

I graduated from North Park College in 1974 and went to work at the Children's home to further test a sense of call to the ministry - my other option was to go on a short term mission to Africa (sound familiar?) but I didn't want to go that far from my future wife who was still at North Park. So, as it turns out I've been a Covenant Pastor for 30 years now, currently serving a wonderful multi-racial church in South Sacramento, CA.

I started out in Elgin, IL, then went to Beloit WI. I planted a new church in Rhode Island and was there for 10 years. Up to Minnesota for five, and now here for another five so far - and I love it. I have had a good and varied ministry - and along with all the joy, there have been some hard spots - the first two churches were quite unhealthy and needed a lot of healing. Planting a church was a joy, but tested me in many ways. I'll spare you more details, but here's the thing - the most difficult year I ever spent in ministry was at the children's home. Honestly!

As you well know, these kids were pretty much bent out of shape, and my first lesson was to learn unconditional love. I think I got the hang of it for real after about six months - and that made things easier. But as a swimming instructor since the age of 12, I came to the task with a certain degree of expectation for beneficial outcomes when so much beneficial input was offered - and so I thought I might see some sign that all the grief and conflict and love were going to have some effect. There wasn't much to speak of.

I had the honor of working with our mutual hero - Nola. One day early in my tenure I asked her about you, for I knew she raised you. "What was Robby Mitchell like - he is such a good guy?" And she told me that growing up, you were as much grief as any boy on my unit. (Including Art Salcido - who was my nemesis both at Covenant Harbor and at the home - man do I have stories about him! It broke my heart to learn that he and his brother along with another boy from Princeton were murdered in Chicago in 1979 just as he was turning his life around).

"What happened to him then?" I wanted to know. And Nola said essentially, "I don't know - it was almost like one day late in his high school years, a switch got flipped, and he was on his way to a solid life. I'm sure it was God working on him, but I think it was also the cumulative effect of a lot of love, and a lot of prayer, and a lot of patience - and people not giving up on him".

- Robert Ander