

VOICE
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VOICE AGENCY COMICS PRESENTS

THE GEORGE STORIES

ISSUE #2 — GEORGE THE BEGINNING

by GORDON ATKINSON

"I wish
you could see
George the way
I remember
him."

"Who is that
little man
with the
beautiful
voice?"

WORSHIP
THE LORD
IN THE BEAUTY
OF HOLINESS
— PSALM 96:9

GROWING
TOGETHER
IN CHRIST

HYMNS

10
295
478



SUBWAY

6" SUB
FOOTLONG 7.29
MEATBALL 2.49
TURKEY 2.49
ITALIAN B.M.T. 2.49



A REAL LIVE
PREACHER STORY

In 1996 an AIDS patient in our local hospital had a delirious vision. He was medicated and in deep pain when he saw Jesus standing by his bedside. The man's name was George.

At that very moment, a chaplain, who happened to be my wife, walked into the room.

George had left Christianity behind long ago, along with his dead father and a lot of other bad memories. He normally would have asked the chaplain to leave, but the vision shook him up a little, and he felt like talking to someone.

Over the next few days, George asked her some pretty tough questions. She said, "I know someone you might like to talk with."

That's how George and I ended up meeting at the Subway sandwich shop.

All I knew was that a guy named George wanted to talk to me about God. All George knew was I was a pastor who supposedly didn't mind questions.

By the time we met, George's Jesus vision had faded, and he was asking himself how the hell he got into this. Meeting ministers for lunch was not his idea of a good time.

He showed up ready to do battle. He hit me with his toughest questions and a lot of anger. Religion and abuse had gone hand-in-hand with his father, and he told me all about it. He was talking so fast I was starting to slip into a coma.



I'm not above a good fight, but I was so tired. I'd been fighting fundamentalist Christians for twenty years, had left my denomination, and had washed ashore with the only congregation that would have someone like me as their pastor. I didn't have any fight left in me.

So I said the first thing that came to my mind.

"Dammit! I hate it when people do shitty stuff in God's name and just fuck things up for everyone, you know?"



I have found over the years that with some people, a well-placed "F-bomb" is the best pastoral move I can make. It's like a conversational "Ctrl-Alt-Delete." If nothing else works, just reboot and start over.

George, who had never heard a preacher say fuck, started to laugh. Then I started laughing too. We couldn't stop and the pimply-faced Subway guy thought we were out of our minds. I guess we were, kind of.

And so it began — a real live friendship. We discovered we had much in common. We both loved astronomy and movies and junior physics, having both read *Dancing Wu Li*

Masters and Stephen Hawking, but nothing else. We both loved science fiction. George was hooked on sci-fi classics while I liked the zippy new stuff, but we agreed that *Foundation* kicked ass.

Mostly we shared a sense of humor and a way of looking at the world. George was a kindred spirit. You ever meet someone like that? It's amazing when it happens.



We usually met at Subway because for some reason their sandwiches didn't make him sick, but sometimes we met at his house. We talked about life, facing death, AIDS, God, grief, fathers, and every other thing you can imagine.

I sure do miss him.

One day George said, "I wish I could believe in God. I really do. I'd like to go to your church, and sing hymns, and be a part of something bigger than myself. I'm at the end of my life, and I don't think I've made a real difference in the world. My life hasn't really mattered to anyone. But, I just can't believe in God, so

You should never tell this preacher you don't believe in God because honestly I don't care. Your current mental state - vis-a-vis the existence of a theistic deity - has very little practical spiritual significance in our lives, actually.

That's basically what I told George.

"You don't believe in God? So what. Sometimes I don't either. The important question in life is not a question of belief. What's really important is whom you serve. I think it's serving God that makes life meaningful."

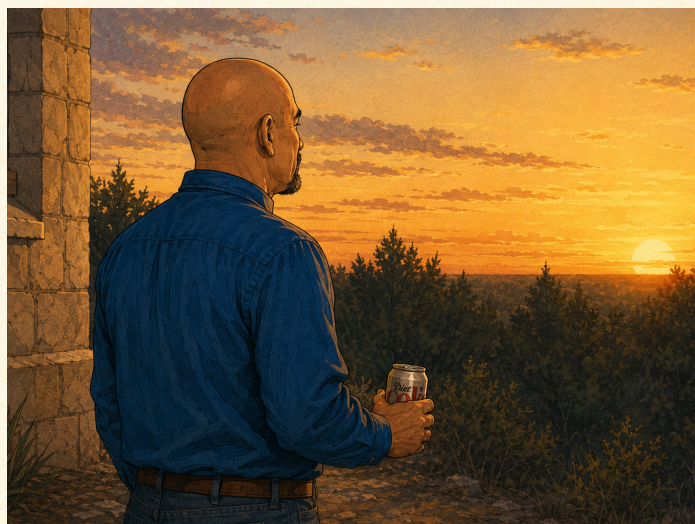
"You mean I could go to church, and sing, and do stuff, and all that, without believing in God?"

"Hell yes. I hope so, or else I better find another fuckin' job."

By this time I was dropping f-bombs right and left because I could get away with it. George loved it. It's not like he was a deacon or anything.

"You don't believe in God?"

"Well, I do now, mostly. Some days I think, Nah, there's no way there's a god. But I have this job, and I have sermons to preach, and then some family has a baby and suddenly the God idea is making sense again. It's complicated. Belief comes later for some people, for people like you and me. Or not at all.



"What would I do? How would I get started?"

"I don't know, I guess just come to church and sing."

Even back when I was a minister I never asked people to become Christians. If anything I would warn people off. I considered following Jesus to be a pretty stiff commitment, and I didn't sugar coat it. But If someone was seeking a spiritual path and wanted to journey with me, I was fine with that. I'd shoulder my pack, help get his adjusted, and we'd move on down the road together. I never gave two shits about making converts. That's wasn't my business. I would walk with people though, if they wanted.

That's really all church is about anyway. We're a bunch of rag-tag pilgrims sharing the road and taking turns shielding each other from the wind. Sometimes we carry each other's packs for a spell. We share maps and provisions and friendship. We serve God by serving each other.

It ain't no big deal, and it is a big deal, if you know what I mean.



George came to church every Sunday after that. He just listened at first. Later he prayed some. He loved to sing. George was 5'6" and weighed about 110 lbs., but he had the richest baritone voice you ever heard. Jesus, that guy could sing.

I wish you could see George the way I remember him. Black tennis shoes, faded jeans, and a flannel shirt with a tie. Sometimes suspenders too, I shit you not. Singing his heart out.

After awhile I noticed everyone wanted to sit near George so they could hear him sing. People stayed around after church to talk with him. He would sometimes stay late and help me put stuff away. That was George's spiritual program. Come. Listen. Sing. Pray. Help me put stuff away.

A visitor once grabbed me after church and said, "Who is that little man with the beautiful voice?"

"That's George."

"There's something almost saint-like about him."

"Yeah."

I don't know if it was because he was facing death, or because of all his new friends, or because God was working in his life, but there WAS something rather saint-like about George. It's hard to explain.

George did become a Christian. It just happened somewhere along the way. Somewhere along the way he made his peace with God. I'm not saying he always believed, but he

made peace. I don't know when and I don't mark that kind of thing on the calendar. He found what he needed.

You want to call it belief? Go ahead. I call it more than belief. I call it faith.

I baptized him in a swimming pool. The whole church turned out for the party. We had BBQ. After George came up out of the water, a lot of folks jumped in and went swimming.

That was a good day.



About six months after George was baptized, we needed to elect a new deacon. At our church, deacons are servants. They have no power. They look after the sick, greet people, help put stuff away, that kind of thing.

I got a shock when I started reading the ballots.

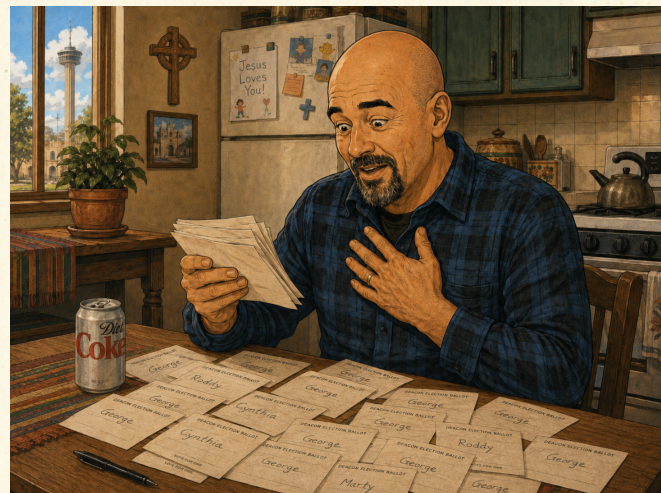
George

George

George

George

George



When I called him to ask if he would be our deacon, he was stunned. "Why the hell did they vote for me? All I ever do is sing and talk to people and put stuff away."

"I know. Apparently that's enough for them to get a sense of your soul," I said.

He shook his head, trying to figure it out. "What does this mean?"

I thought for a minute and said, "I think, George, it means that you matter to these people. I think it means they see something good in you. I think it means George has made a real difference at our church. And I can tell you there are no requirements for being a deacon beyond, you know, showing up, helping out, and putting chairs away."

And so he did those things faithfully, did George Swisher. He was our singing, chair putting away deacon, and remained so for the rest of his life.



BONUS! GEORGE THE BEGINNING EXTRA!

— ★ ★ MORE GOOD STUFF FROM GEORGE'S STORY! ★ —

THANKS FOR READING!
KEEP FAITH, KEEP
WONDER, AND KEEP
SHOWING UP. ♥

SUBWAY

TABLES & TRUTH

A FRIENDSHIP & THEOLOGY CLUB

Good conversations.
Better sandwiches.
Great friendship.
All are welcome!

NEXT MEETING:
After service. Same place.
Different questions.
Same grace.



**BIG QUESTIONS. SMALL TABLE.
ETERNAL FRIENDSHIPS.**

STAR-GAZER

JUNIOR PHYSICS KIT

Includes:

- ✓ Telescope
- ✓ Star Charts
- ✓ Notebook
- ✓ Wonder

"The heavens declare
the glory of God."
— Psalm 19:1



**GROW YOUR WONDER.
HONOR THE CREATOR.**

FOUNDATIONS

READERS CLUB

BIG IDEAS. FAR WORLDS.
DEEPER TRUTHS.

THIS MONTH:

- Future Empires
- Robot Ethics
- The Long View
- Human Hope



**READ.
THINK.
DISCOVER.
BELIEVE.**

FAITH ISN'T AFRAID OF THE FUTURE.

LOVE TO SING?

WE SAVE A SEAT FOR YOU!



**RAISE YOUR VOICE. LIFT YOUR HEART.
MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE!**

BACKYARD BAPTISM

WET. WONDERFUL. UNFORGETTABLE.



**NEW LIFE. BIG JOY.
BRING A TOWEL!**

DEACON ELECTION BALLOT

CHECK ONE (PRAY FULLY).

☐ Bob

☐ Harold

☒ George

He asked good
questions. We said
yes to the call!



**NOT BY RESUME.
BY GRACE.**  **ACTS 6:3**

PUT THINGS AWAY LIKE A CHAMP!

Chairs stacked.
Floor cleared.
Hearts ready.



**GOOD HELPER
DEACON IN TRAINING**

**SERVING IS STRENGTH.
VANITY'S THE HEAVY LIFT!**

KINDRED SPIRIT DETECTOR

Find friends who:

- ✓ Ask honest questions
- ✓ Love truth
- ✓ Enjoy sandwiches
- ✓ Like stars & stories
- ✓ Help put things away



BEEP! BEEP! FRIEND FOUND!
Ephesians 4:15

BE ENCOURAGED. BUILD EACH OTHER UP.

You Belong Here!

COME SING. COME LEARN.
COME AS YOU ARE.

Christ-centered.
People-loving.
Wonder-friendly.
Every Sunday.

SERVICE TIMES:
9:00am & 11:00am



WE SAVED A SEAT FOR YOU!

BIBLE-VERSE BANDAGES

For life's little scrapes
and big reminders.

Flexible faith.
Sticks with love.

Be strong and
of good courage.
— Joshua 1:9

Do everything
in love.
— 1 Cor. 16:14

HEALS? NO. HELPS? YES.
GOD'S WORD DOES BOTH. ♥

DEACON STARTER PACK

- ★ Listens well
- ★ Serves gladly
- ★ Prays daily
- ★ Laughs often
- ★ Keeps showing up



NOT PERFECT. WILLING. THAT'S ENOUGH.

CHURCH SUPPLY SPECIAL!

Flashlight
Hymnal
Snack for choir
Extra smile

ONLY \$19.95
(Priceless)



TOOLS FOR MINISTRY.
JOY INCLUDED.

★ COUPON ★

**ONE EXTRA
ENCOURAGEMENT
FREE** 

Give it. Get it.
Share it.

EXPIRES: NEVER

THANKS, FRIEND, FOR JOINING GEORGE ON THE JOURNEY. ★ STAY CURIOUS. STAY KIND. STAY FAITHFUL.