

## **Hugh Halter's Interaction with Rosco**

Rosco is now forty-two years of age. He travels the world, creating powerful documentaries about homelessness, poverty, hunger, and abuse. He's a storyteller and seems drawn to the worst of the worst in hopes that something good may come out of his art.

Roscoe is an atheist. A really benevolent one.

Thirty-seven years ago, at the age of five, Rosco found himself hiding under a table in his family's small Northern Ireland cottage, desperately trying to keep his dog quiet by distracting him with a bowl of milk. He was hiding under the table because his mother, in fear of losing more family members, had scattered the children just seconds before a band of IRA henchmen came in, holding his father at gunpoint.

In that moment, Rosco prayed that God would save his father. The answer? The sound of a pistol discharging, followed by a deadening thud as his father hit the kitchen floor right next to the table. The fading memories of the day God didn't answer, combined with seeing his father's murderer singing hymns and taking Communion in Mass the next week, left Roscoe with no faith in God at all and only the lingering memory of the smell of his dog and the milk.

How do I know Rosco? I just performed a marriage between him and his fiancée, Tanya. I heard this amazing story over coffee at Starbucks before Rosco flew in to Denver. Tanya, a struggling Christian, was trying to give me the context for why she was marrying an atheist. She spoke emotionally about all the Christian men she had dated and how poorly she was treated, how she was lied to, pushed toward sexual sin. "Rosco has been the most gentle, kind, and respectful man I've ever known. I do hope that someday we can grow together spiritually, but I wanted you to know his story, because his story really matters, and I understand it."

Even with my limited knowledge of Rosco's story, I knew that Jesus was asking me to become a bit fleshier to him. What I knew was that Rosco was Irish, that he had experienced only negative feelings and emotions in regard to religious leaders and systems, and that he needed to see something of God without all the stereotypes he expected.

The place where Rosco and Tanya's wedding ceremony was held was a sixty-acre Seventh-Day Adventist residence, complete with a private chapel. Seventh-Day Adventists don't allow alcohol in any context, even a wedding. But forbidding alcohol to an Irishman is insensitive enough—even worse not to allow malted barley beverages at a wedding ceremony.

So I simply did what Jesus did at the wedding in Cana: I honored the marriage. I called Rosco out to my Jeep, drove him a half mile down the long driveway, and parked outside the private gate. I then reached into the glove box and pulled out two small shot-size Jameson whiskey containers. As soon as Rosco saw the bottles, he whispered, "No way." I smiled and began to crack open both of them. With the beginnings of tears in his eyes, he said, "I thought you were a pastor."

"I am," I replied.

"Are you sure this is okay?" he asked.

"Well, it's obviously not okay to the owner of this wedding chapel, but I follow Jesus, and He got His initial headline billing because He turned hundreds of gallons of water into wine at a friend's wedding, so I don't think He'll mind if you and I enjoy a quick nip of Ireland's finest."

I continued, "Rosco, Tanya told me a little about your story. I understand why you have had a hard time believing in God. I want you to know that I hope someday you can wipe away the images of religious hypocrisy, rules, and traditions that might have kept you from seeing the real God."

As the conversation ended we both toasted. I shared a quick blessing and prayer over him, and he offered an Irish blessing over me. His was actually better! It was a good moment, a God moment, and Rosco knew that his story mattered to me and to God.

*Hugh Halter, "People are not pagans to be converted, projects to be preached at, or demographics to be reprogrammed. Humans should never be generalized, categorized, dismissed, judged, or underestimated. Every person is a story, rich with history, experiences, creative potential, strengths and weaknesses, clarity and blindness. And although spiritual vertigo is universal, we must not put everyone in the same box."*