

Cindi Serenbetz Testimony

MY TESTIMONY: This is a love story that began by a campfire in the woods on a starlit night. On that night, I gave my heart away to Jesus. At a later time, I walked like a bride down a long aisle to the front of the church. There I pledged my love and dedicated my life to Jesus who's love has never let me go.

I think that this Bible verse accurately describes me today:
Psalm 103:3+4 "He forgave all my sins and healed all my diseases. He redeemed my life from the pit and crowned me with love and compassion." Here is my story:

Life is a journey. Mine began on June 11, 1954. My parents are Bob and Connie Landis. I grew up outside of Philadelphia in farm country. Men ruled in our world...I grew up believing I was a disappointment because I was a girl. Boys seemed to be preferred. I was afraid of my dad—I desperately wanted his love. I grew up attending a new Mennonite Church. My church seemed to be all rules, no fun. Anyway, that is what I perceived church was all about...following rules. I was probably 9 or 10 years old when I went to Camp Men-o-lan. (The land for this camp was donated by relatives on the Landis side of my family. It was a Mennonite church camp hence the name Men-o-lan.) I was sitting by a big campfire with stars shining brightly overhead -we had just sung what is now a favorite hymn "How Great Thou Art" when I prayed and gave Jesus my heart. Years later when I was 11 years old, while the hymn "Take My Life and Let It Be" was played, I walked down what seemed like a very long aisle to the front prayer bench at Highland Park camp meeting and there I dedicated my life to the Lord. My Grandpa Kachel, a minister at the camp, prayed with me as I made this most important life commitment. I remember that he lent me his white handkerchief because I was crying.

During my early teen years, I was pretty self conscious about my appearance and I was lonely. I had no boyfriends and the popular girls were unkind. I did not get invited to many parties or sleepovers. I felt like an outcast. When a boy named Dick made a move to kiss me while on a youth group outing at Hershey Park I said: "Hey, wait a minute, are you a Christian?" He laughed at me and bolted—I think he completely disappeared never to be seen again. I experienced huge rejection and embarrassment...I was mortified. You see my grandmother had told me to never marry someone who was not a Christian and I took her very seriously. I was not going to mess with this rule! WELL, after that I decided there was absolutely NO WAY I would experience that kind of humiliation again.... I vowed that NO ONE would ever know that I was a Christian again!! I was going undercover.

From that point on, I acted as lord of my life...I would call all the shots! I knew what was best for Cindi and my game plan was to do everything that was on the "thou shalt not do" list at church. No one would know I was a Christian. I led a very wild life during high school, nursing school and thru my early 20's. I am telling you, God HAD to be watching over me!

On June 13, 1980 my grandpa died...the one with the handkerchief. At his funeral a minister read Hebrews 13:7 "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you, look at the outcome of their life and imitate their faith." That verse zapped my heart like a bolt of lightning...in that moment, I made a decision to live as a follower of Christ again. God began to lead me away from a very destructive lifestyle. One year, two months later, on August 28, 1981 my brother was killed in a car accident--he was on his way home from a night of partying. He died and so did the driver of the other car leaving a wife and 2 small children. The Lord really had my attention now-- I knew that following Christ was a matter of life or death. I needed the Lord and He sent a parade of wonderful

Christian women to mentor me thru the next stages of life...Harriet, Roberta, Suzanne, Pat, Suzy, Linda, Penny...I thank God for the way He used these women to show me that Christianity is not a bunch of rules, it is a relationship.

God has been faithful to protect me, grow me, sustain me, heal me, teach me, bless me...He is an absolutely great God and I trust him completely. Most importantly, the banner of God's love has always been over me—He would never leave me or forsake me despite the way I acted. Even now I stand beneath His banner of love, like a chick under its momma's wing. I have wanted love my whole life but this love I craved eluded me as a teen, as a wife and mother. I needed love, I pursued love, I manipulated to get love, and I tried to earn love.... I was always trying to get LOVE but there was never enough for me. This unquenchable need for love made me totally selfish; the world had to revolve around me... until I surrendered my will and my desires back to God and allowed Him to be Lord of my life again. When I let go of the idea that I needed to get love from people to fill my longing and I looked to Jesus as my first and true love, He completely satisfied my need and my desire for love. I believe that JESUS loved me so much that He died for me a sinner. He was resurrected on the 3rd day to live in and thru me. Jesus was the answer all along, but out of my own embarrassment and frustration, I had denied Jesus and His love and chose to follow Him at distance—living life my own way.

History has no hold- today my life is defined by redemption and reconciliation thru the forgiveness I have in Christ Jesus. Christ's love, joy, peace and hope define me NOT the voices of darkness that spoke insecurity, fear and rejection. God has changed my name: I once called myself wounded, outcast, lonely and afraid. My new name is confidence, joyfilled, overcomer, faithfulness, friend of God, one who seeks His face.

In the year 2006-2007 Community Bible Study studied the book of Matthew. Matt. 5:11-12 reads: "God blesses me when I am mocked and persecuted and lied about because I am His follower. I will be happy about it, very glad for a great reward awaits me in heaven. I will also remember that the ancient prophets were persecuted too." I have renounced the vow I made as a teenager to hide my Christianity. Today, because God is merciful and gracious, I am living as a follower of Christ knowing that His way is love. I walk CLOSELY with Him, I long for Him, I have attached myself to Him, I want to serve Him and become more like Him. He has called me to love Him with all my heart, mind, soul and strength and to love my neighbor as myself...so now my life has flip flopped: I give my love away instead of always trying to get more love. Thanks be to God with whom I enjoy an intimate, satisfying relationship—HE COMPLETES ME!