

Eve's Testimony

I was born on July 17, 1954 in Seneca, South Carolina at Oconee Memorial Hospital. My mother, Geraldine Evelyn Owens was not married. I never knew nor met my biological father. Despite the hardships, I am still thankful for my mother and grandmother. They both always loved and cared for me.

My mama taught me much about the love of God.

Calvin loved to travel around the United States, and we were growing tired of all the instability. My mother was growing weary of our constant moves. She longed to settle down and put down some roots. Calvin finally agreed. We moved to Fairburn, Georgia in the summer of 1967. It seemed surreal that our traveling was winding down. Our hearts were singing. I was excited and hopeful that this year would be different for me at Eastern Elementary as an 7th grader! I'll never forget making friends with Milana Thames, Kathy Vincent and a few other girls. I had to learn to quit comparing myself with my other classmates. One of my classmates, seemed to enjoy teasing me. One day, I finally stood up to her and threatened to meet her after school. For some reason, my problems abruptly stopped!

We moved into a small, two-bedroom house in Fairburn. We had a nice back porch where we could sit and talk. Forever are the memories of walking in my sleep. I'd climb out of my top bunk-bed and walk to the back porch. A few seconds later, I'd get scared and run back and climb into another bed with my sister! Sleep-walking lasted for several years until we moved to College Park.

After we got settled, Pastor Jarrett came to visit us and invited us to Buffington Road Christian Church. He was very friendly and seemed so genuine and concerned for our family. I couldn't help but wonder if everyone was like him.

We attended Buffington Road for several months. I really enjoyed my Sunday school class--especially my teacher. I was finally making friends. I began to feel at home in this small church.

Pastor Jarrett preached the gospel with compassion. He helped me to realize that life is complicated and we need a Savior! Life is easier with the Lord. God can help us navigate those valleys.

That summer, I was invited to a local Good-News Club for children. The host family was such a blessing to me. We played games and had lots of fun. The Woodard's love for Jesus Christ created a strong desire in me to know Him. I wanted what they had—I began to seek the Lord in my life. I needed forgiveness, unconditional love and acceptance. Although I can't remember the date, I will never forget that decision. In the summer of 1967, I was able to go to Christian

camp. I will never forget some of the songs we sang—Miry Clay, I've got the Joy, Father Abraham! That summer reformed my life.

Looking back, I am so grateful that mama got us into church. Her decision made a huge difference in my life. Although it would take years for God to conform me to His image, I'm thankful that He never gave up on me.

Pastor Jarrett convinced Calvin to attend a Half-Way House. His alcoholism, drugs issues, and domestic abuse were devastating his family. Calvin would attend Rehab but it never helped. He refused to allow God to change his life. We all wept. Our family needed spiritual freedom from darkness—especially in our home. Oh, how we wanted Calvin to change but as far as I know, he never did. We prayed for years—so we never know for sure.

Earlier in 1969, mother was approved for a USDA home loan. Her dream of owning her home was finally becoming a reality. Everything she'd ever wanted was a dream come true—a large kitchen and living room, and three large bedrooms. For the first time in years, mama was ecstatic.

Within a couple of months, our family moved into our new “Hillandale” home. We were so excited at the prospect of settling down, making friends and being happy. In 1970, I began the 10th grade at M.D. Collins high school. Although I was quite nervous, I still was optimistic. Making friends wouldn't be easy—especially with my emotional baggage.

Life continued to be disruptive at times. Sometimes at night, Calvin would come home drunk, out of control, cursing and hitting mother. We'd jump in the car and run away out of danger. I'm sure our neighbors were tired of it. Sure—it was embarrassing. Calvin became known as the local drunkard! I was so exhausted at the problems in our lives. Sometimes, I wanted to move away.

One summer afternoon, Charles, a young man from the church visited us. I was not expecting him at all. Out of the blue, Calvin showed up, and threatened Charles with a pocket-knife! Needless to say, Charles ran for his life, and never called again. We were so furious! I knew that we couldn't trust Calvin anymore—if only he would repent. Mother knew that she had to do something, but what? Calvin was a danger to our family. We honestly lived in fear--never knowing when Calvin would turn our home into a battleground.

High school was a completely different battleground for me. M.D. Collins was a brand-new high school. Lots of new students flowed into the halls and rooms looking for acceptance. I was a naïve, and insecure teenager. I had hoped my Sophomore year wouldn't be too complicated. I didn't realize that social circles were so popular. All of us were looking for a friend or group to get connected. High school was a whole new world and sometimes, I felt like an oddball and so lonely.

In the meantime, I tried to focus on the most important things--my classes, a few friends, and my family. I thoroughly enjoyed art and home economics and gymnastics. My teachers were so encouraging. I developed a love for art, sewing and singing. My art class was so fulfilling for me-- ceramic pottery, wire sculptures, weaving and free-hand drawing was definitely therapeutic.

As our heavenly Father created us, therefore, we are designed for relationships. We all need people in our lives. Hopefully, the friends we allow into our lives will be loyal and non-toxic. In my case, I followed anyone who would befriend me. Never considering the consequences of my choices, I was headed for trouble. I didn't see the storms arising.

During study hall, I walked outside the school with another classmate. I discovered a friendly group of teenagers. Most of them were puffing cigarettes, marijuana, or talking about their sexy boyfriends. They loved to party at the downtown disco, drink and spend weekends with their boyfriends. I was surprised. It wouldn't be long before I'd be doing the same things—smoking, drinking and partying with the wrong kind of people. After all, birds of one feather, fly together. “The people we surround ourselves with either raise or lower our standards.” Matthew Kelly. “We all need people in our lives who remind us of our essential purpose, and challenge us to become the best version of ourselves.”

My standards were definitely flying downhill quickly. What was I thinking?

The weekend marijuana and beer parties were a big mistake. Couples were hanging out behind closed doors and participating in ungodly things. There were times that I could hardly drive home! The Lord was definitely looking out for me.

My Mother never knew—after all, she worked full-time and was too busy trying to keep her family together. Mother had her plate full-- stress, anxiety, physical fatigue, mother simply couldn't handle all the issues in our family. Her husband Calvin didn't help at all. Unfortunately, mother failed to set boundaries for her girls. We could actually come and go as we pleased. We never had curfews, rules or guidelines for relationships or discipline in our home.

In 1972, I quit school after I finished the 11th grade. Our family was falling apart and I was tired of high-school cliques. I was unable to build any solid friendships. Every social or sports endeavor was a loss for me. I simply didn't have the motivation to be proactive. I was tired and restless. I honestly felt like a loser.

In the summer, Calvin abandoned our family and run off with another woman. Sadly, we lost our home--mother became sick. I went to work at JC Penney's to help Mother but I was laid off after Christmas. I was struggling to find a purpose in my life. I didn't want to simply survive, I wanted a better life. In 1974, I made a decision to get my GED and join the military. I was desperate to experience a happier, normal life—if such a thing existed.

I signed up for Germany and spent my first 6 weeks in Basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. What an experience! Our military post was situated at the foothills of the beautiful Appalachian Mountains!

Basic training would change all of us! Our female drill sergeant was very strict and proficient at yelling and tongue bashing. Rising at 5am was so hard. Following strict schedules, dress codes and behavioral demands were very challenging; nevertheless, they helped me become a more disciplined person. In the spring of 1974, I graduated from basic training a better person. I couldn't wait to start the next phase of Army training!

My girlfriend and I were transferred to Fort Knox, Kentucky with a combat MOS—or job. Upon our arrival, we were given the opportunity to choose another profession—which was a miracle! Neither of us wanted an office position. I wanted something different and challenging. Donna convinced me to join ranks with the military-police! We transferred to Fort Gordon, Georgia and became roommates at the women's barracks. We enjoyed our time there—had lots of great experiences. I'll never forget my dear friend, Pat Shook—she was a great encouragement. Eight weeks later, we graduated! Before flying overseas to Frankfurt, I was able to visit my family.

Upon arrival in Frankfurt, I was assigned to the 385th MP Battalion. As the only female cop in our company, I knew that competition was inevitable. In order to win the respect of my counterparts, I'd have to work hard and not expect an easy road. After several months, I won a couple of awards and was promoted ahead of my peers! I was finally able to demonstrate my skills. Living in the women's barracks was challenging. I am so thankful that I passed those tests. During that season of my life, I was thankful to be accomplishing something worthwhile.

During the fall of 1974, I asked to be reassigned to Goeppingen, Germany. My older sister, Glenda and her husband, Bob Hammond were stationed there at Cooke Barracks. I couldn't wait to be reunited with their children-- Bobby, Michelle, and David. We were all excited!

Within days, I moved to the women's barracks at Cooke Barracks. I was excited to finally be in a place with family and friends.

I don't recall how this happened, but the Lord brought Debbie Chesser, Janet Holloway and Lucy Clark into my life. I was a carnal Christian and wasn't living for the Him. The Lord knew I needed godly influence. Isn't it interesting that He knows everything about us, yet He still loves us?

In 1975, Debbie and Lucy invited me to the Billy Graham Crusade in Brussels, Belgium! For the first time in my life, we traveled by train to Brussels to the Heizel Stadium. In a large room, we camped in our sleeping bags with dozens of other young women! What a wonderful experience!

Every morning, we participated in Bible Studies and prayer with our group leader and several other people. Afterwards, we watched skits and other programs. During the day, we fellowshiped with other young people. I cannot recall how many people I met from all over the Europe!

In the evening, we all flocked to the stadium. We really enjoyed Billy Graham's inspiring messages. I can never forget these words, "God loves you and He has a purpose for your life!" Personally, I was overwhelmed and convicted at his powerful preaching. During the altar call, I saw hundreds of young people kneel in prayer. What a joy to see so many come to Jesus. A huge revival broke out in that arena. I praise the Lord for this amazing opportunity in my life. Memories that will never fade.

God used that event to remind me of His great love and faithfulness. Isn't it incredible that He can orchestrate events like this?? He is powerful. His love for us "never changes" regardless of our attitudes, sin problems or disobedience.

At the conference, someone gave me a Good News Bible. Inside the front cover, I had written my testimony of salvation. My mother kept that Bible for many years! I am so thankful for Chaplain Nelson and the other godly examples at Cooke Barracks. God used Chaplain Nelson and others to draw me closer to the Lord. I clearly saw the Light of the Gospel in their lives.

In 1976, I departed the military and returned home for a new beginning. I was happy to be back in Seneca, South Carolina with my mother and the rest of the family. I was surprised that Calvin and mother had reunited. His behavior had not changed. Alcoholism, drug addiction and adultery still controlled him.

In the summer of 1976, I had finished my semester and was looking for things to do. My sister Glenda had divorced her husband and moved back home—without her children. Glenda had not changed.

She convinced me and Kathy to move to St. Petersburg, Florida.

Since I wasn't working, I thought, "Why not?" I drove my 1970 Volkswagen Bug with Kathy and her son, Jeremiah, and Glenda with all our belongings! I was paying for most of the expenses, including gas, food and the apartment! I should have known better. I was beginning to understand the insanity of my decision.

Within several days, Glenda had arranged an interview for me at a local Strip club. What was she thinking?? Of course, I'd could never, ever do this. About two weeks later, I managed to find work at a local T-shirt shop. I really enjoyed working there! I made some great friends. Glenda was too lazy to work! Kathy couldn't because of her son, Jeremiah. They both depended on me.

Unfortunately, at the age of 22, I was very naïve and unwise. While I worked, Glenda and Kathy enjoyed their free time in my car. In the evenings, Glenda and Kathy loved to drink and party at the local bars. One evening, I met a young man named Gordy. He was good-looking and super friendly. I was naively

attracted to men who thought I was pretty. Gordy lived in his boat—that should have been a red flag for me. We started dating. He invited me over and consequently, and I became pregnant. I felt so stupid for this.

My friends were happy for me, but I was scared. I called mother and she arranged for me to fly home. Now long before I left, Glenda wrecked my Volkswagon Bug! She drove it into a lake. I never saw it again. Oh, the valuable lessons I learned from this experience.

Once I arrived home, I was feeling very remorseful. Mother was happy to see me but also concerned for me and my future. I was only a few weeks pregnant and very confused. Mother convinced me to get an abortion. I had no idea what I was doing. I only wish I'd done my homework. No one warned me about the consequences of this decision. We went to Atlanta and I killed that unborn baby. Afterwards, deep down in my soul, I wept and realized that I had made a huge mistake. I tried to move on with my life, but I couldn't forget it. Those shameful memories would pop up unexpectedly. We simply can't sweep our sins under the rug! Only Jesus! Only He can help us overcome our sin and shame.

We can be sure that the Lord sees everything. He knew what I had done, and although it broke His heart, He still loved me. I am so glad that God's love carries me-- His work in my life will continue until He takes me home.

Only God could develop me into the woman I needed to be. I was definitely a mess! God knew however that I would eventually need healing from the shame and guilt of my sins. He would do it. The shame of my sin would cast a shadow in my life for years to come. Although I was a Christian, I wasn't spiritually mature to understand that all my sins had been forgiven—for all eternity. I simply couldn't forgive myself.

I enrolled at Tri-County Tech and was able to complete my second semester of college. Understandably, I still grieved over my losses. At times, I would get so discouraged about the poor decisions that I had made that summer of 1976. When would I ever recover and learn how to thrive?

My mother was still living in the trailer park, and trying to remain optimistic about her life and marriage. Sadly, Calvin's spiritual life was greatly declining. He was still abusing alcohol and even drugs. Several times, she had discovered him cheating. The rose-colored glasses were slipping away; after twenty years, mother was beginning to awaken out of denial.

One afternoon, I asked mother, "Are you ready for change?" She sure was! I rented a nice home, packed the U-Haul and we moved away. Mama walked out of Calvin's life for good. Our lives improved without him. He never visited, called or bothered her again. She was finally free! His physical abuse, and adulterous lifestyle wasn't her problem anymore. Sadly, within three years, Calvin would be murdered. For the first time in years, mama seemed so happy.

In the summer of 1977, I also made some important decisions. I needed to change my life as well. In August of 1977, I rejoined the Army! I was assigned to Fort Dix, New Jersey to become a 64C—or a military vehicle operator! I learned to drive everything from a ¼ ton truck to a 5-ton tractor-trailer. Those six weeks of training passed quickly! I couldn't wait to return to Germany!

A couple of weeks later, I flew into Frankfurt and I was transferred to Kaiserslautern, Germany at Kleber Kaserne. I was assigned to the 64th Transportation Company. We had several female truck drivers in our platoon—most were very skilled and friendly. I drove the 5 ton tractor-trailers all over Germany and Belgium. We'd drive through the major cities, out in the remote field sites and throughout small, lovely towns.

One morning, I noticed an advertisement in the military newspaper for vocalists and/or musicians for the military band, "Entertainment Showcase." Several days later, I nervously auditioned as a country/western vocalist. Since my voice wasn't that good, I didn't think I had a chance. Little did I know what God was orchestrating in my life. During the audition, I met an amazing young man, Glen Williamson. He was the Assistant Director and he supervised all the auditions. He was very positive and mentioned that my voice was exactly what they needed. I couldn't believe that I had been accepted! I was excited! A few days later, I received a work release for three months from my unit.

Glen and I became good friends while traveling and performing around Germany. I was impressed with his work ethic and love for music. I learned that he was engaged to his high-school sweetheart, Cathy. I had to be careful with my heart since I did not want to hurt anyone.

Interestingly, as my friendship with Glen grew, I realized that he was one of the most remarkable men that I had ever met! He was good-looking, humble, hard-working, respectable and talented. For years, I never thought I would find someone like him--I was falling in love. Glen was the one I had been waiting for. Glen called his parents and informed them about our relationship.

Within a few short weeks, Cathy sent Glen a love letter on cassette and a photo of herself. Glen wrote Cathy a long letter explaining why he couldn't marry her. Of course, Glen didn't want to hurt her, but he was convinced that he didn't love her anymore. He loved me and wanted to marry me! I realized that Glen was the man that I had always dreamed about! "God had brought us together."

In March, we made the decision to drive to Copenhagen, Denmark to get married. We tied the knot on March 23, 1979 as husband and wife. I have never regretted this decision. Although Glen was not a Christian, he was always consistently loving, kind and respectable to me. Glen resigned from Entertainment Showcase and within a few weeks, began working as a mechanic. In September 1979, we moved to Fort Hood, Texas where Nadyia was born—she was such a

sweet baby. We rented an apartment in Harker Heights until government housing was available. Grandma Owens came to help me during my delivery and recovery with Nadyia.

In 1981, Glen was transferred to Wharton Barracks in Heilbronn, Germany. Our second, precious daughter, Cheri was born in 1983 at a German hospital. I began working for the Morale Support Division in the Arts and Crafts department. For the first time in my life, I had an amazing job with two wonderful ladies--Katya Sharply and Donna VanDyke. Cheri was about a year old when we left Germany and moved to Richmond Hill, Georgia.

In 1984, Glen was assigned to Fort Stewart, Georgia. Since we weren't eligible for family housing, we moved into a nice home at Piercefield Forest in Richmond Hill, Georgia. I was overjoyed with living close to my mother and family in Seneca, SC. At last, our children could build relationships with their cousins and grandparents.

I am convinced that the Lord routed us to Richmond Hill for His divine purpose. Since moving into a private house, our cost of living had increased, and I had to find work. I began working at Military TV and Stereo in Savannah. We enrolled Nadyia and Cheri into a day-school, Castle Heights. Our new life wasn't easy but it was definitely meaningful. Cheri and especially Nadyia loved going to the school. We were building a new life, a future and a community.

Just a few weeks later, I mentioned to Glen that Nadyia and Cheri had never been to Sunday school! What in the world was I thinking? Was God working on my heart? After all, I hadn't been in church for many years. He was in control. He had planted us in this place for a divine purpose.

God was working—someone was praying. Just a few days later, Mrs. Cooper (pastor's wife from Bethel) and another Christian missionary came to visit us. Mrs. Cooper was very friendly. We invited them inside and got acquainted. Of course, she invited all of us to visit Bethel. I allowed Nadyia was able to attend Sunday school with Mrs. Cooper. She really enjoyed it.

At this time, Glen was busy on the weekends. He was moon-lighting as a musician in clubs and bars. He wasn't opposed to me attending church but he had no desire to attend. Later on, he actually promised that he would go—just once for me. I kept that commitment in my heart.

On Sundays, I felt guilty for not going to church with Nadyia. I was working fulltime, and I was tired on the weekends. But still I understood that the Lord wanted all of us in church. I couldn't escape this conviction.

Coincidentally, Glen's band was cancelled for Saturday night! He would be free on Sundays!! I awakened early on Sunday morning and asked him—very politely, if we could go to church. He had already promised! I was excited.

Pastor Cooper was a powerful, compassionate preacher. His message was definitely passionate and compelling. He mentioned several times that everyone needed to know 100% if they were headed to heaven. Everyone was really friendly and of course, I wanted to return just to make friends. I was very lonely.

Understandably, Glen had no desire to go back to Bethel Baptist. The message really bothered him. He mentioned that I could return but he wouldn't be. Of course, I understood his heart—he was raised in a dysfunctional home. His parents attended church but they were alcoholics. Glen simply didn't understand that real Christianity was different. He was about to discover the truth.

The following week, Pastor Cooper and Elmer Walker visited us at home. They were excited to meet with us. Pastor Cooper asked me about my relationship with the Lord. I accepted Christ at a Good News Club in 1968 in College Park, Georgia. Being brought up in an alcoholic home, I wasn't proud of my relationship with the Lord—I had made so many mistakes. Thankfully, I realized that God hadn't given up on me. Looking back, I was humbled and forgiveness so many times. God is so full of Grace, Mercy and Unconditional love.

Pastor Cooper asked Glen about his relationship with the Lord. Of course, Glen wasn't completely truthful. Pastor Cooper challenged Glen. Most professing, authentic Christians attend church, read the Bible and served the Lord. Glen realized that he had to make some choices. We began attending Bethel Baptist regularly. The Lord was definitely moving in his life. One afternoon, Pastor Cooper asked Glen to work with the choir. Within a couple of weeks, Glen asked for some music/preaching tapes. Glen promised that he'd listen to Oliver B. Greene. On his way to work one morning, Glen was listening to the message, "The Other Side of the Door." His heart was breaking. He pulled off the road and begged the Lord to save him. He returned home that evening a new man! I couldn't believe the changes God had made in Glen's life. We cleaned house that week—every bottle of alcohol was emptied and ungodly movies were trashed. Everything in his life changed. 2 Corinthians 5:17

At Christmas 1984, Evangelist Bobby McGilliard and his family visited Bethel Baptist Church. His wife shared an amazing testimony. At one time, she had questioned her salvation—thankfully, she got it settled one day. The more I thought about her words, the more I questioned my own conversion. I struggled to overcome the besetting sins in my life-- anger issues, impatience, unconditional love and lack of discipline. I desperately wanted to be the godly wife and mother for the sake of our family. However, I was naïve to believe that spiritual growth happens automatically. I misunderstood so much. My relationship with the Lord had to be cultivated. Like any relationship, I had to be proactive in my faith. What did this mean? Being faithful to Jesus--reading the Word, praying, worshipping God in our home, loving my family, sharing my faith and being obedient to church.

Of course, my faith journey was never based on a list of rules, it was based on His love and our relationship. I learned that my love for Jesus Christ helped pave the way to complete surrender, obedience and faithfulness. There was nothing I could do to make Him love me more or less. When He died on the cross, I was still a sinner. Romans 5:8

During those days, the enemy taunted me. I felt so unloved and sinful. I thought my sins were too great for forgiveness. Yet, I hungered for that peace and joy that she had talked about. Glen asked the church to pray for me. The Lord heard my prayers and I realized that He had forgiven me years ago. Christianity is never a spectator sport. Although I definitely remember praying to receive Christ, I had never grown spiritually. I had never been discipled. No one ever explained to me the importance of serving the Lord at home and in the church. This valuable spiritual lesson opened my eyes. We are living in a fallen world—there are temptations everywhere. Pastor Cooper taught us to serve the Lord with Joy—not legalistically. It's our Joy that helps us to run the race. One day, we will see Him, face to face. Hebrews 12:2 "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the Joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Not too long afterwards, we began praying for a son. Glen had been adopted, we desired a son to carry on the Williamson name. Everyone was praying for us. Within three months, I was pregnant with Benjamin. We applied for family base housing and were accepted. We moved and Ben was born at the hospital on base. God was and is so merciful to us. The Lord provided a nice home for us. I was overwhelmed at His goodness toward us. My precious mother came down to help me with the children. Our relationship with Bethel grew. God gave me many precious friends during those years. A pastor's wife, Joyce Vicks gave me a book to read—"What is God doing in your life?" She must have known that the Lord would eventually call us into full-time ministry.

It is so important to grow in this relationship by reading the Bible, praying and serving God and sharing our faith with others. I am truly grateful for Pastor and Mrs. Cooper for their example of faithfulness and sacrifice at Bethel. We learned much in Jacksonville, Florida at Trinity Baptist Church! Through our trials and disappointments and failures, we discovered that God would never abandon us—He would use our trials for His honor and glory. He promised that we'd experience tribulations, setbacks and illnesses, but the Lord never once forsook us. In every need, He was always there and He always provided for every single need. We experienced many victories and witnessed many people surrender their lives to the Lord.

Glen graduated in 1992 and went to Ukraine on a survey trip. The Lord provided the funds for his trip, a translator and a place to stay for about one month.

During those weeks, he was able to preach in hospitals, universities and rehabilitation centers and other Ukrainian churches. Many men and women prayed to receive Christ. God gave Glen the privilege of working with Vashya who was an amazing translator. He's with the Lord now.

Glen returned to South Carolina rejoicing over how many heard the gospel. In the fall of 1992, we began deputation. At that time, we had very few supporters. The Lord provided along the way, with every need supplied. Including a van for us! By the spring of 1994, we had raised 100% of our support. During our deputation, the Lord provided the house we'd need in Kiev. He also provided the container, the RV, and the translators for our future ministry.

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering." 2 Peter 3:9

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Psalm 23:1