

God straight Through the Heart

I'm 46 years old and I was born in the South of France. There were five of us: three boys and two girls. My two older brothers had a different father. That's not so strange because that's life for a lot of families.

However, we were in a particular situation. A few days before my youngest sister was born my father upped and left. Suddenly, he was gone, and I haven't seen him since ! No contact, no forwarding address - father disappeared; father unknown.

It was the weekends that were difficult: my two older brothers used to go and visit their father. My sisters and I stayed alone at home.

What's more, it turned out that our father hadn't officially registered himself as our father. Every year, at school, we had to complete a form about ourselves. In the place of the name of my father, I would write "unknown". That hurt. It felt like a stab in my heart every time.

My mother, at the age of 27, was left alone to raise five children. Ours was a precarious existence and once, for a year, we all had to go into an orphanage.

When I was 10, my mother fell in love with a man called Martial. He wasn't very comfortable around my two brothers, and they went regularly to visit their father. Neither did he hit off with my two sisters, who were very little at the time. But he was very kind to me. We used to go off together hunting for mushrooms and fishing. One day, as a present, he bought me a dog. I was so proud and I called my dog Sultan. He taught me how to tame that dog and in this way, at the same time, Martial also tamed me.

One day, he called me over and said: "René-Luc, I was thinking that I could formally recognise you as my son. How about it? You could have my family name."

I was over the moon. Never again would I have to write "unknown" on the form at school. I would be a normal young man with a father. At that moment, for the first time in my life, a window of trust opened up in my heart, but it was soon to be brutally closed.

It was in the second year after Martial came into our lives that we moved houses and I had to change schools. My mother took me to one side and said : "Rene-Luc, when you will arrive at your new school, please, never mention the name of Martial !"

I was astounded! Why couldn't I talk about the name that I'd always wanted to have ?

So I asked her why and she explained that Martial was a wanted man, because he had a son, but had never paid t any alimony. Actually, it turned out that she had told me only a part of the truth. I came to learn that, in fact, Martial was involved in armed

robberies and that he was a member of a criminal gang. I was really intrigued by this and by seeing where he hid his gun in a the wardrobe, in between some bed sheets.

One day, he asked me to go fishing with him and his friend. This friend was involved in the mafia gang, too. I was really happy because Martial hadn't invited me fishing for a long time. I wanted to take my fishing rod but he said to me that I didn't need it and just to take a fishing net. I was really surprised. We arrived in a place where there were a lot of fish. He told me to go a bit further away, and to take care. "The fish will come soon." He took something in his hand, and threw it in the water and there was this big explosion. He had used a piece of C4 explosives. Using my net, I scooped up a lot of fish! Some years later, when I became a Christian, I read in the gospel of the miracle that Jesus did with Peter when he found 153 fish in his net. I'm sorry to say this as a priest but, with the C4, we did better than Jesus!

Of course, it was a secret. I couldn't tell anyone about this at my school. Imagine if I'd said to my friends: "You know what? Yesterday, I was fishing with some C4 with my step-father who is a gangster!"

All this was rather fun for a boy but the situation soon took a turn for the worse. This man was becoming more and more violent with my mother. In our house, the living room, the kitchen and their room were all on the first floor, and the children's room was on the ground floor. When things became too tense, my mother used to ask us to go down to our room. One day, this man was shouting at my mother and he hit her. My oldest brother decided to go upstairs. He was so angry that I was sure he would throw Martial out of the window. But when he got there, my mother told him: "It's not your business. It's between him and me!"

My brother was really frustrated. He wanted to defend my mother and his brothers, but his mother didn't want his help. He went down the stairs, took his bicycle from his room and then left the house through the window to go and live with his father. In leaving the house he broke the windows, but it was not just the windows that were broken that evening, but all of our family. My other brother went to join his father, too, and then it was just me and my two sisters.

My mother had kept the family successfully together, and we were like a hand and five fingers, but this man broke us apart. I became the man of the house. My mother turned to me when things got hard.

One morning, I was playing out in the garden when I saw my mother coming out of our home holding her hand on her belly. Martial was following her. I asked my mother: "What's happened to you, where are you going?"

She said to me that she was going to the hospital because she just had a small accident whilst cooking. But in fact, Martial had stabbed her with a knife in the stomach while they were arguing. Luckily, it wasn't too serious.

The situation was getting more and more out of control. We decided to flee from Martial. But he found us almost straight away. One day he was arrested by the police and spent a year in prison. We could have abandoned him then, but my mother decided to stay close to him. She thought that if we continued to be kind to him, he would be grateful when eventually he was released. And every week for almost a year, I visited my step-father in jail. When he came out of prison, he changed, but not in the good way. He became more violent, more aggressive. We decided to flee again, but again he found us, and one day he beat my mother so bad that we had to seek police protection. The chief of police accompanied us back to the house, but Martial had already fled. The chief of police gave us his number and told us: "If he comes back, call me immediately".

A few weeks later, in November 1979, I heard the doorbell ringing. It was Martial and I was afraid. My mother decided to go downstairs to speak with him. My brother and I went in my mother's room, in darkness, so that we can see the conversation taking place outside. My brother was holding a loaded rifle. We saw my mother talking for a few minutes with Martial. After that she left him standing outside in the street, and came back inside. We asked her: "What does he want?"

She said to us: "It's strange,; he came to say good bye to us..."

She hadn't finished her sentence when we heard a loud gun shot. I ran to the window, and I saw Martial lying down in the street just in front of our house. He had shot himself by putting a bullet straight through his heart. We ran towards him. He died saying to my mother: "It's not your fault, it's not your fault."

At that time, I was a difficult teenager. I used to steal from the shops. I rode a motorbike. The police used to chase me. I used to flirt with girls. The situation was especially hard on my mother. I never listened to her. Once, I didn't come home for 3 days. When I got back, my mother was furious. She asked me: "Where were you?"

I told her that it was none of her business. She said: "Yes it is, because I am your mum". I answered: "That is exactly the problem." I don't know why, but she didn't like my answer.

She began shouting at me, and I decided to leave home. I went to the lift, the door opened, I went inside. My mother followed me in. She told me to get back home. I don't know what was going on inside of me at that moment. I grabbed my mother by her collar. I lifted her up and shoved her against the wall of the lift. I said: "Leave me in peace or I will explode you!"

My mother was terrified. She went back. I went away. At that moment, I took the slippery road of delinquency. I was going down and I went astray. It was at that period of my life that I had the most profound experience that changed me.

One day, my mother met a woman, Marie-Do, who invited her to hear a talk. The speaker was Nicky Cruz and spoke about his life. He had been the gang leader in the ghettos of New York. After his conversion he became a pastor. My mother invited me to that talk. She only told me that he had been a gang leader. She did not say anything about him being a pastor. I was surprised by her invitation, and I agreed. It was in the city of Montpelier, on 19th March 1980. The speech was at a sport hall with around 2 to 3 thousand people in the audience. I could relate to his talk very clearly, because there were a lot of similarities between his life and mine. I had also experienced a lot of difficulties, just like he had.

At the end of the talk he invited us to do something that was unusual for Catholics. He asked the audience to come down to the front of the stage, so that he could ask Jesus to enter our hearts. I hesitated, but I really wanted to go. I looked around to make sure that my mother wouldn't notice me. And I went. The band was playing slow church music. The man was saying: "Jesus, I pray, come and change everyone's life here." For the first time in my life I felt a spiritual presence in my heart. Tears started rolling down my face. It was a strange, unusual experience for me. For example, when my step father killed himself, I went to the morgue. My mother was crying, I came close to the body, I touched his cheek, and I said to my mother: "It's so weird, it's cold, like a chicken in the supermarket."

I did not cry at that tragic moment, my heart was like a stone. But in front of Nicky Cruz I really felt the verses of the Bible, Ezekiel 36:26 "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."

On the way back, Marie-Do asked my mother: "Did you like the talk?"

My mum said "No". She was not moved by the talk.

Marie-Do asked me: "What about you?"

I said; "Yes, I want to know everything about this man."

She asked me: "Which man - Nicky Cruz?"

I said: "No, Jesus Christ!"

When you are a religious speaker, you do not want people to admire you, you want them to admire Jesus. Nicky Cruz did exactly that.

Marie-Do introduced me to a religious way of life: reading the bible, participating in the mass. I also became involved in a prayer group playing guitar. Little by little, I gave up my bad habits. And my relationship with my mother improved.

In June 1980, Marie-Do took me on my first pilgrimage to Lourdes. It was a very powerful experience for me. One night, at 10 o'clock in the evening, in front of the grotto, I dedicated my life to Jesus. This moment would have consequences and I will tell you about them shortly.

Following that, I founded the first Catholic rock band in France. My last concert was in 1986 in front of 60 thousand people at Gerland stadium in Lyon, France. The 60 thousand actually came to see John Paul II, not really just for us. I was twenty years old and the day after the concert I entered the seminary. I became a priest at the age of 27. Since I was ordained I have devoted myself to young people.

Now my story is coming to an end. I just want to back track a bit. Do you remember when I was 13 and my step father was in prison?

My mother took me aside that time. She said: I want to talk to you about your father. She told me then that I didn't have the same father as my two sisters. I was shocked. She explained to me how she met my father. She was recently divorced and lived with my grandparents and with my two brothers. A man came one day and needed a place to sleep for a night. My mother put him up for the night out of the kindness of her heart. This man was tall, blond and a nice person and he knew how to speak to the ladies. So things happened. This man was German and he was from the Foreign Legion and he spent seven years at war in Algeria. They stayed together for three months. They travelled to Germany together, but this man had problems with alcohol. He never hit my mother but the situation wasn't easy so my mother left him and returned to France.

When she arrived in France she discovered that she was pregnant. The situation was very difficult and she didn't know what to do. She was still legally married to her first husband, waiting for the divorce to come through. The father of the child-to-be was an alcoholic living in Germany. People around her advised her to have an abortion. But finally she decided to keep the child. It was thanks to my future God Mother.

Her name is Lucie and that is why I am called René-Luc. She said to my mother: "Come with your two children to my home and just let the baby be." I was very lucky that my mother met this woman at that time.

On 25th May 1985, when I was 19 years old, I received a phone call. The man sounded very strange with a foreign accent. He said: "Hello, I want to talk to René-Luc." I answered that it was me. He said: "I am your father." It was not "Star Wars" even if I am called Luc. I was very surprised and I didn't believe that it was him, so I asked for his name. He said: "Gunther Buschkiewitz." His parents were from Ukraine. As you can see my story is very simple to follow.

I told him that I couldn't see him that day, as the next day I was due to sit last exam for the high school certificate. It was the German oral exam. My mother had asked me to learn German in case I ever found my father.

The next day, during the exam, I was distracted but I received 7/20 (seven out of twenty) and with my 19/20 (nineteen out of twenty) in sports I got my certificate with 10.3/20. So, I want to tell you that to be good at school, you should do a lot of sports!

The day of the exam, in the afternoon, I met my father for the first time. I was emotionally overwhelmed. I could not say a word. He told me how he met my mother. That they stayed three months together, that they went to Germany, and that they separated finally. He told me that the reason for the separation was alcohol. But in 1980, he met a woman in Berlin, where he lived, who helped him quit alcohol. He regained his dignity, and realized that he was a father. So he decided to find his son. He arrived in the Camargue region in France by car. But my mother had left there a long time before

He did not know where to find me. He decided to ask a God for a miracle. He took his car and went to Lourdes, even though he was a protestant. He did not light the candle to the Virgin Mary, but instead, he lit a candle for Bernadette asking to find me. And he went back to Berlin.

5 years later, in 1985, he decided to come back to France, to search for me again. He still went back to the Camargue region and still he found nothing. So he decided to go to Nîmes, because he knew that I was born in Nîmes. He decided to go into a church that was open and he shouted to Jesus: "Help me to find my son. I do not know where he is, help me God." At that time I was living 800km away from Nîmes in Brittany.

He came out of the church and walked down the street. He stopped in front of a house and he recognized it as my grandfather's house. He had visited the house once or twice when he was with my mother twenty years previously. So he rang the bell. My grandparents were already dead by then and the woman who then owned the house was not part of my family. She opened the door, and fortunately she had kept the number of my uncle and she gave it to my father. This is how my father found me.

I was very touched by this whole story, and I asked him when was the first time that he went to Lourdes looking for me? He said it was in June 1980. The most extraordinary thing was that I also was in Lourdes for the first time in June 1980. In the same year, the same month and maybe even the same day.

Without knowing each other, we maybe prayed side by side. Me asking to dedicate my life to God, and my father asking to find me.

The moral of the story is that even if you think that God does not listen to us, he never fails to fulfil our prayers.

René-Luc