

From Addiction To Adoption

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DELIVERED INTO SONSHIP

Rick's Story

He wore a uniform, this man whose car mysteriously appeared by the side of the empty desert road where I had lain down to die. “Looks like you need a ride,” he said to me. Even though all my bodily functions had already shut down in a pre-death state, I managed to crawl through his open car door, and we drove fifteen miles without another word.

Somehow, my stranger-chaperone knew to drop me off at the Stripper Hotel in Rio Vista, where I was living. I got out of the car near the lobby entrance and glanced back toward the man to nod my thanks, but he was gone. *Seconds* after I'd gotten out of the vehicle, it had completely vanished, along with its driver! An angel in human form had materialized on assignment to rescue me from certain death after my first heart attack at age twenty-nine!

Two weeks later, I *was* dead. In spite of the angelic deliverance in the desert, I'd returned to my booze like a boomerang. As a hopeless alcoholic, I'd failed miserably every time I tried to stop drinking. And when my overloaded heart protested and quit a second time, I found myself standing at the tunnel entrance that leads into heaven. Feeling perfectly sober for the first time in at least a decade, I glanced down at my hands and feet. I was no longer experiencing *Delirium Tremens*, the shaking that accompanies alcohol withdrawal. *This is good!* I thought to myself. *No trembling, no more pain, no fears, no anger, no resentment—nothing negative! I have only complete and amazing peace!*

At the far end of the tunnel, an indescribable brightness roiled in constant movement, and beyond it was a magnificent patch of brilliant blue. Suddenly, as I began walking toward the gleaming white, a figure appeared through the wall of the tunnel and stood in front of me. Silhouetted by the light, the being spoke directly: “You have to go back.”

I answered emphatically, “I have no intentions of going back!”

But he only reiterated, “You must return.”

I pleaded and argued, “I’m not going back. *Please, please, please* don’t make me go back there!”

My body began to withdraw from the tunnel, and moments later I awoke in my parents’ home. I’d been dead for almost twenty minutes from a second heart attack. Paramedics worked quickly to stabilize my vital signs, and we headed for the emergency room with sirens blaring. In a tug of war between life and death, I died again during a third heart attack, but emergency crew members in the ambulance brought me back. Finally, I awoke on this side of heaven in a sterile ICU room with tubes and needles attached everywhere. Despairing of any hope that I could someday find the strength to slay the giant of my nightmarish drunkenness, I stared up at the institutional ceiling above my hospital bed and wondered why in the world God had insisted I return to planet Earth.

Stolen Dreams

Before starting to drink at the young age of eight, I had known and communicated regularly with this God who preserved my life. My grandmother, made of goodness from the top of her head to the soles of her feet, taught me to talk with Him, and through her impartation, He and I became friends.

Hearing His voice was natural in those early years—almost as though God and I were carrying on face-to-face conversations. We

could talk about anything; my desires to go to Disney World, my family's needs, whatever a child thinks about became topics of our discussions. And on most afternoons, I could be found sitting in front of our family's television watching healing evangelist Oral Roberts. Though a young boy, I felt tremendous love for God and for His church, and Oral's anointing stirred great dreams of going into the ministry to become a pastor.

Then one day, in the midst of my happiness, I heard an audible voice. The voice said to me, "When you come to a full understanding of all these spiritual things, I'm taking you out. I'm taking you home." Since I hadn't learned there were *other* beings (besides God) in the spirit realm that also had the ability to speak, I assumed the voice belonged to God. I thought He was telling me that when I'd learned enough about Him, I would die.

But as a little eight-year-old boy, I didn't *want* to die! From that day on, I made a subconscious decision that God was no longer safe to be around. When He spoke to me, I ignored Him. I stopped telling Him my thoughts, and I no longer watched Oral Roberts. I was fully convinced that if I knew too much, God would cut short my life. Satan had deceived Adam and Eve to pull them away from fellowship with God, and now he was insidiously and cunningly stealing me away from resting in my heavenly Father's arms.

Another diabolical blow came shortly after hearing the voice. Stumbling into the alcohol stash my parents had hidden below our kitchen sink, I discovered that when I drank vodka, bad feelings temporarily went away. Through experimentation, I soon learned how much I could drink without my mom's or dad's detection.

By the time high school rolled around, that first curious swig as a child had evolved into regular weekend partying. While other seniors in our rural community of several thousand were lauded at graduation for their personal accomplishments, I was notoriously becoming known as Rio Vista's *town drunk*.

Natural Addiction, Supernatural Healing

Six weeks after dying and meeting the figure in heaven's tunnel entrance, I sat in the Striper Hotel lobby, inebriated and experiencing my fourth and final heart attack. At the hospital later that day, the doctor pulled me into his office and tearfully announced, "Rick, go home, get your affairs in order; you've got about six months to live. One of your heart's ventricles is pumping both ways—backward and forward—so it's not supplying blood to your body like it should." Then he added, "But, if you begin dieting and follow our regimen of care, you may live for as long as a year."

I answered him honestly, "Doc, I've tried to stop drinking for ten years, but I can't. Just check me out and let me go home." More times than anyone could count, I had *tried* to quit drinking alcohol, but I could never make it through the detoxification period into sobriety. In my mind, I didn't want to be an alcoholic: I *had* to drink to survive.

One month later, I returned for a follow-up appointment. Weighing in at 256 pounds, I was half drunk, with a distended stomach from alcohol, and white as a sheet. As the doctor stared at an x-ray of my heart, he remarked to me incredulously, "Look at this! Your enlarged heart has shrunk one and a half inches in diameter! I'm sending you for more tests to see what's going on in there."

Several hours later, I listened to the stunned cardiologist's findings. "Rick, I don't understand what happened, but your heart has shrunk, and you now have the healthy heart of a 19-year-old!" When I returned to present my doctor with the cardiologist's findings, I watched as he wrote across my medical chart, "It's a miracle!" He turned and looked at me, shaking his head and mumbling, "This beats anything I've seen in my life!"

I'd been healed! Once again, God divinely intervened in the midst of my drunkenness. This time, He completely restored my physical heart, a supernatural cure that would have thrilled any normal person. But as I left the doctor's office that day, I felt only absolute despair. This gift from above felt like I'd just been cursed to live out a miserable lifetime sentence inside the prison walls of my own addiction. In heaven, I'd felt glory, freedom, and incredible peace. But if I couldn't stop drinking, what did I have to look forward to on this earth?

That afternoon, I decided to bury the torment of my emotional pain with the only method I knew: getting thoroughly loaded. I carefully hid several bottles of alcohol in my clothing so the local police, who knew my drinking history, wouldn't confiscate them. Carrying my cache, I climbed the stairs to my hotel room. Each step seemed to loom up toward me as a wash of deep agony and desire weighed down my whole being. Somewhere between the lobby and my room on the second floor, I crumpled onto my knees under the force of it all and cried out to my childhood Friend, "God! I can't do this anymore! Help me!"

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