

# THE GOOD NEWS LETTER

A publication of the Ards & North Down Christian Community Hub



Issue 1

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN by David Gourley, Newtownards

It was the Summer of 1991.

I was working on a Government ACE scheme for the unemployed in Clandeboye Lodge on Lady Dufferin's Estate in Bangor as a conservation volunteer. I was there 3 - 4 days a week and really enjoyed it. Partly because most of the guys were dope heads like me and we would get stoned among the trees and partly because I enjoyed the work.

We had finished for the July holidays and on the Saturday evening of July 13th I found myself sitting in my parent's house with no money, no drugs and afraid to show my face in town because I was in debt to some drug dealers who had already threatened me. I was feeling miserable, and to top things off my Dad had told me he was at the end of his tether with me and there was talk of serious consequences.

Then at around 8pm there was a knock at the door. It was a couple of friends who wanted to know if I was going to the rave being held on Island Hill between Newtownards and Comber.

I told them my situation, but they said not to worry, that they would share their drugs and drink with me and that the dealers in question had gone to Belfast and that I should be safe. So I went.

Island Hill has a land bridge that appears when the tide is out to gain access to it which is swallowed up again when the tide comes in. When we arrived at the rave there were a lot of people there and it was not long until it was in full swing. Before long I was high as a kite and could not have cared less that the tide was in and we could not get off until morning.

Unlike any other times I had taken drugs, at some point in the early hours of the morning I began to think about how awful a state my life was in and how I needed help. It sounds strange but I started thinking about God and if he really was out there somewhere. I started to go over in my mind all the things that had brought me to that point in my life. I felt so lost and hopeless. I felt I would not be alive much longer if something were not to change. But how?

While all this was going on in my head, I must have walked miles all over that little island. Every so often I would meet a guy as I walked around. He was the younger brother of a girl I knew from Bangor. It was quite strange because he seemed to know what I was struggling with in my head. Very spooky. I knew he was involved in the occult and believe he was somehow able to know what was happening to me. I avoided him as much as I could. In the early hours of the morning, and to my relief, we were able to get off the island as the tide had receded again, just enough for the concrete access path to emerge.



What's your story?



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## “God, if you are there, please help me because I’m going nowhere fast”



There were lots of people on the other side in the car park waiting to get on the island who had made the journey from Belfast in the night hoping to join the rave. I started down the path as quickly as I could passing so many people. About halfway along I was stopped by a girl I knew who gave me a red blanket to put around me as I had given my coat to someone through the night and must have seemed visibly cold to her. I was very grateful. As I walked through the carpark and up to the Comber carriageway with three friends one of them started to hum a Sunday School song I recognised from childhood. Strange I know but it really affected me, and my thoughts were all over the place. I was not talking much and two of the guys walked on ahead. I was really dragging my heels a bit and the other guy soon left me also to catch up with the other two until finally I was on my own as I reached the carriageway.

With not a soul in sight I sat on a fence with my back to the fields that ringed the Strangford Lough shoreline and said in my head. “God, if you are there, please help me because I’m going nowhere fast”. “There’s no point in me taking another step forward”. At that moment I had something like a waking dream and seen myself caught between darkness and light. I knew somehow that both wanted me, and I had to make a choice which one would have me. I stood up from the fence and began to walk toward Newtownards in a dream like state. I began to feel waves of love and peace penetrating the region of my stomach and chest and flowing all through me. It was like feeling something I had been longing for but feeling it for the first time yet somehow also recognising it. It was strange but I wanted, no needed, more.

Physically my arms were wrapped tight in the red blanket like a knot and inside I felt like this feeling was loosing a knot on the inside of me. I began to feel it intensifying as I walked forward and increasingly felt loosed both physically and emotionally, and what I know now, spiritually. I cried out, “What do I do now?” “What do you want me to do?” At the same time as this was happening, I began to hear what sounded like a car revving up behind me and coming toward me at high speed but when I looked there was nothing there. This happened several times and was very distracting and unsettling. I believe now it was the devil trying to stop what God was doing.

Then I looked to my right and in a blink of an eye the most beautiful land appeared out of nowhere. I was still on the path by the road but just at the edge of the fields where the shoreline was there was a border of what looked like high stalks of golden corn or wheat and beyond that the most incredibly beautiful landscape of open meadows with lush green grass and amazing colours of flowers and trees. There was a mountain in the distance that seemed to touch the sky with lightning and brilliant light streaming from it. The air was filled with the most incredible aroma that seemed to get sweeter with every new breath I took and there was a beautiful sound resonating in the atmosphere that seemed to fill me and flow through me. This was the place the love I was feeling seemed to be coming from. I thought I was going to heaven. I mean, I could not imagine heaven being more beautiful and perfect than what was before me. Everything was just so filled with love and life. I cried out. “How do I get there?” At that moment, a path appeared before me which led through the fields to the golden corn and wheat which bordered this place. I began to walk along it from the roadside and as I approached this incredible place before me, the feeling of love and peace and joy just increased the more. I felt the knot inside me loosening and at the same time my arms were almost completely unravelled from the red blanket draped over me. I really thought I was going to heaven there and then. I just wanted to be there so much. I had no thought or concern for this world and my life in it at all. As I took a step towards those golden stalks of corn or wheat I suddenly fell, deep down into a ditch.



## “Is there something you are trying to tell me?”

In an instant, all of that feeling of love and peace was replaced with despair and dread. If you could imagine every positive, good feeling and thought being sucked from you in a moment and being replaced with nothing but fear, hopelessness, panic, terror etc, that is what I was feeling and experiencing, and it worsened with every moment that passed by. Horrible sounds began to fill my ears. The most dreadful stench filled my nostrils, and I felt the sodden earth beneath my feet begin to suck me down deeper into that ditch. I looked to my left and my right and it was endless. I felt like a lost child in the darkness knowing that the bogeyman was coming to get me with no hope of escape. The strange thing was that I could still see that beautiful land just over the edge of this dreadful ditch, but I could no longer feel any of its love, hear its sweet music or smell its sweet aroma.



I tried to scramble out of the ditch on the side facing it but was stopped by thorny weeds that rimmed the top of it and my strength just seemed to drain from my body. I felt myself sinking deeper into the ditch. I panicked and cried out, “God, why have you put me here?”

I tried a second time to get out and cut my hands on the thorny weeds and fell back into that horrible ditch yet again and still I could see that beautiful place I longed for before me. I did not understand what was happening or why. I have never been so afraid. Weeping, I cried out again “Why have you put me here?” “Is there something you are trying to tell me?”

Through my tears I looked down at my hands that were cut and pierced with thorns and somehow knew what God wanted me to understand.

I had the revelation that I needed a saviour, I needed someone to save me because I could not save myself. He had not put me there in that awful ditch. All the junk in my life, every lie told, every wrong thought conceived, every wrong thing done by me had put me there and God was showing me that I needed Jesus who died for me and shed his blood and was pierced with thorns for me. To save me to himself and from the place those things would take me. Somehow, I understood.

The place where I wanted to go to was perfect, uncorrupt, beautiful, and magnificent and so was God and he would not and could not, let me in with all that stuff still in me. In that moment I discovered that I was able to get out of the ditch and climbed out on to the roadside. I turned to see the vision of that most beautiful place still before me but could not feel anything emanating from it. I fell to my knees and poured my heart out to God, telling him about the terrible things I had done and how sorry I was and that I wanted him to save me and forgive me and accepted what Jesus did for me on the cross paying the for my sins.

At the end of that, my first real prayer to God, the vision disappeared but all that love and peace I had felt flooded back. It was amazing. Significantly and I believe symbolically, the red blanket fell off me while I was in the ditch and remains there to this day. For a little while I just stood there reeling from what had happened and wondering what I was to do next. I knew somehow that I needed to tell someone what had happened. I started to walk towards Newtownards and as I approached South Street a transit van pulled up and the back doors flung open. It was some people I knew that had been at the rave on the island. They said to get in and that they would give me a lift into the town. I climbed in but had not said anything at this point. Seeing I was not my usual self I was asked by some of them what was up with me. All I could say was “I met God”. They asked, “what do you mean?” I said, “I met God this morning and I think I got saved or something”. This really freaked them out and I think they thought I had finally flipped into madness. The van stopped outside the Strangford Arms Hotel not far from where my parents’ house was.

## All I could say was “I met God”

It was Sunday morning July 14th around 8am I think. When I got there, I opened the front door of the house as quietly as I could. My parents were still in bed. As I tiptoed up the stairs to my bedroom which was opposite theirs, I felt so strongly that I wanted to tell my Dad what had happened and that I was sorry for things I had done and that I loved him and wanted us to be reconciled. I put my hand to their door handle and opened the door slowly. As my Dad looked up from the covers I got scared and quickly shut the door again and went to my room which I shared with my younger brother.

I lay on my cabin bed wondering again about what had happened to me. As I lay there, I heard my name being called from outside my window which looked out into Fitzjames Park where we lived. It was a horrible menacing voice. I looked out but there was no one there. I lay back on my bed a little worried and afraid. Then it happened again, and I really got scared, and then a third time. I lay there afraid wondering what to do? I looked to my right at the bookcase by my bed and seen there was a good news bible amongst the usual childhood annuals etc, and I picked it up and began to read it. As I did, the fear subsided and did not hear the voice again. I heard my Mum get up to start breakfast as was her custom and went down to asked her to come into the living room because I had something to tell her. I told her everything with much emotion and many tears from both of us. She told me that she had been praying for me for years and that she was so relieved and happy for me. It happened to be her birthday on the 14th too. What a birthday gift! God is so good. Then my Dad came down the stairs and came in to see what was happening. I began to tell him, but he did not want to know about it saying he did not have time for all of that and proceeded to wash and dress before going to sail which he often did at the weekends at Killyleagh. I spent that day going over and over in my mind what had happened to me. I felt so different. My Mum considered it wise to arrange for me to meet with her Minister which I did and had a good talk with him which helped confirmed that God had truly met with me.

The following Monday I was back at the conservation volunteers. I went the whole morning without a cigarette or joint. I did not tell anyone right away about what had happened and had kept myself to myself all morning, but knew I needed to tell them at some point. I took a break to go to the toilet and sat in the cubicle with cannabis in one hand and a cigarette in the other I had found in my pockets which were remains from the Saturday night. Was I truly different I thought? Was I really free from all this? I started to make a joint with the cannabis, and as I did, I realised that there was no desire whatsoever in me for it anymore. I then went outside and up to the guys in the nursery beds where we were working that morning and told them what had happened to me. They understandably laughed and ridiculed me. I said I would prove it to them and showed them the cannabis and threw it away as far as I could into the forest. They thought I was mad and few of them tried in vain to find it.

Soon after I started attending a local church fellowship and a short time after that I left the ACE scheme to work in a guitar factory in Newtownards. A job I was not even looking for at the time but one that God had prepared for me. This was the beginning of my relationship and my many adventures with my God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I encourage you to look at your own life, search your heart and honestly ask yourself the question "Do I need a saviour too?"

Maybe you could start as I did with "God, if you are there, please help me".

May God bless you as you consider these things today.

Yours sincerely, in His love,

David Gourley

