

Alumni Spotlight: Will Kautz (MATS '83)



Current title: Self-employed artist, writer

Favorite professor: Dr. Stephen Mott

Favorite class: Any of the Social Ethics classes

Favorite memory: Realizing that God identified with widows and orphans rather than princes and rulers.

What have you been doing since you left Gordon-Conwell, and what are you doing now?

After seminary, I had a one-year research fellowship at Yale and then went to law school in Boston. During law school, I started an art business to pay tuition bills, but it turned into a bigger thing than I originally planned. After earning my JD degree, I supported my family with my art while practicing law pro bono for abuse victims. I did this for ten years until a series of tragedies hit my family. I lost my two sons and began writing about the experience on social media. Several of my posts went viral and now I have a writing ministry with more than 16,000 followers from over 70 countries.

Tell us more about your artwork:

I have always loved early American folk art and architecture. When I was at Gordon-Conwell, I did restoration work on a few early homes, and I began reproducing some nineteenth century folk art for myself. Eventually, people began asking if they could buy my creations, and that led to a business which has lasted forty years.

I am semi-retired now, but at one point I was filling orders for over two thousand stores and galleries. It became my tent-making work as I ministered to abuse victims in Vermont's family court and ran a charitable foundation that puts young women in the developing world through college.



What can you share about the legal work you did?

I practiced law for ten years, representing victims of domestic violence. I did this until tragedy hit my family. After that, I transitioned to work that was less adversarial. I was grieving from the loss of my first son and eventually went to Nicaragua on three short term mission trips, which really changed the trajectory of my life. I also adopted a young woman

from Nicaragua who asked me to be her dad. It's a really beautiful story [that can be found here](#).

What do you love about the work you currently do?

I love the creative process whether it is in art or writing. Mostly, I love giving voice to the deepest cries of the human heart. There is something redemptive about simply stating our need for healing and significance. Many people are afraid to express their fears and their pain. Others can't find the words. When someone does it for them, they feel validated and affirmed. In time, I came to realize that Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and agnostics all have the same yearnings—and the best way to connect with people on a deeper level is to identify with their humanity. That's what Jesus did. That's how he fed people's souls. That's how to turn wounds into wisdom.

What are the joys and challenges of serving in your specific context?

When I thought I had finished my first book, my editor asked me two important questions: "Who do you want your audience to be? Do you want to write to Christian scholars, or do you want to write to the masses?" She reminded me that Jesus was an effective teacher because he was able to convey deep, complicated truths in a way that the average person on the street could understand. I wanted to be like that. My ministry on social media has given me the opportunity to step outside of the evangelical echo chamber and speak to a wider audience. I actually love doing that. I love feeding the souls of people who are tired of religion but still in love with God. I love finding new ways to connect with people who are from different faiths or have no faith at all. I think this is one of the most meaningful challenges we can face. I've grown a lot by learning how to meet people where they are, and I've fallen more in love with God because he did that for me.

How has God woven together your Gordon-Conwell education with other life events to bring you to where you are now?

I think God is constantly asking us to question our motives and our parochialism so that we can grow. My biblical education showed me the heart of God—his desire to give grace to the humble and his willingness to do something redemptive with our pain. My formal education gave me foundational knowledge but my life experiences, especially the painful ones, gave me those ah-ha moments that deepened my character and motivated me to love the broken-hearted.

What has been Gordon-Conwell's biggest impact/influence on the work you do now or the way you do your work?

Solomon once wrote, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Gordon-Conwell gave me a vision. I was so inspired by the intellect and compassion of my seminary mentor, Dr. Stephen Mott. He showed me God's heart for vulnerable people. Reading the biblical prophets and their concern for justice and learning that the Kingdom of God is breaking in among us every time we care for the alien, widow, and orphan was instrumental to the formation of my character and ministry. I wrote about this once on my social media page, [which you can read here](#). Perhaps this story of faith will inspire new students at Gordon-Conwell.

What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are considering where to best use their skills and education?

Do what you love because it's probably where your gifts are. Also, think outside of the box. Question your own subjectivities. We all have flawed theologies. We are finite—God is ineffable. A broken and contrite heart is more important than a PhD.

Do you have any publications or links you would like to share?

After my first son died in an avalanche, I wrote a book called, [*Winter's Grace: How Anguish and Intimacy Transform the Soul*](#). My second book, *Milky Ways and Fire Flies: Words of Wonder for Tattered Souls*, will be published in 2023.

You can view my work and stay updated on future projects on my [art website](#) and [Facebook](#).