



# Update



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## Someone really does care!

We all have stories, the stories about what happened to us and the ones we tell ourselves about what happened to us. We can't change the past facts, but we can change their power over us. The Lord Jesus heals and delivers. He also gives us the power to choose our responses.

When Jolene came into my class at the Bible Institute that first day, she had come straight from prison after serving 28 ½ years of a 60-year sentence. I thought, *I wonder what the story of her life is?* She agreed to share her story for this newsletter. She, like all the others, wants to glorify Jesus for the work He has done to transform her life. It's her testimony.

Her father was a career military man and her mother a functioning alcoholic. They divorced when Jolene was 10 years old. She bounced around between her mother, her father, and her grandparents. The inconsistency was painful, and she never felt like she belonged anywhere.

When her father remarried, things got off to a rocky start. Her father and step-mother were both active in church, but it seemed that they didn't want a 12-year-old around. He was busy with his military career, and she never really received Jolene as a daughter. Jolene was left to herself and felt the pain of not being wanted.

She said, *I don't remember ever wanting to be bad, but I wasn't in touch*

*with what it meant to be good either. I believed that no matter how well I did in school or how I behaved mattered—no one cared. There were no kind words or pats on the back, no praise of any kind.*

Jolene did and said things along the way that created reaction and drove a deeper wedge between her and her parents. When she was 14, she faked a kidnapping to get their attention. Instead of them drawing closer to her, they pushed her away.

Her father felt she had put his military career in jeopardy. He wanted to send her to a private school but couldn't financially. Instead, she was sent to a state orphanage, the *New England Home for Little Wanderers* in Boston, Massachusetts. She went to school from 7 a.m. to noon each day, and worked from 1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. She worked a 40-hour week at a department store downtown while she finished high school.

At graduation in May, she wouldn't be 18 until September, so she was returned to her father in Oklahoma. When she turned 18 in September, she headed for Texas to live with her grandmother, but her alcoholic mother wouldn't leave her

alone. She kept trying to get her out of her grandmother's house.

Jolene met a guy at a skating rink one night who acted interested in her, and after a fun night he took her home to her grandmother's house. The mother called the police and told them that he had sexually abused Jolene. He was on parole for having consensual sex with a minor, and based on the mother's false testimony, it meant he was breaking parole. Jolene agreed to marry to keep him from prison.

They married and lived at the ranch where her husband worked. The ranch provided room and board and gave \$25 a month for spending money—the comparison was hard because she had had a fulltime job in Boston. She rose at 4:30 each morning, serviced four tractors and drove one of them most of the day or did farm work.

She became pregnant and could not see trying to raise a baby in that situation. Her husband treated her well enough, but he had little education, would not stand up to the boss, and was not be willing to work elsewhere. Her only thought was to get out of the situation.

Jolene had friends in West Virginia who took her in and cared for her until the birth of the baby. She wanted a child, but she was in no position now to raise one. The friends who helped her, adopted the little boy and over the years have kept her informed of his

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development. She said, *They were really good people, and at least I got to place him in a good home.*

From West Virginia, she hitchhiked to Philadelphia, PA where she knew some folks. She found work, married again, and eventually they moved to Texas near her mother who was now single. There was such conflict in her marriage and dealing with her mother that they finally became “married singles.”

Her husband deposited his checks, brought home the deposit slips, and she paid the bills, but he was secretly withdrawing money without her knowing it. That meant she kept writing hot checks. When the sheriff came, her husband took off leaving her to face the charges. She received a two-year prison sentence for the last \$10 hot check.

Shortly into her sentence her mother fell and broke her arm. Jolene was granted a hardship parole to care for her, but her mother was an advanced alcoholic by then and suffered from deliriums. Jolene would take her to the doctor and by the time they arrived home she would think Jolene was kidnapping her and became unmanageable. Not knowing how to get any help, and with very little trust in others, Jolene ran away from her living nightmare of caring for an impossible mother.

She broke parole and took off driving—not knowing where—finally ending up in Oregon with hope for a new life. An unusual thing happened; Texas parole officers found her and worked it out for the Oregon parole to accept her. She went to work in a family-owned restaurant and soon showed that she had a good work ethic and

managerial ability. Eventually, the family turned the restaurant over to her and she managed it like it were her own, and for five years, life was working out.

Family pressured her to go back to Texas to care for her mother, who passed away in a few years. Jolene didn’t drink or do drugs, but she was around family who did, and she kept getting into minor trouble. She couldn’t seem to get away from people with alcohol problems. An alcoholic cousin was sponging off the larger family; the family got together and decided enough was enough. They told her they were not going to give her any more money.

The drunken cousin came to Jolene’s house demanding money and hit Jolene when she refused. Jolene was calling the police when her cousin came at her. In the scuffle, Jolene shoved her, she lost her balance, fell, and hit her head on the handle of the stove and died instantly.

The police did not press any charges, but the Harris County DA reviewed her file a month later and decided to prosecute her for manslaughter. In the trial, the DA said that *She had a bad habit of killing people.* She had not killed anyone, there was no proof presented, and her court-appointed lawyer didn’t fight for her. The trial had eight errors, but the judge wouldn’t allow for an appeal. Jolene was given a 60-year sentence.

In prison she was angry, hurt, scandalized and mad at the world. She disrespected the officers, gave them a hard time, and set about to do things her way. She wanted to be left alone but soon learned that wouldn’t work in the prison. Although she was blind to her own attitude, to her, here was more

proof—no one really cares.

After being in prison for about 15 years the Kairos ministry came to the prison. It demonstrates and teaches about the love of God. She said, *It was always in my thinking that I loved God, but I didn’t know Him or His word. After Kairos, I started going to Bible studies because they were free and kept my mind active. I think things reached a point that God finally had had enough, and as the saying goes, He hit me up beside the head with a two by four and He got my attention. I begged Him for His help in changing my life. It seemed to me that He cried with me that night as I told Him all that was wrong and asked him to lead me in the right way.*

*I didn’t know words like obedience or authority. At this point, I barely knew Him as my heavenly Father. God put me to reading His word and taught me to “talk” with him. I had worked as a brail typist in the prison and over the years became eligible for parole. In 2014, I was looking for a place to parole to and every Saturday morning I would get my paper out for writing half-way houses. God would impress me, “Write Calvary Commission,” and in my disobedience, I would tell Him that address was at the bottom of my list. I wrote 25 places and received 25 refusals. No one wanted me once again; so I thought—no one cares.*

When she finally wrote Calvary Commission she was accepted, but it took three more years before she was paroled. In the meantime, she completed the Faith Based Dorm program and became active in the Kairos ministry of expressing God’s love to others.

Last week I asked her how she was doing. She shared all the ways love has been expressed to her by students in the women’s dorm and the school staff. She concluded with, *I have learned, someone really does care, both people and God.* ✨

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