



LOWERING THE NETS ON WHISKEY ROW

By Lawrence J. Nelson

AS a small boy in the Midwest in the middle of the 20th century, I knew the down-and-outers who frequented the Morning Star Mission on Collins Street in Joliet, Ill., were less fortunate than my family and I. A big Irishman named Peter McCarthy was the proprietor of the Christian mission on what was

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called Whiskey Row in our industrial town southwest of Chicago.

I don't know when I first saw Pete McCarthy or his mission, but it was early in my life. I liked him — he was big, gregarious, happy and always shaking my young hand and leaving a foil-wrapped chocolate mint. Not once or twice, but every time I saw him. That this big smiling Irishman had been, around the turn of the century, a drunk and a barber (maybe in that order) I couldn't have known at the time, nor would it have mattered. I knew his smiling face. There was a peace about him, and always that gift he left in my small hand.

What brought me to the mission was my father, a white-collar manager in a local chemical plant. My mom came too. My parents were married early in the Great Depression. According to the family story, they made a pledge to my dying grandfather to attend some gospel meetings conducted by an itinerant Pentecostal preacher at the Orpheum Theater in town. They honored the pledge and both became Christians. After that they often ministered to the homeless at Pete McCarthy's storefront mission.

My mom was part of a singing gospel trio at the mission and my dad would occasionally share his faith with the men who wandered in from Whiskey Row. As a kid I sat on the hardback benches observing the goings-on. Here and there sat expressionless, unkempt and somber men, worn down by hard lives. Signs on the walls testified to how many donuts had been served during the year, how many meals and the like.

Pete required the men to attend the mission service before going downstairs to the basement where dinners were served and beds were set up. Crudeness and dignity coexisted.

The ritual included a man named John who led the singing — always singing the same two songs: "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow" and "Nothing but the Blood." I can hear John now, distinctive twang and all, leading the rough men: "Ah where He leads me I will folloooow, I'll go with Him, with Him, all the waaaaay." Then,

"What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

Always those two songs. Then my dad would stand up, Bible in hand, and tell the story of salvation from its pages. Dad was a respected member of the business community. He gave his job a hundred percent, but he never really liked it. The company had his head, but the mission and the things of the gospel had his heart. So there he stood in the storefront mission on Whiskey Row, suit and tie, sharing his heart with those who likely had a hundred stories, each one sadder than the next.

Then, to hear my mom tell it, the big Irishman would get up and say, "Pete's going to lower the nets," a reference to the invitation of Jesus to a band of fishermen to become "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Pete would invite the rough men to make their way to the altar and receive forgiveness of sins. Some did, but mostly I remember them shuffling quietly down the stairs to eat and sleep.

One night I found myself at the altar, praying to receive Jesus into my heart. How small I was, how incomplete was my understanding of the gospel and what it meant. But there I was nonetheless, and only

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later would I learn the admonition of Jesus that the simple and trusting faith of a child moved the heart of God more than the arrogant posturing of the adult (Matthew 18:3; 19:14). Nothing can shake my faith in what happened to me on Whiskey Row.

My life stretched out in front of me, along with its sin and corruption. Despite renewal at a Christian summer camp and subsequent water baptism, I came of age in the 1960s — a time when I said, thought and did things for which I am ashamed today. But the grace of God displayed in the storefront mission sustained me even then, and never did I abandon my simple faith in Jesus. I grew instead.

Pete McCarthy died in the late 1950s, but the mission prospered, outgrew its Whiskey Row storefront and moved downtown. Dad's business transferred him to a Park Avenue office in New York City in 1957, but in retirement he returned to Illinois and in the twilight of his life was made a director emeritus of the old mission.

A few years before my mom died I called her and played over the phone "Nothing but the Blood" from a CD.

"Page 298," she said.

The page of the mission's hymnal is well worn. That's my song. Like many of the tragic men to whom Whiskey Row was home, I was one of the fish caught in Peter McCarthy's net. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

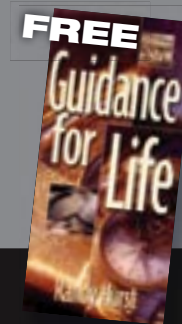
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

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YOUR VIEW

What have you learned about the pursuit of material things?

"I finally discovered that my greed is insatiable! Besides, I have found that my loved ones need financial help far more than I need even more material things. My God and my conscience are far better served by helping others financially than by increasing my possessions."

— Carole Arnold, homemaker,
Helena, Mont.

"No matter how shiny it is when you want it, that shine will fade as the days go by. And soon you will want something as shiny as that once was. You might need to ask yourself what God wants first. I am in prison because of my wants."

— An inmate,
Montana State Prison

"When you keep your eyes on Jesus and on eternity with Him you won't hold tightly to the possessions around you. When Jesus comes, you don't want to love anything on this earth enough to turn around and look back."

— Victoria Lang, homemaker,
Brookline Station, Mo.

YOUR TURN

What does it mean to live a life of significance?

Answers to the question above will be featured in an upcoming issue. E-mail your response, in 50 words or less, to yourview@ag.org, or write Your View, Today's Pentecostal Evangel, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, Mo., 65802. Include your name, hometown, occupation and what question you're answering. Responses must be received by August 10.



LIVING IT

Watch your wobble

During the past 10 years or so, astronomers have discovered about 180 planets outside of our solar system. If you're surprised to learn that, keep in mind there are an estimated 200 billion stars in the Milky Way. Chances are good there are plenty more planets out there.

But if you're a backyard astronomer, don't try to find any yourself. Jupiter and Saturn may show up in your telescope just fine, but any planets beyond the solar system are too far away for even the largest telescopes to spot. So how do scientists continue to identify them?

Astronomers carefully observe a star's light. If a large enough planet passes directly in front of a star as observed from Earth, that star's light will dim slightly. Even if the planet never passes in front of a star from our point of view, its gravitational pull makes the star-light "wobble" ever so slightly.

Jesus described His followers' life examples as "light" that shines out to a lost world. "Let your light so shine before men," Jesus commanded, "that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NKJV).

Like the light of those massive stars spread across our galaxy, our light is subject to subtle influences. It can dim. Our testimony can "wobble."

Sin that latches onto my life may not be visible, but its influence on my ability to represent Christ will be unmistakable. If I consistently give in to temptation, if I let some ungodly practice take orbit in my soul, people will begin to question the "light" I give off.

But that shouldn't discourage me. Rather, I need to remember how dependent I am on the Holy Spirit if I am to live for God faithfully. As the Spirit lovingly whispers conviction to my heart, I have the privilege of repenting. Then the God of the universe steps in. His grace removes that sin as far as the east is from the west. And I keep on shining.

Scott Harrup

Scott Harrup is associate editor of Today's Pentecostal Evangel.