



URBAN CURRENT

Christmas changes everything

Bob, lanky, with a kind of “aw shucks” demeanor, coked his way through Columbia University in New York City. His father had died. He had to pay his mother’s mortgage while working his way through a rich kids’ school. To stay awake he did what was handy: cocaine. Despite the drugging, he did well. At 25 he was Mayor Koch’s labor relations director. He partied hard three to four days a week. More often than not he closed out Studio 54.

A bar fight, a trip to jail on Christmas Eve, a personal encounter with the Christ who transforms lives, set him on a new path. After a hiatus from New York, he came back. All his friends were making huge money living in huge houses. He was doing well but decided he could live on a little and use the rest for good causes. He would say later, “I have the gift of getting.”

Making good money...no, make that making big money, business brought him to Chicago. Not far from where he landed in the windy city was Cabrini Green, the most notorious housing project in the country — 15,000 people shoehorned into four blocks of mostly high-rise subsidized housing. It became a national symbol for all that was wrong with public housing. Bob recruited a bunch of his professional peers and these white businessmen sponsored teams forming the first inner-city Little League Chi-town had ever seen. They commandeered a patch of weeds, trash, and rats bordered on the east by the El tracks creating a field and organizing the league. It became the largest inner-city Little League in the country. That was 20 years ago. The games continue to this day. A few years later, because of his constant business trips and ongoing connections in New York City, he founded the Harlem Little League.

After moving to Chicago, Bob and his wife, Tina, became part of the Armitage family. I

asked him to share his testimony at our holiday service. He stood at the mic in the Christmas Eve candlelight. He captured his story in the following lines:

The Night Before Christmas

*’Twas my last night before Christmas without
Jesus Christ,
I just downed my first drink and I was feeling
quite nice.*

*The presents were wrapped and packed in my
car’s trunk,
But they’d never get home, cause I’d get too
drunk.*

*The club that I owned would be slower that
night,
They had churches to go to...and...candles to
light.*

*Though our bar was jammed packed, I was just
about broke,
Sin wasn’t my problem, it must be the coke.*

*I had killed my own children and we’d ne’er hear
their voice but,
It didn’t matter, cause I... was ... pro ... choice.*

*So I’ll have one last party, there’s nothing to fear,
It’s party time now, and I’ll just quit next year.*

*The following morning I woke up in jail,
My “friends” too hung-over to show up with my
bail.*

*The car sat still, parked, not driven one inch,
I was no longer Santa, I had become the Grinch.*

*So I called an old number of the church in Times
Square,*

*It was Christmas morning, so I knew they’d be
there.*

*My old friend now a “Christian,” rushed down to
the station.
Then he gave all he had...for my emancipation.*

*I told him what happened, he told me of the
Lord,
And for once in my life, I did not get bored.*

*If his story were true, even I had a chance,
no more lying thru life, by the seat of my pants.*

*God had come to the earth in the form of a babe,
for my sins and yours, on the cross he would
trade.*

*So we sold our old club and gave away all the
gold,
In return he had blessed us at least 1,000 fold.*

*For God so loved us, that He came down to
earth,
And tonight’s the night we give thanks for His
birth.*

*So my brothers and sisters, we have nothing to
fear,
Now our lives are so full, it is Christmas all year.”*

*This is Christmas! Jesus came for Bob, for you,
for me, and all those who still haven’t heard.*

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