

Gentile Gesture Profoundly Changed Jewish Boy's Life

Boys in love do crazy things. Some get tattoos. Some spend all their money trying to woo the object of their affections. Others, like me, get suckered into receiving Bibles.

Here I was, 18 years old and I was in love with a girl named Rachel Donnelly. She was a girl in my high school who was the most beautiful and vibrant human being I had ever laid eyes on. We were friends, appearing in school plays together, hanging out after school and things like that ... but I wanted more. I wanted her.

One afternoon, I gave Rachel a ride home from school. She invited me into her house to 'hang out' ... an invitation I gladly accepted. Upon entering her house, we encountered her mom. She was busy in the kitchen, preparing dinner.

Did I mention that Rachel was one of 14 kids? Yes you read that correctly, 14!! So you can imagine what kind of a strong woman her mother was, to birth 14 babies!

Rachel's mom, Susan, was an extraordinary human being. Not just for her ability to procreate. There was something about her. She was all of 5 feet in height. But she had an inner strength that you could just sense, along with something else. I wasn't sure just what it was. But the feeling that I had whenever I was around her, is that being in her proximity was like being closer to God.

It's a hard thing to describe. It was an energy that was almost tangible.

On this particular afternoon, I noticed for the first time, that Mrs. Donnelly was wearing a Star of David pendant around her neck. I was shocked at this discovery. Here I was a Jewish

kid and here she was some sort of Gentile woman (with a name like Donnelly and 14 kids I always assumed she was Irish Catholic, but didn't know for sure) and she was wearing a Jewish star? Before I could help myself, I blurted out:

"Mrs. Donnelly why are you wearing a Jewish star?" She replied, "This is the Star of David, and Jesus is a descendant of David."

I had no idea what she was talking about. But I wasn't about to question her since she was the mother of the girl I was crazy about.

Later that afternoon, just as I was about to leave, Mrs. Donnelly called to me from the other room.

"Come here," she said "I have a gift for you." You have a gift for me, I thought?! This woman has 14 children, how on earth could she have time, energy or thought to get a gift for me, some guy who's clearly trying to make a move on her daughter?

"OK," I said. She handed me a wrapped package. I sensed it was some sort of book. And as I pulled back the wrapping paper, my guess was confirmed. It was a book. But it was no ordinary book. It was a Bible!

Clearly the earlier conversation about Yeshua and the Star of David had sparked Mrs. Donnelly to think she had a spiritual opening with me. Now she was going in for the kill. She was trying to convert me! She wanted me to become like one of 'them.'

The title of this Bible she gave me was 'The Jewish New Testament' by David Stern. I knew instantly why she was giving it to me. But I couldn't show any emotion. I had to keep my cool. I needed this woman to like me, and to put in a good word for me with her daughter. I politely thanked her. Left the house. Got in my car. Tossed that 'book' in the back seat and never gave it another thought.

Fast forward almost two years. I'm now 20 years old. Living in my first apartment in, of all places, Cadillac, Michigan. If you want to get to Cadillac, take a flight to Detroit, drive north for about five hours, until you see nothing but trees. That's probably Cadillac.

I was a young TV producer, working for a CBS affiliate in northern Michigan. I rented a place in an old abandoned country schoolhouse (that looked like the one on Little House on the Prairie) that someone had converted into two apartments. It was on a dirt road, and even had some sort of wooden cross out on the lawn commemorating the school that once inhabited the structure. I had no neighbors. It was just open fields and trees as far as the eye could see.

One evening, I was lying around the apartment, bored out of my mind. There was nothing to do. I was a big city kid, living in this tiny town where I knew exactly no one and had no options for entertainment. Apparently there was nothing good on TV that night either, because I did something I rarely do... I read.

Don't get me wrong, I like to consider myself an educated person. I was a journalist, loved politics, was interested in world affairs. But I just preferred to get my information from TV, movies, the radio, or short articles in newspapers and magazines. I just wasn't a big book reader.

But that night, out of desperation, I wanted something to read. So, I walked to the bookshelf in my bedroom and started perusing the limited selection. And there, to my utter shock, was 'that book.' That 'Bible.' That 'Jewish New Testament' that Mrs. Donnelly had given me. What was it doing here? How did it get here? I had no memory of ever seeing that book again, after leaving her home with it. I certainly didn't remember packing it and taking it with me to my first apartment, after leaving college.

To this day, I have no explanation for this Bible being on my shelf, that night, in that place. It still astonishes me. But there it was.

OK. This was an opportunity, a chance to finally know why I didn't believe this. Being raised in a Jewish home, I was taught all my life that Yeshua and Christianity and the New Testament, wasn't for us. That wasn't what we believed in. Tonight, I was finally going to know why.

I took out the book. Sat down on my bed. And began flipping through, trying to figure out where to start. I was a little bit afraid of it, to be honest. I had never done anything like this, investigating another faith. I flipped through the pages and saw the words—'The Sermon on the Mount.' OK, this was good. I think I had heard of this before. Fine, this is where I'll start my reading.

And so I began. *"How blessed are the poor in spirit for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs..."* etc., etc., etc., ok, this is all quite flowery and weird. Not really sure what this is all about. Keep reading. This is boring. OK, skip a page. Then I see the words 'Love Your Enemies.' What is this, I thought?

Love your enemies? I had never heard of anything like this before. I kept reading. *'But I tell you, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! Then you will become children of your Father in heaven...'* Wow. Wow. This was really something. I put down the book. Closed it. Didn't read one more word. Didn't have to.

Wow. Love your enemies? Pray for them? This was a revelation in thinking that had never entered my brain before. I was stunned, overwhelmed, incredibly moved. I was suddenly consumed with the thought, "this is the kind of thing that I would expect God to say... because men/people don't talk like this."

What an overwhelming thought, that these could be the words of

God. But no ... no, I had to reject that thought. I was Jewish. This was Yeshua talking. This was a Christian Bible. No way!

I tried to banish the thoughts that were invading my mind. I put that book back on the shelf and never looked at it again. I don't know who you are David Stern, but this is not for me!

Or was it?

After only reading those few paragraphs in the book of Matthew, my life was undone.

For days, I was tormented by the thought "just say that you believe that Yeshua is real." What? Who said that? Where is this thought coming from? No way, I'm Jewish!

But this thought wouldn't stop rolling around in my mind. "You don't have to say that you believe in Yeshua; just say that you believe that Yeshua is real."

For three days, these words pounded away at my consciousness, like a raging river. But I was determined to put up a dam in my mind to keep them out. Finally I couldn't take it any more. It was literally driving me mad.

And before I realized what I was doing, I relented. I got down on my knees and yelled out "OK, I believe that Yeshua is real!"

Suddenly, it was as if the dam I had built in my mind was burst through by raging water. My mind was flooded and I would never be the same again.

It would be several months and lots of soul searching before I finally fully comprehended that I was now a believer in Yeshua. I was one of 'them.' And almost 18 years later, I'm thrilled to say I still am!

But it all began that night. Reading those few words, from that beautifully translated Jewish New Testament.

Now here I am, all these years later, working at Maoz with... of all people, Dr. David Stern as he and Maoz put together a plan to translate the text into Hebrew. I couldn't be prouder! What an honor it has been just to meet Dr. Stern and to share my story with him.

Why God used his translation, I'll never know. But I pray He continues to do so with Jews soon reading the Hebrew version. This is a very special translation of the Bible, tailored to meet the Jewish reader right where he or she is, in the midst of our culture and faith and heritage.

I praise God for Dr. Stern and his writing. I praise God for Mrs. Donnelly for giving me that book, all those years ago. She has since left this world and is with our LORD. I think of my life here in Israel and my work to reach the Jewish people with the Gospel as her legacy.

I am the fruit of her faithfulness and prayers. She had such a heart for the Jewish people and was a bold evangelist. And to this day, one of my most cherished possessions is that Star of David pendant she used to wear, which her family gave to me after her death.

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