

# Lost & Found

*A Sanctuary for All*



*Testimonies of how God is Blessing the Homeless and Lost of Denver*

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**This book is dedicated to:**

**GOD; without His love, the sacrifice of His son on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and the talents He gave each of us, this book would not have been written.**

**Jon Tinniswood and Tina Hayhurst, who had the inspiration, love and concern to start a Community Center for homeless youth, "Movement 5280."**

**Denver First Church of the Nazarene, who encouraged, supported and helped finance Movement 5280.**

**Skip Starr, who started Refuge City Ministries.**

**Pastor Bob Walker, Skip's prison pastor, who brought him to Christ. His unconditional love, patience, prayers and support led Skip to accept Jesus Christ as his Savior.**

**Billy, Ed, Jerry, and Dan, Skip's Bible Study Partners, who taught Skip, supported him, helped him, and held him accountable.**

**Gary and Betty Sokol, Skip's true Christian mentors, who encouraged him, coached and counseled him, helped him start Refuge City Ministries, and who guided him through the politics of Cherry Hills Community Church.**

**Cherry Hills Community Church, which has supported Refuge City Ministries since its inception, with prayer, guidance, financial resources, and volunteers.**

**GOD BLESS YOU ALL!!!!**

# **INTRODUCTIONS**

## **I am Tina and I am Blessed!!!!**

**GOD blessed me with a ministry for at-risk and homeless youth. My senior pastor at Denver First Church introduced me to a young man in our church, Jon, who was a youth counselor at a treatment center in Downtown Denver. Within a few months of dreaming and praying, we opened a community center called Movement 5280. I knew very little about the homeless culture, but GOD led the way. Together, with my best friend, Angela, we began a journey to walk life with homeless youth and to share the true Hope in Christ. GOD gave me a new passion and love for homeless and at-risk youth and it is pure joy!**

**The life that led me to this ministry began when I was born into a “chaotic” family. My mom was a single mother struggling to raise three children with little financial help. My dad was nowhere to be found. We moved a lot, living with different relatives and friends. My mom’s parents abandoned her, so she was always searching for a better life and situation for our family. In doing this, my mom tried to find the perfect husband and father for us. Before she really knew what her new boyfriend was like, she would be married and we would have a new family. My first step dad began to sexually abuse me when I was eleven. My mom discovered this when I was 13 and she immediately moved our family away from him.**

**Although it wasn't long before I had a new step-father, my mom made a decision that would have an incredible impact on my life. She took us to church. I was 13 when my family was introduced to Denver First Church of the Nazarene. It was amazing. The youth leaders loved on me and took me under their wings. GOD used Denver First Church in a very significant way in my life; to be my extended family. It was because of the love I experienced from these adults that I sought Christ. GOD's love became very real to me.**

**Mom met a widower with two children from our church and we became a new family of seven. Mom soon realized he was a man full of anger. I remember riding to church in his RV and him driving like a maniac,**

**yelling at all of us and throwing things. One day, in his anger, he brought a gas can into our front room, and tried to ignite it, to burn the house down! The police came, and our family moved again!**

**At age 17, I left home. My mom was moving in with another new boyfriend! I decided it was time to be on my own. I was a senior in high school when I gave my life completely to GOD, wanting above everything else, to have a relationship with Him. I remember that day very vividly, praying alone with GOD, on the steps of Littleton High School. I was mentored in my relationship with Christ by my youth pastor, and after high school, I began to disciple youth at our church.**

**It is a miracle that GOD changed ME from the inside out. I was a silent and withdrawn child. I wanted to be invisible. My older brother and younger sister acted out in rebellion! I went inward, and suppressed my emotions and the trauma of my childhood. I wanted to be the perfect child who did not cause any problems for my mother. As I look back at who I was, with all my anxieties and fears, I now know that God was beginning to transform my life. I was allowing him to be the loving Father I never had.**

**I attended college and completed a degree in Psychology, while working full time. I knew God had placed in my heart the desire to work with at-risk youth. After college, I worked at an adolescent day treatment center. In 2002, while on a youth mission trip as a volunteer youth leader, I felt GOD leading me into full time ministry. I became Children's Pastor at Denver First Church in 2004, and then several years later, youth pastor. GOD blessed me with a great family. I have been married to my husband, Jim for 24 years. We have three children: Jady, Jamie and Joshua.**

## **I am Skip and I am Blessed!!!!**

**I want to start by thanking and praising GOD for my life. It was a life of family, a life of love, a life of great adventure, a life of war, a life of wealth, a life of success, a life of failure, a life of lies, a life of crime, and last and most importantly, a life for Christ.**

**I was the oldest of six boys and raised in an affluent family; never wanting for anything. I had a great education, graduating with a degree in Economics and Accounting from the University of Michigan. It was during the time of the Vietnam War, and my draft number came up while I was in college. I joined the Navy ROTC, which allowed me to stay in college and graduate. On May 5, 1968, I attended my graduation at 10 am, my appointment as an Ensign in the US Navy at 2 pm, and was on a flight to San Diego, for special training at 6 pm; all in the same day.**

**When my three years of duty expired, I had been decorated seven times and was honorably discharged. While in the Navy, I met and married my wife in California. We moved to Omaha where my family then lived. I attended Creighton University, completing three years of law school in two years. During my senior year, I formed an investment group and started my first bank. Over the years I chartered and purchased banks in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado; making Denver my headquarters. I was a workaholic. Because of this, I lost my wife to divorce. I eventually sold all of my banks and invested heavily in various real estate ventures in Colorado. Unfortunately, the real estate ventures went bad, and I committed various acts of fraud and theft, financially hurting my family and friends, in an effort to salvage as much money as possible. It didn't work! I lost everything and was facing numerous criminal charges, totaling a maximum sentence of over fifty years in prison. After liquidating all of my assets, I still owed over \$1,000,000. I was sentenced to five years in prison.**

**Though I did not know it at the time, GOD was working in my life. I had been abandoned by all of my family and friends. I was completely alone. From my prison, which sat high on a mesa in Canon City, I could see seven other prisons. My prison was minimum security, which meant there were no walls or fences. I had a room, not a cell, and was given a job as the bookkeeper for the dairy farm the CDOC (Colorado Department of Corrections) operated, which provided the milk for all of the Colorado prisons.**

Across the parking lot from the prison was a small chapel. Most of my life, I had believed in GOD, but he was never the center of my life. Pastor Bob, who was assigned to our Chapel, would occasionally talk to me about coming to church. Each time, my answer was a resounding “NO!” I told him that until I could forgive myself for how I had deceived and hurt my family and friends, I could never ask GOD to forgive me. He would always reply, telling me that if I surrender my life to Christ, I will find the peace and strength to forgive myself. My first Christmas Eve, Pastor Bob once again asked me to come to church. I agreed, with one condition; that he would never ask me again. He told me it would only take one time. He was right!!!

The moment I walked through the Chapel doors, I was overwhelmed with the Holy Spirit. After the service, when everyone else had left, Pastor Bob and his wife stayed with me and we prayed. That was the night I completely surrendered my life to GOD and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior!!!! From that moment on, you could not keep me from the Chapel.

After eighteen months, I was transferred to a Halfway House, which is transitional housing for inmates returning to society. It is hard to explain, but my first night I missed prison, my fellow brothers in Christ, and the spirit that was always present at the Chapel. I spent most of the night writing a poem of thanksgiving, as a token of my love and appreciation, which I mailed to Pastor Bob, his wife and my fellow incarcerated Christian brothers.

### ***THE CHAPEL ON THE HILL***

***There was a small Chapel, high on a hill;  
over GOD's majestic creation, a sentinel.  
Surrounded by man's self-created hell,  
the sole guardian of GOD's good will.  
Its simple features did not foretell,  
of the spirit that within did dwell.  
The world's grandest cathedrals could not compare,  
to the love and compassion always found there.***

***To this haven from pressures and strife,  
came lost souls drowning in the river of life.  
Lost and alone, struggling for survival;  
in search of hope, redemption, revival.***

***What made it different, what made it right,  
was that we were all in the same dark night;  
struggling with the same fight,  
yet together, we knew we could find the light.***

***A young man giving his testimony,  
another reading his poetry;  
the music of the choir, even off key,  
all produced a wondrous melody.***

***When through those doors I passed, unbeknownst to me;  
amongst the care, concern and comradery;  
I found a new faith, a new reality;  
my life was changed, as I found my destiny.***

***There was a small chapel high on a hill,  
where GOD gave me a new life, a new will.  
That chapel will always be a part of me,  
throughout my life into eternity.***

I did not like the Halfway House. There were drugs, alcohol, theft and sex all the time. Eighteen months later, I was paroled and moved in with my cousin and her family in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. She was the only relative who had not abandoned me. Near her house was a large church, Cherry Hills Community Church (CHCC). Though I was concerned about the size of the church, I felt that GOD was leading me there. The first time I went, I was overwhelmed. It was so large!! Several people introduced themselves to me. One man told be about a men's bible study that was held every Tuesday morning. That next Tuesday, I went to the Bible study. I sat at a table that I now know GOD chose for me. Seven years later, I still sit at that table with the same men and we have two other weekly Bible studies together. They are truly my brothers in Christ.

A year later, I felt GOD calling me to start a ministry for men who had been paroled from prison, and were living at a halfway house. In preparing for this ministry, through prayer and meditation, I first established our Core Ministry Principles, which are:

We believe:

- The Bible is GOD inspired and GOD written and is the authoritative word for our living faith.
- We believe in the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- In discipleship, by providing the least and lost of society with opportunities to receive GOD's love and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ, by helping them, in a spirit of love, learn practical life skills and build a positive self-image and by providing a caring Christian community.
- In helping to provide for the material and social needs of our target groups, their families and loved ones, including housing, transportation, clothing, food, friendship and emotional support.

This scripture is the foundation for this ministry:

***Matthew 25:35-36 : "For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you invited me into your home, was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you cared for me, I was in prison and you visited me."***

I then met with the owner/manager of the Arapahoe Community Treatment Center (ACTC), a halfway house for men. With his approval, I started doing a Bible Study every Sunday night. I was then joined by several members of CHCC. The ministry then expanded to bringing residents to CHCC for Sunday services and special events. We also started our Mountain Adventure Trip Ministry. Once a month we would take the men on a trip to the mountains, for extreme adventures, such as tubing down a river, climbing and tubing St. Mary's Glazier, jumping off water falls, etc. The purpose of this ministry was to show the men the wonder and beauty of God's creation, and the challenge, the excitement and the joy of mountain adventures. We always held a bible study and prayer session in the mountains. This is where the men felt closest to GOD!!!

GOD then led me to start a Bible Study at Arapahoe County Residential Center (ACRC), a halfway house for women released from prison. The

**Center only allowed women to come to the center, so two strong Christian women from CHCC volunteered to lead the Bible Study. These women, joined by some others, have continued this Bible Study. Praise GOD!!!**

**Two years later, two young men living at ACTC told me about Tina and “Movement 5280”, her Community Center for Homeless Youth. I visited the center, met Tina and immediately felt that GOD wanted me to expand the ministry to partner with Tina and Movement 5280. We have been serving the homeless youth of Denver together for five years.**

## **LOST AND FORGOTTEN**

**As I go to bed each night, as I pray all day, as I provide clothing, meals, advice and counsel, love and prayer; I struggle knowing that so many of those we help will lose their battle with life; so many will choose a life of crime, rather than a life dedicated to the needs of their family; and most tragic, so many will put their lives at risk; surrendering to the immediate, temporary high; rather than finding the eternal peace and joy through Jesus Christ.**

**These are the homeless youth:**

**James, who started using meth at the age of ten, before his brain was totally formed. His brain is permanently damaged. He has condemned himself to a life of paranoia, fear, hallucinations, and the need for an artificial high, which is always followed by a deep, dark depression. There is nothing the doctors can do. They say his life will inevitably end in suicide. Only GOD can save him!!! Eventually, the doctors were correct, he died.**

**Melody, who just gave birth to her third child by her boyfriend, Trey. They are homeless. Melody had been accepted by several houses for homeless pregnant young women, but she chooses to stay with Trey on the streets. During the pregnancies, Trey abandons Melody for other women, drugs, and numerous jail sentences. Each time Melody forgives him, staying on the streets, alone, always waiting for Trey to return. I have informed the police several times, but they have no valid reason to arrest her, even though she would have a warm, dry place to stay. She has had three children. The first died in a miscarriage. The other two were born healthy. Shortly after the birth of her third child, she accepted Christ as her savior, permanently severed the relationship with her boy friend. She now has her own apartment and has supervised custody of her two children.**

**Manuel, who was sentenced to prison for dealing Meth at 17 years old. He was very intelligent, handsome and outgoing. He used these talents to con people, to use people, and to become a very successful drug dealer. He was able to con the parole board to release him from prison after one year. Once out, he quickly returned to selling drugs. In the end, he died from a meth overdose.**

**Todd, who struggled with a low self-image, self-doubt, fears and hallucinations. He surrendered his life to Christ, but even so, could not overcome the challenges of life in this world, and eventually committed suicide.**

**Maria, who struggled with drugs and a low self-image. She finally accepted Jesus as her Savior and turned her life around. She regularly attended church, and had a good job. This fatal night, she had no apartment, as her friend had evicted her. She hooked up with another friend, Mark, who invited her to stay with him. He was a drug dealer. That night he took Maria with him to sell some drugs. The deal went bad and erupted in gunfire! When the smoke cleared, Maria was dead, the drug dealer was seriously injured and Mark had run from the scene. Mark and the drug dealer were captured and sentenced to life in prison for the death of Maria.**

**There are the men and women at Halfway Houses:**

**They have been to prison and have been paroled to a Halfway House, the next stop after prison. A halfway house is a very restrictive residential center, which usually houses 100+ men or women. It provides counseling, job searches, educational opportunities, clothing and a gradual reintegration back into society. We provide Bible studies, high adventure mountain trips, transportation to church, individual Christian counseling, and most of all PRAYER!!!! Unfortunately, over 40% will return to prison.**

## **DEAR READERS:**

I've been truly blessed to have a front row seat watching Tina, Skip and Charles take their ministries and their love to the homeless youth and ex-offenders of Denver. You can't help but see our Lord's handprint all over their ministries. Whether it is 73 year old Skip jumping off a waterfall, or trekking up mountains, or commanding (and earning) the respect of the youth, who otherwise don't respect anything; or Tina, who serves as a surrogate mother for these youth, or Charles using his Bible knowledge to teach the ex-offenders, it is clear that God is using them to do His work. What's even clearer is that their ministry programs are **WORKING**. I've watched them restore lives and change the eternities of many lives. It is a blessing and incredibly inspiring to be a part of their vision and passion.

As much as they are affecting the lives of these youth, they are also greatly affecting my life. I hate to admit it, but I am not a patient person. I want results and I want them now. Skip, Tina, and Charles have been so instrumental in teaching me that ministry work (especially this kind of ministry work) is not going to happen on my timeline. They helped me to realize that God has his own schedule and his own plan and we are just a small part of it.

Words can't describe what Skip, Tina and Charles do and what they mean to these young men and women. These young adults are at the very crossroads of their lives. We have to reach them now and that's what this ministry does! That is the true essence of their ministries. They show these people a love that they aren't receiving anywhere else, and that love can and **DOES** lead these them to Christ.

I will always pray that their ministries stay strong.

Dave Newman

We have chosen to write this book, to inform people of the challenges and dangers the homeless youth of Denver face, the difficult adjustment ex-offenders have when returning from prison to society, and how GOD is working in their lives.

There are some repeated abbreviations used:

**Refuge City Ministries (RCM)** - The ministry organized and founded by Skip Starr, with programs helping homeless youth and men and women in halfway houses.

**Cherry Hills Community Church (CHCC)** - The home church of Skip Starr, which helps sponsor and support Refuge City Ministries.

**Denver First Church (DFC)** - The home church for Tina Hayhurst, which helps sponsor Movement 5280, “5280”, and their programs for homeless youth.

**Community Center** - A center sponsored by Movement 5280 and RCM for homeless youth. It provides a “safe place”, a clothing bank, a food bank, hot meals, counseling, games and entertainment. The youth call it “5280.”

**ACTC** - Arapahoe Community Treatment Center – A halfway house, residential facility, for men released from prison. This is the last step for men in prison, before being released back to society.

**ACRC** - Arapahoe County Residential Center – A halfway house for women being released from prison.

**Urban Peak** - This is an organization that works with homeless youth, providing them with a shelter, education and job training programs, counseling services, and long- term residential programs.

Please keep these ministries, the Homeless Youth of Denver, and the men and women in halfway houses in your prayers.

## **A FLIGHT FOR LIFE**

There is a young man celebrating with his family for the first time in two years. Two years that felt like ten! Two years in living hell! His name is Pedro and this is his story, in his words.

***“It all started when I arrived at the Denver Rescue Mission, where I met George. I was all alone and didn’t know anyone. I was from Montana and didn’t know where to go, so George told me he would help me. He got me a job with Trojan Labor. I was excited and thought everything was going to be alright. That did not last long! It all started with verbal abuse and then physical abuse; from throwing me against walls, to throwing me to the ground and beating me with his fists.***

***It accelerated to sexual abuse! When we were at the Rocky Mountain Motel, he stripped my clothes off, gave me oral sex and then forced me to have sex with him. I called my sister in Idaho. She called the Denver police and had him arrested. When he was released, he found me at the Mission. The sex and beatings began again.***

***I’d been trying to get away, but he would never let me be alone. He is big and strong and so mean! I’ve been scared all this time! He has threatened me many times, saying that if I told anyone what was happening, he would kill me!”***

I (Skip) first met Pedro four years ago, at our Community Center. He was standing by himself. I walked over to Pedro and introduced myself. Pedro was very polite, but then quickly left. He would come to the center every now and then, get some clothes and food and then leave, with very little interaction with the other youth.

After a few months, Pedro started coming with an older man, George. George was outgoing and friendly, but was always with Pedro. Pedro would visit the center; always in a hurry and very nervous. He would get some food and clothes and then leave. George would always be waiting for him.

When our lease expired and the Community Center was closed, I started holding our ministry programs at a nearby Park. Pedro and George began to come more often; again, always together. I would occasionally notice a bruise on Pedro, but Pedro always blamed it on an accident and then would quickly depart. That is when I started to realize that Pedro was being abused! Initially, I prayed and internally debated about what I should do. If I called the police, Pedro would give them the same story. They would not be able to do anything and then Pedro and George would disappear, moving somewhere else. That is when, after much prayer, I decided I needed to befriend George and gain his confidence. So, I invited Pedro and George to the programs in the park and allowed them to come to the Wednesday and Sunday meals. It was difficult, because I knew Pedro was at risk and that time was of the essence!

Then GOD intervened! The first change was when George allowed Pedro to go on one of our mountain adventure trips. While on the trip, I asked Dave Newman, one of the ministry volunteers, to give Pedro some extra attention. It was the first time I had seen Pedro smile and actually be excited about life! Upon returning to Denver, Pedro asked me if I had any work for him, as he and George had very little food. That was the opening I had been waiting for!!! I told Pedro that he could work for me the next day. Pedro promptly arrived at the designated meeting place at 9am, with George, who said he also wanted to come work. I thought this would happen, as I knew George would not want to let Pedro out of his sight and control. I told George that I only had enough work for one, and that we would return at 4pm. Pedro and I then left.

As we were driving, I told Pedro, "This is not a work day; this is the day GOD is going to change your life." I saw that Pedro had a new bruise by his right eye, and asked him to raise his shirt. There were more bruises. That is when Pedro told me the whole story. A story of physical and sexual abuse, a story of beatings and rapes. First, I called Pedro's sister in Idaho and explained the situation, asking if Pedro could come home. In tears, she told me that they would always take Pedro back. I then bought a plane ticket to Boise for the 6pm flight that night. I called Pedro's sister and gave her the flight information. Again crying, she thanked me for giving them their boy back. I told her to thank GOD!!!

At four, as I expected, George called, wondering where Pedro was. I told him that I knew everything and that Pedro was going back home to Boise. George made several angry threats and then hung up!

**At 6:30, after a long prayer and a longer hug, with tears streaming down his cheeks, Pedro boarded his “Flight for Life”! Later that night, I received a call from Pedro, confirming that he had returned home!**

**One year later, Pedro has a job, his own apartment and attends the local community college.**

**Praise GOD!!!!!**

**DISCUSSION ISSUE: How can we best help those in need?**

*Psalm 82:4: “Rescue the weak and needy. Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.”*