

GLOBAL LIFE CAMPAIGN™

True Story: James Robison, Plucked from Obscurity

This month's GLC Series *True Story* is about James Robison, who was conceived in rape, almost aborted, raised in part by Godly foster parents, then in poverty with his mother, and yet became one of the most compassionate, gracious, courageous, life-affirming Christian leaders and evangelists of our time. James is the Founder of LIFE Outreach International, and he and his wife Betty make a great team including on their daily TV program, Life Today. Here is his story in his own words, extracted by permission from Chapter 2, "Plucked from Obscurity," of his book, titled, *Living Amazed: How Divine Encounters Can Change Your Life* (published by Revell, 2017):



Used with permission, LIFE Outreach International

IT'S A MIRACLE I was ever born. In fact, if the laws we have today were in effect back then, I'm 99.99 percent certain I would have been aborted.

My mother worked as a practical nurse, giving hospice care to homebound individuals. She had been married at a young age, but by the time she was forty, she was long divorced and working in the home of an elderly man in Houston. That man had an alcoholic son, about ten years younger than my mother, who one day forced himself on her and raped her.

My mother lacked the wherewithal to press charges, and when she became pregnant as a result of the assault, she went to get an abortion, for all the reasons you would hear today—product of rape, no father or family in the picture, mother living in poverty and unable to care for the child. But when she went to see the doctor, he refused to perform the abortion.

I don't know why. Did he see possibilities and potential in that unborn child? Or did he simply believe that all life is precious? Whatever the reason, and whatever you might think about it, he refused to perform the abortion.

When I was old enough to understand, my mother told me the circumstances of my birth and that the Lord had told her, "Have this baby; it will bring joy to the world."

As a result, my mother was convinced that I would be a girl, and she was going to name me Joy. In the delivery room, when the doctor told her she had a little boy, she said, "No, I have a little girl and her name is Joy."

"You can call him anything you want," the doctor replied, "but you've got a boy."

Years later, when I met Johnny Cash, who had recorded the song "A Boy Named Sue," about a boy who was given a girl's name and had grown up without a father, I knew I had met a kindred spirit. And I was grateful that my mother had changed my name from Joy to James.

I was born in the charity ward at the hospital, and my mother immediately placed a newspaper ad seeking foster care for me. This was 1943. Doyle and Katie Hale, a Baptist pastor and his wife from the nearby town of Pasadena, Texas, responded to the ad and took me in. They raised me for the first five years of my life and were hoping to adopt me. In fact, at one time they had the paperwork drawn up, but my mother would never sign it.

When I was five, my mother showed up one day and announced that she was moving from Houston to Austin and that I was going with her. I clearly remember running away from her and crawling under the pastor's bed. And I can remember my fingernails dragging across the hardwood floor as my mother dragged me out from under the bed by my foot. I remember that desperate clawing like it was yesterday. It was quite traumatic.

Mrs. Hale was crying so hard that she was convulsing. She had to go lie down. And Brother Hale was saying to my mother, "Please don't do this, Myra. Don't do this."

But my mother insisted. "No, we're going."

Brother Hale tried to give her a handful of money to help her out, but she wouldn't take it.

"We'll be all right," she said.

But the fact was, she had only enough money for us to get on a bus in Pasadena, on the southeast side of Houston, and ride to somewhere just on the other side of the city. That's where we got off and hitchhiked the 165 miles or so to Austin. I clearly remember sitting on a little cardboard suitcase with my belongings in it, and my mother had a bag. I still have that little beat-up suitcase in my office today.

When we got to Austin, we moved in with one of my aunts, and my mother began looking for work. When she found a job, she needed something for me to do during the day, so when school started, my aunt, who was a teacher, paid for me to go to private school. I was only five, but I went to first grade and got a pretty good kick start on my education. All the way through, then, I was a year younger than everyone else in my class.

Though school always came easy to me—boringly easy—I was so shy and so afraid of everyone during my childhood that I would not even stand up in front of a class to give a report. For the first ten years of school, I was so withdrawn that I wouldn't mingle with the other kids. I carried a brown bag lunch every day, and I ate alone. When they picked teams in gym, I was the kid who was never chosen—because nobody knew me. My mother and I moved so often that I was always the new kid.

We lived in Austin for the next ten years, and over that time, we moved so often—fifteen or sixteen times—that the words *home* and *family* were meaningless to me. Most of the places we lived did not face a street or have a street address, and we would get our mail at someone else's house. I've said that our only address during those years was an alley, a creek, or a dump. If it had an address at all, it would be some number and a half. They were typically little one-room houses with the living area and kitchen all together or a little rectangular room with a bathroom attached to it. We lived the longest in the back of a junkyard, with auto parts, wrecks, and other debris lying around. That was the yard I played in.

In junior high, I walked three miles each way to school every day because my mother didn't have a car and no school bus ran by our house. During the entire ten years I lived in Austin, we never once had a car. And nobody around us had a car. So I walked. . . .

During my years in Austin, I didn't have much money or many material things, but I made the best of what I had. I used to look forward to Christmas presents and birthday presents from my aunt and my foster parents. But starting when I turned nine, and all the way up until I was fourteen, I didn't hear from my aunt or the Hales at all. That was very traumatic for me—and, if not for the grace of God, it might have destroyed me—because I thought that the people who had said they loved me had forgotten me.

One October, when my birthday came and I didn't get gifts from anybody, I remember thinking, *Anybody can forget a birthday, but they won't forget me at Christmas.*

That December, I painted a watercolor picture on a sheet of paper and hung it on the wall, and that was our Christmas tree and our decorations, because we couldn't afford to buy a tree or ornaments. When Christmas arrived and nothing came from my aunt or the Hales, I remember thinking, *They said they loved me, but they don't.*

That put a really big hole in my heart, made me feel as if I couldn't trust anyone, and caused me to doubt people's word. Even after I got into ministry, only the grace of God was able to lift me beyond the trauma of feeling forgotten.

When I was about fourteen, during a time when my mother was having some sort of trouble, she told me I could call the Hales and go stay with them for a week or so. I was afraid to call them, because I didn't know if they'd want me. But they sounded happy to hear from me and said they would come get me the very next day.

During that visit with the Hales, I had a lot of fun with the kids at their church. On Sunday night, which was right before the Monday or Tuesday when I would be going home, Pastor Hale asked the young people in the church to share what Jesus meant to them. Five or six kids stood up and gave testimonies that were really moving.

Then Pastor Hale gave the invitation, and when he said, "Would you come and put your hand in my hand, indicating that you want to give your life to the same Jesus that these kids have talked about?" all I could do was grip the chair in front of me. I was so shy, and so terrified, that I just hung on.

Then I saw Mrs. Hale walking toward me, with tears flowing so freely down her face that she had to hold her glasses in place with one hand. She put her other hand on my shoulder and said, "James, don't you want to go to Jesus?"

I said, "Yes, ma'am, but I'm afraid."

"I'll go with you," she said. "Could we go together?"

"Yes, ma'am."

I stepped out into the aisle and went forward with her, and in the best way I knew how, I trusted Jesus. As I've said many times since that night, I put my hand in the *pastor's* hand, but I put my life in the *Master's* hand.

I found out years later that, during the week I was visiting, Mrs. Hale had gone to all the Training Union groups—which were discipleship classes focused on missions and Baptist doctrine—and she had told them, "We have James with us, the boy who lived with us when he was a young child up until he was five, and now he's fourteen, and he's going back to his mother's place in the next day or two. Would you pray that tonight he'll give his life to Christ?" And sure enough, I gave my life to Christ that night.

This being a Baptist church, they took me right up and baptized me that night—right in my clothes because they didn't have a robe. A few years later, when I first started preaching and gave that testimony, somebody asked me, "If they baptized you in your clothes, what did you do when you came out of the water? If your clothes were all wet, what did you wear?"

The question caught me off guard, because I couldn't remember. The next time I saw Mrs. Hale, I asked her, "Didn't y'all take me right back and baptize me after I trusted Christ?" When she said yes, I asked, "Well, what did I do about clothes?"

Mrs. Hale started crying and said, "James, before I ever left for church that night, I took a change of clothes for you and put them back by the baptistery. That way, if you got saved, we'd have clothes for you."

That's how much faith, hope, and confidence my foster mother had. In later years, when I was preaching my crusades, Mrs. Hale would come to me after a service where

hundreds of people had come to Christ, and she would say, “You know, son, when I watched all those people coming forward, I remembered the night I came and put my hand on your shoulder, and I’m so glad I did.” Here was one lady who touched the life of a boy, and he went on to touch the lives of millions. But it likely wouldn’t have happened if not for her love and prayer and faith. So don’t ever give up on your prayers. And don’t ever give up on the people you’re praying for. God may have a miracle in store.

This is only half of the story that James shared in that chapter of his book, *Living Amazed*. I encourage you to get his book and read the rest of the story. In Chapter 2, he also tells about his mother’s reaction to him giving his life to Christ; meeting his birth father for the first time, and an almost deadly encounter with him later that would have changed the course of James’ life; and an accident that could have been fatal. He also shares about what happened to the birthday and Christmas gifts that he did not receive from his aunt and the Hales, and about meeting his future wife and ministry partner Betty, who quickly became the love of his life, and how they chose God over gold. Also mixed in are Biblical characters in whose lives James finds encouragement, how he was able “to see the reality of people’s pain,” and a special story showing the connection between his painful past and the global ministry he leads, LIFE Outreach International – a ministry worthy of your prayers and financial support.

Check out the ministry of James & Betty Robison, including Life Today (TV program every weekday), and the multifaceted LIFE Outreach International, at www.lifetoday.org.

SDG and for the sanctity of human life,

Thomas W. Jacobson
Executive Director, Global Life Campaign
info@GlobalLifeCampaign.com
www.GlobalLifeCampaign.com
www.GLCPublications.com

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).