

# Cheated for Life

By Steve Stutzman

My mind was stirred by a comment on someone else's post about needing a move of the Holy Spirit to get over what all they missed out on, growing up Mennonite. I thought I would perhaps share a bit of my perspective on what all I was cheated out of. After travelling the US and Canada extensively, seeing institutions of various sorts, and Churches from Amish to Mega, country and city, I offer this rant on the desperate inequities of growing up on a farm, a conservative Mennonite.

I had to work. You have no idea the abuse I endured, slaving away before the sun was up, to do my chores before school. I never go to go hungry. Not Once. I never had the pleasure of being neglected; instead, I had to wash behind my ears, and brush my teeth. Oh the horror of it all, how shall I explain? I had to put away my own wash, fix my own bed, and clean my own room. I even had to wash the 'pink cat ring' out of the bathtub.

By the time I was 14, I ran the entire farm while my dad was away, for weeks at a time. I was forced to be responsible: I had hundreds of head of livestock dependent on me at -15f. I didn't get to be lazy. I never got to run around on the streets unsupervised either.

I never had the excitement of watching my parents' divorce. I was cheated out of the drama of watching my mother bring in new guys to try out. I was never allowed the joy of watching my dad come home drunk, puking all over the couch and floor. I never felt the adrenaline of hiding behind the couch while dad beat mom up. I never got to see my sisters cut themselves, or go crazy.

I never got high. Or drunk. Here I sit, 45 years old, too old to party..... never been drunk or high.... never woke up naked wondering where/who/what..... never slept with a random girl just for funzies. Never did a line, smoked a joint or even a cigarette, never got in a bloody knock-down, drag-out brawl. Never been to a bar to pick someone up, never been picked up there. Never got my eardrums damaged by blasting devil songs into my head. I never got to play heavy contact sports, and never got my knees crushed not doing it. Now I don't get to feel the pain everyday. Oh how shall I bear this cheatedness????? Is there any life for me at all? I mean, I don't even get to experience herpes or AIDS.

I wasn't allowed to feast continually on junk food. Instead, I was forced to eat yucky vegetables. Not only that, but I had to plant and hoe those vegetables too. And that was back when a hoe was an instrument used to chop weeds out of the garden. And I had to drink RAW milk. Imagine!!!

I never got to shoot anybody, or join a gang. I wasn't allowed to even try exciting things like casting spells and worshipping Satan. I mean, not even once. Seems like just a little experimenting would a been ok. But no.... not for me. I couldn't even enjoy a good demonic movie. No séances, no fortune tellers, no statues of Budda... not even incense to burn. No.... instead I was taught that the World is your enemy.

I was forced to church every Sunday morning and evening, and every Wed evening. We had devotions every day, and yes, I was forced to sit and listen. I had to learn about Daniel and David, and Abraham and Esau and all those other dead guys. The first word we learned to read?? Sally? Ran? NO....it was "GOD". Such horrible, religious indoctrination! The narrow-minded controllers! Why not let me choose my own way of thinking? How am I suppose to ever be relevant in this world, if my nose grew up stuck in a 2000 year old Book? And, to top it off, we had to memorize it... even in school.

School..... Hooooo-Boy.... now you talk about abuse. We got whipped if we cheated or lied. We were not allowed simple, developmental joys like talking back to the teacher or cussing. Boys wore pants and girls wore dresses..... I suppose some of them never recovered from the shame of it. We were jilted from the joys of immature, school age dating and infatuation flings, and so never got to

enjoy multiple broken heart flings, or the following separation. The happiness of bully-run, rage-torn, out of control classrooms was also cheated right out of our grasp.

And of course, it was only christian music. No radio, no television.... videos were still years away. I never was allowed to go hear the Beatles.... Or AC-DC.... or any other concerts. Ever.

What did I do? Worked, mostly. Never got to be lazy.

I never felt the euphoria of being beaten by my dad. I never was molested by a perverted neighbor man. I never heard my mother curse. I was cheated out of a house of screaming angry fits..... just never got to experience it. How CAN I be normal? I never watched porn with my dad, or found his sin hidden under the seat. I missed out on being called names, or called good-for-nothing, or useless debris.

I walked up and down the road a lot. I cried. A lot. I begged God to let me see Him in new ways. I plead with Him for a baptism of His Spirit. I read. I searched. I studied. I thought. A lot. Sometimes, I drove that tractor all night, just for the feeling of worth it brought... and while I drove, I thought.

But it was not until years later that I realized just how cheated I had been.

Today-- I work with folks from every walk of life. I have spent time with millionaires and homeless, men and women, and some that are both, Amish, Catholic, Muslim, Athiest and heathen. I have heard story upon tale after journey upon ballad. And I walk away from places, sometimes, so absolutely appalled at the devastation I see played out in the havocchish lives in front of me, that I wrestle with harsh realities I never dreamed I would face. Broken homes... devastated children... homeless, hopeless souls.... women with 4 children from 3 fathers....drug use... murder.... angry parents..... war-zone schools....screaming youth....drunkenness..... dads using daughters for sex.....cutting..... demon worship..... tattoos..... hate filled music..... evil movies..... idols..... séances..... pregnant teens..... abortions..... witchcraft..... herpes.... disease.... laziness... suicide..... hatred.....prison sentences.... hunger..... prostitution....

" But hey, at least they aren't being religious. At least they aren't all narrow-minded and cheating their children out of life!! At least they don't force religion on folks!!!"This is the refrain I hear as I walk among those who identify with my background. " We just wanna get away from all this religion. We wanna follow Jesus. No more of this piddly stuff our parents had, we gonna change things!!"

And change they do. But I wonder as I watch the heaps of teaching rotting in dumpsters, if folks have even the slightest idea of what just happened. I wonder if they realize as they rush to change the awfulness of their up-bringing, if they realize what else they chucked out with it. I wonder if they realize the price tag, in God's economy, that is attached to disposing carelessly of something valuable, simply because it is not understood.

By todays standards, my parents were mean. And by the Grace of God, I would like to carry out some of that meanness onto my children..... and I hope to see them carry it out on theirs. Their are a whole lot of things out there I did not experience.... and I do not want my children to, either. Going to a prom half-dressed, and throwing away the priceless gem of virginity are not necessary experiences for normal, healthy development.

This rant is not intended to belittle or hurt anyone who was genuinely wounded in childhood or youth, especially not someone who was abused sexually. Neither is it intended to portray me.... or mennonites.... as superior. It IS intended to point out that doing things God's way is always better. It IS intended to be a call to this generation to stop and THINK before you arbitrarily trash things you do not understand. And it IS a cry from my heart for laborers in the Vineyard: We have been given so much..... don't spend your life trying to protect it, just grab it and add to it as you reach into the lives of the devastated world around you.

Steve