure, fresh-cut coke. It was a lot cleaner high, but I did indulge in rocks of crack every now and then when things went dry. (Dry: short supply or scarce product.) It didn't take long before I was out of control again, with all the availability of drugs. I stayed high all the time and lost my job, my chances of a fresh start, and, most of all, my sanity. I was back to the old way of doing things. Out of money? That's okay, there are plenty of unsuspecting people to rob in small-town USA.

But there was a major difference that I didn't factor in. This wasn't Detroit, and cops in Wilmington didn't take too kindly to people like me disturbing the American dream. Eventually the combination of rage and coke altered my future forever. When I wasn't out doing dirt, I would try to find odd jobs to make money. One of the jobs I managed to secure involved cleaning out a condemned house to prepare it for demolition. When the week ended, I went to the house of the man who hired me to collect my pay, but instead of handing me money, the man just laughed and slammed the door in my face. Needless to say, I was furious. I stayed up all night getting high and, as the night went on, my blood started to boil with rage. Before long I snapped, losing any amount of common sense that I had left.

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I went to the guy's house and kicked in his front door, and after that everything is a blur. I proceeded to beat the guy up as his family begged me to stop, and then I stole everything in sight that I could carry.

I went home knowing I was in trouble. It didn't take long for word to get out about what happened, and soon the cops were looking for me. I knew I couldn't run forever, so I manned up and turned myself in. After a plea of no-contest, my rap sheet now included five felonies and three misdemeanors. I spent three months in county jail during my trial, but since I was one month shy of my seventeenth birthday, after I was convicted I was sent to juvenile prison. I spent one month in intake, six months in maximum security 23-and-1 lockdown,² and six months in minimum-security rehab. There was a chance that I would be turned over to another maximum-security prison until my twenty-first birthday, so I kept my nose clean when I was on the inside and was released on my eighteenth birthday for good behavior.

During the time I was locked up, I tried to make the best of a bad situation. I got my GED and started talking to my dad again. When I was released I had to be in the household of someone who would be responsible for me during my parole, so my dad took on that responsibility. My dad and I started repairing our broken relationship, and I was keeping my nose clean . . . well, for the most part, anyway. I still drank because that didn't show up on my drug tests. Time passed, and I was released from parole. Now that I was no longer under the watchful eye of the authorities, it didn't take long before I started slipping up again. The ground I gained repairing the relationship with my dad was quickly lost, and I was back to living the street life. I never stayed in one place very often because I always quickly wore out my welcome with friends and family.

2. This is where you're locked up for twenty-three hours a day, and free to move around for just one hour.

I try to tell myself that if I had only known the short amount of time I had left with my dad, I would have done things differently. But I know it's a lie. I was too self-absorbed for that to be true. I spent my days honestly enough—I somehow managed to maintain a job—but my nights were a different story. They were spent drinking, getting high, and sleeping around with any woman that would have me. I was on an emotional roller coaster destined for hell. I should have seen the signs with my dad: weight loss, pale skin, lack of energy. But like I said, I was too blinded by my own self-centeredness to notice. Shortly after I moved out of my dad's house, he was diagnosed with colon cancer. I watched for the second time as one of my parents was eaten away by cancer and died.

It was right around this time that I found out I was going to be a dad myself. I was head over heels in love with the mother of my child. She could do no wrong in my eyes, even though she was married with two kids and cheating on her husband with me. She was still my beautiful Becca, and I feel so much regret for starting her down a negative path. When she found out she was pregnant, she was dealing with a fresh divorce caused by me and my selfishness, and she didn't want another child. I did, but we both knew I wasn't ready. Still dealing with the blow of my dad's death and the recent turn of events, I tried taking the coward's way out yet again. I swallowed a fistful of Vicodin and chased it with a fifth of liquor, then waited for my own date with death. As you can tell, my date stood me up.

When I finally came around, I found myself strapped to a hospital bed. After a few days of observation and a variety of tests, they cut me loose to return to my insane life. The next few months passed by in a drunken blur, filled with time spent in and out of jail, psych wards, and dark subcultures that society usually overlooks, pretending they don't exist. After my final month in county, I met up with the only sane friend that has stuck by me

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through thick and thin. Marcus has always been there for me and is more like a brother than anything. He was generous enough to let me stay with him until I could get back on my feet.

A real friend is hard to come by. Marcus has always looked out for me and has always had my best interest at heart. It didn't take long for him to notice that I wasn't going to change my ways, so he had to show me some tough love by telling me to move out. I was tired of living on the street and tired of life in general. I was packing my stuff when I came across a picture of my mom and dad. It seemed like a lifetime had passed since I had them in my life. I broke down and knew I couldn't keep living this way, so I grabbed the nearest knife and started cutting myself, hoping once again to end it all. Marcus stopped me and drove me to the hospital to get the help that I desperately needed.

Looking back at my life of addiction, I was wrong to call the drugs the demon. The true evil presence in my life was me. I wake up every day, look at myself in the mirror, and come to terms with that fact. The insanity and pain that occurred in my life was done by my own hands and through the lusts of my own wicked heart. I thank God for the grace He has extended to me, because only by a loving God's grace could a monster like me have a second chance at life. There is nothing I could ever do to redeem myself from the decisions I have made.

I am by no means perfect now—I still struggle and I still make mistakes—but with God's help I am trying to be a better man. That in and of itself has brought me a long way from the horrible person I used to be. That's all any of us can do: try our best and let God take over the rest.