

## Johnny Sterling

Well to say I lived a secular life would be an understatement. I grew up the second youngest of ten kids. God was not really talked about in our house, best we could do was a generic prayer before supper every night. Any knowledge of God or the Bible was imparted on us by my God fearing Grandmother. For years she would travel 40 miles each way to take us to church. But that stopped before I was 12 yrs old. She was then getting to old to handle us.

I don't think I ever intended to be a bad kid, I think my need to fit in was what motivated me to allow my brothers to include me into their criminal plans. Needless to say that led me to my first felony charge of burglary at the age of 11 or 12. My parents did the best they could raising the 10 of us, and their was always enough. Some times just barely. So none of the choices I made or the paths I followed was the result of not being shown enough love or discipline. And in hindsight, all were an attempt to fill the huge hole I had inside, that I didn't know was there.

But the worst of it did not start until I drank alcohol for the first time at the ripe old age of 14. Let me tell you right up front, the effects produced in me is not like it is in most people when they have a drink. That very first drink produced a sense of ease and comfort that I had felt I was missing up until then. And I chased that feeling into the gates of insanity for the next 16 years. It started out as fun, a way to be around people and not feel totally alone. Then it became a requirement to function. After witch their was nothing that was going to stand between it and me. I destroyed lives, I hurt good people for no reason what so ever. Nothing and no one mattered to me, only the feeling of being ok that the drugs and alcohol produced. At this point I think you understand I feel it is necessary to skip ahead a good bit. Lets just say my late teens until life changed for me at 30 were less than productive.

Fast forward to October 21, 2008. I was living a meaningless existence, with a gift I did not recognize, in a 30 foot, broken down, Winnebago Rv. We had no hot water, carpet or kitchen to speak of and we had four cats. Now by this time we had been together for over 6 years. We had progressed to a 300 dollar a day drug habit and I had just lost another job. We had no money and no hope for the future. We were tired. I had been walking around for some time now with the feeling of being condemned. An outcast beyond all hope. I felt like a man on death row. And constantly heard a voice in my head calling out "Dead Man Walking". Well that day it just became to much for us we couldn't stand looking at ourselves in the mirror. I wanted to die and I told her this. We agreed. We still had a large quantity of powerful pain killers. The ones you hear about on the news all the time that are killing people. We divided them up and knew their were more than enough to do the job.

This next part is were God in his infinite mercy and grace touched us for the first time. I cried out to this God who I did not know or love or trust or even truly believed in. I said two simple words and they Please Help. We proceeded to ingest these large amounts of drugs and waited. After 6 hours of no affect, our hearts broke. We knew it wasn't going to work. We had no other options. So we

started reaching out for help. We found it. God thru a set of circumstances that I don't have any other explanation for gave us our calling. I was in a local nut hospital that was masquerading as a detox center pacing the halls completely out of my mind when a Woman who worked their told me the only chance that I had of not dying was in Alcoholics Anonymous. I feel that God was using that woman to put me into a place that would allow me to find him.

I would love to say that I was saved at that point. But it still took me another year to invite Christ into my life. A year of hard truths, and of lots of emotional pain. A year that took down the remaining walls in my mind and thawed out my heart. During that year many things happened that had no explanation. It would seem that anything that stood in the way of me getting sober were taken care of. Those around me knew it was God doing for me even when I wouldn't even acknowledge him. Then one day it was in late 2009 when I was asked to speak for a group in AA. I went in incredible fear of doing it. A good friend whom I was talking to about it said if I prayed then God would remove those fears. Well with no better idea of my own, I began praying to God. I got a whole lot more than I bargained for in that conversation. I found that I knew in my heart that if I continued to denied God that I would some day pick up that drink again. That was when I hit my knees and confessed to Christ my belief in him and his sacrifice for our sins on the cross.

That began what to this day continues. Seeking a better understanding and an obedient relationship with God and his Son. Now my work within alcoholics Anonymous continues. I have been placed their by God to help others who are suffering as I was. In this work I am blessed. I get to see huge miracles every single day. I get to see people who were dead every way except physically come back to life. I get to help other people find Christ after running from him for their entire life. I get to see those who lived under bridges and out of dumpsters, become professional productive members of society again. I get to see raw joy and raw pain laid bare before God. I can think of no greater joy.

I joined Gulf Coast about a year and a half ago. I came into a church family that not only welcomed me but, has served me in so many ways. Pete Mishler invited me here for that I will always love him. Pastor Jerry and Daryn have just stepped up and been of so much service.

Myself and that gift that God gave me, that I was talking about. We got married here on Jan 1 of this year. I call my wife a gift for more reasons than one. Because before I even believed God put her in my life. I do not think I would have lived another year the day I met Jonel. She was the only anchor to reality for many years. And after we started to recover I saw her for the treasure she is.

Shortly after our wedding I had another need from Gulf Coast, My younger brother lost his unborn son, and once again Jerry stepped in with his council. He help comfort them as well as provided a service here at the church that helped to provide then with closure. Daryn has taken me in and in glory to God helped me to become a better man of faith. He asked me to prepare this testimony and deliver it to you. And It only took a few months to get past the fear of doing it. Speaking for my wife and myself we have a deep appreciation for all of those here who have helped us to grow and to all those here that will help us in the

future. Christ is alive and well at Gulf Coast Community Church Thank you.