



# PRISONS WEEK 2009 RESOURCES

STORIES OF HOPE 2

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### A Story from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

There is a man who was arrested just because he made some deals with a person before the death of that person. His name is Mr Chambuy and he was a very prosperous businessman in the Democratic Republic of Congo and he travelled regularly to Dubai to buy various articles and vehicles for his customers. While he was in Dubai to purchase some goods, one of his customers in the Congo, who was a lawyer, and indeed a famous lawyer, was assassinated. The police involved in the investigation started to search into the files of the dead man, reading and checking all the documents hoping to find something in them. They found the contract for a vehicle purchase with Mr Chambuy. A file was initiated and a search for him was begun. When Mr Chambuy returned to the Democratic Republic of Congo, he was arrested by the police, taken to the court for the case to be heard and judgement made. He was found guilty and condemned to serve a prison sentence for several years, and was transferred to the Central Prison of Kasapa in Lubumbashi in Katanga province,

In prison, he experienced a wonderful meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ, a meeting that would transform its life, which was without hope because of his incarceration and also because he was in prison his wife left the marital house leaving his children and went to be married to another person. In addition his goods had been seized by the police, and the rest had been wasted by his wife, and so he was in total despair. However this discovery of Christ created hope in his life and he began to help the Chaplain to serve the Lord, and he freely offered his services to assist other prisoners to overcome illiteracy and taught English to those prisoners who expressed a wish to do so.

However while his spirit was beginning to flower he became sick and needed surgery for a hernia. Once more he was without hope, because this was a difficult and almost impossible situation for a prisoner in the D.R.Congo for although he was urgently hospitalized in a university clinic of the city for this intervention he did not have the necessary finance for the operation. Without hope and seeing himself very close to death, he shouted for help to the Head Warden who did not have a solution, and so he then shouted to the Chaplain for help. The life of Mr Chambuy depended this time on the response of the men and women of goodwill that only the hand of the Everlasting Father could touch to prompt them into action.

The Chaplain realised the hopeless situation of Mr Chambuy and contacted a local church to come to assistance of this man who was close to crossing the valley of the shadow of death. The Church responded to the call of the Lord and Mr Chambuy underwent surgery, spent a few days in the hospital to help him recover and was then sent back again to the prison living. ***The Bible declares: "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion." Ecclesiastes 9: 4*** Hoping against any hope, after his arrival in prison, he has been released from the prison and is back to the community serving his God with zeal and tremor. Without God there was no hope, but with God he had hope and his life was saved spiritually from the prison of the devil and also freed from physical death and his physical prison, Glory be to the Lord.

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## **Finding a Song by Margot Van Sluytman from Canada**

*For those who wish to sing, there is always a song. Swedish Proverb*

Senseless violence with the murder of my father, Theodore Van Sluytman, in Toronto, in 1978, completely devastated me. At sixteen, I was thinking about marks, pimples, and volleyball. When I found out from a very tall police officer that my Dad was dead, my world changed. Forever. As if rooted in the soil of anguish and pain, I felt that no matter how fat or thin I was, I could not walk without dragging the entire universe of sorrow with me. At that time, healing from that anguish was not even a concept. One healed a bloodied knee, or a broken bone; one did not fathom what it might mean to heal a broken heart, to never again enter the world without unspoken anguish and raw incomprehension.

In a very simple, profound, and subtle way, I did enter healing. Words not only saved my life, i.e. reading and writing, but eventually gave me my life back. I was given a unique opportunity to communicate with the offender who killed my father. And I chose to respond and participate. I now know the words Restorative Justice, and I know many different meanings of that phrase. I now know restoration and transformation. And I know something else besides, and it is this: No one can tell you how to feel. No one can ever enter your personal journey, your story, and your life. Your journey through healing is your own. I do not believe that any of us is exempt from raw savage pain. I do believe however that compassion for ourselves and for others leaves room for the beginnings of dialogue, challenging dialogue, with what it means to enter our life with a view to finding and or creating new normals that can in time include renewed hope.

I am filled with utter gratitude because the man who killed my father cares about what he did. His actions and words express that, and that matters to me. This is one aspect of Restorative Justice and hope. Only one. Ram Dass' words speak to me in relation to the fact that Glen Flett and I have met, and have shared in a ritual of hope and transformation: ***You and I are the force for transformation in the world. We are the consciousness that will define the nature of the reality we are moving into.*** I believe that the encounter we have shared asks me to acknowledge how I might participate as a force of transformation. A deep sense of being supported continues to fill me. In sharing this short essay now, I feel supported. You are too. That we have choice to give and receive kindness and hope has been highlighted for me in knowing that life always asks us, as Gandhi said, to participate in being the change we wish to see. We can find the songs we need, we can in fact write them. And we need many, many songs.

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***Margot Van Sluytman***, Poet, Calgary, Alberta

## **Three short "Stories of Hope" from Vancouver, Canada**

### **John**

John is a pedophile who has just been arrested having been on the run for a year. After three days sitting in a remand centre in a strange city he is told he has visitors. He can't imagine who would visit him, everyone disowned him long ago. When he gets to the visiting room there are three people there, a man, a woman, and a little girl about ten years old, all of whom he has never seen before. The man is the first to pick up the speaker phone. "If you ever hurt my little girl, I will kill you." he says. Next the woman picks up the phone and says, "I see Jesus in you but please be careful, she's all I've got". John is stunned and asks, "What is the meaning of all this? Who are you and why are you here?" The little girl takes the phone and says, "Hi, I'm Alisha. We talked about you in school, and heard about you on the news. Everyone hates you and no one likes you, so I asked my Mom and Dad to let me come and love you." John's life changes at that moment.

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**David**

David is a prisoner who I sat next to at a chapel social. During dinner we chatted about all kinds of things. About a week later he said to me, "Wasn't that a wonderful time the other night?" When I asked what he'd liked so much about it. He responded "I felt like I was at a real banquet with real people — I forgot I was in prison."

**Gabrielle**

Gabrielle is a transsexual who has just slashed up. The stitches are ugly and she is in a padded cell under the lights. She greets me with "Get out of here! You are too late. I wanted to talk to you, but you didn't come when I needed you. Now you can just go. I want to die! Why won't they let me die? I have no reason to live!" She continues hysterically screaming and sobbing, going over her past life, relating the suffering and pain that has been inflicted on her and that she has inflicted on others. Her volume increases. "How hopeless I am. I don't want to go on. Why won't they let me die? I will find a way to kill myself. I am better off dead." Her screams tell of unbearable pain, of an unbearable life. Finally she is silent, and I dare to whisper. "You do know don't you that you didn't deserve any of this, that you were a child, only a child? You deserved to be loved. You didn't do anything to deserve what happened." "I want to do everything I can to help you believe that." She is quiet, sobbing gently now, and I go on, "You are beautiful and you are good, and I care about you". Hours later when I am leaving she asks, "Are you going to come back again and see me?"

**Five Stories of Hope from the Hope Prison Ministry in Cape Town South Africa****Tania Carelse**

I am 33 years old and I was in Pollsmoor Female Prison for 9 months. I was a drug addict, addicted to every type of drug and to support my drug habit I resorted to credit card fraud. It was in prison where I had an encounter with Jesus. Had it not been for me coming to prison, I would have probably been dead or been prostituting myself by now. I was released from prison in May 2008 and I have never looked back. I have turned from my life of crime and drugs and I am now so excited about serving God. I am working full-time for Hope Prison Ministries and I am ecstatic about what God is doing in my life. The most outstanding thing in my spiritual journey, was doing the Restorative Justice Programme. Only after having done this course, have I fully realized the impact of my crime on other people, and I can now take full responsibility for the crimes that I have committed and not blame other people or my circumstances. I am thankful that God brought me to a place like prison so that I could get into an intimate relationship with him. To God be the Glory!

**Alison Anne Kiewietz-Marais**

I am 44 years old and I was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in October 2003 for Fraud. I served 3 years and 7 months inside prison and I have been on the outside for almost 2 years now. I come from a Christian background and accepted the Lord when I was young but I back-slid. My choices I made in life almost destroyed. It was in prison where I heard the word of God again where God sent people like Pastor Jonathan and Pastor Jenny and several other faithful ones to prison with the Good News that Jesus still saves and that God is a God of Second, Third.....chances, and then I made a commitment to make Christ my foundation, my hope and my trust. Hallelujah!!!! I was working at Hope Prison Ministry as the secretary for almost 2 years. Now I am working in the accounts department of a mail distribution company. Isn't God awesome! My God can! What keeps me faithful is that I am always mindful of what God has done in my life and what He is still doing and going to do. I do not take my salvation for granted. What stands out in my life is that I had the opportunity to meet with some of my victims and that they could share how they felt. It was not easy for them, but knowing that I have a Saviour that wants to restore makes all the difference. I believe that God is going to turn what the devil meant for evil, God will turn it around for His glory! I thank the Lord for loving me unconditionally. Christ is the foundation of this house.

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### **Mervin Joostenberg**

I am 29 years old and I was in and out of prison for 13 years of my life. The very first time I went to prison was when I was 14 years old. During the 13 years of my prison life, I became a 28 gang member. I recruited other potential gang members and I also taught them about the number. The last sentence I got was and 8 years imprisonment of which I spent 5 years in prison. It was during this time that I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. It was through a Restorative Justice Course that I had an encounter with God and where I also denounced gangsterism. I am now working inside Pollsmoor Prison, ministering to juvenile boys and I am also very active in the community, bringing a message of hope to the hopeless. I also bring the Good to people traveling on the train. It is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives inside of me. God Bless.

### **Joybelle September**

I have spent 15 years of my life in and out of prison. Prison became my second home. I knew all the tricks of prison life. I was a shoplifter. I tried to get out of a life of crime but could not because I was addicted to mandrax and dagga and also alcohol. It was while serving my last sentence of six years when an inmate invited me to Bible Study. I refused the invite but she kept coming back till I accepted, and this was only to get her off my back. My life was never the same again after I accepted Christ into my life. In prison, I also did Restorative Justice, where I realized the impact crime had in my life and on my family's life and also on the community. Praise be to God, I am out now for 7 years it is by the Grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that I am still outside working for the Master at Hope Prison Ministry following up on ladies that have been released, but it would not have made it on my own but by attending monthly spiritual support groups run by Hope and peoples prayers and also being in a church has kept me. It is just wonderful and amazing how God provided for me when I was just released and I was unemployed for 4 years. I was never in need. Seeing Gods hand in my life and it is so wonderful to see my 3 grandchildren between the ages of 18 and 15 serving God. I can just give God all the Glory for their lives. I know that their parents will also come to God through their childrens' lives.

### **Natalie Venter**

I am 33 years old and I was imprisoned for drug trafficking. I brought 4 kilos of Cocaine from South America to South Africa. I was sentenced to 12 years of which I completed 6 years inside of prison. This is a miracle in itself as I was only supposed to be released in 2010, but God in His mercy saw fit to allow the prison doors to open earlier for me. I recommitted my life to Jesus while I was in prison, in the beginning it was just to use God, I thought God wouldn't allow His child to get a prison sentence, but I came to realize that He has a plan and a purpose for my life, I had to go to prison to become quiet and so that God and I could become intimate and for me to start realizing that without God I can't do anything! I thank God for my prison experience because its there where God dealt with deep rooted issues in my life, I was able to forgive those who've hurt me in the past and I was also taught to take responsibility for my crime. I had to acknowledge that I destroyed people's lives, families and homes! I sent women out to prostitute themselves for their next fix, people steal, kill & rob just to get the drugs I made available by bringing it into our country..... I was released in 2007 and I am serving the rest of my sentence outside as I'm on parole. While I was in prison I was given the opportunity to study haircare, thus I qualified as a hair stylist and now I'm working in salon. Its not always easy being on parole as there are many challenges because I can't do what I want to do, when I want do it ! However when I think of where God has brought me out from - a life of drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, bound by unforgiveness and bitterness I can't let go of the Lord now, He has kept me, blessed me, poured His favour on me and provided for me.....and when I think of His amazing Grace I'm filled with so much gratitude and its when I think of how much He loves me by giving His only Son for me that I stand in awe of Him and its that that keeps me pushing forward and going through the trials that come my way.....! Hallelujah.

**Prisons week 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Nov 2009**

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**A week of prayer for all those involved with prisons**