

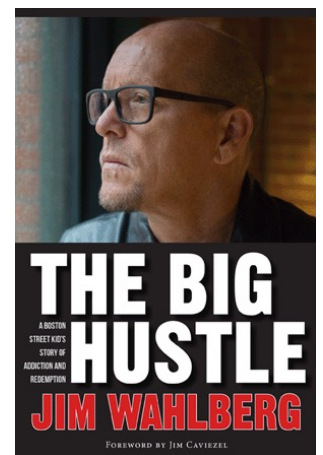
# New book chronicles Jim Wahlberg's road to redemption



I have always been attracted to the Catholic press because of our ability, our capacity and our calling to share stories of inspiration. In my nearly 20 years in Catholic media, I have had the great fortune to put into words the stories of wonderful men and women who have sought to follow the Lord in their lives. Their stories haven't always been easy. Mistakes were made, and there were stops and starts, but the fundamental undercurrent of every story was always the same: These were individuals who actively chose to love Jesus Christ, and they allowed that love to profoundly change their lives.

This is the story of the saints, too, isn't it? And we want it to be our story, as well.

One of the most inspirational stories I have read in a long time came in the form of my Labor Day Weekend read – [“The Big Hustle: A Boston Street Kid's Story of Addiction and Redemption”](#) by Jim Wahlberg and published by OSV just this month.



Jim visited OSV in January 2019 and shared his story with us then. The room in which he spoke was packed, and yet you could have heard a pin drop as Jim related his story to us. He hadn't had an easy life – far from it. He was homeless and an alcoholic before he was legally able to drive. [He made bad choices. He got into trouble with the law.](#) He was estranged from his family. He was expected to be in and out of prison

for the rest of his life, or to die on the streets with no one around to notice.

Instead, Jim was standing in front of us in Huntington, Indiana, sharing his testimony of how his attempt to use the proffered kindness of a priest while in prison – the “perfect hustle” – led to an encounter with Mother Teresa that changed his life.

“I just looked at her and for the first time in my life I saw true humility. I saw love. I saw saintliness,” Jim wrote. “I didn’t understand everything that had happened, but I knew I wanted to know more about it. Right after that I went to Father Jim Fratus and said I wanted to learn more about my faith. And I can only imagine that he went back to his office and said, ‘Check that box – I got one.’”

But Jim’s own path to redemption and a life centered upon faith is only part of the story. He shares the story of his oldest son’s struggle with addiction, as well, and of the Catholic community that gave him a second chance at life. And he relates his new mission of trying to spread awareness [of the dangers of addiction through film](#), the most recent of which is [“What About the Kids?”](#)

“Each of us has something we are called to do,” he writes. “I feel as though God is calling me to make these films, to start these conversations. Every time I think about moving on, about walking away, I remember the families that have lost loved ones ... I don’t claim to have all the answers, but if we pray with each other, communicate with each other and love each other, I have to think we’re on the right path.”

While Jim’s story is primarily autobiographical – and a page-turner of an autobiography, at that – it is deeply infused with faith. It ends not with an exclamation mark on his own story, which he says is a work in progress, but with a call to action – really, a call to holiness – to which each one of us

can relate.

If you, like me, love Catholic media because of its inspirational stories, “The Big Hustle” is one you won’t want to miss.

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