

An Evening On The Streets of Philly, July 9th *by Rex Burgher*

The slapping of the tires along the Philly turnpike had lulled me into a semi-comatose state until Bill started talking about A.A. Allen and the great tent revivals of old. I like Bill, you never have to guess where you are with him, and if you are wondering just ask him and no matter if you are ready or not he will tell you. But not in a condemning way but in a way that challenges you making you think and that's not a bad thing either. He is smart to the ways of the street having grown up in the area and played in the park where the tent will be set up for the meetings next weekend. He can quote scripture with the best of them and because of his street smarts knows how to cut to the chase and pin you right against the wall. He has a way of looking at you that doesn't let you escape, his words cut to the root of the problem making sure you understand. He's kind of like a cutting horse I watched one day in Montana, no matter which way that calf moved that horse was right on top of him till he had him corralled into the holding pen. Bill is like that, when God points out someone to him he gives it his undivided attention and in the end you know you had an encounter.

We pulled off the turnpike at the Valley Forge exit and drove another half hour through a maze of highways till we got to streets named, E Erie Ave., Frankford Ave., Tioga, finally turning down Kensington Ave. where the track for the L Train runs over top of the street making for a strange scene as you look down the Ave. The back of the van was full of cakes, breads, soda pop and assorted sweets that we would be handing out later to the people along Kensington Ave. It gathers people and that gives you a chance to talk to them. Almost all of them are high on something, either prescription drugs given to them by a doctor to keep them sedated or illegal drugs, alcohol or a combination of the above. You don't know if they are on dope or if their brain cells have been so pickled that they naturally cannot make any sense but it doesn't really matter you got to get through to them somehow.

Ministering is interesting to say the least on the streets and I admit there are times when I feel woefully inadequate. But like Bill tells me, "When you eventually give up trying to do the impossible in your own strength is when God comes and makes the impossible possible." We drove around the streets for a while putting up posters for the tent meeting next weekend when we found Bill's brother sitting on the sidewalk with his back up against a building on Kensington down a bit from where we sit up the tent. His un-kept hair and beard, his clothes and heavy coat for sleeping was all he had with him. We talked with him for a while getting him to eat some food and seeing if there was anyplace we could take him. Bill offered to take him home with him and it seemed like he wanted to but in the end I guess it just wasn't his time yet. As we drove around in the van with him sitting in the back behind Bill I could see his reflection in my rear view mirror outside my door on the passenger side. I couldn't help but notice how much he looked like other people I had known in my life. Bill's brother was a college graduate but the Devil got a hold on him and was doing his best to destroy what was left of him.

After a while we went down past Sherry's Restaurant on the corner to hand out the sweets, breads, soda and the water's Bill had in the back of the van. It didn't take very long before we had a small crowd around us and for the next couple of hours we handed out what we had to those who came around.

As I stood there I really thanked God for where I was born and for my parents who brought me up. What would my life have been like if I had been born in Africa, Europe or down here on the streets? In fact what would my life have been like if I would have stayed in South Dakota or Montana? What would my life have been like if I didn't know Jesus? As I leaned against the van handing out stuff and making small talk I realized that life is full of choices. Granted some of the choices we don't get to

make ourselves, circumstances make those choices for us like being born into a family where the father sexually abuses you or where positive role models are non-existent in or outside of the family. What is it that makes some people rise up above a situation? Is it that someone believes in them, goes out of their way to help by handing out a cold soda and some sweets? I don't know, it has got to be more than fate that brings about a change in a person, maybe its someone that prayed for you that triggers something inside that helps but whatever it is we all have the power to make a difference in someone's life everyday for the better or worse. At least today I can make a difference by encouraging someone with kind words, a cold soda, some cake and a prayer.

One lady in particular made it up to the van, she was probably in her early 40's but here it is especially hard to guess someone's age. She talked continually, running her sentences together telling me over and over she wasn't on drugs, didn't do drugs, but she was on something that was for sure. Over and over, every fifteen minutes she would begin to repeat what she had already told me. I was talking to others, giving away food and she would drift between me and Bill or whoever was there she thought was listening. She knew her Bible and said she had received Jesus but it didn't help much. We asked her if she thought she had some demons she needed to get rid of and she told us over and over 'no' but something was running rampant through her mind. We gave her the name and phone number of a woman who runs a women's ministry that is a few blocks from there and told her to contact her and she could help her. After a while she became belligerent and asked me why we come down here if we can't help anyone. It was a good question and one that deserved an answer so I told her this. "Your right I don't have all the answers. I can't take you anywhere for help except to tell you to call the number we gave you. I can pray for you and give you some food but that is all I can do. I wish I could do more and I would like to do more but I have never been here before and the only thing I know to do is to begin by trying. Maybe someday I can be more helpful but for right now this is the best I have to offer. A cake and soda and prayer if you want it."

On our drive home that night as Bill came up the ramp onto the turnpike and accelerated into our lane we sat in silence for quite a while. Finally Bill said, "We really need to come down here around 10:00 p.m. and stay until 2 or 3:00 a.m. That's when things really start to happen." "Your right" I said, "I remember when I used to go out before I was saved, we really didn't go out to the bars till 9 or 10 at night." After that we were quiet for a long time, each of us was lost in our own thoughts about the night and the people we had met.

Last weekend was the tent outreach in Philly and in next months issue we will have an article concerning the events that happened as people gathered from California, Idaho, North Dakota, New Jersey, New York and Canada to help feed the people in the park.