

Steve Smallman

You may know that Pastor Steve Smallman plays the keyboard and sings like a black man even though he is white. And you may know that his dad, Pastor Steve Smallman Sr, is preaching at today's 18th anniversary worship service. But did you know that he once fell out of a construction trailer and pulled a five-gallon bucket of nails down on top of himself in the process? Or that he once played the role of Al Bundy in a performance of "What a Man!" at the Lillian Jones Rec Center? Or that his childhood musical influences included P'Funk, Earth, Wind & Fire and Stevie Wonder? Or that he came close to being detained at an Israeli checkpoint while visiting the Holy Land?

Steve Smallman was born in 1962 in Florida and grew up in a trailer park ("We had roaches!") in Greenville, South Carolina. The family moved to the Washington, DC area in 1967 when his dad became the pastor of McLean Presbyterian Church. Steve remembers that his dad drove the family to Anacostia when Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968 to see the results of the riots and to lament the death of such a great leader; "I have often reflected on that; it had a tremendous impact on me." Steve graduated from Langley High School (where the sons and daughters of Senators and Congressmen attended) in 1980 and then enrolled in Covenant College (home of Merrell Johnson and Ashley Key!) where he graduated in 1985.

During a summer break at home from Covenant, he spent time partying and arrived home one night to find a note from his dad that strongly admonished him about the direction of his life. "I realized at that point that I was a sinner and started taking my faith a lot more seriously, realizing that God loved me. I came to grips with my need for God's love and pardon." The following summer he spent in Switzerland at a Christian study center called L'Abri Fellowship led by Dr. Francis Schaeffer.

Steve met a young woman at Covenant named Mary Lutz. Together they attended New City Fellowship in Chattanooga, an interracial congregation that was dealing intensively with issues of race, class and culture, and under the pastoral ministry of Randy Nabors and Carl Ellis "we formed our first social and emotional connections that crossed racial lines." (Steve met one of his major musical influences at New City: James Ward.) Anyway, Steve married Mary in 1984, and Isaiah joined the family in 1989 followed by Paul in 1991. Steve served as youth pastor at New City for a couple years before he and Mary moved to Philadelphia where he attended Westminster Theological Seminary (graduating in 1992) and helped start Spirit and Truth Fellowship with Dr. Manny Ortiz.

Steve's next stop was a place called Sandtown in 1992 where, among many other things, he became the co-pastor of New Song and began New Song Arts & Media (and where he pulled the nails down on his head). Steve appreciates the openness and compassion of the residents of Sandtown, who "accepted us in our brokenness," and "it was here that I came to more deeply realize that I benefited from a system of injustice and wanted to somehow be part of the solution." He also is forever grateful that his sons grew up in a community that enabled them to be culturally aware and appreciative of diversity.

Today Steve serves as the Director of NorthBay Media Arts. NorthBay is a camp on the upper Chesapeake Bay that hosted more than 10,000 middle school students from Baltimore City and Cecil and PG Counties. The Media Arts Department uses the creative and performing arts in NorthBay's Turkey Point Theater to help kids think about their lives and futures. He also runs, with Kurt Dutra, a for-profit production company called *15four* (can you guess where the name came from?).

By the way, while I interviewed Steve he was on the way to Paul's MIAA C Conference championship lacrosse game vs. Cardinal Gibbons. (Paul, a freshman at Chapelgate Christian, plays on the varsity squad!) And guess what? Chapelgate won the game 9-8 in OVERTIME...so you may want to offer Steve – and Paul – and Mary – and Isaiah – a word of congratulations this morning!