



My Story: Dan Woska (04/02/2017)

(BEING TRANSPARENT WITH AN ENTIRE CHURCH CONGREGATION IS MUCH DIFFERENT THAN BEING TRANSPARENT WITH A FEW FRIENDS AND A SMALL TEAM OF DISCIPLES. SO, THANKS JERRY FOR THE INVITATION AND MAY I BE A WITNESS TO THE CHANGES JESUS CHRIST CAN ACCOMPLISH THROUGH HIS GRACE AND MERCY.)

1. DEBBIE COMMENT ABOUT HOW I DID MANY MORE THINGS I HAVE NOT IDENTIFIED.
2. DEBBIE COMMENT ABOUT HOW "TRUST" IS COMPROMISED AND IMPACTED IN RELATIONSHIPS BY UNGODLY ACTIONS.

(INSERT PICTURE 1, DEBBIE)

I was born in Dallas, Texas at Florence Nightengale Hospital November 1, 1952 to Anthony Gerard Woska, Jr. and Mary Jane Daniel Woska. My sister Molly was born 6 years earlier on July 8, 1946.

(INSERT PICTURES 2 AND 3, MY MOM AND DAD PICTURE AND
AND MY SISTER PICTURE)

My dad was from Newburgh, New York and my mom was from Kerens, Texas. They met in Denton, Texas before WWII when my dad, who was 24, was stationed nearby and my mom, who was 17 or 18, was in college.

My dad fought in Europe in WWII and when he got back home they married.

Dad had 6 sisters, all from Newburgh, and mom had 1 brother in Kerens, Texas.

I grew up in Tulsa from shortly after birth until age 7 when we moved to Oklahoma City. due to my dad's job with Ethyl Corporation selling tetraethyl lead additives for gasoline engines before lead additives became outlawed later.

Life in my home was tense and unpredictable. My parents drank a lot and fought a lot. My sister and I were frequently grabbed out of bed, loaded in a car with a drunk and crying mother, and told we were going to Kerens to live with her parents after they had fights. We would circle Oklahoma City for awhile and eventually return home.

My grade school, junior high and high school years in Oklahoma City were spent with friends and lots of trips to Kerens (INSERT PICTURE 4 OF GRANDPARENTS HOME IN KERENS), where I would stay with my grandparents. I learned quite a bit about calmness and how to raise a family by

spending the night with kids my age in Kerens and by staying with my grandparents. My grandfather died in November 1963, a week or two before President Kennedy was shot.

In 1964, my sister left for college and I was left at home with parents who had escalated partying, drinking and fighting to an art form. I remember one night in the 7th grade, I was doing my homework and I needed help with something. I looked in the kitchen where my parents were drinking and realized “I was on my own”, I was 12 and it put a level of fear and lack of trust inside me that served as the background to most of my decisions through adulthood. I was very angry my parents loved alcohol more than me and my sister. I once told my parents around age 12 or 13 that I did not know why they had children.

Fear and lack of trust drove me routinely to make good grades in school become independent. In other words, in God’s providence the circumstances in which I was raised placed me on a pathway that consistently led me to the question “Why?” God gave me two very good friends on the street where I grew up in Oklahoma City, I was able to spend time with these two guys away from all the drama and craziness, they are actually still my friends to this very day. We shared life together.

We moved to Dallas in 1968 when I was 15 after my sophomore year in high school and my life changed remarkably. My dad got sick and died of cancer in the

summer of 1969 the day before Neal Armstrong walked on the moon. My mom told me I gave him the virus that caused the cancer and I carried around that comment for many years and it made me sad and also angry.

High school in Dallas was a gift from God and the kids in my high school were fun and committed friends and to this very day I am close to many of them and thankful for their placement in my life. They helped me be content with the difficulties I was experiencing with my mom who was 42 and was experiencing dad's death at 48, she was a mess and continued drinking and actually became mean and bitter towards my sister and sometimes me.

College followed. It was September 1970 and I was 17. I graduated from high school, started the University of Oklahoma, and joined the Delta Tal Delta Fraternity. It was 4 years of studying but also lots of drinking. I refined my skills in selfish pursuits, self-condemnation, earning everything on merit and found that I was an egomaniac with an inferiority complex. My relationship with my mother grew more strained and I was involved in my first serious relationships with girls. I regularly and routinely destroyed and blew up or messed up all my relationships primarily because I was scared and fearful of any commitment outside myself and did not trust other people very much.

After I graduated from OU, I started graduate school in history and then law school in the fall of 1975 at the age of 22. I worked multiple jobs throughout college

and law school because I hated having to rely on my mother for financial help. There were always strings attached and demands made which I just hated. I realized that I needed to finish school and get to work and earn a living because I wanted to be 100% independent and free of all the griping, complaining and drama in my home. I finished law school in 2 years and began work as a legal intern in January 1977 until I passed the bar exam in 1978 at age 25.

I went to work for a law firm in Oklahoma City. In 1977, I met my future wife Debbie, and in 1977 I trusted a person enough to fall in love for the first time. Due to my lack of trust, suspicious nature and my desire to be independent, I was unwilling to have a right relationship with another human being until I met Debbie. God placed a Godly woman in my life with strong and loving parents and an excellent upbringing. I thought I had married into the family on Leave it to Beaver.

In 1981 Debbie and I got married, in 1983 we had a son Trey, and in 1985 we had a daughter Laine, and throughout this time, I became grafted into the Smoot family, as most of our free time as a husband and wife and mother and father were spent with Debbie's parents, who were exceptionally kind and grounded people.

In 1986 when the children were small, I was still having problems relating to my wife and understanding my responsibilities as a father to my children, because I was still engaged in self-love and still engaged in self worship which was brought on by fear and lack of trust. I was always seeking to avoid the pain of the past which

made my emotional needs **First**. So, my wife gave me an ultimatum and she took the kids to California to see her sister for a few weeks. The ultimatum was, get your act together or there will be consequences. I didn't know what that meant, but on Easter Sunday in 1986, not because it was Easter Sunday and not because I was in church, I got on my knees at the kitchen table early that morning and asked God if He was really there, asked Him to change me, and He did.

The change was one in which I stopped drinking, began to spend large amounts of time reading the Word, studying the Word, looking up the Word, digging into theology, and serving as a sponge for all that I could accumulate in the way of information about the doctrines of Christ. I became full of head knowledge, but my heart was still far from Jesus. From 1986 until 1992, I worked at "earning" and "deserving" a relationship with Jesus Christ but I did not understand Grace.

In 1992, when I was moving my law firm from one location to another, I injured my back and ended up being prescribed pain killers. I had pridefully avoided being an alcoholic like my parents but a pain pill addiction became part of my life from 1992 until December of 1999, when I checked myself into a rehab to deal with the issue. I was a functional drug user. I was able to work, I was able to perform as a lawyer, but the pain killers had taken over my thinking and I had become consumed by the need to find pain medication and it made for difficulties and embarrassment

for me and my family. The pain pills had "quieted" the emotional pain I had been carrying around for decades.

After getting off pain pills from 2000 to 2005, I started a new business adventure which allowed me to open offices in Houston, Texas, and to pursue securities arbitration cases on behalf of investors all over the country. In 2005, I once again started using pain medication because of other aches and pains, and in 2008, my mom died. In 2009, I went to Rapid Detox in Detroit, Michigan, and finally was cured of my pain killer addiction. In the meantime, I had gotten into another new venture in Oklahoma City, and began pursuing cases all over the country on behalf of plaintiffs in mass torts, class actions and other types of litigation. The business had dozens and dozens of full and part-time employees.

In 2008, when Lehman Brothers bankruptcy took place and the stock market crashed and the economy of the United States teetered on the brink, I was the signer on a large promissory note and security agreement with a hedge fund in New York City, New York. The hedge fund ultimately went broke, and so did my business. When the business went broke, I had employees in cases all over the country and mountains of debt. My offices closed, I moved home, and in 2010 all that I had known financially, professionally and as part of my efforts to be independent, came to an abrupt end and I was doing a little bit of work out of my house, drinking, using drugs and not paying much attention to anything other than my sadness and the

“that’s not fair” in my life. I had stopped going to church, I was no longer the spiritual leader in my home, and as a result my wife was not very pleased with me and my situation.

In 2012, after isolating and spending no time in the Word, no time in prayer, no time in fellowship with other believers and suffering financially, emotionally and spiritually, I reached out to a friend of mine and asked to have lunch. I had known him for years, we were friends in the Delt house, and had remained in contact as adults. I had lunch with him at Jamil’s, was dressed in short pants, a stained shirt, had a beard **(INSERT PICTURE 5 OF ME WITH THE BEARD)**, and probably hadn’t bathed in a couple of days, and as he sat there in his suit and tie telling me all of his stories and asking me what was going on in my life, I began to try and engineer sympathy by telling him how difficult life was and how awful things had become. My friend simply looked across the table at me and said, “get a grip”. The “get a grip” statement was used by God and resonated in my spirit, and my soul, and my head and my heart. As a result, the Lord enabled me to began the climb back into spirituality.

In 2014, I got the courage to took personal and business bankruptcy, I also got up my courage and I returned to the Whitfield Society Bible Study on Friday mornings, one which I had attended for years and years and is usually led by one of my classmates from high school in Dallas. I reached out and started visiting churches

and we found a church home at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in the summer of 2014. In 2015, I met Jerry Wells and began attending a small discipleship group meeting at his home in Edmond.

Sometime after I met with my friend in 2012 at age 59 and before I started back to bible study and found a church home in 2014 I had once again bent my knees in exasperation, fear and trembling. Without the ability to pay current bills, being sued over debts owed by my business and not knowing where the next dollar was going to come from to put food on the table, I finally really and truly saw myself as a sinner, saw the damage and the pain I had caused my wife, my family and my workmates, repented, confessed my sins, and began a slow process of recognizing and understanding God's Grace as I was dealing with the consequences of sin. It has allowed me to slowly and deliberately with a team of disciples from my Friday morning bible study, Redeemer Presbyterian Church and from the small group intentionally led by Jerry Wells and his wife Sandra, to take the time to seek Christ daily, to depend on Christ, to speak with Christ and to stop depending on myself.

In this process, Max Lucado played a significant role. **(INSERT PICTURE 6, MAX LUCADO BOOK COVER)** I was unable to immediately return to reading the Bible after my repentance and confession because of the shame and humiliation I felt about veering of the path I had been walking with the Lord from 1986 until 1992 and instead, started reading Max Lucado books for well over a year until finally,

after reading book after book, story after story after story, I finally reached over and picked up my worn Bible and spent the next year reading and re-reading only the 4 Gospels in order to revisit what I could about the intimate details of Jesus Christ and how He related to His disciples and other people and how I could know Him better.

The combination of Max Lucado books, the 4 gospels of the New Testament, prayer, repentance, confession, and engaging in a more transparent discipleship/fellowship with my family, the men in bible study, the members of the church we attended, many of my high school friends from Dallas, my two childhood friends and many other friends from college and work, has equipped me to deal with the wreckage of my life. The grace of God reached my heart and my mind and authored a change in me. I sought to have a personal friendship with Jesus Christ and began to depend on Him for daily communion and reassurance.

In 2013, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and I fought with the insurance company and spent time in prayer and discussions with my wife and family, and eventually, in 2016, received treatment of proton therapy which just concluded in February 2017.

In 2014, while trying to figure out who I might work for or where I might find employment, I decided to go back to school and get my LLM in tax law. It's a 2-year program. I attended class online at Boston University and finished school in a year and a half. I reached out to a friend of mine to ask her if she knew where I might

be able to find a job and she invited me to come to her offices and help her. I have been there ever since and I am grateful for Donna J. Jackson and her kindness.

Let me thank my wife, my kids, my closest of friends from grade school, high school, college, my work mates, my friends from the Whitefield Society bible study, my church family at Redeemer Presbyterian and all those who cared for and never ever gave up on me when I had given up on myself. I have one friend who called me regularly from 2009 on and would say Dan, I only have 3 friends, one committed suicide so stay the course, I do not want to lose you. He held on tight as I was almost letting go.

“The essence of the Christian life,” says one seasoned saint, “is learning to fight for joy in a way that does not replace grace.” I cannot earn God’s grace or make it flow apart from his free gift. But I can position myself to continue to receive it and thank God for it daily and throughout each day.

The difference for me today compared to 1986 is boiled down to regularly, habitually and intentionally doing these things every single day of the week: hearing God’s voice, having God’s ear, and being with God’s people. Or reading His word, engaging in pray, for me on intentionally bent knees to remind myself that I am speaking to my Lord and Master lest I think I am in charge and intentionally staying in fellowship every single day of the week through texts, emails, phone calls or in person.

I know that God's immense flood of grace not only sees me as holy in Christ, but also progressively produces holy desires in me. It is grace to be forgiven of sinful acts, and grace to be supplied the heart for righteous ones. It is grace that I am increasingly "conformed to the image of his Son", and grace that he doesn't leave me in the misery of my sin but pledges to bring to completion the good work he has begun in me.

It is also my belief that God's providence means that the hand of God is in the glove of all human events and particularly mine. When God was not at the steering wheel, He was the backseat driver. He was the coach who called the signals from the bench. I have come to believe that providence is the unseen rudder on the ship of the state of my existence. God is the pilot at the wheel during the night watch. As someone has said, "God makes great doors swing on little hinges."

I thank God for my mother, my father, my family, my friends, my difficulties and my successes and the ways in which they have all worked together for the good in my life as they have each and everyone been appropriated to accomplish His work in me.

Thank you to all of you who are here today and for all of you who may listen to this on line may God be glorified and may you remember that no matter how things may look, "God's got it" and that is something you can trust.