

TOUGH BEGINNING

When I was a kid, I had a hard time believing in God. I was told about God, but considering my father would beat me and my mother, I had a hard time trusting some imaginary Father when the one I could actually see took pride in beating me. Like most kids, I grew up with an understanding of God; even went to Catholic school; did Communion and all that good stuff.

I remember when I was around eight years old we had to do a presentation of the first letter of our names. My name being Jerry, I got the letter "J." Interestingly, my class had about three Jose's, John's, etc. I got the "J." I think that was prophetic because my line was, "'J' is for Jesus; we all love Jesus." I'll never forget that. 20 years later, I was able to understand what that means.

My parents got divorced when I was ten, so I jumped from place to place. I went to four different high schools, had my own apartment when I was fifteen and was living with some crazy twenty-two year old woman with a kid. Most of my teenage years were a blur because I spent most of my time looking for love in all the wrong places, from all the wrong people.

I HATED RELIGION

My hate for religion started when I was around thirteen. I hadn't seen my father for a while after the divorce and I was so excited I would actually get to see him. Regardless of how bad he would beat me, he was a good father when we were kids. He dressed us for school, hung out with us, took me to work with him, and we went out to buy bread together; so when my parents got divorced and he just disappeared, it was like I had a lost a part of my

life. So I was excited to see him. It was in May, his birthday is the 15th.

I worked so I could have enough money to say that I bought my Dad a birthday card. I wanted it to be from me, not my mum, not anyone, but from his oldest son.

He drove up. I was so nervous and excited and I ran to the car, and hugged him. I was hiding the card under my shirt, and as I pulled out the card with a big smile on my face he looked at it, smirked and said, "I can't accept this." My chest collapsed.

I asked him. "Why?" He said, "Because I don't believe in birthdays." He'd become a Jehovah Witness. I had no idea what that was, and till this day I laugh about it and tell him, "Yo Dad, at least you could've taken it and thrown it away later on or something." But he stood by his beliefs. I ripped the card in his face. Crying, I ran out from the car and didn't get to see him for a while.

My Dad was, and is my hero. Prior to that, I had lived with him for about two months when I was eleven in a motel. Our dinners were crackers with cheese, and till this day I've never had a better dinner. So he and I had a bond that on that day was broken. I hated religion. I hated the notion of religion.

A few years went by. My Dad was growing in his new found religion and family. My Mum started visiting an Evangelical Church and she was so faithful with her tithes and offerings. The pastor (or whatever he was) would stand on the altar and ask for money: "Who's gonna give a hundred? Who's gonna give four hundred? etc." I said, "To hell with everything."

GETTING MYSELF INTO A MESS

From about fourteen to twenty-seven I couldn't have cared less about God. I would

claim I knew. I would study with my Dad. I would use the Bible to stand out from the rest of the teenagers in my school; to stand out to impress the girls, so they could see something different in me and that was my hook.

Anyway, I met a girl. The long story short was that she made my life a living hell. She cheated on me with anything that moved, so I did the logical thing and married her (sarcasm). I got home one day and I found her with another man. That really knocked me to my knees.

During that time, my grandfather passed away, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and I was diagnosed with depression and some sort of neurological condition. I broke down, so I went to New Jersey to get away from Florida.

I was a mess. I moved to my uncle's house. I was about twenty-six at the time. My cousin, who was living there, made my life a living hell. He was very territorial and didn't want me there.

SOMEONE WAS THERE

While in New Jersey I tried over dosing, tried cutting my veins, and jumping in front of a truck. With the overdose I only threw up; with cutting my veins I only went half way; and when I tried jumping in front of a truck, my leg froze.

Till this day I don't know if it was God or fear, or fear of God. That day I just asked God to please reveal Himself to me. "PLEASE," I begged. All of a sudden, it felt like time stopped. No cars passed, the breeze died down, and I heard nature.

I heard the water in the brook; I heard the birds chirping; I saw a chipmunk run across a tree; then I felt the breeze pick back up and the sun hit me right in the face. I started crying. I said, "Thank You," but I was still full of anger and resentment.

OUT WITH THE DEVIL!

I ended up having to move back to Florida. Upon my arrival, I was approached by some friends about going to a retreat. I told the guy I didn't want to go. Since he was a cop he told me I would either go voluntarily or by force as he grabbed his gun. So I went voluntarily forced.

The day of the retreat I was joking and talking when I got on the bus. My ancestry is from the Dominican Republic and Dominicans have a tendency to invoke the devil a lot; just like people say, "Jesus Christ," Dominicans say, "Devil."

I got on the bus and I'm like, "Devil, a lot of people here." The guy there tells me, "Hope you got that word out of your system, because when you come back, you won't be invoking it anymore," and he smiled. I was like, "Ok psycho, whatever you say 'holy man'."

When we got to the place, it was night. I remember everyone got off the bus except me. I was hearing a Spanish song that says, "I just need to see you for a moment; feel you for a second..." and the song hit me hard. So when everyone got off the bus, I looked upward, and I said, "You have three days to prove Yourself."

"I'm sick of this life; I'm sick of this pain; I'm sick of this loneliness; I'm sick of this ALL. You have three days or I'm DONE with You." Till this day I feel that God heard the prayer of my heart, "Dad, I need You."

My mouth was speaking pain, while my heart was breaking. I learned that day that God doesn't get offended. Anyway, three hours later I was on the floor, crying like a baby, asking for forgiveness and declaring myself a child of God.

A lot of crazy things have happened since September 20, 2008. God has done amazing things with me, through me, and around me. Twenty years before that day, I said, "'J' is for Jesus; we all love Jesus." Twenty years later I learned that "J" is for Jerry, and Jesus loves Jerry.

'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8).

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

THE BLESSING OF GOD

I commented on a picture on Facebook and that is how I started communicating with Beberly. I was sending her YouTube videos with worship songs and inboxes with encouraging Bible verses. At the time she was walking away from the church, while I was walking towards the church. We talked for a while and one day she said to me, "Listen, I'm no good for you Christian Boy. I'm going to pull you away from your holiness." So I said to her, "I don't think so. I'm loyal to my God. If anything, I'll help bring you back."

To cut another long story short, I am now married to Beberly and we're continuing our journey with God together. I hope my story can encourage you to also reach out to the big "J" – Jesus Christ.

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* Photo: Jerry and his wife Beberly

THE BIG

“J”



THE JERRY DEOLEO STORY