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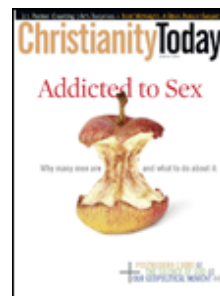
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SPEAKING OUT

Larry Norman, Coffee Shop Evangelist

How a chance meeting with a selfless Christian star changed my life.

Susan Perlman | posted 2/28/2008 09:11AM

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Larry Norman was more than the "father of Christian rock" to me. He was a guy with a guitar slung on his back, who had a big heart for the lost — including a young Jewish girl who didn't even know she needed to find her Messiah.

My first encounter with Larry was in the early '70s, with the Jesus Movement in its glory. I was walking down 47th Street and Broadway, in midtown Manhattan, on my lunch hour, when I noticed him. He was conspicuous because of his extremely blond, long hair. He was also wearing a sticker on his shirt; one that I had seen affixed to people's clothing for days. I was curious to read the message on the sticker. Not only that, but he looked fine, and I was the adventurous type. But my interest was mixed with caution — I was also a street-smart New Yorker — so I didn't want to ask him about it directly. If he was some sort of fanatic, I did not want to get entangled in a discussion that was not of my choosing.

I decided the best solution would be to find a pretense for getting close enough to read the sticker myself. All this happened within seconds, so I stopped him with the first thing that came to mind: "Excuse me, I was wondering, would you mind telling me ... is your hair really that color, or do you dye it?"

Larry smiled and assured me that his hair was not dyed. Meanwhile, I was able to read the words printed on the sticker: "Smile. God loves you."

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Such a statement would not have caught my interest, except that I had recently read a cover article in *Time* magazine about the California "Jesus People." Larry didn't look like a New Yorker; but he did seem to fit the quintessential description of a "Jesus Person."

"Are you one of the 'Jesus People'?" I asked.

"I suppose so," he responded. "Would you like to get a cup of coffee?"

He was intriguing, so I entered a nearby coffee shop with him. I ordered some coffee, and Larry asked for a glass of milk. And then he did what he has done best throughout his career. He shared the message of new life in Jesus and told me what believing in Jesus meant to him.

This was the first time I had ever heard what is called "the gospel." Well, I let Larry know I was Jewish and that Jews don't believe in Jesus. I figured there might be an awkward moment, maybe even a mumbled apology, and then we would talk about something else. Maybe he'd invite me out on a date.

But Larry continued to talk as if Jesus were still relevant to the discussion. Instead of a date, he invited me to a church in New Jersey where he was giving a concert. I didn't know that he was a well-known Christian artist, songwriter, and producer extraordinaire. I guess I didn't know because Larry was not full of himself. He was full of a heart to reach people whom God wanted to reach — and that included me.

I accompanied Larry to the concert. His music and its message rocked my heart. He didn't have any of the corny sentimentality I'd associated with Christians. Actually, he was kind of rough around the edges, in a good way. Larry didn't offer pat answers to the hard questions of life; he was real and that resonated with this Jewish girl's desire to know if the rabbis got it wrong and if Jesus really is our Messiah.

Larry was elated when I later came to believe in Jesus. He rejoiced in seeing me serve the Lord these past 37 years through a ministry I helped found, Jews for Jesus. You could say that anyone I've been able to influence for Christ can thank those who influenced me — and that certainly includes Larry Norman.

Thank you, Larry, for bringing your sweet song of salvation to so many.

Susan Perlman is director of communications and the first assistant to the executive director of Jews for Jesus and oversees the organization's multimedia outreach

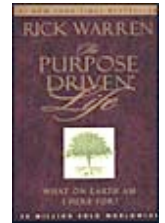
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