



THE UNLIKELY PASTOR

From Drugs and Despair, He Found Deliverance

By Raad Alawan

From the pulpit where he stood one day last month, Ken Gadd, 51, dressed in his white pastor's robe, looked down not at the familiar faces of his own St. Clair County congregation, but rather into the docile and questioning gaze of eyes that looked up to him for guidance. His gravelly baritone takes on a rare human appeal that commands and steadies the small gathering inside St. James United Church of Christ.

"Some of us have spent more time in the ditch, literally and figuratively," rumbled Gadd.

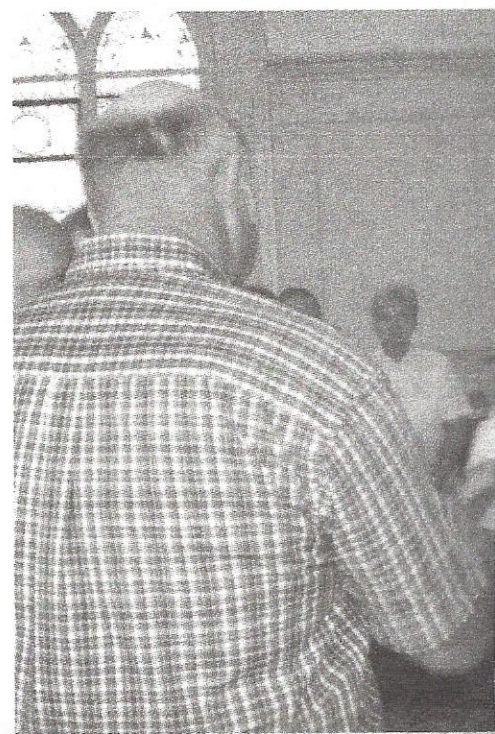
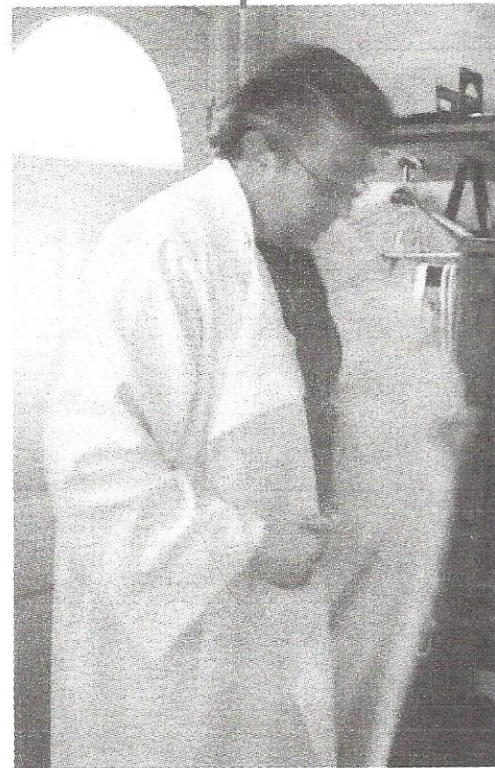
"There's only one way to get out of the ditch. Let someone help you."

A product of his improbable rise to spiritual leader, Gadd feels a kinship to his words.

He has lived the kind of life that inspires novels, which get made into movies.

"I was a thug," Gadd says.

Today, Gadd loves hitting spiritual highs, but he used to love getting high better. Back when he was 11, peer pressure and the desire for acceptance pushed Gadd to first



try alcohol. Then he started taking and dealing drugs. It was the beginning of a 15-year span that led to more serious drugs and eventually to his darkest moment. He wanted to look big, feel tough, and be noticed in a crowd. In this way, he was not alone. How many million Americans want to stand out? Ken Gadd, understand, was not some crazy psychopath; he was a normal guy with a good head who, when he was very young, went to a family gathering, like a lot of us, and began experimenting. And he heard about drugs. And he talked to other people who had drugs. And just like that, he got hooked. Gadd saw the results of his addiction immediately.

"I was busy doing what I was doing," he says. "I liked the lifestyle because people thought I

was important. Everyone wanted to know me."

Gadd says that his home life was good, or at least his parents made every effort to make it such. His father gave his children many hours of individual attention and took time for family outings. And his mother was a stay-at-home mom. But he withdrew from his parents, as young drug abusers do. He chose delirium over devotion, even though, deep down, he suspected the drugs were hurting him. But he kept using them. Kept trying to search for his place in life, even though he felt a constant sense of doom.

"I wanted to be somebody," Gadd says, "but I didn't know what that was. There was a giant hole that needed to be filled. For a long time, I think the trouble with drugs

and alcohol is that they worked."

Until addiction consumed his life. By 25, Gadd lost his job, and eventually lost his family. He spent his days on the streets "with no place to go." Inside, his private demons chewed at his body and his heart. And he kept running. Until he felt the breath of fear. Until he looked over his shoulder. And suddenly, here were these other dealers chasing Gadd, who didn't have their drugs. And this is not a business where "I'm sorry" gets you off the hook.

"Some people were looking to terminate my relationship in a pretty serious way," Gadd said.

So he went underground in Southwest Detroit "and drank and drugged like a fin." All the while, Gadd wished he was dead. One night, he told himself, "Dear God,

make this end!" Little did he know that he was only hours from ending such a life, and beginning a new one. He put a drug into his body one last time, and it returned the favor by sending his heart racing. Then it stopped. He collapsed.

"I saw a white light and a level of serenity that..." Gadd stops, then continues, "I would tell you to this day that when I think of that moment, I have absolutely no fear of death. I have some fear of how we get there, but I'm not frightened."

Gadd didn't know what was going on inside of him. And most likely he never will. The final colors of a man's life belongs with the Gods. And in the early morning light of the next morning, he awoke in his

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bed at his parents' house, with the fear gone and the alcohol gone and the drugs gone. With him sitting there was his brother.

"How was I last night?" asked Ken, peering up to his brother. "Worse than usual," his brother said.

But better than most. And sometimes, that is enough.

Because that morning was the beginning of the end of nearly a decade of drug and alcohol abuse. That was July 28, 1982. Twenty-five years later, Gadd has found his heaven on earth.

"Did I catch a break?" Gadd asks. "Yea, probably. Am I grateful for that? Eternally."

He got up and walked slowly through the corridor of the rest of his life, his head high, staring out at what was in front of him. Gadd redirected his life to God and eventually became a pastor and

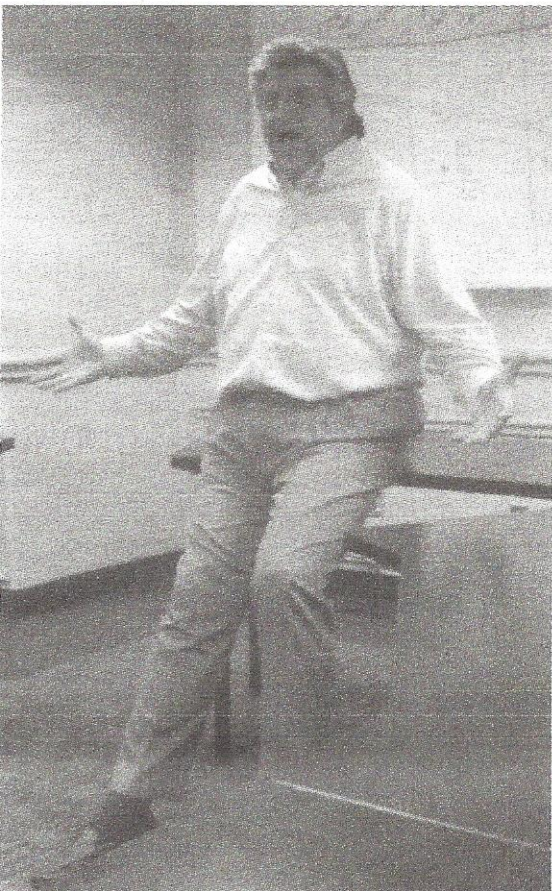


spiritual guide for inmates at the St. Clair County Intervention Center, telling any and all who would listen how God had cured his addiction and changed his life. He spends every Monday counseling and ministering to prisoners and addicts. He is devoting his life now to affect the lives of others.

The societal trends that once led Gadd to drugs are still out there. Someone once sold him the stuff, or gave it to him, because he figured it was OK. Until his body figured it wasn't. Until a higher calling became his lifeline.

"I felt (God's calling) for a long time," Gadd says. "Maybe part of the running thing is what scared

Ken Gadd makes his point during his entrepreneur class at Lawrence Technological University.



the hell out of me. Who wants the burden?"

He's also a business consultant and teaches entrepreneur classes at Lawrence Tech University. He demands strong accountability from his students. On one July evening, the subject is running your own business.

"What is the price you're charging for your daycare?" Gadd asks his students. "We have not determined a price," a student responds.

Not amused by the response, Gadd's voice started to build: "I'M LOOKING FOR SOME COMMITMENT HERE!"

A few moments later, silence. Because Gadd

knows that his students should be prepared. He also knows that they have a million things on their mind, one of them being net worth. What kind of car am I going to drive? How much money will I make? But none of that registers with Gadd, who looked out at the young faces who stared back in silence.

"My friends, if you open a business, you have to know how many competitors you have, what you're going to charge, or even if there's a need for you. My absolute desire here is for you to make all the right decisions knowing I won't be here to make them for you one day. This is all a journey for me. I'm far more concerned in how you get there than getting there."

A mirror of his life, which could have ended tragically. But continues instead. Not serious...

("I love a good joke, particularly) (at my own expense..." says Ken.)

...But sober. Twenty-five years.

"People ask me now, 'What is it that made you stop?'" Gadd says to me. "God pulled the chord that I couldn't pull. I don't believe God ever lost track of me."

"You never lost track of God," I responded.

He smiled.

"Well, I wandered off."

Welcome back. ✧

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