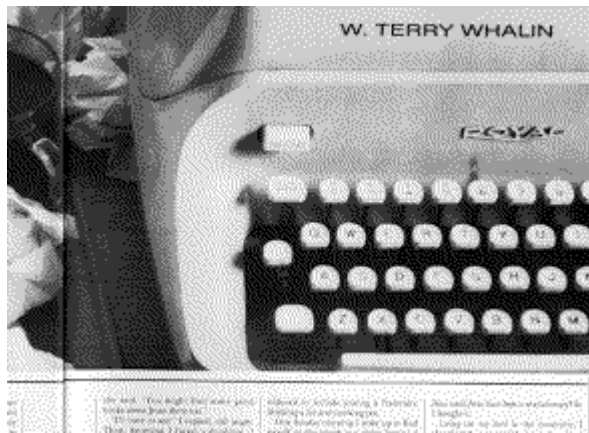


Two Words That Changed My Life

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by W. Terry Whalin

College brought me a new sense of freedom from my parents and from their faith. But a brief encounter in the newspaper office made me question the lifestyle I'd chosen.



I slapped the snooze alarm for the third time and finally opened my eyes at Chi Phi, my fraternity house. Last night had been a late one. After covering an evening speech and interview for the school paper, I worked frantically on the story until just before midnight,

when I dropped it into the hands of a waiting editor.

As I struggled out of bed, my mind began turning over today's schedule. *In an hour I have to interview the dean of Indiana University's school of business, then another professor. Oh, yeah, I have a couple of classes to squeeze in today, but the assigned reading will have to wait....*

Slowly moving through a shower, breakfast and the bus ride to the office, I tried to coax my foggy brain to prepare a list of questions for the dean's interview. My life at the Indiana Daily Student newspaper revolved around newsprint, wire copy, interviews and rewriting news releases. Classes were a distinctly secondary reason for attending IU.

After the interviews, which went okay, I climbed the second-floor steps to the newsroom, hoping I'd be able to meet my 3 P.M. deadline for Bruce, the campus editor. The clatter of typewriter keys and wire machines along with the room conversation seemed particularly loud today. Elbow to elbow, we sat at our yellow desks, pounding away on old manual typewriters which badly needed to be melted down and replaced with VDTs.

Hunched over my Royal, I joined eighteen others banging out copy. Maybe it was the noise and rumble around me that frayed my nerves or my lack of sleep the night before, but I couldn't get my fingers on the

right keys. I kept messing up words, then getting mad because I had to backspace and cross them out. *I can already hear Bruce complaining about how sloppy my copy is*, I thought.

The harder I tried to concentrate, the worse my typing got. After jamming the keys for the twentieth time, I could no longer contain my frustration.

“Jesus Christ!” I swore out loud as I unstuck the keys once again, getting ink all over my fingers.

I didn’t really mean anything serious by these two words. I used them merely as an expletive, an emotional release. I assumed I was a Christian. I went to church with my parents, read the Bible and even sang in the choir when I went home for breaks. But I was basically following the faith of my parents. Christianity didn’t mean much to me personally-- certainly not enough to worry about swearing on occasion.

In the next moment, as I tried once again to focus on my story, a voice interrupted my thoughts.

“Don’t say that,” the voice said. I looked up and saw a blond woman sitting at one of the other typewriters, apparently working on a story of her own. Her name was Nancy; I didn’t know her very well.

“Some day when you really need Jesus,” she continued, “you’ll call out but he won’t be there.” She looked at me with utter seriousness.

I felt the anger rising in me as she spoke. *Who is she to judge me as if she were some authority over me?* I fumed.

Then Nancy’s face relaxed. “There’s a bookstore just off campus called Logos that sells interesting cards and posters,” she said. “You might find some good books about Jesus there too.”

“I’ll have to see,” I replied, still angry. Then, knowing I faced a deadline, I turned back to my story. But Nancy’s words continued to play in my subconscious.

I had been brought up by Christian parents, who taught me all the basics about faith in God and Jesus Christ. But I had felt Christianity was too restrictive; it seemed like little more than a list of things I couldn’t do.

College life brought me a new sense of freedom from my parents and from their faith. Minutes after they left me at my freshman dorm, I bought a pipe and began smoking. I desperately wanted acceptance from the other students, but I also felt that smoking fit my mental image of a journalist or writer. I choked and sputtered at my first attempts, but continued to draw on the pipe often.

During my first year and a half at college, I immersed myself in my journalism major and in reporting for the Indiana Daily Student. My independent lifestyle widened to include joining a fraternity, drinking a lot and smoking pot.

One Sunday morning I woke up to find myself on the couch in a dorm lounge. I couldn’t remember anything about the night before except I had been drinking in my fraternity room with a few friends. I frantically

searched for my glasses; finally I located them in the nearby restroom.

The memory lapse scared me--enough to cause me to consider giving up alcohol. It also made me wonder whether my independence was all it was cracked up to be. *But how do I find joy and fulfillment in life?* I pondered. As a child, my parents had always taken me to church. But at college, Sunday was my prime time to catch up on sleep and study. I associated church only with my brief weekends at home.

Strangely, it was during this time of wondering and searching that my encounter with Nancy occurred. The next day I took a walk and located the store Nancy had mentioned. At the time, I didn't realize Logos was a Christian bookstore. Scanning the titles, I came across a book called *Jesus, the Revolutionary*. I wondered, *HOW could Jesus have been a revolutionary?* So I bought it.

Lying on my bed in the fraternity, I absorbed the pages of the book. I realized that my mental image of Christ consisted of a series of stereotypes--a wimpy figure hanging on the cross or meekly lifting his hand to bless small children. But this book was telling me Jesus was more than that. He was a friend who would stand by me no matter what the circumstances. He cared intimately about me and loved me enough to die for me. Despite my Christian upbringing, I hadn't given myself the chance to see the fuller picture of who Jesus was.

About the same time, another friend from the newspaper staff, Florence, invited me to a meeting with a Christian group called Lighthouse.

As we walked into an old warehouse, I noticed the candles in paper cups for lights and multicolored carpet scraps covering the floor. Nervously I wondered, *Am I in the right place with these Jesus people? Everyone's carrying a Bible but me.*

Sitting on the floor, the group began to sing a few free-flowing choruses instead of using the familiar hymnal. One man gave a short teaching from the Bible. Immediately I sensed this group had a deep love and concern for each other. They hugged each other in greeting and parting. This gathering left an impression on me; it was different than any other church service I'd attended.

I began to attend several of the Christian groups on campus, and decided to read my Bible. Gradually I found myself losing interest in alcohol, tobacco and drugs and wanting to spend more time with other Christians, with the Bible and with Jesus himself. I joined a group called the Christian Student Fellowship, made new friends and learned a lot in their Bible studies.

During my junior year, I made another new friend, Ron Snell, whose parents were missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Peru. Through hearing about his missionary experiences, I began to see that there are people all over the world who need to know about Christ. I tended to view my faith primarily as a personal, localized faith. Each

week, Ron and I met to pray about our future plans, and about the plans of others in our group.

Through Ron I also learned about a missionary convention with thousands of students known as Urbana, because it met at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. *Why would 17,000 students get together to learn about missions?* I wondered. Although I'd miss New Year's Eve with my family, I decided I had to find out.

At the Urbana conference I sat in a stadium packed with students and heard Paul Little, author of *How to Give Away Your Faith* (IVP), tell us, "God doesn't move a parked car." I realized I didn't want my life to come to a standstill. I wanted to move forward, to grow in my faith and in my service to God.

If you want me to serve you somewhere overseas, Lord, open the doors of my life, I prayed. And close them if you have better plans for me.

Not far from the stadium stood a large, barn-like building where hundreds of missionary agencies had set up displays. As I wandered down the aisles talking with the various representatives, I learned more about the different ways I could serve God overseas. My interest grew.

During the final Urbana meeting, the speaker gave a call for commitment. I always get nervous when people ask me to make a choice in public. I didn't want to make a snap decision; I wasn't yet sure I wanted to live in some remote corner of the world and share Christ with others.

But I did know that I wanted to follow God wherever he would lead me. When the call of commitment came and the students were asked to stand, I found myself rising to my feet. Right then I decided that if the Lord wanted me to serve him in some capacity overseas, I would go. In the weeks to come, I felt at peace about that decision.

Coming home from Urbana, I marveled at how far God had brought me in a few short years. Certainly he had used my parents to lay the groundwork of love and basic understanding about God. But I had rebelled against their faith.

Actually, the moment of truth for me came that day in the newspaper office, when a courageous friend chose to confront me about two very important words that I had spoken all too casually: Jesus Christ.



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