

From Rags

To Riches

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Foreword

"As a child I foolishly turned God away,
Not knowing the heartaches sinners must face;
But God, in His goodness, has let me return,
To share with His children this lesson I've learned.
Sin will take you farther than you want to go,
Slowly but surely taking control;
Sin will leave you longer than you want to stay,
Sin will cost you far more than you want to pay."

I am a living testimony to the words of this song. Having been in the country's second best high school, with an almost certain guarantee of a college scholarship, I never dreamed that I would spend over a year in mental institutions. Nor could I imagine that I would finally end up a tramp on skid row. If you get nothing else from this testimony, I pray that you shall realize this fact: the devil is real and sin is real. Neither one is something with which to be played. The scars of sin are many, and they run very deep. Hell is a terrible place to have to live in eternity. The pleasures of sin are but for a moment, and then comes eternity. Oh soul, do not allow a bad attitude, a fleshly pleasure, or someone else's influence or shortcomings to keep you from heaven. If you are in the valley of decision, then as you read this, please note that the way of the sinner is hard, but the gift of God is eternal life, peace and joy through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 6:23).

From Rags To Riches

About four years ago I "came to myself," and found myself in a desolate state on skid row in Los Angeles. I had squandered my substance on riotous living. I would, like the prodigal son, have gladly eaten carob husks. Since then, the Lord has saved my soul and made me a "child of the King." He has also given me a complete healing of the mind. Even as God worked a double miracle for the lame man at the gate Beautiful, so He did for me in healing my mind and teaching me how to act and think like a healthy man. In three years God has taught me much that I should have been taught in my first seventeen years, but wasn't, and every day He is teaching me something new. I thank God for this. Perhaps you have seen men sleeping on the streets and wondered how anyone could allow himself to get into such a state. Here I shall tell how I came to be in such a condition in the hope that someone will take heed and avoid the snare of the enemy. Perhaps there are those who are depressed, lonely, and wondering if there is any hope, or reason to live. I pray this testimony will be an encouragement to all who read it, and will inspire each one to live for God all the days of their life.

I had a miserable childhood. Separated from my mother at about two years of age, I went to live with my father. My father had never married my mother, but had had two children by her. My sister, who was my father's idol, died at the age of three. After that I became a burden to my father, an unwanted load of responsibility. He married my step-mother shortly after separating from my mother. They were married for one year, which was the happiest year of my childhood that I can remember. When they were divorced I went to live with my step-mother, as my father did not want the burden of caring for me. I hated not being with either of my parents, and

aspired to kill my step-mother. One day, after I had been with her for about a year, my grandmother overheard me planning to stab my step-mother in her sleep. I was then sent to spend the summer (1972) with cousins in Colorado. Meanwhile, my grandmother talked my father into taking responsibility for my care. When I returned to Ohio my father, who had picked up a new girlfriend, took her, her son, and me to live in Pinebluff, NC. If you have parents who are still married and still together, who have raised you with love and affection, then count yourself very blessed. The effects of an unstable home are deep and lasting, and very painful. If you have children, be loving to them and your spouse. Hatred is a terrible thing to grow up around and with. The scars run deeper than you could possibly guess.

I was five years old when my father divorced my step-mother, and from that time until his death seventeen years later, he never told me he loved me. He hugged me only twice, both times at my lawyer's request, but could not say, "I love you." He never kissed me. He often called me stupid, klutz, dumb kid, and told me that I would never amount to a hill of beans. He beat me often, and forced me to carry an unreasonable work load. When he beat me, he used his belt (or a section of hose, which left less marks), and would, depending on how much I squirmed and cried, either beat me on my buttocks and back sixty-four licks, or until he was too tired to beat me any more. Many times the beatings would last for one or two hours, as often as twice a day. We owned an acre of land, and I had to mow and rake it weekly, and dig out a basement he wanted under the house. In the summer and on weekends, I often worked from sun-up to sun-down. I remember once I was raking the yard at about 9:00 p.m., and got sick and vomited on myself. I went inside and showed my

dad, and he told me I was not sick at all, but just did not want to work, and sent me back out to work more. I worked until midnight that night. I also had the chore of doing dishes after meals. If my father inspected the dishes and found one dirty, he made me take out all the dishes, pots, pans, glasses, silverware, bowls, etc. and wash every dish in the house. (By hand of course.) The purpose of this was not necessarily to get the dishes clean, but to show who was in charge. There was a constant power struggle. My father did all he could to try to dominate me. I in turn would retaliate in any way I could, and so there was always a sense of friction and fear in the air. I obeyed him through fear and not love. On many nights I stood outside his bedroom door, knife in hand, with every intention of killing him. Only the fear of possible failure and of being caught kept me from killing him. He greatly neglected me. He did not teach me or train me in personal or social manners. I did not learn to brush my teeth, and I took baths only weekly or biweekly as I chose. I was not taught habits of grooming or cleanliness. If he became frustrated or bothered about anything, he would either beat me or send me to my room. I spent countless hours in my room reading books and playing with my few toys. My father did not allow very much interaction with neighborhood children or outside contact. He wanted me wrapped up in "his world." He discouraged me from going to church, teaching me that church was only for weak people, and was bad for me. Twice, because he disagreed with the public school's teachings, he took me out of school for three and four weeks, and had me do all of my book work at home. Because of my lack of training and role models, I made few friends. I was mostly a loner, and an outcast. The other children picked on me a lot, and considered me a misfit. I grew up in a

world full of hatred and coldness and little self-esteem. The world constantly said I did not belong in it. I was not wanted by anyone anywhere. I grew to hate all authority (representing my father) and work. If people tried to show me love, I pushed them away. I put up many barriers between me and the world to keep from being hurt any more.

Two years after moving to Pinebluff my father broke up with his girlfriend, and for the next two years he had a number of live-in mates. After being in Pinebluff for four years, my father met another girlfriend named Jeannie, with whom he lived until his death ten years later. She had a one-year-old son, Michael. My father soon began abusing Michael as well as me.

We moved to Aberdeen, NC when I was thirteen. One afternoon shortly after, he was beating me in the shed when one of the neighbors got tired of hearing my screams and called the police. When he was finished an hour later, the police were there. We went to court for about three months to determine my custody. At about this time my father began to seriously take up witchcraft and sorcery. He claimed to have much "spiritual power," and claimed to have out-of-body experiences at will. He tried hard to make up with me, and to tell me he was sorry (something he never could come right out and say, though). I went back to stay with him for six more months. During this time he switched from physical abuse to mental abuse. He would make me stand in a corner for six or seven hours at a time. He would have me to stand rigidly in a position of attention for four hours at a time. He worked me harder than before, and did not feed me as often. He claimed that all of this was "for my good." He would sometimes beat my head into the wall, careful not to leave many marks.

Finally, I could not stand it any more, and took him back to court for mental child abuse. This time, he did not even bother going to court, so I was placed in the custody of the Department of Social Services.

I spent the next two or three years drifting between foster and group homes. I did not spend much time in each, as my rebellious attitudes were more than most people could handle. I professed to get saved during this time, in a Baptist church, but because I did not know one could live above sin, I did not stay saved for very long. I started smoking near my sixteenth birthday, mostly because my father always had smoked, while forbidding me to. It was a "spite move" which I regret ever having done. Six months later I was accepted into the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. This was the second best high school in the nation (second only to the New York School of Arts), and 98% of the students who graduated from there obtained college scholarships, many of which were in ivy-league colleges. I had always been unusually gifted intellectually and was looking forward to a bright future. I never dreamed then that I would end up on skid row. I had no idea that the next three years would take me so low.

The pace of education at the N.C.S.S.M. was about five times faster than at the regular public schools, and my grades began to drop. I had never had to learn study habits or discipline myself to study, as learning had always come easily to me, since I had somewhat of a photographic memory.

Likewise, at about this time, I fell in love with a fellow student by the name of Sherry. Because of my lack of love in childhood, I had built up many barriers to prevent my being hurt emotionally. Because of my lack of ever having had anyone show any kind of interest in me before, I dropped most of my bar-

riers for Sherry. She broke up with me before too long, and I was greatly hurt, and felt forsaken and crushed. At the time of this writing, it has been seven years since then and I have yet to break down all of these barriers. The feelings of self-pity and depression, as well as the sense of having been forsaken and trampled on caused me to attempt suicide. I saw no reason to keep living—no purpose to life. I drank a sixteen ounce glass of rat poison, and lay down to wait for death. After about three or four hours, I felt no difference in my physical condition, and decided to take a walk to speed up my adrenaline. While walking, I ran across my French teacher who noticed how pale I looked, and, finding out what I done, took me to Duke University Hospital where my stomach was pumped. **Truly the Lord had had mercy on me.** After that, I was moved to the psychiatric ward at Duke. There I was given many different kinds of psychological tests, and asked a lot of questions. After all was said and done, though, the psychologists could not provide a satisfactory reason for me to live. They could not even help me with my depression.

After about three months, the doctors threatened to send me to Dorthea Dix, a state institution. I had heard many horror stories about that place, and so I "played well" so that I wouldn't have to go there. I went back to another group home, and then another, until I ended up in Lexington, NC, at the age of seventeen. At this time I came to the decision that I had tried God, the world, and my own power and had failed miserably. I decided to try the devil for more power in my life. I held a séance in my room with incense, an altar, and a class ring as a modem for power. I invited the devil and his demons to possess me and give me more power in my life. I was

soon possessed, though I never received any "power." That same night I again tried to kill myself by filling a bag with deodorant, glue, and anything I could find which had a strong odor, and tied it to my head. **Again, only the mercies of God prevented me from dying.** After a few minutes, the suffocation effort had had no effect that I could tell, and someone smelled the odor and notified the correct people.

Within a couple of months, I decided to try life on my own. I thought I knew it all. I had obtained part-time employment at a fast food restaurant, a motorcycle, and was to rent a small trailer. I got the courts to release me, and moved out. Within a month I lost my job, my motorcycle burned up, and I was left with almost nothing. The Salvation Army put me up in a "roach motel," and I spent the next couple of months in deep depression. I would sit all day in a corner of my room crying myself to sleep. I went two and three weeks at a time in this state—not eating, not moving, just crying. Finally, I called my father (who had by this time moved to Farmville, VA), and he came and got me.

By this time I had reached a state of terrible devil-possession. My mind, no longer capable of dealing with reality, had retreated into a "fantasy world." It was sort of like day-dreaming, except that my fantasy role playing had become a reality to me. I became unable to control my mind, and could not distinguish fantasy from reality. If I was in the fantasy world, a person could slap me, put ammonia under my nose, etc. without my being aware of it. I became "spaced out" and unable to deal with my surroundings. Life had no meaning. I had given up on the world and life, and just lived from one fantasy to the next.

The school counselor at Farmville High recognized my condition, and sent me to a private mental

hospital in Danville, VA. I was diagnosed as schizophrenic. Once there, I became more and more erratic, and began to get violent. I would spit on people and get violent at the slightest things, sometimes for no apparent reason at all. Finally, after I tried to hang myself, I was committed by a judge in court to go to the Central Virginia Mental Institution in Petersburg, VA. I will here attempt to describe that place.

First, I went through questioning and a physical and blood test. Then I was led to a room filled with about thirty other insane people, and with evil and unrestrained spirits. There were two or three aides to keep the peace, but the unpredictability of the patients' moods kept me always on my guard and fearful. I never knew when one might come up and start hitting and kicking me for no reason. I could relate many stories of the violence displayed there. Uncleanliness, sexual immorality and homosexuality were openly and unashamedly practiced there. Some patients just sat in a corner somewhere and stared into space all day. Others constantly paced the room. Some continually talked to themselves out loud. There were no activities to break up the day. There was not much to do. The television was usually off, as we rarely agreed on what to watch. Occasionally someone would get violent, and that would break the monotony. There were two restraint chairs, two restraint beds, and two rooms for confinement, referred to as "cubes." One or two of these were usually occupied at any given time. Once every month or so, more restraint chairs or beds would have to be brought in from other wards. Often a violent person was given drugs which would work on the nervous system and muscles to calm him down. These drugs often had many bad side effects. Nighttime was worse than the day, and some patients slept during

the day for fear of the night. Screams often awoke me. I had to sleep lightly for fear of being attacked. The dorm area was not monitored, and fear was a strong aroma in the night. Nightmares plagued many. Homosexual activity was bolder and more manifest then. Fear and tension were well-known states of being. There were few laws or rules which meant anything. Insanity and lawlessness ruled there.

After three months I was allowed to go outside for one hour. Within my first fifteen minutes of freedom, I tried to climb a water tower with the intention of jumping off. **The Lord had mercy on me once again**, and I was not successful. Shortly after, I was discharged back to my father. That was on a Friday. On the next Friday I was signing myself back in, after jumping in front of a car. **The Lord had had mercy on my yet once more**, and the car had barely missed me. After another three months or so I was again given outside privileges. I spent my outside time exploring the grounds and discovered an old abandoned building. I broke in and searched the building. In the cellar I found an old freezer room. It had a heavy, thick door with heavy bolts on the outside to lock it. The room was 5' x 8' x 6', and was damp and musty from years of non-use. A fellow inmate whom we shall call Jack and I decided to play a joke on another inmate named Mark. Mark had two bad problems—he was very paranoid, and he had a strong cigarette habit. Jack and I wanted to see if Mark's cigarette habit was stronger than his paranoia, so we took him to the storage room and told him there was a pack of cigarettes in the room. After a couple of minutes of persuasion, he went in, and we closed and locked the door behind him. Then we got scared because he was threatening to tell, so we decided to just leave him in there and let him die. The building was old and we

figured that no one would ever find him there. I was the instigator of the plan and Jack went along with me. For the next three days my conscience smote me mightily. Then, on the third day, Mark escaped from his "cell." My lies and wickedness were exposed to everyone. Mark said that after he had beat on the door for three days he fell down in exhaustion. As he fell he said his hand fell to his breast shirt pocket where he had a small Gideon Bible. That made him think of God, so he prayed, and the door came open on his next push. Then he read in his Bible and it said to forgive one another, so he said he would forgive me, and not press charges for attempted murder. **The Lord was having mercy on me yet another time.** I could have been sentenced five to ten years in prison.

After that I was transferred to the long-term ward. According to the mental institution's system, if a person behaves himself and shows improvement for a period of three years he is transferred to a mid-level ward. If he does well there for three years he is transferred to a low-level ward. After three years of good behavior and improvement there he is placed on a program designed to place him back into the community as a productive member of society. So once a person has been sent to the long-term ward he can expect a minimum of ten years of institutionalization. At that time I was a little over 18 1/2 years old. At the time of this writing I should still be in the mid-level ward with at least five years left to go. One month after being placed on the long-term ward all the patients had to be transferred to another ward so the first ward could be up-dated on its fire alarm system. During this shuffle I was transferred back to the private hospital in Danville where I was discharged one month later. **Once again, the Lord had had mercy on me.**

For the next three months or so I roamed the countryside with little purpose in life, and no idea what to do. I ended up in Ohio (via Florida), where I joined the army. I spent about four months in the army, training at Fort Sill, OK. During this time I got into several fights as I was non-submissive to the army's ways. In January of 1985, at the age of 19, I decided again to try to end my life. I went by night to the top of Medicine Man's Bluff, a cliff nearly 400 feet high. As I went I was praying to God that He would give me strength to jump that I might die and go to heaven. This is how deceived I was. I remember that as I looked down the face of the cliff I knew that there was a road and a river at the bottom. As I saw what I thought was the road, it did not seem so high up at all. As my eyes adjusted to the light, though, I realized that I was not looking at the road, but at the river. The road was barely traceable to my eyes, it seemed so small. Then I knew that if I did not jump right then I never would. So I jumped, closing my eyes as I did so. After a minute I wondered why I still felt okay, so I opened my eyes. As I had jumped, the Lord sent a strong wind which had blown me back into a small cleft about the size of my body. For as far as I could see on either side it was the only cleft on the cliffs face. I had not felt all this happen because the temperature was so cold. I was numb all over. I had fallen some ten or fifteen feet, though, and now I was scared, so I scrambled (how, I know not) back to the top. **Once again, God had mercy on me.**

In February I was given a general discharge from the army. I took a bus to San Diego, CA, where the weather was nice and warm. Within a month, I had squandered my money on riotous living and, not being able to find employment, I became a "tran-

sient." I slept in parking lots, parks, under bushes, under bridges, on the streets, in missions or wherever I could sleep without fear of being chased off by a security guard or police officer. I slept with rats, roaches, lice, alley cats, stray dogs and other such forms of animal life. The population of transients is about 90% devil-possessed, and I lived among homosexuals, winos, tramps, thieves, murderers, drug addicts and such like. The most common emotion on the streets is fear, and I became well acquainted with it—always looking over my shoulder, seeing and hearing things which were not there, while seeing some that were. I was alone, forsaken by all, and death itself was evasive. Survival was my only purpose, sleep my only escape, daylight my only friend. It was hard. I worked my way from San Diego to Los Angeles where I joined the spiritual growth program at the Los Angeles mission. It offered the last hope for sanity. I joined the Nazarene church where I attended services for six months. I had not (through ignorance) been as yet delivered from my devil possession, but I had picked up instead several religious spirits, and was very zealous toward religion. After this time I was invited to a Church of God camp meeting where I received some light on God's Church, and of some of His truths, though I behaved myself very unseemly. I was loud, boisterous and fanatical in my religious viewpoints, but I didn't have the life to back my testimony. I went for almost a year in a condition of hypocrisy, professing salvation and sanctification, unable to receive help because of my spirit. Finally, one day I came to a place where I perceived that I needed help. With the aid of my pastor, Sister Beverly Reed, my eyes were opened to my need to be delivered from the spirits which possessed me. After

much prayer I submitted to God and became willing and very much desirous to be rid of these evil spirits, and sought God for mercy. Sister Reed and some other ministers then prayed, laying hands on me, and I received deliverance from the devils. I then cried to God for mercy and asked Him to save my soul and to come into my heart to live and reign. God had mercy on me and saved my unworthy soul.

I have here painted a picture of many problems which I had as a result of my upbringing and environment. However, most of my deepest problems came not because of outside forces, but because of the attitudes and choices which I made. I can point to my father and the world around me, but ultimately, the responsibility of my actions belongs to me. For example, if I had never decided to accept Satan into my life I would have avoided much mental anguish later on. And yet, while I was in so low and forlorn a condition, God had mercy on me. He looked beyond my faults and saw my need. He loved me when no one else would. I was of all people most unworthy of God's acceptance, mercy and love, yet He accepted me just as I was and saved my poor soul. That love and unconditional acceptance has been what has brought me through the hard times. The comfort of knowing that **God** cared about me, Sid Souvey, in all my shortcomings, has carried me through many storms in life. As I have submitted myself to God, He has given me grace and power to overcome the flesh and to serve sin no more. I do not say that I have not had temptations, tribulations, or mistakes, for since that time I have had many failings. I had put up many barriers between me and the world to keep from being hurt any more, and I am still trying to break some of these down. The healing process has been slow and hard, but God is with me, helping me.

I even still have to work hard, going through many trials and tribulations, as I learn to apply myself to true Bible humility. Many attitudes, much lack of grace, and ways of thinking I have struggled to overcome. The scars of sin were many and deep. I thank God that one by one they are being healed. My mind is being healed more day by day, and Jesus is teaching me how to live. Though I still have many tears and sorrows, I have determined, by the grace of God, to live for Him all the days of my life. Accusations and doubts assail on every hand, but my face is set like a flint.

As I look back over my life, I can see where God has had mercy on me time after time after time. If He had failed one time and had let me go completely my way, I would be dead by now. I would be hopelessly lost without a Savior. As a teenager I never dreamed that I would end up on skid row. I had no idea that the following years would take me so low. The effects of sin and doing things your own way are like that. When you turn yourself over to the devil you take away the power to decide what you will or will not do. "Sin will take you farther than you want to go." Your future may look ever so bright, but if you allow him to, the devil will cause you to stumble and fall. He will promise you riches but give you rags. He will promise you happiness and give you pain, misery and unrest. The devil is real and powerful and if he can he will try to kill you before you can get to God. He is not a little man in a red suit with horns, running around with a pitchfork and pointed tail, he is a crafty, wily, ruthless spirit who will work on your mind to convince you that it's okay to do evil. Hell is a terrible place to be in for all eternity. Hell is real and the devil will take you there if he can. Only in God is the power of choice fully

realized. You say now that you will never reach the depths of sin, but tomorrow you may commit suicide. Nobody ever intends to grow up and be a thief, liar, adulterer, or murderer, but they do because they are under the powers of the world and of Satan. It is a fearful place to be in. Many, having no guarantee of God's mercy, go on in sin—blinded to the realities of death and the everlasting torment to follow. God gives true happiness, peace and rest. He is the only source of contentment and grace. The world promises much, but provides only heartache and disappointment. In this day of advanced technology man still does not have the answers to life. He cannot answer simple questions like, "Why should I continue living?" or "What is my purpose in life?" Only God has those answers. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (I Cor. 15:19). Our hope can only be in things beyond this life. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?" To be "in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming." (I Thess. 2:19). Our purpose in life is to glorify God. "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (I Cor. 6:20). When we are not fulfilling this purpose we are out of God's element and there is a void within our souls. One may seek professional help, may turn to drugs, alcohol, or any number of sensual pleasures, but without being in the will of God there is no help.

Turn to God, oh soul, while the chance is yours, before the seeds of sin bury their roots deep within your heart. It is better to never realize the agonies of a life of sin. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (II Cor. 6:2). Come out of bondage. The truth shall set you free. Open your eyes, dear reader, and observe your path. It leads

either to eternal bliss and happiness or to eternal pain and agony. Which are you choosing? Oh soul, please heed the warning and make the determination to always live for God. It will take a deep humility and great determination to make heaven. It will take long hard work, much prayer and tearing at your heart to undo the effects of sin in your life, but heaven will be worth it all.

On May 7, 1988, my father shot himself in the head with a .22 caliber rifle. Despite all of his claims of power, wisdom and happiness, he died a miserable man. He left this world completely friendless, having few possessions and many debts. He was a lonely and heartbroken man. Let this not be your state, dear reader. Whatsoever you sow, you shall surely reap. (Gal. 6:8). Sow good seed. Be not caught up by the world's glory, flashiness, or glamour. They will fail you in the end. Seek God, and fall in love with His ways. He will not fail you, nor forsake you, as long as you humbly walk in His steps. God's way is best. Follow that way, and your final end shall be better than your beginning. Do not try to live out my testimony before deciding to live for God. The best testimony a man can have is that he served God all of his days. Trials and tribulations are hard enough with God. Without Him, they are overwhelming. God be with you all. Amen.

From Rags To Riches

I once was a sinner, wretched poor and sick,
Often weeping, crying in dark despair;
Oh how my heart did ache, for peace within my soul,
The price I would have paid my griefs and pains to
 spare.

Chorus:

Jesus lifted me from rags to riches,
He has given me a brand new home;
I no longer am a lost hopeless sinner,
For God has cleaned me up, nevermore to roam.
I lived in a gutter of despond and pain,
Running in a circle of sin and shame;
Sinking ever deeper into the miry clay,
It seemed I never would rise, 'til to Him I came.
Hatred filled my bosom, life had left my soul,
In my inner being was darkness cold;
Life had lost all meaning, a hopeless case was I,
Yet in His tender mercies, God has saved my soul.
A tramp I am no longer, with no place to stay,
Hungering and thirsting for peace and love;
I have found a refuge where I've gone to live,
That refuge is in Jesus, sent down from above.

—Sid Souvey