

# Community of Christ



## WEAVE US TOGETHER

### TESTIMONIES FROM A PEOPLE OF FAITH

Volume 9 – January – March 2009

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Dearly Beloved,

This is the ninth issue of your Testimony Journal. It is my prayer that, as you read and study the testimonies included in this issue, you will come away with a renewal of your own faith in Jesus Christ and will encourage you to share your own.

Love and Blessings,  
Tom Barrett, Compiler and Editor,  
CCM Leadership Team

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#### FROM JOYCE KOESTER, MONTGOMERY, TEXAS

In giving my testimony, I'm really having a problem knowing where to begin. How do you put a lifetime onto a few short pages? I can tell you, **without a doubt**, God is with me always. From my birth to the present, He has never left my side. As the poem says when there was only one set of footprints; that's when He carried me. It was I who pushed Him aside. I felt unworthy to come before Him. I had to fix myself first! Well let me tell you, without Gods help, you're not going to fix anything! You will just make a big mess; you can't fix it alone!

Have you ever gotten lost? Turned right when you should have turned left? Well, I am definitely directionally challenged that way! My husband likes to tease me, and says that I can get lost just walking out on the front porch.

I have come to learn that God can take all the bad that has happened in my life and use it for His good, **if** I will only get out of His way and let Him. Romans 8:28 is among my favorite scriptures. "*God causes all things to work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose.*"

I am going to start my story with the things in my life I see as being negative or bad. My real father left us when I was a toddler. I understand that he did not want a girl; therefore, I was born the wrong sex. I had Polio when I was 21 months old, I spent approximately one month in the sanitarium away from my family. My mother remarried about this time. Her new husband

became my “daddy”. *Oh how I loved him!* Daddy liked to change jobs; therefore I was forced to change schools at least twice a year. I became afraid to make new friends because soon we would move again. I would only have to tell them goodbye. I was sexually molested by a loved and trusted family member when I was 9. I had rheumatic fever about age 10. The doctor didn’t want me to participate in recess or any strenuous activity, therefore, my class mates made fun of me; and I was on the side lines again. My “daddy” left our family for a new one when I was 12. That forced my mother to have to take on two jobs to try to support us, and left me to try to care of my 5 younger brothers and sisters. I was raped when I was 13; and started smoking about that same time. Smoking made me feel like I was part of the crowd. At the age of 15, I was in a bad automobile accident, which could have taken my life. (I was in a place I should not have been; I was supposed to be home taking care of the children). At the age of 15 I also quit school and went to work as a carhop. My pay and tips were given to mother, going toward food and rent. It was while at that job I met my first husband. We married when I was barely 16 and he was 19. We were just babies trying to play house. Somewhere in my mind I was thinking, now I had a place of my own. A place I was safe, secure, and truly loved. My dream as a young child was to grow up and have a large family of my own. I used to imagine what my babies would look like; what I would name them, what they would be when they grew up. I would have a perfect life, a husband who truly loved me, someone who would take care of me. I was going to be the perfect wife and mother. (The white picket fence, a real Cinderella story!) That dream was soon shattered. I had no idea how to be the wife, cook and housekeeper my husband expected. I soon began to feel that his family thought they were much better than me and mine. His mother often scolded me on the way I kept house, instead of trying to teach me. His father would sometimes bring out the Bible to illustrate to me what a sinful person I was. If I expressed an opinion, they would often override it, as if it didn’t matter. My husband didn’t want me to spend any time with my family. I was supposed to stay home all day, cleaning, and waiting for him to come home. I started to feel like a rubber-band stretched to the breaking point. At this point in time my mother still needed me to help care of my siblings. My husband seemed to be resentful of that fact. My marriage lasted 25 years, we were blessed with 4 beautiful souls to care for and nourish to adulthood. That part of my dream was fulfilled; I had a beautiful family of my own. As I said earlier, I never felt accepted by my husbands’ family. I always felt like an outsider around them. I wasn’t good enough, I wasn’t, I WASN’T, I WASN’T. In my mind the negative thoughts continued to plague me, and without positive re-enforcement I spiraled into a dark abyss. I couldn’t see the good in my marriage, only the negative. This negativity affected every area of my life; including the lives of my precious children. I was NOT the mother I had dreamt of being. I was a failure both as a wife, and a mother. I had made up my mind when my children were grown. I was going to leave this marriage. The only out I could see, was to end the marriage, and start fresh. I had to find myself. I was so very lost. There is a passage in a book I recently read, that I believe states it better than I can. It is in the book “*The Return of the Prodigal son*”, by Henri J.M. Nouwen. ” *I try hard to please, to achieve success to be recognized. When I fail I feel jealous or resentful of these others. When I succeed, I worry that others will be jealous or resentful of me. I become suspicious or defensive and increasingly afraid that I won’t get what I so much desire or will loose what I already have. Caught in this tangle of needs and wants I no longer know my own motivations. I feel victimized by my surroundings and distrustful of what others are doing or saying. Always on my guard, I lose my inner freedom and start dividing the world into those who are for me and those who are against me. I wonder if anyone really cares. I start looking for validations of my distrust. And wherever I go, I see them, and I say: “No one can be trusted.” And then I wonder whether anyone ever really loved me. The world around me becomes dark, my heart grows heavy, my body is filled with sorrows, and my life looses meaning. I have become a lost soul.*”

In the last months of my marriage I met a man that seemed to see something in me. He made me feel beautiful, like I had something to offer, like I was someone special! He appeared to love me without putting conditions on that love. But, alas, this was just another misconception.

My marriage finally ended and I was then on a more destructive path, “*searching for love in all the wrong places*”. Love always seemed just out of my reach. Then God placed in my life my current husband. Someone who loves me in spite of all my excess baggage! I felt like my life was finally getting onto the right track. Then tragedy started hitting. My little nephew died in his sleep. My mother and step-father were in an accident that took his life, and, almost ended hers. THEN, my oldest son was taken from me. Was God punishing me for all the wrongs I had committed? For the next few years I went into a much darker place, and continued to build walls around my heart. Walls of granite and steel. I built these walls very well, very strong. I held people at arms length, because if I let anyone too close, they would only hurt me. I didn’t feel like I could stand that.

When I started this testimony I said God has always been with me. All through my life’s journey, he has revealed himself to me in mighty ways. He completely healed me of the polio and rheumatic fever. I have actually heard an audible voice a couple of times. The first time was at the birth of my oldest son. (I had been terribly afraid of death.) He showed me what death was, and assured me there was nothing to fear. The next time I was on my way to work when the voice said, “*Joyce, stop*”. If I had failed to listen to that voice, and not obeyed, I would have been hit by a train at an unmarked intersection. He was even instrumental in my going to nursing school. I had a fear of being left to raise my children on my own. Without an education I would be in the same place my mother was, trying to make a living on a waitress’s salary. Anyway, I applied to the nursing program and was told there would be at least a 3 year wait. Their classes were that full. About 3 weeks after I applied, I received a call from the secretary. She told me they had an opening and wanted me to come in for an interview. I made an appointment. During the interview the director looked at me and said “I don’t know why the secretary called you, we don’t have any openings; but we are going to accept you and work you in. I was on my way to becoming an RN. WOW!! GOD IS GOOD!!

God has never pulled back his arms, never withheld his blessings. He has always stood looking for me with out stretched arms, just waiting to receive me back into his fold. But, he had to wait for me to knock on that door. He would open it, but I had to make the first move. We have the choice, He gave us our agency. He will not force Himself into our lives.

I’m not sure now of the chain of events that started my journey back to my Lord. I stopped smoking, I’m sure God gave me the strength because He answers prayer. I know many in my family were praying that I would quit. I started taking my mother to church, (because she had become afraid of driving any distances), and, she wanted to go to Church. I went out to visit my daughter a couple of times. She was having problems in her marriage that so closely mirrored my own. (But, that is her story to tell .She has a beautiful testimony which she is always willing to share.) Anyway, she and her husband gave me books and I started reading.

My brother invited me to go to Celebration. He said I really needed to go, so I made plans. Then at the last minute he had to work. I almost didn’t go, but my daughter assured me that she, her husband Mike, and my granddaughter Aubrey were going and she wanted me to join them. What can I say about Celebration? The Spirit of the Lord covered the campus like a blanket. I felt an anticipation that I haven’t felt in a very long time. Many of God’s human angels ministered to me that week, giving me encouragement and love, they are forever in my heart. On

Monday night there was a powerful healing service. Many healings were taking place. Mike got up and left during the service, and I saw my beautiful daughters' countenance darken. I told her not to let these events pull her down; she had come too far to let that happen. She yelled at me saying that she didn't need a lecture. I felt hurt and started gathering my things to leave. She said something to the effect "**fine you leave me too, every one else has left me**"! She then turned and left. I broke down completely. I couldn't breathe and all I could do was babble, "The sins of the father are visited on his children". I saw my daughter going down the same road I had gone, and I didn't want that for her. I was a total mess! I couldn't breathe! Tom Barrett was the first to come to me to offer support. I'm not sure how many others. I do know John Snider and Derek Sanders prayed over me, for healing of my lungs. (And I was able to breathe better than I had in years, following that prayer.) Bev Morrow sat and talked with me for a long while that night. She called Arlin Epperson over, and he told me to be in his spiritual healing class the next day. To make a long story shorter, Bev and Arlin led me through my spiritual healing session. Jesus broke down the steel and granite barriers from around my heart. I had to totally surrender myself. I came to realize that the people who hurt me were themselves fighting their own demons. And there was no way I was going to move forward, if I were unable to release those resentments and hurts. I had to lay them at the base of Jesus' cross and fully forgive them. Then I had to forgive myself, for the role I had played. Jesus then gave me a brand new heart! I have since been to 2 retreats at Stillwater Oklahoma. I continue to grow with each encounter, and I meet new brothers and sisters in Christ. I know I am a long way from the masterpiece that God sees in me. Each day through His grace; study of His word, and association with the wonderful people He has brought into my life, I am coming one step closer to that masterpiece. I want to close with the words of this song I heard for the first time at the latest Stillwater Retreat. The words have special meaning to me.

**Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Savior  
I know for sure, all my  
Days are held in your  
Hands.  
Crafted into your perfect plan  
You gently call me, into your presence  
Guiding me by your Holy Spirit  
Teach me dear Lord to live all my life through  
Your eyes.  
I'm captured by your Holy calling  
Set me apart  
I know your drawing me to yourself  
Lead me Lord I pray  
Take me, Mold me  
Use me, Fill me  
I give my life to the Potters hands  
Hold me, Guide me  
Lead me, Walk beside me  
I give my life to the Potters hand.**

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**FROM TOM BARRETT, NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS**

I am truly blessed. This past Tuesday our daughter called and told us that Charlie, a man that had been on the Prayer List for fourth stage cancer had passed on. His family, some dear friends in Yoakum, Texas, was in considerable distress. His brother, Mondo, requested us to be at the funeral. Since Charlie was not a member of any particular church, all that was being done for the family was a graveside service, presided over by a Catholic priest. Of course, we said we would come down. Then our daughter asked me, "Would Mom make some food and bring it down with us? The family had coordinated for use of the Catholic Church Fellowship Hall to hold a lunch following the service. Once again, of course she said yes.

Linda began preparing yesterday. She made two huge cakes, a platter of brownies, a large macaroni salad and two containers of iced tea. This morning, the day of the funeral (which was to be at 10:00 am) she rose from sleep at 4:00 am and began again. She baked 30 pounds of chicken, fried 15 pounds of link sausage, made a large bowl of pinto beans and about 10 pounds of green bean salad; all this while recovering from a bout with the flu.

Everyone, about 100 people, were so appreciative of what she did. Can you sense how blessed I am to have a wife and companion like her. Linda is the image of Christ-like servanthood we all need to emulate.



**FROM STEFANIE HOBBS, INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI**

**Stefanie's Testimony of Rebirth**

Hi, my name is Stefanie Hobbs. I'm 28 and was born and raised in Independence Missouri. Growing up, I was continually abused by my father and his various friends. I was also introduced at five years old to the dark side of Satanism. I learned spells, curses, and various satanic rituals. I was attempting to find an escape from the abuse, and looked for love and acceptance in all the wrong places. I found myself addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, and anger. I lived in a constant state of rage, yet felt empty and attempted suicide numerous times. Doctors told me that if I continued down this dark, destructive path, I would be dead by age 16. It took almost killing my mom and sister before I woke up enough to realize that I needed to control my rage. Everyone was afraid of me.

Things began to change when I met Mary Jo Huffman. She and her family talked on a regular basis about Jesus, and the Community of Christ. I wanted what they had, but felt very uncomfortable. The darkness within continuously stirred up trouble, and made it hard for the Huffman's to love me. Mary Jo at one point found my spell book and burned it. This was in an attempt to save me from the evil that was consuming me rapidly. I wanted nothing to do with Jesus, or church, because I believed that no God would allow a child to go through such horrendous abuse, and not answer when crying for help. Little did I realize that He was answering; just not like I thought.

Gail and Tom had attended a CCM retreat at the Independence Temple, the spring of 2008. There, they met Michele Dunlap and Donna Scherer, and were told about HART Ministries. They were excited, and told Mary Jo and I that we needed to go check it out. So, that next

Sunday we did. Little did HART know that I was being sent to create disunity among the staff, and destroy the ministry. I was on assignment, and for several Sundays following I attempted to carry out that assignment. I failed miserably! I was unable to break through Michele's armor and she and the others befriended me. They showed only love and acceptance, despite my attempts to drive them away. Besides attending HART, Mary Jo and I were also attending Michele and Donna's scripture study on Tuesday nights. Things were fine, until Michele's challenge for me to ask Jesus for a personal testimony, that is, if you don't have one. I wanted to know if Jesus was real, and if so, prove it! He did. I was preparing to leave that night, and was held up (along with the others) from going anywhere! Michele laid her hand on my forehead, and down I went! I found myself with Jesus in a beautiful meadow. He spoke with me regarding being alone without him, if I didn't change. He also told me to pray more, and share my testimony. I returned, and shared my experience with the group. The next Sunday, I was spoken to again. Paul Lucero was preaching that day, only I didn't hear a word! I was hearing Jesus telling me to get rid of my unwanted visitors, and go see Michele for help. Michele suggested I be administered to by Paul and Heather. Paul and Heather did, and for the next four hours they and others prayed, and battled for my freedom. I was set free from evil bondage, and now praised my true Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!!! I made the decision to be baptized following these series of events. March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009, I was baptized at Celebration Ministries in Independence that morning and received the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost at HART Ministries that afternoon. My life is truly being changed, and I am being transformed by the love of Jesus Christ! Scripture says: Jesus came to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound...Isaiah 61:1, and if the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed! John 8:36. Also- There should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. I Corinthians 12:26-26. The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they may have it more abundantly! I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep. For I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and they know me. John 10:10-11,13. I am now one of his sheep, a daughter, and most of all a "friend of God!"



**FROM KATHY DECALUWE, ONTARIO, CANADA**

Testimony of Surrender

A few weeks ago a friend passed away, and the family had asked me to do her funeral. I said I would. Depending on the availability of the church, we planned to hold the memorial service for Saturday at 1:00 pm. That evening I received a phone call from my cousin's husband saying that my cousin had passed away and that they had planned on having her funeral on that Saturday also – two funerals in two different cities – a one hour plus drive between them. My heart was broken thinking that I would not be able to be for my cousin's funeral. She and I were close and have grown even closer during her illness. I just could not even imagine not being there. It was something my heart wanted and needed.

As I was driving to meet with my friend's family to plan the service, I thought of asking them to possibly consider having it later. However, that would be a large inconvenience, and they did not need any undue stress. And so, as I drove down the highway, I was praying over the situation. I felt the Spirit of the Lord fall upon me, as I cried out saying, "God, you know my heart, and you know that I will do what is right. I will go and minister to this family and do what

I have committed to do. But you know my heart is breaking, because I want to go to RuthAnne's funeral. Lord, I surrender this to You."

I felt such a peace at that very moment. I was so blessed the rest of the day and felt the Spirit as I met and ministered with the family. After driving home I called a friend; she told me that she had received information that my cousin's funeral would be on Saturday morning at 11:00.

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Thank You, Jesus! My heart soared. I would be able to attend part of my cousin's service, and I was at peace with that.

On Saturday I arrived at the church early and had the opportunity to visit with relatives and be a part of my cousin's funeral. I had to leave early to be on time for the other funeral. I had peace about all of it, and I thank God for the way He worked it all out. I am not sure what would have happened had I not surrendered it to the Lord. It is something I need to do in every situation. God's ways are higher; His plan is better.

I thank my God and King; His love endures forever.

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**MEDITATION THOUGHT  
VICTORY**

Although many of us appreciate Winston Churchill, his stature, his inspiration that sustained England during the gathering storm and in their finest hour, we may not have realized his faith in Christ. He planned his funeral carefully, choosing every hymn, lesson and participant. In 1963 as the "Liturgy of Burial" in St. Paul's Cathedral concluded, there was a brief silence and then from the Whispering Gallery a bugler sounded TAPS, signifying the day is done, life is over.

After a specified interval, from the other end of the great dome, buglers played REVEILLE, the dramatic announcement that a new day had just begun. Churchill thus testified to the Resurrection, that a new day, a new chapter of life as beginning for Christ's faithful soldier and spokesman for human freedom.

It has been 46 years since Churchill's funeral, but the message remains the same: "God has given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord."

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**DISCLAIMER**

The testimonies shared in this journal are expressions of personal experiences and encounters with God. They do not necessarily represent the theology, beliefs, or practices of either CCM or the Community of Christ.

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This issue of the journal is now complete and ready to go to those who need a reminder from time to time of God's Grace and Love for each of His children. The next issue will be published at the end of June 2009. Please send me your testimonies so others will be blessed. We have been counseled to "share the sacred story". Make no mistake; your story is sacred.

Love, Peace, and Blessings,  
Tom Barrett, Healing Ministries,  
CCM Leadership Team, Southwest