

PRAISE FOR OUR TOWN, OUR KIDS

"Might be the most important book in Young Life in the last twenty-five years."

— Brent Cunningham, Area Developer, rural Alaska

"Eric Protzman combines the passion of an evangelist and the pragmatism of an engineer. You'll see the vulnerability of a follower of Christ as he unpacks his journey with Andy and reaches adolescents with the message of God's love. Joy, frustration, and humility are raw and relatable in this book. Through fresh eyes we accept once again that it takes a community to reach a community. When it happens, everyone is changed!"

— Ken Tankersley, SVP Young Life Community Networks

"This book is a human story of relationships, communities, and changes. It offers a prime opportunity to gain insights that apply to all relationships and communities we serve."

— Claudia Mitchell

"These two formed one of the most effective partnerships I have seen in my thirty years in the mission of Young Life."

— Terry Leprino, Regional Director, Front Range Region

“For seventeen years, I have had an Area Director come home to me at the end of the day, and I can attest to the high highs and the low lows of ministry. *Our Town, Our Kids* tells a true story about how Young Life can not only be a gift to kids in our town but how it can be a blessing to those called to it.”

— Genna Morman, wife of Andy Morman

"A fresh and vulnerable book about doing ministry right. Here's the question: How can the Holy Spirit grab hold of a rapidly deteriorating ministry relationship between two seasoned Christians and transform it into something very special, even enviable? *Our Town, Our Kids* reminds us that the gospel can do it."

— Dr. Bill Senyard, Gospel App Ministries and author of *Fair Forgiveness: Finding the Power to Forgive Where You Least Expect It*

“I’ve heard Eric and Andy tell this story dozens of times and I believe in it more now than ever. I have seen Young Life Areas and ultimately people transformed because of the vulnerability of Eric and Andy’s journey together. For all the mistakes shared honestly in these pages, God has faithfully redeemed every single one.”

— Kimberly Silvernale, Divisional Operations Manager, Young Life Northwest Division

“When Committee Chairs and Area Directors model true spiritual friendship the results can be miraculous. *Our Town, Our Kids* reflects Jesus’ loving instruction to send them out two by two.”

— Gill Richard, Regional Board Chairman,
Front Range Region

“When I replaced Andy Morman as Area Director, I walked into the fruit of this book. I too discovered when I am in true partnership with my Committee Chair, I don’t survive, I thrive. My heart is keenly drawn to women and moms on staff. There is a path in this book for women on staff to thrive.”

— Kaylan Riley, Area Director Intermountain Young Life

“In *Our Town, Our Kids*, Eric thoughtfully reflects on his years as a Young Life Committee Chair. In doing so, he provides a roadmap for all of those who are following in his footsteps. It is a must read for Young Life Staff and Committee Chairs.”

— Jacque Abadie, Regional Director, Front Range Region

“An honest and open reflection of a well-intended relationship between an Area Director and Committee Chair that left a lot of hurt and pain. As a Regional Director I have seen this unnecessary spiral happen too many times. We can and must do better. *Our Town, Our Kids* is a must read for any Young Life community.”

— TJ Dickerson, Regional Director Rocky Mountain Region

“A must read for every Young Life Area! I watched Eric and Andy’s story in its pain and beautiful redemption. The reimagined Area Director and Committee Chair relationship is transformative. Ask the questions in the book. Enjoy the journey!

— Jeb Baum, former IMYL Committee Chair,
YL Volunteer Leader, grateful YL dad

“Committee Chairs will learn so much here. This raw account shows how God can make all things new. Eric and Andy share hard-earned wisdom for every YL Area! Using their approach, the transition to serving Intermountain Young Life was seamless. Eric continues to serve as a friend, coach, and encouragement to me and to Intermountain Young Life.”

— Krista Wallace, three-time Committee Chair,
domestic and international,
and current Committee Chair, Intermountain Young Life

“I had the privilege of working with Andy as Committee Chair after he and Eric discovered this new model of true partnership in Young Life ministry. It was a model Andy and I committed to, and I’m grateful that Eric lays out the lessons and practices so clearly. A game-changer for your Area Director and Committee Chair relationship.

— Taylor Wolfe, Committee Chair, Issaquah, WA

"I sat next to Eric over the years as this unfolded. The story of Eric and Andy is accurate and at times painful. It offers great hope for ministries seeking to fulfill their mission."

— Howard Hargrove, Rocky Mountain Regional Field
Missionary for Fathers in the Field

"Our Town, Our Kids opens up the underbelly of ministry with flawed people and reveals the beauty of living out solid biblical principles. The goal is kids knowing Jesus and it really matters! *Our Town, Our Kids...OURS!* Thank you, Eric."

— Cindy Yohann, Committee Developer

"Pastors, please read this book. Accessible and memorable. Share it with a fellow pastor, especially someone wanting to deepen their relationships while not abandoning their organizational goals. The leadership and relationship principles very much apply to church ministry."

— Jason Freeman, lead pastor,
Bergen Park Church, Evergreen, CO

OUR TOWN, OUR KIDS

REIMAGINING YOUR YOUNG LIFE AREA

ERIC PROTZMAN

Our Town, Our Kids

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Christ (Savior and Lord)

Area Director (AD)

Campaigners (weekly Bible-based study with Leaders, also known as Groups)

Club (weekly party with a purpose for kids to gather with Leaders)

Committee Chair (CC)

Committee members (YL Committee)

Community (our IMYL towns)

Intermountain Young Life (IMYL, our YL Area, CO37)

Kids (adolescents/students)

Leaders (in direct ministry with our kids; often called Volunteer Leaders)

Staff (or Young Life Staff, paid YL Staff)

Volunteers/Donors (supporters joining a story)

Young Life (or YL, founded 1941)

FOREWORD

When Eric told me he wanted to write a book about our story, the news was both exciting and sobering. After all, the story Eric and I lived and the lessons we learned mark one of the hardest seasons of my life.

When I started my new role as Area Director of Intermountain Young Life in 2008, I was brimming with excitement and confidence. Eric, as Committee Chairman, was my biggest fan, placing his full trust in me.

Unfortunately, a fatal flaw in the roles we had defined for ourselves created a ticking time bomb, and when things went south, it was devastating. I felt lonely and isolated. Sometimes I felt attacked and blamed.

Fearing I was about to be fired, some days I couldn't get myself out of bed. My wife and kids experienced the fallout of what I thought was going to be the end of my time on Staff. I felt defeated and estranged from the man who had been my biggest fan.

Area Directors, Committee members, paid Staff members, or Volunteers can get discouraged. You may have experienced some of the same frustrations and obstacles that played a role in our story.

Eric and I often share our story in the Young Life community. Many people have experienced our kind of pain, isolation, tension, and mismanaged expectations. We experienced so much of this before God intervened.

One evening, while my wife was putting our children to bed, I felt wound up. While mopping the kitchen floor in our apartment, my mind was spinning with hypothetical conversations I wanted to have with Eric. These imaginary conversations were dripping with accusations and self-defense.

All of a sudden, I realized this is not the way it is supposed to be.

“God,” I prayed aloud, “will you help me? I am tired and can’t handle this anymore.”

Then I did something which five minutes earlier I couldn’t have done. I called Eric and said, “I’m sorry.”

Eric said, “I’m sorry too.”

Then God did a miracle. Immediately, He began to mend our broken hearts. He revealed to us what we had been doing wrong. He showed us that too many other Area Directors and Committees were drowning in the same currents.

Eric and I were both called to this work, and it was now threatened. We had undermined our relationship. In this miracle, He began to mend our broken hearts.

Today, Eric and I are the best of friends. He is someone I trust fully and can rely on in ministry and life.

This story of restoration has been one of the most incredible miracles in my life.

Eric and I went from a frustrating leader-helper model to a true partnership. We experienced courage, equality, and freedom. This resulted in a deeper impact on the youth in our community.

How we got here—and the lessons we learned along the way—are a powerful testimony to God’s redemptive powers. His desire is to grow all of us into the people and ministers he

wants us to be. We believe the hard road we traveled is avoidable.

There is a better way. We lived it, and you can too.

—Andy Morman

INTRODUCTION

Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him.

—Psalm 127:3

For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within.

—2 Corinthians 7:5

We made so many mistakes in the Intermountain Young Life Area.

As Committee Chair (CC), I took on too little responsibility and learned hard lessons.

As Area Director (AD), Andy Morman took on too much responsibility and learned hard lessons.

We created misunderstandings bigger than either of us. As a result, we suffered a severe falling out which lasted years. It breaks our hearts to know, if left up to us, we wouldn't be speaking today.

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit showed us we weren't

expecting too much of each other—we were expecting too little.

He showed us how to begin carrying each other's burdens.

People you know may be walking our same destructive path. In sharing our story and hard-won lessons, I hope your community and kids will prosper. Staff lonesomeness went away and Volunteer engagement increased in our reimagined Area.

The tangle of Area leadership was at the heart of our struggle, and it's at the heart of this book.

Here's a bit of my story.

Most kids whose lives change through Young Life, or YL, remember their Leader's name, but I didn't. Thirty-seven long years after meeting Jesus at a YL Club at Omaha Benson High School, I attended a YL Leadership Weekend at Crooked Creek Ranch in Colorado. I was on a work crew serving food to a new generation of overcommitted Leaders. I happened to be wearing a Nebraska T-shirt I'd snagged from my duffel. A guy next to me waiting to fill his tray pointed to my shirt. He said years ago he'd tried to start a YL Club in Nebraska. We explored some connections and figured the whole thing out.

He was the Young Life Leader who led me to Christ.

Paul Petersen and I dragged a couple of chairs off to a quiet corner and released decades of tears.

For six weeks in 1971, Paul had busted up Interstate 80 from Lincoln for over an hour to Omaha Benson High School. This was always after a day of his own classes at the University of Nebraska. He tried to get a Club started. It didn't take. He'd taken on too much.

His commitment became unsustainable. The result was unimaginable.

He left the attempt dejected. "I never thought I did any good at all," Paul told me through tears.

In truth he *had* done life-altering good. He had entered my

life and changed it forever, but his exhaustion and loneliness had taken its toll.

We need to understand why we have so many lonesome Staff, Volunteers and even Committee members who feel the isolating weight of ministry.

I've experienced walking in Paul's lonesome shoes. So has Andy. As have dedicated YL Leaders, Staff, and Volunteers around the world. There is a healthier, less heroic option.

Andy and I pray for your joy and success.



Andy Morman and Eric Protzman 2017

ARE YOU SETTING YOURSELF UP
FOR DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE
FIRST TEN MINUTES?

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

—James 1:2–4

“I’m going to close down Club for the next nine months for a reset.” Andy, our Young Life Area Director, shocked me with his statement.

We were in Andy’s office, sitting on opposite sides of his desk. His words made me furious.

“The problem is low-energy, uninspiring Clubs,” I pushed back. “Our Young Life ministry is too small, and I don’t think you are up to the job. The way to fix uninspiring Clubs is to practice making inspiring Clubs—not quit for nine months.”

Andy did not hesitate. “Young Life is the expert in kid ministry, and you need to stay out of it. Your input is not welcome.”

This stomped on a nerve.

"If you are such experts, why is it failing?" I asked him. "I'm withdrawing all my support, financial and otherwise."

This shameful confrontation occurred in 2011, just three years after our community had hired Andy to lead Intermountain Young Life.

How did we get to this godless moment?

WE STARTED WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS.

Back in 2007, a gap divided our town and our kids. Adults often saw middle and high school kids as thoughtful and fantastic. We also saw them as confusing and intimidating. Inspiring students in our town to learn about Jesus left us feeling inadequate.

My wife, Nancy, and I saw the gap and were looking for our role in youth ministry. For more than nine months we canvassed our community. We engaged with pastors, youth pastors, coaches, and teachers. We looked for anybody, spiritual or secular, who loved teenagers. We wanted to learn about those who preceded us in ministry in our town. Supporting them was our priority.

"Go meet Ben and Judy McComb," Pastor Philip Reimers advised us. "They have been at the center of youth ministry for decades. They have a Young Life background."

I was well aware of the impact of the organization. Nancy and I had had a long relationship as Committee members with Young Life before we moved to the mountains.

"We've been waiting for you," Ben told us when we met.

Ben and Judy have had a long history of humble, obedient ministry. Their primary focus has always been serving disinterested kids. These kids are sometimes forgotten in the shuffle. Visible, involved kids are the focus of most sacred and secular organizations. Disinterested kids are those who don't have a connection with faith in their family or circle of friends.

They rarely hear the gospel straight. In 2007, these kids hadn't been much of a focus in our town. Thankfully, they are the specialty of Young Life. In fact, Young Life has stood in this gap since 1941.

Ben and Judy said Evergreen had been without YL for twenty years. Soon five couples formed a Committee and relaunched Intermountain Young Life. We wanted to serve disinterested kids in Evergreen and Idaho Springs, Colorado.

Clueless, we messed up in the first ten minutes.

Our first job was to hire an Area Director.

This new Committee interviewed Andy Morman in the comfort of our living room. Andy and his wife, Genna, arrived with smiles and potential. Andy was carrying his future and ours. We warmed to each other right away. It was a thrilling moment.

Andy is the kind of person you'd want in your town working with your kids. He loves kids, and he loves Jesus. On that first night of our interview, Andy and Genna arrived steered by faith and filled with hope. They brought with them one-year-old Grace. Today Grace is in her teens and is a beautiful, gifted young woman with two younger siblings. She giggled and rolled around under the coffee table. We chatted with her parents, and it all felt like progress.

Andy was anxious to tackle his leadership role and prove he was up to it. He projected an energetic *I've got this covered* posture. This wasn't out of the ordinary, as Young Life Area Directors are trained to lead.

“ *Our inexperience was about to create grizzly-sized problems.*

In other words, Andy would provide all the direction, and we would *help*. Figuratively, he tore open his shirt and displayed Superman's red S.

This was a relief to us. We wanted an expert who could

shepherd our town while we cheered him on. In return, we promised to bake cookies, raise money, and fund salaries and expenses.

We prayed a grateful prayer, decided Andy was ideal, and polished off dessert.

We had chosen the right person but made a crucial error. This error would limit our impact. Our inexperience was about to create grizzly-sized problems. We didn't have a clue what was heading our way.

OUR SUCCESS WAS UNSUSTAINABLE.

Our community supported the reconstituted YL Area with prayer. The Committee and Volunteers encouraged Staff members. They showed up at events and meetings and wolfed Nancy's famous chocolate chip cookies. We raised money. We waited for Andy and Young Life to produce results. And they did.

Club grew to as many as eighty-five students. Andy found kids, Andy found leaders, kids found hope . . . and kids found Jesus. Our first summer camp trip to Castaway in Minnesota was a triumph. There was so much good happening. Our town was grateful.

As promised, Andy was in charge. He was our leader. He involved himself in fund-raising, community events, and Leader dinners. We called ourselves *partners* with Andy and Young Life. We were more like fans, cheerleaders. We were helpers.

Nobody could have guessed the mistake we made in our first meeting was about to make itself known.

So, what was the error we had made in the first ten minutes?

We had not adopted enough responsibility.

Three years into the experience there was trouble in paradise. The Area seemed to be losing momentum.

I remember a pivotal conversation with Jeb Baum, our second Committee Chair. If you can trust anybody in this world for wisdom, grace, and discernment, it's Jeb. Sitting in the living room where we had hired Andy, I poured two cups of coffee—before saying aloud the next words I paused for some time. “I have a feeling this ministry is becoming unhealthy,” I confided. “We’ve done good things, but we’re losing altitude.”

“How so?”

“I don’t feel we’ve got the momentum we had in 2008.” I cleared my throat. “We may need to replace Andy.”

Jeb shook his head. “What? No. Everyone loves Andy, and he’s doing a great job. If there are problems, we should go back to the basics and figure out how to do the whole project better.”

Young Life started in Dallas in 1941. As it grew, it developed a hierarchical organization to cope with disbursed operations. This was an accepted and useful organizational style for its time. As YL moved beyond Dallas, the top-down structure continued to be used. Young Life Staff were the dispatched experts on whose shoulders success or failure rested. Local helpers were recruited. Committees were conceived for financing this geographic expansion.

The Committee Chair Handbook says, “Decision making is one of the most misunderstood concepts in Young Life, and as a Committee Chair it will be necessary for you to understand and manage decision making along with the Area Director and Regional Director.”¹

Also in the handbook is the following section: “Characteristic #5: Effective Committees Understand Authority and Decision Making in Young Life.”

This section of the handbook defines Area Director and Committee roles: “The Area Director and Committee should develop a relationship that values trust and collaboration. At the local level, the Area Director and the Committee should be

involved in long-range, major decision making. Committee input and ownership of important decisions are critical.”

Then specifically it says, “Committee members should not become involved in the day-to-day operational decisions that are regulated to Young Life Staff.”

To clarify decision making, both the Committee Handbook and the Committee Chair Handbook stress that “Young Life Committees are advisory in nature and have no formal authority.”² Based on these directives, many experienced Young Life Volunteers conclude that the community supports YL, and YL saves our kids.

Why detail this? In the work Andy and I have done with Committees around the country, we generally observe the following issues:

- underutilization of Committees
- overloading of Area Directors
- Areas undershooting their potential reach
- lonesome Staff

Based on our experience the onus is not sufficiently shared. Staff need broader support, and our town seeks ministry with maximum reach.

As a result of the strong Area Director and limited Committee roles, our town can think of Young Life as a turnkey operation that simply needs local help and support. Of course, Young Life does not say turnkey. Young Life does not believe it is turnkey. But a Committee or community might see it this way.

I know because this was the mind-set of IMYL as our town began this journey with YL.

While a partnership is formally requested and described, the leader-helper model undermines it. And while ADs embrace being in charge, they can find the experience isn’t as

advertised. The leader-helper format imposes isolation on the AD. As helpers lose steam, isolation gets worse.

Insufficient organizational support for youth ministers is epidemic in the church and in other youth ministry. Unreasonable expectations are often placed on dedicated but vulnerable youth ministers. The result? A disenchanting young minister in a struggling, isolated ministry. All towns need healthy ministries who need healthy ministers. We must do all we can to bring all available resources to this goal.

We did find a way out!

But in the meantime . . .

Andy got lonesome.

Then Andy got blamed. By me.

Our IMYL Club succeeded for three years. Then we declined to near failure. As a helper, I blamed our leader, Andy, when ministry declined. I did not realize how much of the problem was me and the expectations of our town.

As we get further into explaining the process, you'll see how I failed.

But ultimately, together we did not succumb. We serve a kind King.

We spent six years solving the problems we had manufactured in the first ten minutes. Through the process I describe in this book, we experienced a new movement of God's love for our town and our kids. This happened when we found solutions to Staff lonesomeness and helper frustration

Intermountain Young Life started with lofty intentions. How did we get this so wrong? How did we end up with lonesomeness and an impaired ministry? Was the root of the problem unrealistic assumptions and expectations?

No, the root of the problem was way worse.

Let me tell you why.