

## Mark's Journey to Faith

I originally come from Portsmouth where I was the youngest of three boys. I didn't have a



religious upbringing. I spent a little time in church through the Sea Scouts but mainly avoided it. I left school not really knowing what I wanted to do I had only one GCSE above a 'C' and that was in art. Over the next few years I attended three colleges and did a year at Salford University in Manchester. After my education I started working and had lots of different jobs from selling aerial photos door to door to working in a fun fair. It was during this time that I started to suffer with depression. The questions of life were driving me in a downward spiral; why am I here? what is my purpose? I had no answers and I felt like a caged tiger. I decided to join the Navy to really let someone else control my life for a while!

It was while I was waiting to start basic training at HMS Raleigh that my life changed in a moment. It was Christmas day 1998 and I was sitting on my brother's sofa with The Bangles 'Eternal Flame' playing in the background. In the blink of an eye the darkness surrounding my life was replaced with a blinding light. All my questions that had no answers suddenly made sense. I remember trying to think faster, to get more questions inside my head so that they

could be answered. When my life was in darkness, life passed me by and my head was down. Now my life was filled with so much love it was overwhelming. I had trouble driving my car home as my legs were shaking so much.

April came, I started basic training and visited the Chaplain and told her my story. She told me that I had had a message from God. Deep down I knew this, but my busy life took over again and God went down in my order of priorities. I joined 899 Harrier FA2 Squadron shortly afterward and as a trainee, had the chance to go on a detachment to Cyprus. It was here that I met my future wife, Georgina, who had been in the Navy for a while. We were both at difficult times in our lives and together we pulled each other through.

We were married on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 2003 and on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2005 we were blessed with the birth of our first child, James. Unfortunately shortly after his birth we became aware that he was seriously ill and he had to be taken to intensive care. We asked for the hospital's chaplain and we had James blessed. This was the first time that Georgina and I had prayed together and she also started searching for answers. James pulled through and is now a healthy four year old. We were blessed again with the birth of our second son Ben on the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

Georgina and I had both driven past Norton Hill School (this is where the church meets) many times on a Sunday and seen the church sign board outside and towards the end of 2007, decided to go in. Shortly after, we decided to sign up for the Alpha Course at John and Mary

Addicott's house. We knew the course was about Christianity but other than that, didn't know what to expect. We soon realised that Jesus was who we were both looking for in our lives and we both made our commitment as Christians with Gavin and Sharon, two of the leaders.

It looked to us like the following year was going to be difficult as I was due to deploy to the Far East for six and a half months.

I work in a seven man engineering team with two aircrew, maintaining the radar and communication on a Lynx Mk 8 helicopter. In February we started sea trials for eight weeks and after Easter set off for the Far East. I packed my clothes and my Bible. The first few weeks were hard being away from everyone.

In July I had the chance to help out at a local orphanage for young girls where I fixed the kitchen doors and managed to repair an oven that had been previously written off (not before blowing all the kitchen electrics!!). To help others and to see how much of a difference having this oven working was gave me immense satisfaction and fulfillment.

I had a few days off in Kuala Lumpur and managed to find a backstreet internet café. I logged on to the Welton website and registered so I

could keep in touch. The email trail that followed absolutely amazed me. The registration was forwarded on by the Web Master to one of the deacons of the church and then to an organisation called "Christian Vision for Men". They in turn contacted Steve Martin from the Naval Christian Fellowship who then contacted

Rev David Roissetter, who was our chaplain joining the ship the following week. Dave sent me an email saying that the previous day his



congregation prayed that there would be Christians on HMS Kent and then he received my email. Before Dave joined, the Sunday services on board were led by one of the ship's officers. Singing with music from a laptop was a little different to the band at Welton!

Dave ran the Alpha course whilst on board and had five takers. It was good to see the DVDs again and to talk to other people about my faith. One person in particular had lost his way in life a little. Having a Roman Catholic background, he went through the motions of church but it had lost its meaning. Doing the course made him think about his faith and I could see a change in him, and his life changed.



Being away from friends & family, bills, commuting, bad weather and Welton gave me the opportunity to take a look at my life from a distance. On board

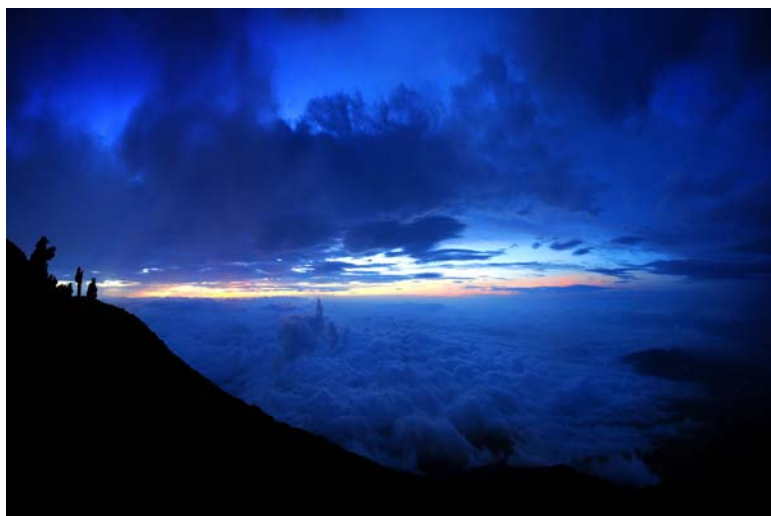
ship with 187 other people at times was fantastic and at other times very hard and the feeling of helplessness when Georgina was feeling low, was difficult. Stepping back from my life I could see the bad points, the things that you don't notice when the world is pulling you along. This filled me with so much enthusiasm and excitement

that when I got back I could change those things, at times the feeling was like electricity running through my veins.

Just before we got to Japan we found a crack in the airframe and a specialist team had to fly out to repair it. This meant flying off the ship to stay at an American airbase while the work was being carried out.



While we were there we had the opportunity to climb Mt Fuji. After five hours of climbing we stopped at a hut where we could sleep. The plan was to get up at 2am to finish the climb and see the sunrise. So at 2am we opened the door and were met by about 3000 people! I couldn't believe that we would have to queue to get to the top! Arriving at the summit, the view was breathtaking although I felt a great sadness that Georgina and the boys were not with me. As I looked at the sunrise though, I began to



feel very calm and the view seemed even more amazing. It was a very "spiritual" experience.

The sun broke the horizon and the clouds changed colour lighting up the sky.

It was a Thursday morning in August, not a particularly special day of the year but it showed

me Gods beauty and I felt His love. To try to feel like this every morning whatever the day would be difficult but I know now that letting Jesus into

my life I can do this.

Our longest stop on our trip was in Hong Kong, a place where Dave had previously been a missionary with wife Hilary. Dave worked with the organisation Jackie Pullenger set up to help heroin addicts break their addiction and rebuild their lives through Jesus. Dave asked me to go to a meeting with him. I didn't know what to expect but when I walked in I saw about thirty men and women mostly sitting down in groups of three. The two people sitting on the outside had their hands on the person in the middle and were praying for them. People with no concept of Christianity or religion or Jesus were being encouraged to pray in tongues. I hesitatingly took a seat next to a middle aged man who looked like he had had some heroin not long ago. To pray like this, with someone else was new to me and a very strange feeling. The man opposite then said that if I wanted to talk directly to the man he would translate. I was told to talk to him as if it was Jesus talking and the man would then have

to make of it as he willed. To see a small reaction in the man's face and to think that I could have said something that would give this man the strength to break his addiction left me feeling numb. Before I knew it I was sat next to



someone else!

It's only now when I look back that I can really see the power of Jesus, to see him changing people's lives in this way, people with no concept of religion. Jesus came into their lives opening their hearts, and they put their trust in Him. This made me look at my life. I knew religion; I knew Jesus but still held back from opening my heart.

The trip home seemed to last forever but I was filled with enthusiasm and excitement about getting back home and getting involved, knowing that I had something that I wanted to share and knowing that Jesus had a purpose for me.

When I did get back, all those things that I had been away from all came back at the same time and life started pulling me along again.

I have been back almost six months now and life has been fast. Writing this and then speaking from the front of the church has given me the

opportunity to look back at the time since my and Georgina's commitment, to see how our lives have changed. We have been through a lot both good and bad since then, but our family has grown stronger with our love for each other and for Jesus. I know there have been things holding me back but doing this has enabled me to let go of the doubts I had and give my life fully to Jesus.

My faith grows stronger each day and I am looking forward to being the person the Lord wants me to be, and to live this life I have been blessed with.

God Bless,

Mark

3<sup>rd</sup> May 2009