

David Wilkerson: Living a Dream—Leaving a Legacy

✖ I was 20 years old and a student at North Central Bible College (Now North Central University) in Minneapolis, Minnesota when the entire direction of my prayer life was profoundly shaken and transformed through my first encounter with David Wilkerson. He had come to speak at the Minneapolis Gospel Tabernacle and it was there that I received my first copy of *The Cross and the Switchblade*. His ministry, Teen Challenge, was in its infancy. It was a dream in the heart of David Wilkerson that he was just beginning to live. I'm not sure he even knew all that lay ahead as he began living out his dream.

Reading David's just-released book, almost straight through in one sitting, fueled in my heart a passion for God as never before and a burden to reach the lost at any cost. I wept as I read his story. That was more than 45 years ago. Although there were other leadership influences in my young life at the time, none impacted my life, particularly in the area of personal prayer and pure obedience, as did David Wilkerson.

Not many months after that first encounter in hearing David in person, I began dating (and soon married) a cousin to David, Dee Krans, whose mother is a member of what we call the Wilkerson clan. (Dee recently counted at least 25 Wilkersons in the full time ministry!) I soon learned that Dee's father, a minister, had been killed in a car accident when Dee was not yet four years old. Together, Dee's mom, Dee and her younger sister Karen moved to the family farm near Toledo, Ohio where they grew up in the home of the legendary grandpa Wilkerson who David described so vividly in his best selling book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

It was David's (and Dee's) granddad who was uniquely

influential in encouraging David to go to New York City to begin what clearly has become one of the most effective restoration ministries in the world today for addicts of all ages—Teen Challenge and its global counterpart, World Challenge. In fact, Dee was but a 14-year old when David first came from Pennsylvania to the farm to share his burden for the gangs of New York City with granddad. Dee says no one on the farm during those days could ever have imagined what God was doing in (and would ultimately do through) David as the result of that visit.

Years later, when Dee and I were working with young people in California, David came to Sacramento's Memorial Auditorium for one of his challenging youth rallies. The place was packed with thousands and many hundreds were turned away. At that time, God had just given me a vision to begin a 24/7 prayer ministry for young people. We called it the Prayer Corps and planned for those who joined to live in residence and pray day and night for revival and awakening in our nation and the nations. But as I began sharing about this fledgling ministry among area churches, criticism began flowing. Some were saying that Dick Eastman was starting a "religious commune for hippies." These were the days that the hippy counter-culture had taken over that part of California and we were a "stone's throw" from San Francisco, the unofficial global headquarters for the movement. I was about to give up even before our first center opened. Criticism from some in my own denomination was especially hurtful.

But late that night, after David spoke at Memorial Auditorium, he invited Dee and me out for a late-night snack. As I told him about the criticism I was getting regarding my newly received vision, he boldly advised, "Don't let it get to you, Dick. Critics lined up to tell me that what I was trying to do in starting Teen Challenge would never work." He smiled and added, "I just ignored them. I've learned to live by something I heard years ago—'Never complain; never explain;

just do the job and let them howl!’”

From that day on Dee and I ventured forward and watched the prayer ministry grow until whole movements of prayer and worship were born out of those early 24/7 centers. We’ve even recently told much of our story in a book with a rather unusual title, *The Purple Pig and Other Miracles* (published earlier this year by Charisma House). David Wilkerson clearly was one of the great visionary leaders of this generation and he leaves a remarkable legacy.

One aspect of that legacy is close to home for Dee and me because David’s son Gary started a church two years ago in our building, The Jericho Center, here in Colorado Springs. Amazingly, what began with a handful of worshipers quickly grew beyond our seating capacity (even with multiple services) and now their fellowship, The Springs Church, numbers in the many hundreds and has purchased a former convention center of our city. It is rapidly becoming one of the fastest growing churches in the Rocky Mountain region.

David Wilkerson truly lived a dream, one almost beyond comprehension, and is leaving a remarkable legacy that will continue to impact multitudes globally. I can only imagine David’s welcome in Heaven. I can almost hear angels around him begging, “Tell us again that story about how Nicky Cruz came to know Jesus!”

Dick Eastman is International President for Every Home for Christ.