

The Stripper Who Found True Love

After former exotic dancer Heather Veitch found Jesus, she gained a new passion: evangelizing people in the hard-core sex industry.

Heather Veitch remembers when a john came into the Colton, California, club where she was performing as a stripper and asked for a private dance. When the man told her he was a fallen Christian, she advised him to go home. “Even then,” she says, “God was training me.”

She has since quit the sex industry, turned her life over to Christ and founded JC’s Girls, a fast-growing ministry to those working in the \$56 billion sex industry she left. Outreaches inside strip clubs and porn conventions have raised many eyebrows. But Veitch insists she must be culturally relevant to be effective.

“These rules we’ve made about how to be a Christian woman don’t exist [in the Bible],” Veitch says from the headquarters for Sandals Church, the Riverside, California, ministry that serves as her spiritual covering. “That you should have a job, be at home raising your kids, journaling and being in your home Bible study are all good rules, but they don’t equal Christianity. We shouldn’t be teaching them at women’s conferences.

“I think the Great Commission is very much lost on women. What I read [in the Bible] is that I’m supposed to be taking the gospel to everyone. And if you’re a stripper all those rules are a gap so big it seems impossible to cross.”

Energetic and bright, the 32-year-old peroxide blond crossed that divide in 1999 when she walked into a church for the first time in her life and broke down in tears of repentance. She says her conversion was not the result of a church outreach, but the end of a long, painful search.

Looking for True Love

Born in Los Angeles, Veitch grew up in a poor home in Muscoy, a town of 9,000 in San Bernardino County. She says her father was largely absent, and her mostly single mother often left her alone to care for a now-deceased sister, who was born with a heart defect and brain damage when Veitch was 14.

The same year her sister was born, Veitch accepted a ride to school from a stranger sporting a new car. He took her to a motel and raped her. After being raped again two years later at a party, she became promiscuous. At 17—the age her mother was when she bore her—Veitch gave birth to a son.

She later married her high school sweetheart, but the relationship was turbulent. She says he was admitted three times into psychiatric hospitals, cut up her clothes and tried to hang himself in her garage. When the couple divorced, Veitch says she left with only the clothes on her back.

Broke and uneducated, she moved in with a cousin in San Francisco and became a go-go dancer. By 1995 Veitch was living in Riverside and making up to \$2,000 a night stripping in clubs there and in Las Vegas. Drinking heavily, she made several soft-core porn films and at the urging of some club managers occasionally consented to have sex with big-spending clients.

Then in 1999 she heard rumors about the millennium ending the world. Though some people bought gold and stored supplies to prepare for Y2K, Veitch decided to change her life. She put herself through cosmetology school, quit the sex industry and convinced her live-in boyfriend, Jon, to marry her while on a cruise.

Their wedding officiator was a Christian minister, who led the couple in their first prayer. He also encouraged them to find a church and change their lifestyle. Back on land, the couple overheard two women in a coffee shop talking about their church and decided to attend.

“For me to walk into a church represented an extreme radical conversion,” she says. “Tears began running down my cheeks. For me that was so emotional; I knew there was no turning back.”

Veitch emptied their house of everything risqué and modified her dress, even gaining 25 pounds. “But the women of the church were still heavily judging me,” she says. “But as I read and learned more about the Bible, I learned that I’m not supposed to be judged for my past anymore. I’m forgiven.”

She attended several churches but had a hard time fitting in. With two children, a husband with brain cancer and a job as a beautician, she lost track of old friends. Then one day a woman came into the hair salon where Veitch worked and told her about a fellow stripper and mutual friend who had died from alcoholism. Veitch often drank with the woman and knew it could easily have been her in the grave.

“It broke my heart that nobody reached out to her,” she says.

“At that point I knew my ministry would not just be an effort to get girls out, but a message to the world.”

When local pastor Matthew Brown, who planted the 1,700-member Sandals Church in 2001, came into the salon for a haircut, Veitch asked him for help starting a ministry to sex-industry workers. Brown was interested. He says Sandals emphasizes outreach and “being real,” and the pastor describes himself as a “jumper,” or risk-taker, for the sake of the gospel.

“There was no doubt there is a call on her life,” Brown says. “But the idea of ministering to women in the sex industry is a struggle for a lot of us. We see strippers as objects and not really people, and she was the first Christian former stripper I had met. My role is to provide spiritual guidance and help her out, and I will always do that.”

A Hard-Core Ministry

Enlisting Sandals members Lori Albee and Tanya Huerter—neither of whom had been involved in the sex industry—Veitch launched JC’s Girls in March 2005. She then recruited friend and porn film director Jimmy DiGiorio to take the photos for the ministry’s Web site, . Designed to lure porn addicts and exotic dancers, the site opened with a banner featuring photos of the three dressed in snug clothing and the invitation, “See us in action.”

The trio enlisted other Christian women, prayed and led outreach events to area strip clubs. Some volunteers would merely talk with the young women to form relationships; others used more unconventional methods, such as purchasing lap dances just to have the time to get the women alone and tell

them about Jesus.

Albee says her first visit to a strip club changed her life. Raised in a Christian home, Albee accepted Christ as a teenager. But after meeting Veitch at the salon where the budding minister worked, Albee decided to accompany her on the ministry's first outreach.

After paying a young woman who looked "like any adorable college girl" the cost for a lap dance, Albee told the woman that she simply wanted the time to tell her that there was a God who loves and cares about her. "Instantly, her eyes started brimming with tears," Albee remembers. "And she said, 'I cannot believe that girls like you would come to a place like this to tell girls like me about God.' That broke my heart."

When Albee asked the woman if she could pray for her, she grabbed her hands. "And I just prayed for her, that she would always remember this moment in time when God came to her exactly where she was," she says. "And then she gave me a huge hug before we left.

"What I realized in that moment was I don't have to have a crazy, radical testimony to tell people about God and share His love. You just have to have a radical passion for Christ. [And] it doesn't matter if you came out of some crazy lifestyle. God is willing to use any vessel."

Veitch, Albee and Huerter trained other Christian volunteers to recruit more workers from churches near strip clubs. Roughly 90 churches signed up. JC's Girls also runs Matthew's House, a network through which women in the sex industry can

connect with a local church as they learn more about Christ.

“We need the church to know that the girls may not come dressed appropriately [so they must] make sure she is not run out by other women,” Veitch says. “We want the church to romance them and take the time the person wants, so when she comes to that point [of accepting Christ] it’s real and not something she was guilted into.”

During a Hannity & Colmes show, Alan Colmes asked Veitch, “Can you be a stripper and a believer at the same time?”

She quickly responded: “The question is: Can you be a believer and a glutton at the same time? Can you be a liar and a believer at the same time? Yes.”

As part of their outreach to the sex industry, JC’s Girls set up an exhibit at the AVN Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas last year. At their pink-and-black booth, amid men collecting free porn DVDs and photos of scantily clad Penthouse Pets, Veitch, Huerter and Albee distributed postcards that read “JC’s Girls, Girls, Girls: Three for the Price of One.”

After asking the gawking men if they knew who “JC” was, the women would tell them about Jesus Christ and ask them to turn over the card. It read, “With God you can have the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with one price paid for you on the cross.”

The women distributed 200 Bibles titled Holy Hotties as well as DVDs of Brown preaching about porn addiction. They even visited the convention’s gay porn area. “They thought I was a porn star,” says Veitch, who planned to lead similar outreach events this year. “We had thousands of men come by our booth

and read the gospel message, and we found that being funny opens the door.”

Veitch recently signed with the prestigious William Morris talent agency in Beverly Hills and is working on a reality TV show. Last summer she moved to Las Vegas to better juggle those activities and to reach out to the thousands of strippers there, though she says Sandals Church will remain her spiritual covering.

Her husband continues to battle cancer, but Veitch says they are determined not to let illness keep them from pursuing God’s plan. “We made a choice,” she says. “We can sit around here or we can go chase after God and do what He says we can do and live our lives for Him. Jon and I both believe what is happening is only what God wants to happen.”

Jon has undergone five surgeries since September 2001, when he suffered a major brain hemorrhage. Veitch says he has difficulty with his speech and memory, but is able to help care for their children, Robert, 15, and Darla, 6. Although she believes prayer can bring healing, she says God has used the illness to make them stronger.

“Jon is extremely passionate about God,” she says. “If he had been given the [physical] ability to become the leader in our home, I probably would not have become the leader that I am.”

Veitch believes the reality show will give her more credibility with Las Vegas strippers and open doors to numerous clubs. Although Brown says he is “not into the whole TV thing,” he notes that if Veitch can maintain her moral purity, her effort to minister in Las Vegas strip clubs is “at

least worth the experiment.”

Stepping out of the box for evangelism is nothing new for Veitch. After a recent meeting in Los Angeles, she says she felt the Holy Spirit leading her to a Santa Monica gay bar. She was quickly recognized, made friends and wound up on stage with a gay male porn star.

“I took the mike and talked about Jesus,” she says. “I got four phone numbers of gay men who are serious about wanting to go to a church. If you don’t box in God, you can take Him anywhere.”

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