

to **RESTORE**: re-store (*verb*) [ri-stawr, -stohr] to bring back to a state of **health**, soundness, or **vigor**.

A Newsletter for Restoration Academy in Fairfield, Alabama

Annual Report 2010

The Best of Times ... the worst of times

Many of us have struggled this year with the fatigue of ministry. It has been “the best of times and the worst of times.”

As I relate Dickens’s quote to ministry, I do not think that we can experience the “best” if we are not willing to place ourselves around the “worst” (miracles typically take place where they are the most needed.) We have experienced murders this year blocks from our homes, suicide threats from broken students and heartbreaking expulsions.

Alongside these “worst of times” we have experienced 100% of our graduates being admitted into college for the 4th year in a row (most the first ones

in their family to attend and many with scholarships and abundant financial aid rewards). We have also witnessed students expressing a genuine desire to serve Christ publicly among their peers--this is a rare occurrence among urban at-risk youth. We have had 70-100 committed believers from churches all over the city tutor and volunteer each week. God’s people have also given 200 scholarships at 5 thousand dollars a piece to support this effort (treating these blessed children as if they are their own biological children).

I celebrate these occurrences and I also continue to exhort you to pray and give as God leads.

by Carl Lynn

A Picture of the Kingdom...

I recently received the following email as a forward. As I read it I was struck not at how the story speaks well of Restoration, but at what a wonderful picture it paints of the Kingdom - right here, right now. The author met Jon (alias) after feeling called to help disciple women in the Woodlawn area. Not exactly a comfortable place to put oneself. Jon’s mother attended and is an alcoholic. You clearly see here how obedience leads to such great blessings.

“I wanted to give you an update on Jon and all the amazing things that God is doing in his life! He has begun summer school at Restoration Academy and seems to love it. His favorite subject is math. Doors are opening right and left for him. It has been so exciting being a part of the process. I took him to a reading specialist yesterday and she determined exactly what his reading weaknesses and strengths were. I was amazed at her knowledge and knew that we had made the right choice by choosing her. When his session was over she told us that she

would like to tutor him for free this summer.

“I have been so pleased that Jon and my son, David, are getting along so well. Jon is so quiet so I am hoping that David can pull out his personality a little bit.. He loves all the activity choices at our house from basketball to playing Beatles Rock Band. I loved getting to hear him sing out loud. It was the loudest I have heard his voice yet. David even taught Jon how to ride a Rip Stick today.

“I finally got in touch with some wise men who have been doing inner city ministry for a long time



A Picture of the Kingdom

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and they were able to suggest the perfect camp. It is supposedly the best camp for inner city teens. It is called "Kids Across America" and is in Branson, Mo. Jon is excited about flying on his first plane. We will take him to Atlanta so he doesn't have to change planes. The camp sounds so great I wish I could go and be a fly on the wall!

"The neatest answer to prayer happened today! Jon's math teacher from Restoration Academy called me to find out more about him. He was concerned why he was so extremely shy so he asked me to share about his history. As I was talking, the teacher kept making soft noises like his heart was hurting just hearing about him. He finally said that he would like Jon to spend some time with his family and maybe he could come to his house to hang out and play basketball with his son. He told me that he would talk to his wife and get back with me. When he called me back he said that he and his wife wanted to see if Jon could stay at their house for the next week and a half while we were out of town. Again my eyes filled with tears! Wow- what amazing generosity!

"There are instances of students at Restoration Academy that live with the teachers families as they are trying to help father them and not only help them get a great education, but also help to restore them emotionally. If this works out well with this family maybe this could be a living option for Jon this fall if he gets into Restoration.

"The first day Jon left for summer school he said to his mother, "I hope that you have a good summer." Even though he was coming back to where she was to stay that week, I think in his mind he felt like he was starting a new chapter of his life. Thank you for your support and prayers. It is amazing to see how God is using so many different people in different ways to help change this child's life!"

"Mercy to the needy is a loan to God, and God pays back those loans in full." (Proverbs 19:17)

by Sonny Culp

...in Our School

Jesus told us that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus knew that an active and obedient church would storm and rail against Satan's strongholds, and He promised the church that in the end the gates of the enemy would fall. As ambassadors and soldiers of Christ we are called to siege warfare - to aggressively surround and attack the enemy's camp with light, grace, hope and peace. Yet, in any battle there are great struggles, pain and casualties.

As an administrator at the school I witnessed a year-long war for our students' hearts. It was a long and hard fought battle that left our staff exhausted and often times discouraged. Our enrollment grew by over 70 students in the past two years and with that growth came a variety of new challenges. Many of our kids have been exposed and are in bondage to very destructive patterns and lifestyles. Sadly we removed several kids from RA after they made a series of horrible, horrible decisions. Every kid we lost to expulsion felt like a casualty. This is the difficult reality of our ministry that not every child is going to make it at the school.

Yet with the pain and frustration of a battle like ours it is important to notice the small victories along the way. For the fourth year in a row 100% of our seniors were admitted to college. We witnessed broken and repentant teenagers grip the altar rails and cry out to Jesus for forgiveness and mercy. A graduate from the class of '01 moved back into the neighborhood with his wife and daughter to join the fight. These are the moments where the Lord allows us to see through the smoke and spot the gates of hell rattling on their hinges. These are the moments where Christ gives us a glimpse of the final hope we have in Him and in His return.

by Ben Sciacca

MORE THAN THAT, WE REJOICE
KNOWING THAT SUFFERING PRODUCES
PRODUCES CHARACTER, AND
AND HOPE I

...in Our Homes



Coach Coker with three of his four "sons"

I met Demarcus about 2 years ago at a Restoration Academy Basketball Game. A friend of mine and mentor of Demarcus brought him for a visit because he thought Demarcus had potential but was quickly falling through the cracks. Demarcus was a respectful young man, but most young men are respectful when you first meet them. That is not what struck me during my first encounter with him. He looked tired. You could see in his eyes the stress of his life

Demarcus lived with his mother. It was a very difficult living arrangement. He shared a room with his brother and his wife, and he shared the small house with many younger and older siblings. As do many fatherless young men, Demarcus lived life to survive. He became involved with things which could land him in a lot of trouble. He became very shy and inward. He learned to keep his thoughts and intentions to himself. He grew further and further behind in school. After meeting with Demarcus, he applied to Restoration Academy and was reluctantly accepted (because he was so very far behind). It was unclear if the school could get him

ready for graduation in two years.

Demarcus was accepted, and for the first three months at Restoration, he rode the transit bus to and from Fairfield every day. He would have to catch the bus at 6 a.m. to get to school by 8 a.m., and he would get home late in the evenings. After a few months of school, his mentor and I determined that something had to give. We didn't believe Demarcus would make it with those circumstances.

After a few meetings, we decided that he should come and live with my family. This was going to be a big challenge because we live pay check to pay check. We barely make it financially. It just didn't seem practical. However, after speaking with my wife, I was encouraged to take the step of faith.

The first year was a challenge. Demarcus wasn't really doing the things he needed to do in the classroom. He was still very introverted. He wouldn't talk to us much, and he constantly wanted to go home. He didn't like house rules, and many times he disobeyed them. At one point, we even considered sending him home. But at some point, Demarcus began to have a paradigm shift. He began to believe Restoration Academy really wanted him to succeed, and he began to believe that the Cokers had no other motive except to help him.

Demarcus increasingly became a part of our family over the next year and a half. Even when he would go see his mom on the holidays, he would make sure he came by our house as well. He became comfortable and trusting. He began to open his world to us. He became very outgoing and quickly became one of the most popular kids in the school. His grades began to steadily improve. He graduated from Restoration in May and will room with my son, Camron, at the University of West Alabama in the fall on an almost- full scholarship.

by DeWayne Coker

ICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS,
S ENDURANCE, AND ENDURANCE
D CHARACTER PRODUCES HOPE,
DOES NOT PUT US TO SHAME...

ROMANS 5:3-5

...in Our Offices

comes with lots of earthly tears and prayers & Godly miracles and provision:

One senior will attend college this fall because two friends of the school stepped up to cover the remaining cost of tuition. Two seniors were \$350 short per semester for their school until Dawson Memorial Baptist provided scholarships to these students through its education trust fund. One senior received a full scholarship to a state university but didn't get a dorm room because of space limitations... five different friends of RA jumped into action to find this young man a place to live in the Fall. And it doesn't end there, our graduates are working for friends of RA all across the city this summer and every year our graduates come back to see us and share their successes and failures.

When I think back on my college days, I remember coming home for encouragement and clean laundry... while we're not washing clothes, we are "home" for an encouraging word (and sometimes a swift kick in the behind, when needed).

by Molly Stone

"Are you planning to pitch a tent on the Quad?" I found myself asking this absurd question to one of our graduating seniors who had yet to fill out her housing a couple of days before graduation. As we laughed at the idea, I was reminded of the real truth we face each day. Our kids have so many obstacles to success. Poverty, fatherlessness, addiction are the ones most discussed, but also ignorance, access, low expectations and inexperience.

Making sure each Restoration Academy senior jumps through the right hoops so that they have the option to attend college is like a pinball game. The process alone is exhausting. Applications, essays, transcripts, scholarship applications, Financial Aid forms, housing applications, fee waivers, ACT tests. It's enough to make the most accomplished among us exhausted.

But God is gracious and provides in ways we could not even imagine! This year ten students graduated from Restoration Academy and this year, for the 4th in a row, all ten were accepted and plan to attend college in the fall. This achievement

...in Our Community

This year, Restoration Academy entered a unique partnership with two organizations in the Birmingham area. The Lovelady Center, located in Eastlake, is a 9 to 12 month faith-based residential treatment and recovery center for women recently released from Julia Tutwiler Prison and their children. Grace House Ministries, located in Fairfield, provides homes for young girls ages 6-19 who cannot live with their birth parents because of abuse, abandonment and neglect. As one can imagine, the inclusion of these students into the life of the school brought deep and devastating issues to the forefront. We were forced on our knees seeking heavenly wisdom.

We will call him Andrew. From the beginning of the partnership with the Lovelady Center, Andrew was selected as the most likely to not make it at Restoration Academy. His mom had been incarcerated and his father was non-existent in his life. His anger issues and lack of focus proved to be a major obstacle in the fourth grade class. By the grace of God Andrew was given one of the best teachers at Restoration Academy, an "old school" teacher whose mixture of discipline and love fostered his love of learning. He almost made it to the end of the school year. His mother withdrew him and his

siblings so that she could pursue a job in another city. As we gathered to pray with the family on their last day, we cried. As I looked at Andrew, he was crying as well.

Desperation leads children to do desperate things. Our young ladies from Grace House have experienced the dark side of sin more than any one should in a lifetime, much less a childhood. One young lady came to us so burdened. Pulled from her home because of unspeakable abuse, this young lady fought suicidal thoughts throughout the year. She would go in and out of caring about work and rules. She was expelled in early Spring for flicking off a teacher. We grieved the loss of this child. A week later, we were approached about giving her another chance. She had repented of her actions, accepted Christ and showed an intense desire to return to the school. We gave her another chance and she finished the year strong with no behavioral issues.

by Brian Goessling