

The Cross and the Switchblade

Character Descriptions

Older David: Our narrator. With years of wisdom under his belt and a front row seat to God’s miracles throughout his life, he implores his younger self to trust in the Lord. He has a wry sense of humor and must have good physicality as he is present in many scenes. 60’s, white.

Gwen: As a young preacher’s wife and mother, this walk of faith is nothing like what she anticipated. From accepting the role of first lady in a roach-infested, Pennsylvania church, to watching her husband leave her side for an insatiable calling to help the youth of New York, she witnesses God’s hand in all of it, her fears cushioned in a masterful sense of humor that takes away the sting of hard moments. Mid-late 20’s-30’s, White.

Nicky: A unique blend of spite, vitriol and chaos accompanies this troubled youth, known by every gang in New York as the most violent and bloodthirsty. Still, his humor and charm shine through. His past of abandonment haunts him, where no love was present to guide him. His mother and father subjected him to the occult at a young age and those demons cause him to act in ways that scare even him. David’s Holy Spirit - inspired omission that he is loved, sets him into an internal battle of flesh and spirit that makes the darkness within him go crazy. His radical transformation is a result of only what God can do. Early 20’s, Puerto Rican.

Maria: When she became president of the GGI Debs, a prominent girl gang in the city, they violently jumped her in. Since she was used to this from her troubled homelife, she took it like a champ and rose to the top of the group. Her battle with addiction is the show’s foremost introduction to the plight of heroin which was so prevalent and one of the realities that grieved David the most. Maria’s despair at the turn her life has taken against her will, with addiction leading to prostitution, soiling any dreams of an otherwise bright future, lead her to almost take her life. Early 20’s, Puerto Rican.

Jo-Jo: He’s as New York as it gets. Jo-Jo is a strange and brilliant combination of matter-of-factness and vulnerability. A need to protect himself goes against his natural emotional inclination. It’s not safe to be who he is in a jungle that takes, giving nothing back and asks kids to do the same in order to survive. Jo-Jo has learned to regulate his feelings while still reserving space for them. He has empathy, which makes him the perfect candidate for a companion for David. David’s kindness in offering the shoes off of his feet wins him over and earns the preacher a glimpse into his life that is as transformative for David as it is for Jo-Jo. Adolescent (or can play young looking teen), Black.

Israel: A jolly young man, described as handsome, fearless President of the Mau Maus. A natural leader, the first to recognize the man in the paper as “one of us” and to see the good in him. If not for his open-mindedness, determination and persistence, Nicky and the Mau Maus would not have attended the rally that led them all to salvation. Early 20’s, Puerto Rican.

Vincente Ortez: In many ways, Vincente is a New York, Puerto Rican version of David. Along with his wife, Delia, he provides the supportive infrastructure that becomes David’s homebase in the city. His ripple effect is felt when he and Delia persistently call their network of believer friends to enable David to headline the rally that wins countless people to God. Early 30’s, Puerto Rican.

Delia Ortez: Like David, her heart is broken by the plight of the city she used to love and the teenage gangs and addicts that don’t know God’s plan for them. She welcomes Jo-Jo and Maria with the warmth and softness of Jesus, even at the risk of danger. It is her prayers and insistence that “God can help you” that causes Maria not to take her life. Early 30’s, Puerto Rican.

Buckboard: President of the Chaplains. He is even keeled yet commanding enough to quiet a room. He encapsulates New York swagger and his status as a gang leader is purely circumstantial. It’s evident that he’s made for more. His salvation as David is preaching in the street is one of the first new births of David’s New York adventure. And his transformation into a soldier by the time he returns speaks to his eagerness to make a better life after God reminds him of his purpose. Early 20’s, Black.

Stagecoach: Buckboard’s right hand and best friend. He experiences a similar transformation from gang leader to soldier as he responds to David’s unusual request to kneel in the street and accept Jesus as his savior by turning to Buckboard with the question: “Buckboard? You want to? I will if you will.” Early 20’s, Black.

Ensemble:

Miles, Nancy, Nosy Neighbor, Policeman 1, Police Officer Dilena, Judge, Courtroom guards, Mau-Maus: The Puerto Rican gang, GGI Debs: The girl gang, Chaplains: The Black gang, Parking attendant, New York Church Congregants, Pennsylvania Church Congregants