




Victory Foundation

7012 Ogden Road SE

Building a heart in the heart of Calgary



Executive Director
Don Delaney

A LIFE RESTORED

Debbie moved to Calgary with a five-hundred dollar a day habit that started in her early twenties when she was living in the Vancouver\Coquitlam area. Arriving in Calgary and now close to forty, Debbie constantly fought with thoughts of failure for messing up a life that had begun with such promise. She was a smart assertive girl and grew up in a good home. She successfully graduated from High School and even went to the local Community College to prepare her for a career in banking.

Throughout her twenties Debbie worked for a bank. Everyone saw that she had potential for promotion, but this potential was stunted by a growing addiction that would eventually overshadow every part of her life. At first it was just weekend drug use. Later, her drug use turned into weeknights and eventually into workdays. Finally, over a period of time, Debbie's drug use was totally out of control and she started to steal from work to support her addiction. In the end, and after working for nine years with the bank, Debbie was fired. The company offered her rehabilitation help but she declined because she was unwilling to admit that she had a problem. Her life went from bad to worse as she eventually became a full fledged addict. Debbie's parents made several attempts to rescue her from her addiction but had no success. Eventually they lost contact with her when she left Vancouver.

Debbie eventually ended up settling in the city of Calgary. However, any idea of a fresh start quickly evaporated as she was drawn like a magnet to live in the community of Forest Lawn. This was a rough neighborhood in Calgary's east end where we had just planted our church. Debbie moved into what was known as a 'crack shack.' It was run by a well known drug dealer named Ronnie who would soon become Debbie's new boyfriend. In order to support her habit, she began helping Ronnie

sell drugs by going up and down the streets of east Calgary and 'trenching' as she termed it. It was here that Debbie first encountered the volunteers of the Eastside Victory Outreach Centre who were out in the community distributing sandwiches to those living in poverty and on the streets. Debbie was constantly high and working the drug scene, sometimes only sleeping and eating two or three times a week. This is symptomatic of most addicts who would only remember to eat when they saw food. So, the offering of free sandwiches was a welcome sight and the first seed of kindness that was planted into her life from the Eastside Victory Outreach Centre. A miraculous turn around in her life was soon to take place.

The police knew that Debbie was a bad influence in the community and would, on average, stop and frisk her up to three times a day. She always made sure that she only carried a minimum amount of drugs. This way, when the police would find drugs on her, she would be charged with a lesser possession charge. That would mean shorter stints in prison where she would soon be out and back on the streets to continue selling drugs. Ronnie and Debbie somehow managed to stagger their arrests. That way, while one of them was being detained, the other could continue the business of selling drugs. Debbie's business skills came in handy as she continued the chaotic juggling act of maintaining customers, competing for new territory, and staying one step ahead of the police.

By 2008 they were running several 'crack shacks' in Forest Lawn and business was booming. Just when everything seemed to be going well, Debbie got some unwanted news when she found out that she was pregnant with Ronnie's baby. This came as a total shock and surprise to Debbie since she had resolved herself to living the life of a drug addict and a drug dealer.

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Pastor Tom Maxwell

"In biblical terms, the number seven signifies two things; completion and rest."

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEVEN

Oh how time flies! It has been seven years since the Victory Foundation purchased the Victory Manor in Ogden. Maybe I'm just getting older, but it sure does not seem like it has been seven years since we moved out of Victoria Park. The past seven years have gone by in a heartbeat. Is it just me, or does it seem that time is speeding up? As we celebrate our seventh year in Ogden, I find myself thinking a lot about the significance of the number seven. **In biblical terms, the number seven signifies two things; completion and rest.** This goes back to the book of Genesis when God created everything by the end of the sixth day. The seventh day therefore signified a day of completion and a day of rest.

I find that the meaning of the number seven has great significance for me. After seven years of working with the building in Ogden, I feel that this is a year of completion and a year of rest for me personally. It becomes a year of completion because the Victory Manor is now where we envisioned it to be years ago.

I remember the building seven years ago as being the biggest blemish in the community. Reports from the Calgary Police Service indicated that there were ninety-six emergency calls out to the facility in the twelve months preceding the purchase by the Victory Foundation. That is just about two calls per week for every week of the year. The police would be called to either quell a disturbance or issue a warrant to one of the residents. They would respond to calls with three or four units and six or eight men. The show of force was for their own safety. It was never safe for one or two officers to approach the building on their own. It was not uncommon for

residents to be throwing items out the window. Things like books, shoes and cans of beer would rain down on the approaching officers. At that time, drugs, alcohol and prostitution ran unchecked. The building was "red flagged" which meant that any ambulance calls needed a police escort before the EMT's could enter the premises. No wonder the city was seriously thinking of evicting the residents and tearing everything down. Today, the "red flag" has been lifted from the building, and the only 911 calls we get today are due to medical emergencies.

Then there were the serious health and safety violations in the building. I remember when we



had our first inspection from the city a few months after we purchased the property. The health department cited thirty pages of deficiencies with twelve items on each page. This was a total of about three hundred and sixty items that needed to be attended to as soon as possible. Things like poor fire escapes, lead based paint on the walls and asbestos in the furnace room. There were infestations of bed bugs, cockroaches and mice. The electrical, heating and plumbing issues were endless. Only one thermostat regulated the heat for the entire building and the plumbing backups were a weekly event. We started with the most urgent items and worked our way down the list. Today, we have a clean bill of health from the city. Our last inspection revealed no issues.

I remember the first week of being in the building and having to deal with a female who had some major mental health issues. She thought that her room was being bugged and that I worked for the CIA. She ended up barricading herself in her room and would not come out even with the prompting of the emergency mental health team. It was only after three months of notices and patiently waiting for court intervention that she finally left.

I remember the slow and agonizing process of bringing in better standards and regulations. Every time we introduced a new standard there would be an outcry from the residents and some major pushback. We would hold our ground and the residents would either comply or move on. There was certainly no place for being a man-pleaser. I remember the endless hours in the building over these years. It was not uncommon to be at the office twelve to fourteen hours per day and six days a week.

I think that I have had a total of five weeks of holidays over those seven years. I remember the renovation of the building and heading up the demolition teams that helped gut everything down to the studs and joists. I remember the aches and pains from sore muscles, splinters and bruises. There was the fractured elbow from my twelve foot fall from a ladder onto a concrete floor.

This is now all behind us and today there is an amazing peace and a calm in the building. With the hiring of Matthew Bannerman as the new Program Director, I know that I can now step back and focus on new things. The building is in good hands. This will be a year for me to relish in what has been accomplished and enjoy a well deserved rest.

A LIFE RESTORED

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Having a child was never factored into that equation. The only answer in Debbie's eyes was to terminate the pregnancy, so she immediately set about planning an abortion. The prayers of her ever hopeful parents, relatives a thousand miles away, and the "over zealous sandwich ladies" in Forest Lawn were about to bring about a different outcome.

While doing another stint in prison Debbie submitted a medical request stating that she believed she was pregnant and wanted to see a doctor. She made the request urgent knowing the laws in Alberta made it illegal to have an abortion after so many days of pregnancy. After a week of waiting and no news of a doctors appointment, she made another request. An appointment was finally made and the doctor confirmed that Debbie was pregnant. However, because of the original delay, Debbie had now passed the termination date by only a few days and now had no choice but to have the baby. Debbie decided to use her unborn child to her advantage in her sentencing. So, after pleading with the judge not to be sent to prison because of her pregnancy, Debbie was sentenced to eighteen months house arrest. The probation system, already overburdened with offenders, made follow up and enforcement irregular. Debbie was able to go right back into the drug using and selling. At first, the pregnancy didn't slow her down at all.

The changes her body was going through brought about a protective motherly instinct she had never experienced before. One incident in particular became a re-evaluating moment. At seven months pregnant, Debbie was robbed at gun point. It was at that moment she knew she had to make some changes but, not knowing how or who to turn to, she continued selling drugs.

A month later Ronnie ended up back in prison. This meant that Debbie was in

charge. By now the operation was so big that Debbie had guards on the front of her three story condo and her own crew of drug runners filling orders. The constant activity made Debbie nervous about how much longer it would be before the police busted the whole thing. That stress and the concern for her unborn child brought her to a point of desperation. By this time, Debbie had been meeting with Pastor Pat and Mary from the church on a regular basis. It was on one of these regular visits that Mary, with tears in her eyes, pleaded with Debbie to get some help. She knew that if she didn't get some help now, she probably never would. Debbie agreed that she would go get help the next day.

At that time, Debbie and Ronnie were making twelve hundred dollars an hour and were the envy of every 'wannabe' dealer in the neighborhood. Their cell phone with all of the drug contacts was worth five thousand dollars and they could use all of the drugs they wanted. Despite all that, Debbie knew she had to make a decision for the future of her baby. Two days later her drug crew loaded her into the a van and drove her to a Detox Centre. Just before leaving the van her fellow addicts asked if she wanted one more hoot. Debbie responded; "No. I gotta do this thing and I might as well start now." Three weeks into her detox program Debbie gave birth to a baby boy she named Chance. Her past history dictated that her son be put into foster care. Coincidentally, while Debbie was in detox, her and Ronnie's crack houses were raided by the SWAT team. Now there was no going back.

With no child, no home and now sober, Debbie began to think seriously about her future. It was during this time that Pastor Pat and Mary offered Debbie a room in the Victory Ladies Recovery House. It was here she began to surrender her life to God and get back on track. Colleen, the house counsellor, encouraged her as she went through treatment programs, addiction meetings and church services. This new life was strange and she wondered what she had gotten herself into. One night, while

Pastor Pat prayed for her, Debbie broke into tears. She felt the presence of God lifting her burden of guilt and shame. She said; "I felt like I did as a little girl in Sunday School when my conscience was soft toward God. I'd been running from God for all these years and now it was as though God was saying He was there all the time." Soon after, Ronnie was released from prison. He entered the Men's Recovery House and began attending church with Debbie. Together they decided to do whatever it took to get their son back.

With ten months of treatment and drug testing behind her, Debbie was able to get custody of her son. Looking back she realizes it was God's hand in every circumstance that brought about the change in her life. It's been six years since that day and her son Chance has just begun grade one. Debbie now works full time at a lunch truck business and volunteers with the church sandwich program that first introduced her to a path of hope. She named her son Chance because she knew that God gave her another chance in life and with her parents. Debbie is an only child and was disowned by her mother because of her addiction. Her dad and stepmother (who had married her father when she was fourteen) never gave up on her. They always hoped that their daughter would come home to them restored.

Debbie's parents knew the statistics for addicts surviving after twenty years were slim. Then, while on holiday in the Grand Canyon, Debbie's father received a text that read; "Hey Grandpa! Call me." He was surprised that Debbie was even alive and could hardly believe she now had a son. A family once separated was now miraculously reunited. They now talk every Sunday. I spoke with him on the phone recently and he told me that he and Debbie are closer than ever. Each summer they spend two weeks together in Kelowna. Like the Prodigal son who was lost and then found, Debbie's father not only got his one and only daughter back from addiction but a grandson as well. God is good!

SPECIAL THANKS

*The Victory Foundation would like to thank
all of those who continue to support the work we are doing
in the inner-city of Calgary.
Your support is touching the lives of many in a positive way*

Victory Outreach Centre

7012 Ogden Road S.E., Calgary, Alberta T2C 1B4
Phone (403) 264-0598 • Fax (403) 263-0028
Pastor: Tom Maxwell
Web: www.victoryfoundation.ca
Email: info@victoryfoundation.ca

Eastside Victory Outreach

1840-38 St. S.E., Calgary, Alberta T2G 1L1
Phone (403) 387-0587 • Fax (403) 387-0564
Pastor: Pat Dennis
Web: www.victoryfoundation.ca
Email: eastsidevictory@shaw.ca

Editor: Tom Maxwell

Editorial Board:

Don Delaney, Vic Lappa, Louise Maxwell,

Design & Layout: Louise Maxwell



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The Victory Foundation

7012 Ogden Rd. S.E. Calgary, Alberta T2C 1B4

Phone (403) 264-0598 Fax (403) 263-0028

Email: info@victoryfoundation.ca



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7012 Ogden Rd S.E., Calgary, AB T2C 1B4