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Almost Didn't Make It How God Saved My Life

by Anthony Casson

On the morning of August 18, 2009, I came dangerously close to not living long enough to experience homelessness at all. With my mind and soul polluted by decades of sinful living and my body polluted with alcohol, cocaine and marijuana, I stared into the motel mirror at the person I had allowed myself to become.

*"Asking God for forgiveness is
also asking God for His help."*

Through tears borne by self-hatred, I decided the only way to escape the evil that took up residence in every fiber of my being was to destroy the man staring back at me. Armed with blades from a disposable razor, with hopelessness, desperation and pain, I struck violently at both sides of my neck; blood spurted with shocking intensity.

I calmly lay down on the shower floor to await my self-pronounced death sentence. I had battled my demons of self-indulgence, selfishness and sin for forty years; it seemed I was about to hand Satan the complete victory he had long sought. However, as I would soon discover, our great God had a different ending written for me that day.

A Dangerous Progression

Drugs, alcohol and pornography had been a part of my life since I was a teenager. The Internet made my pursuit of sexual sin simpler and more expedient. My obsession with pornography ultimately resulted in crossing boundaries that no child of God should ever breach. On that summer morning, the FBI had come to arrest me for the possession of child pornography.

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Mission men praise the Lord during this summer's Spiritual Transformation Program graduation ceremony.

The Music of the Mission Saved to Sing

I was introduced to the music of the Mission on my very first night. A group of about twenty of the most unlikely people stood before us in chapel to sing songs that revealed many deeply personal yet universal messages—words like *"I'm so glad that Jesus lifted me; Satan had me bound, but Jesus lifted me,"* and *"I don't walk like I used to, since I laid my burden down.* Accompanied by conga drums, bongos, bells and tambourines, we sing (I joyfully and loudly join in) to lift our spirits, to praise God and to prepare ourselves to worship Him. Words like *"Jesus prayed for me, and He had me on His mind. He took the time to pray for me"* remind us that the Lord cares about each and every one of us.

But the music of the Mission is only part of what it provides to those seeking something better than the circumstances that brought them here. The Mission helped me obtain much needed medical care and

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A Front Row Seat to History

This year, Central Union Mission turns 130 years old. I like to consider the impact this ministry has made on Washington, DC, America's most important city, in those many years. The Mission started in 1884 as a response to homeless Civil War veterans and other men affected by social upheaval. Electric lights, automobiles and telephones were new, and with the turn of the century came radios and airplanes.

The Mission helped World War I veterans then found itself equipped to encourage temperance and

support those devastated by the Great Depression. Our Camp Bennett started around that time to help orphans and needy children hurt by poverty; Camp Bennett even served our nation as a German POW camp during World War II.

Central Union Mission was a refuge during the stormy civil rights years, the Cold War, inflation, recession and continuing dramatic societal changes. Today the Mission stands just as firmly for helping "the least of these" as it did then. Perhaps 130 years ago, they imagined that poverty would be eliminated by the 21st century, but

sadly, as Jesus said, "the poor you will always have with you." It is only through your generous gifts that can we strive to answer His call to help as many neighbors as possible and to nurture compassion in our nation's capital.

Blessings,




130 Years of Serving Neighbors...Changing Lives

Please join us in these special events as we celebrate the Mission's 130th anniversary of caring in the city.

September and October

Executive Dinners and Luncheons

Attend one of these programs featuring a free meal by a celebrity chef and music by the Central Union Mission Choral Ensemble. Our fall executive dinners are scheduled for October 14 and November 18 at 7:00 pm, our luncheons will be held on November 7 and December 5 at 12:00 noon. Please visit missiondc.org/dinners to reserve your place.



Winter Coat Drive

Our neighbors may come in all ages, shapes and sizes, but this is the same for everyone: DC winters are dangerously cold if you don't have a coat. Please donate warm coats of any size to the Gales School facility to help prepare for the winter months ahead. See missiondc.org/wintercoats for details.





One Congregation. One Family

Central Union Mission is partnering with the DC Department of Human Services (DHS) and the city's faith community to support families experiencing housing instability. DHS can help families with food, housing, child care, medical and many other services, but it is ill-equipped to provide love, care, emotional support and even simple advice. Your faith community can create a volunteer Faith Mentor Team to encourage one family transitioning toward independence. If you're interested, please contact **Deborah Chambers** at dchambers@missiondc.org or 202-745-7118, ext. 227.

November Winter Rescue Kits

Some homeless people refuse to come in from the cold. You can create Winter Rescue Kits for our neighbors living on the streets by filling bags with high-protein snacks, hand warmers, gloves, tissues, lip balm and other cold-weather necessities. Some more ideas are here: missiondc.org/rescuekits.



Turkey Bowl

Get those bowling shoes on! On November 15, join Mission staff and supporters in Falls Church, VA, by raising funds and donating food to help those in need—all while bowling a perfect game. Advertise your company through our Turkey Bowl sponsorship opportunities, available here: missiondc.org/turkeybowl.

ONE YEAR HERE

Celebrate our first year at the historic Gales School during this open house and dessert buffet. Please join us on Veteran's Day, November 11, 2014, from 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm. Please visit missiondc.org/oneyearhere for your invitation.



Thanksgiving Dinner Drive

Sponsor a needy family this Thanksgiving. As you shop for your family, buy enough for another family, and drop it off at our Gales School shelter at 65 Massachusetts Ave., NW, the week before Thanksgiving. You can check this webpage for details: missiondc.org/fooddrive.



The Music of the Mission

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insurance, resume writing help and educational opportunities, among other things. In addition to the plentiful food and comfortable bed, I can map out and follow a road to my new life.

As another song declares, *"I said I wasn't gonna tell nobody, but I can't keep it to myself, what the Lord has done for me."* The music of the Mission defines the purpose of the Mission itself.

By actively participating in one of many Mission programs, we can rise each morning and sing, *"This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it."* With faith and hard work, each person who so chooses can confidently sing these precious words: *"Victory today is mine."*—Anthony Casson

To hear a sample of our Mission men in concert, please visit <http://youtu.be/fVlkXMDfygE>. ■

December

Christmas Caroling on the Hill

Invite your church, family and friends to join Mission staff for a festive evening strolling on Capitol Hill on Saturday, December 6, 2014 at 6:30 pm, starting at the Gales School. Please rsvp at missiondc.org/volunteer.



Kid to Kid Christmas

At a season that focuses on receiving, you can teach your child about the joy of giving through Kid to Kid Christmas. Shopping together for a gift for a hungry or homeless kid will help your child learn generosity and gratitude. Visit missiondc.org/kidtokid to see how to your family can participate.

Year End Commemorative Gift

You can serve your community and also help your tax situation with a year end financial gift. Help us celebrate our 130th year with a gift of \$130, \$1,300, \$13,000 or more at missiondc.org/yearend.



Smile for Amazon

Did you know Amazon.com will contribute money to Central Union Mission when you order through Smile.Amazon.com? This charity-supporting website donates .05 percent of your purchase to us when you select Central Union Mission as your designated charity. Go to Smile.Amazon.com to set up your account so that your holiday purchases can make an even bigger impact.

Almost Didn't Make It

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When I saw the agents in the parking lot, I slipped undiscovered into my motel room and made my suicide attempt. Drawing closer to death, I thought about my mother who had recently died; she believed that she would be in heaven with God. Remembering that, I asked God to help my mother forgive me. I next asked God to help my two grown children forgive me. Then I said the most powerful words I have ever spoken: "God, please forgive me."

At that moment, I discovered that asking God for forgiveness is also asking God for His help. For reasons only attributable to Him, law enforcement officials entered my room without legal cause, where they discovered my blood-covered body. When I regained consciousness in the hospital the next morning, I promised God, "Okay, since You decided to save this life, this life now belongs to You." In spite of having to face horrific charges, I knew I had nothing to fear because I had given myself to God. I was sentenced to a little over four years in federal prison.

Seeing God's Hand at Work

God was with me through the events leading up to my incarceration, and He was with me each and every day I was in prison. Slowly I learned how to love and trust Him and how to listen and watch for lessons He was trying to teach me. God helped me learn how to reach out to those around me, and He helped me to write a book titled *TODAY IS... A Gift From God*, a devotional book inspired by His Word.

I was released from the Oakdale, Louisiana, federal correctional institution on May 20, 2014, and I entered Central Union Mission on May 23, 2014. God cleared my path to Washington, DC,



Newly employed as a chef in the Mission's kitchen, Tony Casson, right, serves up a tasty lunch.

and He has done miraculous things in my life since the day I passed through the Mission's doors. I soon learned that *homelessness* does not have to mean *hopelessness*. I would discover that when we give God control over our lives, we can become the men and women that He designed us to be. How can I describe my happiness in the midst of homelessness? A world of Christian love, compassion and opportunity opens up before me daily, and I am constantly in awe of God's incredible power.

As I have come to learn, Central Union Mission provides those in need not only with nutritional sustenance for a person's body but also with spiritual food for our souls, which is more important. People facing addictions or criminal records—battling demons of all shapes and sizes—need more than a handout. They need to know that God is the one true source of hope.

I am grateful to God for allowing me to survive my suicide attempt and for leading me to Central Union Mission. I look forward to serving others in any way I can, while following each day the path that God illuminates for me.

Anthony Casson participates in the Mission's Special Circumstances Program. He is currently employed at the Mission as a chef while preparing to honor God in the community. ■

Join Us!

Community Breakfast and Health Fair

September 25, 2014

7:00 am to 10:30 am

Come visit our neighbors and receive free health testing. Meet Congressional Black Caucus Foundation representatives and their spouses as they serve breakfast to those in need.

2014 Fall Gala

October 3, 2014

6:30 pm to 9:00 pm

You are invited to help us celebrate our 130th anniversary. Please contact missiondc.org for details and reservations.

Food PLUS Center Grocery Distribution

October 6-9 or October 20-23, 2014

Anytime between 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Register at missiondc.org to help prepare food bags for our community.

Executive Dinner

October 14 and November 18, 2014

7:00 PM with reception at 6:30

Join us for a look at Central Union Mission. RSVP to dchambers@missiondc.org.

Seniors Luncheon

October 17, 2014

9:30 am

Come visit with our seniors and serve lunch at this monthly event.

Executive Luncheon

November 7, 2014

12:00 noon

Join us at the Mission for a free lunch, and learn about our ministry. RSVP to dchambers@missiondc.org.

Thanksgiving Banquet

November 27, 2014

12:00 noon

You can help us serve our guests at our Thanksgiving celebration.

To volunteer for these events and others, please register at missiondc.org/volunteercentral.

For Such a Time as This

“**T**he remark of that it is more blessed to give than to receive is based on the human truth that the more you give away in love, the more you *are*. It is not just for the sake of other people that tells us to give rather than get, but for our own sakes, too,” commented Frederick Buechner. God has planted you at this point in history to serve Him here, and we are grateful that you have chosen to answer His call.

With the support of partners like you, the Mission has been a port in a storm for hundreds of thousands of people throughout countless societal changes. Thank you for your compassionate commitment to helping the hungry and homeless people in our community. ■



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A copy of Central Union Mission's current financial report is available upon request by writing to 2600 12th St., NE, Washington, DC 20018 or by calling (202) 745-7118. In Maryland, copies of documents and information submitted by Central Union Mission are available for the cost of copies and postage from the Secretary of State, Statehouse, Annapolis, MD 21410, 1-401-974-5534. In Virginia, a financial statement for the most recent fiscal year is available upon request from the State Division of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23209, 1-804-786-1343.

I want to help my hungry neighbors today!

I'd like to help protect needy people in Washington, DC.
Please use my gift of:

- ☐ \$41.80 to serve a healthy meal to 20 guests
- ☐ \$62.70 to serve 30 guests
- ☐ \$94.05 to serve 45 guests
- ☐ \$130.00 special Anniversary Gift
- ☐ \$_____ to serve as many guests as possible

Please make checks payable to "Central Union Mission." To donate by credit card, please see our website at www.missiondc.org.

Name: _____

Address: _____

*Your gift is tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.
We'll send a receipt for your records. God bless you for caring.*

Central Union Mission, P.O. Box 96763, Washington, DC 20090-6763

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