

Sister of Patty Hearst Proclaims Christ, Leads Evangelistic Ministry in Colorado

The sister of kidnapped heiress Patty Hearst once aspired to be an entertainer whose glamorous life would be featured on the TV show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. But today Victoria Hearst is a born-again Christian who says she's "having way more fun" leading an evangelistic ministry in Colorado.

Reared as a Catholic, Hearst is the granddaughter of newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst and youngest daughter of Randolph Hearst. The family was thrust into the public eye in 1974, when Hearst's sister Patty was abducted by domestic terrorists and later accused of robbing a bank to aid them in their cause.

Patty Hearst was imprisoned for almost two years before President Jimmy Carter commuted her seven-year sentence in 1979. President Bill Clinton granted her a full pardon before he left office in 2001.

Victoria Hearst says she never doubted her sister's innocence and was instrumental in lobbying for her pardon. "It was just clear that she was not enamored of these people and didn't join them voluntarily, that she was just trying to stay alive," she said.

Victoria Hearst became a Christian years later in 1995 when a "miserable" relationship brought her to a breaking point. "[He] treated me so badly, I finally said, 'I can't do this anymore,'" she said.

She fled to her vacation home in Colorado and spent the next week reading a Bible a friend gave her. "I just read and cried and read and cried," she said. "And I was just a sponge. I was like, 'God show me the truth here.' And the Holy Ghost was wonderful. He showed me the Word. He said, 'Here's the Bible, and here's man's tradition.' He just showed me the truth and the error."

While watching TBN one night, she prayed the sinner's prayer and eventually ended the relationship with her boyfriend. She said that marked a turning point when she decided to give the Lord all of her life.

"I just took my hands off my life and had just reached that point where I just said, I don't know what I'm doing anymore because what I've been trying hasn't worked," she said. "I gave it over to God, and He's been driving ever since, and it's been way more fun."

Hearst moved from New York, where she'd been pursuing a career as a dancer, singer and actress, to Ridgeway, Colo., a town of just over 1,000 in the state's southwest. She began teaching dance to young girls and leading a choir at an area men's prison. In 2002 she opened Praise Him Christian Ministries in a 10,000-square-foot facility that houses a Christian bookstore and youth center.

Hearst hosts Christian conferences at the facility, and for the last six years she has sponsored a two-day evangelistic festival called Night Vision that features popular Christian artists such as Third Day, Michael W. Smith, Tye Tribbett and Francesca Battistelli. Drawn from the idea that Christians are to be light in the darkness, the event drew 10,000 people each day when it was held in Olathe, Colo., in July.

"It's kind of to show them, we can rock, we can dance, we can have a good time and have a great life, but we're not doing all the stuff that's going to hurt you," she said. "... And kids

get to go to heaven at the end of it; that's not too shabby either."

Bible teacher Billye Brim, director of the Prayer Mountain in the Ozarks in Branson, Mo., and a spiritual mentor to Hearst, says Hearst is a natural evangelist in a town with a strong New Age influence. "She's very evangelical in her heart," said Brim, who first befriended Hearst's father, who came to faith a few years before his death in 2000 at age 85.

"She does the work of an evangelist, and she does it in very unique ways," Brim continued. "The part of Colorado where she is, is a very unique place. And she's a Christian voice speaking out in very unique ways."

Hearst hosts a radio show where she evangelizes and gives conservative political commentary. She is also an ardent ally of Israel and has supported humanitarian work in the Jewish nation as well as Night to Honor Israel events in the U.S. in cooperation with the advocacy group Christians United for Israel.

Hearst says since she accepted Christ, her life has taken some unexpected turns-toward evangelism, youth and prison ministry instead of fame.

"It's funny how God has just changed my heart," she said. "He's equipped me financially, He's equipped me as far as having this show business background, given me a mouth to speak with. ... Instead of using that in the world, I'm using it in God's world. And it's a lot of fun. I'm having a lot of fun."