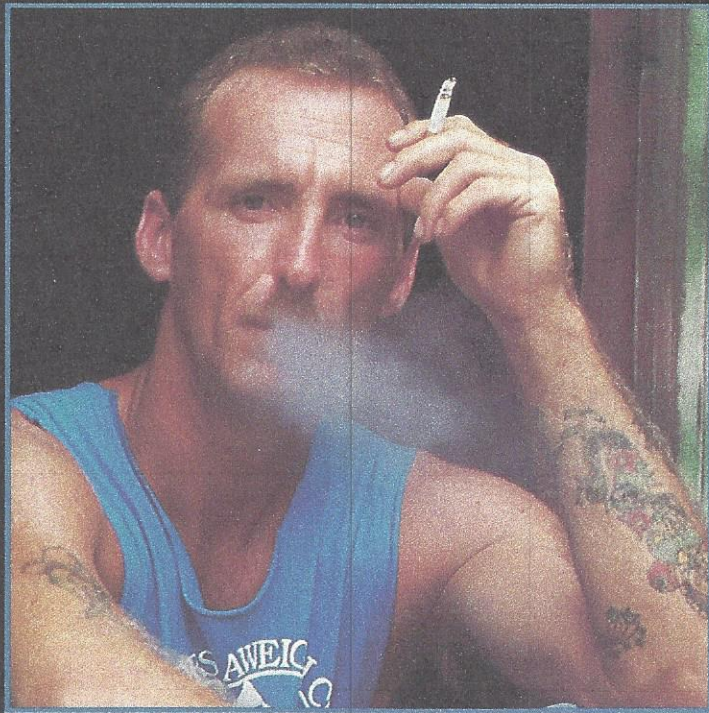


Ministries TODAY

The Magazine About Renewal In Leadership

Nov/Dec 1989

\$5



Ministering to the Fourth World

How Today's Church Can Reach the
Modern-Day Samaritans: Addicts, Cultural
Dropouts, Non-Conformists, Society's
Problem People—and Their Families

Overcomers: Ministering to The Modern- Day Samaritans

Reaching
Problem People
with the Saving
Message of
Jesus Christ

Beside the bamboo-lined banks of a slow-moving river south of Melbourne, Florida, 37-year-old Howard Proffitt stands considering the life he recently left and his uncertain future. Behind him is a small wood-framed cottage called Jewel House. It's his home now, a house provided by the Overcomers ministry of the Tabernacle Church.

Howard talks about his past as he begins walking toward the house. When he learns we might use his picture in a national magazine, he is at first reluctant. "There are some bikers out there who want to kill me," he says. "But...I guess this is what trusting God is all about, isn't it?"

"I used to be a member of a motorcycle gang up north," he says softly. "I used to do drugs, run a house of prostitution...anything you can think of." His tank top reveals arms and shoulders covered with bizarre tattoos—striking evidence of his past life.

"Two years ago, after being in jail for 18 months, I wound up at Dunklin Camp. There I met Jesus," Howard concludes.

Dunklin Memorial Camp near Okeechobee, Florida, is a 400-acre ranch/rehabilitation center for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Mickey Evans is the director.

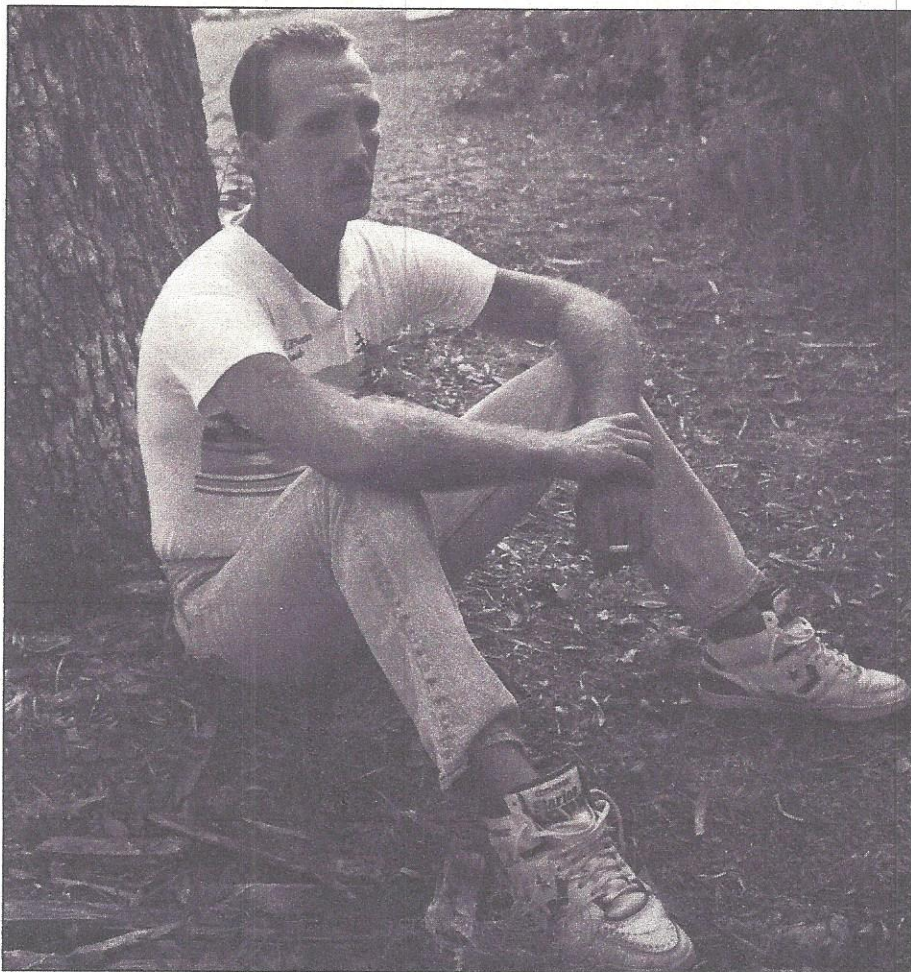
Following his stint at Dunklin, Howard was referred to Jewel House—a halfway house that is part of the Overcomers' program to minister directly to "Fourth World" people like Howard. "Fourth World" is a term used by Overcomers director Jim Gaffney, a former New Jersey drug addict, to describe cultural dropouts and non-conformists—alcoholics, drug addicts and dysfunctional families.

Although under the direct authority of the Tabernacle Church, the Melbourne Overcomers group is but one of 45 similar ministries in Florida. All have evolved directly

Alcoholics and drug addicts used to live in the house that is now Overcomers headquarters.



Story and photos by **Bruce Buckingham**



Left: Howard Proffett, a former drug addict now living at Jewel House, considers the Fourth World life he recently left and his uncertain future.

deeply burdened for society's outcasts. At the camp, Gaffney went through an 18-month program developed by director Mickey Evans that trains leaders to go back into their local churches and, using the Dunklin procedure, open halfway houses and minister to the Fourth World. After completing his course, Gaffney returned to Melbourne to accept a call as a staff pastor at the Tabernacle Church. His assignment: develop a ministry to Fourth World people and coordinate the Overcomers ministry. He still works a few days a week as a pharmacist—but the rest of the time is spent working with those who abuse alcohol and drugs.

"We begin with the basic concept that recovery from any kind of

from Dunklin Camp. While some of these ministries operate independently, most are connected to a local church.

Three years ago, Gaffney, now

32, resigned his well-paying job as a certified pharmacist in Melbourne and, with his wife and small children, moved to Dunklin. As a former addict himself, Jim's heart was

Below: Following the weekly meeting, Gaffney (head of table) meets with group leaders to discuss problems and prayer needs revealed throughout the course of the evening.



dependency is not a one-time event," Gaffney says. "It is a lifelong process and it takes a lifelong commitment for it to work."

Tuesday evenings are set aside by the Tabernacle Church for Overcomers ministries. Meetings are held in the church building and in an adjacent house—once the home of two derelict alcoholics, but now the Overcomers' headquarters. Currently more than 125 men, women and children attend the meetings regularly. They have all committed themselves to at least a year of intense discussion and addiction-breaking prayer. After a general

Gaffney works a few days a month as a certified pharmacist. The rest of his time is spent working with those who abuse drugs.

meeting, the people break up into small groups. "The small groups are the key to success," Gaffney insists.

At the Tuesday night meeting, children, together with trained leaders, gather to discuss the problems they have with their parents.

In another room down the hall, the parents meet to discuss the problems they have with their teenagers.

Leading each group are people who have come out of similar backgrounds. "These leaders lend the degree of authenticity we need to reach those who are hurting," Gaffney says.

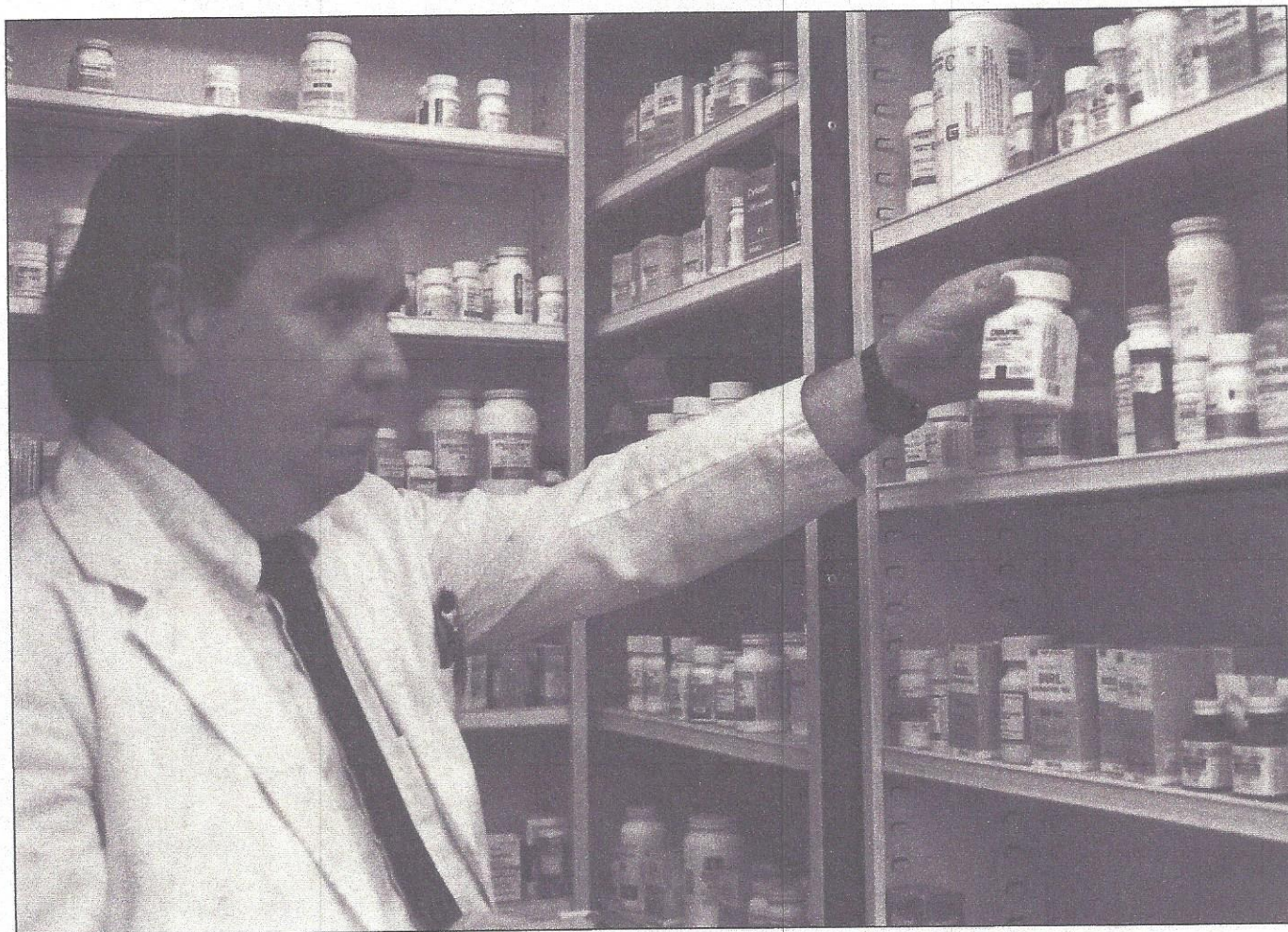
Bob Warner, a retired Army master sergeant, leads a group of 25 teenagers. "If you are only here for a good time," he tells the gathering of casually dressed teens, "you are

wasting my time and yours. But if you want me to listen to your problems, then maybe I can help."

Bob tells them of a kid who came to the teen Overcomers meeting the previous month. "He only came once," he says, "because later in the week he was hit by a train and killed. Many of you knew him. He only had one chance."

Most of the teens in the room come from alcoholic or dysfunctional families. "They are basically good kids," Gaffney says. "Despite the wild hair colors and boys with earrings, they are eager to learn about Jesus because they know Jesus can solve their problems."

It's Jesus that makes Gaffney's Overcomers different from Alcoholics Anonymous. Overcomers acknowledge the traditional AA



Right: At Overcomers, teenagers receive personalized ministry for problems ranging from low self-esteem and bad family relationships to suicide and substance abuse.



12-step program and has groups that correspond to Alanon and Alateen. But it goes beyond AA by insisting that AA's "Higher Power" is Jesus and that through His baptism of the Holy Spirit, entire families can be delivered. Rather than limiting himself to AA's 12 steps, Gaffney emphasizes the Oxford Group's "12 Steps of Wholeness"—an unabashedly Christian approach from which the AA program was developed. Further, Gaffney insists that in order to come face to face with themselves and their problems, those who come to Overcomers are not to be anonymous—although individual confessions remain confidential.

Downstairs, Rico Lamberti talks to newcomers in an orientation group and explains the Overcomers ministry. Among his 30-member group are current drug users, spouse abusers and a runaway. "We cannot give you a 20-day program that will solve all your problems," he says honestly. "The solution has to

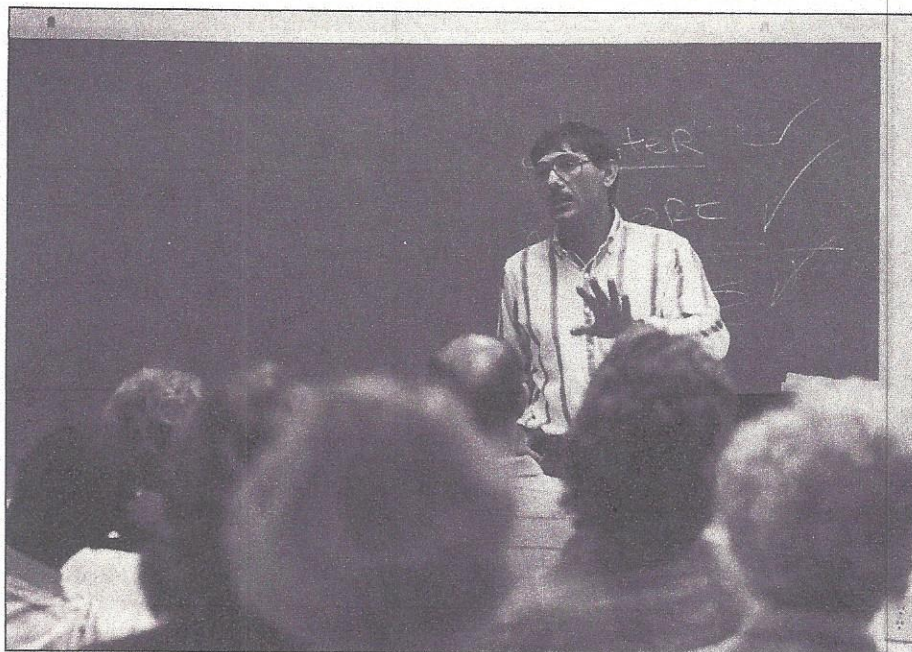
be long range. You have to want to be helped."

Rico is a former drug addict and alcoholic. He knows about life on the streets. "After I decided it was time to get off drugs and went through a rehab center, I came out and couldn't understand why I still felt empty," he tells his group. "Then I met the Lord and He gave me the total, thorough regeneration I was



Left: A woman agonizes over the problems of her teenage children. Broken or dysfunctional family relationships are perhaps the greatest struggle for most of those who attend Overcomers.





Rico Lamberti, a former alcoholic and drug addict, tells a new orientation group how God changed his life through Overcomers.

looking for."

After the meetings, when everyone has gone back to their homes, the Overcomers leaders gather to discuss the evening. As they sit around the table, Marsha, a young nursery worker, begins to cry. "There is a deaf kid in the nursery who desperately needs someone who can sign," she says. "I can't communicate with him, so I have to give him a cookie to keep him from disrupting the others. Then I have to explain to the other kids why Bobby can have a cookie and they can't."

Gaffney looks over at Marsha and recognizes another problem. He knows she is the daughter of an alcoholic father. Little Bobby's parents are alcoholics also.

"I think he is being beaten," Marsha continues. "And on the nights he doesn't come, I know it's because his parents have been drinking. Why don't they just stop drinking!" she cries.

Swiftly, Gaffney and the others move in to pray for Marsha.

"Trying to keep them sober only one night a week is not going to solve their problem," Gaffney says

Left: Recovery from addiction does not happen overnight. Overcomers commit themselves to at least one year of intense discussion, ministry and addiction-breaking prayer.

later. "That is why we often refer those with current drinking problems to AA or to a rehabilitation center. The ones we work with have already made the first step toward wholeness. We try to plug them into something more functional like a Christian home group. Unless we can provide weekly, daily, hourly assistance, we are not going to help them. They may not choose to come each week, but they need to know we will be here when they do."

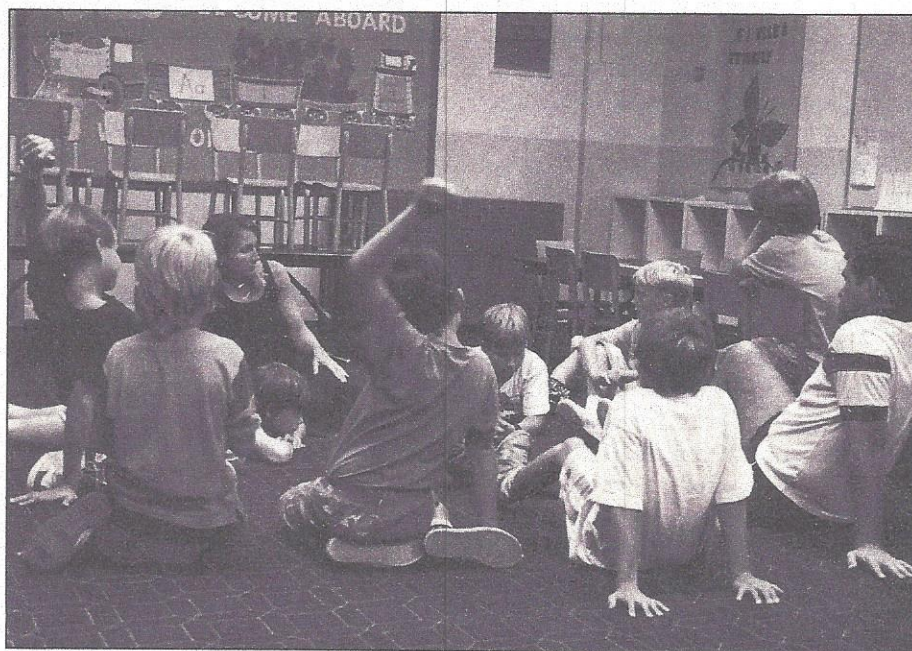
Gaffney understands that recovery from life-controlling addictions and problems takes a lifelong heal-

ing process. "Before you take on someone as a project for recovery," he says, "you must be willing to be patient and not give up."

In other situations, the problems are more immediate. People often show up unannounced on the doorstep of the Overcomers' office. They have no job and may have spent the previous night under a bridge, on the beach or sleeping in their cars.

"People like that come through here all the time," Gaffney says. "If a man comes in off the street, the first thing we do is offer him a cup of coffee or a sandwich. Then we talk. I ask if he really wants our help, or if he is just looking for three hots and a cot. We let him tell us what he really wants. If he shows us he truly means business, then we can help him." *Cont. on page 60*

Below: Children from dysfunctional families are "bystanders" in need of ministry, too.





Overcomers leaders who come out of Forth World backgrounds lend the degree of authenticity needed to reach those who are hurting.

Others, however, are far less obvious in their state of need. At age 39, Jerry Watson is a successful engineer. He was a former Air Force range safety officer, controlling the destruct mechanisms for shuttle launches at Kennedy Space Center. He is also an alcoholic.

"I first started coming to Overcomers because my family was falling apart. After a short while, I admitted I had a drinking problem. I thought of myself as a social drinker, but when you start drinking at age 16, you are doing it for other reasons. I realized I was fooling myself. Without Overcomers, I would not have had the strength to quit drinking completely."

Dysfunctional family problems are perhaps the greatest struggle for most of those who attend Overcom-

ers. Broken homes create broken hearts. Broken hearts lead to drugs, alcohol, sexual dysfunctions and crime. "Parents of problem children need help as much as the problem child," Gaffney says. "The 'bystanders' need specific ministry too."

Back at Jewel House, Howard stands up from where he was seated on the ground and brushes the dirt from the seat of his pants. Shaded by huge oak trees and cooled by prevailing easterly breezes, the quiet cabin was once the home of a retired medical missionary to China, Dr. Nell Holman. When she died 10 years ago she left the property to the Tabernacle Church with specific instructions that it be used for missionary work. For many years it was used as a home for furloughing missionaries. Since then another house has been built on the property. Gaffney has plans to build an entire community on the acreage.

"Ministry to the Fourth World is missionary work in the highest

sense," Gaffney states in his New Jersey brogue. "Individual missionaries are going out into the foreign world of our own backyards and are turning the poorest in spirit toward Jesus."

The men and women of Melbourne's Overcomers have dedicated their lives to spreading the gospel to an entire subculture of drug addicts, alcoholics, criminals, gang members, runaways and others in this community. And they're seeing the fruit of their efforts.

Howard picks up a dog-eared Bible. "I am 37 years old," he says. "I think I'm still married, but I haven't seen my wife or two boys in over four years." His words are sad, but his voice sounds hopeful.

He turns back to his Bible, and slowly his lips move with each word as he begins to read silently under a dim, yellow light. ■

Bruce Buckingham is the public information officer for NASA at Kennedy Space Center, Florida.

The 12 Steps of Wholeness

Following the Wesley revival, the Oxford Group systematized a series of "steps" as a process of cleansing one's inner life. These steps were later adapted by Alcoholics Anonymous, with much of the Christian basis ignored. Here they are re-adapted, emphasizing Jesus Christ as the center of wholeness.

1. I now see that I, of myself, am powerless, unable to control (manage) my life by myself.

2. I now realize that my Creator—God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—can restore me to wholeness in Christ.

3. I now make a conscious decision to turn my entire will and life over to the care and direction of Jesus Christ as Teacher, Healer, Savior and Lord.

4. Having made this decision, I now obey God's call in Scripture to make a fearless, ethical, moral and scriptural inventory of my entire life in order to uncover all sins, mistakes and character defects, and to make a written list of every item uncovered.

5. After completing this inventory, I now will myself to "walk in the light as He is in the light" by admitting to myself, to God, and to at least one other person in Christ the exact nature of these wrongs.

6. Having agreed with God about my sinful behavior, I now ask His forgiveness through Christ and openly acknowledge that I am forgiven according to the Scripture.

7. I now repent from all these behaviors in thought, word and deed, and ask God to remove each besetting sin, through Jesus Christ.

8. I now make a list of all persons I have harmed in thought, word and deed, and a list of all persons I believe have harmed me, and will to make amends to all of them.

9. I now go directly to these persons to forgive and to seek forgiveness, reconciliation, restitution or release, whenever and with whomever possible, unless to do so would cause further harm.

10. I now consciously and prayerfully continue to "walk in the light" by unceasingly taking personal inventory of all my temptations and sins, and by keeping a constantly open relationship with God, myself and other persons.

11. I now continue in regular Scripture study, prayer, worship

and fellowship to increase God's will in my life.

12. Recognizing the impact of God in my life, I now intentionally share these principles and their effect with others as God's Spirit leads, and will to practice these principles in all areas of my life. ■

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