

FORK IN THE ROAD



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# The Believer

Ed 'Skip' Ast says his relationship with Jesus Christ helped him overcome a sordid past and build a bustling, value-based company

Having grown up in the pool industry, it was only natural that it later became a lifelong vocation. At a young age, I was already involved in the business, and though I was a highly disciplined high-school athlete, my life began to deteriorate into one of heavy drinking, barroom brawling and gambling. I was possessed by this lifestyle, and had a violent temper. Many of my relationships began to suffer.

Over the next nine years, I'd arrive home so late that I'd rarely see my children. My marriage started to fall apart. My wife, Sharon, and I would argue over my lifestyle. She was always right, but I was stubborn and refused to change even though I dearly loved her.

In the eighth year of my marriage, my dad passed away. My wife was close to him and shortly afterward, she was ready to take her own life. Instead, she turned on the radio and listened to Billy Graham. That night, she made a conversion to Christ, and I saw an instant transformation. I sensed a new peace and comfort in her life.

Sharon insisted I attend church. I accepted her challenge and became something I always despised — a hypocrite. During the week, I continued to feed my addictions and

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**ED "SKIP" AST**

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on Sunday, I became a good, church-going family man. I prepared myself mentally and emotionally to lose my wife and family.

In 1966, my wife and I were invited to the Lay Institute for Evangelists, sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. The founder, Bill Bright, was the guest speaker that night, and he made a statement that was unlike anything anyone had ever said to me.

He said, "Jesus Christ died on the cross for everybody's sins. Unless you invite Him into your life, you cannot have a personal relationship with him. Everybody must be washed and cleansed in His blood of their sins."

One part of my mind recoiled at the thought of being cleansed in somebody's blood. I knew what this meant. I arrived home many nights after fighting in a bar where I was covered in someone else's blood, and it repulsed me. But the other part of my mind said, "Skip, this is the solution."

I had done everything I knew how to do

to salvage my marriage and my family without success, so I tried this. Bill asked me to say a prayer, and Christ would come into my life and cleanse me. Before I could repeat the prayer, a loud voice in my head said, "Skip, don't buy into this foolish nonsense. You're

experience I ever had, receiving Christ in my heart.

God placed a new value system in my life. It reminds me of II Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: Old things are passed away;

**It was the greatest experience I ever had, receiving Christ in my heart. God placed a new value system in my life. ... I became the man I should have been all along.**

going to lose all the money you make gambling. No more quick trips to Vegas."

The prayer was, "Lord Jesus, come into my life, forgive me my sins and make me what you want me to be."

I said those words — and I meant them. It was the greatest

behold, all things become new." That's what happened to me. I became the man I should have been all along.

Six months later, in January 1967, my brother, Bob, asked me to join him and a local home builder in creating a new pool entity. I had never worked for myself, so I told Bob I'd pray about it, which I did. In April 1967, we opened Shasta Industries.

At the end of the first year, we built



PHOTO COURTESY AST FAMILY

**New beginning: A transformative prayer brought Ed "Skip" Ast (right and inset with wife, Sharon) closer to God. The experience gave his life — and business — new meaning.**



PHOTO BY JOHN NEELY / SHASTA POOLS & SPAS

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225 pools. In 1968, we doubled to 530 pools and became the No. 1 pool builder in Phoenix, overcoming unbelievable obstacles. Since then, we have not relinquished the No. 1 position.

Seeking God's direction in every facet of the business gave me great peace and allowed me to guide the company to heights I never could have imagined. God has given me this supernatural energy. Despite

several negative circumstances, he showed that he supported me and continues to have a great plan for my life.

Fast forward to today: We have nine divisions, 11 executives who report to me, 700 employees and our purpose is the same as it was then. We want to astonish our customers and use this business as an instrument of influencing people every day to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I am not as concerned about my legacy as I am that everyone has the opportunity to come to know Christ in a personal way. I now use the business to help others come to Christ by supporting organizations such as the Prison Ministry, Campus Crusade for Christ, the Billy Graham Ministries and others.

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My life is about integrity and open communication. I believe in teamwork and honesty, dependability and continual improvement. Those are the values I practice now.

In closing, I would invite you to say the same prayer I did. Christ will come into your life, and you will begin the great adventure for which God created you. ■

— as told to Shabnam Mogharabi

### Lessons Learned



■ Trust God with everything you do and put him first in your life.

■ Live by a set of values and principles. Success will assuredly follow.

■ Implement a company mission that your employees can wholeheartedly embrace.

■ Work like it all depends on you, pray like it all depends on God and practice the Golden Rule.

■ Give to charitable organizations and build a company that's a member of the community.

