

# Keeshon's Story: A Knock Heard Round The Hood - Part 2

*This story is Part 2 of a 4-part series.*

*Read Part 1 [HERE](#)*

Soon after VBS, I was solicited for a weekly program that ran through the year. I remembered enough from the VBS picnic that I didn't put up a fight, but I still went with a general cynicism toward the whole program. I remember walking into our school gym with a look that would have shot right through you. I was unwilling to enjoy myself, and made that clear to everybody around me. One of my teachers was a man by the name of Dave Mellinger. He had a smile that always looked like he had just pulled a prank on someone or done something mischievous. I knew when I first saw him that he was going to be annoyingly loving.

His lesson was a rather poor one. I'm still convinced it was one of those situations that nobody planned to teach and so he had to take the bullet. We started off with the usual singing and chants, and then the lesson began. Dave began to ask us if we believed he would give us a new car. Nearly everybody raised their hands to play along, while I sat and scoffed at their stupidity. I knew that this was all a ploy by the teacher, and I wasn't interested in playing along. For about five minutes this went on and on, with houses, clothes, and electronics all being offered. Slowly less hands were showing, and everyone had lost interest. Then, Dave pulled out a \$20 bill and said "Ok, now I promise, I will give this to the first person to raise their hand." I had enough sense to raise my hand, and nobody else was paying close enough attention to notice. This worked to my advantage as Dave took me out back and handed me the bill. He asked me not to say anything when we went back into the gym, but I wasn't going to obey him. As soon as we re-entered the gym, I shouted to all who would listen that Christians don't lie and when they make a promise they wouldn't break it. Dave (I assume) was both happy and disappointed. Happy I got the point of his lesson, but disappointed I decided to finish it for him.

From there on my outlook of Christian white people improved. I began to see them as friends and not as enemies. I began to see how they would struggle a lot like I did. They could get mad,

and yell, and apologize. I was eventually apologized to more often than I had to apologize. This was one of the major turning points in my life; to see these people who I thought were far greater than myself show me that we were both unqualified for the call that they were trying to teach me. They were actually hypocrites, but that made me respect them even more. They couldn't live up to the perfection they were teaching, but they were pulling me in to be a part of that journey and I appreciated that. It wasn't until later that I realized that I was still missing something significant. I was missing Jesus.

### **"Who is Jesus?"**

A year or two went by and I was still routinely in trouble at Bible school. However, my mischief had a different motivation; I was no longer getting in trouble for waging war against my leaders. I was getting in trouble for protecting them. Whether it was someone making fun of Miss Sarah's covering, or the way Mr. Shawn dressed, I took offense to those things. I had plenty of criticisms of my own for the Mennonites. I still had a strong distaste in my mouth for the way they approached certain things. But I was going to be the only one making fun of them because they had become an important part of my life.

This position isn't an uncommon one in Mennonite youth clubs. There are always a few charming but disorderly kids to keep the group leaders on their toes. This position would still likely have ended in eternal damnation if there had not been a more aggressive discipleship in my life. This is where Austin came in.

"Do you want to come to my house for a Bible study?" Austin asked me on one of our Bible school nights. I didn't know much about Austin, but what I knew fascinated me. He was an extremely "off the wall" kind of guy, there was nothing conventional about him. I knew his older brother better because he was the director of Bible school, and even he was really weird. I can speak about them in this way because, [spoiler alert] they are my brothers today. No matter how captivated I was, there was still a lot that made me hesitate at the thought of joining Austin in an environment that I couldn't control. I lived a very lonely childhood and had never spent time in another person's home that wasn't family. I'm still not sure what captivated me to say yes. It feels like God Himself must have provoked me to join him and the following Tuesday, he was at my front door.

When I got in his car a lot of bad thoughts came to my head. I had personally seen an abduction take place before, and I knew that people couldn't be trusted. I felt somewhat secure

in the fact that if Austin would try to pull anything on me, I was bigger and stronger than him. I checked the back seat and held my breath for the 8 minute drive to his house. When we arrived I was even more confused. The side of his house read “ANTIQUES” in large letters. Why in the world did Austin live in an antique shop?

We entered the gate to his yard which is one of the largest yards in the city limits. I remember feeling a bit frustrated at first at how much more of a privileged life he had versus me. That wasn't the last time that feeling would come over me, but it quickly went away when I entered his house. The first person I saw was his sister Autumn, who was also in my class because we were close in age. I never drew the connection that they were related, but I remember thinking how cool it was that Austin had a sister. I never knew any of my sisters, so I always wondered what that was like. The only problem was that Austin didn't just have one sister. Before I knew it, Shenks were coming from the ceiling, down the stairs, and under the table. I was overwhelmed by a strong welcome from all seven of his siblings. Where I came from, families with 8 children were common, but they were never all from the same parents.

The house smelled and looked like how I imagined a home in the 1800s would look like. It smelled like fresh baked bread, none of the furniture was modern, and they heated the house with firewood. I met his parents and another thought came to mind. “This is the family that always arrives 10 minutes late to Bible school!” I was beginning to piece it all together. I then found out their family was so big that they had to buy an old antique shop and remodel it just to house their family. That explained the large letters on the side of the house.

What happened next is what I would call the most shaping experience I have ever had with the Mennonites. We sat down for dinner and I wasn't sure what to think. The table was stretched across the entire room, and there were probably 30 different food items scattered around. Various kinds of jellies, meats, vegetables, seasonings, etc. When I ate dinner at home we had a main dish and possibly one side. We didn't sit at a table together, and we didn't talk to each other while we were eating. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I spent an unusual amount of time observing the table itself. It was an expandable table, and several visits later I made them show me how it worked.

Austin's father Clayton prayed and then everyone went into motion. They passed everything to the left and I tried my best to keep up. Somehow they were multi-tasking and able to do all of this without missing a beat. By the time all the food was passed around, I hadn't gotten any food. I was too busy trying to do everything right. While this was far from fine-dining, I was

completely lost and amazed. Later in the evening, Austin pulled me into a different room and sat down with me for a Bible study. My fears weren't all relieved yet, but I was comfortable enough to listen to what he had to say. He used some material from Ray Comfort and tried his best to run through the Gospel with me. I didn't understand any of it and I felt like I was being run through a program, which I didn't appreciate all that much. Austin was only 16 and didn't know how to do this, but it was the thought and time he spent with me that mattered. He handed me a Psalms and Proverbs Bible and encouraged me to read parts of it every night. He closed with prayer, but I noticed something different about the way he prayed. He started the prayer with "Dear Jesus". I don't remember if I cut him off right there or not, but I remember those words tensing me up and causing great curiosity. I asked him "Who is Jesus?" He looked at me like I had just asked the golden question.

Austin told me about Jesus like He was his hero. It was clear to me from the very beginning of our relationship that the number one thing in his life was Jesus. All of a sudden I had sat down with a man who put all of the attention to Christ. We weren't getting together to talk about Moses; we were getting together to talk about Jesus. I left still not knowing who Jesus was, but the answers Austin gave me that night, and the nights that would follow, planted seeds that would blossom only a year or two later.

Visits with Austin became the highlight of my week. I began to fabricate reasons to be over there as much as I could. I'm still certain that many times Austin was aware I was lying to try to come visit, but I had good reason to not want to be at home. The atmosphere I was growing up in was causing emotional and physical damage. I was still too young to make my own decisions, so I had to live with the decisions my parents made. Up to this point, the most important thing in the lives of my parents was their addiction to cocaine. It consumed all of their thoughts, and took most of their time. I remember breaking down their door to find out what this substance looked like and to attempt to permanently remove it from our lives. That experience left me with a piece of a crack pipe lodged into my foot and a crying mother wishing she could stop all of the madness for my sake. I was promised dozens of times that they would stop the drugs, but they were never able to accomplish that while I was living with them.

*To be continued...*

***Read Part 3***