

Former Soldier is YouthCARE's newest Area Chaplain

AFTER all they have been through; you could forgive Martin Bekker and his wife Monica for wanting a simpler, calmer life.

In 1984, a bomb explosion seriously injured Martin and changed the course of their lives forever.

Martin grew up in a Christian household in Johannesburg, South Africa and had initially wanted to be a dentist, before deciding to study theology.

He studied for seven years and was then required to complete his compulsory military service.

In January 1984, Martin was deployed with the 44th Parachute Brigade special forces unit in Angola as part of South African Border War and Angolan Civil War.

Fought in the shadows of the Cold War, the conflict involved several countries including Soviet Union, Cuba, South Africa, USA and China.

"We were the first ones to go into a conflict, the tip of the arrow if you like," Martin said.

"It was a very complicated situation – rebels retreating in all directions, dropping their weapons."

On March 11, as the 44th travelled along the border of Namibia and Angola, some of that collected ammunition – which was stored behind Martin - suddenly detonated.

The explosion ripped the right side of Martin's body off and he died.

Medics rushed to the scene and were able to resuscitate him and after thinking he was stable, moved on another injured soldier.

However internal bleeding meant Martin died for a second time.

When the doctors finally realised he had stopped breathing, Martin had been medically dead for an estimated eight minutes.

They managed to bring him back, only for Martin to slip into a coma for several weeks with a 5 per cent chance of survival.

But Martin eventually did wake up, only to realise he had lost his ability to speak, hear or walk.

Months of surgeries, rehab and an addiction to morphine were to follow.

During this time, he promised God that he would use his new lease on life to travel the world and help those in need.

Martin credits his faith and wife for getting him through.

"Monica was amazing," he said.

"She sat by my bed faithfully and was always there for me."

Miraculously, Martin eventually regained his hearing, speech and the ability to walk.

True to his word, he recommitted his life to Christ and travelled to Europe's Eastern Bloc, most notably the Ukraine, helping people deal with post-war trauma.

"I have a passion for the nations and a desire to help people grow, he said.

"I felt my unique experience with trauma and addiction could be used to help others.

"It was a very difficult time in that area; there were a lot of displaced people following several revolutions."

In 1999, the Bekkers were called to New Zealand.

"We helped people who had immigrated to the country transition to a new way of life," Martin said.

In that time, Martin also completed a Doctorate in Pastoral Counselling and Trauma, a Postgraduate Diploma in Health Science, worked in treatment centres and treated trauma victims in the aftermath of the 2010 Christchurch Earthquake.

After several years in NZ, Martin was called to Geraldton, where he has lived for the past four years.

At the end of last year, he accepted a position to be YouthCARE's newest Area Chaplain.

"When I heard of the opportunity for ministry in the area, I jumped at the chance," he said.

"It felt like everything I had learnt and experienced so far, all my skills and training would be utilized."

His first few weeks have already been very eventful, but Martin said he wouldn't change a thing.

"It has been an amazing experience," he said.

"Everyone had been so supportive and encouraging.

"I'm really looking forward to building relationships with my chaplains and the community.

"This is more than a job – it's a calling."

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