

My Little Columbine

A true story from [The Rocklore Files](#)

Of [Jamie Thompson](#)

Published by Jamie & Judy Thompson

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Introduction – Columbine Hits Home

I remember when I first heard the news reports about Columbine. The survivors were saying that the killers were looking for specific jocks and shooting anyone who was wearing a team hat or a sports jersey. The reports said that the killers had been picked on mercilessly by the jocks in their school... That got my attention because I believe I have some small insight into the daily experiences - the humiliation, hatred and rage - that were in the hearts of those murderous boys...

Switching Schools - Big Changes and Rough Transitions

Back in 1970, when I was 11 and 12 years old, we had a junior high school system as opposed to the middle school system that we have now. In the junior high system students stayed in elementary school until after the 6th grade. Then they moved on to junior high for 7th through 9th grade. It was a rough transition going from sixth to seventh grade and moving to a new school in the middle of puberty... especially for girls. That's why they changed the system. It also wasn't good for ninth graders to mix with 7th graders... there was too much developmental difference between them.

It was a VERY rough transition for me, actually, for a variety of reasons. When I moved from Walter Miller Elementary School to junior high in the fall of 1970 my sixth grade class was split in half. My half was sent to Carl Sandburg Junior High while the other half went to Neshaminy Junior High in Langhorne. Because of the split the Walter Miller kids were a small minority of the new seventh grade student population. Students arrived from two other elementary schools and their classes were not split up. So, I

suddenly felt like a new kid wandering down the halls among mostly strange people who all seemed to know each other. I felt as though they looked at me, with my six-foot tall, skinny stature and long hair, like I just stepped off of a UFO. I have a flash-bulb memory of one event where a straight-laced, short-haired kid who I didn't know from anybody walked up to me, stuck his face into my face, sneered, and asked, "Are you for real?" He walked away laughing.

Alienation and Ruffians

Many of the kids from the other schools were ruffians who hung out in their own well-established gangs. They grew up in tougher neighborhoods than mine and it seemed to me like they lived for smoking and fighting. I was a long-haired, peace-loving, hippy-type country boy who loved rock and roll music. I loathed smoking and fighting. To me those kids were like aliens from some war-like planet... like a bunch of Klingons or something. I couldn't relate to them at all. Being as tall as I was, though, I couldn't blend into the crowd. On the contrary, it made me a target.

The place to be at Sandburg if you were cool was "The Gate." The Gate was a break in the fence behind the school where a paved pathway allowed access to the school grounds for kids who walked from the Forsythia Gate section of Levittown. Before and after school there were typically about twenty or thirty kids loitering there. They smoked a variety of things, drank, talked, spat, fought, coupled up and oftentimes made a scene by French kissing and/or laying in the grass. They also enjoyed picking on other kids who used the pathway but didn't hang out at The Gate.

I didn't smoke, spitting made me gag, I avoided fights like the plague, and, at 12 years old, I never had a girlfriend so I had never kissed anybody. I liked to talk... but not about who was the best fighter, or who drank so many

beers at a party, or who was going out with who, or who was a slut, or who was a stud, or any of that kind of rubbish... which seemed to me to be the main topics of conversation among most of my peers. So, I kept to myself and became a mystery. People stared at me as I walked by and after a few weeks I started hearing rumors that my new cohort didn't know what to think of me. So the general consensus was that I must've been a "faggot." I didn't care for that label too much but what was I going to do? My best hope was that people would eventually get to know me.

My passion was music. Unfortunately the sixties music that I loved and grew up with was already being supplanted by the much more innocuous popular music of the seventies. Because of the influence of my three older brothers I liked The Beatles, Cream, The Who, Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, The Grateful Dead, Crosby Stills Nash & Young... etc. At the same time many of my cohorts who didn't have the guiding hand of hip older siblings were impassioned over bands like Black Sabbath, Three Dog Night, The Partridge Family, Shawn Cassidy, etc. So, when it came to music, my cohorts and I were on a whole different wavelength.

My worries over my general status among my peers, however, soon became a small issue to me because I found myself focusing my energies on protecting myself from a rising tide of ostracism and violence that was developing at the whims of the football team jocks.

Jocks in the Land

Probably the main thing that caught their attention was my height. I was already six-foot tall at the tender age of twelve. I was skinny as a bone and had virtually no fighting skills. I had never been a fighter and I had no desire to fight anyone. Unfortunately, the fact that I was taller than most everyone made me an obvious target. Apparently the bullies saw in me an

opportunity to impress their friends because when you can beat up somebody that's bigger than you are, you get noticed.

My own little Columbine experience started with the tough guys on the junior varsity football team. One day I was sitting in the lunchroom minding my own business when a little toady approached me and said, "You're a pretty big kid. Do you think you could beat Anthony Colombo in a fight?" These situations are dangerous because you can't show weakness yet, if you don't want to fight, you have to avoid the confrontation somehow without letting on that you're avoiding it.

"I don't even know who Anthony Colombo is," I replied coolly.

"That's him, right over there." said the toady, pointing his finger at a four foot nine inch tall, skinny kid who was staring at me menacingly from three tables away.

I chuckled, turned back to my lunch and said, "He's pretty small. I don't know. I suppose if I had to I could beat him in a fight. What's the point? I don't even know him."

"So, you say you could beat up Anthony Colombo?"

I turned to check him out again. Those bulging snake-like eyes... he looked like a midget Charles Manson! "He's just a twerp! I think just about anybody could beat him up."

The toady hurried away and I returned to my lunch. My peace was soon to be interrupted again, though, by the real Anthony Colombo. He was almost as tall as I was and he was one of the crowd that hung out at The Gate... I had been set up!

He stood over me with his muscle shirt and veins popping out all over the place waiting for me to say something. I didn't. Finally he poked my shoulder and said, "What's this I hear about you wanting to fight me?"

"Who are you?" I asked incredulously.

"I'm Anthony Colombo."

"**YOU'RE** Anthony Colombo??" I felt like someone poured a bucket of cold dread over my head.

"Yeah, that's right." He whacked my arm. "I'm the guy that you said you wanted to fight just a minute ago. Well, wimp, are you going to fight me or are you chicken?"

The lunchroom crowd quieted down as people began staring at us. I could see in their faces that no one wanted to trade places with me. I looked over at the Charles Manson midget kid who was introduced to me as Anthony Colombo just minutes before. He was also staring at me but now he had a wicked smile on his face. Then I noticed that his table companions were all tough guys from The Gate. They were all in this together!

"The kid who was here a minute ago told me that **HE** was Anthony Colombo!" I said, pointing at the skinny little kid.

"That's Greg Winberg. So, you want to fight him?"

"No."

"Why not, chicken? He's half your size. You could take him."

The absurdity of this situation almost made me laugh but I stayed sober. "Why would I want to fight someone I don't even know?"

"We'll see you at The Gate after school, wimp, and you better not chicken out. We'll come lookin' for ya."

He walked away swaggering like he was drunk on testosterone. I rolled my eyes and continued eating my lunch like nothing happened. Soon the room was buzzing with conversation again.

After school that day the goons went to The Gate to wait for me but I just went home on the bus like usual. I didn't know all their tactics (yet) but the set up in the lunchroom was enough to teach me to steer clear of them whenever I could.

But when I couldn't avoid them they targeted me for abuse in the hallways in between classes. They knocked my books out of my arms and

then when I tried to pick them up they stepped on my hands and kicked my books around the hall where they got trampled by the crowd. They also enjoyed suckering me by hiding in the crowd and then suddenly pushing me into a locker as I walked by. The halls were so dense with kids, I never knew when it was coming.

Rosenbaum, Ort & Bentley - The Varsity Goon Squad

Then the varsity football players got in on the game. I had the misfortune of having gym class at the same time as several of them so I had to use the showers and locker room at the same time they did. The ones I remember the most were Ricky Rosenbaum, Tim Ort, and John Bentley. Rosenbaum was short and stocky. He looked like a little albino gorilla with his bulging muscles, curly blond hair, and pale white skin. Ort was tall and lanky with short dark hair, dark eyes, and black tortoise shell glasses. Bentley was mid-sized with sandy blond hair. I actually was familiar with his family already because his father was Detective Bentley from the Middletown Township Police Department. He had been to my house several times to take my brother Jake to jail.

Rosenbaum, Ort, and Bentley named me Gladys in honor of my long hair. They snapped me with their wet towels, tripped me and slammed my naked body into the metal lockers saying, "Oh excuse me, Gladys. HEY! Watch where you're going! What's the matter with you, Gladys?" And then Rosenbaum held the back of my head with one hand, squeezed my face with the other and stuck his hideous white face right up to mine and sneered, "C'mon, Gladys, give me a kiss! What's the matter, don't you like me? I think you're cute! C'mon, Gladys, give me a kiss..." I just stayed silent.

As time went by the whole football team started saying, "Hey

Gladys!" whenever they saw me in the hall. My books got dumped over and over again and I got smashed into a locker at least a couple of times every day.

Operation: The Biggest and the Baddest The Suicide Mission

I was pretty fed up with the whole thing but I had no idea what to do about it. So I asked one of my older brother Jake's friends for some advice. I was hoping that once he heard my story he would get angry, get a bunch of older kids together, and go kick the crap out of those guys... or at least threaten them. Unfortunately that didn't happen. This was his advise: "What you do, Jamie, is pick out the biggest one and attack him with everything you got. Then, after you beat him up, all of the others will leave you alone."

I didn't care much for his advice but I was desperate to stop being abused. So, I thought about it and decided it was worth a try. Ort was the tallest of the three main bullies. Maybe I'd surprise myself and actually pull it off!

A couple of days later I saw Ort walking down the hall by himself. "Hey Gladys!" he said, waving cheerily.

"This is it," I said to myself. Once I was out of his sight I doubled back, snuck up behind him and jumped on him, wrapping my arms around his neck. My plan was to crash him into a locker, throw him to the floor, and then smash his head repeatedly on the tile floor until someone stopped me.

The plan didn't work. "HEY!!!" he yelled as my arms encircled his neck. He countered by jabbing me in the stomach with his elbow. That knocked the wind out of me and caused me to lose my grip on his neck. He turned on me with a vicious look in his eye and shouted, "Whadya think yer doin?!" as he grabbed me by the collars. The next thing I knew he lifted me

off the ground and smashed me into a locker. "I'd like to see you try that again sometime," he sneered as my feet dangled in the air. Suddenly he let go and my traumatized body crumpled into a heap on the floor. He laughed as he walked away. "Seeya later, Gladys!" So much for that strategy!

Jake meets the Goons Squad

A few days later I was riding my bicycle through my neighborhood when I happened upon Ricky Rosenbaum, Tim Ort, and John Bentley, each walking with their arms around their girlfriends. I couldn't believe it was them as I whizzed by on my bike. They saw me too and yelled out, "Hey Gladys!" I didn't respond but I headed for home because I knew that Jake was there.

"Hey Jake!" I said frantically.

"What?" He asked absently without looking up from the bicycle he was working on.

"Ya know those kids who always call me Gladys?"

"Yeah?"

"Three of them are walking down Roving Road right now. I just saw them!"

Jake looked up from his work and asked in a whiny, sarcastic tone, "What do you want me to do, beat em' up for ya?" He shook his head, smirked and went back to work.

I was crestfallen. What I wanted was for Jake to be my big brother and defend me. I wanted him to jump up, ride over there and hassle those guys. I wanted him to threaten them with physical violence and tell them that their days on earth were numbered if they didn't leave me alone. I wanted him to call all of his friends in the neighborhood and go put those

guys to the hospital! I was desperate and, as always, Jake was letting me down.

"No..." I lied, "I just thought that maybe you'd like to see 'em."

Jake eyed me for a moment. And then, much to my surprise he stood up and said, "Okay. Let's go see these friends of yours."

I was ecstatic as we hopped onto our bikes and rolled down the driveway but I had no idea what to expect when we saw them. Looking back I hardly think that Jake, the hippy burnout, would've been any match for three jocks with girlfriends to impress even if he was two years older than them.

As they came into view we rolled up and stopped about twenty feet behind them. Tim Ort heard the whiz and whir of our pawl mechanisms and turned to see what it was. When he saw me he smiled and called out, "Hey Gladys!"

"Shut up man!" John Bentley whispered hoarsely. "Can't you see what's up?" He looked at us with fear in his eyes. "He brought his older brother."

The six of them turned to look at us. Jake and I stood there straddling our bikes with our arms crossed looking tough as the air thickened with foreboding. Then Bentley said, "C'mon. Let's get outta here." The fear in his voice was unmistakable. I was hoping real hard that Jake would challenge them or just walk up to them and start slugging but he didn't. He didn't say a word. Meanwhile the jocks and their girls decided it was best to ignore us and keep moving. They walked fast and they looked scared. I was enjoying the fact that no one was calling me Gladys anymore. We remounted our bikes and rolled up about ten feet behind them, keeping pace. They continued walking in silence, apparently intimidated and hoping we would go away without a fight. I looked over at Jake but he obviously wasn't going to do or say anything. In reality he was no more a fighter than I was

but thankfully they didn't know that. Eventually Jake turned around and headed for home and I followed him. As we disappeared around the bend Tim Ort called out, "See ya later Gladys!" That made me angry but there was nothing I could do except take it... as usual. What I didn't know was that a seed was sown that day and that seed would soon spring up and bear fruit.

Rumor Mongering Johnny Goodman Steps Up

During the next few weeks I had the usual troubles with the football team. Then one day a guy named Johnny Goodman came up to talk to me. He was the younger brother of a pair of very talented local musicians known as Billy and Franky Goodman - The Goodman Brothers! Frankie was older, Billy was Jake's age and Johnny was in the same grade as the bullies. Johnny didn't play any instruments but he was a freak. He knew Jake and so he took an interest in me when he noticed that I was having a difficult time.

"Hey Jamie! Hey man, I wouldn't worry too much about them guys pickin' on you anymore. I think I fixed em' pretty good."

"Whadya do?" I asked incredulously.

"I said, 'Hey, you guys have been pickin' on Jamie Thompson? Callin him Gladys and stuff like that? *Are you nuts??* He's got three older brothers, man, and they got all kind a friends! And you know what else? I heard that they're all comin' up here today after school lookin' for you guys. You know what they're gunna do, man? They're gunna take every one of you and rip your arms and legs off! That's what they said, man! Boy!... You guys are in ***DEEP \$H!#!!***"

"You told em' that??" I asked in a mixture of terror and amazement.

"Yeah, man. That's what I told em'. Hey word's gettin around fast. I don't think those guys will be pickin' on you anymore. Ha Ha Ha!!!"

"Is it true? Is anyone coming here after school today?" I hadn't heard anything about it.

"No, man! I just made it up. I figured it would scare those guys and then they'd leave you alone." I was happy and horrified at the same time. Maybe it would scare them into leaving me alone. Then again, what if when they realized it was a hoax they made things even worse for me?

Foxhole Repentance Bentley Sees the Light

(The next part of this story is true and not exaggerated in any way) A few minutes later I was walking down the hall thinking about all this when suddenly a desperate voice called out from behind me. "**JAMIE!**" I turned to see John Bentley walking briskly toward me. His face exuded the terror of a coward who just found out he was living the last few hours of his life before being treated to a slow, grisly, brutal death. I stopped to hear what he had to say.

"Jamie! Oh thank **GOD** I found you!! Look man, I'm sorry I ever called you Gladys and I promise I'll never do it again if you'll just tell your brothers not to rip my arms and legs off!!"

Suddenly I felt very powerful. I didn't want to give in right away so I said, "Well, I don't know, John. I.... "

"PLEASE!! Oh **PLEASE** don't let them kill me!!" He was whining piteously and almost crying! Then he actually, really and truly got down on his knees to beg me right there in the hall! "I'll do ANYTHING! Just CALL THEM OFF!! OH GOD, PLEASE!! He wailed. He clenched his palms together and wagged them desperately at me as if I were his executioner and he was being allowed one last plea for his miserable life before being boiled in oil or thrown into a pit full of hungry rats or something. His whole body

was trembling.

I stayed cool and played my hand. "I don't know, Bentley. It may be too late. I might not see them before they catch up to you."

Clinging to this crumb of hope, he continued. "Look, I promise I'll never call you Gladys or pick on you ever again and I'll make sure that no one from the team does either. I'll see to that! Oh please, please will you tell your brothers not to kill me?" He was pale as a ghost and his eyes were bugging out. I was enjoying this!

"I'll see what I can do, Bentley, but like I said, it might be too late."

"It's not too late! ***It can't be!!***" he shrieked. He stood up and started backing away. "I'll start telling the other guys to leave you alone right away. Just.... whatever you do, ***don't let them kill me!!***"

"All right, John, we'll see...."

Before I could finish John Bentley, the cowardly bully, turned and ran frantically down the hall toward the gym and disappeared.

All of the sudden I felt like a new man. I couldn't believe that Bentley actually begged me to spare his life like that. What a dope! Of course the downside of all this was: What was going to happen after my brothers and their alleged execution squad failed to show?

That day I went home on the bus like usual. When I saw Jake I told him what Johnny Goodman did hoping it might inspire him to put together a posse of friends and make a showing up at the school. He just laughed and I was left wondering how all this would play out.

Rosenbaum Goes It Alone

The next day seemed at first to be the beginning of a new era for me at Carl Sandburg Junior High. As I walked down the halls nobody picked on me. Nobody said "Hi Gladys!" Nobody knocked my books down or smashed me into lockers. It was GREAT!

Then I went to Gym class and the new era ended. Unfortunately Ricky Rosenbaum was not impressed by the threat of being dismembered and he continued the usual abuse all by himself. He snapped me with his wet towel, he tripped me, he pushed me into the lockers, and he held my head and face in his iron grip while putting his ugly face right up to mine and saying, "C'mon, Gladys, gimme a kiss!"

I was amazed that John Bentley and the other football players didn't seem to notice that Rosenbaum's arms and legs didn't get torn off as a result of his continuing to bully me. They avoided me like the plague but Rosenbaum's abuse continued as though nothing had happened. I was beginning to lose hope that this was ever going to end.

Michael – The Gentle Giant

Then one day I was at a party over at my friend, Mickey Largo's house. There were a lot of kids there and the main attraction was Mickey's rock n' roll band. It was during one of their breaks that I started a conversation with Mickey's drummer. His name was Michael.

Michael was a gentle giant. He had straight brown hair that was parted in the middle and hung down to his jaw line. He had a warm, friendly, smiling face. He was tall with broad shoulders and huge bulging muscles with veins popping out everywhere. If not for his warm countenance he

would have been very intimidating to me. In spite of his massive stature it was obvious that he was a kind and gentle guy. I was a budding drummer at the time so I introduced myself to him and we chatted about drums and music and bands, etc. I was very charmed by his laugh. It wasn't a particularly unusual laugh except that he seemed to laugh at anything that was even remotely funny. That meant a lot to me because I had a pretty offbeat sense of humor and I enjoyed meeting the rare person who laughed at my jokes. So, Michael and I had a good time laughing it up and we became fast friends.

During the course of our conversation I found out that Michael was also an athlete. He was a pole-vaulter on the Carl Sandburg track team and he knew Ricky Rosenbaum, Tim Ort, and John Bentley. He didn't hang around with them, though, because they were beer-drinking jocks while Michael was a dope-smoking freak. Michael got a hardy laugh from my story about Johnny Goodman telling those guys that my brothers and their friends were coming up to kill them because of the Gladys madness. But when I told him that Rosenbaum continued to make life at school hell for me he got all fired up. "You mean to tell me that little pip-squeak Rosenbaum is givin' you a hard time? Jamie, don't you worry about a thing. I'll take care of him for you."

I was elated!

Rosenbaum's Delicious Crow Dinner

That weekend Mickey's band played at the junior high dance. I never went to a dance before but I went along to see Mickey's band perform and to cheer them on. During the breaks I hung out with Michael and the rest of the band's entourage.

During one of their sets the band was jamming and I was standing in

the crowd watching when all of the sudden Ricky Rosenbaum approached me. He was dressed nicely in a collared shirt and tie and he was handing out flyers to everybody. I deduced that he must've been on the student committee that sponsored the dance. He handed me a flyer and then, in a flat tone that sounded like he was reading a script he said, "Jamie, I'm sorry I ever called you Gladys and I promise I'll never do it again. I'm also sorry that I pushed you around and I promise never to do that again. I'll also make sure that none of the other guys ever do either. If you will forgive me I'd like to shake on it and be friends from now on." He extended his hand but his eyes were cold and distant. I was shocked! I didn't respond right away because I simply couldn't believe my ears... or my eyes! He extended his hand further and continued. "Really, Jamie, I mean it. I'm sorry I ever called you Gladys and I'd like to end this right now." I extended my hand slowly, half expecting some sort of trap – a hand buzzer or a judo flip - but apparently he really meant it. We shook hands and, without another word, he turned and continued handing out flyers. He never said anything to me ever again.

I stood there dumbfounded for a few minutes. It seemed too good to be true! Then I started thinking about it. What in the world could've caused him to do that? He had been such a committed jerk for so long, even after everyone else quit picking on me.

When the band took their break, Michael approached me and said, "Did Rosenbaum talk to you?"

"Yeah!" I said.

"Did he apologize to you?"

"Yeah!" I said with a laugh.

"Everything's okay then? He's gonna leave you alone from now on, right?"

"That's what he said."

"Great!"

We stood there in silence for a few moments.

"Whadjya do, Michael?"

He smiled broadly and replied, "I grabbed him by the throat, lifted him off the ground, smashed him against a wall, and explained the situation to him. I told him that you are my friend. I said that I didn't like what he was doing to you and that he had to apologize to you. I also told him that I'd be watching him from now on so he'd better cut the crap."

We stood in silence for few more moments.

"That would do it," I said, nodding my head.

Michael and I shook hands in the soul-man style. I looked into his eyes and saw the warmth and good humor of a great human being and I felt like the luckiest guy on earth to have found such a friend.

Sunburst at Last!

After that evening, no one ever called me Gladys or pushed me around ever again. And, thanks to Michael, my life at school totally changed for the better. I started making new friends and before long life went pretty much back to normal for me. Within a few years I established myself as a guitarist/musician in the social structure at school and even the ruffians started going out of their way to be nice to me.

To this day, when I feel like the world is against me and no one seems to notice or care, one of the ways that I cheer myself up is to remember my buddy Michael and how he went to bat for me when no one else would. I think of all that raw power draped around a big heart of compassion and kindness for a long-haired, stick of a guy like me.

God bless you, Michael!

Hindsight

Looking back all these years later it amazes me to realize that those bullies who seemed so dangerous were just a bunch of twerpy 14 year olds. The situation seemed so cataclysmic and large at the time. I can't say that it ever occurred to me that I might have told my gym teacher what was happening to me. On the other hand, it's also surprising to think that such violence could've gone on in the locker room week after week without anyone in authority noticing.

My Little Columbine

Columbine was a terrible, terrible, murderous criminal event. My personal feelings toward the perpetrators, however, I think are a bit broader, perhaps, than the average person's because I know what it's like to be beaten, harassed, abused, and treated with no dignity or respect by a mob of ignorant social elitists week in and week out in a place where I had no choice but to be. I'm certainly not saying that the perps did the right thing. Quite the opposite! I have a little daughter and son now and my worst nightmare would be that some twisted psycho might harm them for some situation that they had nothing to do with. Hence, my heart goes out to the families of the victims of Columbine. I am, of course, on their side. On the other hand, I can say that while my naked body was smarting from being smashed into a locker, tripped and pushed to the tile floor, and whipped by wet towels... and while Rosenbaum held my head in his vise-like grip, scrunched my cheeks together and sneered directly into my face, "Kiss me Gladys!" for the umpteenth time in so many weeks ... if a handgun had miraculously appeared in my hand, my anger, rage and humiliation was such that it's likely I would've blown him away. It wouldn't have been the right thing to

do, but it would've been hard to resist.

On the Spiritual Side

In conclusion, I think that the problem of bullying, which is now getting national attention in our post-Columbine culture, is part of a more general problem. The problem, in my opinion, is a spiritual one and it manifests itself as addiction to power and control and the compulsion to do anything and everything, no matter how despicable, in order to get it.

I believe that the same spirit that inspires young people to bully other kids also inspires people to become physically/mentally abusive members of society. Some examples include physically and mentally abusive parents and spouses, bad cops, rapists, and abusive bosses and coworkers. While the great majority of people that I've known throughout my life have been wonderful, I've had my share of run-ins with power and control addicts too. It's most unpleasant but it begs the question. What do you do about it? Do you follow the example of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold? Heaven forbid! One person that I've known all my life is in a terrible situation with an abusive spouse and his solution has always been to do nothing and hope that it'll get better someday... unfortunately for him his troubles have only gotten steadily worse... but then again, some people aren't happy unless they're unhappy. Do I hear an "amen???"

When I was twelve years old I wasn't willing to let the abuse stand so my solution was to look to the people who I believed cared about me and who I perceived to be more powerful than the bad guys. It was a sad lesson to learn, and one that I continue to learn to this very day: most people, even your closest "friends"... people you've known all your life, *even your own brother* will leave you high and dry the moment they are called to stand by you in a difficult situation. So, I took it on the chin until I crossed paths with

Michael who had the power to communicate clearly to the bullies in the only language they understood - brute force.

In those days I needed a powerful friend like Michael to stand up for me and put the bullies in their place. In my adult years, though, and after decades of discipling in Christianity, I've come to realize that I have a friend who is infinitely more powerful than Michael - God Himself! When I gave my heart to God through the death and resurrection of His son Jesus, I tapped into a power that makes volcanoes look like firecrackers in comparison! A power that can create life out of nothing. A power that can create and destroy the universe!

Here is God's promise: "... **in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**
(Romans 8:28 NIV)

This is a VERY powerful scripture and I have found that it challenges the very integrity of my faith. Why? Because, when I read it, I see that ***I have to love God and be called according to his purpose*** in order to benefit from it! Hence, when I'm in a situation where someone is trying to beat me down in order to wrongfully obtain power and control that is within my domain of stewardship, the best thing I can do is stand on the truth, speak it boldly, be still, and know that God is in control... and that He loves me with great passion. As long I am right with God and have nothing to hide, I have nothing to fear.... justice WILL be served.

In the case of Michael, I had the privilege of finally seeing the bullies put down. In current situations though, I can't and don't count on the same kind of fairly immediate gratification. This is part of the challenge to faith because God sees the **BIG** picture, I don't. Hence, what God is working out in the life of an abuser may be long range... it may even extend to Judgment Day! As a servant of the living God who lives inside me, it is my privilege to be available for a good work, even if it means not having an immediate

personal sense of justice having been done on my behalf. You've undoubtedly heard the scripture that says:

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature, will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

(Galatians 6:7-9 NIV)

What a beautiful and perfect love God has! And what a relief to know that if someone deserves something, God's going to take care of it. It's not up to me or you to make it happen. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear! And if you are being abused by someone, run to God and love Him with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength! He'll take care of you... then contact whoever is in your chain of authority that can help. It may be a friend, a family member, a spiritual leader that the abuser respects... or the police! Whatever or whoever it is, **DON'T EVER LAY DOWN FOR ABUSE!** The abuser will hate you and try to take you down in the short run, but in the long run s/he will thank you some day!

Up and Around the Helix Michael Revisited

So, why exactly is the song "It's Been So Long" dedicated to Michael? After hanging out together for a couple of years in the early 70's Michael and I started to drift. I ended my friendship with our mutual friend Mickey Largo... that's another short story not yet written down. That didn't help us stay in touch. I also started playing in bands and playing gigs all the time while Michael turned his interest away from drums to cycling, body-building and Marshall Arts. Even though we didn't see each other very often

after 1974 or so, Michael always held a special place in my heart.

About 26 years went by and I had seen Michael only a handful of times when one day in the spring of 2000, when I was in the middle of recording the "It's Been So Long" CD, I heard that he was in trouble... **that he was in jail!** I was blown away! I made a few phone calls but no one seemed to know anything specific... only that Michael was involved in some kind of drug deal, got caught, and that he was in Federal prison. I felt terrible for him... and, in part, responsible because when we were kids Michael's involvement with me lead him to be involved with some of Jake's unscrupulous, greedy, druggy friends and I just knew in my heart that the seed that was sown all those years ago had come to fruition in his life. I say that because it had been my observation over the years that many of the people that I knew in the early days that either dropped out of high school or barely graduated high school, never went to college, and never found their way out of my hometown, stopped maturing morally and spiritually at about age 14... Jake was chief among them. I also thought of how Michael had helped me all those years ago and I wondered if there wasn't something I could do for him to return the favor now that he was in trouble.

I finally did a web search on "Federal Prison" and ended up sending an email "to whom it may concern..." to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). A very nice lady responded and, after a few exchanges of emails, she gave me Michael's address and numeric identity.

I wrote to him half expecting not to hear from him. I was pleasantly surprised when he wrote back to me straight away and was VERY glad to hear from me... it seemed that most of his "good friends" had deserted him when he was sent up and he was feeling pretty isolated. Thankfully, his sentence was only for 46 months so he had a lot to look forward to.

I made the two hour drive to his "camp" to visit with him several times over the next two years and we engaged in quite a lot of heavy duty

Spiritual conversation. I was very pleased to find that he was taking full responsibility for his actions and current predicament. I say I was pleased because my experience with many of the people that I grew up with was such that they would do and say virtually ANYTHING to avoid taking responsibility for they said and did. This kind of sociopathic tendency seemed almost ubiquitous in my hometown - which had a lot to do with why I moved away for so many years. Michael, it seemed, had made friends with several Christians in the lock up and had decided to give his life to God - consequently, he was now seeing clearly how the evil one had taken advantage of his spiritual blindness over the years and inspired him to destroy himself with drink, drugs and greed. The joke was on the evil one, though, because Michael finished the job by completely destroying himself and arising from the ashes a new creature in Christ! Judy and I sent him a new NIV Life Application Bible. Michael was elated because he had been borrowing the very same bible from an inmate friend who had been released and took it home with him. As it worked out, God's timing was perfect! No sooner had the borrowed bible become unavailable when the one we bought for him arrived in the mail. We, of course, had no idea. I've learned over the years that this is the way God works!

It was around this time that I decided to dedicate the song "It's Been So Long" to Michael because, after so many years of madness, he was finally free Spiritually and closing in on the end of his incarceration. Whenever I sang the song I couldn't help but think of him. I was SO excited for him and very pleased to have played some small role in his new found faith. It was as though I had helped to free him from the worst bully of all... the devil! Not a bad reciprocation if you asked me! It was all so poetic and perfect. I just had to dedicate the song to him!

Michael's trouble's were, in reality, really just beginning. Without going into details, suffice to say that the life he was going back to was very

complicated. Most of his old friends and his fiancée, who was faithfully standing by him, living in his house and keeping it going, had no clue about the Spiritual changes Michael had gone through. These were people, in my humble opinion, who played principle roles in the social/spiritual dynamics that enabled him to get into trouble in the first place. I worried about what might happen to his faith when he returned to their midst. But that, of course, was God's business with Michael, not mine

I helped get him a job at a warehouse that was managed by a friend of mine. Getting that first job is always so important - and difficult for parolees. I did some leg work trying to set him up with some other connections that I had but they didn't pan out for him.

I really didn't know what to expect from Michael once he got resettled into his life. It had been decades since we were close friends and I had virtually nothing to do with the life that he was going back to. So, I kept no expectations and hoped for the best.

In the end, Michael redisappeared from my life. Once he landed a good job and got most of the madness surrounding his incarceration settled he stopped calling me. I called him a few more times and listened to his awkward talk of getting together "sometime" but I sensed the growing distance between us. I was saddened to have to let him go but at least I felt that we were finally even.

Dear Michael

If I could say anything to Michael now it would be this: You were right, Mike. What you did for me all those years ago wasn't really a huge thing. **It was huge to me...** but not for you, as you said. I've learned that the thing that makes a good story is when the characters come out in the end changed in some way... hopefully for the better. What you did for me

required no courage or self-sacrifice. You were just being decent and compassionate in part because it was easy for you. It seemed momentous to me at the time because I grew up around people like my brother Jake who had little or no good character or integrity to speak of... but you emerged from my little Columbine odyssey pretty much the same as when you went in. Now that I've had the privilege of making your acquaintance again my intuition tells me that is a predictable pattern of behavior for you... and one that God will probably want to deal with, so get ready.

Well, here it is, "Buddy." From your old friend who's been coming to terms with God since 1977. Big muscles and fancy karate moves won't do you any good against your new adversary. If you want to be an honest believer, you've got to stand for the truth and stand against the evils that surround you - you know what I'm talking about. Those evils that helped you find yourself in the slammer. The same evils that now want to shut you up, keep you wrapped up and mired in social pressures and expectations that will ultimately drag you down to Spiritual mediocrity. If there's one thing that I've learned about the Christian life it's this: You can't shrink from the hard choices or you'll never grow up Spiritually. You will *often* have to choose over and against your feelings and your self interest in order to be true to your faith. If you honestly seek to "know God," and I think you know what I mean by that - and the ultimate importance of that - then God will give you the power to achieve it... but you gotta want it bad. You've got a role to play in the Spiritual outcome of those you claim to love. Hence, you can no longer avoid the challenges that require real courage and self-sacrifice. You may lose a few "friends" and/or family members along the way but Jesus predicted that anyone who wanted to follow him would have to be prepared to endure such pain. Take care, my friend.

Jamie Thompson



Jamie Thompson is a writer, musician, songwriter, photographer, videographer, husband, and a stay-at-home-dad with two small children.

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Check out Jamie's website at www.jamiethompson.net.

Read more short stories online at [The Rocklore Files](#).

Check out Jamie's audio CD release ["It's Been So Long."](#)

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