

Christmas 2014

My dear friend

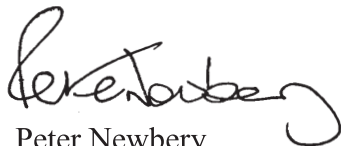
I don't think that many of us grew up in families where breaking the law was taken for granted. Or where visiting your father and elder brothers in prison was an accepted part of family life. But Andrew's father was a triad leader and his brothers and himself were expected to follow in the family "trade". He even recalls keeping fit and learning the martial arts because he knew that in the future he would be involved in triad fights.

Because of one almost unnoticeable event where Andrew found something which he liked and found attractive outside that triad culture he began to grow in a different direction. Often young people we think are beyond help have a spark within them which can bring them back to life if we are patient and offer them opportunities they need.

As you prepare to celebrate the Christmas season, a festival which is so much focused on the family, remember Andrew. But also remember all those other young people who are simply waiting for us to reach out to them and offer them a road back to life.

Please share your family's joy and peace with them this Christmas. I appeal to you to give a generous gift so that these young people can see that they don't have to live in darkness. Their life too can be full of joy and light.

Sincerely



Peter Newbery
Executive Director

My name is Andrew. The following story tells what happened to me before I was fifteen.

I remember my family then was considered well-off. I had an elder brother (now 30) and a sister (now 18). We also had three maid-servants.

My parents often had to travel, to and fro between the Mainland and Hong Kong. So, I didn't see them very often. In fact, I saw the maids more. But, whatever I wanted I would get. From 6 to 10, I was so pampered with presents.

When I was still small, I asked my mother many times to buy me a skateboard, but she always refused, claiming that the game was too dangerous, and bought me something else instead. By and by, I forgot about it.

From a very tender age, I already knew that my father and my brother were members of a triad gang. To me, it made no difference. After all, they were my family. When I was eleven, I was told that my brother was used by money-launderers, and after litigation, he was sentenced to jail, and most of the family assets were frozen. I still did not quite understand what had happened. But mother told me that we became much worse-off than before, and my pocket-money was cut drastically.

Between 12 and 14, as my father and my brother were members of triad, I became involved with the organization and the people. I was recruited by a "big brother". In spite of my smoking habit, I was aware of the importance of good health and strong physique, so as to keep a fighter's image in a street fight, when summoned by the big brother's whistle.

On going out with fellow gangsters, our days were spent mainly on video games, smoking, fooling around with girls, recruiting juniors, and for quick money, we retailed ketamine. Whenever the "whistle was blown", they, as "friends", allowed me to join in. Because my life was so busy, I was often late to school or played truant. In the end, I found school too much of a hassle. I quitted school altogether.

Living with the habit of going out at late night until the small hours, as a fourteen-year old boy, I began to feel what would become of me repeating this kind of listless life. Many of my acquaintance were arrested for gang-fight and retailing drugs, and some even went to jail. My sister was imprisoned for peddling drugs. I began to worry about my future.

It was this sister that brought me to Hangout, operated by Youth Outreach. The new-fangled video games attracted me most and I invited the programme-assistants to play with me. So, I befriended them. They also taught me how to play snooker and even the piano. One of them called DADA taught me how to ride the skateboard. This aroused my passion for the skateboard. As a child I saw, on my way from school, how youngsters rode the board, jumping and doing different patterns. That was how I learned about skateboard riding and how I became interested.

Every time I come to Hangout at Youth Outreach, I ride the skateboard, from afternoon until late in the night, each time playing with youngsters of my age group. It gave me the incentive to improve myself and to compete with them. There are several instructors. As boxing in the triad days, I felt cool and manly. I want to learn new technique so that some days I could become a professional. As I went there every day after school, I gradually alienated myself from the triads and concentrated on the skateboard.

I felt uncomfortable with the generic type of schools, and after Form 1, I went to Unusual Academy. The skateboard is always by my side, and gives the chance of being Programme Assistant in Youth Outreach, to learn youth work. I want people to learn the positive and healthy side of riding the skateboard. I can go to different schools to teach and to perform, this is, doing youth work through the skateboard.

Written by “Andrew”

Translated by Stephanie Choi