

Misfit: My Story
by Paul E. Hamilton

2007. It is a brand new year and as I sit here in front of my trusty laptop, I am compelled to write my story. For many years now, I have lived with a secret and I have allowed it to dominate my life and hold me prisoner. At times, it has kept me from being honest with people. It is the giant, 500 pound gorilla in my life that I try to ignore and act like it is not there. My prayer is that when you are finished reading my story, not only will some of your questions be answered, but I hope that you will better understand me, my life, and my passion for helping other people. It might take a while, so grab a cup of your favorite drink, have a seat, and listen to my journey.

I am the youngest of three children. To best understand the dynamics of my childhood, you have to understand my perspective on my family. Despite being raised in a great Christian home with a wonderful Dad and Mom, I felt “less loved” than my siblings. Phil, my older brother of eight years, was born blind. Despite his blindness, God has gifted him with a special musical talent. Because of this, I spent many a day traveling with my family as they escorted Phil from performance to performance. Along with my sister, I grew up watching my brother stand in the spotlight and receive praises and accolades. People always had a way of telling me how impressed they were with my brother. Honestly, it angered me greatly. To me, Phil was nothing special. So what . . . he was blind, we were brothers that shared a bedroom, and he could play a guitar - what was the big deal? Yet, people flourished Phil with attention and he seemed “perfect” to me. I so craved for someone to pay attention to me that one time, while Phil was performing at a church, I pretended to be deaf so that people might pay attention to me. The only attention I got that day was a smack on the back of the head from my mother. She wasn’t amused with what I was doing. My mom and dad had spent a lot of energy and money on Phil to make sure that he could lead a “normal” life when he reached adulthood. I resented that and felt that they must have loved Phil more than me. As an adult, I know now that this was never true, but it shaped who I was as a child.

My sister, Jeanne Ann is five years older than me. Jeanne was Daddy’s girl and the only girl in our family. As a father of two girls, I understand now the special bond between a father and his daughters. Don’t get me wrong, I love my three boys immensely, but a daughter always has a special place in their father’s heart. At the time, I didn’t understand that. Consequently, I was always jealous of the attention that Dad seemed to give Jeanne. For me, the rock of my life was my Mom. We spent a lot of time together, especially before I went to school. Even though she was strict, I knew that I was loved. I hugged her multiple times each day and looked to her for advice a lot. My Mom said I had always been a very physical child and seemed to crave a physical touch from my parents.

Growing up, we lived in a neighborhood made up of mostly older adults. Because of this, I spent a lot of time alone in our basement or our backyard playing by myself. I loved my fantasy world of comic books and superheroes. In there, I was indestructible and nothing could hurt me. I became a avid reader of books. By the time I was 11, I was reading huge Stephen King novels and each week had tons of new comic books to read. I had an immense collection of superhero action figures that I played with everyday. I even made a city out of shoe boxes in our

basement and it was my world. This all continued till I was a teenager and entered middle school. It was then that I met my first “love”.

My family had been members of Southwest Baptist Church since before I was born, thus I was raised in church. People sometimes joke that their parents were the first to arrive at church and the last to leave, but that was usually true of my family. When I was seven years old, an evangelist came to our church to hold a revival. One night during that revival, I was sitting with my parents when I finally understood what I had been told about Jesus Christ all of my life. I knew that I was a sinner, or at least as much of one as you could be at age seven. I also finally understood that Jesus had died for me and wanted to take my sins away. When the evangelist issued the altar call, I went forward and accepted Christ. I really enjoyed going to church. I had friends there, especially my best friend, Jim. He was a year older than me and was the “voice of reason” in my usual chaotic behavior. I was the wild one who came up with the harebrained ideas while Jim was the sane one who usually talked me out of what I was planning to do. He and two other guys, Gary and Danny, were my constant companions at weekly church services. I was good friends with Gary and Danny, but Jim was my best friend. I shared everything with him and he was always there for me. Then in seventh grade, I met Christine. I was lovestruck and she soon became my first girlfriend. We spent a lot of time together and it felt good to be accepted by someone besides my Mom. Unfortunately, that relationship didn’t last long. A year later, Christine’s family moved to Illinois and my life was shattered. I can honestly say that I fell into the deepest depression of my young life and I wanted to die. I began making plans on how I was going to run away but Jim talked me out of it. I then began devising a plan on how I was going to kill myself. I seriously thought that I couldn’t live without this girl. Thankfully, Jim was there again to help me deal with these feelings of suicide. He was the best friend anyone could ask for.

Fortunately, with Jim’s help, I made my way through this episode of depression and so my carefree life resurfaced again. It was at this time that I met a boy named Pat. Pat lived a couple of blocks away and we met each other while riding our bikes in the alleys of our neighborhood. I quickly became friends with Pat and he filled the much needed void of a neighborhood friend. Unfortunately, Pat was involved in pornographic magazines and quickly got me hooked. He stole them from his dad’s stash and sold them to neighborhood kids for a dollar each. Believe me when I say, I was quite the regular customer. I know now that my thinking was not rational, but I soon became personally attached to the women in these magazines. They would never say no to my growing teenage lust, they didn’t reject me and, most importantly, they couldn’t move away and leave me.

Life continued to grow chaotic as I reached high school. I can’t remember when it really started, but I found myself traveling down a road of bad decisions and manic behavior. A couple of weeks into my freshman year, I started skipping my last class of the day. It all began one day when I ran into my friend, Jim, at the end of fifth period. He was collecting things out of his locker when I asked him where he was going. He told me that he was going home because he didn’t have a sixth period class. Don’t ask me why, but I told him that I didn’t have one either and we left together. He walked home from school and I joined him. After he went into his house, I began the long journey to my home. I found that I got home at the exact same time that I did when I rode the bus home. My mom was none the wiser and I soon began down the road of

leaving everyday and skipping my algebra class. I also started using my bus money to purchase comic books each day. The way I looked at it, it was a win - win situation.

Don't ask me why I never thought about the possibility of getting caught. I just disassociated myself from the the whole thing. This was how I had learned to live my life. To keep from falling into depression, I would ignore what hurt me and would enter into a fantasy world where nothing was wrong. My friends liked me because I was always wild, crazy, and spontaneous. If someone was going to think of something fun to do, it was me. Needless to say, months later, reality came crashing in on report card day. It was parent-teacher meeting day and my mom could not come, so Dad came instead. I was passing all my classes with A's and B's, except for the huge glaring F for algebra, which was the class I never went to. I tried and tried to distract Dad and get him to leave or talk to other teachers, but he fixated on meeting with my algebra teacher. We sat down at her table and Dad introduced himself. I will never forget her words that day: "So YOU are the elusive Paul Hamilton. Glad to finally meet you." She then went on to tell my Dad that she hadn't been the teacher of that class since the second week of school and she had NEVER had the privilege of meeting me. She took us to the current teacher of that algebra class and introduced us. That teacher told my Dad that I had missed 49 out of 50 days of class. Needless to say, Dad was furious. If you don't know my father, when he gets angry, he grows quiet. He told my teacher, in a very calm voice, that he was sorry for my terrible behavior and that he promised I would never miss another class. We then left and he didn't say a word to me the whole ride home.

Unfortunately, things were not as quiet when we got home. Something happened that day that I will never forget. My father sent me to my room and, after cooling off, came upstairs to talk to me. All he did was sit on my bed and he cried. This was very hard for me because I had never seen my dad cry. It as especially hard because I knew that I had caused it. He then got up off the bed and left the room without saying a word. When Mom got home, she wasn't quiet at all. She let me know in no uncertain terms that she was angry. From that day till the end of the school year, my Mom met me at my locker after fifth period and walked me to my algebra class. In addition, she met me after class and drove me home. I worked on algebra till supper, ate, and then went back to my room to do some more algebra. I got an A in algebra that second semester and passed the class with a C for the year, but things had changed between my parents and I that year. I was no longer the cute redhead boy with the wild imagination. I was now the problem teenager who needed their constant supervision. Though my parents hated it, this behavior only made me more popular with my friends. They dubbed me "King Cut" and my days of cutting school became the stuff of a legend.

Sophomore year didn't go much better for me, and I found myself being told that I was not going to return to Southwest High School for my Junior year. My parents were going to send me to a St. Louis city Magnet school, where the class sizes where smaller and the schools were out of walking distance for me. Mom wanted me to go to military school and Dad wanted me to go to the business magnet school. They told me that the decision would be made during the summer. My parents began taking me to see a counselor to figure out why I continued to do such odd and destructive things. The counselor told my parents that I was just a normal child who was feeling neglected. This observation did not set well with my parents, and my Mother let the counselor know that she felt he was a quack. Unfortunately, I did not agree with my

parents. At the time, I felt neglected and I felt that Phil received all the attention. As an adult, I know now that my parents were only doing what was best for Phil, as Phil did require more of their attention. I understand this all now, but as a child I could not see things on that level. I could only see my own version of reality.

During that summer between my sophomore and junior years of high school, I met my wife, Jamie, at Windermere Baptist Assembly. This was a Christian camp located in Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri. Jamie was working as a lifeguard while I was working as a dishwasher in the kitchen. Jamie was there for a summer employment opportunity while I was sent there by my parents in the hope that I would “shape up” after a horrible school year of trouble. From my first glance, I was head over heels in love with Jamie. It was definitely love at first sight for me. Not since Christine in seventh grade did I feel this way about a girl. Unfortunately, Jamie didn’t feel the same way about me. She was dating another guy in the camp, who was two years older than myself. The three of us became close friends that summer. After our jobs at the summer camp ended, Jamie and I talked occasionally on the phone, but nothing beyond a friendship developed between us.

When the new school year began, I ended up attending the business magnet school for my Junior and Senior years of high school. The last two years of high school were fairly uneventful, at least, until the week before my high school graduation. On the day of my prom, my Mom let me take her car, a 1979 Buick Regal, to school since I would be leaving school early to get ready for the prom. I had been bragging all year about this car and how I could outrace anyone in it. Needless to say, I had never raced this car, or any other car for that matter, but I had told all my classmates that I did. Needless to say, there was a guy in my class who decided to rise to the occasion and challenge me to a race. Beginning in the school parking lot, the two cars raced recklessly down the street. In order to appreciate my insanity that day, you have to know where this school was located. The business magnet school sat in the heart of downtown St. Louis and it just happened to be 7:15 a.m., the height of morning rush hour. I was speeding and burning rubber around the three block radius of my school. I was even winning the race. That was, until I sped right through the red light that I did not see. I don’t remember much to this day, but I was told that I was struck in the middle of the intersection by an old lady, who just happened to be a nun. Both cars were extensively wrecked, the nun had a broken collar bone, and I put my forehead right through the windshield of my mom’s car. The only thing that kept me from being totally ejected was my right knee which was pinned under the dashboard of the car.

As I sat in the car with blood trickling down my forehead, I was staring at all the shocked faces of my classmates. I remember wishing that I could just die so that I didn’t have to face Mom and Dad. Well, God didn’t answer my prayers and I spent my prom night at home decked out with a head and knee bandage surrounded by friends. I finally graduated high school a week later, on my 18th birthday, and was sadly informed that the car I had wrecked was to have been my birthday/graduation present. This news made me even more depressed.

As the next season of life began, I quickly learned that college turned out to be no better. My parents had paid for me to attend Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. To say the least, I reveled in my new found freedom from Mom and Dad. I quickly became well liked because I didn’t drink. This meant that I was the ever ready designated driver for my friends who wanted to get plastered. I was also the “go to guy” when someone wanted to

make a 3:00 a.m. burrito run to the 24 hour Taco Bell. Needless to say, these appointed responsibilities didn't leave much time for class and I soon found myself on academic probation for not attending classes.

The only good thing that happened to me in 1984 was hooking back up with Jamie. She and I had not talked since we left Windermere prior to our senior year of high school. The last time I had talked with her, she was still dating our mutual friend from Windermere. I can't tell you what prompted me to call her that night in November 1984. I was alone in my dorm room, bored out of my skull. Suddenly, the idea hit me to give Jamie a call. I hadn't talked to her in quite a while, but I didn't let that stop me. I jogged upstairs to the pay phone and used my long distance calling card to call her home number. I was even amazed that I had still remembered her home phone number after so long. I soon found myself talking on the phone with Jamie. I was in heaven. I had never quit loving Jamie even though she was dating someone else. My feelings for her were just as strong as they were the first time I saw her. We began to talk about what all had been going on. She told me that she was no longer dating our friend and that things were not going all that well for her right now. I could tell she really needed a friend. I told her that I would be home soon for Thanksgiving break and we proceeded to make plans on getting together and our conversation ended. That weekend, we met at a local Dairy Queen and had a great time. We talked and talked and talked for many hours that night.

I was always very comfortable around Jamie. She and I began to see a lot of each other over the next few months. We dated till after Valentine's Day when I then broke things off with her. The whole long distance dating thing wasn't working out all that well and I had met someone else at SEMO. I stayed at SEMO for another semester, but continued in my bad behavior of not going to class. I finished out my freshman year on academic suspension. The university said that I could not return for a full semester. Once again, my parents were absolutely furious and told me that they were not going to pay for any more schooling for me. I returned to St. Louis and began a series of bad jobs that never lasted more than a month. After the summer was over, my father approached me about working for him at Associated General Contractors in their blueprint room. The pay was good, so I took the job and decided against going back to college. I contacted Jamie again and we dated off and on over the next few months, but nothing serious seem to develop. Jamie seemed ready to settle down and have a family, but I was not ready for that kind of commitment or responsibility.

While living back at home again, things became increasingly uncomfortable for me with Mom and Dad. Things were especially tense because I was dating a girl I had met in college and my Mom did not approve. After a lot of arguing and fighting, I made the decision to move out of their house and into my own apartment. I moved in with my high school friend, Ken, and continued to live my life as I wanted. In September of 1985, I received a very unexpected phone call at work from Jamie. I was floored. We had not talked since our last breakup and I figured that I would never hear from her again. Jamie and I began to spend more and more time together. I remember sitting in my parent's kitchen one day, talking to my Mom about Jamie. My Mom laughed and told me that for someone who was dating someone else, I sure talked a lot about Jamie. I knew then that I wanted to be with Jamie and I immediately broke things off with the girl I was dating. Two months after our first official date, I asked Jamie to marry me. We were married in July of 1986 and quickly began to have children. Things appeared to be going fine in

our first year of marriage and then my problems with pornography began to resurface.

The worst part for me was seeing Jamie so hurt by what I did. Even though I had confessed my problems with pornography to her and God, it was a very rough time for us both. I had began seeing a counselor about my problems with pornography and I seemed to be doing better. Victory didn't seem far off, but things were getting ready to take a turn for the worst.

In January of 1988, my mother had a seizure and was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer. I remember the phone call from my Dad. I was at work when he called and I was so distraught over the news, I had to leave work and go home. I couldn't believe this was happening. I was so angry but all I could do was cry. As Jamie tried to comfort me, I remember her telling me that I needed to cherish the time I had with Mom while I could. I knew that I had to be strong for my Mom and my Dad. Life was definitely going to be hard. The rest of 1988 was filled with spending time with my mother and experiencing life as a father and husband. While working for my father at Associated General Contractors, Jamie felt led to leave her hospital job and become a stay at home mother with our children, Heather and Andrew. Our little family, which was quickly growing, moved into a house in the city and we became members of Tower Grove Baptist Church.

A little while later, our son Jacob was born. His birth happened shortly after my mother began hospice home care. She was not able to come to the hospital to see Jacob so we brought him to her bedside two days after he was born. I was so blessed that my Mom got to hold and talk to him as well as spend time with all three kids together. The very next day, Mom slipped into dementia and died two months later. My world fell totally apart. I just couldn't deal with the fact that Mom had died. Over time, my behavior seemed to become more and more erratic. I quit my job with my Dad when Jacob was born and I struggled to find a job that paid a decent wage. Desperate, I began to lie to Jamie about possible jobs. After a few months of strange and bizarre behavior, I woke up one morning, left a suicide note, drained our bank account, and took off with my mind spinning. I don't remember a lot about the next four days. It is all a blur now, but I do know that I found myself in Georgia on a pay phone to my wife. I made my way back to St. Louis and Jamie took me to see a psychiatrist. The decision was made that I needed to be admitted to the hospital while starting treatment with Prozac. I checked into Missouri Baptist Hospital and stayed in there for two weeks. Honestly, those were some of the most horrible weeks of my life. I saw things in that psychiatric ward that have stayed with me till this day. After two weeks of time, the doctor told Jamie that there was little hope for me to ever lead a normal life. A diagnoses was never given, but the prognosis was not good. Jamie told the doctor that she refused to believe the report and checked me out of the hospital. I came home, settled down, and found a job as a real estate title investigator. I enjoyed the job a lot, but unfortunately the job paid very little. This offered little help for our mounting bills.

After living under this stress for a few months, I had another episode. This time I ended up in Los Angeles, CA. Again, I wasn't sure how I had gotten there, but I "came to" in a mental ward at Los Angeles County Hospital. I was told by the doctors that I was fortunate to be alive. It seems that I had been found by the police in a motel room after taking two bottles of sleeping pills, a 150 pills total. The doctor told me that he could not explain how I had no physical problems from taking that many pills, but that it must have been a miracle. I asked the hospital staff if they had contacted Jamie and they said yes. Fortunately, I wasn't alone for too long. I

had a aunt and uncle that didn't live far from Los Angeles who was willing to come get me. The next day, I found myself on a plane for St. Louis and back to my wife and kids. While I was missing, Jamie had found information that Prozac had been linked to causing severe depression and suicidal tendencies in some people. I stopped taking the Prozac immediately and refused to see a psychiatrist again.

I'm sure that by now you are wondering, "Is he crazy!" Many people thought I was a very cruel and selfish person to put my family through all of this. Well, things got worse before they got better. Plenty of people, including my own family, told Jamie that she should consider divorcing me. She has told me many times that, during those years, she was very tempted to leave me. But it was God's tender words that caused her to hold on. God kept telling her to trust Him because He was going to do a "new thing" with me. At times it was hard to believe, but she continued to lean heavily on the Lord, and the promise God spoke to her. When people questioned her about me, she said that, unlike her, they didn't really know the real man inside of her husband. Jamie believed that there had to be a bigger issue at hand and the answer would not be hidden for long.

After spending a couple of years at Tower Grove Baptist Church, Jamie and I felt that something was missing from our spiritual life. After seeking God and talking with some trusted friends, we made the decision to visit Life Christian Center. This was a very major decision for us since we had both been born and raised in the Baptist denomination. We began to visit Life Christian Center and loved it. The worship was so vibrant and Pastor Shelton's preaching was fantastic yet challenging. Both Jamie and I began to grow in our walk with God and we soon made Life our church home. We decided to move from our house in the city to a basement apartment in Hillsboro, Mo. I took a job at a local bakery and Jamie became pregnant with our fourth child. Things seemed fine for a while and then Jamie started having problems with the pregnancy. After an emergency ultrasound, we were told that our baby boy was stillborn. We were absolutely devastated. Watching my wife labor through the delivery was almost more than I could stand. When it was all over, my wife and I held the lifeless body of our son, Daniel. This event, along with our growing financial problems, triggered another episode for me. When I returned, I found myself unemployed and in a deep depression.

Through most of that time, we continued to attend Life Christian Center. Our associate pastor, Mike, was very instrumental in helping me try to gain control over whatever it was that was going on in my life. After a lot of counseling sessions, he suggested that Jamie and I attend Pure Life, a program designed for couples affected by sexual addiction. The meetings were held at Grace Church in West County. Our whole family drove there from Hillsboro, Missouri each and every week. It was an hour trip one way, but I was determined to seek help. I learned a lot from Pure Life as well as the couple that ran the program. The program helped me deal with my lingering problems with pornography and helped Jamie and I walk through a lot of pain. It was a life changing time for us both.

Little did I know what God had in store for me. One day, while sitting in front of the wood fireplace in our basement apartment, I was listening to a new cassette tape that Jamie had purchased for me. In our earlier days, we both loved the Christian musician, Keith Green. A Christian record company had just released a tribute album of other Christian artists singing Keith's songs. As I sat watching the fire, the song "Asleep in the Light" began to play. Tears

began to stream down my face as I heard the line of the song “He’s told you to speak, but you keep holding it in.” Immediately, I heard God speak to me that he wanted to use me to minister to hurting people. I wept even harder because I felt so unworthy. I knew where I had been and what I had done to my wife and children, yet I knew what God was speaking to me. I walked into the other room and shared this with Jamie. She was floored and suggested that I go speak with Pastor Mike. We made an appointment with him and I told him what I felt God had spoken to me. I went on to tell him that I wanted to start my own Pure Life group at Life Christian Center. Mike prayed with us both and then told me that he wanted me to continue to walk things out for another year. After that, we would all come together and discuss things at a more in-depth level.

Sometime later, Jamie became pregnant again. We were very happy because we had specifically prayed that God would give us another son after we had lost Daniel. On July 15, 1992, Samuel Joseph was born. We named him Samuel after the prophet in the Old Testament. Samuel’s name meant “God has heard” and we gave him a middle name of Joseph because it means “He adds”. Joseph was also my father’s name. Shortly, after Samuel was born, our dream of starting a Pure Life program at Life Christian Center came true. Pure Life was just one of many support and recovery groups Life was starting at that time. Right before the group started, Pastor Mike had told us not to be disappointed if no one showed up. He told us that the subject matter was very sensitive and that many people who could use the help might stay away out of embarrassment. I remember the first meeting night like it was yesterday. We had 20 people waiting for us when we walked into the room. We were shocked! It was the largest class size of any of the new recovery programs.

Even though I continued to have bouts of depression and manic like episodes, Jamie and I ministered each week to men and their wives helping them overcome the issues of pornography and infidelity. I was also committed to not taking any medications with the hope of managing my problems myself. A short time later, we began to attend Christ to the World Bible Training Institute. It was a very rewarding experience and we learned a lot by attending Bible college. In August of 1993, Jamie gave birth to our daughter, Bethany. At the same time, I attempted to start my own paralegal business. It didn’t work out very well and things began to become financially unstable again. Soon after, we were hit with some really bad news. The couple that owned the home where our basement apartment was had sold the house and we were given 30 days to move. Out of all the days, we received the news on Christmas Eve day.

Six days before we had to be out of our apartment, we found a two family flat deep in the city of St. Louis. It was a real culture shock to go from the cornfields of Hillsboro to the heart of the city. I decided to close my failing paralegal business and began working for a temporary company as an accountant. It was during this time that Jamie and I both felt that God wanted us to do more than just run our Pure Life group. I didn’t totally understand it at the time, but God had given me a vision. It happened one night while we were at a service at Life Christian Center. The worship time was phenomenal that night and it just kept going. Pastor Rick began to pray and told everyone to just open themselves up to the Lord. I felt compelled to kneel in the pew that we were sitting in and I began to pray for God to use me more. As I knelt down with my eyes tightly closed, I saw myself standing in the middle of what seemed to be a field of wheat. This field seemed to go on for as far as I could see. Suddenly, I realized that it was not a field of

wheat but of outstretched arms. As quickly as it came, the vision was gone. I truly didn't understand what I had seen.

I shared what happened with Jamie and we decided to just pray about the whole thing. From our times of prayer, Hole in the Roof Ministries was born. The name was unusual, but it was a name fashioned by God, that we cherish to this day. We continued to run Pure Life, which we eventually renamed Clean Heart Recovery. The meetings seemed to be very successful, but more importantly, we were more blessed in helping people. We not only ministered to folks from Life Christian Center, but to hurting souls all over St. Louis. Life at home was filled with its usual ups and downs, but nobody anticipated the news we would soon hear. During Bethany's one year check up, Jamie was asked how old the apartment we were living in was. She told them it was an older two family flat in the city. Upon hearing her response, our doctor made the choice to draw blood from both Bethany and Samuel. A week later, we received news from the doctor that both Samuel and Bethany had elevated levels of lead in their blood. To make a long story short, the two-family flat that we were living in was coated with lead based paint. Earlier on, we were having problems with cracking plaster walls. These walls created a lot of dust and debris. Jamie did the best she could to keep the kids safe, but the dust went everywhere and it had infected our two youngest children. Our cries to the landlord went nowhere. In addition, my wife had again discovered she was pregnant. But once again, the pregnancy ended in another painful stillbirth. On August 3, 1994, Jamie delivered a perfect little boy who we named Benjamin. Just like the previous time, we sat in the hospital room holding our deceased son. My anger melted into tears as I asked God why? No answer came, but I could feel the peace of God despite the circumstances.

Desperate to move away from the lead source, we packed our things, put everything in storage, and moved in with my father and his new wife. Our stay with them lasted two months when my Dad told me that we were going to have to find somewhere else to stay. At the end of the month, we packed up our van and left. As we pulled out of the driveway, Jamie began asking me where we were going to go. I told her that God would provide something. The ugly truth is, we ended up sleeping in our van at a rest stop that night. This was a very low point in our lives. All night long we listened to the sounds of the dog licking the condensation from the windows, the kids sleeping, and Jamie crying. I was angry. I had prayed for days and days that God would show me what to do and He just told me to leave Dad's house. I felt betrayed and foolish.

The next day, I took the family to church. After church was over, a friend of ours approached me and asked me where we had stayed last night. I told him that we had slept in our van. With those words, the friend began apologizing. You see, God had spoken to him the day before to tell us to come stay with them and he had not done it. So after church, we temporarily moved in with him and his family. The living arrangements were quite a challenge, both for them and us. There were 15 people living in one small house that only had one bathroom. Believe me when I tell you that we prayed daily for the peace of God to reign among us all! We stayed there till July and then moved into a small house in the city of St. Louis. It had been our dream for some time to own our own home, but it seemed nearly impossible in light of everything that we had been through. While we were living with my Dad, God had placed a dream in our hearts concerning buying a home. At the time, I couldn't see how it could happen, but we believed. After working out some credit issues and hooking up with the St. Louis Reinvestment

Corporation, our dream of owning a home became a reality. In August of 1995, we moved into our own home on Delor Street. After being homeless for eight months, it was great to have a place that was our own.

Shortly after that, two more things happened that changed our lives forever. First, Jamie and I felt led by God to leave Life Christian Center after 8 years. Much has been said about Life Christian Center during the Rodney Howard Browne revival, but Jamie and I had attended the entire revival and gained a lot of insight during that time. Many positive things came out of the revival time, but after the revival was over, things seemed to change at church. I found myself becoming disturbed by what I saw going on. One such night, I sensed the spirit of God speaking to me. As I carefully listened, I heard these words plain and clear, "These people are not truly worshipping Me, they are worshipping revival". Immediately, my mind quickly thought of the first of ten commandments. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." As the service continued, I felt no other choice but to leave. I told Jamie to go get the children and I went to get the car. We sadly left Life Christian Center that night never to return. It was a hard decision for us, but a decision that had to be made. Despite leaving the church, we decided to continue running our Clean Heart Recovery group out of our home and the arrangement was a great success.

Secondly, I was diagnosed with Diabetes. After purchasing our home, we tried to take out a term life insurance policy to cover our new mortgage in the case that my wife or I would die. The insurance required a blood test. To my surprise, our application for insurance was turned down because the blood work came back with elevated sugar levels in my blood. Having no health insurance, I went to see a doctor at a city free clinic. After some additional tests, I was told that I was now a full blown diabetic. Now, not only was I having problems controlling my bizarre episodes, but now I had to make serious lifestyle changes to deal with my new diagnosis. Thankfully, I was still working as an accountant for a temporary company. On occasion, my depressive episodes would resurface, causing me to be absent from work. Fortunately, the woman who was my supervisor had a brother with similar problems. Her sympathetic manner and timely advice helped me get through so much. I still resisted the idea of taking medicine, which was one piece of advice that I didn't choose to take from her. The side effects were more than I could handle, so I wouldn't take them. After a while, I found myself losing more and more jobs because of my health. It was getting increasingly frustrating because I experienced no memory of what happened while I was gone. My diabetes was out of control, and I was scared. Help soon came in the form of our friend, Dayna. Dayna was a Christian counselor who's son had come to our Clean Heart program a year earlier. Jamie and I began seeing Dayna in hopes that she could help me with my problems and help us with our marriage. Dayna and her husband, Bob, became very good friends of ours. It was during one of my episodes that Dayna began to ask Jamie some pointed questions. As Dayna asked her about my behaviors, it became clear to both of them that I was dealing with a medical issue and not a character issue, as some people claimed. Dayna recommended that I seek medical attention, beginning with a full mental and neurological evaluation. This suggestion did not excite me as my past experiences with "mental" doctors was not positive.

Doing what I felt was best for my family, I went to the University of Missouri-St. Louis for an evaluation. They had a sliding-scale evaluation clinic and, since I had no insurance, this

was the only way I could pay for it. After the evaluation, I was initially given the diagnosis of non-specific Bipolar Disorder and began to see a new psychiatrist. She placed me on some medication and I began to see small improvements. Unfortunately, I suffered another major relapse at the end of 1999. I had been working as a temporary for a company and I experienced a manic/depressive type episode. I was gone for two days and returned to find myself unwanted and unemployable. The temporary service decided to let me go from the company, because they couldn't risk sending me to any more assignments. The sporadic episodes had made them weary, and had cost me another job. I had hit bottom, and it hurt.

My search for employment became more and more difficult. In the past, I had always been able to land new jobs after losing them, but now I seemed to be blacklisted with a lot of temporary agencies. I had been doing temporary accounting work for eight years and now I couldn't find work. It was at this time that Jamie and I made the decision to apply for disability. My health issues had become more and more difficult to manage, although, I did experience good stretches of time as well. After a lengthy process, I was approved for Social Security Disability in November, 2000. At first, I felt worthless and angry. I felt like I had been stamped with a message that said - "non-contributer". It was during a Hole in the Roof Ministry board meeting that I realized my life still had purpose. Members of the board, including Bob and Dayna, encouraged me to keep my passion for ministry alive, despite the obstacles. Adjustments would have to be made, but I began to see that what had happened was truly a blessing after all. Now that I was on permanent disability, I didn't have to worry about finances for my family. For the first time in ten years, we had stable income or at least as stable as Social Security is. I then decided to turn my full attention to my health and to Hole in the Roof when I was able.

Since leaving Life Christian Center in 1995, Jamie and I had attended couple of different churches. Most of our experiences could be labeled as times of learning. During the good and the bad, we continued to minister to people through Hole in the Roof. We held meetings in church basements and really believed that God could use all the bad things that had happened to us to help others. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was only by the grace and mercy of God that I was still alive and had a marriage. There had been plenty of opportunities for me to lose both, but God's hand had always been on me. Jamie and I ministered each week to men and their wives helping them overcome the issues of pornography and infidelity. We also became involved with the Assemblies of God International Fellowship. Soon after joining AGIF, we both became licensed ministers. It was through this organization that we first met Reverend LeeRoy Maxey. Rev. Maxey was a board member of AGIF and a minister here in St. Louis. He took Jamie and I under his wing and began to mentor us as new ministers.

One day, Rev. Maxey invited us to a meeting of St. Louis ministers at a Ponderosa restaurant here in St. Louis. He was going to be one of the speakers and wanted us to come. As we sat and listened to him speak, he began to talk about Jamie and I and our heart to minister in the city. This was something that we had shared with him for some time. Suddenly, he called us to both stand up and come to the front of the meeting room. As we stood there, he asked that the room full of ministers come circle around the two of us and he began to pray to God to anoint Jamie and I for full time ministry. He asked God to give us a deeper heart for the city. In an earlier conversation, he had told us that he wanted to ordain Jamie and I as ministers. I just never expected it to happen in the middle of a Ponderosa restaurant just three feet from the buffet

line. Boy, I now know that God must have a great sense of humor. When I told my father about the whole incident, he laughed and said that the whole event seemed like a perfect fit for me. Rev. Maxey continued to be a great mentor to Jamie and I until he went home to be with the Lord after suffering from asbestos induced lung cancer. It was shortly after he ordained us that Jamie and I filled out the necessary paperwork and Hole in the Roof Ministry Center became an official church.

Much has happened since the birth of Hole in the Roof. After two years of seeing my psychiatrist and having multiple tests, it was determined that not only did I have a form of Bipolar Disorder, but I also suffered from a rare illness called Dissociative Fugue. It is most common among veterans of wars, but it is usually triggered by severe physical, mental, or emotional trauma. The symptoms involve loss of memory, sudden travel with no recollection of the journey, and bouts of depression. Along with multiple daily shots of insulin, I take a rather large collection of medicines. Most of these carry with them some not so nice side effects, but I take them to stay balanced. So much of my lifestyle as changed now as well. I have chosen to never travel alone or carry large amounts of money. I'm committed to getting plenty of sleep as well as exercising. Many years ago, the decision was made to remove me as president of the board of directors of Hole in the Roof. I willingly stepped down from this position, but retained my pastoral duties of offering hope and healing to a hurting world.

Probably the hardest part of having an illness like this has been my loss of friends. Many people find themselves uncomfortable with people they don't understand. I have found this to be true in my own life as well. Unfortunately, I am no longer friends with anyone from my childhood. Most of them walked away from our friendship years ago while I was going through the worst of my problems. This was very hurtful to me, but I still have my best friend, Jamie, and my kids.

Well, now you know my secret. The 500 pound gorilla is no longer hiding in my closet. I wish that I could say that my life is problem free, but it's not. The fugue episodes have lessened, but memory problems, slight speech problems, and concentration issues have begun to plague me. I still deal with times of depression and I live constantly with the effects of diabetes. I continue to stay on my medication despite the side effects of these drugs. Friends, I refuse to allow my health issues to stop me from trying to fulfill the call of God on my life.

Since the first day of being placed on disability, I told Jamie that I did not want to just sit at home, do nothing, and watch television all day. Sure there are limitations to what I can do, but I can still serve God and help people. I truly believe that Jamie and I have experienced all of this in order to be prepared to help people. I am a changed person because of what I have gone through. I have been to places and experienced things that most ministers will never walk into. I have been homeless. I have slept under a bush. I have been in a mental ward. I have been unemployed. When I sit with a brokenhearted person in our food pantry, I can tell them that I have walked where they are walking, because I truly have. I know the pain of feeling useless, but I can offer hope because its been given to me. The truth is that I have always been able to identify with Hermie. Hermie?? Who you say? You know, the elf who wants to be a dentist, from the cartoon "Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer." Believe it or not, I even have a "Hermie" figurine in my makeshift office at the food pantry. You see, I have always felt like I was a square peg trying to live in a round hole world. Now, there's nothing wrong with round pegged people,

but I believe that there is room enough for the square pegged people of life, too. I realize that it might be a strange idea to have a minister like me trying to help others, and many of you might not think its even possible. As I close, my only challenge to you is to remember what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:26 through 2:5 :

“Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”