

Coming Home

An Interview with Former Inmate – Kevin McCoy

The pencil drawing of “Coming Home” is a very special piece of artwork done by Kevin McCoy while he was incarcerated at Valdosta State Prison. The original, done on two bed sheets sewn together hangs prominently in our chapel during Kairos Weekends. During his time as the Inside Agape Coordinator, Kevin Daly recreated this drawing on a regular sheet of paper so that it could be distributed to a wider audience as agape for Kairos and other 4th Day Movement weekends.

I asked Kevin, “What was your inspiration for the piece?” The easier way to understand just how much emotion, and from how deep it came, is to watch my testimony during the 25th Anniversary Celebration at Christ Fellowship Church in Valdosta, GA recently. (We hope to have that video available on the Kairos of Georgia website in the near future). In as short as I can make it, I found myself arrested for trespassing and then charged and tried for murder. The facts of the case really aren't the issue. Anyone who has been wronged by someone will feel that the offender owes them an apology.

With me, in 1990, I found myself tried, mistried, retried, convicted, and sentenced to life for murder. I knew that I was innocent of murder, as did those close to me. I knew that I was railroaded for murder to protect a judge from a manslaughter charge. I just couldn't prove it. I dreamed for years of revenge. I ran various scenarios through my head of ways to dispatch my foes, so to speak. What kept me from suicide was the burning rage inside me that one day I would parole and then exact my revenge. It drove me on.

Some nine years later, in 1999, I finally received documents that I had requested for years through countless Open-Records-Act requests. In those documents was evidence that the district attorney and two judges knew that I was innocent of murder before I was tried, and tried me anyway. I filed various post-conviction remedies in the courts and found myself denied as being “time-barred” in that I should have filed the case within a year of my appeal ruling in 1993, or at the latest, when a new law became final in 1997. How convenient.

To slightly backtrack, I was saved in jail in 1991. I wrote a poem called “My Heart” later that year:

My Heart

My heart is hollow
It is an empty vessel
Yet it sinks like a stone
Through the abyss of my soul
Lost in the currents of the depths
Driven by inner conflict and self pity
Never to find Bottom

Perhaps never to care again
My Heart is a crosscurrent
Nowhere to go
I have no direction, no purpose
Not that I seek one
Just let me sink, alone
Drowning isn't so bad, really
Better than being trampled by muddy shoes
Worn by those who care

My heart is hardened
By a thousand sorrows
Yet it is thin as an egg
Very fragile, though I won't admit it
Burning with the pain
of being forced to survive
My heart cracks as it sinks
Through the icy depths of my past

What I shared with the congregation at Christ's Fellowship Church in Valdosta was how could a saved man write something so wonderfully filled with “joy?”

By 1994, it was clear to me that I couldn't be saved, couldn't be forgiven because I could not forgive those three men for what they had done to me, as well as my family. I read Matthew 6:12, 14-15 to the congregation.

I stopped going to all Christian functions, Church, Bible study, etc., for seven years, from 1994 to 2001. Kairos began at VSP in November 2000 and I knew nothing about it because it was announced at the church services. I wouldn't have gone anyway. When it came time to apply for Kairos #2, two men were instrumental in getting me to apply. First was Marty Murphy, who explained how badly I needed to go to the weekend.... I wasn't hearing it. Then was another close neighbor, Wayne Williams, whom we know as the man accused of the Atlanta child murders. From researching his documents, I am convinced that he was also framed. Wayne is one of the most gentle people I have ever known. He enticed me on a more political scheme, that I could catch the ear of some outside people, and maybe expose the corruption, blah, blah, blah...

I fell for it and I was accepted as one of the forty-two to attend. During the weekend, I spoke with several men (oh how I pity them as I look back). One man finally was able to explain to me what was going on with forgiveness. I was condemning the men for their acts, easy to see. I never understood that the man and the act are not the same. I could hate the act. The act is sin and God hates the act. He explained to me how we all know John 3:16... I said, God so loved the world...

Yes, he said, the world includes everyone in it, you, Kevin, me, those men... God hates our acts as much and more than you do. God loves the man and wants him to come home. To sin no more. To hurt no more.....

There it was, so simple that only I could screw it up. I held a price on their heads, and it was only hurting me. They don't even remember that I exist. Later in the weekend, Saturday morning, nothing Earth-shaking was going on. I was in a corner of the gym with my table guys, and tears started to come to my eyes. To put this in perspective, I hadn't shed a tear, not one, in over eleven years. Not one. Now, here I am crying in front of these tough guys and couldn't stop. The more I tried the worse it got. The other five residents of my table got up and came to me, put a hand on my shoulders, and supported me. No one laughed or snickered, no one gawked. No one told me to suck it up.... That made it worse. The tears came and they hurt. They were the poisons of rage, humiliation, anger, and you name it, pouring out of me. I look back and know that the three team members held back because my guys came to me first.

As anyone of the Kairos Community will know, Saturday afternoon came around and we got a bag of personal agape letters. In my bag was a crayon note that said "God says come home". I lost it. Sadly, I forgot to share that with the congregation at Christ Fellowship.

So, to give you some sort of input or perspective on the inspiration for the piece, maybe that will give you an idea.

How long did it take to draw? The drawing took about a month to complete. It was in the crafts room in the gym and I was detailed to the inmate store next door. My boss would let me go over to work on it when we were done for the day, or waiting for the Noon count to clear since we were all in the same building.

What do you hope people see when they look at it? Themselves in the arms of the Savior. At Kairos it has been the forgiveness, the coming home of the prodigal son. The drawing traveled along with "Recreation" (the potter reforming the clay pot with someone's face on it) to Biloxi, Mississippi following Katrina. They hung between a double row of cars as people received a full Thanksgiving meal for the family, as well as FEMA supplies. There the image meant the Comforter in a time of great despair. It has meant different things to different people. That is why we know God has His Hand on it. I just held His pens.

How does this work convey the message of unconditional love in the work? If God could love me enough to send those men in to just love me, how much more would you feel He loves you?

What other information would you want people to know about this work? Unforgiveness will follow you to your grave. It can be the cause of your grave. My father did "Tom Clancy" stuff before Clancy was writing about it. He performed covert duties as an Army/ CIA operative, of sorts. Some of this work was traumatic, up-close and personal. For over forty years, Dad was haunted by visions of the eyes of men he had...

dispatched... Forty years of sleepless, haunted nights. My parents came from Baton Rouge with my three daughters to visit me in prison. I had just gone through the VSP Kairos #2 weekend. As my girls were talking, all at the same time, I noticed that Dad kept staring at my eyes. Finally, when the girls were off doing girl things, Dad asked me what had changed about my eyes. They showed life in them when before they were dead inside. I hadn't seen a difference, but he did. I explained the Weekend to them all. Within a month of our visit, Mom and Dad had both gone on a three-day weekend, and Dad was forgiven himself, and was freed of his haunted past. He also came home.

The first time my parents had seen the drawing was October 31, 2010 at when I gave my message. As I spoke to the congregation, I had pictures of ripples in a pond on the screen. I explained that someone had cared enough to toss a cookie the size of a mustard seed into my pond. You have no clue how far the ripples will go or what they will impact. God knows. All we need to do is toss a pebble into the pond.