

hockey, football and softball, I played with Gordon Bell Panthers and was a left wing forward with the West End Marauders' Hockey team. I knew that my six-foot, 130 pound frame was too light for hopes of a professional career in sports. But I was intense and wholehearted whenever I played.

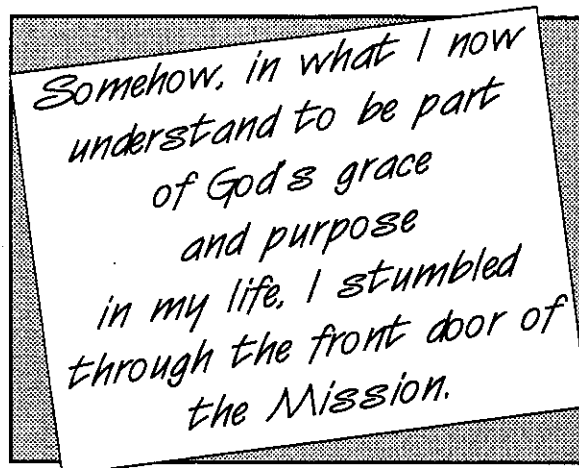
In time, I also began to enjoy controlled social drinking. I never drank as a teenager, in fact, never drank socially before I got married. So, until my world fell apart, there was no question of alcohol being a problem to me. I had the habit of drinking casually, but there was no suggestion that the habit had me.

Then the hurricane broke, blasting my life, wrecking the superstructures, washing away the foundations. What unforeseen catastrophe was this? Without warning my wife of twenty-six years left me to live with another man.

My wife and I first met when I was twenty-one. I was playing football with a bunch of the guys out at City Park. Throwing the pigskin around was great fun. It got even better when I noticed this dark-haired girl watching us play. I had no idea that something was starting that evening, something which would become a five year courtship leading to marriage.

I think it's true to say that there were no obvious problems in our marriage relationship. Of course, in hindsight, I wonder how it could be that somebody else was able to replace me in my wife's affection. I haven't got the answer to that. All I know is that our home and family life seemed normal and happy. I had a good job with a steady and sufficient income. We drove a Cutlass car. We loved to camp, so I bought a motor home which we used for years for short trips to Whiteshell and annual trips across the continent. B.C., where my wife's family lived, was a favourite destination.

So that was our life when, one day, I came home and discovered my wife had left. I can't talk about the devastation that caused within me. All I can say is that, like a sudden eclipse of the sun, darkness overwhelmed my life. That's when I started drinking. It was like an escape from a nightmare. The trouble was, drinking made the



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nightmare worse.

I had a good reputation as a worker. But my drinking pattern gave me an attitude of indifference to everything else in life. I was careless at work when I was there. Pretty soon, my frequent absence made it necessary for my supervisor to talk to me. Though he gave me chance after chance, his warnings fell on deaf ears.

I think hopelessness is the word which best describes my state during this stage of my life. I went from responsible behaviour to destructive, uncontrolled drinking. My daughter and son-in-law were terrific, but even their love and concern were not enough to lift me up out of the pit of despondency and distress into which I'd sunk. Inevitably, after thirty years of building up a good employee record, I drank myself out of a job. Worst of all, I didn't care.

This was a black period for me. Yet, it seemed I was helpless to overcome my circumstances. I just sank lower and lower. That's when my daughter uttered the fateful words. "Dad. You either do something about your drinking, or I don't want to be around you." Her ultimatum, spoken in love, I'm sure, managed to pierce my gloomy depression. I took my first step towards salvation.

I remembered a concerned work colleague who had told me about Union Gospel Mission. You must understand, I'd never even heard of UGM before. I'd been raised in the West end, one

of a family of seven children. My Metis parents were very religious (although I have to admit it was a church-dominated religion into which they had been born.) I had a good home, and the North End, Skid-Row area of our city was uncharted territory to me. So, I had no knowledge of Union Gospel Mission - until my friend told me about it.

Somehow, in what I now understand to be part of God's grace and purpose in my life, I stumbled through the front door of the Mission. The date was September 24, 1991.

After a time of adjustment, as my body became used to functioning without alcohol, I began to observe and hear the emphases on God's Word and God's Work in human lives. I had some previous knowledge of the Gospel, but this was different. Gradually, through the Bible classes and talking with individuals, I came to understand the terms of the Gospel. How simple they are.

"What must I do to be saved? Believe the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This was no propaganda from some self-interested religious group. This was the Word of God, staring out at me from Acts 16:30,31. Nobody at UGM could force me to accept Christ. Nobody at UGM tried. I knew that this was something between Bill Armitt and Almighty God Himself.

While nobody pushed me, the people and programme at UGM are set up in such a way that a resident can hardly avoid confrontation with the Gospel and confrontation with the reality of God's love. The staff and volunteers are there because of their desire to serve God. God's love is conveyed through them. I suppose I could have walked away without responding to God's offer of forgiveness and new life through faith in Christ. But, I don't think I could ever deny that these things are real. I saw them in people's lives at UGM.

It was towards the end of the programme that I quietly prayed in my room and invited the Lord Jesus Christ to be my Saviour and Lord. I think I had always known Christ died for sinners. That night, I confessed I was the sinner

for whom Christ died.

The Bible says that if anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation. I can attest to that fact. Before being saved, I basically lived for myself and for my family. I like to think I was a reasonable and kindly man. But I know that my love didn't reach out beyond the circle of family and close friends. I had no knowledge, and certainly no first-hand experience with the broken lives which, every day, find their way into UGM.

I want to say that those who support UGM ministries are extending their love and concern far beyond their families and friends. Their love and obedience to God's call to ministry has, through UGM, impacted my life and led me to Christ. If you support UGM through prayer and financial help, I want to thank you as somebody who has benefited from the Mission's work.

Now God has given me something new. One night, as I watched street people coming into the Mission, it seemed God was telling me something. In my heart, I felt two things. I felt that God was leading me to serve Him by helping others to know Him and experience His saving grace just as I had done. And, I felt a great joyous assurance that the Lord was leading me in this direction. It wasn't just something Bill Armitt wanted to do on his own.

I finished the Mission programme in six months but stayed on at UGM, paying board and lodgings and volunteering work where I could be helpful. Through the assistance of a brother in Christ I got a job which put me back on the City payroll. I had always been a good worker until my life fell apart. Today, seventeen months later, I am happy and determined to be the best worker possible, not only for my own sake, but to honour the One Who is my Redeemer and Lord.

Evenings and weekends, I counsel with the new men coming into the Mission. I share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them and provide a listening ear to their troubles. I also help at UGM by overseeing the programme on weekends and leading a meeting called Overcomers. Modelled like an A.A. meeting but centred on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

as the answer to human problems, Overcomers is one of the volunteer activities set up to help those who are serious about changing their lives.

It's been four years since my wife divorced me. I keep in close touch with my daughter Gwen and son-in-law Brent. And my three and a half year old grandson, Damien, is one of the great joys of my life. I attend a local evangelical church. And I have neither need nor inclination for alcohol. I will never take another drink, not because of fear that I am an alcoholic but because I truly believe there is no place for alcohol in the life of a Christian.

Somebody asked me what changes I see in my future. I can't anticipate any. As far as I can see, God has given me these ministries at UGM and I want to give them first place in my life, for His glory.

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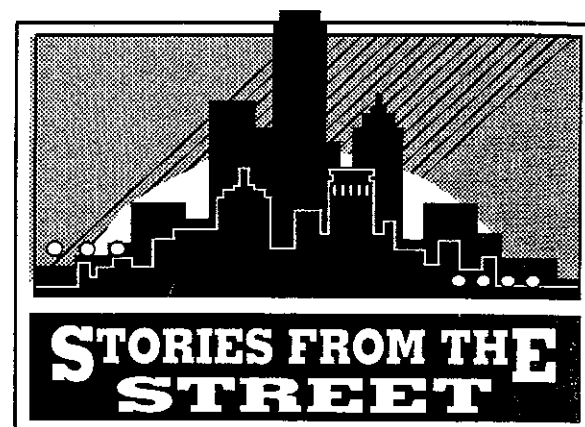
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Bill Armitt's Testimony

"Dad. You either do something about your drinking, or I don't want to be around you."

My adult daughter, bless her heart, loved me enough to level with me. I'm glad she did. It was because of her tough love that I found my way to Union Gospel Mission.

I was 48 years old and had worked for the City of Winnipeg since graduating from Gordon Bell High School some thirty years before. I was a technician with the City Water Pollution Control Centre. On the job training plus computer and other courses had raised my skill level and I took my job responsibilities seriously. I owned my home, enjoyed my marriage, and loved my wife and the one daughter born to us.

For recreation, I had a happy leisure life which centred around sports. Always a participant in