



PRISON
FELLOWSHIP

FOR WOMEN

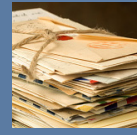
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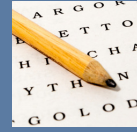
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How Kellie Found the Key to Freedom

by Emily Andrews

Kellie Thimmes stood in front of the mirror, shocked by the miserable 88-pound woman staring back at her. Eyes dark and sunken, arms bruised by drug use—how had her life come to this?

Kellie's life hadn't always reflected such hopelessness. Raised in Colorado in a stable family, she attended college on a swimming scholarship and pursued a career as a nurse. She married her high school sweetheart and had two kids. Life seemed good. But the young mom felt like something was missing.

Lost in the cycle

"I was constantly searching for something to fill the void that I felt," she admits. Overeating, over-shopping, over-exercising, and late-night partying with co-



Photo by Chad Prince

Kellie seemed to have it all. But restlessness led to meth addiction and prostitution. Weighing only 88 pounds, she was at death's door—until prison saved her.

workers—Kellie tried it all. At one party, she saw a tray with lines of cocaine coming her way. She decided to sample it.

"Immediately, I felt like I had arrived," says Kellie. "I

felt like, 'This is the answer. This is filling the emptiness that I feel.'"

As quickly as she'd discovered cocaine, Kellie was addicted. She left her

job and her family to live on the streets. Cocaine led to crystal meth. Soon she was not only using but selling drugs, burglarizing homes, and prostituting herself.

She got pregnant two more times during her short stints of clean time. Her children went to live with her parents while she continued life on the streets. Once she was robbed and beaten almost beyond recognition.

Kellie tried to free herself from the mess, but she felt powerless. "I was depressed, and the more depressed I got, the more drugs I did," she explains. "The more drugs I did, the more depressed I got. ... And I wasn't a person you would want to be around."

Eventually, Kellie hit her rock bottom. Her tired feet had entered and left more rehabs than she could count. Her weary eyes had seen so much darkness. Her knees hit the floor, and it wasn't just from exhaustion; she felt hopeless and needed to pray. She cried out, "God, if You're real, You need to show up—and show up now—because

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Conflict: What's Your Piece of the Pie?

by Danielle Arnold

Let's face it: women sometimes clash.

"You won't believe what she did!"

"Did you hear what she called me?"

Occasionally a woman walks into my office wanting

to vent about a problem she has with her roommate. The conversation usually centers on what the other person is doing wrong; sometimes it's a long list. Eventually I ask the woman to pause. I draw a circle on a piece of paper, and sometimes the woman rolls her eyes, because she knows what's coming next.

"This conflict is like a big

pie on the table," I remind her. "How big is your piece? What do you control?"

The roots of conflict

Generally, we raise little girls to be polite and nurturing. We give them dolls and tell them to play nice. These traits have an instinctive basis for most women, but without appropriate self-worth and boundaries, these nurturing little girls can grow up to be women who avoid or mismanage conflict.

Poor conflict-resolution skills show themselves when women live together in the close quarters of a prison environment. When an issue arises, instead of dealing with it openly and respectfully, some women keep it behind closed doors. They may gossip to vent their frustration or insult one another. Or they may be too afraid of conflict to deal with it, and turn their anger and frustration inward,

which can lead to depression or self-harm.

... Women may feel tempted to control others—an impossible job that leads to codependency, anxiety, and frustration.

Unhealthy conflict has its roots in poor personal boundaries. Without good boundaries, women may feel tempted to control others—an impossible job that leads to codependency, anxiety, and frustration.

To go in a healthier direction, I offer you the same advice I give women in my unit. Sit

down, look at the "pie" that represents your conflict, and draw the slice that shows what you have control over. Focus on things inside your slice—your actions, thoughts, and feelings.

By having a laser focus on your slice, you can stop letting your personal growth be hindered by the chaos around you. And within these healthier boundaries, you can find the freedom to act with greater respect for yourself and your community.

Less tension, more unity

Dealing with conflict in healthy ways is easier said than done. If you've been around poor examples of conflict resolution your whole life, you will tend to repeat what you know. But you can get out of the rut of toxic conflict. If you work through it thoughtfully and respectfully, conflict can actually strengthen your relationships.

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leekris/GettyImages

Conflict is like a pie. Decide how much of the problem you're responsible for, and only focus on the "slice" you can control.

Your Letters



Photo by Taralyn Quigley

challenging, so we encourage you to find a good community and focus on your goals one day at a time. We look forward to having you share your story someday. Stay positive and keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

Victoria, Nevada

I am 42 years old. I have been given a sentence of 18 years to life. Tonight one of my sisters in Christ gave me the Inside Journal for Women to read. As I was reading I came across your article “Are you fumbling in the dark?” Throughout my life I have known God, but I am just now developing an intimate relationship with Him. ...

Dear Victoria:

We are so glad that you found Inside Journal, and we pray you continue growing in your relationship with God and seeing His light replace any darkness in your life. ■

Staceyann, Florida

I love to read the Inside Journal for me. It is inspirational to me, and all those testimonies touch my heart. ... I go home this year, and I would like to keep in touch and share my life story with Inside Journal one day ...

Dear Staceyann:

It's great to hear that Inside Journal has been encouraging. Life after release can be

Here at Inside Journal, we get a lot of letters, and we want you to know we read them all. Sometimes, we share these letters in this section. Please keep them coming! Yours in Christ, Annie Goebel, director of programs and special events at Prison Fellowship

Cecile, Oklahoma

I came across Inside Journal on the book cart. High point, even though you guys always bring me to tears. Going to sign up for the Bible study—thank you! Some days in here you wonder where humanity is? Where's our own humanity? Thank you for keeping us walking toward the light ...

Dear Cecile:

Humanity is alive and well—there are so many people, even total strangers, praying for you and other women each day. Keep your head up and your faith strong!

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

At Inside Journal® (IJ), we receive many letters each week from prisoners asking for subscriptions to our newspaper. We are grateful for the interest and support of our readers—however, because of limitations on our staff and budget, IJ is only available in bulk shipments to your chaplain, programming coordinator, or a volunteer who visits your facility. Chaplains, to set up these shipments for free, please contact our editorial staff at P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790 or insidejournal@pfm.org.

Piece of the Pie

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When we all have healthy boundaries and work through conflict well, the results are beautiful. We get past blaming others and shaming ourselves, and we reap a sense of community and unity. Here are some tips for handling conflicts in open, loving, and productive ways:

1. Acknowledge your emotions.

Have you ever heard a woman say, “I’m fine!” when it’s obvious she’s not? To avoid conflict and please others, women often learn to bury painful emotions. But you can’t work through conflict without first identifying what you feel and why. In a journal, practice being real about your emotions. Is there fear or anxiety under your anger? Did someone’s offhand comment trigger a sense of shame you’ve been carrying around for years? Understanding your deeper issues is key to successfully moving through conflict instead of repeating it over and over.

2. Use “I” statements.

This is part of owning your piece of the pie, and letting others own theirs. When you are working through a conflict, concentrate on your own actions, reactions, and emotions with phrases like “I feel ...” and “I think ...” As you consciously do this, it will help you to stop focusing on other people’s actions and emotions, which are outside your control.

3. Practice reflective listening.

Sometimes, during a conflict, you might race ahead to the next point you want to make, without waiting to hear what your conflict partner is saying.

Practice slowing down so you can really listen.

Practice slowing down so you can really listen. Then reflect it back to her. You could use a statement like, “I hear you saying that when I said X, it caused you to feel Y.” This shows your conflict partner you are listening carefully, and it also gives her a chance to clear up any misunderstanding.

It takes some practice and commitment, but having good boundaries and healthy conflict resolution can revolutionize your life. As you invest your energy in the things you can control, and not the pieces you can’t, you’ll experience greater freedom, confidence, and personal growth. And when you maintain those boundaries in your community, you’ll develop a more positive, encouraging environment to pursue the changes you want to make in your life.

Danielle Arnold works with women in the Prison Fellowship Academy, a holistic life-transformation program at Nebraska Correctional Center for Women in York, Nebraska. ■

Key to Freedom

Continued from page 1

I’m going to die.”

Two days later, she was arrested.

Carted to prison in a white van, Kellie looked out the window and saw razor-wire fences and armed guards. She was terrified as she began her six-year sentence. Still, she told herself, *You’re going to come out of these gates a better woman. Not this empty, broken person that you are walking in.*

“...as women, we have all these insecurities, especially if we’ve lost our kids.”

A reflection of hope

While incarcerated, Kellie began attending church and enrolled in the Prison Fellowship Academy™, a year-long life-transformation program that she postponed her parole to complete. She knew she needed to surround herself with good influences and tackle her issues directly.



Photo by Chad Prince

Kellie’s key necklace is a symbol of the freedom she found when God unlocked her heavy chains of addiction.

“When I first started the Academy, I didn’t feel like I qualified just because of all the mistakes I had made,” says Kellie, “as if no one could be as bad as me. I feel like as women, we have all these insecurities, especially if we’ve lost our kids. We feel like we could never be forgiven for

that. The Academy helped me look at that issue. I learned how to love myself.”

With the help of Academy volunteers, Kellie faced the root of her shame and identity issues. She met with a mentor once a week and learned how to set healthy boundaries in habits and relationships.

“I have made a ton of mistakes, but my mistakes don’t define me,” says Kellie.

Through the Academy, Kellie realized what she had been missing for so long—a relationship with Jesus Christ.

“I wasn’t ready [to change] until I hit my knees and cried out to Jesus,” she admits.

“He had to be the one to say, ‘Look, you’ve tried every other power, and nothing worked. I’m going to show you I’m the answer.’”

After Kellie’s release, friends helped her face the challenges of reentry and find housing and employment. She connected with a church, found a mentor, and joined a Celebrate Recovery group for accountability and guidance.

Today she is living a life she never thought would be possible. She works at a dental water lab, using the biology degree she earned before prison. She and her husband—who is also a former prisoner—live in Denver and stay actively involved in church. Recently, Kellie has even gone back to prison to share her testimony and pour hope into others. And she’s slowly mending relationships with her children and trusting in God’s timing.

Now when she looks in the mirror, Kellie likes who she sees. And she doesn’t just have a refreshed appearance. She has a transformed heart. “It has nothing to do with me,” she says, “and everything to do with God.” ■

The Good Kind of Fear

by Grayson Pope

Abby was the living definition of a “good girl.” Raised in a family of perfectionists, she worked hard in school and earned high grades. She went to college, got a good job, got married, and had two children.

But she wasn’t at peace. Inside she had a craving for acceptance that was never satisfied. She always said “yes,” never “no.” She didn’t just want people to like her—she needed them to. Approval was her drug, and her greatest fear was that other people would stop loving her.

So Abby did whatever she need to keep the approval of her friends and family. She bought gifts for them that she couldn’t afford, and before long, she was embezzling money from her employer to pay for them.

Abby became so depressed because of her activities that she considered killing herself. Finally she gathered the courage to tell her boss and her family that she had been breaking the law. Her worst fears were realized.

Have you ever lived as a slave to others’ opinion of you? It turns your life into a rickety rollercoaster of insecurity. If they praise you one day, you’re on top of the world. If they criticize you the next day, you feel resentful and depressed. Terrified of losing their approval, you bend over backwards to meet their demands—even when it’s not good for you.

When you live to please people, you might seem “nice” on the surface, but your relationships aren’t healthy or loving if they are based on fear. It’s not a path that leads to true joy.

Respecting God—a healthy fear

The Bible tells us there’s a better way. Matthew 10:28 says, “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

So, are you just supposed to cower before God instead, hoping a lightning bolt isn’t headed your way?

No. The Bible talks about different kinds of fear. There’s the kind you usually think of—the fear you experience when a threatening person or situation confronts you.

It’s fear that makes you try to please someone to avoid getting hurt. The Bible says that God’s perfect love, demonstrated through His Son Jesus, actually casts out that kind of terror.

But there’s another kind of fear—the loving, respectful fear that a child has for a good, committed parent whose love is unconditional. A child who loves and respects her parent wants to do everything she can to please him or her—not because she fears being punished or rejected, but because she is confident in her identity as a beloved child, and knows it’s in her best interest to follow her parent’s plans for her well-being.

When the Bible talks about fearing God, it’s referring to this loving type of fear—fear rooted in respect and love for



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Do you worry about others’ approval? Does conflict give you anxiety? Trade your fears for peace.

TIRED OF WALKING ON EGGHELLS?

Replace your anxiety about gaining the approval of others with a loving, respectful fear of God. The Bible says, “Fear of the Lord leads to life, bringing security and protection from harm” (Proverbs 19:23). So how do you shift your focus off others and onto God? Start with a simple prayer:

Lord, I have been looking to other people to fill me up with their approval, but only You can do that. You love me on my good days and my bad says. I want to be Your child. I want to receive Your grace and forgiveness. Make me new from the inside out, and teach me how to love, serve, and respect You, no matter what anyone else says. Amen.

If you’d like to learn more about God’s love, Inside Journal wants to connect you with a partner organization that offers a free correspondence Bible study. Write to “Walking on Eggshells,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box. 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. You can also get an Inside Journal NLT Life Recovery Bible (limit one per person). To receive a Bible, write to: Tyndale House Publishers, Attn: Inside Journal Bible, 351 Executive Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188 with your name, prison ID number, and institution name and address.

God the Father. So, a woman with a healthy fear of God is not terrified of Him. She understands that while God can destroy the body and soul, He doesn’t want to. In fact, God “wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Respect is earned, grace is given

The truth is that God is full of grace. He loves you so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, who willingly sacrificed Himself and died for everything you’ve ever done wrong, and all He asks in return is that you accept Him into your heart.

In our world, approval is not always given without a price. But God’s grace does not need to be earned—it’s free and available to all who believe in Jesus.

In prison, Abby had lost the approval of most of the people in her community, but she found something better

that gave her hope: God’s unconditional love. She knew that when God looked at her, He saw a beloved child. That realization gave her the strength to get through the rest of her sentence and rebuild her life and relationships on the outside. And because she no longer sought others’ approval, she had peace that nothing could shake.

What if you did the same? What if, instead of fearing other people and their opinion of you, you were unconditionally loved and accepted by an all-powerful God?

Being in good relationships with others is important, but as Abby learned through her anxieties, you will never find peace by focusing on approval of others. True peace comes from the Lord. If you fearfully respect God, and accept the never-ending grace He freely offers, you’ll find what you’ve been searching for all along. ■

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Word Search: Important Qualities

How many of the words below can you find in the puzzle? (Words are hidden left-to-right, right-to-left, upward, downward, and diagonally)

Respectful, Valued, Honesty, Worth, Helpful, Humble, Obedient, Reasonable, Decent, Kind, Useful, Sympathy, Good, Favor

Y	A	U	Q	I	D	H	L	D	T	Y	D	T	B	E
R	N	Z	A	E	F	U	U	Q	N	H	S	O	X	O
A	M	Y	C	Q	F	M	F	Y	E	T	Z	U	O	M
C	S	E	E	U	I	B	E	W	I	A	K	K	U	G
W	N	R	Q	F	V	L	S	H	D	P	S	C	B	I
T	P	E	L	E	Q	E	U	C	E	M	G	L	D	L
T	A	S	V	A	L	U	E	D	B	Y	H	Y	U	W
N	D	P	R	O	V	A	F	I	O	S	T	F	O	D
A	Q	E	I	L	X	H	L	E	T	S	P	R	F	N
U	Y	C	B	L	Y	K	F	R	E	L	T	G	U	I
L	E	T	N	Z	B	S	Y	N	E	H	S	D	X	K
J	U	F	I	P	R	S	O	H	X	U	P	W	D	M
N	G	U	V	D	T	H	F	D	Z	B	V	S	Z	G
C	Y	L	E	L	B	A	N	O	S	A	E	R	R	D
R	Q	P	W	Q	S	P	E	X	M	V	G	G	R	R

Abuse, Boundaries, and the Road to Self-Respect

by Emily Andrews

Annette Oltmans co-founded The M3ND Project, an organization that seeks to educate, equip, and restore survivors of abuse. Because so many women behind bars have been affected by abuse themselves, she sat down with Inside Journal to share her own journey, and to discuss how readers can find healing, self-respect, and healthy boundaries.

Inside Journal: What led you to start The M3ND Project?

Annette Oltmans: I experienced marital abuse, and at the same time, I witnessed a child go through a crisis of molestation. When we reached out for help, we both received criticism and were shunned by some close friends and family. I was inspired to go on a deep and long research project about the layers of abuse and simplify the topic for victims and their communities. I learned that when victims reach out for help, they often are re-victimized. I trademarked the term “double abuse,” because how can we stop it if it doesn’t have a name?

IJ: Tell us a bit more about Double Abuse®.

AO: Double Abuse occurs when friends, family, authority figures, or even therapists doubt or downplay the victim’s experience or pass judgment, or define the situation by their own biases, rather than



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If you’ve been a victim of abuse, don’t isolate yourself or give up hope. Reach out for help, and keep searching until you find the right resources and advocates.

listening to, empowering, and helping the victim. It’s so important to confront the issue, give the victim a voice, and see what’s really going on.

IJ: What might help incarcerated women on their journey to healing?

AO: The main thing is learning to find your identity in Christ. Everyone matters to God. Incarceration can be an opportunity for women to face their mistakes, and the experiences that shaped them and led them down that path. Facing areas of growth and developing positive character traits will help them overcome the challenges that continue, sometimes unfairly, after their release.

There are resources to help you. Never give up looking for resources. It only takes finding that one person who will listen and believe you and advocate for you. Keep searching until you find safe, compassionate people who will listen.

IJ: How can a person form healthy boundaries?

AO: If you have unhealthy friends around you, and they keep asking you for advice but never listen to it, or they encourage you to continue bad habits, that’s toxic. None of us is perfect, but you need to surround yourself with people who are willing to grow and change if they need to. If you confront someone, and they throw it back at

you and reverse the blame onto you, you may need to remove yourself from that relationship. It’s like a bad break-up—you know you’re going to miss that person at the beginning, but ultimately it opens the door for you to move on to the right person. It’s about guarding your heart. Scripture says, “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life” (Proverbs 4:23).

IJ: What does “guarding your heart” have to do with self-respect?

AO: There are voices everywhere that will tell you to isolate yourself. They will tell you that you are worth nothing. But God cares about

every single one of us, and we are so valuable to Him. We have to guard our hearts against the lies that tell us otherwise. One of the ways we experience His love is through healthy connection with others. We need connection with safe people. We cannot grow and heal in isolation. Surround yourself with people who will help you name your experience. Find people who will speak Christ’s words into your life, gently confront you when necessary, and always show compassion rather than condemnation.

IJ: What has surprised you about the healing process?

AO: What helped me was the advice, “Get out and help someone.” At first, I kept thinking, *How can I possibly help someone? I’m so broken, so afraid.* But I learned that you can help someone else because you’ve been in their shoes. That gave me a purpose and actually helped me keep moving forward. By helping other women, I was able to work through some of my own things.

IJ: Do you have any final advice for our readers?

AO: Find a support group. You need Christ, coaches, counselors, and comrades to pour into you and come alongside you on this journey. Use the time inside to practice, strengthen, and develop your character so you’re ready when you’re outside. Even if you’re serving a life sentence, your attitude matters more than your aptitude. It’s worth it to invest in your growth now. ■

NEWS + NOTES

Fighting Cancer From Within

Soledad, Calif.—The men inside Correctional Training Facility of Soledad, California (CTF Soledad), participated in the third annual Relay For Life cancer walk on June 23, called “Fighting Cancer From Within.” This year, men inside CTF Soledad donated more than \$15,000.

The Balanced Reentry Activity Group and The American Cancer Society helped organize the event, in which participants walked around the central yard to raise money for the cause.

Over the past three years, this event has raised more than \$40,000 to help support Relay for Life of Salinas. Some of those prior donations were raised by men behind bars. Their family and friends contributed the rest.

According to one Prison Fellowship volunteer who

helped some of the prisoners ask for donations, these prisoners love being a part of the event and contributing to a cause much bigger than themselves.

Other in-prison cancer fundraiser/awareness walks have taken place in the past year, as well, including the Mini Relay for Life at Folsom’s Women’s Facility and the Relay For Life at Avenal State Prison. ■

Prisoners’ Children Find a Safe Space


Los Angeles, Calif.—Twenty students have their eyes fixed on the man in the front of the room. It’s lunchtime on a recent Wednesday at Venice High School. The man is assigning a writing prompt to the students who have one thing in common—someone in their family is or has been behind bars.

Prisoners’ family members sometimes experience an

unfair stigma, and they can’t always share what they’re going through. The organization sponsoring this writing workshop, POPS (short for “Pain Of the Prison System”), battles against this stigma and works to create a safe place for students with incarcerated family members. The organization was launched in 2013 by editor and author Amy Friedman and her husband Dennis Danziger—the man giving the writing prompts—who is also a playwright and novelist.

Students attending POPS meetings are equipped and encouraged to write their stories as a restorative process. Writing stirs emotions and creativity and allows the students to bond with one another. The organization hopes to bring POPS to as many U.S. high schools as possible.

Meanwhile, students at Venice High School who thought they had to hide part of their lives are finding a safe space every Wednesday at lunchtime. ■



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ANSWER KEY: Word Search

Y A U Q I D H L D T Y D T B E	DECENT (diagonal)
R N Z A E F U U Q N H S O X O	FAVOR (right-to-left)
A M Y C Q F M F Y E T Z U O M	GOOD (diagonal)
C S E E U I B E W I A K K U G	HELPFUL (diagonal)
W N R Q F V L S H D P S C B I	HONESTY (diagonal)
T P E L E Q E U C E M G L D L	HUMBLE (down)
T A S V A L U E D B Y H Y U W	KIND (up)
N D P R O V A F I O S T F O D	OBEDIENT (up)
A Q E I L X H L E T S P R F N	REASONABLE (right-to-left)
U Y C B L Y K F R E L T G U I	RESPECTFUL (down)
L E T N Z B S Y N E H S D X K	SYMPATHY (up)
J U F I P R S O H X U P W D M	USEFUL (up)
N G U V D T H F D Z B V S Z G	VALUED (left-to-right)
C Y L E L B A N O S A E R R D	WORTH (diagonal)
R Q P W Q S P E X M V G G R R	