

snapshot.

a glimpse of Life!



November 2009

A Story of Hope

Yes, it's my picture you see below, but this isn't my story to tell this time. Many of the stories you read are from my perspective, but this month it's from the perspective of one of our staff members who helped at a recent rally in Kaukauna, WI. Read on, and be amazed by our incredible God...



Bob Lenz

This wasn't a typical rally. More than 1,200 people showed up to fill an auditorium with 800 seats. So we had to ask people who had seen Bob Lenz and AJ the Animated Illusionist perform before to be willing to give up their spots. Still not enough room. Then we asked parents to give up their seats so more kids could hear the message.

The response to having Bob and AJ in the schools was so positive that it seemed the entire community came out. The reality is that the programs in this community had received a lot of publicity, but not for positive reasons. You see, the programs were organized in response to a rash of recent tragedies. Four students had taken their own lives in the past six months. The most recent was less than a month ago – a 15 year old sophomore boy.

After a 20 minute delay to get everyone seated, the program began. The night hadn't gone quite as I had planned. I had intended to assist AJ with one of his illusions by being the disappearing girl... apparently disappearing people need to be really flexible. Needless to say, the disappearing act didn't take place, but I did get to sit back stage and wait for the queue to bring out AJ's beloved performing dog, Bear, for his part of the opening show. Though I couldn't see the audience from behind the stage curtain, I could tell that hearts were softening and laughter was bringing healing.

AJ finished and Bob Lenz took the stage to speak. I remained back stage for a while, helping AJ pack up some things. Then I decided to go out to the commons area to see if I could help there, but the youth leaders had everything under control. I wanted to take some photos of Bob on stage as he spoke, but I knew I couldn't go inside the auditorium that was already at full capacity. Someone suggested I go to the sound booth to get some photos from there. When I climbed the stairs and turned the corner, I quickly realized it was too dark to get any good shots. So, I decided to just hang out until the program ended.

I could see down on the crowd from there. Every seat was filled. I tried to see if there was anyone I recognized, but it was difficult from the back. I can't explain why, maybe it was the pattern of her black and white hounds-tooth coat that stood out to me, but I particularly noticed a woman who sat against the wall, with a man seated next to her. Maybe it was because the room was mostly filled with students that these adults stood out to me. I don't know, but they were listening intently and I said a little prayer for them.

Bob continued sharing about the love of Christ. Then, that most important moment came when heads are bowed, eyes are closed and the ear of God is bent a little closer to the earth, anticipating a whisper from the heart that says, "Yes, I believe." He was not disappointed. As Bob invited people to respond to the gospel and trust in God's love, literally hundreds of hands went up in the air: young and old, boy and girl, including the man and woman I had noticed earlier. Tears came to my eyes as I looked down on a sea of people, who only moments ago I couldn't find anything in common with, but now I could call them my brothers and sisters. So many had come and found a lasting hope.

Things wrapped up on stage and people began piling out after the program to get their free pizza. Those who responded to the message were given a free workbook, along with Bob's book *Grace*, as a result of the generosity of many people from a local church. I wanted to cut through the flow of traffic to go back stage and help finish packing up, but getting through was going to be difficult. So, I paused on the edge of the crowd, waiting for an opportunity. Suddenly I heard my name, "Tammy, how are you?" I gazed into the eyes of a woman who was about my age. She looked vaguely familiar, and I'm sure she saw the wheels turning in my head as I thought, "Where do I know you from?" She could tell the answer wasn't coming quickly and generously offered the information. "It's Rita, remember?" she said. "I graduated a year ahead of you. I recognized you when you brought the little dog out on stage."

Suddenly, it came to me. Her eyes hadn't changed since the last time I saw her 25 years ago. But there was something in them that made me wonder what life had brought her in those years. We were merely acquaintances back in high school, having some mutual friends, but never really engaging in conversations or spending much time together. "Yes! I remember you," I said. Not really knowing what to say, I stated the usual, "How have you been?" She seemed to offer the usual response, "I'm okay."

There was that moment of awkwardness that always comes when two people who haven't seen each other in years come face to face again, having lost any connection they might have once had. A sea of people pressed against us, willing us to move down stream, but we temporarily fought against the tide to continue exchanging pleasantries. "Did you enjoy the program?" I asked. "Oh yes, it was wonderful," she said. "I came to the parent program last week too. It was so good." "That's great," I responded.

What she said next stunned me. The words didn't match her glimmering eyes and I found myself wondering if I heard her right among the excited chatter of passers by. "We came because of my son, Lucas. He was the last one to commit suicide." My heart sank, instantly turning from a feeling of joy over reconnecting with an old acquaintance, to horror at what I just heard. Tears welled in my eyes and the only words I could find were, "Oh, I'm so sorry." I reached out to hug her and we embraced. It was one of those real hugs where you linger a little longer than usual. "I'm so sorry," I said again. What could I say? It had been less than a month since her son had taken his own life.

"Thanks for tonight," she said. "It's good to know there are so many people who care and want to help." I wanted to pull her aside and talk, but the crowd pushed stronger and she gestured that she was ready to give in to the throng of people streaming out of the auditorium. "It was good to see you," she said. "You too," I replied. "Take care..." And she slipped back into the crowd.

I stepped back for a moment, holding back the tears. What just happened? The conversation maybe lasted a minute, but it left me heartbroken. Questions flooded my mind. Would I see her again? Would she be okay? What could possibly take away the pain she was experiencing? What could possibly restore her hope? The answers to my haunting questions came as I glanced back for one last look to see her walk away... with her black and white hounds-tooth coat draped softly over her shoulders. There was hope. The giver of hope had taken up residence in her soul, and in the hearts of countless others that night. I felt a rush of emotion and turned to face the oncoming crowd once again; my heart strangely at peace. *(Written by Tammy Borden)*

I can't imagine the stories we may never know about, but God allowed us to hear this one through an amazing series of events. In this season of giving thanks, let's offer Him our thanks for bringing hope in the midst of trials.

For the Kingdom,

Bob Lenz
International Speaker

You can be a part of reaching young people with messages of hope and the love of Christ!

If you'd like to support the ministry of Life Promotions, visit www.lifepromotions.com or e-mail daver@lifepromotions.com.



Life! Promotions

211 E. Franklin St. Appleton, WI 54911

800-955-LIFE www.lifepromotions.com