

# Beth ducked and ran as **bullets** smacked into the wall behind her . . .

By Bill Emery

A child was lost in the streets. Her mother called Beth, crying uncontrollably. Beth could hear the mothers sobbing voice over the phone, "SHEEE ISSS MISSSSING, and I need help, NOW!!"

Beth was just finishing that week's street outreach, and was preparing to lock up and leave the center.

She assured the mother that she would come and help find the missing girl.

As Beth, left the center walking quickly through the streets of the drug ravaged neighborhood, fear of what might have already happened, fluttered through her mind.

Word on the street had filtered into the center. Two new problems had cropped up in this urban neighborhood which were terrifying the local girls who were trying to make it with their lives.

First were numerous incidents in which groups of kids "egged on" local boys into sucker punching unpopular girls as they got off the bus.

Crowds of kids, 10 to 13 years old, were 'starting' up the situation, in hopes of getting a front row seat to witness the surprise and humiliation these girls were about to face.

Many of the girls were terrified. If they didn't join in, if they weren't part of this popular group, if they didn't help stir up the boys to carry out these violent attacks, then the boys might just turn on them.

These same groups of kids had been inviting their friends over to one of the latch key kid houses. There, they would pick out a girl and bring her to a back bedroom, where the gang members would rape her.

The neighborhood was normally set on boil, and it frequently blew up. Now a little girl was missing. Beth looked around to see if the area was clear and took her bearings. She didn't walk this neighborhood at night, but she knew how dangerous it could be in broad daylight.

When the sun went down, it was like the vampires came out to prey. They might be in an alley, or behind a tree.

Crack heads, stole anything that wasn't chained down, and Beth only weighed 98 lbs soaking wet. She began to plan how she might be able to scoot past the street corner and peek over the fence to get a view of where the missing girl might be sitting. Hopefully on some friendly neighbors front porch.

The dark cold streets enveloped her as she ran past packs of youth staked out on their chosen street corners. She prayed that God might make her invisible.

Beth looked like a little Barbie, and she knew she stood out. Most of the time it hadn't really mattered, as all the kids loved her and wanted to be hugged by her. She was a magnet for lonely kids who needed a friend. Her "peoples" would run up to the car, yelling her name whenever she rolled through the neighborhood.

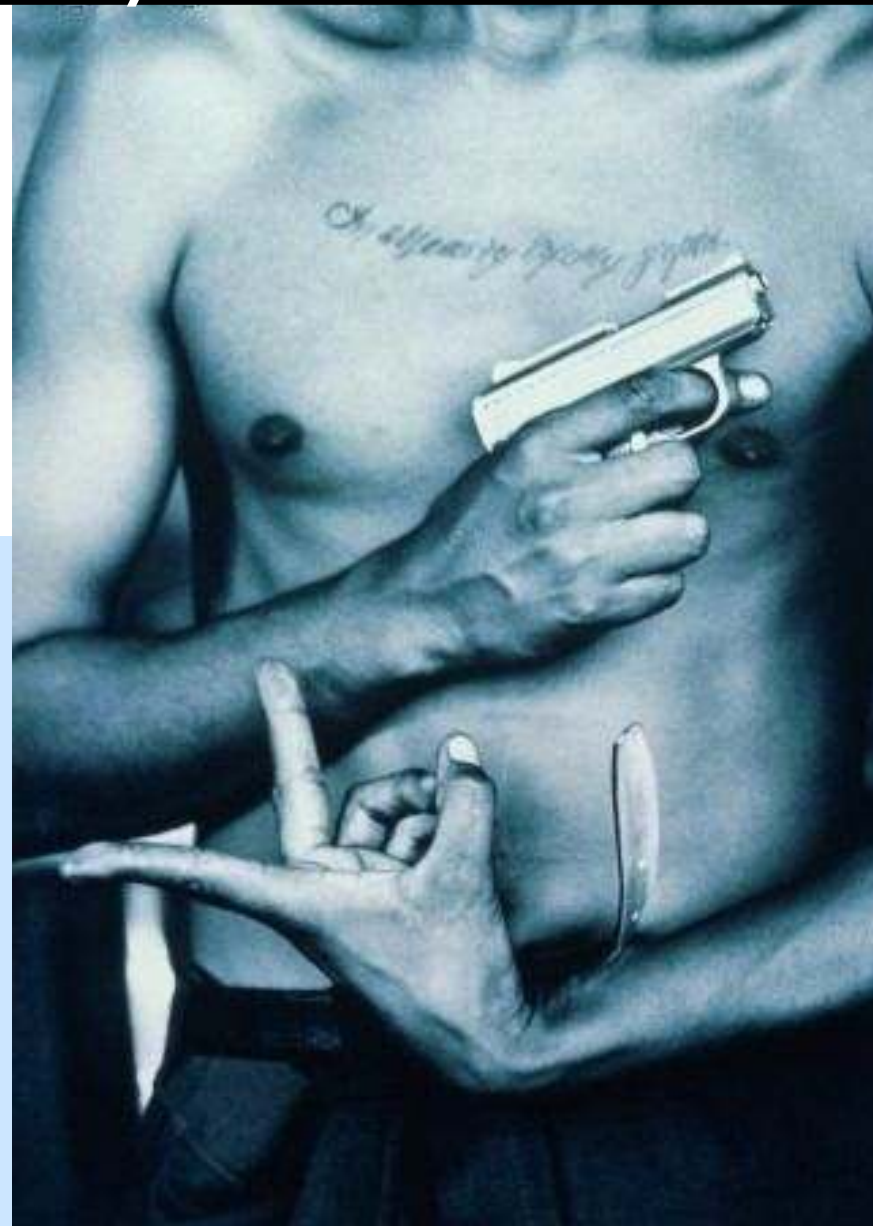
That was during the daytime, but now Beth knew she was in danger. She could sense that her angels had gone into double overtime.

Past events popped thru her head. Just that summer, one of the families at the mission center had lost two kids to gunshot wounds. Two kids in one household.

Suddenly shots rang out, BLANG BLANG, as Beth felt the brick wall behind her spit chunks onto her back. Maybe it was stray bullets from the messed up drug sales, and maybe not. As she ducked her head and ran, she told herself that she didn't sign up for this kind of work. She had been a staff member at the missions center for 4 years, working for free. Well now she thought it was definitely time for a raise.

She cried out, "It's my turn for some good news, Lord: give us a miracle for this little girl. I can't stand it if we loose another one..." and then her cell phone rang. The mother was calling with a cry of relief. She shared that her "baby" had been at a friends house. She had just lost track of the time. With a happy ending, Beth raised her hands and praised the Lord ... and then quickly ran back to her car.

Once safe and secure, Beth thought about the little church that she and her husband had pioneered over the last two years, and how it had grown into a constant beacon of hope ... right in the middle of one of the most difficult areas of central Norfolk.



On Friday nights, young people would walk through the streets, 'grouped up' for safety. As they would approach the cheerfully lit doors of the church, the youth would begin to laugh and dance their way into the building where music awaited them, as well as a prayer and a hug.

This was a fun, safe place, where kids got door prizes for learning their memory verses.

The rules were simple -- keep your hands to yourself, no borrowing without permission, raise your hands if you want to talk, shut off your cell phones, and no making fun of others. For those who regularly attended, there were field trips to go roller skating, or to attend other special events in the area. Rappers, step teams, and wonderful stories poured from the front of the church in a high energy hip hop styled evening of ministry. New attendees were given their own Bible, and were encouraged to write their name in the front.

This small center, had been named "Over Jordan", in hopes that whole families would move into the promised land, from death unto life. Lets face, it, in the inner city, good news, was normally GOoD news. There wasn't a lot else happening that impacted this area that wasn't done through some of the local churches. It was the means to move from death unto life.

This ministry to the local street children and their mothers, (and sometimes fathers), had connected with more than 280 families. Some wonderful changes began to take place. Marriages were mended, and men folk got off drugs, and found jobs. Families learned to position themselves for buying their first house, which would change the generational position of who they were in Christ. We saw the fruits of our labors when a family moved out of the neighborhood and got a place in the suburbs.

Volunteers often heard of our work and felt led to put their feet to their prayers and hit the streets. Open Jordan became a training ground for urban missionaries. It was pretty much "hands on" as you learned the 'how to' on the job. There were those who came and learned, and then went out and reproduced the idea into another neighborhood.

Our urban street outreach ministry was transferable. Love reaches out. Churches around the country were learning that the Lord of the harvest was moving His people into the streets. Where sin abounds, grace abounds more.

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## \$5 Can Buy You A Kid in Hampton Roads

The lost children of Sudan have been identified as being sold for \$43. In American dollars after rounding off for inflation, that means you can purchase a child off the streets for about \$100.

We have a mother in our Friday night 'hip hop' family night, at the GXG Outreach Center, who has 9 children by 9 different fathers.

Most of the fathers come to visit 'their' children, periodically, and after a burger they make the pilgrimage to a local shoe store to buy their child a good pair of shoes. In the urban culture, this "is" a demonstration of fatherly love. My child is going to get theirs, and I am going to make sure, 'they' have shoes.

The other kids watch patiently, knowing that eventually, they too will have a new set of sneakers. That is the high point of their year. Not Christmas, not July 4th, not even the last day of school. Their entire childhood is groomed by that one moment of pay off.

We work in the center servicing seven Hampton Road's cities, reflecting 55% of the people in Virginia.

We now have an escalating gang problem that can be tracked back to these kids reliving that one moment of full gratification, over and over and over again.

Kids don't want to be joked at school about their 'kicks,' and in order to make sure their toes don't stick out and get verbally stepped on, they build huge, huge resentments, and watch for any opportunity to 'get theirs'.

Many of 'my own' neighborhood youth, are looking to the streets for ways to make a few bucks. You don't see folks grooming their lawns in the urban area, so money is made where it is flows.

Our outreach center has an after school tutorial program. Every day the volunteers have to go out into the streets to gather the kids who are supposed to be in the program. These kids are "running" drugs for the drug dealer on the corner. This is how they earn a few dollars. They can make \$20 in an hour after the bus drops them off just by running drugs at five bucks per run.

The drug dealers sit back out of the eyes of the law, and send out our kids for \$5 to distribute their drugs and collect the money.

With fresh money in their pockets, the kids don't always remember to come to the center. Our volunteers go to their homes and pick them up. We know where they live and it is a full time job to convince an 8 year old that his hour in the computer lab doing math is more important than adding up the money he just made in hopes of purchasing a pair of tennis shoes.

Our little brothers and sisters want a father figure, and we're all they have. So we are the ones they turn to ... IF we don't judge them, nag them, or verbally beat them up.



Most of these kids have had male figures who have laid hands on them. They aren't easy to reach out to, but with our consistent love, we can break through and help them.

We consider ourselves to be urban missionaries who are making a difference in these neighborhoods. With consistent love and attention, we are

changing the lives of these young people for the better.

Otherwise, these kids will continue to be lured by the fast money being offered by gangs to 'get that pair of shoes'.

But God's X Gangsters has their back, and we will make sure they 'stay' in new shoes without having to sell their souls for \$5. We will be their family.

We are in it for the long haul, not just a few fleeting minutes. These kids aren't used to someone being in their lives, caring for them, spending time with them. Up until now, their attention spans have been short, extremely short ... 8 seconds short. That's an ipod snip, or a flash of home video on Youtube.

Gangs promote quick gratification. Five bucks in just a few minutes to run some drugs. These kids are selling their souls for \$5.



## Beth Ducked and Ran

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On the street is where the miracles happen. We saw food multiply time and time again. Money multiplied also.

Once, Beth had an envelope with \$600 in it to help payoff some "cut off notices." But through God's blessing, she found \$1,100 in the envelope to pay the bills. God is good, all the time. He has always taken care of all of our ministry's needs.

One time, we prayed, "Lord we need a spare tire, real bad, as one of them was bald", and someone drove up, real puzzled and said: the Lord directed me to give you this tire but I'm not really sure if you need it.

It is unbelievable how timely the Lord is, and how faithful He is to fulfill His goals.

God wants to heal His people, especially those lost souls in the urban city.

Not long ago, a mother showed up at the center and asked for bus fair so that her kids to go and stay with their grandma. Her boy friend was beating her up, and she was afraid social services would take them away. "Please pray for him to leave, and please help me with some money" she requested.

Beth didn't give her money, but she did pray with her that God would take that man out of her life, quickly.

Three days later, he was shot dead right around the corner from her house while collecting drug money. It was amazing to find her crying as one of our volunteers came to pick up the kids for an event. The mother said "who is going to take care of me now?"

That week, a car load of local ministry partners from New Life Providence Church visited the center. We took to the streets and came to this woman's apartment complex. Standing in front of the house, we prayed for every family in every apartment.

The woman seeing this was overcome with tears, and confessed that she hadn't been to church in years. But then her face beamed as the Lord forgave her and healed her heart. Hope sprang anew, and she was reborn with a fresh light of the gospel.

While we were still praying in front of this apartment complex, a man walked up to a group of ladies standing near us. He attempted to purchase "favors" with a new pack of cigarettes. It was amazing what little it took to purchase another human being, right in front of her family. The innocence of children is routinely forgotten in these streets.

Beth walked over, and helped the ladies stand their ground and stare him down. He eventually walked away puzzled as to what their problem was.

As we prayed for the ladies, one of the fellas we had met at the local detention center, walked by us with his peoples and their pit bulls.

Yo-Yo, little brother, you want some of this?, I yelled.

Unexpectedly he yells back, "Yes, I just lost my job, and my PO (probation officer) is getting ready to jack me."

We pulled him into the middle of the circle, and began to pray. You could see his whole body relax as the stress was released and he was filled with hope.

The nice rides with 4,000 rims, were circling the block as we had changed the flow of traffic. Business was getting jammed up, and we were creating a bottle neck. The next street over, an automatic was emptied quickly, to let us know it was time to move on. Time for the Holy Ghost Hit men to go.

We passed out the last of the candy & took off.

The young people who attend the center's training now have more than the streets to raise them. Once the kids begin to feel our love, they introduce us to their parents to whom we offer various counseling programs and our love.



"What do you have that will help me and my family, this week" is a common question.

The center organizes and sponsors workshops to serve the locals, such as marriage enhancement, conflict resolution, life skills, job preparation, and substance abuse intervention are probably the most popular topics.

One family sent 8 of their kids to the center one summer to get special tutoring and training. Their mom said, "all my kids gonna get a chance to learn how to get ahead. I am going to make sure of that."

One night a mother called Beth and said her "car is busted, and if I don't get to work, we going to get kicked out of the house."

Beth came over and picked her up and took her to and from work for a week until she finally got paid and was able to fix her car. That is what a family does. We stick by each other, and we help each other where needed, and whenever we can.

We've come to trust in the Lord to provide referrals for whatever services the families might need. We don't have the resources or special volunteers to do it all ourselves. Christian brothers and sisters volunteering from other churches have been able to connect those in need to multiple service ministries of their own. We know this is a miracle of the Lord using us all together for the harvest.

We support this unity in action. Together these groups have merged into a network of networks. United, we are all moving forward, while still reaching back to give a hand up when needed. It is all about demonstrating the love of Jesus, one person, one family, one neighborhood at a time.

God's people need urban missionaries. He needs those men and women who aren't afraid to get underneath the work, and take on the job of being a shock absorber for the rough urban ride.

So what can we do to reach the lost? By that I mean those people who tend to be invisible because they are in parts of our communities that we don't minister to, areas we try to avoid, dangerous, wicked niches on the outskirts of our neighborhoods. Are we tourist, or are we occupying the land?

Some kind hearted saint keeps putting Jesus Saves stickers on electrical boxes in our area we serve to draw attention to the one who has real juice.

Lets take a risk and put our hands on some thing that has juice today.

## \$5 Can Buy You A Kid

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Ten years ago, it was "Gone in 60 seconds", and now the grand theft is due to media groomed attention spans. These momentary sound bites of gratification are luring these at risk youth into making decisions based on today, not their future.

These are the kids who are living with their mothers. Overwhelmed, but not necessarily broken, their moms are struggling with getting up the rent, keeping their boyfriend from molesting their children, and trying not to have social services grab their kids during the 2 hours the children are unsupervised after school.

The after school hours are the best time to recruit gang members, as they have no one to run to and no one who has their back. It isn't latch key kids, but no key kids, that really are targets for gang recruiters.

They offer to supervise our kids, and to listen to them. They will discipline them, and also reward them for 'loyal' responses.

Disgruntled youth who don't have money for candy are going to 'make sure' they take care of they own needs. They can't depend on anyone else. So they make choices based on what they know and what they see others doing.

It's a life choice for many of these kids. To them, the gang world gives these kids a way to pass go and collect \$200.

But we can't give up on these kids. Can we?

Can't we address one child's life choices, today?

Now, that urban America, has chosen to 'have justice at any price', it is apparent that the suburban church can't ignore our bare foot children need to have a \$100 gift certificate to Foot locker. It becomes apparent that our kids need to trade their bo-bo's in for some new kicks.

Slavery in America is now again an issue that threatens to split America. Isn't it time to take a stand and see our future change? What is God telling you today? We can show the love of Jesus, and help kids see the Church isn't asleep, as we are family, & we care.

God's X Gangsters, would like to partner with regional teams, who would do a quarterly or semi-annual fundraiser to save our children. We are in need of volunteers who are willing to step forth and help change the world -- one person, one family, one neighborhood at a time. You can partner in our regional pre-Christmas fund raiser/youth awards banquet, by sponsoring a table for our urban youth to sit at with their families. We need to help them feel like part of a family, and to celebrate their moments of victory. Lets do this together family, as it will take the whole village to raise these children.

**You can support the God's X Gangster ministry and help make a big difference in our urban youth and their neighborhoods. Start by being a sponsor of the Annual Gang Prevention Awards this Dec. 8th. See page 13 for more information.**