



THE TRUTH TELLER

Building Bridges for Tomorrow

Volume 4, Issue 1

Truth Be Told

Fall 2007

Inside This Edition

Building Bridges for Tomorrow.....	1
Bridge Builder Insight	2
Carol's Column	2
Love Can Build A Bridge...3	
One Woman's Journey	3
New Board Members	5
Volunteer Opportunities	5
How Long Do I Have To Pay?.....	6
Good Medicine	6
Letter from a Graduate.....	7
Quilt Project	7
Calendar	8
Make a Donation or Contact Us.....	8
Board of Directors and Staff.....	8

*Visit our website at
www.truth-be-told.org*



Truth Be Told will hold its
3rd annual fundraising luncheon

Building Bridges for Tomorrow

October 24, 2007

12 - 1 p.m.

Education Service Center: Region XIII
5701 Springdale Road
Austin, Texas 78723

We invite you to attend this
free, informative and inspiring
one-hour presentation about our work.

RSVP by Friday, October 12
at 512-292-6200 or
office@truth-be-told.org.

Truth Be Told

Bridge Builder Insight

By Natalie Weinstein,
Class Facilitator

What is a bridge? It connects two places. It is a passageway. It is a means to safely cross over an area that is dangerous or otherwise impassable.

The work we do at the Lockhart women's prison is very much about building bridges. We are trying to connect these women to their future, to themselves, and to one another.

I began teaching Talk To Me/ Circle this summer. I can honestly say it is one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. Every time I'm there, I see courage, pain, regret, strength, vulnerability, and truth.

Here are a few experiences that come immediately to mind:

Shining light on secrets...

A woman shared that she was deeply afraid of telling her story because once people knew what she'd done, they wouldn't like her anymore. Once she told her story, though, the secrets began to lose their power over her. She was an inspiration to her fellow classmates.

Offering support...

Another woman went into a kind of emotional shock after her speech. I could see that she was a million miles away, and I inter-

rupted the normal flow of class and asked aloud how she was feeling. That's when the real pain gushed out. The shame she felt for her crime has been overwhelming her life. Her classmates were so generous in their encouragement and acceptance. I was so proud.

Seeing clearly...

One woman whose mother repeatedly abandoned the family and whose parents were later divorced said she didn't understand why those experiences had so traumatized her, why they led her down the road to addiction. "Other people go through this and are fine," she said. But I know why and told her: She has a sensitive soul. And I would be proud to call this woman my friend.

Working through pain...

One woman cried throughout her entire speech as she recounted the ways her abusive husband tried to kill her. She is deeply grateful to be in prison, to be away from him, to be safe for the first time in years.

I honestly don't know what the future holds for the women in my class. I don't know if they can make it across the bridge we are building. I can't see the other side yet. I don't know how long the construction will take. And I'm not sure if the building materials are strong enough.

But I do know that every time I leave Lockhart, I truly feel that healing has been done in this world. And I am filled with hope. ■

Carol's Column

By Carol Waid,
Founder and Director of Beyond Bars Program

"Love can build a bridge, between your heart and mine. Love can build a bridge. Don't you think it's time? Don't you think it's time?"

I attended a memorial service last night for 25-year old Justin "Davis" Armistead. Davis is the son of our co-founder and dear friend, Suzanne Armistead, and her husband Dave Armistead.

Under a brilliant sapphire sky, the Wildflower Center was baptized in magic and mystery; open hearts, Crocodile size tears and laughter, expressed that which cannot be explained. Davis' life and death had built a bridge from one heart to another, calling us to cross over that which separates us: fear of being vulnerable. Suzanne and Dave stood in their grief and modeled the elegance of grace, inviting us to experience the mystery.

At the end of the service, I floated into one embrace after another, growing lighter and brighter. It was/is time for me to receive a new understanding of how death and birth hold hands.

I took a similar journey when I walked into the GEO Lockhart facility, 7 years ago and was welcomed by women who were incarcerated and living in a concrete vault. With shy eyes, yet courageous spirits, these women took
continued on page 3

Carol's Column

continued from page 2

me down the path of a reality that I wasn't sure I wanted to know. I have heard stories of violence, incest, loss of respect and dignity, loss, loss, loss, yet I have witnessed the elegance of grace. These women gave me the visual of an overused term, "letting go".

I began this work because it filled a gap in me that was starving for peace. The women that I have met, and taken into my heart, have given me way more than I could have asked for. They gave me a purpose.

The bridge from incarceration into the "free" world is rickety and unstable. Many women step into dead end roads and are captured by poverty, anger, rejection, and despair. These women need our support. They need guidance and they need one-on-one interaction to enter the unknown and the unwelcoming of our society. They immediately step onto free land with a label that says, "Can't hire, can't help you, would like to, but your record keeps me from being able to give you a second chance". I receive one call after another, pleading for prayer that they will be given a job that will allow them

to feed their children, house their children, clothe their children, find medical care ... and the list goes on. The facts are that the majority of our women are met with doors slammed and some that are gently shut, but a shut door is a shut door.

Truth Be Told wants your support; we invite you to cross over that which can not be explained, only experienced, the bridge to love.

We invite you to join us in Building Bridges for Tomorrow. ■

Love Can Build A Bridge

By The Judds

I'd gladly walk across the desert
With no shoes upon my feet
To share with you the last bite
Of bread I had to eat
I would swim out to save you
In your sea of broken dreams
When all your hopes are sinkin'
Let me show you what love means

(Chorus)

Love can build a bridge
Between your heart and mine
Love can build a bridge
Don't you think it's time?
Don't you think it's time?

I would whisper love so loudly
Every heart could understand

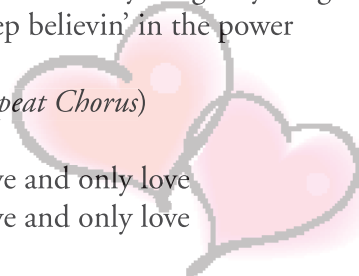
That love and only love
Can join the tribes of man
I would give my heart's desire
So that you might see
The first step is to realize
That it all begins with you and me

(Repeat Chorus)

When we stand together
It's our finest hour
We can do anything, anything
Keep believin' in the power

(Repeat Chorus)

Love and only love
Love and only love



One Woman's Journey

By Nathalie Sorrell, Founder and Director of Behind Bars Program

T. stood in front of our second ever Talk to Me Class on the day she was to tell her story. It was autumn of 2000. Tightly built and pretty, with long, dark blonde hair and blazing blue eyes, she said "I hate men. If I don't get rid of my anger, I'm gonna kill me one when I get out of here." No one laughed. Her hatred was palpable in the room.

Then she told us of parents who owned a nudist colony, and men who used her as their sexual plaything while she was a toddler; the mother who accidentally shot her when she was aiming at T's brother; the 34-year-old man who offered

continued on page 4

Truth Be Told

One Woman's Journey

continued from page 3

to protect her after she'd run away from home at 14, then beat her so severely he eventually broke every bone except for her legs so she'd still be able to dance in topless bars and earn money to turn over to him. By the end of her story, we were all shaking. No one was the same.

She was the first speaker. That class, triggered by her example, spoke their secrets and shame-filled stories until the last shy woman left was blue-lipped and trembling, knowing she too would have to match T's courage and re-live her personal horror. We all swam in graphic memories spilled out, flooding a prison classroom with dark nightmares that they had lived.

After each woman spoke her piece, we saw that we could not move onward through the classes without guidance. Carol and I were not trained counselors. We were afraid these women would break, psychologically, and we'd have taken them deeper into trouble instead of helping them out.

The day after our last woman spoke, I walked into Magnolia Cafe and saw Barbara, a friend I've loved since our grown sons were 2-year-olds in Sunday School together. Her face lit up and she beamed: "We were just talking about you!" She introduced me to Margaret – who had been her Bible Study

Fellowship instructor. Margaret looked up at me, laughing, "I have 5 minutes – tell me everything about your prison work!"

I laughed, sat down, and breathed a prayer for brevity. Then I spoke of the situation, and the fears we were drowning in. Margaret said "You need a prayer team. I will start it. Find people who do e-mail and we'll get it going right now." She wrote her e-mail address on a napkin and I took it home.

That was Wednesday. At Saturday's UT football game, I ran into another friend from a church we neither attended anymore. She and I stood in line in the stadium women's room, and by the time we finished talking about our prison work – it was an hour later and the game was two-thirds over. She informed me of her Women's Bible study that met on Tuesdays during the hours we were at the prison. They would hold us up weekly as they met and prayed.

When I emailed Margaret, she said "That was my first prayer request – God provide a prayer group for the day you're there."

I get goose bumps on my legs telling this story every time!

We have grown, changed, come far, done a lot – not ONE THING has been done without prayer, and God's spirit guiding and supporting this work, including our calling to be a Service Organization instead of a Christian Ministry. Many

times we've been overwhelmed and discouraged—and sent requests for prayer to the group that quickly became 75 strong. Every time, God showed up with some volunteer's skin on, or intervened in Spirit to change our attitudes, to relieve our fears and solve our problems.

I have a folder in my email files called "Prison Prayers," full of requests and answers. Many of you are reliable supporters. Some of you have probably wondered why we so rarely send out prayer requests any more. Believe me, it's not because we don't need prayer! It's because God has grown Truth Be Told and the women we serve have increased in numbers until Carol and I can no longer take individual prayer requests from our classes, and keep a coordinated prayer letter going. (Perhaps some one of you might feel called to coordinate this as your volunteer service?)

Some of you reach out to us, and now and then we send desperation pleas to you. Always you come through and God comes through and the next piece of the Bridge to Truth be Told's tomorrow is put into place.

Of all the donations that are given to make us able to serve these women's needs – none is more important than the heartfelt prayers offered up for their sake. Thank you for putting your hearts and minds to God's use for Truth Be Told's needs to be met.

continued on page 5

One Woman's Journey

continued from page 4

I hope you'll come up to me at the October 24th fundraiser and say, "I am one of the Prison Prayers!" I'd so love to thank you and hug you – You have been bridging the gap between prison and the Free world with us for 7 years now! ■

New Board Members

Truth Be Told welcomes two members to our board of directors, Alison Brock and Kimberly Vincent.

Meet Alison Brock

I am extremely honored to be able to serve Truth Be Told, an organization I have long admired and respected.

My intent over the next year is to be able to bring to this organization the same joy, prosperity and excitement that this program brings to women inside and outside prison. I can attest to the fact that there is no other organization that is doing what Truth be Told is doing for women in prison.

Women comprise the fastest growing population in our criminal justice system, and Texas witnessed a 1,141% increase in the its female prison population from 1977 to 2004. These women are mothers,

wives, daughters and they are, in my opinion, a part of who we are and they are a part of who I am.

As such, my wish for this organization, and for the men and women who support it, is to continue to allow women in prison access to true healing in the form of Truth Be Told.

Meet Kimberly Vincent

As I reflect upon our theme of "Building Bridges for Tomorrow", I know that it is only through the dedication and support of our volunteers that our work is even possible.

As a new board member and volunteer coordinator for Truth Be Told, I am honored to work with an organization that strives to enhance the lives of a forgotten population, women in prison. But we know that in order to accomplish our goals a solid bridge must be formed for the women who need us most. That bridge ensures that incarcerated women can cross over from a life behind bars to the love, support and resources critical to living a productive life in society.

This simply cannot be done without your help. As volunteers for Truth Be Told, you are the bridge that an incarcerated woman will have to a better life. Through your activism and support, many women will feel the strength of a bridge built by the love, dedication, prayers and support of our phenomenal volunteer force!

Whether you are an experienced volunteer or someone who is new to the volunteer world, we invite you to learn more about Truth Be Told, and discover how you might partner with us. All of your gifts and talents make the bridge for tomorrow more solid and we look forward to the experience of working with you.

The bottom line is simple: Truth Be Told depends on the support of our dedicated volunteers in order to accomplish our mission. With your help, a bridge to tomorrow will be built to last for many tomorrows to come. ■

Volunteer Opportunities

PR Team Member

This member will help with public awareness and media coverage of our work, monthly Truth Be Told Behind and Beyond Bars meetings, other public events. This person will partner with Robert Doyal who produces the newsletter, website and brochure. They will build and maintain bridges with contributors and supporters of our work. Media, public relations or IT experience would be helpful.

Fundraising

This volunteer will work primarily with the Raising More Money (RMM) structure for our annual fundraiser and the yearly and bi-yearly events and presentations done to honor and connect with other donors, and work with *continued on page 6*

Truth Be Told

Volunteer Opportunities

continued from page 5

other creative ideas that volunteers bring in for fundraising. Non-profit or any previous fundraising experience would be helpful.

Party Planner

We have an ongoing need for a person with event planning skills. This volunteer may elect to serve on or off the Board of Directors. This person will coordinate logistics, decorating, food, and other details for several functions held throughout the year. They will work with the Volunteer Coordinator, supervising a team of volunteers to help with each event. ■

How Long Do I Have To Pay?

By Rutanya, Former Inmate

Even with more than 5 years of work experience and training since leaving prison, finding employment is not easy for a person that has a criminal background history. From July 7th to August 30th this year, I have applied for over 107 positions, I have gone on 20 interviews, and still no job.

How long do I have to pay?
My crime is older than a decade.

I have excellent references, not just personal ones but from previous employers. What do I need

to do to prove myself? It is heart breaking to tell your children that you have an interview and then to tell them that you didn't get the position. While I was in prison I could not support my children because the job that I was given only earned extra time that went toward my sentence, not a real wage. So, my children suffered and went without things. Now that I am out of prison, the situation has not changed very much. Without a job, I am still unable to support my family.

I have conditions that must be met while being on Parole. One is to maintain employment. How can I do that when no one will hire me? On every application there is that horrid question: Have you ever been convicted of a felony? If I am lucky I may run across the question: Have you been convicted of a felony within the past seven years? And even with that question it still depends on what the charge was for.

It is so easy to get discouraged and give up and turn back to a life of crime. I have had interviews where the employers are very impressed and eager to start the hiring process even after the knowledge of my past has been revealed and but I still do not get chosen. It is very frustrating.

How long is really long enough?

I know that I have a lot to offer any company who would be willing to hire me. But it is like I am

still paying for my crime after being tried, sentenced and time served. When is my debt to society paid in full? ■

Good Medicine

By Peggy Lamb, Class Facilitator

I can't stop smiling. Every time one of my sisters shares her "Hallelujah Moment" and Rhonda teaches us the sign language for it, my smile widens and more joy bubbles up. Acceptance, waking up, family photos, baptism, rebirth, birds singing, music, grandmas letters, children's voices, grandson, compassion, spirit, animals, happiness, graduation from school, puppies and a son returning safely from Iraq. A joy shared is good medicine.

I came to class feeling tired, jangled, sad and overworked. Relationship challenges, car problems, and the two books on tape I got from the library didn't work. I needed those tapes for the drive to Dallas (ugh!) after class. I desperately wanted to call Carol and Nathalie and plead, "I'm too stressed, and I can't come!" But, I was facilitating today's class so that escape route was closed. The theme for today was "Hallelujah Moments" and most of my day had been filled with "Oh shit" moments!

So many things distract me from standing still, breathing, and noticing the small wondrous "Hallelujah Moments" of my life. Those moments that open the pores

continued on page 7

Good Medicine

continued from page 6

of gratitude in my skin and perfume the air I breathe. Like reading about Norman, the blind Labrador Retriever that rescued a drowning woman.

As the women come to class, they each give me a hug which is full-bodied, full-hearted hugs that begin to melt my distress. As we create our "Hallelujah Dance", all of our gratitude creates a vortex of love. Our smiles are big and beautiful.

Once again, these courageous women of Lockhart have healed me and brought me home to the essentials of a life well lived. We are the Sisterhood of Good Medicine. ■

Letter from a Graduate

Why am I here?
from a Talk To Me student

I needed a chance to talk about my life, to take a look at it and share it with others, that is the main reason why I am here. The reason for telling my story is to open the eyes of mothers every where, that they should know that although we need money to survive it is not everything in life, what's everything in life besides GOD and our children?

The deep down truth is that I am ready to change my life to make up

Quilt Project



Pictured above (left to right) is Carol Waid and Gigi.

From Gigi: "This quilt means so much to me -- as the 10th recipient, I feel like I am now a part of Truth Be Told history. My quilt is a symbol of the journey I began with Truth Be Told in prison and completed five long years later in the Free World. I know I am a better person for having made this journey, and I attribute my success to God, my precious family and the strong and wonderful women of Truth Be Told."

for all the neglect, hurt, and pain I have put my kids through. The audience I would like to reach is Mothers. We can't go on living for ourselves, once we bring children into this world, we have to change our way of life, our priorities and live for them.

The only speaking and listening I'll be doing for a long time is going to be with my children, I don't have any other plans to speak in public, I just want to be a better mother, that's my 2nd goal in life. My 1st is to get closer to GOD. ■

Calendar

OCTOBER 2007

12 Luncheon RSVP Deadline
512-292-6200
office@truth-be-told.org

24 Building Bridges luncheon
12-1 p.m.
Education Service Center: Region XIII
5701 Springdale Road; Austin, Texas 78723

NOVEMBER 2007

16 Discovery Class Graduation
Lockhart prison from 3-5 p.m.

19 Board Meeting: 6-8 p.m.

DECEMBER 2007

6 Donor Appreciation Event

7 God in Human Form presentation

17 Board Meeting: 6-8 p.m.

Make a Donation or Contact Us

Truth Be Told is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and your donations are tax deductible. Donations may be made securely online at www.truth-be-told.org or mailed to Truth Be Told, PO Box 161763, Austin, Texas 78716. You can reach us at 512-292-6200 or by e-mail at office@truth-be-told.org.

Board of Directors and Staff

Jackie Borcharding, *chair of the board*

Alison Brock, *media and PR liasion*

Chris Close, *director of strategic planning*

Robert Doyal, *director of communications*

Nathalie Sorrell, *founder and director of behind bars program*

Debbie Stover, *treasurer/project manager*

Carol Waid, *founder and director of beyond bars program*

Shannon Holtzendorf, *administrative assistant*

Kim Vincent, *volunteer coordinator*



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