

No Longer a Victim

By the time she was 28, Jackie Holland was on her fourth marriage and had lost count of how many times her husbands had beaten her. But today the woman who once had lost all hope is reaching hundreds of people a week with Christ's compassion.

It's Tuesday afternoon, and The Care Ministry at Restoration Church in the DallasFort Worth Metroplex bustles with activity. Nearly a dozen volunteers bag free groceries for locals who wait patiently in line. Cereal, orange juice, powdered milk, yogurt, bread, pastries, pizza, and fresh carrots and asparagus are among this day's selections.

The Care Ministry distributes food every Tuesday and Thursday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., and an evangelistic service is provided beforehand for those who wish to attend. Their chaplain is the woman who started the ministry 14 years ago from the trunk of her car—Jackie Holland.

One of the volunteers—David Anderson, who first worked at The Care Ministry as part of his court-ordered sentence in a legal case—continues to freely give his time, even though his attendance no longer is mandatory. He enjoys hearing what Jackie has to say.

"She's as beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside," Anderson says.

Anderson's right. Jackie Holland, 55, is attractive—the spitting image of actress Loni Anderson. She has big "Texas" hair and wears flamboyant jewelry. Beneath the exterior,

however, is a compassionate, Texas-sized heart that once was broken almost beyond repair.

Looking for Love

In All the Wrong Places

It's hard to understand how Jackie, who grew up in a loving Christian home, could have taken a wrong turn. She became a Christian at age 12 in Avery, Texas, and her family attended church regularly.

At 14 she began dating the high school basketball star, Chuck, and married him a year later. Young and naive, she truly thought he was her ticket to happiness.

Two months after getting married, Jackie became pregnant, and Chuck started drinking regularly. Saying the wrong thing would send him into a fury. Jackie came face to face with domestic violence but could not talk openly about it, despite her physical and emotional pain.

By the age of 17, Jackie was the mother of a son and daughter—Michael and Charlsey. Michael was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at the age of 3, and Jackie's world began to cave in.

Meanwhile, Chuck was ignoring his fatherly duties. He would come home late at night, and Jackie began to suspect he was cheating on her.

The morning after what Jackie believed was one of Chuck's all-night flings, she found a phone number in his dresser drawer and dialed it to test her suspicions. A young woman answered, and Jackie asked if Chuck was there. "No, he's out with the guys getting some more beer," the woman said.

Jackie told her that she was a friend of Chuck's and asked if she could come over to party with them. The woman gave her the location, and Jackie made the long walk—wearing high-heel shoes.

Chuck wasn't there when she arrived, but the young woman was. She was drunk and bragged about sleeping with Chuck.

Jackie returned home and was soon "greeted" by her husband. Instead of being remorseful, Chuck beat her in front of their children. Jackie somehow convinced herself that the altercation must have been her fault.

Soon afterward, a bone spur caused by Jackie's long trek in heels became unbearably painful, and she went to a doctor. He treated her foot, and suspecting that she was being abused, he asked her several questions. For the first time, Jackie told someone about all the beatings.

"You need to leave now," her doctor advised her, "for your safety and your children's."

Jackie took his advice. At age 19, she made a clean break from Chuck and moved to Minneapolis at the invitation of her sister and brother-in-law.

However, Jackie wasn't living for Jesus, and the new arrangement didn't last for long. She soon moved back to Texas, feeling like a washed-up old woman and a failure. But she hadn't given up on finding Mr. Right.

This time she thought she found him at a Texas rodeo. His name was Fred, and he was as big as a football linebacker. After a two-week romance, they visited a justice of the peace and were married.

Two months into the marriage, Fred returned early from a business trip and blew up at Jackie for no apparent reason. Indignant, she told him if he didn't apologize, she would move out.

Her demand didn't go over well at all. Fred picked her up and threw her outside of their mobile home. Then he pinned her to the ground and beat her severely. Jackie truly believed she was going to die.

Trying to sound like she really meant it, she cried out, "Fred, I forgive you!" Those were the magic words. In response, he collapsed on top of her, sobbing and telling her he didn't mean to hurt her.

Staggering into the house, Jackie went into the bathroom and couldn't believe the person staring back at her in the mirror. Her face was a bloody mess. Minutes later, she heard Fred on the phone and decided this was her opportunity to escape.

She drove straight to the police station and filed charges. The nightmare was over, and she prayed she would never see Fred again.

After two years of going to clubs, Jackie married a country singer named Mike. Although he wasn't abusive, he hadn't gotten over the breakup with his ex-wife, "Boots," and he missed his children.

One day before Jackie left to take the state test to get her cosmetology license, she told him, "When I get back, I don't want to hear anymore about Boots and the boys, or it's over."

She returned to discover that Mike was gone. The loss broke her heart.

To escape the pain, Jackie began to go out almost every night. Although she distrusted men, she was addicted to the "chase."

"I enjoyed getting dressed up because that made me feel good about myself. For someone to tell me I looked pretty and then to pursue me also made me feel good. I became all tangled up in a web I had created myself," she says.

Finally, she found a man named Sonny who was handsome, treated her with respect and seemed to be loaded with money. In the spring of 1973 Jackie married for the fourth time in 12 years. Sonny bought her a lovely home, and she liked being the well-dressed wife of a successful businessman.

Four months into her marriage, she became pregnant again. When Jackie gave birth to son Howard, Charlsey was 10, and Michael was 12.

Sonny's ex-wife called one week after Howard was born and

asked Sonny to take custody of his kids—Sonny Jr., 5, and Ann, 3. Much to Jackie's dismay, Sonny agreed, and Jackie, then 28, suddenly became the mother of five.

Over time, Jackie's marital bliss with Sonny turned into marital abuse. The emotional pain was almost worse than the physical beatings, and she had convinced herself that she deserved it.

For some time, Jackie had realized that Sonny was being unfaithful. He would return in the wee hours of the morning with the scent of perfume on his jacket. Sometimes he would even come home late at night with friends and send Jackie to her room like a child.

Overwhelmed and at an all-time low, Jackie couldn't take any more. The next time Sonny came home after being out all night, Jackie searched his pockets while he showered. She found a book of matches with a woman's name and phone number written on the inside cover.

Filled with rage, she went to the kitchen and found her .25-caliber pistol. She wasted no time venting her anger.

First, she aimed the gun at their china cabinet and fired. Sonny stood by and watched, simply yelling, "You broke the dish!" His reaction made her furious.

As Sonny walked toward the door, she pointed the gun at him. He ignored her. Jackie pulled the trigger, and Sonny collapsed.

Walking over to him, she boldly asked him, “Did you dance with her?”

Luckily, Sonny shook his head no.

While Sonny was taken to a hospital, Jackie was escorted to jail. Miraculously, her husband didn’t press charges, and she was free to go home after one night.

A few days later Sonny came home from the hospital. Jackie nursed him back to health, still trying to hold on to the marriage.

Not long after the shooting, they moved to another house. Jackie believed the move represented a fresh start in the couple’s relationship. Sonny was making good money, and they climbed their way up the Dallas social ladder.

Inside, however, the status wasn’t helping. Jackie was miserable.

From Heartache to Hope

In 1980, Jackie began sending the children to a nearby Baptist church. Charlsey was baptized when she was 13, and her enthusiasm for the Lord made Jackie feel guilty and ashamed. Jackie says it was the church’s bus ministry that led her back to the Lord.

“Scripture says a little child will lead them—and that was so true,” she says.

By 1984, Jackie not only was attending church regularly, but she also was going to Bible conferences and Bible studies, watching Christian television, and putting Jesus pictures all over her home.

“I was panting after the Lord. Something was stirring in me—a call to tell people about Jesus,” she says.

Several months later, Jackie found Sonny at a hotel with another woman. Jackie was glad God intervened and kept her from killing both of them. Sonny moved out.

Then one day, not long after the hotel episode, he called and said he had accepted Christ. Jackie didn’t want to hear it, but she believed God was telling her to give him a second chance.

Only by God’s grace was she able to ask him to move back in the house. He did, and over the next year, he became zealous for Christ.

But to her dismay, his changes were short-lived. Sonny had decided that he couldn’t be a Christian and make money at the same time. So he left Texas to work for an oil company in another state, and once a month he came home to visit the family.

In 1985, Jackie discovered a new church, Lake County-Midcities, which later was renamed Restoration Church. Shortly after becoming involved, Jackie set up an appointment with the pastor, Doug White.

"I want to do God's work—to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, help hurting women," she told him.

White prayed that God would open doors to help her fulfill God's call. That prayer was answered on Father's Day 1987 when Jackie's son Howard, then 12, discovered all kinds of discarded fruits and vegetables at a specialty store near her parents' home.

He took Jackie to the site, and, sure enough, there was box after box of perfectly good food. Jackie began making regular trips back to the restaurant, and each time she packed her car full of groceries. Sometimes she delivered the food to apartments, and other days she would give it out at a coin laundry.

While Jackie's ministry was budding, her marriage was coming to an end. She learned that Sonny was living with a co-worker in Houston and that his lover was pregnant. Jackie had given 15 years to the marriage and wanted desperately for it to work, but she sensed in her heart that Sonny had made his choice.

Focusing on her journey to recovery, Jackie put all of her energy into the food ministry. She approached store managers and asked if she could pick up their discarded food. A man donated his van to Jackie's outreach, and her assistant named it "God's Chariot."

The ministry grew to the point where Jackie believed she needed to seek financial help from her pastor and elders. They met, and she told them how much money was required to operate the ministry.

They agreed to her request, and what had been known as The Widow's Mite was renamed The Care Ministry. Restoration Church serves today as Jackie's spiritual covering.

A Wounded Healer

Several years ago, partly as a result of counseling topless dancers through The Care Ministry, Jackie expanded her outreach. She set up a separate office with a phone line that could be used as a hot line for women trapped in adult entertainment.

"We get a lot of calls from women wanting to get out of the sex clubs," she says. "Scripture says, 'You older women teach the younger women,' and that's what I've been called to do. I believe these young women can relate to me and the life I've led."

One of the women, Madeleine, saw Jackie on a national Christian TV network and wrote to her. She got an immediate response from Jackie.

"Jackie never judged me. She loved and encouraged me. She gave me hope," Madeleine told Charisma.

Madeleine's father, a Baptist pastor, sexually abused her when she was growing up. She never could talk to her mother about it, but she has poured out her heart to Jackie.

To help her get out of the adult industry, Jackie paid for Madeleine to take computer classes. Today Madeleine has a respectable office job in Fort Worth, Texas.

Almost 14 years ago, Jackie never dreamed she would still be giving food to the poor today. She didn't expect to still be single either.

"I'm the kind of woman who has always needed a man. It's a miracle that I've been able to remain single," she says.

Every day, Jackie talks to people who are so trapped and beaten down by life that they do not know how to get out of the pit. She shares with them her story of restoration and victory, giving them hope to make it through another day.

Jackie even found out earlier this year that her new pastor at Restoration Church, Bobby Treece, used to come to The Care Ministry for free groceries.

"How did I know back then that [from giving away discarded food] and out of my broken life, God would have me feeding my next pastor?" she asks.

A woman of faith and determination, Jackie is making up for lost time.

"I have discovered that marriage is not the optimal goal in life. If it happens, then that's great. But I know I'm doing what God has called me to do."

Carol Chapman Stertz is a former assistant editor of Charisma who now lives near Dallas. Jackie Holland has recently written a book about her spiritual journey, *Exposed Heart* (Bridge-Logos).

Editor's note: Some names in this story have been changed at the request of those interviewed.