

Sharing God's Great Gifts in 2018



2017 has come to a close...and with it...memories of Bridge Graduates and Alumni. The stories of many are touching as we experienced at this year's 11th Annual Banquet. It has become clearer to

those of us at The Bridge that many men and women face an epidemic of "pain" played out by the temptation of drugs and alcohol that would rip their lives from loved ones and family. What can be done? We so appreciate the support of awareness that The Bridge received from KSBW 8 NBC and Erin Clark as they brought to light the stories of those affected in our community -- stories of those forgotten, serving time in jail or prison, stories of our very own neighbors who have lost hope. What can be done?

The answer is "Faith in God." The Creator Who loves us and wants us with Him (2 Peter 3:9). His desire for all of us to know His grace and accept the gift that only He can give (2 Timothy 1:7). His arms are open...He is calling us to His rest.

We encourage you to spread the good news that God is love, slow to anger, abundantly patient and personal to each of us. We look forward to an exciting 2018 in sharing His gifts.

Thank You on behalf of the Board along with the Men and Women of The Bridge.

Merry Christmas, Bless You All...
Rick and Lori Barnett



Home for Christmas

Judy Villaneda

This December 23 I will graduate from The Bridge and be home for Christmas. During this past year, I found there truly is such a thing as authentic hope in changing if you really want to and are willing to commit and submit to God's authority over the world and over you. In my case it was either I would really change and give my life to God or it was death. I was always overdosing and ending up in the hospital as Jane Doe. I wasn't suicidal, but the opiates were so strong that I was on a slippery slope. I knew that I had to submit to God's will completely or that was the end. Not if, but when. It was my heart change, not my head change that had to take place. You can't trust your feelings when you're in the condition I was in because they are fickle. I'd get better one day and then the next day when facing a problem I'd begin using again. The drugs were a cheap substitute for the Holy Spirit. I had a God-shaped hole that was getting filled with other things, not God.

Because my family was trying to help me, they found a way to get me to look at an application to The Bridge by giving it to my six-year old daughter to give to me. I couldn't say no. I didn't know about The Bridge and wasn't planning to go into rehab during the holidays. But I knew I was hopeless and like a dead woman full of fear, and anxiety, and depression. It was a day-to-day battle for me before I got into The Bridge last December.

What first began changing me was the strong support and accountability from Michele, who with her husband, Mike, founded The Bridge, and Kathy, the house manager of the house I was in. I

See **Home** other side



From the Director Looking Ahead



Looking ahead to 2018, I'd like to first look back to the promise God gave me some 18 years ago in Joel 2:25, "The Lord will restore the years that the locusts have eaten." In November 1999 following a massive stroke I was told that I would never again walk, drive, work, or be productive. That's when this verse really spoke to me as I turned my life over to God and asked Him to do what He would with it - His will, not mine. Within two years Michele and I began working with people in recovery and then in 2006 we started The Bridge.

We've seen firsthand how God changes people's lives. We look for the full picture of success by seeing how many who graduated some years ago and are still involved and connected to the body of Christ. That number has grown. I regularly see one of our first graduates who was here 12 years ago. I recently got calls from two men in the county jail who just wanted to say, "Hi." When people call, we encourage them and tell them they can give their recovery another chance. We tell them, "It's not how many times you fall, it's how many times you're willing to get up."

So, looking ahead to 2018, we see the need to open another facility that will provide more bed space for men and women in The Bridge program. The need for recovery and restoration is far greater than what we can currently provide. We know it will take prayer, funding, volunteers, and time to do so. Though it's like we're starting all over again, the need to expand our facility is clear and we feel we must answer that call.

2018

Come to Buy Things and Leave With a Gift of Hope

Most of us don't expect to find hope in stores. Well, maybe we're happy when we finally find the shoes we've been looking for or that tool we needed. When walking into the Second Chance Thrift Stores in Monterey or Pacific Grove to find some unique gifts or things we never thought of buying, it wouldn't occur to us that we might also find encouragement for a personal problem we're facing or hear from the person helping us talk about how God changed his life.

"Many customers aren't familiar with our stores," said Michele Casey, manager of both Second Chance stores, "especially those not from this area who think we're just the usual thrift store." Yes, these stores are filled with interesting and unusual items, but the Second Chance Stores don't just sell used things. It's the Christian music playing in the stores that surprises newcomers. "Most customers like the music and some don't, but it is definitely a conversation starter," noted Michele. "They usually ask if this is a Christian store or what church we're affiliated with, which starts many of the conversations between the customers and residents in The Bridge program who work here to learn retail skills. We tell the customers who ask us about the Christian music that we're part of The Bridge, which inspires even deeper conversations. This happens especially with customers who are struggling with problems such as drugs and alcohol. After these conversations, many leave our stores with hope."

Michele recalls one woman who needed some information about a picture she was buying. The conversation about the Christian music became serious as the customer began crying while talking



The Bridge
Bringing the
pieces together.

See **Hope** other side

Home from other side

would say to them, "I don't want to do this," and their response was, "You can do this and you're going to do it." I so needed that. They pushed and encouraged me and enveloped me in prayer and support. I needed to be pushed. I was a spoiled little brat. I knew I had to relearn life as I'd come from a life of not doing laundry, not cooking, losing one job after another. I even drove around high.

Now I've learned from Michele that I don't have to do something, rather I get to do things. I have a new perspective. I want to be a blessing. I'm learning to have a servant's heart. I've learned that it's not all about me. When I first came I was put to work and my life became full. I went to church, devotions, Bible studies. There was no down time to feel sorry for myself. No idle time to sit and mope. I found that it didn't do me any good. I learned to ask myself if I'm doing things with a joyful heart.

Living with people in different stages of their lives in The Bridge has helped me. All the women with me in the program have been such a blessing and I've learned many lessons, for instance how to live with six women and one bathroom. I've learned to cook and love it, how to be clean and tidy, how to do things now rather than putting them off to do later. Michele and Mike reward us when we do well, not just spank your hand when you don't do well. Their motto is "Do the next right thing." Sometimes it's hard, but The Bridge gave me the tools to put into my shed of life and they taught me how to use them.

Now I have three weeks left here. I get to have my sobriety test. Before I came here I hadn't been sober for six years. Now I have my family and a job working for my grandmother and aunt. I'm blessed to do homework with my kids. Last year I was spending money on drugs instead of my children. This year I was so glad to spend money on them. I know all these changes come from God. It's not my strength and power. All I need to do is to be obedient, even when it's hard to do so, and God blesses me with His help.

It's important for me to stay connected with The Bridge. I want to thank the women who poured into my life with Bible scriptures/studies, who mentored and loved me, faults and all. All of these women go to Calvary. They are truly a part of my arduous journey back to freedom. I have made lifelong relationships. They loved me when I couldn't love myself, and my family couldn't love me because they didn't know me anymore. But the Lord loved on me through them. Michele and Kathy are really out to help the men and women in The Bridge. I so admire them for it. They are my spiritual Moms. I needed to know how to pray and how to wait on the Lord. Now I can get my car and a driver's license back. I can afford to pay rent. I am so grateful for my husband sticking by my side – as have my parents and my family. Without their support and the support of my new family in The Bridge and Calvary church I could not have done it. I love The Bridge and Calvary and am so grateful for the many hands that helped me put my life back in the direction it should have been, for all those in the Bridge family who welcomed, prayed, and accepted my husband and children into their family. They truly, through God, saved my life. Thank You Jesus!

Hope from other side

about serious problems with her son. Though she initially came to browse in a thrift store, she also had a deep and inspiring talk with Michele, who knows the Lord and could talk to the customer about Him. "We never know when God has a divine appointment for us with a customer, and we've had quite a few," Michele said. "So it is not unusual when someone leaves the store not only with some item they found, but also with a different outlook about God, about Jesus, about life."

Come to Second Chance Stores for Christian Christmas Gifts

Though people usually don't go to thrift stores like the Second Chance stores in Pacific Grove or Monterey to find Christmas presents, they're in for a surprise. "Our Christmas gifts, decorations, and ornaments were really popular last year," said Michele Casey, manager of the two stores. She recalls how people who came to the stores last year were so pleased with the selection of special Christian items such as journals, notebooks, and bags with Scripture on them that the stores ordered more this year for customers. "There are no Christian stores or book stores that offer these items in our immediate area, so people are surprised and pleased when they see what we have," said Michele. "So come on in and see what we've got – and definitely expect to hear some Christmas music."



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**Thank you for your support,
happy shopping!**

prayers and support in 2017!

Thank You for all your

and Board Members of The Bridge

From All the Men & Women

*Merry Christmas &
Happy New Year!*

The Bridge
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