

Radical Salvation? Teacher Convicted of Sex With Student Is Now a Christian

A former teacher who was convicted of sexual encounters with one of her students is now a Christian, her friend and biographer says.

Debra Lafave allegedly slept with a 14-year-old male student in 2004. She pleaded guilty to lewd and lascivious behavior in 2006, but has radically turned her life around in the decade after.

"She's a completely different person from when she was 24," Joe Zuniga tells *People* magazine of Lafave's life now. "She has grown up a lot. She has become a Christian, and she's a great mom. She recently got married, and she just ignores the media. She knows it will always be there, but she focuses on her life now. It's very normal."

Zuniga published *Debra Lafave: A Crown of Beauty for Ashes*, last year.

"She makes no excuses for what she did," Zuniga says. "She has always owned up to it. She says, 'If I could turn back time, I'd never would do that.' She understands that she didn't just negatively affect her life, but she hurt many other people, and she is still very sorry for it."

Of the book, Zuniga says:

I came to know Debra, whom will henceforth be referred to as Debbie, through family. My sister, Cris Zuniga Meza, worked with Debbie at a community health center for about three years. Debbie was really nice, and quite funny. Cris and Debbie immediately became friends. I would sometimes visit my

sister at work, bring her lunch or just stop by to visit. She introduced me to Debbie.

This is Debbie's story, though she has privileged me with sharing it. Yes, I do say privileged because though many may disagree, I find her to be intriguing and dynamic. It is not for me to judge a man or woman based on their past. I found that Debbie's story resonated with my own. I walked down the wrong path in life and ended up in prison. People can judge me, and often do, for my past; but since that time I have made immense personal changes and have grown immeasurably.

Looking back, I can see the transformation that I have made and just how far I have come from the troubled youth of my past. Learning about who Debbie is now, looking back on her life and all that it entails, I cannot help but feel moved by and connected to her. Her tale is truly one of transformation. Again, I am in no way attempting to emotionally hurt any of those who may have been affected by the events in Debbie's life. Much of what will be shared throughout this text is very sensitive to the parties involved, including Debbie, and all information is treated with the utmost sensitivity and respect.

Lafave's story was one of the first of its kind to make national headlines, though teacher-student relationships have become more common in the decade since.