

FREE

# REACH OUT COLUMBIA!

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## **Wes Luke:**

Balancing School,  
His Skateboard  
and Kids' Souls

FriendShip

Running for Austin

Take Me Out to  
the Ballgame(s)

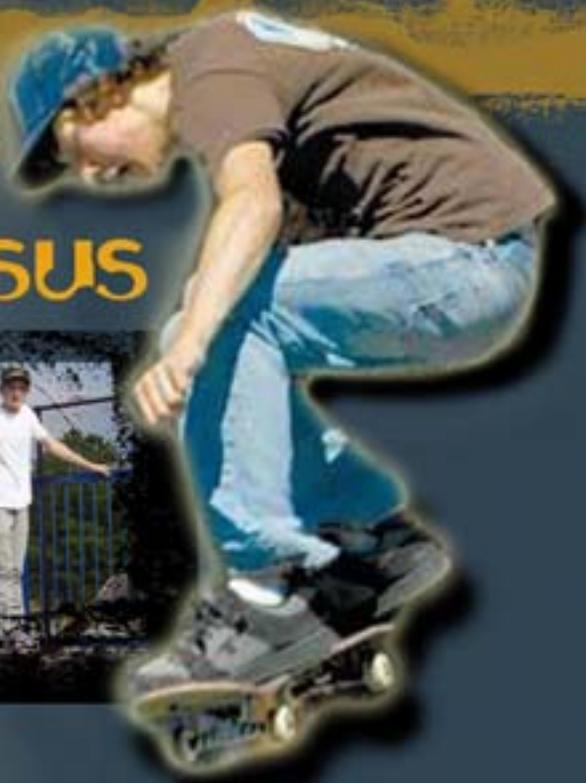
How Hospice and  
My Father's Death  
Changed My Life

✂ Behold My Hands and My Feet 

# Wes Luke

## On a Roll for Jesus

By Suzanne Bates



### "Kids

today!" It's a common lament heard throughout every parental generation. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems to have reached an earsplitting crescendo. Gangs victimize each other and innocent children become the collateral damage. Drugs zap the minds, bodies and spirits of our teens. Underage binge drinking has become a rite of passage. Childhood obesity is at an all time high. Internet websites and the media encourage our kids to grow up too fast. Video games create virtual realities to which our teens escape to avoid living in the real world. And we wonder why they say, "Whatever."

But this is not another article on the despair, hopelessness and troubles of this generation. It is the story of a young man, Wes Luke, who provides a bright spot of hope and freedom in Jesus Christ for a population to which many adults might say, "Whatever."

Wes Luke is a skater....and a Christian. It's a combination that's hard to find in this town or any other. Extreme sports enthusiasts, including skateboarders, are drawn in by the danger and dare-devil stunts. They like living on the edge and their lifestyle and appearance reflect it. Drinking, drugs, foul language and a hot temper are characteristic. As Wes says, "It's a tough crowd to reach out to." But this is his mission field. I am reminded of Jesus' admonishment, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1).

### Friday Night Lights

Born out of Wes' passion for skating and a desire to reach others for Christ, Liberation Skateboard Ministries is meeting these kids where they are—on their boards. Inspired by actor Stephen Baldwin's "Livin' It" documentary, which also reaches out to extreme sports participants, Liberation Skateboard Ministries is face-to-face street style evangelism that brings kids in with the skating and leaves them with the message of Christ's love for them.

One Friday night each month, from 7-10 p.m., the parking lot of East Lake Community Church is converted into a high-energy skate park with multiple boxes, rails and quarter pipes. Accustomed to being "shoed" from public parks and downtown sidewalks, the skaters are welcome here. Kids freeskate to speaker pumped music or a live band, grab a slice of pizza and down Gatorade and sodas. After about two hours, they enter the church auditorium to hear a speaker—someone who can relate to the kids. It may be Wes or Barry Russell, Wes' mentor and Youth Pastor at East Lake church. Or it may be someone like Army Captain Jake Morrow, who, when he spoke, had recently completed jump school. Talk about extreme! In sharing his experience, Captain Morrow shared that in the midst of danger, his security lies in knowing his life rests in Jesus Christ. Even in the face of death, he is certain of his eternal life—a truth he will rely on, now that he has been deployed to Iraq.

### A Young Man's Vision

18 year-old Wes Luke grew up in a Christian home. Events in his life have given him the opportunity to really grow in his faith. At the age of five, his father passed away. Later, his mother battled cancer. "During those times, I learned to totally rely on God," says Wes. After moving to South Carolina, near Columbia International University, he got into skateboarding. He also started hanging around the CIU campus. "Wes was the kid always coming around bummin' rides and stuff," jokes Barry, who was a student at the time. Wes laughs. They share a great rapport—one part mentor, one part friend. Wes and Barry developed a bond and Wes began to share his dreams of a skateboard ministry. Barry, also a skateboarder, gave Wes that encouraging nudge to make it happen.

With a quiet maturity beyond his years, Wes explains how he chose the name "Liberation." "I like the idea of being free and I just wanted kids to know that they can have freedom in Christ." He also chose Galatians 5:13 as their theme verse to illustrate that feeling of liberation: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love."

Barry approached East Lake Community Church with the idea and received great support from them. He says, "What other church would let you turn their parking lot into a teenage skate park once a month?!" Barry and Wes then scraped together some donated equipment, built a "box," and with nothing more than a homemade flier, put on the first event. "I really didn't think I could do this," says Wes. "But I remembered the verse in Proverbs: 'Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed'" (Proverbs 16:3). Indeed they have.

### Skating into the Future

Sitting on the ground on a hot Sunday afternoon at the Owens Field skate park, Wes, Barry, and friend Brian Sikkema talk about how the ministry has grown over the past year. About 70 kids from grades 6-12 regularly attend Liberation skate nights. They've acquired a lot

more equipment and have enough money on hand to upgrade what they have. But the real change is in people's lives. "We've had people accept Christ and we have kids attending church regularly because of the skate nights," says Barry. "I always tell these guys that the skating's great, but Jesus comes first. If I ever see Jesus taking second place, I remind them of that." Brian sees a big change in people's attitudes. "There's a lot less yelling and throwing boards than there used to be," he says. All three agree that they have to be role models in that regard. They can't preach Jesus' love then cuss and throw their boards when they get mad.

They also talk about the future. Barry's five year plan includes internships and maybe even a part-time paid position. "I want to continue investing in these kids that I've been working with the past few years," he says. Wes dreams of a bigger, better permanent skate park and hopes to give lessons to elementary age kids this summer. And down the road? Wes Luke has his heart set on becoming a skate pastor/evangelist.

Dude, we know you will!

If you would like more information on supporting Liberation Skateboard Ministries, contact Barry Russell at East Lake Community Church at 749-9298, or [barry@eastlakeonline.com](mailto:barry@eastlakeonline.com). For upcoming Liberation events, check the calendar at [www.eastlakeonline.com](http://www.eastlakeonline.com). East Lake Community Church is located at 10057 Broad River Road in Irmo.

## Mission Statement

*Liberation Skateboard Ministries is calling you to know Jesus Christ and skate for him!*

*Join us in truth and freedom, "for God calls us to be free" (Gal 5:13). Freedom only comes through a personal REAL relationship with a Living God. Reaching a generation who dare to surrender their lives and skateboarding to Him. Being unashamed to worship and serve God through their lifestyle - shattering the mistaken belief of a boring God.*



Wes and Barry