

# A Journey Home

by: Dale C. Crow

Before I can start my journey home I must tell you about from where I have come. I am a product of a broken home. Yes that is 60's lingo for divorced home. I always hated that phrase it sounds like some one dropped the home and broke it. I digress before I start.

I was the younger of two sons. My brother and I were 6 years apart. Ours was a lower middle class family. My father was a hard worker and a very strict disciplinarian. My mother was a very strong woman and she was a house wife up until I was 9. My brother was an athletic superstar. It was clear to me at an early age I was not! It was also obvious that I was not much of a student either.

My father was caught up in getting my brother up to speed in baseball, football and did not have much time for me growing up. My father was a little on the physically abusive side as he would beat my brother and myself more than he should. For me the word stupid would all but become my middle name. I found myself on the short end of my fathers love and attention and on the wrong end of his belt and verbal beatings as well.

When we moved to the city, my mother got a job with the local paper. Things looked like they were going well. We were able to buy a nice house as my mother's job along with my father's civil service job moved us toward the top of the middle class ladder.

I remember when the big problems started. It was when I came in the house and saw my parents drinking beer. This was the first time I knew of them drinking. I was shocked. I was 9 years old at the time. Then the Mardi Gras balls and parties came. As my parents started to climb the social ladder they also had to climb a party ladder as well. They started coming home drunk and began fighting at night. The fighting got worse and worse. Then the hitting started.

I would end up picking up my drunken naked mother off the floor after my father would of beat her. As a teenager I was not able to take some one home unless I called first to see how things were going. I also remember one Christmas day that my mother fell and broke off her two front teeth. The physical abuse toward my brother and me got worse.

I remember a time when my father threw my brother through a wall after hitting him with a closed fist. I remember one beating I got where my ears were bleeding. My mother would jump in and pull my father off of us but that would only put her in the line of fire. Many nights I would cry myself to sleep. No one knew my hurt. No one knew my pain.

When I was 15 my parents divorced. What bad timing. My brother had moved out and it was just me and my mother. I remember my father trying to get me to live with him. I knew I had to eat and I knew my mother would protect me so I went with my mother. My father was not a happy camper. A year after the divorce my mother remarried. By this time I was in the High School Band and I was now doing ok in school.

The two things that helped me through it all, was the church and band. I was good at band and it helped me think better of myself and the church gave me the love with out all of the strings attached. The kids are the people really hurt in divorce. They are placed in the middle and are used against the other parent in fits of rage.

My father dropped out of my life after the divorce. When I did see him it would not take long before he

started in on me with "why don't you live with me?" and how bad of person my mother was. By the time I was in high school I had no real contact with my father.

When I was in my twenties I reconciled the relationship with my father. This happened around the time I got married. It lasted about 5 years during which time I would get the same old stuff. He would drink way too much and then start in on me "Why do you go see your mother but you do not come over her to see me?"

At this time my father lived 60 miles out of the way and the trip was getting longer with each trip that I was verbally beat up. I had grown up in an alcoholic family and did not want a repeat of it! My father had remarried and he wanted me to fall in to his family but he just did not understand that I had a family of my own that I was making a life of my own.

In 1988 my wife and I went on a mission trip to Costa Rica. We had a youth house sit for us. My father in a drunken rage called the house and left an ugly and nasty message on the answering machine. When we got back the house sitter said you have a message on your machine you should listen to. I had never been so hurt in my life.

I wrote my father a letter telling him how I felt about the years of abuse and how I was no longer going to take it. I told him I would no longer be able to go to his house if he was going to drink when I was there. I told him in that letter that I wanted a relationship with him but he would need to apologize to me and to my wife. At that point we could start over and not bring up the past. Other than one or two emails he sent me in 2003 that was the last contact we had until March 2004.

Over the past 15 years I have had to put my relationship with my father out of my mind. I knew that I wanted a relationship with my father but it was not up to me. I tried to right the relationship in 1988 but my father rejected my offer and I was cut out of his life. The old joke that my parents moved and forgot to tell me where they moved to actually happened to me. My father and his new wife moved to Arkansas some time after 1988. I knew the name of the town but that put my father 10 hours away. Now though, location was not what was keeping us apart.

I am not sure how to tell you what that does to a man to have his father disown him. Funny thing is, often abused kids crave the approval of the abusive parent. In my life, I had never heard my father tell me he was proud of me. I was first chair in the band and was solo trumpet in high school and would cry at night knowing that my father never saw me play solo. I longed for a relationship of my father but could no longer take the abuse that came with it. As an adult I refused to be the victim any longer.

My brother kept up a relationship with my father over the years. The first of 2004 my brother told me that my father was really sick. I told him that if he wanted to talk with me that he could call me or email me and ask me to come up. My father has always been sick in some way. Some of it real and some was not so real. He used this often to manipulate us.

Over the last 15 years I had to separate myself from the hurt just to survive. I was a part time youth pastor and was able to use my hardships for God's glory. Even with putting the bad times out of my mind I often felt the hurt. But I was armed with the knowledge that I was the one that had tried to rekindle the relationship but was rejected. At this point "it was not my problem"! This was how it had to be to stay mentally healthy.

In Feb. 2004 my brother called and told me that my father was terminal with alcoholic liver disease. I responded to my brother that my father had been dead to me for 15 years. On March the 11th my brother contacted me and told me that my father wanted to talk with me and that he was doing very bad. In looking back at my reluctance in going I now understand some what. We get familiar with our pain and are scared of the unknown. Sometimes pain becomes a confidante. That is why battered wives have a hard time leaving their abusive husbands.

I drove up the 10 hours to Arkansas. I got to his nursing home room at 4 PM on a Sat. I had no idea what I was going to say or what he was going to say. All I know was that if he asked for me to come I owed him that as my father. When I went in to the room he was asleep. I stood over him for about 5 minutes. I was searching for the words to say. This was not the same man I last saw 15 years ago. He was much older looking as the years of alcohol and pain medicines had taken their toll on his body. He was a small yellowish man now.

I cleared my throat but that did not wake him. I then shook him and asked him if he was going to sleep all day? He opened his eyes and then closed them. I said Daddy, and he opened them again. He said "you're my 2nd son" as kind of a question. I said yes, I am your 2nd son. I asked him if he knew my name. He said my name and started to cry. He told me that he was sorry for all of the things he had done. He asked me to forgive him for all of the things he had done to me. We hugged and cried for some time.

He then started to go down the things. He told me that he was sorry for whipping me the way he did. He said it was too hard and that he was too ruff on me. He then told me that he loved me that he knows he did not give me the time I should have had as a child. He said he was sorry for the last 15 years and that it was his entire fault. I told him that it is all in the past now. He said over and over "So many wasted years." I told him we can start new now.

We talked more after the first wave of crying ended and he started to tell me things I had no idea of. He told me that he saw many of my band performances as he would work all day and beat it back to see me on Friday night to see me play solo. He then told me that he was so proud of me. This was what I wanted to hear all my life. My father told me he was proud of me. I told him that I looked for his approval all my life. He turned to me and said "You got it".

I told him that I never knew he saw me perform. I asked him why he did not let me know he was there. He told me that he did not want to interfere. He said it had gotten back to him that my stepfather was a better father than he was so he dropped out of my life. He told me that he was a failure and that he was sorry for failing me. I spent the rest of the night talking about the good things I remembered growing up. I had to admit to him that I had large gaps in my memories as a child. He apologized again for how hard he was on me.

He then asked for me to pray for him. I told him I would and then he asked for me to pray for his sins. I asked what he was talking about and he said I want to make sure my sins are forgiven. I then took his old yellow hand and started to pray for forgiveness. I asked God to take away my daddy's sins and make him whole and remember his sins no more. We cried more and told me that he was going to go to heaven. I told him that my brother and I had wondered about that and I was glad that he will be in heaven with us. What an ending of the night! I was spent, and was about to drop. After driving all day to receive such a blessing I was blown away. I kissed him goodnight and went to the hotel.

The next day I stayed till noon. He was doing better but he was still emotional. Every staff person that came in his room he would tell them about seeing me play solo in the band and tell them how proud he was of me. We spent the rest of the day remembering things we shared and just say holding hands. He only wanted me to feed him and to take him to the bathroom. I was finally home. I was in my father's heart. He wanted to be with me and loved me and was proud of me. What more could a son ask for? Well other than time. I would stop him when he started with the time lost. I told him we had to take what was given us.

We often see God in the same eyes as we see our earthly fathers. For years I have worked and worked for my Heavenly Father to gain his approval and to make him proud of me. My heart longed to hear the words "Well done, my good servant!" what I did not understand is, I got it! I have always had my Fathers' approval. Both Fathers!

Thank God that he has let me see that I also had my earthly fathers' approval as well. I don't know how all this will affect in my life. I feel a peace that I have never known. I also have a sense of loss. The lost time with my father but we can't afford to look back now!

The fact that God allowed me to know that my father was proud of me and then letting me lead my father in prayer to secure his salvation was a gift that makes the lost years fade. Life is too short to spend it looking back. What a homecoming we will have in heaven!

#### **Update:**

**Sunday, March 21, 2004 at 2:05 PM my father went to be with the Lord.** My brother was with him and that morning he called before we went to church. Daddy wanted to talk to me and wanted me to pray for him. He had my brother pray for him and my sister-in-law pray for him so I guess you would say it was a prayer chain. About 1:30 Kenny called and said that it would not be long. He put me on speaker phone and I told Daddy that I loved him and I wished I was there. He said he understood and said he loved me. I told him we had a good visit and he said it was wonderful. This would be the last words I would ever hear my father say to me. I let my wife talk to him and my two girls. Everyone had a chance to say they loved him. At 2:05 PM my sister-in-law called and said that daddy has gone home.

Our time together was a wonderful blessing that God gave both of us.

Never in my life have I seen such a change in a person. My father had changed into a sweet loving person. His whole being had changed. I am glad that I was able to have the short time with him. I will never forget the three days we had together. Those three days we were father and son. This was truly Gods time. God prepared this time for me and my father to come together.

#### **The Funeral:**

Before the funeral my brother placed his Bible under Daddy's right hand and I placed a copy of this story and the photo of our reconciliation under his left hand. That seemed the thing to do as that was two big things that happened in his life at the end. The funeral was just a simple grave side as Daddy requested. It was one of the best funerals I have been to. I know that sounds odd, but you've got to understand that I know where my Daddy is and it is not in his beautiful casket. The young preacher did a very good job in summing up my fathers life. He asked if any one had something to say and you all know me, I could not pass that up. I added that Daddy and I were at odds for many years but God allowed us to reconcile the relationship and we had three wonderful days together. I would remember those three days as long as I lived. I added that there was no doubt where Daddy was now.

#### **Looking Back:**

Daddy's last days were spent seeking God and asking for forgiveness. Daddy is with my Father now! No questions in my mind. My father taught me how to humble one's self, how to seek God and how to die. What a good father I had.

**All glory be to God.**

**Here are some photos of My father and of our reconciliation.**



The faces of reconciliation!



Wonderful Visit! God's Gift To Us!



Cleve K. Crow Sr.  
12-26-1935 to 03-21-2004

