

My journey started in Brantford, Ontario, where I was one of six kids living in a pretty unhappy family. Dad did a lot of drinking and Mom had to shoulder the responsibility of supporting us and trying to keep us straight. In spite of her best efforts, three of us managed to mess up our lives pretty badly. Dad was an effective teacher!

Though I was an average student at school, I followed in my father's footsteps and started drinking. At school dances, my buddies and I all carried 'mickey's of whisky to liven up the evening. I left school at age 16 - or should I say I changed schools when I was sent to a Reformatory. I'd been in minor trouble with the law since age 14 when I was caught stealing plums from a garden which happened to be owned by a cop. At juvenile court, my Dad told the Judge I should be sent to a mental institution. The judge was livid and told him maybe he should be the one sent to a mental institution. Maybe my Dad was frustrated, or maybe he had a hangover that day. Maybe he didn't mean what he said, but I took it on board. From then on, I had the attitude, "I'm nuts - so I may as well act nuts." Actually, being 'nuts' helped me to make friends, though mostly of the wrong kind.

More skirmishes with the law led to my final appearance in Juvenile Court for car theft. I was sentenced to two years less a day in Reform School. After about a year I escaped. I was in B.C. for the six months I was out. I met a nice girl there and her Dad (who happened to be a Mountie) found out who I was and advised me to go back and finish my time. When I went back to Brantford and turned myself in, I got sentenced to an extra two years, to be served in adult jail. I did 15 months, then escaped again with a buddy. We took a bush road which led nowhere. The day after we took off, there was a big prison break and scores of prisoners were out. Hundreds of prison guards and police scoured the bush rounding them up. We got caught - and I got

yet another two year sentence, this time in Kingston Penitentiary.

I don't have any joy in telling you these things. At the time, my life was godless. Only in recent years have I come to realize that God was watching out for me, even in prison. I was 23 when I finally got out. I worked in a bar in Brantford (bad choice) and soon got deeply involved in drinking. I knew my life was spinning out of control. I didn't want my mother to see me like this so I went to B.C. again. The girl I had courted before was married now - but I started going out with one of her friends. After six months we got married - against her father's wishes. He never stopped interfering, even when we moved back to Brantford to get away from all of that. Our two sons were born during the three years we spent in Brantford. My wife came from a very different background than me. She left me twice to return to B.C. with the boys, but came back each time. Finally she left and never returned. She got a divorce in B.C. and has since remarried.

I have to say that even though I was drinking I did support my family financially as best I could. Sometimes I got a job in one of the building trades. But I always gravitated back to working at the same hotel where I started out. That's when I started into drugs, mostly cocaine. I got drugs easily - the drug dealers paid me in drugs to look the other way when deals were being made. But my life was going down too. I wrote a couple of bad checks for which I spent 30 days in jail. And I lived in a rooming house where the landlady (also an alcoholic) skipped out with unpaid bills which resulted in everybody being evicted.

Now comes a totally unexpected twist for which I have always thanked God, even when I didn't know Him. A 15 year old foster girl, Angela, also lived at the rooming house. She attended school, dreamed of going to University and becoming a grade teacher. When we were all evicted, I was making de-

cent wages in construction work. Finding Angela crying, I asked her what the problem was. She was overwhelmed with the difficulties of where to stay, how to remain in school, and how to support herself.

From working in the hotel, I knew what could happen to such a vulnerable young girl. I was old enough to be her Dad - and that's the role I took. I rented a two-room apartment and supported Angela's dreams. My girl-friend of that time helped me. When Angela graduated from Grade 12, we could not have been prouder if she had been our own daughter. Of course, there was some gossip and unpleasant misunderstanding, but Angela and I knew that we were both wandering stars, kind of kindred spirits, and neither of us cared what others thought. We knew that there was no sexual relationship - and for me this relationship was the beginning of looking beyond myself and caring about somebody else. Incidentally, Angela is now married, has a little family, and is a certified teacher. I still refer to her as my daughter and I guess I'm the only Dad she really knows.

After Angela graduated and got off to University, I went to B.C. to see my two sons. My wife had split up with her second husband and had no reluctance in letting me visit the boys. Then her husband came back into the picture - and wouldn't allow me to see the boys. I stayed in B.C. for five years, walking the same old path of drink and drugs but mostly drink. When my sister, who lived in Manitoba, asked me to come help her move, I thought, "My boys were so close, yet I can't see them. I may as well move."

In Manitoba, I got back into heavy drug use. My sister told me that Angela and my mother wanted me to come to Brantford. I didn't want them to see the condition my life was in, so I stayed in Winnipeg. One night, I was stoned. A cop picked me up and told me he could put me in jail until I sobered up or take me to where I could get help. I don't even remember being in detox, but I did end up in the program at Union

Gospel Mission. There, I met an old buddy who had himself been through the program and was living a beautiful clean life. Maurice worked at the Mission. He, along with the head cook Dave Clory, spoke to me about the Lord. So did Sheila Giles (the volunteer coordinator) and Ron Robertson. Seeds were being planted. That was the beginning of my recovery from addiction and my first steps towards new life through Jesus Christ.

After completing the six month UGM program I went back to Ontario. I remember sending Maurice a post card - but I did slowly get back into running with the old crowd. It wasn't long before I was drinking and using drugs again. Angela and Mother lived in Brantford and I didn't want them to see the mess I was in. So I returned to Winnipeg and moved into a rehabilitation centre. I discovered that my friend Maurice worked there, along with his wife, Susan. Their friendship and regular Bible studies began to make a huge difference in my life. Susan remembers that although I wasn't clearly in the light myself, I talked to the other men about the Bible and defended God's Word when somebody tried to put it down. It seems that God was becoming more and more involved in my life. It was there that I came to a place of certainty - that I could trust the Lord Jesus Christ for new life and that God's Word would be the light to keep me focused on Him. At last, the old life of drinking and drugging was gone. I was a new creature in Christ Jesus. A couple of years into my new life in Christ, I volunteered at Union Gospel Mission, a place which I owe so much under God. Last year I joined the staff. I praise God for His grace and mercy and for giving me the opportunity to share His grace with others.

It's a joy for me to go home to Brantford. My Mom still lives there; and Angela has made me a proud grandpa. It's been a long tough journey - but now it seems to me that God was involved long, long before I knew it. So that's my story. And now you understand

when I say that if somebody asked me, "what do I really need?" I would tell them, "You need Jesus and you need God's Word." Thank You for your prayers and support of Union Gospel Mission. You've made a difference in my life. ☩

Are you saved?

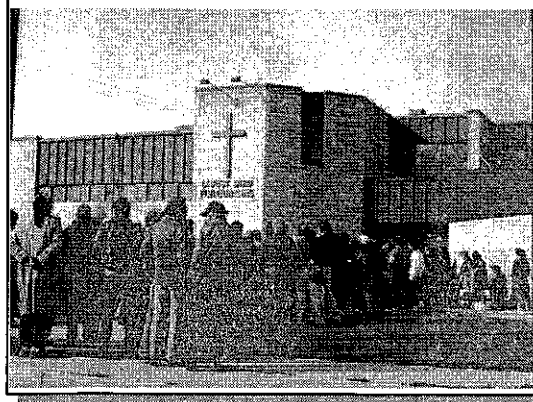
1. Romans 3:23. *All have sinned...*
2. Romans 6:23. *The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
3. Romans 10:13. *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Are you serving the Lord?

- Be a UGM prayer warrior
- Be a UGM financial supporter
- Be a UGM volunteer worker

For more information, contact

Union Gospel Mission
 PO Box 1073 Stn Main
 320 Princess Street
 Winnipeg MB R3C 2X4
 Tel: (204) 943-9904
 Website: www.gospelmission.ca



Proclaim liberty to the captive



**"You need Jesus
 and
 you need God's
 Word."**

By Joseph D. Comeau
 (as told to E. Hughes)

If somebody asked me, "What do I really need in my life?" I would say, "You need Jesus, and you need God's Word."

If that somebody was a person who knew the family I came from and the life I lived from early adolescence to middle life, maybe my answer would surprise them. You see, what I know now I didn't learn until I came to the end of a miserable forty-some years of drinking and drugging and spinning my wheels on life's highway. And I first learned about God's truth at Union Gospel Mission in Winnipeg.