

I lost my sight when I was nearly nine years of age. It was a shotgun accident. I was watching people shooting trap when a guy came up to the firing line where he became careless because the clay pigeon had already been launched. He had the shotgun pointed in the direction where my brother who was five, my sister who was three and myself were sitting on the side of the car. A bright flash of light, brighter than anything I can ever say I saw, and it was the last thing I saw in my life. I was struck with buck shot from my chest up and my brother Henry was killed. A shotgun shell looks a lot like a roll of coins and is filled with pellets. These pellets will spread out in to about a twenty-four-inch circle which explains why both my brother and I were shot with the same blast. Yes, a tragic event indeed, but good can even come out of tragic events.

Before this event I was a troubled child and was one who just made it by in school with mostly C's and D's. I spent three weeks in the hospital, where I had a moment about two weeks there, that I realized I could be miserable the rest of my life or I could be happy. You see the other children there were also blind in some way and they were all having fun and playing, and I was just miserable. I decided then that I would play and be happy and collect jokes in my head. The story goes on from there since it was 1970 and there were no laws to accommodate the disabled in schools back then.

I had to go away from my home in Schuylkill county and come to Philadelphia. There I attended the Overbrook School for the blind from the end of fourth grade till I graduated in 1979 with pretty much straight A's. My life had turned around with my studies and learning to do many other things. I still rode a bike and roller skated as well as wrestled from seventh grade on. However, it was not all roses even at that time because I, at the age of twelve, discovered alcohol and then marijuana.

I made it through high school using alcohol and other drugs but that use was soon to catch up with me in college. After attending Villanova University, I dropped out because of my "partying." My partying got in the way of my classes. That partying really carried on for many years and on June 28th, 2002, I came into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. It was not my first time to AA but since that day, I have remained clean and sober for twenty one years. AA has helped me to find God again and Christ in my life.

When I first got sober, I did not believe in God anymore but having to find a power greater than myself as part of step two, I began to believe in something. That led me to God and even Christ. I went back to my old church Saint Paul's in the Olney section of Philadelphia. There I was on a community outreach team and as a result of that my wife and I began an AA meeting in 2004 at Saint Paul's. That meeting is still going strong on Tuesday nights at six o'clock. As a member of Saint Paul's, I began to write praise songs and playing them at Saint Paul's. While at Saint Paul's, I completed college.

I started by going to Community College of Philadelphia where I earned two degrees. One, in Technology, Science and Culture, and a second degree in Humanities. From there I transferred to Temple University where in 2007 I received a degree in American Studies. In that same year of 2007, I also started working fulltime for the federal government at what many call the Navy depot here in Philadelphia on Tabor Road. I am still working there under the DOD.

In the meantime, I moved in 2010 to the Tacony section of Philadelphia. That also meant I needed to find a new church since it was more than a half an hour each Sunday to get to Saint Paul's. My wife and I found Saint John's where we became members in 2014. I joined the praise band there which I was to continue my writing of praise music for the band to play. I was on church council. I also

was on the Music and Worship team. Currently I am on the Service and Evangelism team and the Reconciling in Christ team. The RIC, Reconciling in Christ team, worked together for a little more than a year to try to make our church a LGBTQIA+ welcoming space and we are now a RIC congregation. That team still continues and is the Welcome and Inclusion team because we recognize the importance of the church to remain active in being a welcoming space for LGBTQIA+ people.

In the process of working with the praise band and writing praise music I felt a call. A call to up my game and to become a pastor which led me to begin seminary in the fall of 2017 at United Lutheran Seminary. I attend the Philadelphia campus and still have a little time to go since I am a part-time seminarian.

Sometime around 2017 I started working with Lisa Thomas at Feast of Justice playing music. We both worked with Pastor Trisha to provide a dinner and service on the second and fourth Thursday each month which was open to the whole community whether it be church members from Saint John's, Feast of Justice clients or neighbors. It was just a natural progression that soon after playing the music for the service, I began to work with Pastor Trisha in putting together the service. Next, I was putting together the service completely on my own and shortly after that preaching and leading the service. It is at Feast of Justice where I truly became a preacher and a pastor. Especially, since after the service I found that people from our gathering began to come to me for advice in spiritual matters.

Between my wife and myself we have four grown children with six grandchildren. We also have five cats, Rocky, Solomon, Cecil, Ace, and Pearl. In October of 2020, in fact fifty years after I lost my eyesight, I went to Seeing Eye to get a guide dog, and he is Milligan. Milligan is one of the best things I have done when it comes to helping me with the loss of my sight.

Finally, I must say that I am a pastor because that is what I have been called to do and what just feels right whenever I lead and preach at a service. When it comes to my blindness, I really relate to John 9:1-3 where there is the blind man and the disciples ask Jesus who sinned his parents or the blind man and Jesus says, "Neither this man or his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." That second part of Jesus's statement is how I feel about being a preacher, that God's works will be revealed in me. I am a preacher to show how God works in my life and how God works and can work in the lives of others.