

Follow Me *The Beginning of Urban Harvest Ministries*

This story is an excerpt from chapter 1 of Tom Grassano's book "Walk with Me." Read more about this inspiring book and purchase your copy [here](#).

"You've been here before. I remember you!"

I didn't anticipate hearing those words during my first trip to the South Bronx. It was in May of 1992. I was leading a three-week outreach in New York City with college students, something I had done previously in many cities and nations. We had already spent two weeks in Flatbush (Brooklyn), Jamaica (Queens), Spanish Harlem, Washington Heights and other areas of New York City. We had experienced amazing things, but I never expected what I would encounter that day in the South Bronx.

Delayed by traffic, we arrived about 30 minutes late to a drug and alcohol rehab center called "*The Way Out*." This organization had been ministering effectively in the South Bronx for many years, led by a godly woman who began with a compassionate act of faith bringing homeless addicts into her home. It was our purpose to encourage the residents and have a worship service with drama, music, testimonies and sharing together in God's Word.

The residents were thrilled to see us. It was apparent that they did not have many visitors from outside of New York.

During joyful greetings and hugs, Cathy, one of my students and mission team members, brought one of the men to me. He was about my height, standing a couple inches over six feet tall and with a healthy handshake. With a look of wonder and amazement on her face, Cathy said, "Doc, you've got to hear this guy!"

The man joyfully said, "I'm Hector. You've been here before. I remember you!"

"No," I responded, "This is our first time in this part of the Bronx, but it's great to meet you!"

"No, you've been here before. I remember you."

He kept insisting, so much so that I was reminded of the old TV commercial about your brain on drugs with the eggs cooking in the fry pan. *How could he remember me in a city of millions of people when we come only three or four times a year?*

He insisted even more. "I remember you. You were here about this time last year."

Well, he was correct in that observation. We were here with a team of students in May of 1991, our first outreach in New York, but we did not come to this section of the Bronx. Just coincidence? Maybe. But then his words grabbed my attention in a life-changing way:

"You were in New York City in May of last year and you were wearing those same T-shirts. I remember you!"

He was right! We were in New York City in May of the previous year and we were wearing the same T-shirts with a cityscape of New York City and the words *Jesus Died for you!* But “How could he remember us?” I thought. “What in the world is this guy talking about?”

He continued. “You came to me when I was living in the Times Square subway station. You talked with me and prayed for me. If it wasn’t for that, I wouldn’t be here right now.”

Speechless. It’s rare to find me totally speechless, but at that moment, I was.

I stood in wonder and amazement at the providential footsteps that God had led us through. In a moment, I felt as if God wrote these words in the clouds with His finger above Hector’s head:

“So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”

(Isaiah 55:11 NIV)

Hector and I talked for quite some time. I remembered him sitting behind a construction barricade in the Times Square Subway Station near the stairs for the platform for the N and R Trains. He was frail, unkept and totally dependent on crack cocaine. He said he weighed about 135 pounds and had not eaten or bathed in weeks. It was the last night of that outreach trip to New York City, at the end of the day. We thought we were finished with “ministry” and we were on our way to a late dinner before preparing to depart the city, but ministry never ceases if our eyes are opened to the world around us.

Now Hector stood before me healthy and in the middle of a dynamic life change. I was amazed at the providence of God, and His infinite grace in revealing Himself to us in that profound manner. What an awesome God.

Hector graduated from *The Way Out*. We kept in touch for a few years. He was reunited with his wife and children in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He started his own business – a carpentry shop. He called it *New Creations*. A very fitting business for a guy remade by The Carpenter.

I saw a store called “One Stop” on Brook Avenue just around the corner from the rehab. The store window was filled with merchandise and the sign on the outside of the store read, “Stationary, Gifts, Supplies and Other Varieties.” Foolishly, I thought I could find stationary, gifts and supplies in that store.

The store was a drug front that only sold “other varieties.” I didn’t know that until I walked in the store. I looked at the man inside smoking a blunt (a marijuana cigar) behind a Plexiglas and wood barricade and asked the only thing I could think of: “Do you have greetings cards here?”

I have thought about that and laughed many times since. The look he gave me was more of a “You idiot” than a look of anger. He shook his head saying “No.” I said “Thanks” and walked out the door.

I found out later that day that someone walked into the same store two weeks prior,

asked the wrong question, and was shot in the head. They dumped his body on the sidewalk of Brook Avenue, an avenue well accustomed to the stain of blood.

As I walked out of the door of this little store front on Brook Avenue, I looked at the abandoned casket factory across the street. It was huge, occupying half of that New York City block. Abandoned for 30 years and in complete disrepair, it was now used by drug dealers and homeless drug addicts. Gangsters would dump bodies there and hang a stuffed animal on a tree on the corner to instill fear in the community and to announce, "Keep out of our business." The five-story abandoned building was a daunting figure in the community, avoided by anyone except those who had "business" there.

Walking out of that "One Stop" store and looking at that abandoned coffin factory, the Lord surprised me with compelling words spoken almost audibly to my heart:

"Prepare yourself, Tom; I have future ministry for you here."

I knew at that moment that I would never be the same.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him." - 1 Corinthians 2:9

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