

## A Friendship Begun at Haley House

Our God is a God of surprises. God puts people in our paths who have the power to change the direction of our lives. For me, it is George Cooper.

When I graduated from high school in Bangor, Maine and headed to Boston College, I had my life all planned out. I was going to be an Economics major, have a successful financial career and become a millionaire. The sky was the limit. During my freshman year, through the Boston College PULSE Program, I volunteered at Haley House. Twice weekly, I helped make and serve meals and it was there I met George. I had no idea how much my life would be influenced by what seemed at the time, a random meeting, but God had plans that I didn't know about.

George and I connected on many levels. He is quick-witted and loves to play cards, so we would often play cards together after I helped serve the evening meal. His life has been difficult in many ways, a difficult childhood with an abusive parent, struggles with drug abuse and run-ins with the law. He was in and out of jail a number of times always praying to God for some "peace of mind", but he could never seem to find it.

Homeless, Haley House was one of the places where George would get a meal. He was personable and well-spoken. His descriptions of life on the street were vivid and stayed with me. He was the catalyst, as I changed my major from Finance to History, with a minor in Theology, and began to realize I was drawn to work with the homeless population.

George and I stayed in touch throughout my college years. Then I moved to Chicago to work for the Chicago Continuum of Care, an organization working to bring homelessness to an end in that city, and I didn't see him for a while. A few years later, I returned to Boston and worked as a case manager serving homeless youth at Bridge Over Troubled Waters and connected with George again. He was enjoying living underneath the Mass Pike, until some of his friends got rowdy and the cops were called in. Once again, George lost his "home."

After that, I moved to Australia for a couple years. A few years after I returned to Boston I ran into George. He was panhandling in a subway, and we recognized each other immediately. He told me that he had a place to live, and he wanted me to see it. It turned out that the rooming house was about a ten-minute walk away from my home and we began meeting again regularly to play cards and talk. No matter where I traveled, George kept showing up and making an impact in my life.

At one of our meetings, George told me about the Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP) – ([ispretreats.org](http://ispretreats.org)). ISP offers spiritual companionship to those recovering from homelessness and addiction. ISP had lit a fire inside of George and changed his life and he encouraged me to get involved. George had attended several overnight retreats with ISP. I was drawn by George's happiness and began volunteering.

Soon my relationship with George blossomed on a deeper level. We became best friends. He attended my wedding; he spent Christmas with my family, and he helped my wife and me welcome our first child into the world.

Today George, is living comfortably in a friend's house in Brockton, with a couple of roommates. He has been given the peace of mind he always prayed for. George not only attends ISP retreats in Boston, but helped start ISP programs in several other cities. He is a remarkable, resilient and faith-filled man.

When I began volunteering at Haley House, nearly 20 years ago, I could never have anticipated that one of the guests would be a moving force in my life, a true blessing for me and my family.

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