



When FOX news commentator Todd Starnes walks through his Brooklyn, New York, neighborhood, people part like the Red Sea before Moses. And no wonder. They don't know what to make of this pork-eating, NRA-supporting, teetotaling, 21st-century amalgamation of Paul Harvey, Erma Bombeck, and Lewis Grizzard.

Born in Memphis, Tennessee, the stocky, brown-haired Starnes accepted Christ at age 13. His father led the way, coming to faith when a coworker invited him to a revival meeting. His mother soon followed, and then Todd.

"I was so bad," Starnes joked, "Mom asked the preacher to dunk me twice, just to be sure it took." He attended VBS and Sunday School and memorized Bible verses in AWANA.

Although he dreamed of owning a small town newspaper, he worked first as a radio announcer for KFBK in Sacramento,

California, weaving his faith into the stories he told. In 2005, he won the Edward R. Murrow award and the Associate Press Mark Twain Award for Storytelling for his firsthand account of his own open heart surgery at age 37. Executives at FOX heard the broadcasts and extended an invitation to "come tell stories for FOX News." He has worked there as a writer/commentator ever since.

In June, 2017, Starnes became the host of his own syndicated show on FOX News Radio. Listeners tune in daily to hear him tell stories based, in large part, on his strongly conservative views. "Some people get paid to be a conservative, to be a person of faith, as weird as that sounds," Starnes said, "but people can recognize authenticity. I'm a broadcaster who's a Christian. My faith flavors my stories. That comes through."

Starnes has always been drawn to words and considers Southerners the best storytellers in America. "My calling, honestly, is to be a



Todd Starnes— Southern-Fried Stories for a Faith-Hungry America

storyteller. I love telling other people's stories, not just for entertainment, but to accurately convey the messages behind the stories."

He cites as an example his interview with a high school senior – a letterman in three sports and all-around good guy – who took his grandmother to the prom. After Starnes asked silly questions like *What did you wear?* and *Where did you go to eat?*, he heard the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit tell him to ask the student if he was a Christian.

"Why yes," he replied, "That's how I live my life. I'm a follower of Christ." All of a sudden, the whole story made sense.

"I tell stories because I'm concerned for America," Starnes said. "We live in the greatest country on earth, a country where our forefathers considered our religious freedom so important they wrote the first amendment to protect it. But our freedoms are under attack. Decades of the far left chipping away

at religious liberty have undermined our liberties."

"Christians have a responsibility to engage the culture," he said. "And the best ideas will win the day." His goal is to bathe the stories he tells in love, compassion, and mercy. "But we must take a stand. There's no such thing as a non-combatant when we are surrounded, the cultural bombs are flying, and the enemy is advancing. We can't rely on the people in the White House to defend our religious liberty. That's our responsibility."

Starnes had always wanted to write books, but never got around to it. After being diagnosed with a failing aortic heart valve and an enlarged heart, however, he drew up the proverbial bucket list. Along with biking across the Golden Gate Bridge and spending time with family, he listed *writing a book*. Thirteen years later he's

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written not one, but four, with another one in the works. His first, *They Popped My Hood and Found Gravy on the Dipstick*, tells how God used his open heart surgery to strengthen his faith, launch his career, and solidify his calling as a Christian broadcaster.

Instead of minimizing his southern roots, Starnes embraces them, describing himself as “a Baptist who loves to talk,” and considers Chick Fil A “the official chicken of Jesus.” He orders southern provisions, including Duke’s mayonnaise, and has them shipped to his Brooklyn apartment. His family keeps him

from taking himself too seriously, and his faith keeps him grounded.

“I have a quiet time every morning,” he said. “I have a Bible on my desk at FOX News and a big painting with Micah 6:8, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with

your God,” behind my desk. You have to be intentional about it. Every single day.”

He intentionally attends a young church plant in the Village. Although he lives around the corner from the famed Brooklyn Tabernacle, he chooses instead to attend a fellowship that began after 9-11 and meets in school buildings.

“It’s a Baptist church plant,” he said, “but in New York, denominations don’t matter as much. You don’t have the history, and tradition, and generations of the South.” Believers are an oddity in the teeming city that swirls around him, and the sheer volume of need makes the contrast between light and darkness especially noticeable. “There’s almost a rawness about the gospel, and ministry, and

reaching your community,” he says. It compels and energizes him to boldly share his faith. “We have to share the gospel every day. We have to minister every day.”

Starnes encourages believers to find their piece in the puzzle. Part of every Christian’s calling, he said, is to stand up and speak out, whatever that looks like in your world.

“It’s a position we’re not naturally comfortable in, but we’ve got to take a stand, and we’ve got to speak out. Most Christians don’t want to talk, because they don’t want to make waves. Here’s the down side to that. If we don’t take a stand for religious liberty, we’re in danger of losing all our freedoms.”

His latest book, *The Deplorables’ Guide to Making America Great Again*, isn’t about Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton. Instead it’s based on a fiery sermon the late pastor/teacher Adrian Rogers preached. “He reminded us that Christians have a biblical responsibility to engage the culture. It’s not an option,” Starnes said.

Four years after his open heart surgery and valve replacement, Starnes threw a clot and suffered a stroke. In the time it took for paramedics to arrive, he thought about his bucket list. “I’ve written a book. I’ve spent time with my family. I’ve run a marathon. I’ve bicycled across the Golden Gate Bridge. If it’s my time to go, I’ve lived a good life.”

But it wasn’t, so he assumes his assignment isn’t complete. “There’s a country song that tells us to live like we’re dying,” he said. “I disagree. Don’t live like you’re dying. Live like you’re living. Don’t put things off. Embrace and squeeze the life out of every day. We only get one chance.”

For Starnes, that means continuing to tell tales that engage people’s imagination, keep them informed, and, most importantly, compel them to action. “We have a responsibility to tell the stories,” he says, “and the greatest story of all is the good news of Jesus Christ.” **ROC**

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