

March 2024



FUNDAMENTAL BAPTIST MISSIONS INTERNATIONAL



THE CON MAN

Walter was a carnival (carny) man. Following in the footsteps of his Roma (Gypsy) ancestors, who emigrated from Europe to the United States in 1900, Walter learned by osmosis how to “hustle” from his traveling-carnival father and fortune-telling mother. His six short years in school (age 8-14), where he excelled in every subject, ended when he was sent to his Uncle Steve, a hustler extraordinaire, to “learn the trade.” Not only could Walter hustle merchandise out of the trunk of a car, but he also perfected the “five-finger discount” (shoplifting) at local stores.

At age sixteen, Walter’s prearranged marriage to successful fortune teller Dolly Tennis, a Greek Gypsy four years his senior, catapulted his prestige among the clan to new heights. For nine years, life was all about money, more money, cars, clothes, vacations, diamonds, and gold. By age twenty-five, despite having a wife and four children and an “almost millionaire” status, Walter was not happy! He was disillusioned with life and despondent over whom he had become. Ignoring his moral compass, Walter sank into the low-life, nightclub, drug-crowd scene.

Summer 1980: Everything changed. Walter signed up to work with Joel, a childhood friend-turned-amusement-company owner whose life was so debauched by drugs and alcohol that he literally beat his employees. Then Joel got “born again” and became a changed man. Walter was baffled when Joel prayed on his knees behind the carnival trailers. He was more perplexed when Joel announced, “Walter, you need Jesus!” It took six months for Walter to process and respond, “How do I

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get Jesus?" Following Joel's directions, Walter knelt by his bed alone, confessed to God that he was hopelessly on his way to Hell, and cried out, "God, come into my heart and forgive my sins!" Praise God! Hallelujah! The Gypsy con man got saved!

Immediately, drastic changes manifested in Walter's life. Dolly saw the transformation and accepted Christ. With no church or pastor to guide him, Walter cut down Dolly's fortune-telling sign (the signature of the Roma culture), and Satanic war began. Family disowned them, and finances plagued them; but God led them to the Crossroads Baptist Church in New Carlisle, Ohio, to be mentored for five years and to learn to serve. One by one, family members accepted Christ, but the lostness of all the marginalized Roma (40 million worldwide) weighed heavily on Walter's mind. Finally, he surrendered to reach his people.

In 1990, Missionary Walter Stevens started a Roma ministry in Cleveland, a city where the Gypsy clan was one of the most wicked of the Gypsy culture. During the next seven years, Walter planted congregations in Detroit, Michigan; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Mansfield, Ohio, and drove weekly to all four sites to minister to a total of 150-200 converts. Lives changed! More than thirty fortune tellers were saved. Men left the carnal life to build honest businesses.

From 1997 to 2002, the Stevens family built a thriving work of 100 in Miami, Florida, where the Gypsy population sprawled across three counties, but God was burdening Walter's heart for the forgotten Roma of post-Communist Romania and Hungary. Twice per year, Walter traveled to Eastern Europe, where he established six churches and trained pastors for them.

The next twelve years were a roller coaster of triumphs and trials. Because the Roma people speak the same (unwritten) language, Walter was able to extend the Gypsy work to Germany, Austria, and Italy. Other missionaries began to reach out to the impoverished, marginalized Roma people, and the ministry mushroomed.

Then tragedy struck! Dolly was diagnosed with cancer. After nine years of riding the roller coaster of Dolly's surgeries, chemotherapy, and medical complications, Walter returned to Florida to nurse his dying wife. Inside he felt "sidelined, benched, and sucker-punched." At this chaotic time, God directed the establishment of Roma Outreach Missions Association (ROMA), which focused on the 40 million unreached Roma and other marginalized people groups. ROMA now supports forty national pastors.

In 2017, a Facebook request launched ROMA into media. Pastor Asif, a Pakistani Gypsy, inherited a church congregation of 250 from his pastor father, but Asif had no training for the task. Would Walter help him? Walter was very dubious. It sounded like a scam, and he was most certainly NOT going to be conned by Pakistani Gypsy! After a year of vetting Asif, Walter cautiously invested \$1,500 in a computer, monitor, and generator and began teaching the GRACE BIBLE CLASS over Skype. In the last seven years, Walter has trained ninety literate Gypsy adults in their twenties through the three-year GRACE BIBLE CLASS program. Forty-five are presently enrolled, and Walter has never set foot inside Pakistan!

Editor's Note: Two years after Dolly's death, Walter married Simone Dixon, a Godly Christian singer and business owner from Melbourne, Florida. Working with Simone has given Walter renewed zeal and purpose. ROMA is expanding as God opens more doors of opportunity.



Mahdi, Ali, and Soraya with Emily and Michael Germi

UNITED STATES **Wisconsin**

Persian broadcaster Michael Germi is establishing a Persian church in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, beginning March 24, 2024. Three Afghan siblings, who escaped the Taliban regime by fleeing their country, were saved in Tajikistan and later disciplined by Michael. The three have legally entered the United States. Falls Baptist Church in Menomonee Falls is

temporarily housing them while they obtain housing and jobs. These young converts will be the seeds for the new church plant. Please pray for a great harvest.

ROMANIA
Gypsy Ministry Expands

ROMA, directed by Walter Stevens, has begun the first-ever Gypsy radio program being aired in the Transylvania region of Romania in the city of Oradea. Romanian Gypsies are generally extremely impoverished and are usually illiterate. Please pray for more outlets to carry the program.

George Zarris
Christian Radio International



Gypsy Service in Tinca, Romania

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