

“Violent and eruptive*.” Smoking cigarettes at 11; drug and alcohol user at 13. In and out of correctional institutions since age 14. Teen years spent in fights and scrapes.

Would YOU hire a guy with a resume that looked like this? Not likely. But I knew Randy Johnson to be a stable adult with a reservoir of spiritual strength, and last Fall I asked him to consider working for us at Damascus Way.



Not that Randy had turned into an angel overnight. He not only was arrested at age 16 for assaulting two police officers, but even the Marine Corps discharged him at age 18 as “undesirable.” By 31 he had spent years in state prisons, primarily on assault charges.

It was during his last stint in Stillwater State Prison that Randy began to face some harsh realities – about himself and about God. There in a hostile prison, God tenderly led Randy to Himself. Where rage had been, joy surged in, flooding his heart with a new peace.

One memory in particular set Randy to singing, right there in Stillwater Prison. He recalled how good it had felt as a youngster of seven, at a Salvation Army Open Air meeting, to stand tall and sing the

*psychiatrist’s diagnosis

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treasured words of “Blessed Assurance” as a solo. Warmed by that memory, he finished his Stillwater sentence singing every gospel song he could learn – often at the top of his lungs!

We first became acquainted with Randy on November 16, 1985 after his release from Stillwater. He graduated from Damascus Way February 14, 1986 and headed west, eventually marrying. The couple lived and worked in California and Idaho, bringing a son and daughter into the world, both of whom are in college or headed for college this Fall. Randy kept in touch with me over the years, wherever he was.

Randy’s wife divorced him after 20 years of marriage during a time of economic and emotional hardship when Randy lost his job. He returned to St. Paul looking for work and seeking God regarding his future. When he called, it happened that we were in need of an experienced cook, which Randy is, and Shift Supervisor.


He did not hesitate to accept our offer of a staff position, and began training on October 18, 2010.

“I still enjoy singing,” says Randy, “and hope that doors to return to my music ministry might open down the road, or other doors for running a business as I did before.” He is confident that God will lead his steps and is happy to “humbly accept the ministry set before me.”

It was a psychiatrist who declared the youthful, troubled Randy “violent and eruptive.” **Because of God’s work in his heart, it is a changed man who humbly serves the men of Damascus Way** as cook and Shift Supervisor ... and calls it his ministry. “I am profoundly happy,” Randy says, “that the Lord has provided this opportunity to give again ... which I cherish.”

Perhaps you helped to support Damascus Way in 1985 and 1986. If so, I hope you are glad to see that your gifts had a huge impact for God’s kingdom! And now with your support in 2011, Damascus Way is able to multiply your Kingdom Investment many times over through Randy and others. With your help, we continue to help broken men find healing, peace and God’s grace. Thank you for your continued partnership. We count daily on your help. An envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

For the men of Damascus Way,



Dick Harden, Executive Director
Damascus Way Reentry Center, Inc.

P.S. Well, now that we have a trained chef, the stove went out! Our 60-inch commercial range was over ten years old when I came to Damascus Way in 1979 ... and we can’t get parts for it anymore. Definitely time to replace it. A new one should be installed in the next two weeks, to the tune of \$4,800. **Would you consider a donation toward this capital improvement?** We are looking forward to our first roast turkey or pot roast dinner from the new range and it would taste lots better knowing you had helped us pay it off. We can’t thank you enough!