

## MY STORY

**M**ay God bless everyone who is reading this message! My name is David Berkowitz. I am a prison inmate with a life sentence, and I have already been incarcerated for more than twenty-eight years. My criminal case is well known as the “Son of Sam” shootings. It was eighteen years ago, when I was living in a cold and lonely prison cell, that God got hold of my life. Here is my story of hope...

### ***Child of Torment***

From the time I was a small child my life seemed to be filled with torment. I often had seizures, rolling on the floor and even knocking over furniture. When these attacks came it felt as if something was entering me. My mother, who has long since passed away, had no control over me. I was like a wild and destructive animal. My father had to pin me to the floor until these attacks stopped. When I was in public school I was so violent and disruptive that an angry and frustrated teacher once grabbed me in a headlock and threw me out of his classroom. I got into a lot of fights, and sometimes I started screaming for no apparent reason. Eventually my parents were told by school officials to take me to a child psychologist or I would be expelled. I saw this psychologist weekly for two years, but the sessions had no affect on my behavior. During this period of my life I was also plagued with bouts of severe depression. When this feeling came over me I would hide under my bed for hours, or lock myself in a closet and sit in total darkness from morning until afternoon. I had a craving for the darkness, and I felt an urge to flee from people.

### ***A Force Was at Work***

Occasionally this same evil force came upon me in the middle of the night. When that happened I felt an urge to sneak out of the house and wander the dark streets. I roamed the neighborhood like an alley cat and then crept back into my house by climbing the fire escape. My parents never knew I was gone, though I continually worried and frightened them with my strange behavior. At times I went through the entire day without talking to them. Instead I stayed in my room and talked to myself. My parents couldn't reach me, not even with all their love. Many times I saw them break down and cry when they saw my torment, but they were unable to help me.

### ***Fighting Thoughts of Suicide***

Thoughts of suicide often came into my mind. We lived on the sixth floor of an old apartment building, and sometimes I sat on our fire

escape with my legs dangling over the side. When my dad saw me he yelled at me to get back inside. I also felt powerful urges to step in front of moving cars or throw myself in front of subway trains. At times those urges were so strong that my body actually trembled. I can still remember what a tremendous struggle it was for me to hold on to my sanity. I had no idea what to do, and neither did my mom and dad. Besides my weekly visits to the psychologist, my parents took me to talk to a rabbi, teachers, and school counselors, but nothing worked.

### ***My Mother Dies***

When I was fourteen my mother was stricken with cancer; within several months she was dead. I had no other brothers or sisters, and so it was just me and my dad. He had to work ten hours a day, six days a week, so we spent very little time together. For the most part my mother had been my only source of stability. With her gone I was filled with anger, and my life quickly went downhill. I felt hopeless, and my periods of depression increased in intensity. I also became even more rebellious and began to cut out of school. My dad tried to help as best as he could, even managing to push me through high school. The day after I graduated, which was only a few weeks after my eighteenth birthday, I joined the Army, hoping to escape my problems and start a new life. But even in the service I had trouble coping, though I did manage to complete my three-year enlistment.

### ***The Force Still Had Me***

I got out of the service in 1974, ready to start life again as a civilian, but all my friends had either married or moved away. I was living alone in New York City. Then, in 1975, I met some guys at a party who were heavily involved in the occult, though I didn't learn that until much later. Ever since

I was a child I had been fascinated with witchcraft, Satanism, and the occult, and I had spent countless hours watching those types of movies, including "Rosemary's Baby," a story that particularly captivated my mind. Now I was twenty-two, and this evil force was still reaching out to me. Everywhere I went there seemed to be a sign or a symbol pointing me to Satan. I felt as if something was trying to take control of my life. I began to read the *Satanic Bible* by the late Anton LaVey, who founded the Church of Satan in San Francisco in 1966. Innocently, I began to practice various occult rituals and incantations, oblivious to the fact that I was playing with fire.

I am now convinced that something satanic had, at some point, entered my mind. Looking back at all that happened in my life, I realize I was slowly but surely being deceived. I didn't know that bad things were going to result from all this, yet over the ensuing months the things I once considered wicked no longer seemed so. I was headed down the road to destruction, and I didn't even know it. Maybe I was at a point where I just didn't care.

### ***The Horror Begins***

Eventually I crossed that invisible line of no return. After years of mental torment, behavioral problems, deep inner struggles, and my own rebellious ways, I became the criminal that, at the time, seemed to be my destiny.

I now see it as the horrible nightmare it was, and I would do anything if I could undo everything that happened. Six people lost their lives as a result of my actions. Many others suffered at my hand, and will continue to suffer for a lifetime. I am so sorry for that.

In 1978 I was convicted for my crimes and sentenced to about 365 consecutive years, virtually burying me alive behind prison walls. When I first entered the prison system I was placed in isolation. I was then sent to a psychiatric hospital because I was declared temporarily insane. Eventually I was sent to other prisons, including the infamous “Attica.” As do many inmates, I found life in prison to be a struggle. I have had my share of problems, hassles, and fights. At one time I almost lost my life when another inmate cut my throat. Yet through all this, though I didn’t realize it at the time, God had His loving hands upon me.

4

### ***Hope Was Coming***

Ten years into my prison sentence, feeling despondent and without hope, I was walking the prison yard on a cold winter’s night when an inmate named Rick came up to me. He introduced himself and began to tell me that Jesus Christ loved me and wanted to forgive me. Although I knew he meant well I mocked him because I didn’t think God would ever forgive me or want anything to do with me.

Still Rick persisted, and we soon became friends. We often walked the yard together, and little by little he told me about his life and what he believed Jesus had done for him. He kept reminding me that no matter what we had done, Christ stood ready to forgive if we were willing to turn from the bad things we were doing and put our full faith and trust in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross—dying for our sins.

Rick gave me a *Gideon’s Pocket Testament* and asked me to read the Psalms, which I did every night. It was during those times that the Lord quietly and gently melted my stone-cold heart.

### ***A New Life Begins***

One night as I was reading Psalm 34 I came upon verse 6, which says, “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” At that very moment in 1987 everything seemed to hit me all at once—the guilt from what I had done, the disgust at what I had become—and I began to pour out my heart to God. In my cold cell on that dark night I got down on my knees and cried out to Jesus Christ.

I told Him I was sick and tired of doing evil. I asked Him to forgive me for all my sins. I spent a good while on my knees praying to Him, and when I got up it felt as if a very heavy but invisible chain that had been around me for so many years was now broken. A peace flooded over me. I did not understand what was happening, but in my heart I knew that my life was going to be different.

### ***Almost Two Decades of Freedom***

More than eighteen years have gone by since I had that first talk with the Lord, and so many good things have happened in that time. Jesus Christ has allowed me to start an outreach ministry right here in the prison, where

I have been given permission by prison officials to work in the

“Intermediate Care Program” (ICP Unit) where men who have various emotional and coping problems are housed. I can pray with them as we read our Bibles together, and I get the chance to show them a lot of brotherly love and compassion.

I have worked as the Chaplain’s clerk, and I also have a letter-writing ministry. In addition, the Lord has opened ways for me to share my testimony with millions via CNN’s “Larry King Live” on television, and on Dr. James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family” radio program.

### ***There Is Hope for You too***

One of my favorite passages of scripture is Romans 10:13, which says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Here it is clear that God has no favorites. He rejects no one, but welcomes all who call upon Him. I know from personal experience that God is a God of mercy who is willing to forgive. He is perfectly able to restore and heal our hurting and broken lives. I have discovered from the Bible that Jesus Christ died for our sins, even though He Himself was without sin. He took our place on that cross. He shed His blood as the full and complete payment God required for our wrongdoing. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” but Romans 6:23 promises, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” These passages make it clear that everyone has sinned. Some of us did so more than others, but all have done wrong. Therefore, we must all make the decision to acknowledge our sins before God and be sorry for them. We need to turn from our lives of sin, as well as believe that Christ is the Son of God.

### ***Here’s Your Chance***

Friend, here is your chance to get things right with God. The Bible says in Romans 10:9-10, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” So believe in your heart that these words from the Bible are true—and then tell someone of your decision. Please consider what I am saying. I beg you with all my heart to place your faith in Christ right now, for tomorrow is promised to no one.

You see, I am not sharing this message simply to tell you an interesting story. Rather, I want you to taste the goodness of God, just as I have in my own life, a man who was once a devil worshipper and a murderer, so that you will know that Jesus Christ is about forgiveness, hope, and change. I was involved in the occult, and I got burned. I became a cruel killer and threw away my life, as well as destroyed the lives of others. Now I have discovered that Christ is my answer and my hope. He broke the chains of mental confusion and depression that had me bound. Today I have placed my life in His hands. I only wish I had known Jesus before I committed those terrible crimes, for then they would not have happened.

With Love in Christ,  
David Berkowitz