



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

## 'You can't do it alone'

BY JANE SALISBURY  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

### JOSEPH PARK

*It's been a long journey from salesman of the year to struggling with addiction, but faith and friends helped Joseph Park overcome*

Joseph Park, a slender man with a gray brush cut and an expressive face, talks with his hands and leans forward to make sure his listener is engaged. His life is a study in extremes. We met to talk about that life, and how he, very recently, moved out of chronic homelessness into his own apartment near Providence Park stadium.

Joseph grew up in a large Mormon family of eight children and lived with his family in Salt Lake City. He had a good life, he says, until sixth grade. His mother and stepfather, the only dad he'd known, were divorced then, which was unusual for a Mormon family.

Divorce was not the only difficulty in Joseph's young life. His mother was part Native American and had dark skin: "People did not see her as white. We were poor, and struggling as a family, even though my dad worked. I didn't know money or success. I didn't learn that part of the world."

After the divorce, Joseph says, "Things went crazy. I had been a straight-A student. But we three oldest, the children of my (birth) father who had been in prison, went with my mom. The other five went with my stepdad."

"Mom became a bartender; we three oldest became juvenile delinquents. I ended up in the Utah reform school for burglary for six months. There we were told that 80 percent of us would end up in prison as adults.



"When I got out, I moved to Oregon with my mom, after a short time of living with my birth father, who had gotten out of prison. He was a scary, mean man, and my mom took me back. She had a new man by then.

"We lived in the Albany-Lebanon area. I was 15. I was spending a lot of time on the streets, trying to pretend I was older than I was. I was "Disco Danny," wearing a leather jacket with the collar up and all that. I didn't fit in rural Oregon.

"At 16, I left home. I was working. I got all kinds of different jobs, managed a car wash, but I wanted to make more money. I finally got a job at Oregon Metallurgical at 19 years old, and stayed there for 10 years. But I got antsy."

Joseph wanted to be in business, and was eager for success. He learned about different kinds of multi-level marketing, some closer to pyramid schemes, and about selling, which became his great passion.

So he quit his job at Oregon Metallurgical at 29, cashed out his shares, and went into business, recruiting and training for a company that procured customers for U.S. Sprint. He became the district director, with an office at the Galleria, training large groups in salesmanship and how to get customers.

Joseph was doing well, but not well enough to keep up with his expenses, which had risen to match his increasing income. He studied "neurolinguistics" and started offering sales training, based on his studies, to companies large and small. But he only did that for about a year. He was perennially restless, always looking for the next thing.

One of the best opportunities for a good salesman was selling siding and cabinet refacing for Sears. Joseph convinced Sears to hire him, though he had little experience, and very soon, he was outpacing seasoned salesmen. "I was in heaven, best job I've ever had. I was working for a reputable company, but really working for myself."

At 32, not so many years after his time in reform school in Utah, Joseph was named the Salesman of the Year for his department at Sears. Thinking about that time, Joseph said, "The average person who grew up the way I did wasn't supposed to make it. I was supposed to be in prison. I didn't have the regular American life. Reform school, strikes against me...I had to pull myself up by my own bootstraps."

But his life was not an unbroken series of successes. Up until 1992, he was what he calls an "upstanding taxpaying citizen." He was making \$10,000 a month. "I didn't know what to do with all this money. Up to that point, I hadn't bought anything but a car."

Joseph met and fell in love with a woman, who was, he discovered, an addict. "I had never done much more than smoke a little

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