



God Snuck In

By Peter White

Peter White taught for 17 years in the magazine journalism program at Ryerson University. Recent projects include work with The Salvation Army and the launch of www.christianity.ca.

The meeting was about to start when my client announced, "Let us begin with a prayer." In all my working years, I had never commenced a business meeting with a prayer.

Although I was chairing this meeting, what was I supposed to do? Say no? After all, my colleagues and I were there to interview this woman for a new project we had just begun for her employer. So I did nothing. And she proceeded to pray.

Some kind of cult?

It was November 1996. At the request of a senior executive officer with The Salvation Army, I had put together a team of editorial professionals to evaluate the effectiveness of their publications.

I was a successful communications and media consultant, with expertise in marketing, brand repositioning and launching new media properties. My clients included Maclean Hunter-Rogers Media, Reader's Digest and Southam Communications-Can West.

Although born and raised a Roman Catholic, I had fallen away from my faith after graduating from university. After more than 25 years apart from God, Jesus was

nowhere on my radar screen. I didn't think I needed Him. Life was good, and I was proud of my self-reliance.

As soon as that first meeting came to a close, my similarly startled associates asked me if this Salvation Army was some kind of cult. I said I didn't think so and reminded them we had a contract. The clock was ticking and we had our work cut out for us.

Prayer time

Throughout the eight-month-long project, every meeting began or ended with prayer. As a former Catholic altar boy, I could rattle off prayers at any time, for any occasion, in both English and Latin, without blinking an eye. But the prayers these Salvation Army people prayed were different. They were customized to fit each particular situation. The language was personal and gave the impression that God was actually listening, as though he were in an adjacent room. As our meetings progressed, complete strangers began mentioning my name in prayer, asking God to protect and help me and the other members of the team. Although disconcerting at first, I slowly became more comfortable with their prayers.

Journey to Newfoundland

In June 1997, the team delivered our final report, which earned the approval of the national leadership committee. The project now completed, we received our payment,

disbanded the team and went our separate ways.

As the leader of this project, I had just spent eight months immersed in an intensive study of The Salvation Army—its culture, philosophy, theology and history. Through this process, I had come to understand and appreciate the role Newfoundland played in the development of the Army in Canada. So in August, I decided to take some time off and visit that beautiful island. While there, I took the opportunity to visit some Army churches, or "corps" as they are called. My first Sunday on the island, I went to St. Anthony Corps on the northwest coast. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced. People were honest and transparent. They called out to God, seeking His forgiveness, help and love. They prayed audibly for friends and neighbors by name. They laughed and they cried together, as though they were one big family.

As I witnessed the service unfold, I sensed I was in a special place. And although I didn't understand it, I knew in my heart that there was a powerful, positive, supernatural presence around me in the church that morning.

As I traveled across Newfoundland, I had the opportunity to talk about faith with the many people I met. I also visited Army churches in Triton, Springdale and Bonavista, culminating with a morning service at St. John's Citadel.

Newfound life

I can't say exactly when it happened, but while I was in Newfoundland, God snuck into my mind and impressed upon me that His Son, Jesus Christ, was my personal Savior, and that He had died on the Cross for me Me? In a personal relationship with God? I had never considered such a possibility, but this revelation caused a dramatic shift in my life.

In the end, I swallowed my pride, acknowledged I had sinned and asked God to forgive me, to come into my life, to shape me into the person He had created me to be. Needless to say, I was a very different person by the time I returned home from Newfoundland. I was excited because God was now in my heart, but I was also very confused. Why had this happened to me? Who could I talk to about it? And what now? I couldn't go back to the business practices that I had relied on for so long. Then, as God would have it, The Salvation Army called me and invited me to implement the recommendations I had made in my report. By this time, I realized that far from being a "cult," the Army was a vibrant Christian church that lived its faith by helping others. So in November 1997, I accepted the challenge. Among the many suggestions I had advocated was the introduction of a unique magazine, Faith & Friends—the same publication in which this story was originally published.

I see now how God used this business project to slowly draw me to Him. In my final report, I had concluded that Faith & Friends should provide "a sense of hope, direction and unconditional support for those who need it." How could I ever have imagined that I was actually referring to myself? I had come to do a job, but I had come away with a ministry. I had given birth to a magazine, but hadn't realized that the magazine would see my rebirth as a Christian, and for that I will be forever grateful.

Faith & Friends seeks to communicate mission and news to members and friends of The Salvation Army in Canada and Bermuda.

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