



## Spiritual Autobiography

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I have had the privilege of being born and growing up in a Christian family. My parents came to Africa as missionaries for the first time when I was three years old. During our first furlough in 1975, my Dad was the pastor of a church in Schuylkill Haven PA, and one Sunday evening he gave an altar call. I was 6 years old and knew that I needed to give my heart to Jesus, so I went forward.

When I was in third grade, my parents decided to go to the mission field full time, so my family came to Africa to stay. While here in Africa, I attended Rift Valley Academy, a missionary boarding school. Although RVA is a boarding school, I stayed at home because my parents were working either at the school, or at the national Bible school located on the same mission station. While attending RVA, I was involved in all the usual school activities, such as Bible class, Sunday School, Church, Youth Group, Spiritual Emphasis Week, etc. During high school I was also involved in Choir and Band, with their associated outreach events to the communities here in Kenya.

Throughout my high school years, I felt my walk with Christ was getting stronger and stronger. The two 6 month furloughs, my family took while I was growing up, didn't prepare me for the shock I was going to have when I got back to the United States for college and was out on my own without my family around for support.

Very early on in my college life, I discovered two important facts that impacted my life in a very poor way. The first was that Christians in America were not interested in the Gospel. I had been in Africa, living among missionaries who had given up everything in order to follow the call of Christ on their lives. When I got back to the US for college, it seemed that most of the Christians I came into contact with were happy living their lives the way they wanted to, and were not willing to sacrifice their comforts for others. This really discouraged me to the point that I didn't even want to go to church because I saw the hypocrisy in their attitudes.

The second important fact that I discovered quickly is that I no longer had anyone telling me that I HAD to get up on Sunday mornings and go to church. Coupled with my perceived notion of the state of the church in America, I quickly stopped going.

Now, not attending church, and not having anyone to be accountable to, was very hard on my spiritual life. I started getting involved with people that I shouldn't have, and started doing things I knew were wrong. Attending so many parties (being a people person, I like being around lots of people) also affected my studying and my grades.

During the summer after my sophomore year in college, a couple of events occurred which changed my life and brought me back from making a fool of myself. First, Houghton had a speaker come from Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group that was planning protests in Buffalo right at the end of that school year. In them I found people who were part of the church in America and who were willing to give up everything, to the point of going to prison, in order to stand up for their beliefs. I got involved in Operation Rescue, and was arrested for protesting at an abortion clinic. I spent the whole summer wondering what was going to happen when the case came to trial, and leaning on God's love for me, knowing he was in control.

The second event which helped me out was that I was able to come back to Africa and spend the summer with my parents. I came out for three months as a volunteer missionary. It was great to be back with my parents, although I did have to try to explain to them about the whole "being arrested" thing. Actually, now that I think about it, most of the time those "Father/Son chats" were actually "Father talks, son listens".

The third event, which on the surface doesn't seem so good, although now I do know it was, was that during the summer, I received a letter from Houghton telling me not to bother returning to school in the fall. My grades were poor enough that it wasn't worth wasting my parents' money. Through a number of phone calls and letters, I was able to convince the school that I had changed, and

that I was willing to do the work necessary to graduate. They did allow me back in with some extra time spent learning study skills and things like that.

The main thing that I realized during that whole summer was that God was in control. The Christian church in America is not perfect, but neither am I. I also realized that I could be used by God to help the church grow closer to him. The answer wasn't to leave the church, but to become involved more fully with it, so I changed my major to Christian Education with a concentration in Youth, re-took some of the courses to get better grades in them, and, with an extra year to make up some work, finally graduated in 1992. While in college, I led a small church youth group program.

When I graduated from Houghton, I got a job as the Youth Pastor of Trinity EC Church in Harrisburg, PA. I spent 7 wonderful years as the Youth Pastor. It was great to see kids grow up in the church. At the same time as I was Youth Pastor, I also attended classes at Evangelical School of Theology in Myerstown, PA working on my Masters of Divinity.

I always knew that God was calling me to work with missionary kids. I didn't know how that was to happen, or when, but I knew that because I had grown up as a missionary kid, I had some insights as to some of the struggles and trials that MK's go through that other kids don't. After being a Youth Pastor for a number of years, I felt God telling me that it was now time to move on. I applied to Africa Inland Mission in January of 1999 and was accepted by them to come to Rift Valley Academy as a teacher. In June of 1999 I ended my time at Trinity EC Church. It was difficult to leave, but I knew I was doing what God wanted me to do. In August of 1999 I came back to Kenya, back to RVA, but this time as a teacher, rather than as a student.

One incident that brought me closer to God was the death of my younger brother, Tim, in 2002. On September 11, 2001 (the same day as the attack on the World Trade Center), my brother, who was 29 at the time, was diagnosed with a very serious brain tumor. The doctors gave him 6 months to a year to live. I came back to the United States for about 5 months (December through April) to be with my parents and my brother. In April of 2002 I came back to Kenya, and Tim passed away in June of 2002. I cannot deny that I questioned God on why he had taken my brother and left a widow and two small children, as well as my family, really hurting, but I constantly went back to what I had learned that summer in college. God knows what is best for all of us, and that even when things seem to go so horribly wrong from a human standpoint, God is still in control.

We have a great God who loves us tremendously. He does want the best for us and from us, and it is by following him in all we do that brings him pleasure.