

Grace for All



ANDREA JOHNSON/Editor

Growing up in a small community, our class roster varied little from year to year until we reached junior high and merged with other

students in our county. From kindergarten through sixth grade we saw the same 20 kids day in and day out. Class roles were fairly well established by second grade: the class clown, the pouter, the smart kids, the athletes, the “goody-goods.”

Shirley was somewhere in the middle of all that. Though she didn’t stand out in any specific area, it would have been hard to imagine a school day without her. For instance, in fourth grade our class consistently managed to get the teacher off track in discussions that took us completely away from the planned curriculum (and learned a lot in the process). Shirley was always involved in those discussions. Blonde hair, blue eyes, fun, unpretentious – everyone liked Shirley.

One evening during our teen years Shirley came with me to my uncle’s home for a Bible study. My uncle was role playing an evangelism encounter to teach us how to witness and decided to use Shirley as the person with whom he would share the gospel. While going through the presentation he noticed tears in Shirley’s eyes and realized she was not role playing. That night Shirley accepted Christ as her Lord and Savior.

After high school I lost touch with my friend but heard she was doing well as an airline hostess. Then, soon after celebrating the birth of my first child, I learned Shirley had passed away. After being married a short time, she had contracted AIDS from her husband. Little was known about the HIV virus at that

time. Her distraught mother cared for her for several months before learning even the name of the dreadful disease taking the life of her precious daughter.

Another friend, from Bible college, also died of AIDS, having received tainted blood in a transfusion after a car accident. She left behind a husband and two children. These are just a couple of examples of the innocent contractors of the virus. Others are babies born with AIDS or young rape victims.

It is easy to feel compassion for these individuals and their families. It can be harder to weep for those whose lifestyle choices significantly increase their chances of acquiring HIV. Yet when the Bible says, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) it does not refer to any “specific” sin. My gluttony, my gossip, and my critical attitudes are just as deserving of death as someone else’s sexual immorality. The good news is found in the last part of the verse, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” I can offer the best gift in the world – a new life – to people who really need it. I can convey the same compassion Jesus showed as He ministered grace to those whose lives were broken by poor choices.

As the Church, we have the ability to assist those who already suffer from this disease as well as the opportunity to halt its spread. Kay Warren, wife of author Rick Warren, says, “The Church is the most effective distribution channel of help, assistance, care, support, and compassion, and it has the moral authority to call for lifestyle changes.”

Individually, we can bring hope to those nearby looking forward only to death. Working together as the Body of Christ, we can reverse the growth trend of this insidious disease.

Andrea Johnson,
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Plus Much More!

*For tips on beginning a ministry to those with AIDS visit www.purposedriven.com/en-US/HIVAIDSCommunity/GlobalConference/Initiative.htm