

Written by By Richard Kontz
Friday, 20 July 2018 03:34



Continuing a 7-part special by Richard F. Kontz on a Vietnam Vet he met while running the Bread of Life Christian Bookstore in 2015 through mid-2011.

Don and I went into a restaurant called My Sister's place and sat down at a table. So as the server came and gave us a menu and took our drink order we sat there looking at the menus, and Don said "boy, Rich, it's been a long time since I have had a meal in a sit-down restaurant – I don't even know what to order – too many choices". As I listened I thought to myself "I wonder how many people take for granted that going to a sit-down restaurant and having people wait on you and having such a selection of what to eat would be such a big deal." So, I said Ron order whatever you want okay, like I said it is my treat.

Then the server came back with our drinks and asked if we were ready to order. I told her I would like to order a Cheeseburger with French fries and come back at the end to see if I want to order maybe a pie. Then she looked at Don and you could see he was a little anxious and then he said "wow, that sound good Rich, I take what he ordered and a piece of pie later." As I sat there again drifting in my thoughts I could see eating in a sit-down restaurant wasn't something Don was used to. I recalled in my mind how many times when I came to the store early and would see street people digging in the McDonalds' dumpster or the Subway dumpster for food. I wondered if Don had ever done that.

I began to talk to Don – my interest was piqued to know more about him. Remember in Part two, I mentioned that after my first conversation with Don I had deduced the following things: A – He was a recovering alcoholic; B – He had previously worked in recovery ministry for several years; C - He had been in prison; and D – He had been in military service.

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So, not wanting to embarrass him or hurt his feelings I started by saying I know you mentioned you had appointments with VA and so what branch of service did you serve in? He said I went to Vietnam and I served on a carrier. I was part of the medics who received the wounded and dead – when they would fly them out of conflict to the carrier – we were supposed to stabilize them and so they could be transported to a hospital and then eventually stateside.

Then he said: “that’s why I go to VA – I go for counseling I am on disability due to PTS”. As he continued he said: “I can hardly talk about it – but Rich, that’s what really messed me up”. He said I was all “gung Ho” to sign up and go fight, you know for the country and all that. But, I was assigned to the carrier and the very first day I arrived they were flying people in. He said, you know thinking back if I had some time to prepare I might have been okay but just as soon as I was there I had to jump right in and start unloading people – he stopped and began to “tear up”; and just about then the waitress brought our food and she looked at him and he said “must have got something in my eye” pretended to be rubbing his eye. She left and I said Don lets pray for our food. As soon as we were done praying he said Rich I need to go wash my hands – you know I been shaking a lot of the street people’s hands and you never know what they been touching and he jumped up to go the bathroom.

While he was in the bathroom – I sat there and thought “Wow, I greeted him with a handshake when he came in the store without even thinking about it.” As I realized that, I thought maybe I need to go wash my hands since I shook his hand, and he had shaken the street people’s hands; therefore, I might have “dirty hands” now. When he came back I prayed silently “Lord, you touched lepers and you told us not to be afraid, so Lord, I ask in your name not to let me be afflicted in any way, shape or form.”

After Don sat back down he very deliberately prepared his food to be eaten and he looked at me and said Boy, Rich, I really appreciate this – it just smells so good and he took a big bite of his Cheese burger and began to slowly eat. I sat there and thought “Lord, I thank you so much that I do not have to search for my food every day – I thank you that my wife and my kids have never had to go without food – thank you Lord for how you have taken good care of me all these years.

After savoring a couple of bites Don says – “Oh, sorry Rich, now, where was I?” I said, “You were on the carrier. Oh, he said [now clearly composed again], it was so bad – I mean these guys were being brought off with arms or legs shot off or just all bloody, some had an eye ball hanging out of their head, or half the face look like it was gone and some would grab your arm

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and say “am I going to live?” and they wouldn’t let go – he said “like you had the answer or the power to say yes or no – He said “I mean how the Hell was I supposed to know”. He said one guy did that to me and I jerked my arm away and just dropped him and walked off.

He said the worse was when they were dying – I mean you could see the life leaving them and that really got to me. He said I could tell when one was an Indian and when they saw me they wanted me to stay by them like another Indian could help them but I had to go and get others. Sometimes I would say medic over here and someone would come over and look at them and save leave him he’s going to die anyway.

He again choked up and stopped for a minute. I said Don, it’s okay just take your time. Then he said “why did the medic say that right in front of him – I mean like his life wasn’t worth anything?” He said that is where I lost it – I mean something happened to me – like a dark evil spirit of death took over me and I got numb. But, at the same time I was mad – I mean really, really mad and I thought this isn’t right! Then, he just stopped and said that’s it Rich, that is where I got messed up. After that the other guys said, “Hey Chief let’s go get drunk and smoke some pot – that is the only way you are going to get through this.”

To read the first two installments, visit: gallupsun.com

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