

CONVICTED

Sandi Rog

“Please, Blake. You know I can’t read. I really need your help.” The blond-haired, blue-eyed boy was in jail for the first time. Just the night before, he had been raped by five men. He remembered the comfort he had found as a child when his mother would read the Bible. He begged Blake Williams for most of a day until finally his cellmate gave in and started reading the Bible to him.

Sitting inside a Louisiana parish jail, they began studying together from a correspondence course the boy had acquired. After a short time, Blake tossed the Bible across the room, landing it in the trashcan. “This isn’t what I was taught!”

He exchanged that Bible for a different translation.

After tossing several translations into the trashcan, Blake finally realized something. “They’re all saying the same thing.” The men decided to forget about everything they had been taught and simply read the Bible and see what it had to say.

They began reading in Matthew. As time passed, more inmates joined them. After reading through the four gospels and having finished the book of Acts, they were ready to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

The jail had no provisions for anyone to be baptized. The men were desperate to be baptized, however, and they prayed to God for help.

Meanwhile, a preacher from the Lord's church had been trying to get into the jail for several months and had never been allowed admittance. He just happened to arrive again about this time. The same jailer who had refused him admittance before said, "Boy, are we glad you showed up! A bunch of Bible-thumpers up there really need your help."

The preacher found out that the prisoners already knew what it took to become Christians. And he "just happened" to have an inflatable child's wading pool in the back of his truck.

The Lord answered the inmates' prayers and saw to it that these men were able to be baptized. Nearly every inmate in that county jail was baptized that day.

This true story took place just before Blake was transferred to El Reno Federal Correctional Institute in Oklahoma. He didn't even have a chance to learn the name of the preacher, and not until later did he realize that he was a member of the church of Christ.

After Blake arrived at El Reno, he gathered together three or four other men to read the Bible with him, curious to know if these men would see the truth as he saw it. They sat outside under the shade of a tree, reading the Scriptures. However, the men were told to break up their regular meetings out of concern for prison security. They had to file grievances for official permission to have a place to study.

Finally, a room was made available to them. They continued their Bible studies and began holding worship services in the prison according to what was shown them in the Bible. Before long, their numbers grew; and they were again baptizing each other.

"Do you think we're the only people who actually adhere to the Bible?" the prisoners wondered.

“Let’s find out!” suggested another prisoner. They began collecting information on different kinds of churches. Other prisoners listed churches where they had grown up.

The men then compiled a list of twenty questions pertaining to the Bible and mailed them out to all those churches. In the responses, some were answered according to the Bible and some not at all according to the Bible.

Then they received a response from Ridgewood church of Christ in Beaumont, Texas. All twenty questions were answered with the same answers the prisoners had found in the Bible. Blake and the other Christian inmates were thrilled to know they had other brothers and sisters in Christ outside prison walls.

A church member near El Reno visited the church in prison. To his amazement, he found that the prisoners had become Christians and were worshiping simply by studying the Bible and with no outside help. Years went by; and when it was time for Blake’s release, some prisoners said, “You’ll forget about all this Bible stuff as soon as you’re on the outside.” But Blake didn’t forget. He continued his service for God in the field of prison ministry, visiting prisoners all over the country.

About this same time, Don Turner’s search for truth seemed like an endless roller coaster ride. Don tried so many religions that confusion and fear became interlaced with faith for Don’s daughter, Sandi. She could trust no one when it came to religion. She believed in God but doubted mankind.

“How can there be so many different denominations and teachings when there’s only one God?” she asked. “How am I supposed to know which one is right?”

Don then began serving time in the El Reno Federal Correctional Institute for tax evasion. While there, he met Blake, who only had one more year to serve, but he studied

the Bible with Don; and on Jan. 13, 1986, outside in freezing cold water, Don was baptized.

After serving eighteen months in prison, Don was released and went home. He and his wife had been divorced since Sandi was six, so he wouldn't be going home to the house where Sandi lived.

Sandi was now sixteen and her younger sister twelve when they went for a weekend visit with their dad. He said, "Why don't we have a Bible study? There are some things I'd like to show you."

They began their study at seven that night. By midnight, Don, with tears in his eyes, baptized both his daughters on June 6, 1987.

After that time, Sandi was never afraid for her soul again. She had learned that she didn't have to depend on man to tell her what to do. She could simply read the Bible.

Later when Sandi attended college in Oklahoma where Blake lived, they became good friends. He was like a dad to her; he protected her. He watched out for her in many ways and was always there, even late at night if she would call.

"Blake!" Sandi shouted one day when seeing him across the large room in the Student Center. She ran to him. Blake opened his arms, scooped her up and spun her around.

That was Sandi's relationship with Blake. God used him to show her Christ's compassion and love.

In June 1993, Blake lay on his death bed. He was dying of cancer. He had received hundreds of cards and letters from friends around the country. But he had finally

asked Brenda, his nurse, not to read them to him any more. He was just too tired and in too much pain. He pleaded for God to take him home.

Friday was an especially hard day for Blake. Brenda said to him, “There’s one letter here for you that seems to be from someone close. Let me read it to you.” She tried to tell him who it was from but kept mispronouncing the woman’s married name, so he didn’t know who it was.

“No.” Blake moaned. Nothing could take away the pain or make him feel better that day. But Brenda decided to read the letter anyway. Blake lay there half-listening until she came to the part about the baby coming and “Sandi” deciding to name the baby after him if it was a boy.

Blake’s senses became alert. “Who?” he asked.

Brenda again faltered over Sandi’s husband’s name but added, “and Sandi.”

“Brenda, you know who that is?”

“No, I don’t,” she said.

“That’s Don’s daughter!”

For the first time that day, Blake perked up. He had Brenda start over in reading the letter. When he heard the part about them naming the baby after him, a big smile came over his face.

He began to tell Brenda about Don and his daughter, what a fine Christian Sandi had become, and what a wonderful Christian man she had married. He talked about how happy he was that he had gone to their wedding. And he said that now he could be certain that they would remain faithful and raise their own Christian family.

Sandi, who lived in Holland by then, didn't know if Blake had received her letter until two years after his death. It was then that Brenda and Sandi met for the first time. Brenda told her the story of how receiving the letter had brought Blake joy in a time of great pain and suffering.

Brenda explained that Blake had heard Sandi's letter on a Friday night. That Sunday, after communion, prayers and singing, he had gently slipped into a coma. Shortly after, he passed away, leaving this legacy behind.

This is just one story from the many lives Blake Williams, a man convicted of a crime but later convicted for Christ, left behind. Without him, this story wouldn't exist.

I was able to write this story because I am Sandi.

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