

My Life Story - Barbara (December 2015)

Born as a Catholic – Born Again as a Child of God.

My name is Barbara. I'm 67 years old, divorced with a 36 year-old son.

Life was good growing up in Montreal with my loving parents and 3 older brothers. We were brought up Roman Catholic by Dad who took us to Church every Sunday. This was a rule my mother had to agree to as a Protestant marrying a Catholic. She respected my Dad and all of us were infant baptized as Catholics. Mom would never again step inside a Catholic Church. At home, we didn't have a Bible, didn't talk about God or pray at mealtime but Mom made sure we ate fish on Fridays.

My spiritual life was mostly about the religious ceremony of Sunday Mass. There were no Bibles in the pews at Church. Some scripture was read but the Priest would interpret it. I remember feeling frightened when the message left me unsure of being good enough to get to heaven. I worried about going to hell a lot.

There were a lot of religious rituals - lighting candles, putting money in the box, dipping fingers in holy water and doing the sign of the cross. I didn't have the discipline or desire to say the rosary. Memorized prayers to Mary and the Saints made God seem even less accessible and more impersonal. It didn't take long to sin once I left Church. I just kept trying to be a better person. I felt guilty a lot.

Even attending a Catholic school run by the nuns didn't bring me closer to God. We studied the Catechism of the Catholic Church, not God's Word in the Bible. I worried about my many sins. I had no assurance of getting to heaven, only doubt. Going to confession was stressful, done in secret to a man that I called "Father", who had no personal relationship with me. When I started working, my world seemed much less judgmental than at Church. I attended just to please my Dad.

At 22, I married a man of no faith, stopped going to Church and just tried to be a good person. My life was about my professional career, getting recognition and promotions. That gave me more money, confidence and independence.

After 10 years of working to acquire material things, my life still felt empty. Hoping that a baby would bring meaning to our life, we had a son. But instead of helping our marriage, it put more distance between me and my husband. I transferred my energy and time to the baby. At 36, with a 5 year-old son, my husband's affair gave me a religious reason for the divorce.

Feeling rejected and a failure, I sought new relationships but attracted only men that were emotionally unhealthy. All ended in pain, regret, and loss of hope.

After seven years, at age 43, I moved to Vancouver with my son. I agreed that he could spend summers in Montreal with his Dad, who was re-married with a 6 year old son. The following summer, I met a man who invited me to a Christian (non-Catholic) church service. I enjoyed the Bible message and started to attend with him weekly, until that relationship ended and my hope was crushed again.

I decided to go to a Ladies Camp with friends from church. On the last day, there was a request to those who did not have a personal relationship with Jesus to

“come forward to the front and commit your life to Jesus”. I resisted even though my heart was pounding. Again came the request and I heard a voice in my mind saying “get off the fence and decide to make Jesus, Lord of your life.” My legs were shaking. I made my way to the front. As I knelt down, tears flowed as I asked Jesus to take control of my life and to guide me. My huge burden of guilt and shame was lifted. I had been born again by His Spirit, set free from religion. I was a child of God, saved by Jesus and given a new life. Amazing.

Soon after, I joined a Ladies Bible Study group. As I studied God’s Word, I learned how much God loves me, with a love that I didn’t have to work for. My love for Jesus and for others grew. I started a Care Group for single women in my home.

When I was 48, I fell in love with a man from a family of 7 siblings who were all strong Christians. A year later, we married. Soon after, my son moved to Montreal to live with his Dad, step-mother and step-brother and to attend College.

For the next 5 years, I worked hard both at home and at work. Having a stressful job and a long commute took so much time and energy out of my day. We didn’t have much time for each other. My husband was emotionally distant and he stopped attending church with me. Counseling didn’t improve our situation. Then, I got notice that my job in Vancouver was ending.

Meanwhile, in Montreal, my son struggled with the breakup of his Dad's second marriage and was stressed with his final year of university. My son was diagnosed with depression and was prescribed anti-depressants. After 8 days, he fell into a black hole. He decided to take all the pills and drink all the alcohol in the house. His step-brother found him 3 ½ hours later and he was rushed to the hospital.

I was on a plane that night overwhelmed with grief and fear of losing him. I desperately prayed “Jesus help!” over and over again. I pleaded with God to spare his life. I recommitted my life to Him and promised to serve Jesus for the rest of my life ... no matter the outcome. My son survived. After months in hospital and then as an out-patient, he returned to complete his degree. I returned home to learn that my husband was having an affair and wanted a divorce.

God’s amazing love gave me the strength to get through this most difficult time. As I developed a thirst for His Word, the promises of God worked in my heart. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

He has made me a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a follower of Jesus, I now freely pray directly to Him. I have His peace and joy in my heart, with certainty of my salvation. I have helped with ‘Singles over 35’, served on mission trips to Latin America and hosted foreign students. I am so thankful for His story in my life.

My final plea to you: Reject dead religion. Trust Jesus alone. (John 14:6)