

Nathan Wilcox: “I felt my life was over”

IN PROCESS

by Major Glen Doss
Reeling from the vodka (“I was drinking at least a gallon a day”), Nathan Wilcox, 32, stood by helplessly as his small radio splashed into the stream.

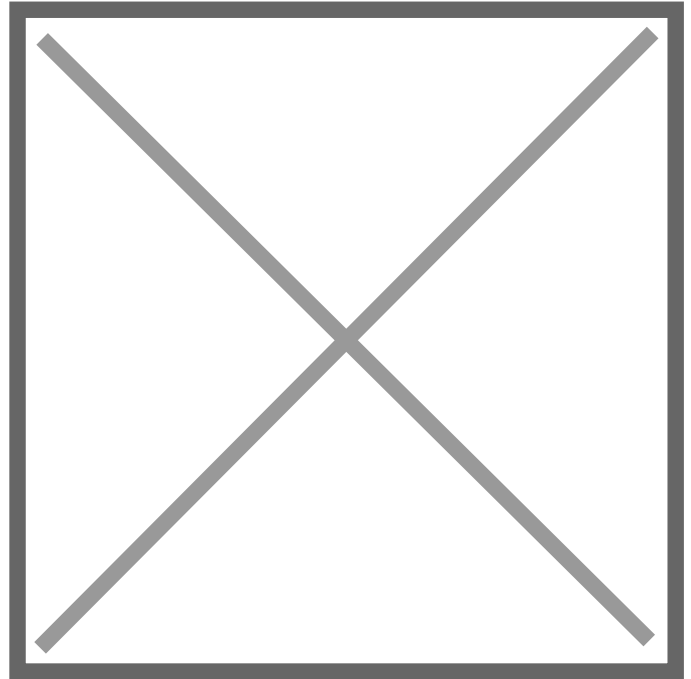
His heart sank. “During those six months I spent in the mountains in 1998, that little radio was my whole life. When I listened to it, I felt I was still part of the world, and losing it seemed the most tragic event of my life. I even pondered ways to kill myself, but I was afraid I would go straight to hell. Finally I prayed, ‘God, I can’t live this way anymore.’ ”

The arduous trek that had led Nathan to his bout with despair in the mountains above Pasadena, Calif. had begun, it seems, with his feelings as a child that he “was different.” He started thinking this way, he remembers, at age 12 when his parents divorced. “I came from a pretty good family—we went to church,” but after the divorce the churchgoing stopped. “That’s about the time I felt I didn’t fit in at school, like I was an oddball.”

However, by age 15 Nathan was sure that he had found the solution to his problem. “I started drinking and using (drugs) and now felt like I fit in again.” Later a welder with the Ironworker’s Union, he says, “I was good at it and loved the work.” Nevertheless, “I did cocaine, marijuana, and speed—whatever drug I could get. And the alcohol was always there. For a while I was functional.” However, by age 28, Nathan remembers, “I was no longer able to get to work on time and called in sick a lot. Eventually I started drinking all the time” and ultimately lost the job.

Arrested in 1994 for “crashing into a police car while drunk,” Nathan says that he was “sentenced” to The Salvation Army. He checked into the Pasadena ARC “just to get the courts off my back.” Not long after finishing the program he relapsed.

Nathan now gave himself over completely to his addiction. “I shut myself off from everyone. Alcohol and depression took over my life. I cashed out a 401K Plan and spent two years living on the money. In my deluded mind I thought as long as I’m just drinking, everything is okay.” When the money was gone, he sold his car and hiked up into the mountains where he could live cheaply. “I intended to drink all I wanted. As long as I could drink I thought I was living.” Ensnared in a tent on the mountainside,



the depression ever deepening, “my whole life became listening to my little radio.” When he lost that radio, Nathan says, “I felt my life was over.” Frightened, also, that the terrible bouts of depression might never end, he cried out to God, and “something told me to go to my mom’s house.” He spent a few days there “trying to shake the alcohol.” Afterwards, he recalls, “something told me to go back into the program.” This time Nathan checked into the Canoga Park ARC.

Now fiercely calling out to God for help, he found he had difficulty “focusing” in his prayers. Telling of his dilemma at an AA meeting, he was advised: “Why don’t you write your prayers like a letter to God?” Nathan found this to work for him. He adds, “I got into the habit, and today, three and a half years later—although I do other prayers as well—I still write such letters to God. Each night I write: ‘Thank you, God, for keeping me sober.’ ”

Today Nathan concentrates on “growth” through Bible Study and helping others. A member of the Canoga Park ARC Corps, he asserts, “It’s like: ‘If I don’t grow, I’m gonna go.’ I find I grow more by helping others than by any other avenue. For years I thought that drugs and alcohol were fulfilling me. But, hands down, this is the best life I’ve ever known.