

PICKERING

A tale of love

Gary Allen Steyn



Beyond Impossible
Live His Dream

All scriptures from New International
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Pickering: A Testimony of Love



Foreword

If ever you doubted the power of the gospel to transform lives, then this story will stir you to new levels of faith: it is amazing! In his unassuming, matter- of-fact style Gary lays out the traumatic and tragic story of his childhood years. But there is no self-pity here, no guilt trip for readers who have had an easy life; it is simply the background to a radical transformation brought about by an encounter with Jesus Christ.

The Gary I know and love today is married to a beautiful wife with two stunning children, marketing job, pastorally caring and prophetically gifted – a million miles from the little boy at the start of this book. Yet there is still an occasional glimpse of that wild child of the streets: now a man who is wild for the kingdom.

You will not be able to put this book down.

Richard Lawton
Senior Pastor
Hillside Church

From Shannon (Angie's sister)

When I think of the book titled from "Pickering" and "Beyond Impossible" I am in awe at how far these 2 special people have come. Gary, you are a good man. You are a true testament to the fact that your upbringing need not define who you are. You haven't allowed negative influences to prevent you from living your dream and you have used every obstacle placed in your path to grow. I can see the love you have for my sister and your 2 gorgeous children, despite your lack of a solid earthly role model you are doing a mighty fine job as a husband and father. Keep it up...I am super proud of you.

To my darling sister, Angie aka The Queen. When God chose me to be your big sister he blessed me with the best. You are wise beyond your years, beautiful, kind hearted, always full of compassion and a gentle way of helping me see reason and logic through any storm. I love you more than any words could ever describe. Proud of you I'll always be, because you are the most awesome person on the planet.

I know that this book will be a blessing to all who read it because the lives they have lived this far are an amazing testimony to God's grace and love.

Foreword

From Linda (Angie's mother)

It has been a special privilege for me to have been a part of the many roads you have travelled in the last few years. Some of the four way stops were confusing and terrifying, and some were exciting and adventurous. BUT GOD has brought you through to greater heights of joy, love and peace.

You now live, as a family, in the beautiful city of Toronto and I have had the pleasure of visiting your quaint new home, attending your place of worship and enjoying being a part of your daily life. You take your role as parents very seriously and have raised Gabi and Eli to love and have a joyous personal relationship with our Saviour Jesus Christ. I thank Father God for His favour over all of you and for blessing me to have been a part of this journey.

Gary. You are, thoughtful, spontaneous, generous, adventurous and humorous. Thank you for being my spiritual counsellor, an incredible emotional support and a fun son-in-law.

Ang, My precious daughter, a special blessing from Father God. You are a pillar of strength to all who know you. Serene, beautiful, generous, kind, loving, caring and very funny. You are a woman of substance, powerful yet tender.

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Gabi, my beautiful princess. You are a talented drama student and you love dancing and singing praises to your King Jesus. You are creative, and so very gentle and kind.

Eli, my handsome prince. You are a great sportsman. You do everything with joy. You love to love, and to be loved and to make everyone happy.

I am so very proud of all of you and thank God for the joy and love you bring to me.

Introduction

Love requires courage, more than any of us can imagine. It is not a simple choice, but rather a complex and emotional one. To love, to really love, will inevitably require sacrifice, and for most, at some point, pain. Whether the pain comes because of the loss of a loved one, disappointment or some other way, it will come, but we love despite what may come. It's a mystery for sure, but it's a powerful bond that keeps people together throughout all the circumstances of life. Perfect love comes only from God, He is love and He first loved us.

This is my story, of being born into challenging circumstances, desperate for love, insecure and lost, then, like a lost sheep or coin, being found by the lover of my soul: Jesus. Once he enters my story, everything changes for the good, and so in sharing my journey my aim is to inspire you to believe that despite your circumstances, find love, find true love. As we read in His word: "And now these three remain, faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV) He will change, challenge, shape everything about you, if you will let Him in, because God is love.

Today I stand tall, a man of God, a soldier equipped with His armour. The belt of truth buckled around my waist, the breastplate of righteousness in place and my feet fitted with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:14,15). Everything in this book is a truthful account of my life story as I experienced it, from my birth on 19 November 1977 at Addington Hospital, Durban.

Now in my early forties, a man with a smile on my face and joy in my heart for the things that God has given me, for the life that He has set before me and the purpose He has instilled into my daily living.

This story may come across as shocking and traumatic, and I have been less descriptive of some of the events for this reason, but to me and those close to me, it is an artwork, with God as the author and perfecter of my faith.

A song sung by Chris Tomlin rings loudly in my head: “And all you ever do, is change the old for new, and we believe that, God, is bigger than, the air I breathe, the world we’ll leave, and God, will save the day, and all will say, my glorious”. God is the hero of my story and I trust that at the end of reading about my life, He will be yours too.

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CHAPTER 1

Entry into Darkness

*Children born not of natural descent, nor of human
decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

– John 1:13



Gary and his mother, Patricia

It was 1976 in Durban South Africa, which, like many cities of that time, was going through many changes. In South Africa we were deeply entrenched in apartheid, which caused the police and customs officials running our harbors to follow many interesting policies. Everyone entering or leaving Durban harbor was under suspicion, guilty till proven innocent, or something of the sort. When the cargo ships came into port with all their goods, it was up to the Port Captain to take things into her own hands. They called her the Port Captain because she would arrange the pickup and transport of the seafarers to and from the harbor and take them to places of leisure and entertainment, the sort that men at sea had waited months for.

She was a strong, popular lady whom everyone knew and respected. She was basically in charge of all the incoming ships. Her specific job was not what you might think; she wasn't on the employees list of the Ports Authority. But she knew just as much as any of them.

Many Greeks, Phillipinos, Portuguese and seamen of other nations were in and out of the Durban ports every month. The Port Captain would collect the men and escort them to a club called the Monte Carlo, a notoriously popular place for the seamen to go. I imagine it became legendary among them. Inside the Monte Carlo night club would be loads of women who had been set up there by the Port Captain to entertain the men with dancing and the like. My mother and her friends were some of the local girls at the club. Erica was her self-appointed name, the one everyone knew her by.

She was the youngest of 10 children born in Cape Town. Being born with rheumatic fever had prevented her

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from finishing school – in fact, she dropped out at a very young age. Running away from home at 15 she found herself in Durban, vulnerable and into the ready hands of those who prey on the young and impressionable.

In no time, Erica had made new friends and had found a new career of sorts, the night life, and all that it offered. This led her into a web of lies and a distorted understanding of life, with lots of sorrow, anxiety and fear. By the time she was 29 she had given up five of her children for adoption, some of the children she gave up, were willingly taken in by her loving sisters, others went into foster homes and were raised by other families. Despite leaving home at a young age, her sisters remained in touch with her. Her family never understood the life she had chosen so they loved from a distance. My mom told me that she was abused by someone as a child, as is so often the case, and that made her run away from home. The shame she felt led her like an easy prey into the arms of predators.

She quickly found comfort in daily drinking and drug binges, and friends that supported, encouraged and agreed with her daily habits.

Every night brought along a new opportunity to meet someone new, try something new and push her habit to the limit.

Amidst the constant partying and carefree mentality, I am sure that genuine relationships were made, where, perhaps partners may have even fallen in love. Some men chose to leave their country of birth and remain in South Africa, others would smuggle their new-found love onto the ship and “sail off into the sunset”. But in my case what

my mother informed me, was that when my biological father found out that she was pregnant, he fled, returning to his own family and was never heard from again. She told me that she fell in love with a Greek sailor, whom she called Costa. Whenever the Port Captain informed her that he was in town, Erica would meet with him and they would laugh, drink and enjoy each other without a care. According to my mother and her friends, Costa was a real womanizer, he loved his whisky and making people laugh. They spent loads of time enjoying parties and good times together, until Erica fell pregnant. When my mother told Costa about her pregnancy, he left never to return.

I am not sure if it was my mom's age or the fact that she had loved Costa, unlike the many others, that led her not to give me away, like many other children she had birthed. She kept me, and named me Gary Allen. I didn't have a surname for the first year, as my mother didn't register me at Home Affairs until a year after my birth. For forty years I believed the stories of my mother and her friends who insisted my father was this legendary "Costa". I tried for more than 20 years to find him, using private investigators, journalists in Greece and television programmes that assist in the reunion of families, I wrote hundreds of letters to men of the same name in Greece and even received some responses encouraging me in my search. I even wrote a letter to the Greek Prime Minister.

However Just before my 41st birthday I did a DNA test which resulted in not only a disappointment for years lost but also a new found freedom and a closed door. The results revealed that I am not the son of a Greek man but

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rather that I have strong Italian, Portuguese and Spanish genes. This as you can imagine came as a bit of a shock, yet a part of me was not surprised at all.

Whilst it may seem obvious to many that it would have been impossible for my mother to recall who my father was, I wanted to believe the story that my biological father was an identified individual with a name and a face.

Shortly after my birth, my mother became more serious with one of the men she had met. His name was Johannes Zacharias Steyn, a manager for a local company that fixed up ships in the dry dock. He was a good-looking young man who loved life. He fell in love with Erica and decided to move in with her and adopt me, I then became Gary Allen Steyn after Johannes registered himself as my father at the Home Affairs office. At the time Johannes would have been 21 when I was born, and my mom was 30 years old .

They rented a flat together in Lionel House, Pickering Street, which was the heart of the red-light district in 1977 In Durban, South Africa.

The building's first four floors were factories which produced different things over the years. On occasion we were evacuated in the middle of the night by firemen, due to explosions in the factories on the floors below us. We stayed on the 5th floor so we couldn't help but hear the bangs. Fortunately, I can only recall this happening twice, however still very traumatic for me as a child.

The building across from where we stayed was about three stories high and I remember that each road-facing

apartment had a woman, a red light, and what I later learned was an open invitation to men with cash in their pocket. Pickering street was known as the prostitute and pimp shopping mall.

I took karate classes for a while on one of the floors in our block. One day, while heading out to participate in a tournament, I was crossing the road without looking and got hit by a car. Whilst I was very shaken, I still insisted on going to and participating in the tournament. The organisers of the competition did not want me to fight, but I convinced them to let me unleash the adrenaline from the accident, I fought and won my first trophy.

Pickering Street was littered with many men covered in tattoos, sitting on the pavement, smoking cigarettes wearing vests and hats. With names such as Blacky and Spike, they had that thousand yard stare in their eyes that made you want to throw your wallet at them and run away as fast as you can, if you were ever unlucky enough to cross their path. They would sit there spurring their ladies to work the street hard, whilst instilling fear in all who lived in the area and frequented their paths.

Prostitution was illegal at the time except in “massage parlors”, as they called them. So, the women would walk up and down the streets approaching the cars and negotiating prices before either hopping in or taking their client into one of the adjacent blocks for an allotted time. Often the pimps would beat up the men who visited the ladies, take the cash and advise them never to return, knowing that most of them were married or prominent

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people and wouldn't dare report the incident to the police for fear of humiliation.

Not that the police were any better, many of them knowing each worker by name and sometimes arresting them, sometimes receiving favors.

Despite what I have already shared, I had, what you could say, for the most part, a regular childhood. There were other boys and girls that lived in our apartment block, and we would all play in the streets, ride bikes and get up to all the regular mischief that I thought all kids got up to. It felt normal, it felt like fun.

But just to backtrack a little, soon after I was born, approximately two years after having me my mom gave birth to my brother Eric (real name Thenius Lodewyk Steyn), child no 7. But I called him "Boy" for the first few years. He was a cute little guy and had a soft, loving nature. I took on the well known role of the hard-older brother a lot. If you know what I am talking about, it's the stance you regret taking later in life. But I also felt like I needed to be hard on him to protect him as my mother wasn't around watching over us and we didn't have a dad for very long to teach us the ropes.

My step father was a hard-working man, who was kind to my brother and I, he loved us both very much, even though I wasn't his biological son.

He was much younger than my mother and it is a possibility that he ended up moving in with her because she was pregnant, as he didn't seem to stay very long. I don't know much about his life before us, but I guess he didn't have too much of a history, being only 22. He enjoyed a good party just like the rest of my moms

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