

HEART CHANGE

The story of David Wilkerson's first years in NYC with the gangs is told in his book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*. Over 16 million copies have gone around the world in 30 languages. In 1970 a film was made by the same title and over 50 million people in 150 different countries have seen it. We showed it at least 15 times in our evangelistic outreach in Belgium in 1983-1984, but my most memorable showing took place in our little country church in upstate NY in the summer of 1980. That summer I was crew chief for a group of teens whose job was to clear hiking trails through the forest in our rural county of Chautauqua. Every work day I would drive down to the end of a sparsely inhabited dirt road to pick up one of the teens named David K. His family lived in an unkempt old wooden house set back from the road over 75 yards. Many times when I pulled into their driveway I noticed an older man in a long trench coat lying on their front lawn, as if he had been sleeping there all night. Apparently he had been doing this for quite some time. David told me it was his uncle Peter, who his dad wished would finally move away.

About three years before, God had lit a fuse of evangelism in my heart. It happened when I ran across a scripture in Matthew 10 (left page on the right column about half way down in my Bible.) When God jolts me with his Word it is hard to forget where I encountered it. :)

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Matthew 10:32-33 NIV

I had been dating a non-Christian girl in 1977 that I had met at work, but after about three months she came to work a bit early one morning and said that she had something to share with me. She said that the previous evening she had given her life to Christ and had been 'born again'. We hugged each other with such joy and excitement! What happened over the next months would affect me deeply. I was challenged by her boldness for Christ in public. Although she was a corporate secretary at Welch Foods, she would bring her newly acquired large black leather Bible to work and keep it on top of her desk. When we would meet in the hallway at times, she would like to talk about Jesus and I would look both ways to see if anybody was coming. She was not ashamed about her faith, but I had been living more like an undercover Christian. In a previous year I had read a book called: *The Cowards Guide To Witnessing*, but it did not help me much. However, the words of Jesus from Matthew 10 and the example of my girlfriend propelled me into greater openness about my faith.

Over the next year I had the joy of helping her grow in her walk with Christ. Never before had I helped disciple a person who had not grown up in church as a Christian. This was a precursor to what I would find in the decades ahead to be the most rewarding of experiences as a Christian - discipleship of new believers. Although it is exciting to lead others into salvation, the greatest pleasure is to see them grow up into full maturity and become fruitful for the kingdom of God. Those who are parents can relate to that. A newborn baby brings joy, but to see them grow up and reflect good

character and be successful in life is an even greater experience. What could be better than that? Being a grandparent! There is a deep satisfaction to see your kids have their own children who then reflect good character and go on to success in life. In our case, we can apply this in the spiritual aspect too. It is what Jesus had in mind. Go make disciples who will then go on to make disciples etc.

As a youth leader in my church, I would occasionally rent Christian films and show them to our community. It was during the late summer of 1980 that I decided to show the film, *The Cross and the Switchblade* at our church. I also invited David K., the teen I drove to work each day, and he agreed to come. It was a beautiful summer evening when I drove into his driveway to take him to see the film. As he came towards the car, I was rather surprised to see another person coming behind him, it was his uncle Peter. He was wearing a brown sport coat and a tie that was somewhat crooked. As he approached the passenger door, he bent over and suddenly pulled out a knife! As he did so, he blurted out these words through his yellowish front teeth that had gaps between them: 'Can I bring this?' I told him he would have to leave the knife at home.

In a few minutes, Peter, David and I were on our way down the dirt road to the church which was a couple of miles away. Without notice, Peter suddenly starting jabbering words to himself about war and dropping bombs. I wondered to myself what might happen when Peter got to the church. Before we got there, Peter asked if he had to sit at the front of the church. I assured him that he could sit in the back or even could watch through a window in the foyer area. I dropped Peter and David off at the church entrance and went to park the car, in hopes that Peter would sit somewhere in the back. I was already wary of his erratic behavior that he had exhibited in the car.

When I entered the sanctuary I immediately looked to see where Peter was sitting. Much to my surprise and chagrin, he was sitting alone up front in the second row! I stayed in the back as I liked to survey the audience during the film showings. *The Cross and the Switchblade* is quite an engaging 106 minute film. Peter was mostly quiet throughout the film except the few times he mumbled a bit to himself and one time he loudly blurted out the words, 'concentration camp'. Shortly after that as the film neared the conclusion when David Wilkerson (played by Pat Boone) was preaching to the gangs about the love of Jesus expressed by his death on the cross, Peter got up and walked out of the sanctuary. I figured he probably had come under great conviction and could not take anymore, so he had stepped out. Right after the film was over, a cousin of mine came up to me and scornfully remarked: 'I wonder who invited that fella?' (in reference to Peter). I decided not to address the issue. In a few minutes I drove Peter and David back home without saying much along the way. The following Monday morning when I went to pick David up for work, I noticed that Peter was not on the lawn. I asked David about it and he said that Peter had left. His father also made the comment, that it was almost as if Peter had been born again.

That was the last I ever heard about Peter. He had thought of bringing a knife to our quiet country church the night of the film, but then he had heard a message about the cross. Did God somehow touch his life that night in some mysterious way? Only God knows. One thing we do know - when Nicky Cruz was confronted with the power of God's love and forgiveness demonstrated by Jesus at the cross, he laid down his

switchblade, took up his cross and followed Jesus Christ. There is much talk these days about gun control, but little discussion about other related factors that lead to crime. Nicky Cruz was influenced by a terrible family life and he was full with hatred.

There have been several mass shootings in America including one in Florida. The shooter at a Florida school had a bad family life and was addicted to violent video games which he watched up to 15 hours per day. He was desensitized to killing. Also, most of these shooters are taking psychotropic drugs which can cause one to be suicidal or violent.

Why is there so much more violence in our world today? Our culture has changed with much less respect for life and authority. You probably think I am referring to human life and authority, which is true. However, God is LIFE. He is the one our society has cast aside in so many ways. He gets little attention or respect. I remember my 4th grade teacher Mrs. Carlson, every day after lunch she would read to our class from the book of Psalms in the Bible. She also taught us many good character habits and I was honored to win the best citizenship award.....which may be another reason I liked Mrs. Carlson. :)

David Wilkerson knew the problem with gang leader Nicky Cruz was not the knife in his hand, but what was in his heart. Man looks at outward things but God looks at the heart. That is where true change comes from, and only God can take a sinful, angry and rebellious heart and make it new. Politicians may mean well, but making laws is not the panacea for our problems.

When nations are most corrupt, laws are plentiful. - Tacitus /Roman empire

The smartest and wisest person to ever walk this earth was Jesus Christ. He had the perfect solution for mankind's problems..... **a heart change.**

A prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, place a special person on my heart that you want me to pray for - not an easy case, but one that will show the world that you can soften the hardest of hearts through Jesus, just as you did with Nicky Cruz. Also, make my own heart more sensitive to your voice. Thanks. Amen

jesusreigns.net