



# Reconciled

Scottie Barnes is helping children avoid the separation she endured



Scottie Barnes lived a shattered childhood, embarrassed that her father spent most of her youth behind bars as well as dejected because her father never showed any kind of emotional attachment to her.

For three decades, Barnes prayed for the salvation of a man who — while being in and out of prisons five times — ignored and rejected her.

Despite the hurt, Barnes, now 60, spends her time making sure prisoners' children receive something she never enjoyed: a full, fun day with their incarcerated fathers.

At age 4, Scottie began accompanying her mother on weekly prison visits to see her father. Every Sunday, they would make a three-hour drive from their home in Lenoir to Reidsville, N.C. Barnes at age 6 began to realize her father didn't express any affection for her. She remembers him repeatedly staring at his watch, appearing anxious for the two-hour family visit to be over.

When she was 7, Scottie's father, James Fred "Babe" Pennell, briefly was out of prison and the family moved to Knoxville, Tenn. Scottie started attending church and put her trust in Jesus. She heard sermons about Jesus being able to do anything, including healing her fractured family. Scottie figured if

to invite a minister to visit him again.

Scottie kept praying her father would love her and her mother. Within a couple of years Pennell returned to prison. Fearing stigma and shame, Scottie never told any of her classmates about her father's whereabouts.

"Most children aren't concerned about why their parent is in prison," Barnes says. "They are concerned that their parent loves them."

Finally, when Scottie was 13, she and her mother, Marguerite Rector, went to prison to bring Pennell home after he had served a 3½-year sentence. Scottie believed they finally could be a real family.

But the officer at the gate delivered shocking news: Pennell had just left with another woman he called his wife. That began Scottie's long-held resentful feelings toward her father.

"A lot of prisoners' children turn to crime because of bitterness," Barnes says. "Reconciliation is needed to break the cycle."

Scottie's father continued to return to prison for longer sentences as his crimes graduated from bootlegging to tax evasion to drug kingpin.

As a young adult, Scottie went on with her life and tried to put her father out of her mind. But at age 20, after the birth of her first daughter,

est in the child. Barnes' feelings of rejection and pain started anew. She decided she wouldn't try to be involved in Pennell's life anymore.

"God must have chuckled that day," Barnes says. "It's not in God's plan for us to write our parents out of our lives."

Four years later, upon his release from prison, Pennell knocked on his daughter's door in Taylorsville, N.C., to announce his plans to move next door.

"I prayed, 'Lord, I don't want him in my life; I don't even like him,'" recalls Barnes, who continues to live in Taylorsville. "I still had an unforgiving spirit."

Soon her father suffered a massive heart attack in Myrtle Beach, S.C., where he spent his weekends. At the hospital, he listed his 37-year-old daughter as next of kin, which prompted a spark of hope in her.

"I felt overjoyed that he needed me," Barnes says. She expected to see a man clinging to life, finally prepared to ask Jesus into his heart. Instead, although still in intensive care, Pennell was sitting up in bed, placing gambling bets over the phone.

"He wasn't ready to get saved," Barnes says. "Money was still his god."

Nevertheless, Barnes experienced a renewed compassion for her father. Encephalitis and a stroke left

By John W. Kennedy

the minister talked to her daddy at home, everything would be OK.

When the preacher came in the front door, Pennell exited out the back. Before the pastor left, he told Scottie never to give up praying for her father's salvation. When Pennell returned home, he warned her never

ter, she found Pennell in an Atlanta penitentiary.

"Deep down I wanted him to see my baby — and love me because of her," Barnes says. "I hoped this would cause us to begin a relationship."

But Pennell expressed no inter-

him somewhat impaired, and Barnes knew he didn't have much longer to live. She knelt in prayer and pleaded again for the Lord to do whatever it took, even if it meant God choosing to take her life in order to reach her dad. At that point, Barnes says, God replaced the root of bitterness with

# Reconciled

forgiveness. She continued to pray in earnest.

Two months later, Pennell asked his daughter to pray for him just after his arrest in Charlotte, N.C., for drug trafficking. Barnes knew God had begun to answer her prayer. But Pennell rejected his daughter's plea to accept Jesus as Savior, saying he couldn't believe a holy God would forgive him of all the wrongdoings he had committed. Yet the following day, Pennell did pray a salvation prayer and was baptized.

"A lot of prisoners don't understand grace," Barnes says.

At a highly publicized trial in South Carolina, the judge allowed Barnes to make an impassioned plea for mercy for her father. The judge reduced a 42-year sentence for the 61-year-old felon to 18 years. Pennell, crying uncontrollably, leaned over to his daughter and for the first time said, "I love you."

Barnes began making an 800-mile round-trip every other weekend to visit her father in federal prison in Lexington, Ky.

"I didn't dwell on the past," Barnes says. "Now we had a commonality in Christ."

Six months later, in 1987, her father died.

After her long ordeal, Barnes had no intention of becoming involved in prison ministry. She felt content operating a small retail store. But 12 years ago, a prison chaplain asked her to share her testimony with inmates. Prisoners responded to the message of how a little girl felt detached from, and then reconciled to, her father during his life behind bars. Invitations to speak at prisons and churches have poured in.

One such ministry trip to the Philippines changed her life. At an orphanage in Cebu, she prayed with a 12-year-old boy named Ezekiel

who asked God to motivate his imprisoned father to love him. The following day, Barnes gave her testimony at a local prison. As she left, a white-haired man hollered at her.

"Today I asked Jesus into my heart," the man explained. "I have a little boy, Ezekiel. I want you to tell him I love him."

Barnes made a beeline back to the orphanage and delivered the message, cradling the boy in her arms.

Afterwards, Barnes sensed God calling her to help prisoners reconcile with their estranged children.

In 2004, under the auspices of Forgiven Ministry, Barnes began operating "One Day With God" camps designed to do just that.

Working with an array of volunteers, Barnes sees to it that inmates and their children can spend a fun Saturday together. The day's activities include praise, worship, crafts, a Christian movie, food and games. Afterwards, the fathers present

Bibles and other Christian gifts to their children.

"It's a simple concept," Barnes says. "I don't know why someone hadn't thought of it before."

In addition, 19 churches under Barnes' ministry operate "Ezekiel Room" at Alexander Correctional Institution in Taylorsville. In the room an inmate's child participates in a structured Christian program of songs, Bible stories, prayers, crafts and skits. Some of the fathers have never seen their children involved in any activity before.

With the support of Jack, her husband of 34 years, Barnes is ministering at prison camps in one of six states most weekends.

"If we want to stop the growth in the number of prisoners we have to reach children," Barnes says. **tpe**

JOHN W. KENNEDY is news editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

## ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

### A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

### Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

### B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

### Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

### C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

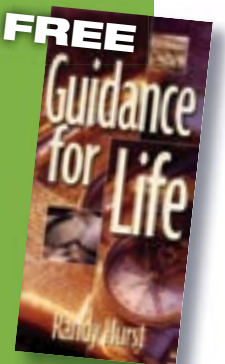
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

# 1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center



## Building a Successful Education

Blueprints guide the construction of a building, allowing the many separate aspects to become a unified structure.

GLOBAL UNIVERSITY firmly believes prayer is the first step in allowing God to help you build your education. We can be the second step. We can **customize** a program to meet your training needs and offer **accelerated plans** to help you move at the pace of your life. Our independent study system lets you progress as quickly as you desire, and our degree completion program maximizes your previous learning and experience.



- Customized Plan
- Accelerated Learning
- Degree Completion
- Bachelor's and Master's Degrees

For all the details, visit [discovergu.com](http://discovergu.com) or call **800.443.1083**

## GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

1211 S. Glenstone Ave. • Springfield, MO USA 65804-0315

## SHE WAS BORN INTO A BROTHEL IN MUMBAI. HER MOTHER WAS SOLD AT 15. TODAY, THEY ARE SAFE WITH US.



## PROJECT RESCUE

HOPE STARTS HERE >>

Rescuing today's young sexual slavery victims is nothing short of a miracle. The pain and trauma a victim has faced is so horrible, one can hardly imagine. Yet our determination to right this horrific wrong remains unshakable. Our joy is in seeing the miracle of restoration reflected in a young woman's eyes — from sad darkness to exuberant light. This provides our singular focus — giving hope in Christ.

Go to [ProjectRescue.com](http://ProjectRescue.com) to learn more about the ministry and how you can get involved.

P.O. Box 9931 Springfield, MO, 65801 | Phone 417.833.5564 | Toll Free 866.862.0919 | Fax 417.833.5568



PHOTO COURTESY OF REBECCA GRANT