

June 2022

→ **MINISTRY UPDATE** ←

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UPDATE

There is one thing we can all be sure of, and that is change. Whether for the good or for the bad, things always change. One recent change made me sad. We had to put John Gomez in a nursing home. He is 83 years old. He came to Hand Up the day after Christmas in 1996, and he was never able to leave. He has zeal for Christ, and he was a big help to the newer men in our ministry. He is a faithful Christian and a pillar of our ministry. Thank you John! We love you, and we look forward to being together with you in heaven.

We are progressing on getting the finishing touches done on our loan. We are supposed to be closing before the end of June. After 26 years, I see light at the end of the tunnel. Everything the devil meant for evil, God has used for good. This will not solve all of our needs, but it will be a giant step forward.

We live in such an uncertain world, so we are just happy to be moving forward. The world is not getting better, and it could get much worse. God's plan will come to pass in His timing. Satan is doing everything he can to cause death and destruction, because that is who he is and what he comes to do. Don't let him destroy your faith. This is not your home. We are just traveling through. We will be known as His disciples by our love for one another; not by our words, but by our actions. It isn't just our love to our friends, but to all. He is

coming again. Don't be caught unaware.

Thank you for your prayers. Thank you for your support. You have no idea how much your donations accomplish over and over. You don't just help one person, but it keeps on multiplying. God bless.



Everything the devil meant for evil, God has used for good.

— David Nichols,
President & CEO

A TRIBUTE TO JOHN GOMEZ

John Gomez came to Hand Up Ministries in 1996, the year Hand Up opened. Recently, because of health issues, John was moved to a nursing home. We believe it is fitting to write a tribute to our friend.

I came to Hand Up on December 2004, but I didn't get to know John well until we became roommates in April 2008. We had just moved from our original location on Broadway Drive to our current location on SE 59th. I chose John to be my roommate because I knew he wouldn't be listening to loud rap music and having his buddies over to play video games. After all, he was in his seventies at the time. I was 55, and I didn't want to have to put up with any nonsense. What I didn't

know was that I would be listening to M*A*S*H reruns every night.

John would never admit he was hard of hearing. We lived at opposite ends of the house, but I could hear every word of dialogue when he watched M*A*S*H. John worked for a construction company until he was too old to work. Honestly, he put some of the youngsters to shame when it came to having a work ethic. John moved to a smaller house to live alone. I can't remember which year this happened. I am 69 now, and I don't always remember details like that. I didn't see John much until I started working in the Hand Up office in January 2018. John would sometimes reach into the wrong mail slot, and then he would say, "This isn't my mail," as if the wrong mail had been put into his mail slot.

I always messed with John when he came into the office, and he would always respond by giving me a hard time. The other guys in the office would crack up laughing. John liked to sit on the bench where the HUM vans picked up passengers, and he would talk to whoever was sitting there. Guys loved talking to John. As his health got worse, he didn't sit out there much. He finally reached the point where he couldn't care for himself, and the only option was to move him to a nursing home. I was saddened, but I knew it was necessary for his wellbeing. I miss my friend.

— *Chris Benson,*
Newsletter Co-Editor

Recently, on a Saturday, I went to see John Gomez in Weleetka, Oklahoma. I did this as director for Hand Up and as a friend. We talked about his transfer to Rainbow Terrace Nursing Home. John is glad to be there. He likes the people and the staff, and he seems to be doing well. What amazed me was that all John wanted to talk about was how God changes us into better people if we let Him. Every time I started a new conversation, John would

come back to how he needed to let God make changes in him to be a better person. To have that as your main concern at age 86 is absolutely amazing to me, and it brought tears to my eyes after I left.

— *Ray Riddle,*
Oklahoma Director

When I first came to Hand Up, Mr. Gomez was one of the first people to welcome me. That was about 12 years ago, and we have remained friends all of these years. I enjoyed the jokes, which were mostly about himself. The jokes made me laugh, and it taught me that it is better to laugh at yourself than at others. He was, and is, a welcoming face to anyone who crosses his path, and I envy those at Rainbow Terrace, because they get to experience his loving presence. That is why I was both hurt and joyful when I set it up for John to go there. One the one hand, I will no longer see him on a regular basis, but, on the other hand, he is safe and has the help he needs in his elder years. I will sorely miss Mr. Gomez.

— *Chris Spears,*
Lead Chaplain & G-1 Coordinator

John came to Hand up when it first opened in 1996. He was the fourth or fifth person to come to Hand Up. He is now 86 years old, and he became unable to care for himself after possibly suffering a stroke. I met John when I came to Hand Up in 2004. In all of the years I have known John, I have known him to be a godly man, one who has a deep love for Jesus. We often talked about our faith in Jesus, and we also spoke of how God is truly good to the residents of Hand Up.

John has been an inspiration to me, and I would like to model my life after him. He helped me realize that Hand Up is a great place to start over in life after coming out of prison. John is a sound Christian, and he lives right. He always helped his daughter and his grandchildren. John is the one who helped me decide to follow Jesus once and for all, and he inspired me to serve the Lord. That is why I love John so deeply. He is now in a nursing home where he can receive the care he needs until he passes on to be with the Lord. I miss him. I miss his smile, his joy, and his wisdom. I will see him again, both on this earth and in heaven. I will stay at Hand Up for a long time because John

stayed here for a long time.

— Bernard L.,
Transportation Director

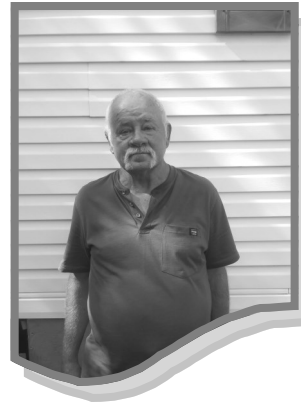
TESTIMONIES

I was born Sugarland, Texas in 1956. I was the middle child of five siblings. My dad worked for the county, and my mom worked for a large company. My parents got divorced in 1968, and my mom moved us to Ada, Oklahoma. My mom met my step-dad there. My step-dad and I didn't see eye to eye. We attended a Baptist church. My step-dad wanted us to go to church, and the only reason I went to church was keep peace in the family. I graduated from high school in Ada, and I returned to Texas to go to welding school.

I got job Tulsa in 1978. I worked in Tulsa for a year, and then I went to Alaska to work on an oil pipeline. I spent 11 months in Alaska. I wanted to stay in Alaska, but there was no position open with that company. I returned to Ada, where I got a job with a company which made grave monuments. I worked there for 36 years. We helped build the Murrah bombing memorial in Oklahoma City.

I got married in 1978, and I have three daughters and 11 grandchildren. My first wife died in 1989. I thought there was no reason to live, but I met a man who encouraged me to continue living. I remarried in 1996 or 1997. We were married for ten years. I committed a crime in 2004, and I spent 17 years in prison. I started attending church in prison, and I was baptized in Church of Christ in 2015. I got out of prison in 2021, and I came to Hand Up Ministries.

I got a job in July, 2021, and I have been at that same job for four months. I have made many good friends at Hand Up, and Hand Up has given me a chance and made a big difference in my life. There is more to do than sit around the house. I have found a good church, which I attend on Sunday morning, and I like the church service at Hand Up on Sunday night. If any brothers here want me to pray for them or help them, I am glad to do that.



Hand Up has given me a chance and made a big difference in my life. There is more to do than sit around the house.

— John Anderson

My parents were Catholic, but they didn't go to church when I was very young. When I was nine, my parents made me start attending church. When I got a little older, my parents let me decide whether or not I wanted to attend church. When I was in my early teens, I learned that my mother's side of the family was Jewish. This made me Jewish. When I was 17, I dedicated myself to the study of Orthodox Judaism, and I read the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). I found the culture and history to be fascinating, so I decided to practice Judaism. I practiced more out of respect for culture than for God. I was proud of my heritage, and I believed I was doing the right thing by following traditions.

I joined the United States Air Force in 2002, and I put aside Judaism to focus on my training and new career. I met my girlfriend in 2003, and we got married four months later. My wife and her family were Jewish, so I started practicing Judaism again. I was always angry when I was growing up, and I got angrier as I got older. The Air Force boosted my ego to the point that I cared only for what I wanted in life. I didn't care about what others needed or wanted. I began speaking to other women online, and this led to one night stands with two other women. My wife filed for separation in separation in 2005, and we were divorced in 2006.

My mother was an alcoholic who had an addictive personality. She lost her nursing license due to stealing medications she would consume. She would end up having seizures. This happened while I was in the Air Force. She would often call me when she was drunk and I was at work. She would slur her words, and we would argue and fight. The last time we did this was in June of 2006. I broke down. I was infuriated and anxious, and I drove to my girlfriend's house in

Norman after work. I sat outside and smoked a cigarette. Her mother came by to visit, and she quickly started yelling and cursing at me, telling me to get off the property. This only fueled my anger, and, instead of arguing back, I decided to hurt my girlfriend by yelling at her daughter while exposing myself. I left, and I have had no contact with them since that time.

I was arrested in California in 2008, and I was sent back to Oklahoma to serve prison time for my crime. While in prison, I met many good, spiritual people, and I regularly attended church. As the years went on, I found peace within myself. I read the entire Old Testament, and, one night while lying on my bunk, I decided it was time to start reading the New Testament. My eyes were suddenly opened. I realized that nothing was new at all and that God had been with me since the beginning. I became a believer in Christ, and I converted to Messianic Judaism. I started to understand that the legalism to which I had so firmly held kept me in bondage.

A friend told me about Hand Up Ministries. I took a chance and sent an application to Hand Up, hoping that I might receive a little mercy. I was accepted in the program in late 2014, and I arrived at Hand Up in November, 2014. I am still here eight years later, and I am now the acting Park Manager. Having nowhere else to go, and seeing there was a man (David Nichols) who had it in his heart to create such a program, instilled in me the belief that there are good people who desire to do God's work on earth. All of this could only be achieved by the grace and mercy of God. Without God, I would cease to be.



With Hand Up and my personal relationship with God, I have more understanding, and I want to offer what help I can to the next person in the program.

— Joseph Costa,
Office Manager

I was born in Waukegan, Illinois in August of 1969. My father was Russian, and my mother was an Okie. I had a normal life growing up. We lived just outside of Chicago. I was into hot wheels and Star Trek when I was a kid. Evel Knievel was my role model. I made a ramp out of a board and a five gallon bucket. I would attempt to jump almost anything. My dad died in 1979. My mom wanted a change, so we moved to Oklahoma.

I was raised Catholic, but after we moved to Oklahoma I became a Southern Baptist. My mom worked in the fabric department of a TG&Y store, and she did the best she could to raise two boys alone. My mother was proud when I graduated in 1987. I got saved, and I started to walk with God.

Things were normal until mom's health started to fail and she needed dialysis. I felt so alone. I blamed God for my situation. It was hard taking care of my mother's medical needs. I turned to drugs, and I soon began my downward spiral. I was arrested for a crime to which I pleaded guilty. I attended church in prison, and David Nichols came to the prison and spoke at our church service. He said something which touched me deep in my soul. I honestly believe God sent David to me that day. David said you might not always like the road God has you walk down, but He will always provide a way.

Soon I sent an application to Hand Up Ministries. I was accepted, and I came to Hand Up on May 1st, 2014. It took a while to find a job. I filled out 90 applications in three weeks. I finally got a job, and I paid restitution to the state. I know it is hard for guys who are getting out of prison, but like David said, God will always provide a way. Sometimes you won't like the road you go down, but that makes the reward much sweeter when you achieve your goals.

— Anthony Vugrin

We appreciate all our partners and donors. It is your support that enables us to assist individuals back into society as new brothers and sisters in Christ.

