

# OUR CULTURES

STORIES THAT SHAPE US

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## He Didn't Go Back

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THE STORY OF A MAN  
WHO CHOSE FORWARD  
WHEN GOING BACK  
WOULD HAVE BEEN  
EASIER.

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*Interview and story by*  
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***Most people meet Yuri Lockette as he is now.***

He talks in a way that doesn't rush you. He listens longer than most people expect. When he responds, it feels like he's stayed with what you said long enough to understand it.

Nothing about him asks for attention. Yet people tend to remember him after he leaves.

What they don't always know right away is that this version of him came after twenty-six years in prison.

He doesn't lead with it or try to hide it either. It's just part of the life behind him.

"I still see myself as Yuri," he says. "Same kid, just... different roads. A lot of time in between."

For years, other people tried to define him. Inside that environment, people weren't introduced. They were known by reputation.

And reputation decided how people saw you.

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At some point, he started feeling like he didn't want to be known that way anymore. Not all at once. But something had to change.

"I got tired," he admits. "Just tired of where things were headed."

There was a time that made that feeling impossible to ignore.

A search came through without warning. Officers moved fast, turning everything over, checking every part of his cell.

Yuri was outside when it happened.

"I already knew what was in there," he adds. "I just stood there watching it go down."

They found some things. Missed others.

What they missed could have changed everything for him. But that's not what stays with him.

"It felt like everything went still," he says. "That was it. I was done with that part of my life."

But stopping something doesn't mean it leaves you alone right away. It just shows you what's still inside you.

That next part, *he didn't walk alone.*



*She believed in me...*

His wife Nancy Sue is part of the story in a way that can't be pulled out.

She didn't meet a finished version of him. She met him while things were still coming together.

"She believed in me when there wasn't much proof yet," Yuri says. "That changed things for me."

Their relationship didn't begin with certainty. It grew over time through conversation and small decisions that built on each other.

She didn't only encourage him. She corrected him at times, often in simple ways that didn't feel like much then but stayed with him.

"How you talk matters out here," he recalls her saying. "You can't move the same way."

He laughs a little when he says that now.

"I had to learn that stuff," he notes. "Some of it I didn't even realize I was doing."

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"I remember just standing there," he says. "Thinking... I'm not forcing this."

He had already made up his mind. Then he stopped himself.

"I will trust what's ahead," he said out loud.

Then he walked away.

Nothing around him changed right away. But something in him did.

Today, Yuri is the founder and president of Crip To Christ Ministries, a faith-based outreach focused on prison ministry and at-risk youth. The work takes him inside correctional facilities, into reentry conversations, and into places where young people are trying to figure out who they are after life has already spoken for them.

He doesn't talk to them like they are far from him. He speaks like he understands how fast life can move when there isn't much room to make mistakes.

"They already got voices," he explains. "You just have to actually listen long enough to hear it."

One young man, Brian, stays with him.

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After he came home, the adjustments didn't stop. They just became harder to ignore.

Some habits didn't leave right away. They showed up in small ways.

There were days that went well. And days that didn't.

"I had to slow myself down," he says. Then he corrects it. "Not slow... just not react to everything the same way."

Faith became part of how he moved through it, but not in a way that made everything feel settled. More like something he returned to when he didn't know what else to do.

There was a time he talks about where everything felt uncertain again.

He was in a place where he could have acted on his frustration. He didn't.



They met inside a juvenile facility. A place where most introductions already come with assumptions attached.

After his release, Brian reached out. He got a job and started building something that wasn't there before. Yuri doesn't take credit for it.

"I just told him to slow down," he says. "Learn life as it comes."

When asked what he would tell his younger self, he doesn't hesitate.

"You've got more in you than what people are saying," he states. "Don't trade that away trying to prove something."

His wife is still part of his everyday life in a real way, not just support from the side. She helps him think through decisions, catches things he misses, and keeps him from moving too fast when he gets ahead of himself.

"She keeps me honest," he laughs. "In a good way."

When asked how he wants to be remembered, he pauses longer this time.

"A praying man," he says. "Someone who trusted God."

He leaves it there.

*Not as an ending. Just what remains.*



To learn more about Yuri and his work,  
visit **Crip To Christ Ministries: [www.criptochristministries.org](http://www.criptochristministries.org)**

  
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