

CJM Connection

The bi-monthly newsletter of Criminal Justice Ministry -St. Louis

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Angelo's Story - God Gave Me Six Months

Testimonial from Craig Schoenfelder - CJM Volunteer in Clayton Jail

Angelo was a self-professed "Grandma's boy"! He never knew his father. His mother worked long hours. When Angelo was 15 years old, his grandmother died. One year later, his mother died. Angelo was lost and empty inside. He was grasping for help, but did not know where to go. Grandpa wasn't mom! Grandpa wasn't Grandma!

All that Angelo clung to in his emptiness ultimately put him squarely in the path of the law. He was in and out of jail several times in his late teens. At age 20, Angelo again found himself in jail. With the heavy losses he experienced in his youth, with the weight of loneliness on his shoulders, and nowhere to turn; Angelo wondered if he would see his 21st birthday.

I met Angelo at this point in his life. Over several months, soft-spoken Angelo talked, and I listened. We prayed together and I gave Angelo a prayer of encouragement or some "borrowed" words of wisdom. One really spoke to him. "If I have a situation in my life that is not what I want, I don't continue to think about the way it is ... I see it and tell it the way I want it to be."

Angelo began to tell himself that he would not serve prison time. Despite the times his appointed counsel said 18-24 months was a good offer, Angelo remained steadfast. He would not accept prison time as his future. Angelo began attending bible studies and to talk with God in ways he had not done before. He asked God to get him out. And he kept telling himself daily that with God's help, he would not go to prison.

Five months later in a courtroom hearing, Angelo found himself laughing uncontrollably. Everyone in the courtroom was confounded. "Are you ok?" He responded that "something" in the past triggered his laughter. There was a smell of perfume drifting in the air – the same perfume his grandmother always wore. Angelo knew that she was there with him. That gave him comfort, strength, and reassurance.

As the hearing proceeded, Angelo was invited to speak on his own behalf. The judge, well-known for his ability to see through hollow words and proffer stiff sentences, waited and listened intently. Angelo wondered if the letter he had written to the judge in which he asked for leniency would be looked on favorably. In it, he had quoted Psalms 130:3-4 "If you, oh Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared."

Angelo said, "Judge, I did not ask for my mother to die. I did not ask for my grandmother to die. In search of help, I went looking for love in all the wrong places." Angelo cried as he spoke with honesty and sincerity.

The judge felt it. The judge said he believed Angelo would change his life. Angelo was given a 6-month sentence and having served 5 months already, would be out of jail in a month. There would be no prison time! Instead, Angelo would be going to a halfway house for several months to get the personal attention and guidance he needed to reshape his future. The judge told Angelo to get out of his courtroom before he changed his mind.

Angelo then turned to his attorney and said: "God gave me six months!" His attorney was puzzled and didn't comprehend. The judge nodded in agreement – a sure sign to Angelo that the words in his letter had found a home in the judge's compassionate heart.

At the end of the hearing, Angelo's grandfather told him that he had weathered the storm without an umbrella, getting soaked and windblown along the way. *With six months from God, do you really think that Angelo did not have an umbrella?* It makes sense during the storms of our lives to ask God for what we want and then to be patient enough to allow Him to grant us what we need - in His time - in His way!

Angelo is moving forward with God's umbrella in hand. And he is holding on tight!

2020 SAVE-THE-DATES

- Thursday, February 13; 5:30 - 7:30 PM** - Screening of a criminal justice love story at St. Vincent De Paul Church. RSVP - [CLICK HERE](#).
 - Wednesday, March 4; 5:30 - 7:30 PM** - New Volunteer Orientation at 1104 S. Jefferson. Dinner included.
 - Wednesday, March 25** - CJM Incarceration Forum at Il Monastero.
 - Thursday, April 23; 6 -9 PM** - CJM GALA - Moulin Events 2017 Chouteau Ave. Stay tuned for sponsorship, table, and ticket information.
 - Saturday, May 2** - Volunteer Training Workshop
 - Saturday, May 9; 10 AM - 12 PM** - Let's Start Gospel Brunch at St. Vincent De Paul Church. Stay tuned for sponsorship, table, and ticket information.
 - Thursday, June 17** - Volunteer Appreciation Dinner.
 - Friday, July 3** - Pies & Cobblers inside Farmington prison.
 - Thursday, September 17** - Movie Night.
 - Wednesday, November 4** - Volunteer Orientation.
 - Friday, December 4 & 11** - Annual Prison Cookie Events.
 - Thursday, December 17** - Annual Client Holiday Dinner.
- For more information about any of our events, please email alisah@cjmstlouis.org*

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS!

"Trauma not Transformed is Trauma Transferred"

Trauma is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. It is a concept that is completely subjective because what may be traumatizing to you may not be as traumatizing to me. What is not subjective is the long-term impact trauma can have on the brain. Exposure to traumatic events can change the structure of the brain which in turn can have life-altering side effects. We also often hear about the "vicious cycle" and how often family systems create the same behavior/thinking patterns that can continue to cause psychological harm.

This video link below, explains the importance of treating trauma and transforming it as opposed to passing it on to a loved one.

[CLICK HERE](#)

If you or someone you know is experiencing stress due to a traumatic event please check out the resources below:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/trauma-and-ptsd/mo/saint-louis>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207191/>

Brittni Collins, M.Ed., NCC



ABOVE: Annual Client Holiday Dinner Volunteers for donated and serving all the food.

ABOVE: Tony Messenger for moderating the Incarceration Forum



LEFT: Willie's Toupee and the Heavy Anchor for hosting a CJM Fundraiser.