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"I feel strong enough to say that I won't end up here again, but I still have nightmares about this place - especially the sound of those doors closing."

Angela Bain



Breaking Free

By Dean Leonard, Editor/Writer

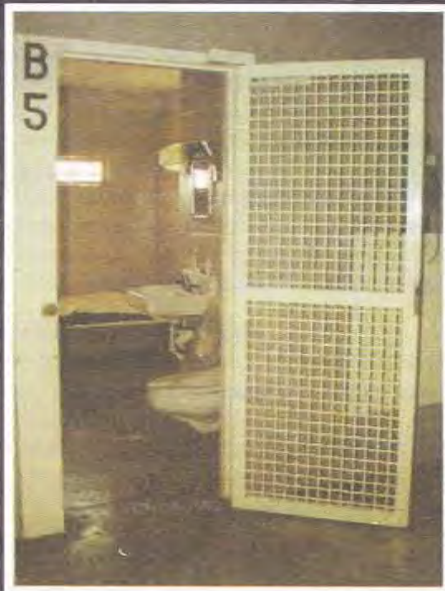


PHOTOS BY DEAN LEONARD

Angela Bain with Louise Johnson and Chaplain Gary Anderson

"I spent many days in that cell reflecting on my life...about what I had done, where I had come from and where I had ended up."

Angela Bain



Lost and alone, Angela Bain had once again hit rock bottom in a Rutherford County jail cell.

Hope was a memory, and the drumming sound of heavy steel doors slamming shut during lock-up replaced the sound of happy laughter from her three children. Drugs and alcohol had ruled her life for years, and the way back to self-preservation seemed far reaching, if not impossible.

"I spent many days in that cell reflecting on my life...about what I had done, where I had come from, and where I had ended up," said Bain. "Time was all I had."

As a resident of the Rutherford County Adult Detention Center's A-Pod section, Bain's existence was like that of the other inmates held there...hard.

Kitchen work, yard cleanup and sleepless nights were her reality for eight long months.

In an effort to make a connection with the outside world, Bain began corresponding with AfterCare pen-pal, Louise Johnson; often sending her letters in beautiful envelopes that Bain had embellished with pastel crosses and flowers.

"Angela really wanted to turn her life around," said Johnson. "She just needed a hand to hold and direction. She had no one else to turn to."

Johnson and twelve other members of the Murfreesboro community created the AfterCare program to assist inmates who need guidance and support. Through the aid of many churches in the area, the program provides a new start for those who find themselves without a home or a bus ticket back home.

During Bain's stint at the jail, she slowly regained control of her life through faith and counseling. Her will to succeed was so evident, and her story so moving, that she began accompanying Chaplain Gary Anderson to area churches. Her speeches serve to instill hope in others.

"She is a pioneer," said Anderson, jail chaplain since April of 2000. "Her story is amazing. She has received many cards and letters from some of the people she has reached because of her testimony."

Anderson serves over 500 inmates at the Adult Detention Center, holding daily prayer sessions and answering requests for visits. "I empty the request box at least three times a day," he said. "These inmates are hungry for human contact and the word of God. We do what we can to help them out, but without church support, it would be difficult to reach everyone."

Today, Angela is gainfully employed and able to take care of her three children.

"I want people to know that hope is there," said Bain. "I broke free of my past, and started over."

Then she added, glancing back over her shoulder at the front entrance to the jail, "I feel strong enough to say that I won't end up here again, but I still have nightmares about this place - especially the sound of those doors closing."

Anthony Kennedy is another example of how community support can be successful in helping an individual find their way back from despair.

As the Resident Manager of Room In The Inn Day Shelter for the past six months, Kennedy is working on turning his life around after spending 123 days at the Detention Center for a probation violation.

"I sat in that cell and thought about how empty my life was," he said. "I had burned a lot of bridges to get there, and all I wanted to do was start over."

Kennedy remembers hearing about Room In The Inn, but he didn't think the shelter would be of any importance to him until much later.

"I had planned on going home to take care of my grandmother, but her health deteriorated and she ended up in a nursing home. The night I was released from jail, I had nothing but the clothes on my back."

Kennedy felt himself drawn that night to the Room In The Inn where volunteer George Kelly immediately welcomed him in.

"I didn't really know what to expect, but I took a chance," said Kennedy. "I explained my situation to Mr. Kelly and he offered to help."

In time, Kennedy decided that what he wanted to do most was to help the folks sheltered there. "I wanted to become more involved...the program really touched me inside. I've seen what it can do."

For six months, Kennedy has been in the position of resident manager at the shelter and credits Director Christine Huddleston with changing his life.

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