

Former Prison Inmate Now Reaches Cons for Christ Around the Globe

Once a drug addict and a thief, Canadian minister Monty Lewis uses his testimony to draw people to Christ

An ex-drug addict who used to beat other addicts senseless, steal wallets and forge doctors' signatures to maintain his habit now advises the Canadian government on chaplaincy issues within the prison system and recently received the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for turning his life around.

A salvation experience while lying naked, about to commit suicide, in the isolation hole of a maximum-security institution left Monty Lewis changed forever. He was delivered of his chemical addictions; anger, fear and other emotional problems eventually disappeared too.

"In my entire life, I had never felt loved until that moment, that instant when I told God I wasn't worth saving but asked Him to let me die with dignity. An explosion of God's love filled that prison hole and a peace I'd never known let me sleep like a baby for the first time in years," recalls Lewis, 58, of his 1977 conversion at Dorchester Penitentiary in New Brunswick.

The next morning he received a visit from a Salvation Army captain, who led him in the sinner's prayer.

Lewis, who finished hosting his second Coalition of Prison Evangelists' (COPE) conference for 250 international prison evangelists in September in Fredericton, New Brunswick,

believes God protected him through almost 20 years of brawling, stealing, forgery, drugs, alcohol and womanizing. At one point, he had dozens of charges pending, from assault causing bodily harm to robbery with violence, stretching from his home province of Nova Scotia on Canada's east coast to British Columbia on the nation's west coast.

"I always had a sixth sense—a voice inside would say, 'Don't go down that alley'—I know now it was the Holy Spirit. I remember once being in a car with a hooker; we were driving to a pig farm in Penticton, British Columbia, and that same voice told me clearly to get out of the car. I found out later it was the famous pig farm where 50 prostitutes were killed, dismembered and buried," he said.

The sordid quality of Lewis' early adult years was preceded by an equally disturbing childhood as Lewis' alcoholic father frequently beat his mother and told Lewis he would never amount to anything. As a child, Lewis was sexually abused by some teenage boys, an experience he said made him feel "dirty, stinky and never as good as anyone else."

After accepting Christ and going clean, Lewis got a lucrative job, married Lynda, who he met at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and had three children. In 1986 he started Cons for Christ, a Canadian ministry whose workers visit inmates in jail and send them Bibles, and follow up by discipling them when they're on the outside.

Cons for Christ has since spread internationally to Haiti, Estonia, the Ivory Coast, Britain and France. Cons for Christ sponsored its first COPE conference in British Columbia in 2001. The conference was co-sponsored and funded by Kenneth Copeland Ministries.

Lewis is now chaplain's adviser to the department of public safety in New Brunswick and wrote a training manual used throughout the Canadian prison system called Can the Chaplain Do It Alone? As an ordained minister with the Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada, he frequently shares his testimony at schools, churches and prisons.

Although the severe limp in his left leg from a terrible fight and the "train tracks" running down his left arm from years of shooting heroin belie Lewis' past, he now seems every inch a respectable, hard-working person; a man with a mission.

"God has shown me my destiny," Lewis told Charisma, "and it's to reach the hearts of those who are imprisoned not just by bars, but by their own sin, shame, hatred and unforgiveness."

Josie Newman in Toronto