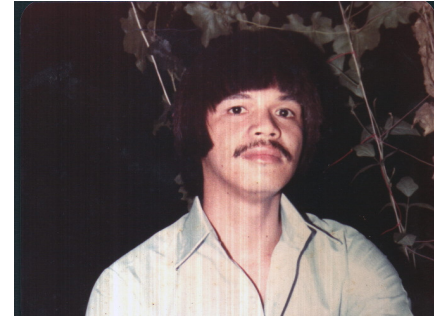


Joe Gonzales - my life story

During my teenage years, I lived at Bangkusay, Tondo, where many gang leaders live. Our community was and still is full of all different kinds of vices; such as drugs, prostitution, alcohol and gambling. As a teenager I was forced to join a gang because if I resisted my life would be put to danger. Most of the people around me were part of this gang and had criminal records.

I became a member of the gang and I had a tattoo in my right thigh. In my early years I needed to feel that I belong to such a group.

With this kind of environment, I learned so many bad habits like gambling, alcohol drinking, even fighting with the use of man made guns called "sumpak." I was involved in gang wars or riots, and because of that I was put into prison for hours in my young age.



Even though I was only there for a short period of time, it was hard to be in jail - it was like a hell. I experienced sleeping near the toilet bowl without a cover and eating in the same place - the smell was very bad.

My relatives paid my bail, but even though I had experienced being in jail, I still continue my bad lifestyle. At the age of 19, I was promoted to be a gang leader. I continued to be an alcoholic, gambler, and even taste some drugs because of my stubbornness; I was brought in the hospital and almost lost my life in one of the gang wars.



Sumpak - home made gun

At that time I was in my second year of study at FEATI university taking mechanical engineering.



In the same year I also met my wife and got married even with this kind of miserable life. The pressure of raising up a family affected me, so I stopped studying and decided to work abroad. But I was still doing the same bad things and I found myself inside a jail again.

When I came back to the Philippines, I met a person who had a passion to share the love of God. This person was so kind and tried everything just to bring me into the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

One time, he invited me to his church and I went along to his church - "Maranatha Baptist Church." I was so mad with the speaker during that time because he mentioned the characteristics of a person who is going to hell (Mark 7:21-23 *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within and defile a man"*) because he was describing me.



I almost walked out, but I heard the speaker, he said that there is good news, THERE'S A WAY OUT for me not to go to hell. As I listen to him, he said that JESUS IS THE WAY (John 14:6 *Jesus said to him, "I am the way the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*) because HE already paid the penalty of our sins. So I accepted JESUS as my Saviour but it took me a further four years to surrender my life to HIM.

It was a great encounter with God and now I'm not a leader of a notorious gang but a leader who brings life to all the people who will repent and accept Jesus as their LORD and SAVIOR of their lives. I'm the founder of "Slbikong KAbataang Taga-Tundo" or "SI KRISTO Ang Tagapagligtas ng Tundo" (SIKATT) that means JESUS CHRIST is the Savior of Tondo. This group shares the gospel to students, teachers, school staff and parents to the high schools in Tondo area - and also with "out of school" children on the streets.



I thank God for calling me and making me His child.

If you have not taken that step, please do so today and know real peace and joy and a purpose for living.

I also thank God every day for my lovely family

Joe Gonzales

