

# ***Robert Ashley***

I was a lost soul, but I didn't know it. I was introduced to Christianity when I was young. This changed my life, but I didn't take it seriously. Satan was trying to enter my life, and I started doing things which weren't good. I woke up, and I started going to church again. Satan tried to come back into my life, but I knew better and I refused to let him into my life.

I got into trouble later in life, and I asked myself what happened. I went to prison, and I didn't know what I was going to do when I got out of prison. I heard about Hand Up Ministries, so I applied at Hand Up, and I was accepted. I knew only one person at Hand Up when I arrived there. This was a person I had known in prison. I started attending church at Hand Up, but I also started attending church outside of Hand Up. I became a Christian again at Hand Up. I am Native American, and my tribe wants me to be involved in our cultural customs in the Native American church. The elders of that church have taken care of me spiritually.

Hand Up has been good for me, and I am honored to be part of Hand Up. I am thankful to Hand Up for taking me into this ministry and letting me be part of this wonderful setting. I now have a better outlook on life.

Robert Ashley

# ***Art Athens***

I was raised in a Christian home with Christian family members, but I started to stray from the Christian path in high school. This behavior continued in college, but it got worse after my first divorce. Making poor decisions in life can happen to anyone, but a lifestyle choice to drink, use drugs, and womanize can lead to more poor decisions than the average person would make. My decision to be with a woman at work one night was a poor choice, because we were seen by a minor. The girl told her mother, and her mother called the police. I was arrested and charged with a sex crime, and I was sentenced to two years of probation.

I had gotten away with many poor decisions in my life without getting caught. I thought this mistake was the beginning of the end. I was unsure of how to return to a wholesome life, but I knew it was going to take the power of God to do it. My sister told me about Hand Up Ministries, and she sent an application to me. I was scared of change, and I lied to her and told her I had sent the application. She called David Nichols to see if I had sent the application, and she learned I had never sent it. Her next call left no doubt that it was to be Hand Up or the graveyard if I kept on my path. I prayed, and I surrendered to God. I decided I would go to Hand Up.

When I arrived at Hand Up, all of my possessions were in a duffel bag. My father dropped me off at a trailer which was under repair, and I promised God I would do whatever it took to leave my old life behind. Good things began to happen almost immediately. The men here were inviting, and the staff gave me encouragement and direction. I was sober, and my mind began to clear. Daily prayer and reflection allowed me to make short term plans and goals. A job seemed just to appear. I moved to a better trailer, and I had two roommates who were Christians. They were both employed, and they were doing well on life. I wanted what these people had. Hand Up has given me a life and a hopeful future. I see God work every day, and I listen to Him.

Art Athens

# ***James Beardsley***

I was born in Maryland in 1978, but I grew up in Michigan. I was raised by my mother and my stepdad, and I had a mentally unstable older sister. I was a loner who had very few friends. We attended church, but not regularly. I accepted the Lord in 1989, but it took a long time for me to act like it. When I was a teen, I would ride my bike at 2:00 AM and talk to myself. I enjoyed coasting down a long, steep hill on my bike. I was expelled from school in ninth grade for creating a disturbance in class.

I stayed home after I was kicked out of school. I was lazy. I committed a crime in 1997, and I went to prison. I spent 11 years in prison. I was put in protective custody in prison, and I was in a cell by myself for 23 hours a day. I had plenty of time think about my past, and I came to understand the harm I had caused. I sought counseling and the help I needed to correct my behavior. After a few years, I had an opportunity to be released on parole, but I asked the parole board to not release me so I could complete my counseling. At this point, I was in general population. I read the Bible and attended chapel when I was in prison.

I was discharged from prison, and a year later I moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma to take care of my mom. She was dying of cancer, and she passed away in 2010. I plead guilty to a crime in 2011, and I was sentenced to 20 years of probation. My lawyer told me about Hand Up Ministries. Going to Hand Up was a condition of release for my probation.

Hand Up has given me a home, and Hand Up has given me a church. I have a few good friends here. I am grateful to God for providing this place for me and others in my situation, and I am also thankful to David Nichols for following God's will concerning Hand Up ministry.

James Beardsley

I was born in Oklahoma City in 1952. I was the youngest of seven children, and I was raised as a Roman Catholic. My father was a roofing contractor, and my mother stayed home and took care of the children and the house. I had a fairly normal fifties and sixties childhood. I liked Mighty Mouse, The Beverly Hillbillies, the Beatles, the Mamas and Papas, Aretha Franklin, the Blazers hockey team, OU football, and Marvel Comics. I have always believed in God, and I prayed every night before I went to sleep.

I started drinking alcohol when I was in high school, but I was more of a social drinker than a hardcore boozier. I started smoking pot at the end of my senior year of high school, and I became a chronic pot head during my sophomore year of college. I also took a lot of LSD during my sophomore year. I went from the dean's honor role to academic probation. Something very significant happened that academic year. I accepted the Lord.

I continued to attend Mass at a Catholic church. I knew the things I was doing were wrong, and I prayed to God that He would change me. I began studying the Bible during the summer before my senior year of college, and I had a fervent desire to do God's will. I was also restless. On Wednesday of the third week of my senior year (the day after my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday), I met a member of a small, radically fundamentalist Christian group which traveled around the country. They were camped by Lake Carl Blackwell. I quit college, and I joined the group. I left everything, including my family, my friends, and my fiancée. Most people would refer to this group as a cult. They didn't drink alcohol, nor did they smoke or use drugs. They didn't take medicine or go to doctors. They didn't even drink soda or coffee. There was no sex outside of marriage. The women wore long dresses, and they didn't cut their hair. The men kept their hair short, but they wore untrimmed beards. We didn't watch TV or listen to radio.

I spent 19 and one half years with this group (September, 1973 to April, 1993). I left the group because there were too many teachings with which I did not agree. For a few years, I continued to believe much of what they believed, and I lived in a tent in California. I got in touch with my family in May of 1997. Before I contacted them, they didn't know if I was dead or alive. They received me back with joy, and my brother invited me to stay at his house in Oklahoma City. I returned to Oklahoma, and I got a job.

I had a job, a bank account, a car, and an apartment, but I lost everything in 2002. I committed a crime, and I fled the state. The long arm of the law caught up with me in February, 2003, and I was incarcerated until December 30<sup>th</sup> of 2004. I was on probation until the end of 2012. My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries, and I arrived at Hand Up on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004. I started working at a very large laundry on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006, and I worked there for 11 years and four months. I worked until December of 2017, and then I retired and started drawing social security. I began working in the Hand Up office in January, 2018, and I also edit and type the resident testimonies which are included in the Hand Up newsletter.

I would have been homeless if Hand Up hadn't existed. I am grateful to David Nichols for creating a safe haven for the many people he has helped over the years. Of course, I am very, very thankful to Almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ, without whom we are nothing.

The Hand Up program is a blessing for those who wish to get their life on track and do what is right.

Chris Benson

# ***Paul Best***

I was born in Hialeah, Florida in 1949. When I was five, I went to live with a foster family on Long Island. My foster mom was afraid she would lose custody of me to my biological mom. My foster parents wanted to adopt me, but they would have had to involve my biological parents. My friends and I built a tree fort. My foster parents were Roman Catholic, and they raised me as a Catholic. I can't say they didn't have a Bible, but I don't remember seeing one. I didn't understand the Catholic Mass, because the liturgy was in Latin. During my senior year of high school, I dropped out of school before I was kicked out.

I went into the Marines when I was 18, and I went to Viet Nam in 1969. I was a radioman, and then I was trained to make maps, so I wasn't in combat. I went to Iowa after I left the Marines. I met a stripper in 1972, and we got married in Kansas. I went to truck driving school in Omaha, but I didn't finish. We moved back to Iowa, and we got divorced in 1975. I went to prison for bad checks in Iowa in 1976, and I spent 18 months in prison. I came to Oklahoma in 1984, and I lived with my ex-wife.

I became a Christian in 1984. I went to Dallas, and I got a job as a painter. I spent six years in Dallas. I started drinking again when I was in Dallas. I went to North Carolina, and I spent three years there. I came back to Oklahoma in 1994, and I have stayed in Oklahoma since then. I stayed with my daughter for a while when I returned to Oklahoma. I went to prison in 1998, and I got out of prison in 1999. In 2002, I was arrested for failure to attend the counseling class I was required to take. I was released from prison in 2004. I came to Hand Up Ministries in 2006.

Hand Up gave me a place to live. I worked for Hand Up off and on for two years, and I started drawing Social Security in 2007. I wanted to be a good Christian after I came to Hand Up.

Paul Best

# ***Joshua Bidwell***

My name is Joshua Bidwell, and I am 36 years old. I have been a resident of Hand Up Ministries since October, 2017. My grandmother introduced me to Jesus when I was very young. At the time, I didn't understand who He was. These were just cartoon videos I enjoyed watching.

My parents got a divorce when I was eight years old. My dad remarried, and my step-mom made us go to church. It was a Baptist church, but I didn't like going to church because it was boring. We went to church every Sunday, and that was my church life until my parents stopped making me go to church when I was a teenager. I still didn't understand who Jesus was. I just knew God was the guy who made everything, but He couldn't be seen. The Godhead, 3 in 1, was very confusing to me. How could one person be three different persons? I had friends who invited me to go to their church, but to me they were a bunch of "holy rollers."

As an adult, I worked hard and made an honest living. I believed I didn't need God because I was a good person. I met a woman, and we began to date. She was a Christian, and she invited me to go church with her. I told her I didn't want to go to church. I said I didn't need God and God wouldn't notice I wasn't at church, so she went to church by herself.

I had been addicted to pornography for many years, and I kept this secret from the woman I was dating. The pornography had polluted my mind, and I was so far away from God that I committed a crime. When I was in jail, I was angry at God, and I blamed Him. There was an older guy in my pod, and he asked if he could pray with me. We would talk, and I told my family I was a Christian. This was the beginning of my "jailhouse religion."

I was in the county jail for a few months before I went to the Lexington Assessment and Reception Center (LARC). There was nothing to do at LARC, so I started reading the Gideon Bible which was in my cell. It was a King James Version, and it was difficult for me to understand. I had to concentrate on the words. It was at this time that I started to draw near to God. I prayed a lot, and I wanted to know what was in the torn out parts of that Bible.

When I shipped from LARC, I went to a county overflow where I was able to get a complete Bible. I spent my time reading the rest of the Bible during the few months I was there. I was proud of myself because I had read the entire Bible. God had been working on me, and it started to show. I was shipped to Hodgen, and I soon became the chaplain's assistant. Hodgen had the Victory Bible Institute course. The course had a long waiting list, but I was able to get in right away because of my position. My relationship with God was getting stronger and stronger. A friend of mine was always on me about getting baptized, but I wasn't sure if I was ready. On Father's Day, 2012, I was ready, and I got baptized.

In 2017, as my sentence was coming to an end, I knew was going to have to find a place where a sex offender could live. My case manager told me about Hand Up. I applied to Hand Up, and I talked to the Hand Up office manager on the phone. I was accepted to come to Hand Up. I now have a blessed life and a good job. I have a place to live where I feel safe, and I know people here care for me. God has blessed me many times over. I have never had a chance to talk to David Nichols, but I know he is a good man with a godly heart. He helps a group of people with whom most others refuse to associate.

I am very thankful for Hand Up Ministries, because I would be homeless if it wasn't for Hand Up. This ministry helps me keep a good relationship with God by holding me accountable.

Joshua Bidwell

## ***Richard Bouchard***

I was born Miami, Florida in 1964. I have a younger sister. I was abused by my dad when I was a child. My parents didn't go to church. I went over a water fall when I was ten. I survived, and this was when I started believing in God and going to church. My parents divorced when I was 13. My dad bribed me to live with him after the divorce, but the bribes were empty promises. I left him when I was 16, and I came to Oklahoma to live with my mom.

I started high school in Altus, but I was expelled from school for truancy. I got a job working at Long John Silvers. I had gotten into trouble for hot checks, and I had to pay the cost of the checks. I started drinking when I was 16, and I spent a lot of money on alcohol. I got married to a 24 year old woman when I was 18. She introduced me to marijuana. I started using cocaine when I was 21. I broke into a vocational technical school, and I stole typewriters. My wife and I pawned the typewriters, but the typewriters had something like "property of vo-tech" written on the side. We were arrested. We both got probation. Two years later, I went to prison for burglary. I was trying to support my crack habit.

I got out of prison, and I moved in with a woman. I was shooting cocaine, and I stole money from her to support my habit. I went back to prison for trafficking cocaine. I got out of prison, but I went back for something else. I came to Hand Up Ministries in 2016. I went to the Chandler location, but my probation officer had me arrested for a probation violation. I came back to Hand Up after I was released from prison.

Hand Up has given me freedom from drugs and alcohol. I have gotten closer to the Lord since my arrival at Hand Up. God has done much for me. I was hit by a bus once when I drunk. I thank God for life.

Richard Bouchard



# ***Marshall Brown***

My name is Marshall Brown, and I am 46 years old. I was born in 1972. My father was an agnostic, and my mother was a Pentecostal. I went into foster care shortly after my parents divorced. This was because my mother and my new stepdad abused my sister and me. I was sent to live with my biological father at the age of five.

God was occasionally mentioned in my dad's house, but only as an issue, not as a person. My dad's outlook was based on logic and the reasoning of man. I went back to my biological mother when I was 15 years old, and it immediately became apparent to me why she lost custody of me when I was three. She was religious, but her religious activities only served to mask her behaviors and ease her conscience. My mom was a poster child for hypocrisy.

I spent three years moving in and out of my mom's house. I started drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. These things made me feel better, and they gave me the deceptive sense of being in control of my life. I got married shortly before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was so I could stop the back and forth with my mom. My marriage was miserable. My wife was like a girl in a woman's body. I didn't even like her.

Initially, my marriage served the purpose of anchoring me to some semblance of normalcy while giving me responsibilities. This gave me a sense of control of my own life, which had always been denied to me by my parents and DHS. I learned that the woman I had married was not at all like she had presented herself to be before our wedding, but I settled into my expected role as a husband.

When I was 18, I had yet another fight with my mother, which resulted in my mother putting false charges of child molestation on me. This pressure plagued my life and my marriage. I left Washington for two years, and my marriage ended after five years. I committed a real sex offense in Oklahoma when I was 22, and I served 15 and one half years in prison. God called on me after I had been in prison for three years, but I balked at his call. I obeyed the call one and one half years later, and I haven't looked back.

I came to Hand Up Ministries in early 2013. Hand Up has provided me with a safe, secure environment in which to rebuild my life and work for a brighter future. Hand up is a place for people who genuinely want to serve others. Hand Up isn't a place for posers and players.

Marshall Brown

# ***Daniel Byrd***

I was born in Dallas in 1979. My mom left when I was five, and I was raised by my mom's boyfriend. He adopted me when I was in sixth grade, and I have no siblings. I had a middle class upbringing. He was great dad, but I was a troublemaker. I had behavior issues, and I started doing drugs when I was 15. I didn't stop using drugs till I was 33. I was arrested my junior high school. My friend and I stole an 18 wheel truck and drove it into the side of a 7-Eleven. I got my GED in juvenile prison (I have three GEDs).

I moved to Oklahoma after I got out of juvenile prison. I got kicked out of high school, and I joined a carnival. I had sex with an underage girl when I was 21, and I got arrested in Indiana. I spent a year in prison, and I moved to Alabama after I got out of prison. My mom lived there. All I did was get high for the next 20 years. I worked in a shipyard, but I went to prison for meth in 2012.

I didn't have place to go when I got out of prison. I applied to Hand Up Ministries. I was accepted, but they didn't have a bed at the time. I lived in a motel in Mobile for five months. The Catholic Church paid for the first month, and my dad paid for the other four months. I came to Hand Up in April, 2017. Everything has gone great since I came to Hand Up. I have a good job, and I am sober. I pray every day, and I thank God for helping me. I would be homeless in Alabama if Hand Up hadn't helped me.

Daniel Byrd

# ***Calvin Randolph***

My childhood was just fine. I lived with my grandparents and my mom. They did a great job with me, and I'm proud of them. I was brought up in church from an early age. Going to church was like eating. We had to feed the spiritual body. My teenage years were fun. I played sports, and I loved school. I didn't get into trouble. I had to deal with segregation. I lived in Virginia, and segregation was still in effect at that time. Family was what kept us together. If it wasn't for my family, I would have gotten into a lot of trouble. Everyone was related to everyone on that street, and the entire neighborhood would know if you got into trouble. If you got into trouble, you might get two spankings before you got home.

I grew up knowing the Lord, but He wasn't number one in my life after I left home. I joined the Army, and I went to college after I left the Army. I played football and ran track in college. I returned home, where I got into trouble with the law. I went downhill after that. I went to prison, and I had a lot of time to think. I had made the Lord number two in my life, and that was why things had fallen apart. Prison put me back on track with the Lord.

I heard some people talking about Hand Up Ministries when I was at the probation office, and I called Hand Up the next day. They called me back, and here I am. I take one day at a time. I have family, which is great. Compared to where I came from, life is great. Hand Up will give you a guideline and help you get your life back. After that, it is up to you. One thing God has done for me in my 67 years is giving a choice to walk with Him or go the other way.

Calvin Randolph

# ***Danny Carmichael***

I was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma in 1977, and I was raised in Haskell, Oklahoma. I grew up in a twisted family. My uncle and my cousin raped my mom. My uncle flirted with every woman who came near him. We moved from Haskell to Muskogee after third grade. We moved back to Haskell after my sophomore year, and I finished high school in Haskell. I graduated in 1997, and I joined the Army National Guard.

I drank heavily, and I smoked like a freight train (cigarettes and weed). I had a gambling problem, and I was in bad shape. I got baptized at a Baptist church in Muskogee in 1999 or 2000. I had already quit smoking and drinking, but I met Christians who smoked and drank, so I started doing both of those things again. I didn't really know the Lord at that time, even though I had accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior.

I met a woman in 2001. We got married, and we had a daughter in 2002. Our daughter was diagnosed with autism. I was working at a McDonald's in Choteau in August, 2014, and after this I got arrested. I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior again when I was in the county jail. My life began to change at that time. One of my cellmates told me about Hand Up Ministries. He said Hand Up was a good place to go. I heard more about Hand Up when I was in prison. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. I quit smoking when I was in prison. I had already quit smoking and gambling. I stayed in the Word, prayed, and attended church when I was in prison. I was baptized a week before I left prison.

I am now at Hand Up, and I will soon have a job. I have Christian brothers with whom I can socialize. I am thankful to Hand Up for providing this for me. Hand Up goes all out to help felons in need of help. God was the one who made it all happen for everyone. If it wasn't for Him, we would have nothing. I thank God first, and I thank Hand Up for all they have done for me. God bless you all.

Danny Carmichael

## ***Doug Carnes***

I was raised in a Christian home. We went to church every Sunday and every Wednesday. I liked going to church until I started losing my hearing. My parents sent me to the Oklahoma School for the Deaf in Sulphur, Oklahoma. My twin brother, who was totally deaf, was already there. He was glad I came there. My brother and I had always gone to church together, and I only saw him in the summers during his first two years at the school in Sulphur.

When I arrived at the school, I didn't know which church I should attend. I tried different churches during my first year, and I finally picked a church I liked. That church also had a congregation in Oklahoma City, plus they had a summer camp. I stayed with that church till I graduated.

I got married after I graduated. I helped at my church, and I started helping with the offering. Later, I became the church treasurer and did the bookkeeping. I also mowed the lawn and built cabinets and countertops. I went astray because I associated with people who didn't go to church, and I committed a crime and went to prison.

My counselor told me about Hand Up Ministries. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. I want to walk the straight and narrow path and not have any more victims. Hand Up has given me a place to live and an opportunity to serve the Lord. God watched over me when I was in prison. I could have died when I lost a lot of blood. This happened again after I came to Hand Up. I have been in and out of the hospital during my time at Hand Up, and God has answered my prayers. I attend a church for the deaf, and I also attend church at Hand Up. I will serve the Lord till the day I die.

Doug Carnes

# ***Derek Carney***

I was born in Mustang, Oklahoma, but we moved to Oklahoma City soon after I was born. My parents divorced shortly after I was born. I was bullied in school because of my speech impediment and my struggle with math and other subjects. In sixth grade, I was taken out of school and home schooled. I went back to regular school in ninth grade. I reconnected with my dad in my teen years, and I moved in with my sister in Ardmore. I was bullied in school in Ardmore, and I was sent to the Chickasaw Children's Village in Kingston, Oklahoma.

I was raised by my mom's side of the family, but later I was raised by my dad's side of the family. I spent most of my early adult life in prison (ages 18 to 26). I grew up in the Church of Christ, but I didn't know the Lord. I was going through the motions. I went through personal tragedies in my teen years. My grandmother died, and I was abused by a family friend. I felt God's presence in my life, even when things were bad. I was mad at God for letting these things happen. My mom always said God had plan for all of us.

My crime changed my life and the life of those around me. Prison made me rethink my life. It also helped me understand the importance of family. I felt God's hand upon me in prison. I learned about Hand Up Ministries in prison. My life now is vastly different than the life I had before prison. I have friends who are part of my support system. Hand Up has given me a stable place to live and an opportunity to begin anew. I am blessed to be a part of Hand Up.

Derek Carney

# ***Robert Carpenter***

My name is Robert Alan Carpenter, and I am 54 years old. My earliest childhood memory is of the time I accidentally started a living room fire with kitchen matches. This happened in Kileen, Texas. After the fire incident, I was sent to live with my father in McCloud, Oklahoma. I started school in McCloud. I got along fairly well with my brothers. My father took us to church, and we regularly read the Bible while we sat around the kitchen table. This is how I learned about our Lord Jesus.

I moved to my mother's house in Channelview, Texas when I was ten. I wanted to be there at the time, but it was there that I began to go astray from the Lord. I learned about drinking, marijuana, and girls. My stepdad was suffering from the after effects of his experience in Viet Nam. All of these things led me further away from the Lord. I started making wrong choices, and this led to more wrong choices. My mother sent me back to my dad when I was 14.

My dad tried to get me back on the right track. I knew what the right path was, but the devil was deceiving me. I went down a path of torment and destruction. I was using alcohol and marijuana, and this led to other drugs when I was an adult. I was committing felonies on a regular basis, and this eventually led to a very long prison sentence. Prison led me back to the Lord and a relationship with my God.

I learned about Hand Up Ministries from former Hand Up residents who returned to prison. They couldn't abide by the structured system we all need. Hand Up has afforded me the opportunity to be released from prison without becoming homeless. Hand Up has provided the structure I need, and God has given me the opportunity to become a spiritual person. I am looking forward to the kingdom of God.

Robert Carpenter

# ***Tommy Coddington***

I was born in Oklahoma City in 1957. I was the third of nine kids. My dad worked at the Dayton tire plant. My parents divorced when I was young, and I lived with my dad after the divorce. I lived with my mom at a later time. I went to a Baptist church with my grandmother, and I played on their softball team. I was always getting into trouble when I was in school, and I got into fights. I played football in junior high school, but I dropped out of school in seventh grade. I went to work for my brother-in-law's brother after I quit school. He was a tree trimmer, and trimming trees is the only job I have ever had.

I was a trouble maker when I was a teenager. I drank and engaged in petty theft. I hung out in bars when I was in my twenties. I picked up girls, but I never got married. My friends and I would steal lumber from lumber yards, and I went to prison for theft when I was 18. I spent one year in prison. My mom moved to California when I was 22, and I moved with her. I met a woman in California when I was 28. She had three kids, and we moved in together. I stopped using drugs when I began living with her, and I stayed off drugs for nine years. We moved to Chicago, and I went into tree trimming business with a man who turned out to be a drug dealer. I got strung out on drugs, and I left the woman and returned to Oklahoma.

I was still using drugs after I returned to Oklahoma, and I went to prison for second degree burglary. I was in prison for three years. I didn't get into trouble for a few years, but I eventually went back to prison for burglary again. I did another three years in prison. I got out and did tree work until I went back to prison for burglary. I served four years in prison that time. I was still doing drugs, and I was arrested for first degree robbery. I was sentenced to 40 years, but only served 27 years.

I went to Kingston, Oklahoma to run off some people who were at my granddaughter's house. I was falsely accused of a sex crime, and I spent four years in prison. I came to Hand Up in March, 2019 after I got out of prison. I stay out of trouble now. I quit drugs and drinking. I have had three heart attacks since I came to Hand Up. Doctors put two stints in my heart. My heart almost stopped after that, and I spent five days in the hospital. I had gone to the hospital for a COVID test, and they told me my heart was about to stop.

I am a different person now, and my family has noticed that I have changed for the better. I asked God into life, and I don't want to do the things I used to do. The Hand Up church service and the Genesis One meetings have helped me to change for the better.

Tommy Coddington



## ***Otis Cole***

I grew up with a loving mother and an abusive father. My father would get drunk and beat up on me and my mom. He was okay when he wasn't drinking. My mother was loving and caring. My parents took me to church when I was nine years old. We all got saved. My dad stopped drinking, and he became a preacher. Our lives changed for the better, but, when I was 14 years old, we stopped going to church. My dad started drinking again, and the abuse started again. My parents divorced. I started drinking and doing drugs when I was 14, and I gave up on God.

I married at the age of 20, but I continued to drink and use drugs. We had three children, and we divorced when I was 33. I had a breakdown, and I attempted suicide for the first time. God saved me from death. I went to prison when I was 34 years old. I found God again in prison. I was 36 years old, and I served Him until I was 45. My mother passed away when I was in prison. I got mad, and I blamed God for not answering my prayers and allowing my mother to die.

I turned my back on God, and I began to use drugs again in prison. I left prison after 16 years and nine months of incarceration. I hit the street, and I did more and more drugs. I also started drinking again. I tried to commit suicide seven more times, but each time God saved me. I was homeless for eight long years. I was admitted to a mental hospital when I was 58 years old. I was having problems with anxiety, panic attacks, depression, no sleep, and nightmares. My hospital counselor told me about Hand Up Ministries. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted.

I have been at Hand Up for about two months. I have a home, and I am alcohol and drug free. I have God in my life again, and I am building up the loving relationship I once had with God. I still have problems, but daily I am growing stronger in all ways. One day at a time. God and Hand Up have given me back the life I tried to take away so many times. If it wasn't for the grace of God, and the love and concern of Hand Up, I wouldn't be alive now. Praise God.

Otis Cole

# ***Mike Crockford***

My mother was 17 years old when she gave birth to me in 1984. I never knew my father. My mother was arrested for drugs when I was eight years old, and I was placed in a foster home where I was physically and sexually abused for over 18 months. When I was ten, I was admitted to the hospital with a broken collar bone, a shattered eye socket, and a broken finger. Charges were brought against my foster parents, and one of them went to prison.

I was placed with an amazing couple who introduced me to God. They adopted me when I was 12. They took me to church twice a week. I loved what I heard at church, and I loved going to church. I did this for three years. I tried meth for the first time when I was 15, and it changed my life forever. I started getting high, and then I started drinking. I dropped out of school, and I forgot about God.

When I was 18, my parents threw me out because I was out of control. I bounced around from couch to couch, sleeping wherever I could. I started cooking meth, and I also began committing crime after crime. I would steal five cars in a week, and I was also committing robberies (both residential and commercial). There was a darker evil living inside of me, and, because of this, I was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2011.

Prison saved my life. It allowed me to slow down and take stock of my life. I began to address all of my issues. Prison allowed me to find God again. I began to realize how difficult it was going to be for me to go back into society with my kind of record. There were many requirements I had to meet. Both of my parents had passed away while I was incarcerated, so I had no kind of support whatsoever. My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries. He gave me an application to Hand Up, and I was accepted three weeks after I turned it in to Hand Up.

I now reside at Hand Up, and I am working a full time job. I go to church twice a week, and I am strengthening my relationship with God. Hand Up has given me a chance when no one else would. God has stood by my side through everything. He loves me when I am at my worst and my best.

Mike Crockford

# ***Dallas Johnson***

My childhood was very amazing. I had very good parents who cared for me and my two younger brothers. We did family stuff like game night, movie night, and family shows. My parents played hide and seek with us. I had ADHD, which caused me to act out and be out of control. I fought a lot with other kids, but I had a many friends. I played sports. My favorite sport was football.

I still fought a lot in my teen years. I still played sports, but I also started using drugs and drinking. I partied with my older friends, and I stole stuff. I didn't care about anything. My younger brother went to juvenile prison, and I straightened up and focused on football after that. I still smoked weed and drank, and I fought with my parents.

I went to college to play football, but I dropped out after one semester. I went to work in the oil field. My relationship with my parents improved after I left home. I met a woman who was seven years older than me. Our relationship was good at first, but she became mean and abusive. She stabbed me and hit me, and she accused me of cheating on her. I moved in with my parents when I was 24 years old, and I lived with them for about six months. I moved in with a woman, but I cheated on her. We hardly ever fought, and I stayed sober for a long time. We got married, and I continued to cheat on her.

I committed my crime in 2017, and I spent three years in prison. My relationship with God became stronger in prison. After I left prison, my therapist told me about Hand Up Ministries, and I came to Hand Up a few days later. My life now is great. Thanks to Hand Up, I have a roof over my head and an amazing job. Hand Up took me in when I had no place else to go. There are good people at Hand Up, and it is a drug free environment. God has done much for me. I thought my life was over when I went to prison, but God hasn't failed me. He forgave me for my bad choices, and He gave me a second chance in life.

Dallas Johnson

## ***Daniel Dage***

I was born and raised in a small town in Oklahoma, as were my parents and grandparents. My brother and I were raised in a strong Christian environment. When I was in high school in the seventies, my friends and I started smoking pot, and I went to my first strip club before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. I started drinking and doing hard drugs when I was in college.

As I grew older, I strayed further and further from Christianity. For forty years, I worked hard and was gainfully employed. I had an abundance of friends, and I obtained all of the things a person strives for in life: houses, a lake cabin, boats, and nice vehicles. My parents and my brother passed away, and, after a few hard years, I found myself in jail with nothing and nobody. I was given a lengthy prison sentence, and I was shipped to the toughest prison in Oklahoma.

Shortly after arriving at prison, a very large man approached me and asked if I wanted to pray with him. After a couple of weeks of praying and rediscovering the Bible, I gave my life to Christ and I was born again. Almost immediately, the Lord began bestowing blessing after blessing upon me. My conviction was overturned on appeal, and I was released after accepting a plea bargain. Shortly before I was released, I heard of a place called Hand Up Ministries. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. Four days after my release, I was told I had been gotten a job.

As I continue to walk with Christ, my situation improves daily. Although I have very little, I am happier than I have ever been in my life.

Daniel Dage

# ***Kenneth Day***

I was raised in Dallas and Pensacola as a small child. I can't remember much about them, because I was too young. I have a memory of getting candy bars out of a grocery store without paying for them. My mom made me return them and apologize. It was humiliating, but I learned it is better to confront situations head on. My mother was injured in a car wreck, and this caused her back to hurt constantly. She took pain medication until she died.

My father worked three jobs, and he still does not speak very often. He was not a large part of my life when I was growing up, but he became more of a part of my life when I was an adult. My parents were not very religious, but I found my way into a relationship with God when I was 12 years old. I started reading the Bible and going to church with my friends. I fell away from God, and I started using drugs and partying. I did this until my children were born when I was 19. By the age of 22, I was raising them by myself, because their mother left. We went to Life Church, and I became closer to God than ever before. I was arrested in 2007, and I went to prison.

In prison, I took Victory Bible College classes, and I graduated. I was baptized and redeemed. I heard about Hand Up Ministries when I was in prison. I was told it was the only place which would help sex offenders get on their feet. I was homeless when I got out of prison, and I would still be homeless if it wasn't for Hand Up and my relationship with God. As it is, I will have a job soon. With a safe place to live and God directing my path, the future looks good.

Kenneth Day

## ***Delbert Luper***

My life started in 1961 in a small town in northwest Arkansas. Life seemed to be great, but, as time went on, my family went downhill. By the time I was 16, we lived in Kansas, Oklahoma, a very small town where life was like country living. I bought my first gun for my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I thought I was a great hunter. Two months after I bought the gun, my father used it to kill himself in our living room. I ran into the front room to find my father with a gunshot wound in his chest. He was dying in front of me. My world was never the same after that.

I moved around a lot, and I joined the Navy. I could never find peace in life again. I went back to Kansas, Oklahoma in 1997. I had a wife and one kid. A few years later, I committed some of the worst crimes, and I was sentenced to 35 years in prison. I stayed busy in prison by working and learning to play music. I also joined the church. After I had been in prison for a few years, I was blessed when my sentence was reduced to 20 years. I could see daylight.

I always followed the rules in prison. I tried to learn about myself, but I mainly tried to learn about the Lord. I earned my Class 1 boiler license, and I received a license to run my own boiler business. I thought I had it made for my release from prison, but I was surprised to learn that no one would hire me because of my charges. I went to Hand Up Ministries when I left prison. Hand Up is a blessing.

Hand Up has given me a stable place to live, and the staff helped me with all of my probation paperwork. I have a place to grow not only as a person, but to grow spiritually as well. I am getting to know God. If more people had the opportunity I have been given here at Hand Up, it could really make a big difference in our society, as well as leading more people to Christ. I thank Hand Up for all they have done for me, and I pray for a long lasting relationship here.

Delbert Luper

# *Joseph Dodge*

I was born in Las Vegas in December of 1992, and I am the youngest of four children. We moved to Oklahoma eight months after I was born. My parents didn't go to church. I went to a Baptist church with my grandmother, and this is how I was introduced to Christianity. As a child, I didn't take my faith too seriously, but a friend invited me to church in high school. I really got into this church, and I was truly seeking the Lord. However, this church's legalism affected my relationship with God. I had bitterness toward my family, and this affected my relationship with members of the church. I began to withdraw and isolate myself, but I was still participating in church activities.

I wanted to surrender myself completely to the Lord, but I was still holding onto hurts and pains. I wasn't studying the Bible daily, nor was I praying like I should. I was just going through the motions, and I began making bad decisions. I felt condemnation and shame all of the time. All of this emotional turmoil and my struggle with lust led to me committing my crime.

I turned myself into the police, which is what my pastor recommended. I spent five days in the county jail, and then I bonded out of jail. I fought my case for a year and a half. I took a blind plea, and I received a sentence of five years in prison and fifteen years of probation. I started attending a Bible study in prison, and my whole view on Christianity transformed. I began to see my identity in Christ and know I am forgiven. My relationship with God found depth.

My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries, and I came to Hand Up immediately after I left prison. I am grateful for a place to live, and I am grateful for the strong, lifelong friendships I have made here. I appreciate the church services and the fellowship with the men here. I have grown in God at Hand Up. The church services and the godly leadership have helped me in my relationship with God. I have had the same job for two years, and I was able to save money for a car. I participate in the worship team at Hand Up, and I have twice gone to Arkansas to perform praise music and testify at the church pastored by David Nichols' brother. There are many challenges ahead, but I know with accountability and faith I will be alright. I thank God for everything. He will see me through it all. Thank you.

Joseph Dodge

# ***Donald Stevens***

I was the oldest of six kids, and I grew up in a good Christian home. My mother homeschooled us until she thought we were ready to attend public school. We went to church as a family every Sunday. We attended the First Baptist Church in Frederick, Oklahoma, where I was baptized when I was nine years old. That was when I became a Christian. My parents gave a Bible to me for my next birthday, and I read the entire Bible. My favorite book was Revelation, and I remember looking forward to seeing Jesus return.

I was a quiet teenager. I didn't get into much trouble, though I often didn't do my homework. When I was 16, my dad got me a job at the same grocery store where he worked. That was my first job. I worked there until I left for college in 2005. I didn't take my Bible with me when I went to college. I thought I had outgrown religion. I thought I was too smart for it. If you had asked me back then, I would have said there was no need for religion.

After I received my college degree, I moved around from place to place, taking whatever jobs I could find. I went to Oregon, where I had a nice car, a house, and a great job. I felt like I had it all. I believed there wasn't any need for God in my life. Then, I lost my mind. I began hallucinating and panicking, and I drove to Missouri, where I went to a mental hospital. My parents brought me home, but I was unstable, and they kicked me out of the house.

I stole some food, and I was accused of assault. I was arrested and went to jail. My mother heard about Hand Up Ministries, and she brought me to Hand Up. I found a place of refuge at Hand Up when I had no place else to go. I now have a job as a gate guard at Hand Up. I believe God gave me schizophrenia in order to teach me to be humble and lead me to Hand Up. Through it all, He has kept me alive and healthy, which is a wonderful thing. I am truly grateful for Hand Up, and I am blessed to be here.

Donald Stevens



# ***Donald Young***

I was severely abused by my mother when I was a child. She beat me with various objects, and she almost killed me with a toilet plunger when I was nine years old. I didn't have many friends, and I wasn't allowed to date when I was a teenager. I was allowed to work, but the money either went into her pocket or was used to buy my school clothes.

My adult life was rough. I was married for nine years, and my wife and I had three daughters. She cheated on me, so I didn't know if the girls were mine. My wife and I eventually divorced. I knew of God when I was growing up, but I didn't give myself to Christ until just before I went to jail in Oregon in 2003. This was the first time I went to prison. I studied the Bible in prison. Later, I left the grace of God for many years, and I didn't return to the Lord until I met my last wife.

God was giving me advice, but I started following myself again. I stayed clean and sober for 23 years, but I started drinking and doing drugs again. I moved to Oklahoma. My wife betrayed me in 2020, and I went to prison after that. I learned about Hand Up Ministries from a case worker in prison. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted.

My life now is awesome. Hand Up has given me a place to live and a second chance. God has shown me love and forgiveness, and I never want to turn my back on Him again.

Donald Young

# ***Douglas Chaney***

I was born in Claremore, Oklahoma on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1975. My father was in the construction business, and my mother was a beautician. I had an ordinary childhood. We were middle class. We had a nice four bedroom home with a swimming pool, plus nice clothes and toys. This lasted till I was nine. I didn't know my father was an alcoholic. It didn't occur to me at the time that sharing a beer with him was wrong. It was just what we did. I loved him, but he was gone for good when my parents divorced.

My mother worked hard, and she provided us with the things we needed. She eventually remarried, and my step-dad did a good job of making sure we were happy. I was an athlete in school, and I made decent grades and went to parties. I went to college after high school. I was always missing God. I occasionally went to church with my friends, but my family never talked about God.

I drank a lot when I was in my twenties. I had a very good job, and I made a lot of money. I got married, and I stopped drinking for ten years. Life was good. We adopted four kids, and things were good. I started drinking again after 12 years of marriage, and I also started having extramarital affairs. We got divorced, and I stopped caring. I was working and drinking, but I wasn't living.

I didn't know Christ at all when I was growing up. I knew of Him, but I never took the step. I got saved early in my marriage, but I really didn't have faith. I feel like I truly came to the Lord while I was in a program at John 3:16 Mission with a pastor named Steve Whitaker. We had daily Bible studies, and I felt like I had finally found what I was searching for. I started drinking again, and I allowed the devil to lead me astray.

I was in a drunken haze one weekend, and I put myself in a bad situation which led to me being arrested and sent to prison. My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries. I am very thankful God directed me to Hand Up. I am sober and I am working. I am living how Christ wants me to live. Hand Up helped me find a job, and Hand Up provided clothes, food, and transportation.

God has changed me, and He has filled a hole in my life.

Douglas Chaney

## ***Joshua Dubois***

I was born in 1981. My mother was very young when my sister and I were born. My mom worked three jobs, and my dad worked construction his whole life. My mom went to church, but my dad didn't go to church. I don't remember much about my childhood.

I was raised going to church, but I never lived a Christian life. I became rebellious when I started driving at age 16. I didn't do drugs, but I drank and partied with girls. I started living with women after I graduated from high school. I started looking at pornography when I was ten, and I became hooked on porn. The addiction became worse as I got older. I regret that I was introduced to porn at such an early age, and I still struggle to this day.

I have always prayed to God to help me with my struggles. My addiction caused me to go to prison. After I had been in prison for six years, I prayed to God and begged Him to help me with the thoughts which led me to prison. One morning I realized God had taken those thoughts away, and I felt a big burden had been lifted off of me.

I heard about Hand Up Ministries about a month before I discharged from prison. At first, I was skeptical, because I heard about all of Hand Up's rules. I now feel truly blessed to be at Hand Up. My life changed before I came to Hand Up, and now I feel like I have a purpose to help people with their struggles. I am thankful for what I have learned at Hand Up. I know God still has a plan for my life. I thankful for what God has done for me.

Joshua Dubois

# ***Terry Estes***

I was born in Pennsylvania, and I moved to Oklahoma when I was two years old. I graduated from high school in Oklahoma. I went to church when I was younger, and I was in a group for young boys called Royal Rangers. I knew of the Lord, but I actually didn't know the Lord. I grew distant from the Lord when I was a teenager, and I started doing things I shouldn't have been doing. I was hanging out with the wrong people.

I was admitted to a mental hospital because of my anger and ADHD, but it didn't help. I got married right after high school. I did it to disobey my dad, and it was a big mistake. The Lord wasn't in my life or hers. My family was close to the Lord, and they went to church often. My dad is still involved in prison ministry. My adult life was very different from my teen life. I had a son and a daughter. My son is 17, and my daughter is 14. I love my kids with all of my heart.

A fellow inmate told me about Hand Up Ministries. I was accepted to Hand Up, and my now is good. I have a job at a restaurant. I have worked there for three months. I like my job. I have friends at work and friends at Hand Up. I like the environment at Hand Up, and I like meeting new people and interesting people here. Hand Up gave me a place to live so I wouldn't be homeless.

God has done a lot for me. He kept me safe when I had surgery, and he healed me of having seizures. I haven't had a seizure since 2014. My thyroid was removed because it was cancerous. I have to take medication, but I would rather take medication than have cancer.

I am a changed man, and I have my head on straight. With the Lord's help, I will not go back to prison. I appreciate the Hand Up church service and the Genesis 1 group.

Terry Estes

# ***Anthony Evans***

My childhood was a little rough. I didn't have a father most of the time. He was on drugs, and he was often in trouble with the law. He went to prison. My mom kept me away from my dad for fear of putting me at risk of using drugs or worse. I was abused by my dad when I was five or six. This might be why my mom kept me from him.

When I was 12, my grandma had a little diner in the small town where we lived. My family and friends worked there. We had our ups and downs, as any family owned diner would. I was an outcast as a teen, and I didn't have many friends (maybe five). I worked, and I bought my own school supplies and clothes. I grew up fast, not really being a kid. I didn't know it would hurt me in the long run.

My father reached out to me when I was 18 years old. He had been out of prison for two years. We talked about everything, including the abuse I suffered as a child. I got married shortly after that, but the marriage only lasted six months. I moved to Wichita Falls from Abilene. Most of my family lived there, and I lived with my mom for two months. I worked all kinds of jobs. I had heart attack when I was 23.

I grew up knowing the Lord. I went to Bible study courses when I was little. I memorized the Ten Commandments, and I had a wonderful time doing it. As we moved around during most of my childhood, it became harder to stay focused. I lived in fear of moving again and again, and I eventually stopped going to church. I started hanging out with the wrong people, and I began smoking marijuana, taking opiates, and drinking alcohol. I was working a dead end job when I was 24, and I was unhappy with my life. I woke up during that time, and I heard a voice in my head. I thought I was crazy, but I quit everything in one day. Deep down, I was tired, and I asked the Lord to take it all away. I didn't want to be that person. God answered my plea for help, and I have been grateful since then. I was blessed with a handsome little boy.

Committing my crime was the biggest mistake of my life. It changed my life forever. God had a plan for me, and going to prison was part of it. Prison got my life back on track. Prison humbled me. I am 29 now, but my mind is trying to be a teenager. This is because I didn't have a normal teenage life. Hand Up gave me a place to live as I try to become a respectful citizen.

Anthony Evans

## ***Matt Evans***

My family took me to church when I was a kid. I didn't mind going to church, because I got to dress up. I always enjoyed dressing up. I also got to hang out with my friends, but that was all church was to me. It was never about God. As I got older, I thought to myself my family doesn't go to church, so why should I? I stopped going to church.

Shortly after this, I started smoking pot and drinking alcohol. It got so bad that I couldn't function if I didn't have something in my system. My life was starting to spiral out of control. This was when I went to prison. I spent ten years, two months, and ten days in prison. During that time, I explored alternate religions. I was even a pagan high priest. Nothing seemed to work, but then a friend invited me to go to a Bible study. I wasn't convinced, so researched the archaeology and apologetics behind it to prove it was false, but, to my surprise, it was true. I decided to turn my life over to God.

Some friends told me about Hand Up Ministries, and I applied to Hand Up and was accepted. I was amazed at the love and support everyone gave me. God has provided me with a good job and people who care about me and help me stay out of prison. Hand Up is a huge blessing in my life, and I don't know what I would do without them.

Matt Evans

# ***Stephen Farley***

My childhood was chaotic. My parents broke up when I was in kindergarten, and I was in the custody of my father for a few years. He was an alcoholic. I don't remember a time when he didn't have a beer in his hand. I had to take care of my younger brother, because my dad wouldn't take care of us. Our dad had women coming over constantly, but he never had a stable and lasting relationship. My mother won custody of us when I was in fifth grade. That was when I could finally be a kid and enjoy life.

My mother took great care of us. She was a hard working single mother, and she loved us unconditionally. I got a job at McDonald's when I was 16. I worked with my grandfather during the summer doing roofing and installing siding. My grandfather taught me the value of hard work and responsibility.

After I graduated from high school, I moved to Oklahoma City to find a good job. I met my daughter's mother in Oklahoma City. When we had been together two years, our daughter was born. We broke up when our daughter was six months old. I spent most of my time away from work taking care of my daughter. I had her most of the time, so I didn't have free time to try to find a relationship. This led me down a dark spiral, and I made bad choices. These bad choices led to me being incarcerated.

All of my life, I had always felt a missing presence that I could not find. While in prison, I had the time to find this missing presence without any distractions. The missing presence was God. I had been searching for Him for most of my life, but I had been ignoring the signs He was showing me. Now that I have accepted Him into my life, I feel complete. I know he will always be there for me.

I heard about Hand Up Ministries from my probation officer. I was staying at a halfway house. I found the Hand Up website, and I read the testimonies. I knew Hand Up was a great place to start rebuilding my life for a better future. Hand Up gave me a place to live while I found a job. Hand Up is a healthy community, and my life now is much better than it was before. I have a home, a job, and a community of men who follow God. Hand Up has a great support system. God has shown me He is forgiving. I don't have to be controlled by my past.

God has provided me with a path to a better future. I am thankful to David Nichols and Hand Up.

Stephen Farley

## *Chris Flores*

I was born 37 years ago in Norman Municipal Hospital (now called Norman Regional Hospital). I was born to a couple who fell in love in high school, but who fell out of love as the years passed. I grew up with no idea of what a real family was like. I thought dysfunction was how a family functioned. I thought I was the black sheep of my family. I never truly fit in with the white side of my family, nor did I fit in with the Mexican side of my family. This was preparation for what was to come.

I lived with different members of my family during when I was young. I lived with my mom, my grandparents, my dad, and an uncle in Texas. I also lived in a children's home. It was that bouncing around like a ball that taught me not to worry about it all. I didn't worry about staying in one place for too long. It was preparation for what was to come.

I dropped out of high school, but later I went back to school. I graduated from Norman High School in 2001. I went from a 3.96 GPA to a 2.6 GPA, but I finished school. I attended Oklahoma City Community College, but I followed the same pattern as before. I had to drop out, but this time it was because our niece, of whom we had custody, was burned in a house fire. She was five years old, and she had burns on 26% of her body. I had to take care of our daughter full time, work full time, and go to school full time. I had to quit school, but eventually I went back to college, and I earned an associates degree. I continued my education at the University of Oklahoma, but I didn't graduate because I was arrested.

I spent almost six years in prison. I served two sentences concurrently. I was also sentenced to 18 years of probation, but only two of those years are supervised probation. I began to wholeheartedly seek the Lord when I was in the county jail. I weighed 296 pounds when I turned myself in to the police. I now weigh about 210 pounds. My life has been a journey of epic proportions. I have gone through changes both spiritual and physical.

While I was incarcerated I attended a preaching school for one year, and I also attended a vocational school for a year. I discharged from prison about one and a half months ago. I slept outside on my first night out of prison. My hands and feet were so cold I couldn't feel them, but I still praised God. On the following day I went to see my probation officer, and I met people who have been homeless for years. I only spent one night outside, and I can't imagine being homeless for years. I now take supplies to homeless men and women.

I spent a night at Drover's Inn, and the next day I went to Hand Up Ministries. God always provides. I have had a great job for a month, and I am a supervisor on the weekend. I also have an opportunity for an even better job. I have been blessed every day. God has given me the desires of my heart, but, more importantly, I have Jesus. He is my rock and my fortress. Life in Christ has radically changed me, but my journey isn't over. Like David, I want to be a man after the Lord's heart. May God bless you on your journey.

Chris Flores



# **Stetson Ford**

I was a pretty good kid when I was growing up. I always did what my mother told me to do, and I did quite well in school. I played video games in my spare time, and I also went to the local recreation center. I had very few close friends, so I mostly hung out with my brother and sisters. We did things normal kids do, such as watch a lot of TV and listen to music. We also snuck into the local pool at night.

I had my first taste of alcohol when I was 12, but I wasn't into it. I began smoking weed and cigarettes when I was 14. I only did these things sporadically, because I didn't have the money to afford such habits. We moved to a different city during the summer before my sophomore year of high school. I made more friends very quickly. By the time I graduated from high school, I had tried over seven different types of drugs, but marijuana was the only one I continued to use. I had seen firsthand what withdrawals and overdoses could do to a person, so I didn't do anything harder than marijuana. My mother was a devoted Christian, and she took us to church at least three times a week. She also took us to Celebrate Recovery.

When I was 17, my mom gave me the choice of whether or not to go to church, and I chose not to go. I still retained my Christian upbringing and morals, but, living in such a liberal city, I began to research other religions. I did this not to practice other religions, but because the other religions were interesting. I considered myself to be an agnostic with Christian values. I always had a job, and I was promoted at some jobs. My family and I moved to California when I was 26.

Things were good until I moved into an apartment with my sisters. I began smoking meth, and I got into demonic conspiracy theories. My father and my brother were both diagnosed with schizophrenia. I never had schizophrenia until I started smoking meth. I had already stopped smoking weed, but I was hanging out with the wrong people. This only fueled my manic episodes, and it caused me to eventually quit my job and move back to Oklahoma. My episodes continued. After three months in Oklahoma, I was still suffering from a residual disconnection from reality, and I hurt the person who trusted me the most. This landed me in prison.

I am not the kind of person who can thrive in an environment made for killers and career criminals, so, for my own safety, I kept my head down and spoke to very few people. My mother said I could stay with her in California after I left prison so I could get the spiritual and mental healing I so desperately needed. However, the law prevented me from going to stay with my mom in California. I had no place to go, but my case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries and how it was created for people like me.

I sent an application to Hand Up, and, by the grace of God, they had a bed open. Hand Up not only accepted me, but they welcomed me into their community while also helping me with every sort of legal issue I had. They informed me of plenty of programs to get me on my feet. They provided me with food and job leads. If it wasn't for Hand Up, I would be out on the cold streets with no idea where or how to start. In the end, I am in a better position to start acting like an adult and taking care of my responsibilities than I was before I was in prison. The Hand Up organization is a godsend, and I greatly appreciate everything they have done for me. I see so many success stories here, and I want to add my name to that list.

Stetson Ford

## ***Jay Fortune***

I was born in Oklahoma City in 1952. I was an only child. My dad worked for the State of Oklahoma, and then he worked in construction. My mom worked for an insurance company. She attended Church of Christ, and we attended church three times a week. My dad moved to California to work, and I spent seventh grade in California. I returned to Oklahoma after seventh grade, and I went to John Marshall High School. I graduated from high school in 1970, and I went to Central State University (now called University of Central Oklahoma) for five years. I earned a degree in Business Administration.

I managed a convenience store for about a year, and then I got a job at Southwestern Bell. I worked at Southwestern Bell for 21 years. I got married for the first time in 1978. I had one child, and we got divorced in 1985. My I got married again in 1987, but this marriage lasted less than three years. I remarried in 1991, and I have two children from that marriage. My first wife and I attended church regularly, and my second wife and I did the same. I also went to church with my third wife.

I was arrested in September, 1998, and I was incarcerated until October, 2009. I attended chapel regularly in prison. I heard about Hand Up Ministries when I was in prison, and I came to Hand Up in October, 2009. I worked for Hand Up for about a year, and I worked for Labor Ready for over three years. I retired when I was 62 years old. I would have been homeless if not for Hand Up, because I had no place else to go. I appreciate the weekly church service at Hand Up.

Jay Fortune

## ***Francisco (Frankie) Garcia***

I was born in Santa Rosa, New Mexico in 1972. I have an older sister and two younger brothers. I lived in Vaughn, New Mexico till I was six, and we moved to Tucumcari because my dad found a job there. We stayed at my grandmother's house for six months, and then my parents found a house. I got a summer job when I was 15. I was a supervisor for a youth program. My parents didn't have much money, so I used my money to help with our bills. I bought my first bike with one of my checks.

My dad got me a job as a janitor when I was 16. I worked a lot of overtime, but I still went to school. I was hanging out with my step-cousin, and I started skipping school with him and getting into trouble. I dropped out of school in tenth grade. I was working and partying, and one of my dad's friends introduced me to cocaine. I didn't like how it numbed my mouth, so I didn't use cocaine again. Unfortunately, I started using crank. I started blowing all of my money on crank. My attitude started changing, and I started breaking out on my skin. I quit crank, but I still drank alcohol.

I met a new friend, and I started doing crank with him. A female friend introduced me a 16 year old girl. I was 22. She lived with foster parents. Her birth parents allowed us to get married, and we moved to Woodward, Oklahoma. I wanted to get away from my friends so I could start a new life. My wife and I lived in a rundown trailer. My son was born in 1997. I got a job at Atwoods.

I started as a janitor, but eventually I was promoted to head of the automotive department. I was moved to the tire shop, where I became the manager. I was later promoted a key carrier. My work was recognized by the owner, and I was asked to move to Elk City to be the assistant manager at the store there. We move to Elk City. My daughter was born in 1999.

My wife got a job cleaning houses. Everything was going well. I went back to the tire shop because I got tired of the responsibility of being in management. I got hurt in the tire shop. I fell and my back was injured. I had a cyst on my spine, and I was working less than 20 hours a week. My wife's boss started helping us financially. My wife's boss told my wife to leave me for her son. I started abusing my pain meds and buying drugs on the street. I threatened to kill myself.

I committed a crime. I told my wife, and her parents called the police. I overdosed on my meds, and I went to the hospital. I eventually got arrested, and I went to prison for ten and a half years. I met David Nichols when he visited the prison where I was incarcerated. I came to Hand Up Ministries in 2019. They didn't have a bed when I got out, and I had to spend the night at a motel. Hand Up has given me a home. I got a job three days after I arrived at Hand Up, and I still have that job. I got COVID-19, and I missed two weeks of work. God has helped me very much, and I am thankful to Him. God has given me reconciliation with my family. I would have been back in prison without Hand Up and God's help.

Francisco (Frankie) Garcia

## ***Frank Limon***

I grew up on the northwest side of Oklahoma City. I have two sisters. I grew up watching my parents drink and fight. In some way or another, drinking has always been a part of my life. I thought that was what most people did for fun, but I am not using this as an excuse for my behavior. I didn't start drinking until I was 18, and then I started drinking and driving and hanging out with the wrong crowd. This led to my first DUI. Years later, I had more DUIs.

I did two years in Vinita, and I did quite well for the first eight months after I was released. My dad died, and I started drinking again. Soon, I was drinking and driving again. I have always dealt with pain the wrong way, and now I completely understand where I went wrong. I just got out of prison after serving five years. I have learned much in the last five years. I have failed my kids and my family. I am stronger now, and I know I hurt my family and my kids. I will never put myself in that situation again, and I no longer have the desire to drink or do drugs. Without God, I would never have made it through the five years I spent in prison. God taught me patience, forgiveness, and love, and He gave me strength.

I came to Hand Up because it is a Christian based program with great structure. Hand Up has a weekly church service, which is good for me. God is a big part of my life, and I owe my success to Him. My life is different now. I am thankful for Hand Up providing men with the opportunity to have a place to stay.

Frank Limon

# ***Jerime Frost***

I was born in Haleyville, Alabama, and I had two younger brothers. My mom was 15 years old when I was born. My parents divorced after two years of marriage. My mom met my step-dad when I was four. We moved around a lot during my childhood, but we became more stable during my teen years. My step-father taught me about a good work ethic, and he taught me about earning money. He also exposed me to drinking alcohol, parties, explicit talking, and dirty films before I was ten. The rest of the family was decent and respectful.

Both of my grandmothers went to church every Sunday, and they made sure my brothers, my cousins, and I went to church. That was when I started to know the Lord. I didn't go to church as often in my teen years. I was interested in girls at that time. I joined the Marine Corps after I graduated from high school in 1992. I met a woman through a Marine friend, and we got married in 1995. This was a big mistake, and we divorced three years later. Military life and my wife led me away from the Lord.

I left the Marines in 1996, and I transferred to the Army after I discharged from the Marines. I developed a large circle of friends in the Army. We loved to go to the clubs, and we loved to party hard. I was stationed in upstate New York, and the locals liked the way I spoke. I spent a year in Korea, where I went to prostitutes and did a lot of partying. After a year in Korea, I went to Fort Sill in Oklahoma.

I cut down on the partying and drinking when I was stationed at Fort Sill. I also got married. It was 2003, and I was shipped to Iraq soon after we got married. I came home in one piece, and my wife got pregnant with my daughter. Two years later, I had to do a second tour in Iraq. This tour was longer than the first tour, and it took a toll on me. I returned from Iraq, and nothing was right after that. Arguments and stress, along with work, were tearing me down mentally. Finally, my plate was full, and the dam broke. My thought process was no longer right, and I committed a crime. I turned myself in to the police in July of 2008. My chain of command escorted me to the police station.

I served four and a half years in prison, and I had five years of probation. I learned about Hand Up Ministries at a Genesis One meeting in prison. I applied to Hand Up, and that gave me something to look forward to when I discharged from prison. I came to Hand Up in February of 2013, and Hand Up welcomed me with open arms. I had a roof over my head, and I started working soon after I arrived at Hand Up. I have been attending Genesis One meetings and church services for seven years, and I am thankful for the blessing Hand Up has been. I couldn't have accomplished any of these things without having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and brothers to which I can turn for help and advice.

Jerime Frost

# ***Isaac Gibson***

When I was a child, my father gave me an allowance of \$5 a week. I could spend the money on whatever I wanted. The first things I would buy were an ice cream cone and a soda, and then I would buy ten loaves of bread for \$1. Things were cheap in the sixties. I bought the bread for my mom.

When I was a teen, I did yard work so I could buy a car. I also worked as a painter so I could buy a car from my step-dad. My mom had a garden in the back yard. I was told to dig up the ground for the garden, and I had to pick the vegetables when they were ripe. We grew corn, okra, squash, and tomatoes. Mom canned vegetables. My step-dad worked at a chicken hatchery, and he brought home double yoked eggs.

I went astray from Jesus as an adult, but I found my way back to the Lord. I messed up and went to prison. I never thought I would go to prison. Now, I feel like I can go on with my life. My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries. Hand Up has taught me how to be supportive of others.

God has done miracles in my life since I accepted Jesus. I have been blessed.

Isaac Gibson

# ***Michael Gonser***

I was born in Woodward, Oklahoma. I was raised in a church which was very strict in its beliefs. Although I was raised in and around church, I had a strong drug problem. I was dragged to church every Sunday by my grandmother. I rebelled against forced religion by using drugs, and later I started heavily drinking alcohol. As an adolescent, I got involved in sexual activity, and I slept with multiple women, although I found no satisfaction in any of it.

I started watching a lot of pornography. At age 19, I was arrested for public intoxication, and later I went to jail for 30 days for the sale of meth. In the next year or so, I faced multiple charges, including a 15 year suspended sentence for possession and distribution. I turned to alcohol to get away from drugs, and alcohol became my default coping mechanism. My dependence on alcohol led to experimenting with K-2, which caused me to lose control at times and have blackouts. My total loss of control, combined with having no direction in my life, caused me to do things which I didn't recall later. It was during one of those times that I committed a crime for which I spent eight years in prison. I am currently serving probation time for that crime, and I attend group classes to help me understand my triggers and restrain my behaviors.

Before going to prison, I was at a place where I didn't believe in God. I committed a crime that landed me in the county jail, and I knew I was going to prison. These circumstances began to sober my thinking, and, after about a week in the county jail, I fell to my knees and reached out to the God I knew as a child. A deep peace swept over me. My cellmate was a believer, and we read scripture and prayed together. It wasn't until about three years into my incarceration that a lot of things began to come together for me. I had been so wiped out for nearly a decade that I had no real remembrance of what I had done.

Scripture speaks of having a reprobate mind, and this verse comes closest to describing where I had been for a long time. I didn't care about anything or anyone. Life was a blur. After about three years of incarceration, God began to bring all of that back and help me remember what I needed to do. This was important for me to move forward. I went to a medium security facility, and I was told I was not a candidate for lower security because of my past. However, God had other plans, and they moved me to lower security, where I met Christian brothers who inspired and encouraged me. I was able to grow in my faith.

Later, I was moved back to higher security. This was a blessing, because I teamed up with a man who helped me develop a genuine relationship with God (as opposed to just having knowledge of God). I finished my time at a lower security prison, and I was accepted at Hand Up Ministries. Hand Up wasn't the only place I could have gone, but I didn't want to return to a place where there were former friends, old drug connections, and the temptations of my former life.

Hand Up is a safe place to be. I now have a calling to preach upon my life, and I receive invitations from time to time to preach at various churches. My gift is to be an evangelist, and this is what drives my ministry. I am also called to be here at Hand Up so I can minister to the men here. I serve as one of four chaplains at Hand Up. I have a strong passion for the homeless, the lost, and those hung

up on drugs. I lead a ministry which provides food, clothing, and ministry for the homeless. I believe in Hand Up and what Hand Up does. The future is bright for me, thanks to Jesus.

Michael Gonser



# ***Steve Gooden***

I have lived in Oklahoma all of my life. I grew up in the country with two brothers and a sister. I had loving parents who raised us the best they could. I went to church every Sunday until I was 11 years old. It was around this time that I stopped praying. My mother had a serious medical problem which eventually killed her. Dad had a hard time taking care of the kids and paying medical bills, and my siblings and I were sent to live with other family members. I thought God didn't care, because He didn't answer my prayers for my mother to get better, nor did he answer my prayers to bring my family back together.

I became a loner at school, and I didn't talk to people. My father and oldest brother became alcoholics and drugs addicts. It was impossible to talk to my father, and eventually I was unable to love him. I moved out of my father's house when I was 18. I graduated from high school, and I got a job. I met a woman, and we married a year later. We had two beautiful sons. When I was between the ages of 21 and 24, I lost my brother to a car accident, and my dad passed away from a heart attack.

I started drinking heavily. I was trying to drown my feelings in a bottle, and this began to affect my marriage. It was during this time that I committed a crime and was sent to prison. My wife divorced me while I was in prison, and she took the boys. Family members stopped talking to me. It seemed I had lost everything I cared about.

I started reading the Bible again when I was in prison, and I also started attending church while I was in prison. I was released from prison in 2017, and I went to live with my step-mom and oldest son. Everything was good for a while, but then I started having problems. I couldn't find work, and they didn't want to take me to the places I needed to go. They eventually told me I needed to move out by January, 2019. I filled out an application at Hand Up Ministries, and I came to Hand Up in January of 2019.

I had a job three weeks after I arrived at Hand Up, and I am still employed a year later. I have a car, and I am getting on my feet. I believe the Lord guided me to Hand Up. He has given me a second chance in life, and I will embrace this blessing He has offered to me. I also want to thank David Nichols for providing a place for people who have no other place to go. I thank him for showing he cares for people and loves them with all of his heart.

Steve Gooden

# **Monty Gregory**

I was born in Nowata, Oklahoma in 1961. Soon after my birth, we moved to Hardin, Montana, where my dad got a job as a game warden. I had a great childhood. There were mountains. I went hunting and fishing with my dad, and I also went on patrol with him. Life was good. My parents divorced when I was seven, and my sister and I moved back to Oklahoma with my mom. I never heard from, or saw, my dad again. There were no cards, no letters, nor calls. I was devastated.

My mom remarried when I was nine. My step-dad already had two grown daughters who were married. My step-father and I didn't get along. He didn't know how to interact with a stepson, and I didn't want anyone taking my dad's place. From the start of their marriage, we all went to church. We attended a small church in the middle of nowhere. Between 40 and 70 people regularly attended this church. Seeds of faith were planted in me there. Hell fire and brimstone scared me to death. I got saved when I was 10, and I was baptized in a farm pond. My walk with God began when I was 10. Years later, I let the world and its empty promise of happiness get in the way of what is truly important in life.

I needed a mentor so I could learn discipleship. Even though my step-dad's faith was strong, we never talked to each other. I never heard about the grace side of salvation, and I always felt guilty. I got my first car when I was 16, and I didn't have time for God anymore. It was drugs and girls. I came down with a spiritual illness I call "Lucifer Syndrome." I was corrupted by pride, and I was self-centered. It was me, me, me, and I, I, I. I found myself in a downward spiral of bad choices, drugs, and alcohol. My life was party central. I used anything that would give me a buzz and help me escape reality for a while.

I got married when I was 26, and my son was born when I was 28. We got divorced when I was 30, but I got full custody of my son. His mother chose not to be in the picture. I loved my son very much. We did everything together. I realized that God felt about me the way I felt about my son. When I was 35, I knew I needed God back in my life. I started going to church again, but I still clung to my old life. It all came crashing down when I was 45. Because of bad choices, I got into trouble with the law, and I got a "vacation" courtesy of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. I went to prison.

I lost everything, including my self-respect. Hopelessness was staring me in the face. I decided to renew my faith and put God first in my life. When I was in the county jail, I heard a man talk about Hand Up Ministries. I knew this was God sent, and I knew Hand Up was what I wanted and needed. I was able to get an application and apply, but, because of the pandemic, I didn't know if I was going to be accepted. God stepped in, and, with four days left till my release date, I was accepted. My prayers were answered. I want to thank the Hand up staff and all the individuals I have met here. They demonstrate true Christianity. God has given to me an opportunity for hope and restoration.

Monty Gregory

# ***Francisco Gutierrez***

I was born in Denton, Texas in 1971. My mom left when I was six, and I was raised by my dad. We moved back and forth between, Denton, Brownsville, and Denver. I used to go to church with my grandmother in Brownsville. I dropped out of school in Brownsville when I was 14 years old, and I started working with my dad in construction. We moved back to Denton, where I found a job working in a restaurant. I worked at the restaurant for five years, and I started living by myself when I was in my early twenties.

I used to go the club with my friends. It was always a Mexican bar. I met a woman at the club in 1993. We started living together about a week after we met, and we got married on Valentine's Day in 1994. We never had children. We moved to Marietta, Oklahoma in 2002. I was arrested in April, 2003, and my wife divorced me when I was in prison in November, 2004. I was in prison until May, 2012. I was homeless for a year and a half after I left prison, and I worked odd jobs in Oklahoma City. I applied at Ecotex Healthcare Laundry in 2014, and at Ecotex I ran into a man I knew in prison. He told me about Hand Up Ministries, and I moved into Hand Up in January, 2014. I worked at Ecotex until March, 2017, and I started working at another laundry the same month.

I accepted the Lord at a Hand Up church service. Hand Up has given me a place to stay, and living at Hand Up keeps me out of trouble. I have good friends at Hand Up, I am thankful to God for Hand Up Ministries.

Francisco Gutierrez

# ***Joseph Heilgiest***

I was born in Dixon, Illinois in 1982, and I was raised as a Christian. I was the middle child of three children. My mom met my stepdad when I was three. At the age of 12, Christ came into my life at Vacation Bible School, but I started using drugs when I was 15. My stepdad adopted me when I was 17, and I took his last name. I hung around with the wrong crowd, and I lost athletic scholarships because my drug use.

I arrested for a felony when I was 19. I was sentenced to four years of probation, but I was arrested again before I finished my probation. I got out of prison in 2006, and I got married. I was arrested again 2007, and I got out of prison of 2009. I got married for the second time in 2015. I intentionally took an overdose of psychotropic drugs in 2016, and I ended up in a mental hospital. I got divorced in 2017. I moved to Oklahoma in 2018, and I got arrested that same year. I was incarcerated for 15 months. I heard about Hand Up Ministries from an inmate when I was in prison, and I arrived at Hand Up in June of 2019.

I have grown in my faith since I have gotten out of prison. Hand Up is a blessing, because I would be homeless without Hand Up. I have made some good friends at Hand Up. God has given me hope to better my life through my faith in Christ.

Joseph Heilgiest

## ***John Hider***

Hello, brothers and sisters in Christ. Most of you don't know me. My name is John Hider, and I am the director at Hand Up Ministries' Chandler, Oklahoma location. I want take this opportunity to introduce myself to you. Like many Hand Up residents, I had no place to go after prison. I spent seven months at a rundown motel in Oklahoma City, and I was desperate after my money ran out. I cried out to God for help, and my prayers were answered through a man named David Nichols. Hand Up gave me a place to live and a way to start my life again. David gave me a hand up, not a hand out, which is the way I wanted it. I had a chance to get on my feet again. It was a chance to gain my independence and prove to myself I could make it in this world on my own.

I have nothing but praise and thanks for David and Ray and the staff at Hand Up. My testimony would not be complete if I did not say something about Ray Riddle. Ray is my buddy, a true friend in Christ and a true brother. He has helped me and tutored me in this demanding and rewarding job that David has given me to do. Thank you Ray for everything.

We here at Chandler are thriving and growing by leaps and bounds. We are now a community of 31 people with more coming. I want to encourage each and every one of you to count your blessings and never give in to discouragement. You someone special in God's eyes.

John Hider

# ***Wayne Hodge***

I come from a small family. My parents split up, and my mom remarried. We went to Catholic Church, but my step-dad was Lutheran, so we were Lutheran. We bounced around from state to state during my childhood and my teen years. When I was ten years old, my step-father introduced me to the art of mixing drinks. He also introduced me to stealing. My mom and my siblings stopped going to church. We found that drugs and booze were the way to go.

Our friends were into the same things, but my so-called friends always teased me and used me for their gain. I was bullied in school, and I was physically abused by my sisters and cousins. I slowly turned into a mama's boy. I stopped going outside to be with my so-called friends and family members.

I stayed to myself, drinking and smoking dope. I was failing all of my classes, and this went on for years. By my late teens, I had committed many burglaries. I spent years in and out of jail and prison. My step-father called me the demon child. I had so much hate and anger inside me that nothing could control me. Then I woke up one day, and I started to use humor with anger. I had to get away from everyone who knew me.

I came to Oklahoma in 2002, and I went to prison for a sex crime. I met David Nichols at a prison in 2005. He spoke at the chapel. I knew Hand Up Ministries was the place I wanted to be. I started going to church again while I was in prison, and I also started going to Genesis One. I came to Hand Up the day I got out of prison, and the Hand Up staff has led me on the right path. My whole life has been turned around since I came to Hand Up. I thank, and look up to, David Nichols and every person here. I have been at Hand Up for six years, and every day I wake up and thank the Lord for me being alive and for being at Hand Up. This is the place I call home. I am treated like family, and I have never enjoyed this feeling as a grown up.

Every day is a joy and a blessing to work at Hand Up. Hand Up keeps us from the wrong things life has to offer.

Wayne Hodge

## ***Howard Stevens***

My parents divorced when I was ten, and my mom was left to raise seven kids on her own. She had very little time to oversee her kids, and I was left to my own devices. She didn't have time to take us to church, and I grew up not knowing God. I never found rules to be much fun, so I followed my own rules. When I was a teen, alcohol and drugs became part of my life, and I never looked back.

I managed to slow down enough to go to college, graduate, and start a career. I also got married and had a daughter. However, I was never satisfied with what I had. When life got hard, I found excuses and blamed others for my problems. I even blamed God. I started using drugs again, and this time I couldn't stop. In spite of the consequences, I'd find that I could only stop long enough for the problems to go away. I didn't realize I was the problem.

I never felt God cared enough about me to help me, much less notice me. Every time I had gotten into trouble and needed His help, bad things still happened to me. Pornography entered my life, and it dominated me, just like drugs and alcohol had done. After my arrest for possession of child pornography, I lost my business, and my wife divorced me. I was flat broke, and I had no means of support. It took two years for my fate to be decided by the court. I returned to AA during this time. I had been in and out of AA for two decades. This time, I met a man who, after listening to my whole story, became my sponsor. He took the time not just to tell me, but rather show me, how God had changed his life. He patiently walked me through some simple steps, and he waited to see what I would do.

For the first time in my life, I began to realize God might actually care about me and could do things I couldn't do for myself. I looked around, and I saw others had changed their lives. My sponsor passed away about a year later, and I found Hand Up Ministries. I didn't know that to expect of Hand Up. I just knew I had nowhere else to go. Hand Up gave me a place to live. They had a few simple rules to follow, and they asked that you try to put God into your life.

I have always believed in God, but I wasn't sure He would forgive me for my past. Today, I put God first, others second, and myself last. I am grateful for the second chance I have been given. I have a long way to go, but know I can get there with God's help.

Howard Stevens

## ***Shannon Hunt***

I grew up in El Reno, Oklahoma, and I was raised as a Christian. I had a good life, but I couldn't stay out of trouble. I started getting into trouble when I was a teenager, and my mom kept grounding me. She always let me off the hook early, and I went back to getting into a mess.

I have always believed in a higher power, the Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit. I know the good Lord has always been with me, but there have been times when I let God down. Looking back, I see I was the only one to blame. I am not a bad guy. I just got involved in drugs. My involvement with drugs was off and on for a long time. I thought I needed drugs to make me feel better, but I always came back to reality.

My case worker told me about Hand Up Ministries when I was in prison. I came to Hand Up in 2018. Hand Up is a good place if you chose to work the program, but I smoked weed when I was here the first time. I couldn't pass a drug test, and I was removed from Hand Up. David allowed me to return in 2021, and I am going to give it my all this time. I feel good about Hand Up. There are a lot of good people here, and they are always willing to lend a helping hand. God has opened my eyes to many things in life. He allows me to wake up each day, and he gives me good health.

I am 49 years old, and I still get around every day. I am able to work, and I am very thankful to Jesus for dying on that cross for all of us sinners. God Bless.

Shannon Hunt



# **Steve Ivey**

I had a lot of pain and suffering when I was growing up. I was abused in every way by my parents (biological and adoptive) and a family friend, and I was hardly ever happy. I was also victimized by a DHS worker when I was seven. She blamed me for what my foster mom did to me. As a result, I stopped trusting people, and I felt as if I had no value. I had hate and bitterness in my heart, especially against my foster parents and DHS.

It wasn't easy to live with my adoptive parents. I never felt loved by them. I first went to church with my biological mother and my stepdad. I was confused about which church is right, because I went to Church of Christ and the Catholic Church. I was never taught about a relationship with God. My adoptive parents attended Church of Christ, but I thought they were hypocrites. I was coerced into being baptized when I was 14. I told the pastor I wasn't ready, but he insisted.

I didn't know how to forgive people and move on with my life, and I was miserable. I never truly thought of myself as a Christian. I had thoughts of suicide when I was 20. I committed a crime, and I went to prison. I believe God's hand was on me in prison. There were inmates who wanted to hurt me because of the nature of my crime, but God protected me. I felt closer to God in prison, and I took counseling classes which helped me learn to forgive others.

I heard about Hand Up Ministries right before I got out prison. I was accepted at Hand Up, but I was kicked out for breaking an important rule. David graciously accepted me back and gave me another chance. God has looked after me, and He has helped me get another job soon after every time I lost a job. I now have a steady job at a landfill.

Hand Up has given me a second chance at life, and the people at Hand Up truly care about me. I am getting closer to God, and I am growing into a better person. I want to thank David Nichols for giving me a second chance at Hand Up. God blesses me every day.

Steve Ivey

## ***Floyd Jackson***

We always went to church on Sunday and Wednesday, and we all got along. Mom read the Bible to us before we went to bed. She did this until we were old enough to read the Bible for ourselves. I grew up knowing the Lord.

My case worker told me about Hand Up. I gave my life to the Lord. Hand Up has helped me out a lot. If it hadn't been for God, I would be living in the woods, or I would be back in prison.

Floyd Jackson

## ***Jim Musgrove***

I was born and raised in Oklahoma City. My mom, sister, and grandpa raised me, and I had a good childhood. My mom worked two fulltime jobs. Mom was always working or cooking and cleaning. My sister and I did arts and crafts or puzzles on rainy days, and we listened to her rock records on a record player in her room. We also rode our bikes and played outdoor games, and we went to a recreation center to swim, play basketball, and do arts and crafts.

I used to help my grandpa paint houses. I took care of myself during my teen years. My mom worked a lot, and she stayed late at bars. My sister partied and spent time with her boyfriends. I spent time with my grandpa, and I did arts and crafts and read books. My mom's drinking got worse, and I left home to stay with my grandpa. I joined Job Corp when I was 16. I took arc welding, metal cutting, and basic plumbing. I attended church while I was at Job Corps, and I went to a Christian coffee house. I went to their teen meets. I enjoyed hanging out with other teens, but I wasn't raised in church, so I had a hard time relating to church.

I joined the Army National Guard when I was 17, and I did my basic training at Fort Benning. My grandpa passed away while I was in basic training. I returned to Oklahoma City, and my second family took me in and helped me get going again. I moved into my first apartment, and I started drinking and partying. I got married when I was 20, and I went to truck driving school. We had a son, but we got divorced because I spent too much time on the road. I spent ten years paying off my child support. I also spent five years paying off student loans.

I remarried, and my second wife and I adopted a boy and two girls. I went to jail for an offence with a teenage girl, and we divorced after 17 years of marriage. I lost my wife, my children, respect, and everything else. I spent ten weeks in jail, and I received a ten year suspended sentence. No mission would take me, but my probation officer told me about Hand Up Ministries. Five people were ahead of me on the waiting list. When I checked back with Hand Up, the five men were gone. I came to Hand Up in December, 2009. I have worked the same job for several years, and I help my family when I can.

Father God has helped me all of this time.

Jim Musgrove

# ***Michael Jochims***

I was beaten and molested when I was a child, and I became a ward of the state. When I was 11, I was adopted by a wealthy Lutheran couple. They had already adopted a girl before me, my sister Julie. I was different. Because of the violence and trauma of my childhood, I was untrusting of any adult. I was gifted in school, but I had trouble due to my attitude.

I left my adoptive family when I was 16. They were more worried about what people would think of my behavior than about what was really going on with me. The only one I could talk to on a regular basis was God. I was into everything when I was in my late teens and early twenties. I joined the Army when I was 21, and I served four years overseas. I returned home in 2006, but I had trouble fitting back into civilian life.

In 2010, I took the law into my own hands, and it backfired. "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord." My daughter was born in 2015. God blessed me. In 2018, my wife and I split up, my grandma died, my brother's wife died, and my sister was strung out on pills. I had a lot going on in my life, and I failed to register. I served a little over a year and a half for failure to register. I was homeless when I returned to McClain County. I was sleeping under an overpass. I got third degree burns from the sun, and I almost died of heatstroke. Hand Up Ministries came and got me. God answered my prayers. In one week, I had a roof over my head, food in my belly, and a job. God didn't care that I had a record. He put me in Hand Up's path. The Hand Up staff has been helpful and kind, and so have the residents.

From my childhood until now, I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death many times. I have been beaten, stabbed, shot at, and strangled. I also fell down a mountain. I should have been dead many times, but God always had my back. God has saved me more times than I can count. If He can turn me around, He can help anyone. Knock and it shall be opened. God and Hand Up have opened a big door for me, and I intend to go 200% with it.

I will be helping others as I go. It isn't impossible. Your life is only ruined when you give up. I haven't given up for 41 years, and I am not about to start. Prayer works. I am living proof of that. I recite Psalm 23 numerous times a day. I thank God and Hand Up. May the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

Michael Jochims

# ***John Anderson***

In was born Sugarland, Texas in 1956. I was the middle child of five siblings. My dad worked for the county, and my mom worked for a large company. My parents got divorced in 1968, and my mom moved us to Ada, Oklahoma. My mom met my step-dad there. My step-dad and I didn't see eye to eye. We attended a Baptist church. My step-dad wanted us to go to church, and the only reason I went to church was keep peace in the family. I graduated from high school in Ada, and I returned to Texas to go to welding school.

I got job Tulsa in 1978. I worked in Tulsa for a year, and then I went to Alaska to work on an oil pipeline. I spent 11 months in Alaska. I wanted to stay in Alaska, but there was no position open with that company. I returned to Ada, where I got a job with a company which made grave monuments. I worked there for 36 years. We helped build the Murrah bombing memorial in Oklahoma City.

I got married in 1978, and I have three daughters and 11 grandchildren. My first wife died in 1989. I thought there was no reason to live, but I met a man who encouraged me to continue living. I remarried in 1996 or 1997. We were married for ten years. I committed a crime in 2004, and I spent 17 years in prison. I started attending church in prison, and I was baptized in Church of Christ in 2015. I got out of prison in 2021, and I came to Hand Up Ministries.

I got a job in July, 2021, and I have been at that same job for four months. I have made many good friends at Hand Up, and Hand Up has given me a chance and made a big difference in my life. There is more to do than sit around the house. I have found a good church, which I attend on Sunday morning, and I like the church service at Hand Up on Sunday night. If any brothers here want me to pray for them or help them, I am glad do that.

John Anderson

## ***David Jones***

I was born in Lake Jackson, Texas. I have two sisters and a brother. I had a good childhood. We weren't rich, but we were middle class. My dad worked for a big construction company. My mother's parents lived next door to us. They attended the Assemblies of God Church, and we went to Sunday school and church with them. I knew of God and Jesus at an early age.

My parents divorced when I was 11 years old. My siblings and I moved to Lomax, Texas to live with our father. I did well in school until after the divorce, and then I didn't care. I started acting up and getting paddled, as well as getting detention and expulsion. I stopped going to church in seventh grade, and my brother and I started drinking and smoking weed in eighth grade. I started shooting speed when I was 12.

We moved from Louisiana, then to Oklahoma, and then back to Texas. We all lived in Texas until my oldest sister turned 15 and moved back to Valiant, Oklahoma to live with my mom and my stepdad. My little sister also moved to Valiant to live with our mother. My brother joined the Navy and left in 1980. It was just my dad and me, and I did whatever I wanted. I started going to bars with my dad. My dad died in 1984.

I always had good jobs. I lost and quit a few, but I always got a new job the next day. I went to prison in 2007, and I went to prison again in 2013. I rededicated myself to Lord after I got arrested. I heard about Hand Up Ministries when David Nichols came to the prison where I was. Hand Up was there for me when no one else was, and I am grateful for Hand Up helping me in my time of need. They gave me a place to live, and I was able to get a job and become a functioning part of society again.

God forgave me of my sins, and Jesus continues to be my Lord and savior. I thank God for being true to his word.

David Jones

# ***Derrick Kearnes***

I grew up on the southwest side of Oklahoma City. I am the youngest of three children. My brother is nine and a half years older than me, and my sister is eight and a half years older than me. With that being said, I was picked on and teased all of the time.

I grew up going to church with my mom and grandparents. At a young age, I gave my life to the Lord. We went to church every Sunday and Wednesday. My Dad would go to church on holidays and special events. On the evening of October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1997, my grandpa, my mom's dad, lost his battle with a lung disease. Over the previous few years, I had lived with my grandpa, and I helped him with the housework and anything else he needed. I knew it was coming, but that did not stop me from blaming God for taking my best friend from me. I blamed God for my grandpa's death. I questioned why He let my grandpa suffer and why He took him from me.

Over the next 15 years, I lived my life the way I wanted to live it. I became addicted to opioids after knee surgery when I was 21 years old. I continued that addiction into my thirties. I discovered crystal meth when I was 32. At the time, I thought it was the greatest discovery. I had no idea of the fast decline my life would take with the discovery of this drug. Over the next three and a half years, I lived life fast and hard. After my mom had a knee replacement, she had to rely on my dad and me to take her to the places where she had to go. One of the places I took her was church. I really enjoyed taking her to church, and I began to search for my faith again.

My dad and I found my mom unresponsive on in July of 2015. She took a nap, and she never woke up. She was placed on life support. She had too much brain damage, and she was taken off life support. She passed away on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015. That is when my life took a turn for the worse again. I blamed God completely, and I turned my back on God. I decided I would do things my way. My way landed me in prison for four years.

While in prison, with God's help, I got off drugs. I have been drug free for almost three years. I also rededicated my life to God, and I have been very happy and blessed since then. I was told about Hand Up Ministries when I was in prison. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. I have been blessed since that day. Hand Up has allowed me start over, and Hand Up was there when no one else was.

Derrick Kearnes

# ***Kenneth Reel***

I grew up in Oklahoma City with my family, but I also lived in Sayre with my grandparents and other relatives. I liked living in Sayre because I could go fishing and hunting a lot more. I have known the Lord all of my life. My family taught me about God. They told me what the Lord did for us. I was baptized when I was five or six years old. I tried to follow what I had learned, but, like so many others, I fell off the trail. I started drinking when I was 13 years old. First it was beer, and then it was whiskey. I drank my parent's whiskey without their knowledge. I tried pot when I was 16, and I liked it. I found myself going to church less and partying more. I knew the Lord was watching, and he saved me from death many times. I still partied, and it cost me a lot. I got into fights in bars, but I still tried to help people.

I went to prison. I decided to quit drinking when I got out of prison. I hadn't had a drink in four and a half years. I tried to find a place to stay, but no one wanted me. My brother-in-law told me about Hand Up Ministries. I lived at Hand Up for five years. I became a deacon at Love Street Ministry, and it was there that I met my wife. We got married in 2013.

I moved out of Hand Up to live with my wife. We stayed at a hotel for two years, but our marriage didn't work out. I went back to prison. I was released from prison on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. I tried to stay at the hotel where my wife and I had stayed before, but I wasn't allowed to register there because some new law. I had to live in the parking lot. It was cold, and I passed out from hypothermia. I called Hand Up, but they told me they didn't have room. I called David Nichols, and he made room for me that day. David saved my life, and for that I am forever grateful.

Kenneth Reel



## ***Joe King***

I was born in Baltimore in 1958. I had four sisters, but we were not a close family. We moved to Alabama when I was five, and we moved to Saint Louis when I was 11. We moved to Pennsylvania when I was 13. I graduated from high school in Pennsylvania. My mother forced us to go to church on Sunday, but she was a Sunday Christian. She had a mouth like a sailor the other six days of the week. My first personal involvement with the church was when I was 15, and this was when I learned the hypocrisy of the church. The deacons thought I should have been paid for my volunteer work, but the pastor disagreed. The pastor took over my duties.

I became an electrician after high school, and I worked as an electrician for about 15 years. I had some problems, and the union failed to support me, so I quit and became a truck driver. I drove a truck for five years, and then I became a dispatcher. I eventually became an operations manager.

I got arrested on federal charges in 2002. I had minor brushes with the law before that, but nothing major. I ended up in Oklahoma City, and I came to Hand Up Ministries in 2004. I became the office manager at Hand Up soon after my arrival. Due to expansion, my position changed to business manager. I left Hand Up in November of 2007. I wanted to explore other options. I worked at Guaranty Laundry for a short time, and then I worked at the OKC airport for a while. I was having problems finding a place to live. I lived in a hotel room, but it wasn't in a place where I could legally live. I was arrested by U.S. Marshalls, and I spent another year in prison. I was put on probation, and I returned to Hand Up. Due to conflicts with probation and counseling, I left the state and went to Alabama. I was arrested in Alabama for a probation violation, and I served 10 months in prison.

My dad embezzled \$10,000 from me during this time. After I was released, I returned to Alabama to confront my dad. He had a piece of property there, and I convinced him to sign it over to me to compensate me for the money he took from me. I lived on that property for five years while I was on probation. I sold the property after I completed probation, and I moved next door. My neighbor allowed me to put my camper next to his house. I spent the next year contemplating what my future would be. I accrued debt during this time, and I decided to leave Alabama and go to Nevada.

I stopped in Oklahoma while I was on the way to Nevada. I realized my income would not support the cost of my trip to Nevada. I talked to David Nichols, and he allowed me to return to Hand Up. This has turned out to be a blessing. I am able to pay down the debt. Hand Up has always been there for me, and being at Hand Up has always helped me feel closer to God. My experience with churches has not been good, but Hand Up has always accepted me, regardless of my faults and shortcomings.

My health is deteriorating, and I know my day could come at any time. It is time for me to get serious about my relationship with God. I know Hand Up will be there to guide me down that path.

Joe King

## ***Joe King***

It is just simply amazing how God works in our lives. He gives us free will, and He allows us to make mistakes. No matter how big or how small the mistake, He is always there to pick us up, dust us off, and put us back in the race we call life. This has happened to me many times. I blamed God most of those times, and I turned away from Him. Now I know those mistakes were incorporated into His plan. It took some big mistakes for me to realize He expected me to learn and use those experiences to further my path and better myself. It boils down to that old saying, "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade." Now, that is what I do. Instead of feeling sorry for myself, I now ask Him for forgiveness and guidance.

There are many other adages from days gone by which are just as effective today as they were back then. One such saying is, "Learn from the mistakes of others, because you won't live long enough to make them all yourself."

God will always guide you down the right path as long as you let Him, but you MUST let Him. Don't worry, because He will always be there for you. The hard part is implementing His plan and guidance. That doesn't mean go out and make mistakes. As you grow in life, think about your actions beforehand. Think about the consequences of your actions. This was a struggle I dealt with most of my life. I only thought about what was fun and pleasurable. I only thought about ME. I didn't care about what harm I caused others. They didn't matter. My lifestyle was sex, drugs, and rock n roll. I searched for euphoria in every aspect of my life.

Now I have learned a new euphoria, and that is the love of God and my savior Jesus. I have a learned a lot from my past. I learned computers. I learned management skills. I learned perseverance. I learned tactfulness and many other traits. In the past, I used these traits to manipulate people. Now, I use these traits as a way to help God in His works at Hand Up Ministries. I now realize these were gifts He gave me to use for His purpose, not for my own selfish desires.

My family moved around a lot during my formidible years, which made it difficult to make friends. As a result, it was a difficult challenge to build relationships when I was an adult. This is probably the reason I never married. Looking back now, I see I sabotaged relationships because I feared they wouldn't last. I'm struggling with this, but I am getting better. My love for God and this ministry is helping me overcome that challenge. I still have a hard time SHOWING that love, and I'm sure many people see that. Sometimes, I overcompensate, and this has caused problems for me. Even so, God always gives me the guidance to see what I am doing, and He gives me the wisdom to manifest this into something positive.

It is heartwarming to see how Hand Up has grown in the 16 years I have known about this ministry. It is awesome to see the work He has done here, and it is awesome to see all of the many lives which have changed. This ministry has been nationally recognized, and the potential for growth is astounding. I am happy to be here and see this growth, and I hope to be a part of this ministry for years to come. I frequently pray to God and ask Him to give me the strength and ability to remain here until He decides it is time for me to come Home.

Joe King

# ***David Lacy***

I was born in Mesa, Arizona. My mom and I live d on an acre of land with chickens, cows, and one pig. We moved to Texas when I was eight. I blew up the van on the way to Texas. I thought I was checking the oil, but I was checking the transmission fluid instead. It took us forever to get a ride. Everything was okay once we got to Texas.

I started to go downhill, and I was put in a mental hospital. This started a trend. From that point, I was always in trouble. My life was drugs, drinking, women, and mental hospitals. I went to Job Corp when I was 16, but I met a woman when I was 18, and I dropped out. I got married when I was 19, and I got divorced when I was 20. I remarried when I was 22, but I was arrested the same year. I was in prison till I was 31.

I grew up in a very loving home, but I never thought about God. I referred to Christians as Jesus freaks. I laughed at Christians, and, before I went to jail, I said God couldn't do anything to stop me from going to hell. That was the wrong thing to say. I was looking at 10 years in prison, and I started reflecting on my life.

I have spent most of my adult life in prison, but I don't look at prison as a mistake. I got saved in 2013. Scripture says examine yourself, and this is what I did in prison. I had always heard a person has to get saved in church, but I got saved in a cell by myself. I was fed up with the life I was living, and I cried out with a broken heart. It has not been an easy walk. There have been many trials since then, but I wouldn't trade them for anything.

People asked me what I was going to do when I got out of prison, and I said I didn't know. I was told to talk to Darren Hunt about Hand Up Ministries. He told me Hand Up helps guys with everything. I got out of prison on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, but they put me on a bus to Muskogee instead of Oklahoma City. I was homeless till a guy paid for a hotel room. To make matters worse, the bus company lost my box, and I didn't have the number to Hand Up. I had to be out of the hotel at 11:00 AM. My box showed up at 8:30. I called Hand Up three days late, and they sent a driver to pick me up.

For three days at the motel, I didn't know what I was going to do, but God said He would take of it. God took care of me.

David Lacy

## *Ulysses Lee*

I was born into a poor and abusive situation, but I made it through by the grace of God. I grew up in the foster care system of Oklahoma, and I suffered abuse during my childhood. I was forced to go to church until I became an adult. I didn't like church, and, for this reason, I didn't develop a personal relationship with God. I knew of God, but I lacked the understanding and knowledge of the word of God. I didn't have knowledge of the path I should take. I lost my belief in God for a while, but I was forced to go to church, so I made a false devotional. Later in life, I began to understand a little more about God's Son, and I made a personal decision to believe. I began to understand a personal relationship with God, but my sins were stronger than my faith.

My sins grew stronger as the years passed, but my faith was starting to grow within me. I learned that, even in my sin, God loved me. I had no control over my behavior, and this got me into trouble. My sinfulness resulted in a prison sentence, and, in prison, I began to stop my sinful nature from growing stronger. My sins made me weak, but God became stronger in my life. I became closer to God in prison.

An inmate told me about Hand Up Ministries, and Hand Up gave me a place to live. With the spiritual help I have found at Hand Up, and with my will to live right, my sins have become only a thought. My past is my past, and my past does not define who I am now. God be praised!

Ulysses Lee

## ***Eric Loftis***

I was born in Rock Springs, Wyoming. My early life was stable, even though my parents got divorced when I was young. I grew up in Kingfisher, Oklahoma. We went to church, and I was in a church youth group called Royal Rangers. We were having a revival, and the Ranger meeting was cancelled, so my friends and I went to play by the tracks near the church. A church member thought we were ditching church, and he chased us into the park. I was around 12 years old, and I stopped going to church after that. I went astray from the Lord.

I started working in the oilfield after high school, and I was drinking and using drugs a lot. I met a woman who moved in with me. I got a house, and she got pregnant. We got married before our daughter was born. I knew about the Lord at this time, but I didn't seek Him unless I was in a bad spot. I left the oilfield and went into construction after our son was born. I did this so I could spend more time with my family.

My mother died in September of 2013. I became angry at the world, and my wife started distancing herself from me because of this. I began communicating online with a person I thought was a fifteen year old girl, but this person was actually an undercover cop in El Reno. I went to jail, and I was mad at everyone, including God. My cellmate handed me a Bible, and I started reading Job. I finished my GED in prison, and I started tutoring others. I attended church, and I took all of the classes they offered. I joined Genesis One, and I became a group leader.

I heard about Hand Up Ministries, and I decided to apply. I had nowhere to go. My wife had left town, and I rarely heard from her. I was greeted warmly by everyone at Hand Up. The people here actually care. I got a job five days after I was released from prison. I have been in touch with my kids. The Hand Up office staff has been awesome. They take the time to answer my dumb questions. I know people say bad things about Hand Up, but I have been here for two months, and I have nothing but good to say about Hand Up. I know I can make it with God's help and Hand Up. I know God has good things in store for me. I just have to be patient.

Eric Loftis

# *Mike Lower*

## A Saving Grace: My Testimony

My personal walk with God began when I was 11 years old and was in a near fatal boating accident. After this experience, I began a closer walk and yearning to understand who God was and what I could learn from Him. I accepted Christ when I was 12, during Easter service in 1973. All was going well for many years, but I was like a lot of other Christians, riding a roller coaster of emotions and situations. I noticed that I was really backsliding when I was in my mid 20's. I was having wrong relationships with girls, living and sleeping with them, social drinking, basically "playing Christian".

I really understood how God continued to be in my life when I went through some major circumstances in my life. This being that in September and October of 1996, I went through 3 very hurtful and painful deaths in my family. First was my closet cousin, the next week, my grandmother then the next week, my mother. I became very angry with God and decided to live my own life my way. God revealed to me what the problem was. It was simply me. I had accepted Christ into my life for salvation and guidance, but I had never made Him Lord of my life. Once I allowed Christ to be my total Lord and Savior....things began to happen. Through Christ, I had a place to stay, a job and what I needed to survive. But come to find out, where I was going to live and work was not an acceptable location.

Through Christ's hand, I was accepted at Hand Up Ministries without any notification or application process. Rev. Nichols love and compassion for helping men showed through in him accepting me without delay. Being here at Hand Up has been a total blessing for me. Hand Up has such a passion for helping others reach a higher goal for their lives is just overwhelming and obvious.

Hand Up has allowed me to grow into a much better person and more confident in my sharing the Gospel with others. Not only has Christ given me a stronger yearning, but Rev. Nichols compassion has given me my own compassion for others. I made a decision to help others because there was such a need. I believe that because of this, God opened a floodgate of doors for me.

I obtained a Masters's Degree in Psychology-Christian Counseling and will be working on my Doctorate in the same field. I also have been put in charge of the worship music of the church services here at Hand Up, and became a Genesis-One group leader helping other men in a relaxed atmosphere in a small group setting. Since that time, I have become the Genesis-One sponsor, overseeing the 59<sup>th</sup> street groups as well as the Chandler location groups.

If one can learn to truly trust God and be obedient, He has **PROMISED** more blessings than our storehouse can hold. I believe that is what is happening to me. By Christ's grace and mercy, I have been given another opportunity to serve Him here at Hand Up Ministries. Christ tells us that if we are faithful in the little, He will give us a chance to be faithful in a lot. God has a certain plan for all our lives which He will reveal in small bits over time.

I for one am thankful that I finally took the steps, one at a time, to be faithful and obedient. God works in ways we cannot understand, but if we will trust Him and listen, He will reveal what His will is for our lives. I am so thankful that Christ has used Rev. Nichols, Hand Up Ministries and those who are involved, to help bless my life. God has put me in this position to share that love with others and hopefully be a blessing to them in return. My prayer for those reading is simply this... may you bless others a little so that God may bless you a lot.

Mike Lower

## ***Dewayne Luper***

My whole testimony could be summed up in one statement. I never knew how much I needed the Lord until the Lord was all I had left. I was saved and baptized when I was 11 years old. Our church was a great place to be, and I loved going to church. My mother pulled us out of church when I was 13. This was because of the dysfunctional relationship my parents had. Later, I tried to get back right with God, but I wasn't very successful at it.

From the age of 17 to 2012, my whole life was spent either running from God or trying to find a way back to Him. My life was a life like anyone else who has addiction and mental problems, and who lives out of God's will. I spent a total of 24 years in prison. I failed my children and my family, and I failed at almost everything I tried. There were times I tried to get back on the right path, but I always let myself go back to evil ways. I don't blame anyone else but myself. Most of the time, I knew I was headed for more trouble. After being incarcerated, or after getting clean, I would not recognize the person I had been. I never lost the memory of how it felt when I was saved, nor did I lose the memories of what life was like when I was on the right path. No matter what I did, I always knew belief in Christ and His Father was true.

I learned about Hand Up Ministries three days before I discharged from prison in December, 2020. I had no hope for the future. Two years before I discharged, I told God I would do whatever He wanted me to do if He would give me another chance. I could not have imagined how much my life would change in such a short period of time, nor could I have imagined having the life I have now. If I had written the script, I would have robbed myself of so very much.

Hand Up has been a blessing in so many ways. It would take pages to write down all of the things Hand Up has done, and is still doing, for me. Hand Up has led me back to the life I always wanted to have. I believe God has His hand over Hand Up. He sees this place keeps helping people like me and growing. Hand Up helps people who had very little hope when they got here.

I take care of my God business when I wake up, and I end my day the same way. I am clean and sober, and I am back to knowing I am a loved child of God.

Dewayne Luper

# ***Michael Mann***

I was born in Kansas City in 1964, and I have one older brother. I had a good childhood and loving parents. It was a normal childhood. I grew up going to the Methodist Church. I had a paper route when I was 11, but I didn't do it long because I couldn't make any money at it. I was molested when I was 11. The person who molested me was the neighbor who helped me get the paper route. I became rebellious after this, because my boundaries and my sense of right and wrong had been violated.

I started middle school when I was 12, and immediately fell in with the wrong crowd. I smoked cigarettes outside of the school. I started smoking marijuana when I was 13, and I started drinking alcohol when I was 14. My mother was an alcoholic. I hung out with older people who drank and smoked. I eventually became an alcoholic before I was old enough to buy alcohol. I got a job bagging groceries when I was 16. I moved to being the butcher because one of the butchers cut off three of her fingers. I started stealing beer from the store after this. I worked there until I was 18. I quit because the store was sold to someone with whom I did not get along.

I joined the Army when I was 19, but I was discharged for alcoholism after almost three years. I started getting into trouble with the law. In 1987, I was given four years of probation, and I went to prison in 1991. I spent three years in prison. I got out of prison, but got into trouble two years later. I was in and out of prison for the next 20 years. I stayed out of prison for nine years, and then I went back to prison when I was 54. I did two more years in prison. I learned about Hand Up Ministries when I was in prison, and I arrived at Hand Up in June, 2020. I have my head on straight now, and I won't go back to prison. I am grateful to David Nichols for letting me come to Hand Up.

Michael Mann



## ***Kris Maples***

I was born July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1972 in Dallas. My family moved to McAlester, Oklahoma in 1982. My first son was born in 1988, and I have five sons.

I was a manager at KFC in McAlester. I went to synagogue in Tulsa. I have always believed in God, but it wasn't till I was incarcerated that realized that it wasn't just knowing the rules that counted. You also have to follow the rules. I was in the Horizon program in prison. This is a faith based program, and it reaffirmed my faith in God. This program helped me realize the rules are there for a reason. I went to prison in 2007, and we got divorced the same year. I had a cellmate who was getting out, and he said he was trying to get into Hand Up Ministries. He told me about Hand Up.

My case manager told me about Hand Up when I was nearing discharge. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. I was surprised I was accepted, since I am Jewish. I came to Hand Up in January, 2018. I worked at a landfill for eight months, and then I started working on the Hand Up landscape crew. I transferred to maintenance crew the following winter, where I worked until September, 2019. I am now a manager at KFC.

Hand Up has helped me have peace. If I am having a bad day, there is always someone to whom I can talk. We are not alone at Hand Up. I make it a point to put Hand Up in my prayers so Hand Up can grow, but it is up to each resident to do his part. Shalom.

Kris Maples

# ***Ronald Marvin***

I grew up in Davenport, Iowa. I had a good childhood until my parents divorced in 1978. My mother remarried. My step-dad was okay until I was ten years old, which was when the physical and verbal abuse started. I was put into a home for boys when I was 14, and I truly enjoyed life and was happy.

I went to church off and on throughout my childhood and teen years, but I didn't come to know Jesus until I was 17. Because of friends and beer, I strayed when I was 21. I was told I would never amount to anything. My own family didn't want anything to do with me. I turned to my so-called friends, and I also turned to crime. I went astray from Jesus, and I stayed away from God until I went to prison in 2015. I had nowhere else to turn, so I turned to Jesus.

I strayed again because people told me Jesus wouldn't help me. I stayed this way until 2017, when I was so alone and lost in my pain that I cried out to God and begged for His mercy. I found peace. I still struggle with being alone. I heard about Hand Up Ministries from a friend. My life is getting better since I arrived at Hand Up. It is awesome to be around good Christian brothers. I have a long way to go, but I continue to grow daily.

Hand Up has given me a place to stay and a church to attend. I have enjoyed being at Hand Up, even though I have only been here since July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. I know I will grow more and be a better Christian. God will give me the tools I need to grow and help others learn about Christ.

Ronald Marvin

# ***Marcus McKinney***

In was born in San Leandro, California in November, 1982. My mom was in the military at the time. She discharged soon after I was born, and we moved to Louisiana after she honorably discharged. She immediately married an older guy. He was very physically, verbally, and mentally abusive toward me and my mom, and I grew up to despise him. He never did these things to my younger brother, who is his biological child. I started to feel shame and guilt for not being able to say or do anything about the situation.

I became very rebellious when I was a teenager. I found refuge in drinking, smoking weed, and having sex with women. I left home when I was 14, and I moved in with my grandmother. She was older, and she had no control over me. I had no positive male role models other than the men at church. They tried to take me under their wing and mentor me, but I couldn't open up to anyone. I also knew these guys were doing stuff they preached against, and I wouldn't take anyone seriously who wasn't leading by example.

Two days after I graduated from high school, I was hanging out with friends on a country road near three 20 foot oil tanks. These tanks exploded and one of my friends was killed on impact. I was burned on 45 percent of my body. I had third degree burns, and I went into a coma. I was declared brain dead. I woke up a month later, and I was mad at the world. I became a psychopath.

I have over 30 arrests on my record. I didn't care about anyone I hurt, including myself. I just spent five years in prison in Oklahoma. This was enough to get my mind right. I have lost too much and gone nowhere in life by being foolish and not accepting help. I have decided enough is enough. It is now or never, because I refuse to go through hell again. There is a better life ahead.

I was referred to Hand Up by someone I met in prison. He explained what Hand Up does for people. I cannot thank this man enough right now. I would be homeless without Hand Up. I want to thank everyone at Hand Up for their kind words, loving spirit, and positive environment. I could not be more thankful for Hand Up's love and support.

Marcus McKinney

# ***Matthew Meashintubby***

I grew up in Honobia, Oklahoma and in Talihina, Oklahoma, both of which are small towns. I was a quiet person, and I kept to myself most of the time. I didn't like to hang out with other people. I preferred to be by myself. I played football, basketball, and softball in school. When I got older, I started drinking beer and whiskey. I hardly spoke to my dad, but my mom and I spoke a lot. My mom cooked meals for us, and she made us get up and go to school. She also made us go to church and Sunday school.

When I was older, I stayed with my mom most of the time. I helped her around the house. I cleaned the house, mowed the lawn, and fixed things. My mom made us go to church, and I grew up knowing the Lord. I got old enough to drink, and I started getting into fights. I went to jail a lot. I eventually went to prison.

I heard about Hand Up Ministries when I was in prison, and I thought I would give it a try. Hand Up has given me a second chance. I have place to live, and I am looking for a job. God is the best. He will help you. When I was in prison, I prayed every night and every morning. I want my family back. I miss my wife, my daughter, my grandsons, my brother, and my sisters. Without God, I wouldn't have anything. I want to thank Hand Up for giving me a place to live and for helping me get started again.

Matthew Meashintubby

# ***Able Melton***

I was born in Barstow, California. My dad bought an alfalfa ranch in Hinkley, California when I was five. My dad worked the farm, and he also worked at Barstow Marine Base. My dad was a hard man, but he was also a good man. I have six older brother and three sisters. All of us worked on the ranch. My brothers roughed me up every chance they got, and this made me a bully at school. I am not proud of that. I got into fights at school.

I left school because I got into drugs, alcohol, and sex. I got my girlfriend pregnant. I got married, but I lost my wife and son because I was being a fool. I knew Jesus was Lord, but I made drugs my lord. I have done some very stupid things in my life. I always had a job, but I continued to drink and use drugs. I had two more sons with other women, but I lost them because of drugs and drinking. I was told I had a problem, but I would say, "I go to work every day, so how dare you say I have a problem?" I wouldn't stop till I went to jail, but I started again after I got out of jail.

Many good people tried to help me, but I was being stupid. I was arrested in 2016, and I spent four days on the floor of the Oklahoma County jail. I used my bologna sandwich as a pillow. I have never been so ashamed in my life. I told the Lord that if He got me off that floor, I would stop all of the nonsense. I stopped until I went to prison. I smoked some weed in prison. I told my friend about what I said to the Lord in jail. He told me I couldn't ask the Lord to bless me and not follow through. He said it doesn't work like that. He told me the Lord holds everyone accountable.

This made me think about how the Lord sees all and hears all. I learned this in my Bible study. I told myself I would not get to heaven being like I was. I started working out because of Covid 19. The Lord told me he would keep me safe if I did what he told me to do. I got Covid 19, and the good Lord did as He said He would do.

Before I discharged from prison, my case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries. I had been praying for a place to go after I left prison. I filled out an application for Hand Up, and I was accepted. The Lord Jesus has blessed me. He sent His angels to work at Hand Up Ministry. I have never felt so loved in my life. The staff cares for the residents. Being at Hand Up has been a blessing every day. Thanks to Jesus for His blessings.

Abel Melton

# ***Calvin Menefield***

I was born in a small town in Texas. The population was 3,000. I can't remember much of my childhood, except that it was violent and dysfunctional. I thought everyone lived that way. My grandmother raised us most of our lives. I can still remember that two room shack with a living room and a kitchen, but no bathroom. It was my older brother, two younger brothers, and me.

We went to church a lot. My grandmother was a God fearing woman. She was a woman of faith who believed and read the Bible. She taught us to call on the Lord, and she told us that prayer changes things. We went to a holiness church which believed in laying hands on the sick, casting out demons, and being filled with the Holy Ghost. My grandmother prayed over food, situations, circumstances, sickness, and everything else. I truly believe I am alive today by the grace and mercy of the Lord and my grandmother's prayers. When I was a child, my favorite song was the one with the lyric "I shall not be moved, just like a tree planted by the water." I was a good and kind kid who loved Jesus.

The pain, the confusion, and the world got too hard for me, and I turned to alcohol. Alcohol helped until it didn't. My first wife put up with me for 17 years. I was in a car wreck because I was drunk. The car flipped five times and caught on fire. I was shot through my large intestines. I was shot another time with a .32 pistol. If it had hit me one inch over, it would have killed me.

After my fourth divorce, I turned to alcohol again, and I made some bad choices. I went to prison. While I was incarcerated, I had a lot of time to look back on my failures and mistakes. I learned a lot in the classes I took in prison. Most of all, I learned to accept responsibility for my actions. I lost everything, and I didn't know what I was going to do when I was released. I applied to Hand Up Ministries, and I was accepted. I thank God for Hand Up. I have a roof over my head, clothes to wear, and food to eat. I believe God has a plan for me.

I am 58 years old. My mother died of cancer in 2017. My sister was killed, and my aunt died of alcoholism. I am so tired of starting over.

Calvin Menefield

# ***David Moody***

My early childhood days aren't much to think about. I went to church a few times with my step-grandma. My dad died when I was five, and my step-dad wasn't much of a dad. I grew up going to a Pentecostal church off and on through my teen years. I never really got settled in church. It was just once in a while. My mom and step-dad didn't go to church. I think my mom didn't believe in heaven and hell.

I got closer to God when I was older, and I got saved when I was 23 years old. It happened one day when I was walking home after failing to get a job. I had walked three miles to get a job, and I learned the job was gone. I saw a church at the intersection of Blackwelder Avenue and southwest 25<sup>th</sup> street on the south side of Oklahoma City. I stood across the street by a little store, and I smoked my last cigarette. I was in a bad way. I was living in a ghetto type place with a woman who had three kids. I had no food and no money. We were living on welfare.

It was a hot July day. The church doors were open, and there were people working inside. I walked into the church, and one of the workers said the preacher was home just across the parking lot. I was going to ask him for a little help, but I decided against it. I left, and he came looking for me a few minutes later. I had already gone two blocks, and we went back to the church. We talked a little, and we prayed a lot. I was filled with the Holy Ghost, and the preacher helped me out.

I went to New York with my girlfriend. Her people lived there. I lived there 11 years. I had sex with a 16 year old girl, and I was arrested. My life now is okay. I only have a year and a half left on the registry. Hand Up Ministry gave me a place to settle down and live. I got right with God again, and I can see a better way of life. God has done so much for me. I thank everyone who has helped me, and I truly appreciate the help I have received. God is always in control of all things, including my life.

David Moody

## *Mike Moseley*

My life journey started in 1960. When I was six months old I was adopted by the best parents possible. I was loved and spoiled as an only child. Looking back, I see it as a true blessing that I was adopted. My parents were not church going people, but they taught me the basics, and they took me to church when I wanted to go. I was taught right from wrong, and I did well in school.

My mother died of cancer when I was 11 years old. My father worked long hours to pay the hospital bills and support us. I was lost. I didn't know how to deal with death. At her funeral I heard someone say, "She's in a better place." I don't know who said it. I masked my pain with alcohol and, eventually, with drugs, as more close relatives died.

When I was 17 I got mixed up in an ordeal in which I was shot with a shotgun. I died once, but I made a full recovery. Looking back, I see this was another blessing. My friends say I have someone watching over me. I agree. I came out of the fog somewhat, and I got married. We had a son, and we lived in a house by the lake. This was because I was blessed with a wondrous job. I was the service manager at a marina.

My father died, and I spun out of control. I lost everything, and I did six years in an Arkansas prison. I went to church every chance I got, and I finally woke up. I had the Lord in my life. I was released from prison in 2007. I found a nice country girl, although she had a mark too. I was trying to save her, and I fell again. Both of her parents died, and my cousin died of an overdose. I went back to prison. I knew I couldn't keep repeating this cycle. I thought my blessings had run out.

I couldn't ask my sons for help. They had wives and lives of their own. I am proud of them, but I doubt they are proud of me. I didn't know where I would go. My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministry. I thought it was too good to be true. It was a place to get away from all of my so-called friends and make a fresh start. Hand Up was another true blessing. It is a shame it took me so long to see the light. I gratefully thank Mr. Nichols and his staff for allowing me to come to Hand Up. My family is also grateful.

Mike Moseley



# ***Cornell Mukes***

I was born in Cushing, Oklahoma. I grew up in and out of foster care. My mother wasn't able to take care of my sister and me. This went on for several years. We were tossed around from foster home to foster home until a family member decided to take my sister and me into her home. She introduced us to church, and this was when I found God and was baptized. My family members were church going people who loved the Lord.

I continued to go to church as I grew up. I moved out after I graduated from high school. I started drinking and trying to live a fast life. This life continued until Satan had me bound. I found myself slowly drifting away more and more each day, and I was living a life which wasn't pleasing to God. This led me to getting arrested and going to prison. I was in my prison cell in 2009, and God spoke to me. He told me to give my life to Him, and that is when my true relationship with God started.

I went to another prison, and I heard about Hand Up Ministries when David Nichols spoke at a Genesis One meeting. I can honestly say that being at Hand Up has truly been a blessing, and being here has made me the man I am today. I thank David Nichols for giving me a second chance.

Cornell Mukes

## ***Paul Argo***

I grew up in a family that had a lot of Christian values and morals, but we rarely went to church. In my teenage years, I started straying into partying and drugs, and I left Christianity and the church behind. As I got older, I got more detached because of drugs and alcohol. I had two kids, and I got into trouble several times. I prayed a few times here and there, but I never prayed with conviction and honesty.

I spent my whole life blaming God for everything. I was forty when I committed my crime. This was the first time I had been in very serious trouble. I was angry when I went to prison. I hated God. I met a priest after I had been in prison for two years. Through continuous effort, he was finally able to break through to me, and I began to understand how God works. I understood how people must go through suffering to be saved. I became Catholic, and I accepted God into my life.

When I was close to my discharge date, my case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries. I had nowhere to go, so I applied to Hand Up. I prayed everyday about going to Hand Up, and, two days before my release date, my case manager told me I had been accepted to Hand Up. I was overwhelmed with happiness.

I was leery when I came to Hand Up. I didn't know what to expect. My prayers to the Lord opened up a whole new world to me. At Hand Up, I met people who had made mistakes like I had made, and I found out that God works in special ways. Hand Up has given me a second chance that I never gave myself. I've found self-respect and a sense of purpose. I was hired to work on the Hand Up lawn crew, and I am extremely excited to continue serving as long as I am here. I thank David Nichols and Hand Up for giving me a hand up. Most of all, I thank God.

Paul Argo

# *John Peabody*

I was born eons ago. The world was a different place. Television was black and white, and there were only three channels. Phones had cords. There were no mobile phones. Prayer was in school, and marriages lasted for decades. My father was in the Air Force, and we moved constantly. The longest I lived someplace was four years. It was hard to make friends and then leave.

My mother went to church, but my father and I did not go to church. My father was an alcoholic, and I started using drugs and alcohol when I was fourteen. I was beaten when I did wrong. I was punished worse than my sister and my two brothers. I thought I was adopted. When I was fourteen my mother told me my father was my step-dad. My birth father ran when my mom got pregnant.

My drug use was bad after high school. I joined the Army, and I was sent to Germany. My drug use skyrocketed, and I became a full blown alcoholic. I was released on a drug discharge. I went through girlfriends and wives, because I preferred alcohol and drugs to them. After my last big crime I planned to kill myself. I drew up a plan to do it, and I put the plan in my pocket. I decided to get one last beer before I offed myself. I was drinking the forty ounce beer in a parking lot, and I heard and felt God speak to me. He said, "You don't need that anymore." I felt an amazing change in my mind and in my body. I poured out the rest of the beer, and then I went home and gave my life to Christ. On the very next day I started attending Alcoholics Anonymous. I also found a church to attend, and then I turned myself in to the police. By the grace of God I have been clean and sober for over ten years.

John Peabody

# ***Percy Hall***

I was born in Granite, Oklahoma in 1953. I had five brothers and two sisters. I don't remember much about my early childhood. I remember going to church, and I also remember shooting a BB gun at people's houses. I started getting into trouble when I was 15 years old. I was arrested for burglary, and I spent a year and a half in prison. I only stayed out of trouble for six months after I got out of prison. I committed another burglary, and I went back to prison, where I served another four years. I was arrested for burglary a year after I was released from prison, and I served eight years of a 15 year sentence. My daughter was born in 1975.

I didn't start drinking till I was twenty, and I started smoking crack in 1996. I got married in 1996, and I moved to Oklahoma City, where I got a job working at a cafeteria. My wife passed away in 2007. I was arrested for domestic abuse in 2013, and I served a little over seven years in prison. I violated my parole in 2020, and I went back to prison. I got out of prison in 2021, and I came to Hand Up Ministries. I got a job at a linen cleaning service.

I went to church most of the time I was prison. I do what I have to do to stay out of trouble. Hand Up keeps me away from drugs, and, of course, Hand Up has given me a place to stay and has helped me find a job.

Percy Hall

# ***Bobby Reeves***

I had a good childhood, and I had parents I loved. My parents were Catholic. They did not pray to Mary, but they did teach me that Jesus Christ was our Lord and Savior. We regularly attended church at Saint Patrick's. We did not attend church much as the years passed, except for Christmas and Easter. We prayed at every meal, but, for some reason, we didn't regularly attend church. I believe this could have caused me to stop taking God seriously. By my teenage years, sin was running my life.

I went through an atheist stage, but a friend brought me to a church service. I don't remember what the pastor said, but it broke the stone around my heart. I cried, and I rededicated my life to Jesus. I married my first wife when I was 22. I could not get her to attend church with me, so I did not go much. I am not blaming her. I should have been the spiritual leader of my house, but I gave up.

I began to drink heavily. I would go out and party, and I would leave my wife at home. I opened the door to more sin in my life, and this destroyed our marriage. I met and married my second wife, and I destroyed that marriage also. We divorced in February, 2009, and I decided I did not want to live anymore. I partied hard from February, 2009 till August, 2009.

I was arrested on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009. I remember sitting in the jail cell and looking in the mirror. I did not recognize the man looking back at me, and I knew I had to change. My dad bailed me out, and I got a lawyer. I received a four year suspended sentence. I got the call from Bobby Miller (Hand Up Ministries' office manager) in 2013. He said I had been accepted at Hand Up. I learned about Hand Up from my counseling group. All of the services I have attended here have added to the healing of my spirit. I have great memories here, and I have great brothers who love me. Best of all, I have a will to live.

The Lord Jesus took this very broken man into his family and restored my soul. I am forever grateful to Hand Up, and I even more grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ for saving a wretch like me.

Bobby Reeves

# ***Larry Richard***

I was born in 1965. I was the oldest of three children. I don't know why my parents divorced, because I was a minor child when it happened, and I wasn't told why they went their separate ways. My parents fought a lot, and my dad was abusive toward my mom. I grew up in Lawton, Oklahoma. I attended a vocational technical school, and my teacher helped me get a job at a Ford dealership. I worked on the front end of cars.

I started hanging out with my friends at night, and I was drinking and smoking weed. This cost me my job, because I occasionally showed up late or called in sick. I didn't know the Lord when I was growing up, although I attended church with a friend. I even went to church camp. I knew who Jesus was and what he did for me. My friend moved away, and I stopped going to church.

I met my wife when I was 26 years old, and we got married in 1997. We had a daughter in 1998, and we divorced ten years later. I was arrested in 2009. This was the scariest time of my life. I lost everything, including my wife, my job, and watching my daughter grow up. She was 11 when I was arrested, and I missed much of her life when I was in prison. I broke down numerous times and begged the Lord for forgiveness when I was in prison. I attended church services every Saturday. I wanted to learn more about the Lord.

I was baptized in the county jail. I knew I had done a terrible thing, and I wanted forgiveness. While I was in prison, I met inmates who had similar convictions, and I associated with those inmates. That was when I learned about Hand Up Ministries. God guided me to Hand Up, not just to come back to society, but also to change my life for the better. My life is starting to get back on track, and I will do everything I can do to let Hand Up change my life.

Hand Up has done a lot for me, and I appreciate everything the staff has done for me and for all of the other guys who come here. I want God to be in my life for the rest of my life.

Larry Richard

## ***Deke Roberts***

I grew up in small country towns. We moved a lot because of my dad's work. He wasn't my real dad, but he was all I knew. My real dad died before I was born. I had a good childhood. Dad worked all of the time in the oil field, so Mom raised my two sisters, my brother, and me. I am the baby of the family. We played outside all of the time. We didn't have much, but we were happy. Now days, it is all about money. Times sure have changed.

I have worked for as long as I can remember. The one I called "Dad" died when I was 13, and Mom married a man who beat us often. That was when I started staying gone all of the time. I was working cows, breaking horses, and building fences. I started roping and riding bulls. I moved out when I was 15. I got my own place, and I started doing drugs and drinking all of the time. I started cooking meth when I was 16. I was in a bad wreck when I was 18, and I was on crutches for almost two weeks. I went to my mother's house for Mother's Day when I was 19, and my mother fell to the ground and cried because of how bad I looked. I stopped doing that drug, and I have not touched it since.

My friends and I went to church on Wednesday, but it was mostly just to hang out. We went to church when we went to our grandmother's house, but I didn't know the Lord. I went to prison in Texas when I was 20. I worked on ranches after I got out of prison. My stepbrother got me a job on a ranch near Ardmore, so I moved to Oklahoma in 2006. The people there were asses, so I quit. I went to work on a farm near Wynnewood.

I had a kid in 2010, and I got to see him here and there when his mom needed something or wanted to go party. I was locked up in August, 2012, and I haven't seen my son since. I was arrested for having sex with an underage girl, but I didn't know her real age. Now I am a sex offender for the rest of my life.

I learned about Hand Up Ministries when I was in prison. I needed a place to go when I got out of prison, and now I am at Hand Up. I am unhappy about the fact that I can't hang out with family and friends because they have kids. I am trying to get closer to God. Hand Up has helped me get a job, and Hand Up has also given me a roof over my head. Attending church on Sunday helps me get closer to God.

God has given me the life he wanted me to have. Thanks to Hand Up for everything this ministry has done for me.

Deke Roberts

# ***Henry Ross***

I was born in Tulsa in 1989, and I was an only child. My dad died when I was six or seven, and I had rough childhood. I was raised by my grandfather and my mother, but my mother wasn't there some of the time. She was an alcoholic and a drug user. I ran the streets and got into trouble, even though my grandfather tried to steer me in the right direction. I went to church when I was younger, but I never really got into it. I got into using drugs when I was a teenager. This caused me to lose contact with my family, but I reunited with my family before I went to prison.

I went to prison when I was 22 years old. Before I went to prison, I learned I had a half-brother on my dad's side. This was very emotional for me. I still haven't met him. My mom started to talk to me more when I was in prison, and I developed a better relationship with her. I spent eight and a half years in prison, and I started attending church when I was in prison. God showed me the right path. I read the Bible and prayed a lot.

A prison staff member told me about Hand Up Ministries. He said Hand Up would be a good place for me. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. Because of the nature of my crime, I was a little nervous when I got out of prison. I arrived at Hand Up, and I felt safe. Hand Up has been a blessing. The staff has helped me get on the right path.

God has blessed me the last few years. I have made friends at Hand Up, and there are guys here I knew when I was in prison. I now have hope. People here care about me.

Henry Ross



# ***George-Richard Rutledge***

I am 66 years old. My adoptive father was in the Navy. He married my mom when I was two years old. My sisters were three and five when he married our mom. He was at sea most of the time. My mom kept us close to home, because she thought the government would take us to the Blackfoot reservation or the Ojibwa's in Canada.

We three kids went to Mass most Sundays. My dad said he was a lapsed Catholic, and he only went to Mass on high holy days. My mom didn't go at all, and she didn't make us go when he was at sea. We lived on base, and my sisters and I were mistreated by the kids in town because we were Navy brats. I became an altar boy so I could get out of the house two or three times a week. This was also why I joined the Explorer Scouts. Scouts had little supervision and lots of free time, and we spent much of that time chasing girls.

I joined the Marines, and I was very promiscuous in the Marine Corps, even after I got married. My wife and I participated in extramarital sexual activities, and this eventually led to a divorce. I remarried, but I divorced this woman due to infidelity. Another woman made me decide between her and the Marines. I chose her, which was the wrong choice. She left me for someone else.

I committed a crime, and I spent seven and a half years in prison. I was also sentenced to serve 12 ½ years of probation. I joined the Genesis One program in prison, and I became an assistant chapter coordinator for Genesis One. I enrolled in a two and a half year Bible program called Maximized Manhood. Through this program, I was brought into a close personal relationship with God. This program changed me inside and out, and it made me understand who I am in Christ. I graduated from this program in March of 2013, and their certificate is the most valuable thing I own outside of my relationship with the Lord.

I discharged from prison in August, 2013, and I came to Hand Up Ministries on the same day I left prison. Had Hand Up not accepted me, I wouldn't have had a place to go. Because of the stigma of my crime, my family didn't want anything to do with me. I got a job, and I began to study for the ministry through a correspondence course with Open Ministries. I was ordained on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019. I serve as a deacon at Love Street Ministries, where I share the Word with the congregation nearly every Sunday.

I have worked at Quad Graphics since May, 2016. I am a pressman there. I am successful because Hand Up is successful. I don't honestly know here I would be if it weren't for Hand Up. I might even have ended up back in prison. I wake up every morning secure in the knowledge that I belong to Christ. As long as I remain in God's will, I will do well. I will remain at Hand Up unless, or until, the Lord leads me elsewhere. For now, Hand Up is my home.

George-Richard Rutledge

# ***Erick Samuel***

My parents divorced when I was 2 years old, and I was raised by my grandmother. I have two brothers and one sister. I had a good childhood. I didn't have any problems, even in high school. I played sports in high school, and I also worked a job. My adult life has been up and down. I lost my grandmother four years ago. I was in prison when she died. This was very heart wrenching, because I wasn't there for her.

My dad was the best. He was always there for me in the good times and the bad times. My dad and my grandmother were Christian people. Both of them were hard working people, and they often talked to me about staying in school, staying out of trouble, and working hard.

I was caught doing something stupid. I can't change the past, but I know God has forgiven me for what I did. I pray every day, and I read my Bible every day. I thank the Lord for giving me a fresh start in life. I have learned a lot at Hand Up Ministries. I have met Christian men who have helped me live a new life, and my life is getting better. Hand Up gave me a new start. God blesses me every day. I have a roof over my head, and I am able to help others. God is helping me to be a better person.

Erick Samuel

## ***Sam Smith***

I was the second youngest of nine children, and my dad had nine other kids by his first wife. I lived on a farm in Kansas till I was 12. I liked living on the farm. We never had much money, and my dad drank almost every day. He was drunk when he wasn't working. I started going to church when I was six. The preacher would drive six miles to the house. My sister and I went to church every Sunday and every Wednesday for three years. I think the pastor moved away. My parents never talked about the Lord. I don't know if my dad believed in the Lord. He got sick, and he passed away when I was 12. We had to move from the farm, and my life changed immediately.

My mom had never worked, and she had to go on welfare. She found a house in a small town about 30 miles from the farm. It was a shock to move to a town where I could go to a store any time I had money. When we lived on the farm, we went to town once a month. We were poor. We didn't have nice clothes or much food. I started school in fifth grade. I didn't like going to school. A lot of kids were mean. I quit school when I turned 16, and I got a job as a dishwasher.

Three months later, I got a job in the oilfield, but I got fired after two months. I started drinking and using drugs. I also started getting into trouble. I went to live with my older half-brother. He was 50, and he had ten kids. I was 18. He got me a job in the oilfield. I always had beer and drugs. I started going to church on occasion. I worked in the oilfield for four years, but the work slowed down. I moved back to the small town in Kansas.

I went back to work in the oilfields, and I met my first wife in a bar. We both drank and used drugs. We went to church on occasion. We stayed together for six years, and we got divorced. I met another woman eight months later. She attended church, and she taught me about the Lord. I had a dream about being left alone when the Lord came back, and I got saved that night. We went to church for a long time, but then we stopped going. This was when Satan had time to lure me.

I got into trouble with the law, and I hurt a lot of people. Many people gave up on me. I went to prison. I gave my life back to the Lord, and I got closer to the Lord in prison. I repented and asked God for forgiveness. In prison, I met many people who loved the Lord. One of them was Dan. He always talked about the Bible.

Dan told me about Hand Up Ministries. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. Hand Up has been a blessing. The staff and the people here are willing to help in any way they can. I have a place to stay and food to eat. There are people here who love the Lord. Hand Up is one big Christian family. Nothing can stop you when the Lord is guiding your life.

Sam Smith

# ***Chris Spears***

God was always in my life in some way or another. As a child, I watched my relatives receive letters from Jimmy Swaggert or Oral Roberts promising that for a small donation all their prayers would be answered. Church was a place the adults sent us so they could have the day to themselves. After my parents divorced, I was moved from house to house and state to state, because no one wanted the responsibility. This led to me being sexually and physically abused.

Finally, after much running away, I was sent to Christian home for children. This was where I learned about God from some very good people. Our minister took me under his wing, and he taught me about sermon outline structure, how to pick a topic, and how to use a concordance. This led me to win a contest which paid for my tuition at a Christian college in Oklahoma City.

I can't explain it all in a short testimony, but I walked away from the church and into a life of sin. As much energy as I put into worshipping God, I put more energy into sin. Alcohol was the bane of my existence, and I was in and out of relationships every few months. Eventually, this life led me to hurting a lot of people in my life, and I went to prison.

A lot of people's testimonies end where they met God in prison, but not this one. I hated God even more. I was totally convinced God was at the root of all my pain. It was only when I met Cindy that I came to my senses. She was a Christian who hired me to finish her house. We talked a lot about my past, and, instead of judging me, she just listened. After months, she asked this one question. "Who made all of the decisions in your life?" I said it was me. That was when I realized God had nothing to do with my pain. I did.

I read God's word more. I studied more. I prayed more. The more I did these things, the more God gave me understanding and wisdom as to what I needed to do. I had been on the run from the law for a long time. I turned myself in to the authorities, and I expected to receive a life sentence. I was content to serve God wherever He put me. I received a suspended sentence.

I became ill after I was released from jail. I was on the street, and, through God's grace, I found Hand Up Ministries. They took me in without question. They gave me a bed, and they helped me get food and SSI. I have remained faithful to God and my promise to serve Him wherever He put me. Through his goodness, I have a relationship with my children, which shouldn't have happened. I serve Him through my ministry at Hand Up.

Chris Spears

## ***Don Staller***

I grew up in a home with my mom, my dad, and my brother. My dad was a truck driver, and mom was a waitress, so my brother and I spent a lot of time on the road or at a Shoney's. I was saved and born again in my childhood. We went to a church in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. It was called Church on the Move. I was happy, and I felt the Lord come to into my life. This also made my parents happy. Our family was non-denominational, and we knew who the Lord was.

My crime was a terrible, unexpected event. I was sentenced to eight years in prison and 12 years of probation. Even with all the bad things that have happened to me, I still trust in the Lord. He will never forget us or leave us. My case manager told me about Hand Up Ministries. I almost didn't get to come to Hand Up because my case manager didn't do things right, but the Lord came in, and now I am at Hand Up.

I now have a job as a dishwasher. I am with great people, and I am trying to publish my novel. Hand Up has given me hope and a place to feel safe. Hand Up has given me food and transportation. God has given me blessing after blessing, even if it is just a nice person saying hello. I know it is the Lord.

Don Staller

## ***Steven Guzman***

I grew up in church. I went to church off and on with my grandmother. My sisters and I would stay with her on the weekends, and she would take us to church. I went astray after I moved away from her and was no longer forced to go to church. I fell in with the wrong crowd when I was in the military, and I made some bad choices. I went to prison.

I learned about Hand Up when I was in prison. I was trying to find a place to live so I could be release from military prison. My life now consists of working, fulfilling my obligations for release, and going to church at Hand Up. Hand Up gave me a place to go once I got out of prison. The military won't release you from prison without a place to go. Since the military doesn't fall under the FBOP, it is more difficult for military offenders to find a place because we don't fall under FBOP halfway houses. Without Hand Up, I would most likely still be in prison.

Without God, I would be hopelessly lost. With Him, I have found a place to live and a career that pays more than minimum wage. I don't have to live from paycheck to paycheck. God has blessed me with the ability to help my younger sister.

Steven Guzman

# **Tim Stone**

I have one brother and two sisters, and we lived in Warr Acres, Oklahoma till I was nine years old. We moved to Hominy, where we lived for six months, and then we moved to Stroud, where we spent another six months. We lived in Chandler for two years, and then we settled in Choctaw. I went to junior high and high school in Choctaw. We attended Nicoma Park First Baptist Church, where I helped in children's church and drove a church bus. My mom still lives in Choctaw, and I regard Choctaw as home.

I graduated from high school in 1974, and I started working at Western Electric in Oklahoma City. I married my high school sweetheart in 1975, and we had two children. I was laid off from Western Electric after working there for three years, so I joined the Army. I served eight years in the Army. I moved with my family to Washington State, where we lived for two years. I was shipped overseas, and my wife and kids moved back to our house in Choctaw.

I came home for Christmas without telling anyone I was coming. My parents came to the airport to pick me up, and they took me to my house. I saw a car in the driveway, but I didn't recognize the car. I asked my parents to wait in the car, and I went into the house. The kids were watching TV in the living room. My wife was in the bedroom having sex with my so-called best friend. I filed for divorce the very next day.

I returned to Egypt. When my tour was over, I chose to be stationed at Fort Carson, where I started drinking. I reenlisted, and I met my second wife while I was stationed at Fort Gordon. We had three children. I was stationed at Fort Bliss for two years, and then I left the Army. We moved to Illinois, and I was charged with a crime in Illinois. I was sentenced to 12 years in prison, and my wife divorced me.

I spent ten years and two months in prison, and I came to Hand Up Ministries in 2009. I learned about Hand Up through my sister's church. I moved out of Hand Up when the state took away Hand Up's exemption to the law which forbids two sex offenders from living together. I met a woman in Chickasha, and I lived with her while registering as homeless in Oklahoma City. Her daughter turned me in to the police in 2017. I got out of prison in 2019, and I returned to Hand Up.

I would be on the street if Hand Up hadn't helped me. I have turned over a new leaf. I live for our Lord and Savior. He has given me a church to make things right. He is everything to me.

Tim Stone

# ***Toby Blackwood***

I had a pretty good childhood. We moved to California when I was three years old. My dad worked on aircraft. My mom was hit by a drunk driver, so we moved back when I was 10. I dropped out of high school when I was 16, but I got my GED the same year. We have a small family, but we are close. We don't get together as much since my grandmother passed away.

My adult life has been good. I had my daughter when I was 20, so that made me grow up fast. I have always been a hard worker, but it is more important when you have a child. I didn't grow up knowing the Lord. We only went to church a couple of times. We didn't talk about God in our family. I was saved by the Lord when I was in prison, and it has changed my whole life. My dad and mom have also been saved.

I committed my crime out of lust. I was just lonely, and I wanted to talk to someone. I spent 40 months in prison. Prison saved me from myself and the road I was going down. It made me realize I wasn't alone if I gave myself to the Lord. I learned about Hand Up when I was in prison. My cellmate was in Genesis One, and he was going to Hand Up when he got out of prison. I got out and stayed with my cousin, but I had nowhere else to go, so I came to Hand Up. Hand Up saved my life.

My life now is blessed. I have a good job, and I can give back. I have a good relationship with the Lord. My daughter is going to college soon, and both of my parents are in good health. The Lord has truly blessed me. Hand Up has not only given me a place to call home, but this ministry has also shown me that anything is possible if we come together in the name of the Lord. The Hand Up staff is very caring and nice. I don't know where I would be if Hand Up hadn't helped me. I hope I can bless someone as Hand Up has blessed me. God has done everything for me. He has given me faith, friendship, family, a place to stay, and a job. Without God, we have nothing. With God, we have everything.

Toby Blackwood



## ***Corrie Wade***

I was born in Elko, Nevada in 1969. I was born with cerebral palsy. When I was three, I had to have surgery because one leg was shorter than the other. We moved to Texas in 1976, and we started going to church in Texas. After we moved to Texas, we lived in a tent until we moved into a trailer. My grandmother knocked out my teeth when I was seven. I started dipping snuff when I was 13, and I quit going to church when I was a teenager. My sister and I were hauling hay in a wheel barrel once, and the wheel barrel fell over. I got mad at my sister, and I kicked her in the knee with a steel toed boot. I got into trouble for that. I was put into a living center when I was 15, and I had sex with a lady who worked there. She got fired, and I left the center when I was 18. I moved back into my mom's house, and I lived there till I was 20. I started drawing SSI when I was 19, and I moved into a house owned by a family friend.

I worked at a restaurant for about a month, and I quit. I moved into another living center, but I left after two months. I moved back to Granbury, and I lived in a trailer my mom owned. I met a woman I knew in school, and she moved in with me. She got pregnant, and we got married. That was a big mistake. I ended up taking care of my son by myself, but I was talked into putting my son up for adoption. My son has several disabilities. I moved to Ryan, Oklahoma in 1995.

I remarried in May, 1997. I committed a crime in 1999, and I went to prison for four and one half years. I came to Hand Up Ministries in March, 2004. I was a driver for Hand Up till 2005. I worked for Pizza Hut till 2007. I was arrested for not paying fines in 2007. I became a driver for Lou Davis (Hand Up director and assistant director) in 2008. I did this until Lou retired in 2011. I have been trying to get SSI for many years. I was arrested for doing something stupid, and David accepted me back to Hand Up. I am now a gate guard for Hand Up. Hand Up has given me a home since 2004. I am very grateful to David Nichols for all that he has done for me.

Corrie Wade

# ***William Watkins***

I was born in Fort Worth, Texas. I have two older sisters, and my mom read the Bible to us when I was a child. I was molested by a neighbor girl when I was six, and I was molested by a sixteen year old boy when I was nine. I also had a girlfriend when I was nine, and I did sexual things with her. My dad physically abused my mom, and I would try to intervene, even when I was five. My mom took us to a Methodist church every week. I became interested in God when I was young. I wondered what He looked like. My mom taught me how to pray, and I prayed often.

My mother died when I was 11. She was in a Piper Cub when it exploded. I saw this happen. I almost ran up to the plane before it exploded, but something told me to stop. For many years, I blamed myself for my mother's death. I tried to stop her from getting on the plane, because I was afraid something was going to happen. After my mom died, I moved to Tulsa to live with my dad and my sister. In Tulsa, I was molested by a guy who worked at a convenience store. I was 13 years old when this happened. I told my dad I thought I was gay. He spoke a bunch of Bible verses to me, but he did this in a condemning manner. It was around this time that we started attending a Methodist church. My father remarried when I was 14.

I started smoking pot when I was 14, and I had girlfriend when I was 15. I was intending to have sex with her, but she told me her grandfather molested her, so I decided not to try to have sex with her. A woman who worked in a liquor store let me buy liquor when I 14, so I was the liquor buyer for my friends. When I was 15, my dad busted my lip with a flashlight, and I ran out of the house while my dad was grabbing a rifle to shoot me. I ran to my neighbor's house, and the neighbors took me to the hospital. I refused to return to my dad's house, and I went to live with my sister in Arlington, Texas. I went to school there for about a year, and I bought a car. My dad said he had a heart attack, and he begged me to come back to Tulsa. I returned to Tulsa, but I only stayed at his house for one day. I couldn't live there, so I moved into an apartment.

I finished high school, and I worked in Tulsa till I was 19. I was still smoking weed and drinking. I moved back to Texas, and I got a job as a janitor at a school in Arlington. I did this for two years, and I became the head custodian at an elementary school. I returned to Tulsa, and I started using drugs (heroin, cocaine, LSD, PCP, meth, and pills). When I was 27, I was driving drunk, and I was in a bad wreck. My back was injured, and this still gives me problems today. I was busted for pot and a sex offense when I was 28, and I served three years.

After this, I got some minors drunk, and I had sex with one of them. I was arrested, and I served 16 years of 37 year sentence. In prison, I searched through different religions in an effort to find the truth. I learned Christ was the only way. I knew the only way to live is to let Christ live in me. I got out of prison, and I started smoking weed again. I got arrested for weed, and I was sentenced to two years of incarceration and six years of probation. I came to Hand Up Ministries in 2008. Hand Up has helped me to become stronger in my faith, and my walk with God is much stronger.

William Watkins

# ***James Watson***

I was born in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1948. My mother abandoned her children when I was a baby. My father was a truck driver, and he was on the road at the time. A black lady found us in the house after we had been alone for three days, and she took us to her house. She was able to breast feed me because she had a daughter who was one month older than me. My dad came and got us. He sent my sister and me to live with our grandparents, and he put my three older brothers in an orphanage. My dad came and got us when I was eight years old. Shortly after that, my mom came and got my sister. This started my life of crime.

We lived by a river, and I stole a boat to go find my sister. I was raped by my brother when I was 11. I told my dad, and he beat me because he thought I was lying. I caught the school bus when I was able, and I got off at a crossroads and never looked back. I have been to prison 13 times. That is the subtotal of a man who has failed in life.

Something happened the last time I was in prison. I was in church, and I heard a song which had these lyrics: "For when he was on the cross, I was on His mind." This song changed my life. I now know that Jesus was always with me. He protected me through the bad times and good times. I started studying the Bible, and I have done 28 Bible studies. I am writing a Christian western (no cuss words). I am up to page 155. I have given my soul to God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Hand Up has given me a place to live that is drug and booze free. I believe we all have our eyes on Jesus. They have church and programs to help. They keep things away that might tempt us. They took me from under a bridge and gave me a home. God has blessed me with all of this and more. He has blessed me with His Son.

James Watson

# *James White*

I was born in a small Oklahoma town called Clebit, which is about 40 miles north of Broken Bow. The year was 1946. In 1952 our family moved to Mount Hermon, Oklahoma. I started school in Mount Hermon when I was six years old. We didn't go to church. None of my relatives went to church. We moved four times, and we eventually settled in Antlers, Oklahoma.

I occasionally attended church when I was a teenager, but my heart wasn't in it. I worked different jobs from the time I was 15 until I was 21 years of age. I still didn't know the Lord. I got married in 1967. My wife came from a family which didn't attend church, and my wife and I didn't attend church. This changed when I was 32 years old. My wife, my sister-in-law, and I went to church one night. My wife gave her heart to the Lord that very night. By that time we had three sons. One night my wife said to me, "If anything happens to me, I want you to keep the boys in church." I said I would do that. It was soon after this that I asked Jesus to come into my heart.

My boys grew up, left home, and got married. After this I committed the crime which for which I went to prison. In the county jail they were giving me the wrong medication for my diabetes, and this nearly killed me. God came to me in a dream, and He said, "You will not die in prison." God told me to relax. He said his grace was sufficient for me. That was when I started trusting God.

I spent five years in prison. I got knocked around some, but I survived. I received an acceptance letter from Hand Up Ministries, and I have lived at Hand Up for four years. I broke my foot on the day after I arrived at Hand Up. It took six weeks for my foot to heal. Every day I thank God for Hand Up Ministries. I can't get around well, but I thank God for what I can do.

I have read the entire Bible 64 times.

James White

# ***Alan Wickham***

I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness, and early in life I learned about our heavenly Father Jehovah and His beloved Son Jesus Christ our Lord. I did Bible readings in front of the congregation, and I attended our meeting twice a week. As a young child, I did what my parents wanted me to do in our daily life, but I didn't take the teaching of God to heart. I started doing what I wanted to do in my early teen years, and I stopped going to meetings. I didn't care about it anymore.

My parents began having problems in their marriage, and they stopped going to meetings. They divorced, and our family split apart. We all went our separate ways. This was when I went astray from God and started living a life of sin. After this, it seemed whatever I did was wrong, and I sinned again and again. I got far from God. Things just didn't go right for me, and it seemed to be endless.

I became an alcoholic because of the stress of trying to work and stay ahead on the bills. It was all too much for me, and then one night I did the wrong thing. I committed a crime, and I went to prison. Prison was a wakeup call for me. I was scared someone was going to kill me for what I had done. It was four years before I could relax a little. I wanted to keep busy doing something I liked, so I started reading books. I liked to read novels and stories of adventure. This went well for a while, but I realized I should be reading the Bible instead of other books. I got two Bibles, but something wasn't right. I wanted to read the Bible I read when I was young. I knew one of the guys in my unit was a Jehovah's Witness, and I asked him to get a Jehovah's Witness Bible for me. He invited me to attend Jehovah's Witness meetings in the chapel. When I went to the meeting, I knew in my heart that was where I needed to be. This happened in January, 2017.

It came time for me to discharge from prison, and I needed to find a place to live. I had no family or friends who could help me. My counselor told me about Hand Up Ministries. I applied to Hand Up, and I was accepted. I had a place to go. Hand Up has helped me get back on my feet, and they gave me encouragement to get a job and become a member of society again. I thank David Nichols for building Hand Up Ministries to give people like me a second chance. I also thank our heavenly Father Jehovah for all things. I have a life with God again. My faith is in Jehovah and our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you.

Alan Wickham

# ***William Harrison***

I was born at home. I had five brothers, and we all went to Concho Boarding School in El Reno, Oklahoma from first grade through eighth grade. Afterward, I went to another boarding school named Riverside, and that is where things started going bad. I started drinking and smoking marijuana. Of course, we all got caught and were punished with work detail. From then on, this was my pattern until I went to prison in 1998.

I was in and out of prison for the next fifteen years. I desperately needed some guidance. I hit rock bottom, and I was about to be released from prison with nowhere to go. I heard about Hand Up Ministries in November, 2020. Hand Up was a true godsend, a place with a true hand up and the guidance and discipline I so badly needed. I can't thank David Nichols enough for taking a chance on me and eventually trusting me enough to man the gate. I thank the Lord every night for giving me another chance.

Because of therapy, the discipline at Hand Up, and the Hand Up staff, I have been clean and straight for over a year. If not for Hand Up, I would be back in prison or living on the street. I am working on getting my driver license and becoming self-sufficient. Things are looking up in my life, and, with the Lord's help, I can see life clearly and positively. My family sees a whole new me, and that makes me feel worthy. When I look back, I see that I wasted a lot of time. Now, I am in the Lord's club.

William Harrison

# *James Womack*

I was born in eastern Oklahoma. My mother was a strong woman who raised my five sisters, my brother, and me. She taught us morals and values, and she made sure we attended church so we could learn about God and our savior Jesus Christ. When I was 13 years old I was baptized in the cold waters of a creek just outside of town. I attended church throughout my teen years, and I volunteered to help the missionaries who came to our church each summer. We built classrooms, an ambulance garage, a basketball court, and a medical clinic.

My mother got her first driver license and her GED when she was 42 years old. She earned her bachelor's degree in behavioral science when she was 52. My mother was my hero and my role model. I had some tough times as a teenager, and it was because of my mother that I graduated from high school. I was the middle child in my family. My three older sisters dropped out of school, and I was the first of two siblings who graduated from high school.

I joined the Air Force a few months after I graduated from high school, and I proudly served our country. I was stationed on the east coast during most of my time in the service. I returned home after I discharged from the Air Force. I went back to the place where I had learned small town values. The following year I began studying radiologic technology at the University of Central Arkansas, and I received a bachelor's degree four years later. I began my career as a radiographer in North Little Rock, and I started a family. I had a wife and three children. Five years after receiving my bachelor's degree, I enrolled at Southern Technical College, and I earned an associate's degree in electronic technology. I got a job with DuPont (a Fortune 500 company), and I moved to Oklahoma City.

While I was in the military, I got into drinking and partying with my friends. I thought they were my friends. This behavior continued in college and after college. Thus began my downward spiral. I stopped going to church, and, because of my drinking, I failed as a husband and a father. I also lost my job. Because of my education and my background, it wasn't hard to find another good job. I continued drinking, and it wasn't long before I committed a crime against a minor girl. I touched her inappropriately while I was drunk. I was prosecuted for this crime, and I went to prison.

While I was incarcerated, I thought about all of the things I had lost. I pondered how I had done everything society said I should have done to be successful, but I was thinking about me and what I had lost. I started praying and reading the Bible, and it wasn't long before God showed me the error of my ways. I had been thinking about myself and all of the things I could have and did have, and, in so doing I lost my family, my job, and my freedom.

In prison I met a man who told me about Hand Up Ministries. I sent an application to Hand Up, but I didn't get the response because I transferred. At the new facility, I met a minister who was on the board of directors at Hand Up. He checked on my application, and he learned I had been accepted. I discharged, and I arrived at Hand Up Ministries on Broadway Drive. I soon found a labor job, and I started to earn my keep.

I was soon asked to work for Hand Up. I said no at least seven times. I finally said I would pray about it. After a visit to eastern Oklahoma, I agreed to work for Hand Up. Two days later the place I had been working closed, and everyone lost their job. God had a plan for me, and He put me where He wanted me to be. I started out helping in the office, but soon I became the office manager. This was around the time Hand Up moved to SE 59<sup>th</sup> Street in Oklahoma City. I continued to work as office manager until Louis Davis retired, and then I became the director of Hand Up. I believe my mother's lessons and my military experience have served me well in this position. God has me where He wants me to be, and I am certain this ministry is here to help those who feel lost and alone.

I have learned it is not how much you make or how much you have that makes you happy and successful. The things that bring true happiness are doing the work God puts before you and allowing Him to lead you. I thank God for allowing me to be a help to this ministry, and I am thankful for the good values my mother taught me. These values help me serve this ministry. Hand Up has been a blessing to in my life and in my family's life. I now have the respect and love of my family.

James Womack

# **Zachary Stewart**

I grew up on the south side of Oklahoma City. When I was a child, I went to church on most Sundays and Wednesdays. My mother was in an automobile accident when I was seven, and she suffered long term complications as a result of the wreck. She started having short term memory loss and seizures, and she spent a lot of time in the hospital. My dad worked during the day, but he started staying home with my mom when I was 14.

I dropped out of school in the tenth grade. I was failing math, and I was often truant. From ages 15 to 20, I pretty much stayed at home and played video games. I also worked on go-karts. My mother died when I was 18. My dad was in a motorcycle wreck when I was 20, and he was paralyzed from the waist down. From then until I went to jail was a very spiritual time for me. I realized who my true friends were, and I learned God was there for me.

I went to jail when I was halfway through my 21<sup>st</sup> year of life. I was scared of jail at the beginning, but I had to stay strong for my dad and best friend. I believe jail is something some people need as a sign that you matter and life isn't what it seems. Going to court every day was stressful, but in my dorm they had a Bible study group which met every day. I started attending the Bible study, and I felt a connection. I talked to God, and I asked Him all these questions. Why am I here? Do I deserve this? Is my dad going to be alright? One day I was flipping through my Bible, and I found 2 Corinthians 4:8-10. I knew I was going to be alright.

I was relaxed when I went to court, because I knew God was there. I was sentenced to time served, and I was released. I was stuck in Los Angeles. I tried to transfer my probation to Oklahoma, but my dad's house was too close to a school. My probation supervisor told me about Hand Up Ministries. He told me it was a place where I could live and be close to my dad. I have been back in Oklahoma for eight months.

I am now 23 years old. I have my old friends back, and my life is kind of back to normal. I wouldn't have been able to come to Oklahoma and be home if Hand Up hadn't accepted me. I thank God for pointing my probation officer in the right direction. Without my faith and spirit, I wouldn't be here today. God saved me from prison, and He saved my father from dying. He also saved me from going down the wrong path. I believe we were all put on this earth for a reason, even though we may not always know what that reason is. God will tell us when the time is right. Thank you for hearing my story.

Zachary Stewart