

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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Child Criminal Now Christian Man

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This is my testimony.

For the first 11 years of my life I was just your average kid.

But all of that would change forever on a cold, rainy day in February 2003 in Ephrata, Washington. I was 12 years old, and I found myself in a park with my best friend Evan.

We did not go to that park that day to murder Craig Sorger. It was just another day in my average life, until Evan pulled a knife out of his pocket and told me he “wanted to go on a killing spree.” At first I thought he was just making a sick joke. Surely he wasn’t serious.

But I soon found myself following him to a nearby travel trailer, where 13-year-old Craig Sorger lived. Evan knocked on the door, and asked Craig’s mom if he could play.

We roamed the park, playing near a canal before stopping to build a fort in a wooded area in the back of the park.

This was when my average life changed forever.

Evan asked Craig to touch the ground for 10 seconds; Craig got on the ground and began counting. At 9, Evan dropped a rock on the back of Craig’s neck, knocking him to the ground.

I got up and tried to stop Evan. I said, “Stop!” Evan got off Craig and pushed me to the ground. I stayed there and watched Evan begin hitting Craig – more than 30 times. Several times Craig tried to get away but Evan repeatedly

pulled him back to the ground and continued to strike him. I did not see anything in Evan’s hand, but he was stabbing Craig to death.

I look back and I wish that I would have done something to rescue Craig. It’s one reason I now do everything in my power to rescue the pre-born from the slaughter.

The attack lasted minutes, after which Craig remained motionless on the ground. I then picked up a stick and was going to hit Evan, but he had a terrifying look in his eyes. I was afraid that I would be next in his killing spree. So I braced the stick, walked past Evan, and struck Craig in the head and legs before throwing the stick to the ground.

Evan said nothing. He walked to me and he shook my hand.

3 days later we were arrested for 1st degree murder and held on \$1 million bail.

We spent months proclaiming our innocence, first saying that we had seen Craig walking towards home from the park. We later said Craig had fallen from a tree.

We were tried as adults, becoming the youngest defendants tried as adults in Washington state history.

A year would pass before I broke down and finally told the truth about what happened. I would plead guilty of 2nd degree murder by complicity and sentenced to 14 years.

After my sentencing, a journalist asked me if I was angry I received a 14 years sentence. I said, “No. I deserved worse.”

The next day I was transferred to prison.

My time in prison started badly. I spent the majority of my time in solitary confinement for fighting.

I was locked into an 8-by-10 foot cell for 23 hours per day, where the lights were on all the time. There were no windows in my cell to let in light. My only view was the window in the cell door that looked out onto a sterile cellblock.

When I was allowed out for one hour of recreation per day, I would first be strip-searched. Then I would be shackled hands and feet and taken by two guards to a small brick cage that was my exercise yard. I was not allowed to talk to the guards, or to the other prisoners. I would then be shackled again and led back to my cell. All meals were served to me through a slot in my cell door.

I lived like this year after year after year.

The only positive that came from all those years in solitary confinement was that I taught myself how to read and write. I spent all of my time reading book after book. I must have read thousands of books.

Those years in solitary confinement must have also taught me a lesson, because I stayed out of trouble for the rest of my sentence.

A year would pass before I broke down and finally told the truth about what happened.

For the 14 years I spent in prison there was only one thing I looked forward to: visits from my best friend Marissa. We had been friends since we were 9 years old, our fathers worked together, and she had served as my character witness at my trial. She attended my sentencing hearing. We exchanged hundreds of letters over the last decade I spent in prison, and 5 years before I was released we fell in love.

In 2016, three months before my sentence was up, I escaped. I fled my work release program in Yakima, WA, and hitchhiked 300 miles to Idaho. From there I jumped on a bus to South Dakota, where U.S. Marshals captured me at gun point at a Rapid City bus stop.

Looking back now I was simply overwhelmed by the responsibilities of work release after living my entire life behind bars.

I served out the rest of my sentence in state prison before being transferred to county jail to be charged with 1st degree escape. I faced 5 more years in prison.

I found myself on the top floor of one of the worst county jails in the country. The first day I witnessed a man murdered by 2 other prisoners.

It was in this environment that God began to work on me.

In my jail cell I found 3 books: the Bible, the Journals of Jim Elliot, and Eric Metaxas' biography on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This last book sparked my interest in reading the Bible. I was impressed by Bonhoeffer's bold stand against the Nazi Holocaust.

In my cell, I began to read the Bible. Every hour that I was awake, I was reading it. I would spend five, six hours reading, then fall asleep, wake up, and begin reading from where I left off.

On January 7th, 2017, I remember falling on my knees and calling out to God to save me. I know that we are saved by repentance and faith, but at the point of conversion all I knew was that God loved me and I was saved. I remember getting up from the floor of my jail cell and it was like the old Jake Eakin stayed there dead, and a new Jake Eakin rose from the dead, and I knew that nothing would ever be the same again. The grace of God found me on the floor of a jail cell. He met me there and changed me forever.

I was born again.

I realize that I was not worthy of the grace that I had been given, I was a murderer; and I deserved nothing but death and hell. But by the grace of God I was alive, and I wanted to spend the rest of my life obeying the call of my King with every breath of grace I had in my lungs.

I hope my testimony sheds light on the truth of the Gospel and its power to save the worst sinners. No sin is too deep that God's amazing grace cannot reach. We serve a mighty God who can take murderers and transform them into instruments to advance His Kingdom.

Paul was a zealous murderer out for Christian blood before God used him to save thousands. We serve a God who can save repentant murderers.

When I was released in February, 2017, I briefly moved in with my family. Within months I married Marissa. But I remember feeling adrift, not sure what God wanted me to do with my life.

A few weeks before my wedding, while sitting on a coach with Marissa, I saw a YouTube video that stopped me in my tracks. It was of Rusty Thomas, the National Director of Operation Save America, staging a rescue outside an abortion mill in Louisville, Kentucky. At one point in the video, Rusty Thomas was sitting on the sidewalk in handcuffs and he turned to his son, Jeremiah Thomas, and told him, "Son, this is your heritage."

Something about the look on Jeremiah's face broke my heart for the preborn children being murdered through abortion. I had never even thought about abortion before that moment. But I felt the Lord

move on me and break my heart for the preborn. It changed my life forever.

All glory to God for what He has done in my life. I have nothing good in myself. I am a redeemed murderer, deserving of death and hellfire. But God chose to radically change me.

If God can save me, then no one is beyond His power to save.

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