

## SECOND CHANCE, OR LAST CHANCE - TEEN ADDICT: `IF I HADN'T COME, I THINK I'D BE DEAD'

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It's a Friday night in Collierville and teenagers are crying. They're talking about their drug addictions, their bad choices and about how no one trusted them.

Some of them, if they've earned it, might get to talk to their parents for all of 10 minutes. These teens won't see their parents until the next Friday, when they might get another 10 minutes of supervised talk.

But in the midst of the tears there's also laughter, and the tragic testimony gives way, ultimately, to accounts of redemption and rebuilding. Rebuilding relationships with their parents. Rebuilding relationships of trust.

Rebuilding a relationship with God. The redemption that they believe only He can give.

These youngsters have been handed over to the care of Rev. F. Scotty Cassidy and his wife, Jean, both 60. The program is Second Chance, and for some of them, it's their last chance.

The takeoff

Scotty Cassidy was an addict when he came to the United States on a plane from Scotland on June 24, 1954. Jean arrived the same day from Scotland, on a boat. Although they'd grown up only 7 miles from each other outside of Glasgow and members of their families had known each other, they didn't meet until they were stateside. Some would call it coincidence, chance or just the luck of the draw, but the Cassidys think they know better. Just as He would intervene 34 years later to bring the Cassidys to Memphis, Jean and Scotty believe the Lord was guiding them when they came to the States.

Scotty was an active addict when he met his wife, and he would remain one until 1970, when he went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in New York. He moved his family to Florida in 1974, and a friend from AA in New York came to visit.

Scotty was not a religious man then, but he saw changes he liked in his friend, who had become a Christian.

"I saw him and I knew something was different. I said to him, `Charlie, my boy, I don't know what you've got, but I want it,' " Cassidy said, "my boy" rolling off his tongue as if he'd just arrived from Scotland last week.

They went to a Waffle House on 56th Street in Tampa, and it was there that Scotty opened his heart to the Lord. It was then that his true recovery began, he said.

Scotty left behind his career as an engineer to work for Straight Inc., a recovery program in St. Petersburg that taught 12-step recovery and employed the host-home method that the Cassidys would later adopt for Second Chance. Later, Jean also went to work for Straight.

"Straight was doing great work, just super work," Scotty said. "Jean and I had the idea to take that model, the secular and the spiritual, and to put it together and combine Christianity to make it Christ-centered. We sat on it for five years."

In May 1987, Rev. Jimmy Latimer of Central Church in Memphis sent a delegation to Florida to meet with Scotty. Latimer wanted to develop a recovery ministry in Memphis.

"We didn't go down there to get him," Latimer recalled. "We went down there to ask him how to do it. What had interested us was that Straight did a pretty good job."

Latimer had envisioned a ministry of coordinated treatment, a program that would provide counseling, health care and spiritual guidance.

Scotty told them about his idea for Second Chance, and the next month, he and his wife were invited to Memphis to discuss the program with the church elders.

The couple moved to Memphis, leaving behind in Florida four grown children and a grandson. In September 1988, Second Chance took in its first three clients in Memphis.

The Cassidys' children and grandchildren began moving here, too.

"Jean and I were looking for confirmation from the Lord that we were supposed to be here," Scotty said. "Well, we're not going any place: We've got five grandchildren here now."

Second Chance has taken off, offering a Christ-centered recovery program in which the participants live with host families who have a teenager in the program. It is one of few programs in the country, if not the only one, that uses the Christian and host-family approach, according to Cassidy and other drug-abuse recovery experts contacted.

In its 10 years, more than 700 teenagers have been through Second Chance, and 58 are enrolled currently. Cassidy says 80 percent of participants stay off drugs at least one year after they leave the program. He arrives at that figure by keeping in touch with the parents and seeing the graduates at yearly reunions. About 60 percent of the teenagers are from the Memphis area; the others are from around the country.

Second Chance is an alternative to hospitalization for chemical-dependent teenagers and young adults age 13-22. Doctors are among the staff of 40, and counselors lead the teens and the parents in extensive counseling sessions each week: The youths spend up to 12 hours a day at the Second Chance facility when they first come to the Cassidys.

The program is funded entirely through fees and donations from churches and the private sector. Some insurance companies cover all or part of the cost of the program.

Until healthy

Second Chance is not for everyone. It's deeply religious with a stringent structure. It's not cheap: \$15,000 for the full rate, although scholarships are available based on need. It's not a recovery program where you send your child for a quick fix. And unless you're willing to devote about a year to it yourself, your child isn't a candidate.

"I'll take your child in treatment if you don't have any money," Scotty said, "but not if you won't get involved."

Jean is more specific about what it takes for a family to get through Second Chance.

"By the time families get to us, they've probably gone through other treatment. You've got to be pretty desperate. I'll ask them if they'll bring me the Mississippi River, cup by cup, if I ask, and by the time they're here, they will."

The program has five phases. While some teenagers have completed the phases in 10 months, it has taken others more than two years.

"We keep 'em until they're healthy," Scotty said, "not until their insurance money runs out."

In Phase I of Second Chance, the participant is sent to live with a host family. Phase I participants are called "newcomers" and the ones who have moved to Phase II and beyond are "oldcomers." The newcomers stay in their host home for a minimum of 30 days, and can stay longer - 90 days or beyond. They stay until they're ready to move past the phase of concentrating on their personal development and their relationship with God to go on to Phase II. During the second phase, they return to their homes and add working on their family relationships to their list.

In the first two phases, participants are protected in the confines of the Second Chance building, leaving only to go to their host home in Phase I or to their family home in Phase II. Students are taught at the facility at 3505 Houston Levee Road in Collierville by Evangelical Christian School's homebound program during the first two phases.

The only contact the newcomers get with their families is 10 supervised minutes of talk at Friday night open meetings - if they've earned it. Parents can talk to their child only in front of the whole group during "open mike" at these meetings. Also, during the first part of Phase I, the newcomer is led around by an oldcomer by the belt loop - the "hand of friendship" or the "loop of love."

"We don't lock them up," Jean said, adding that teens in the first phase often want to run from the program and have to be constantly monitored.

In Phase III, most of the children leave the cloistered confines of the Second Chance building and enroll at Collierville High School. This is a difficult time for many participants, because this is the phase where they go back into the world and start to work on their relationship with the community.

Mike ██████ of Cordova has seen a tremendous change in his home since his 14-year-old stepdaughter Jessica ██████ entered Second Chance last June. She's changed from a combative stepchild to a loving daughter who regularly writes him friendship notes, he said, and his marriage, too, has been saved.

Jessica's family sought help when she was expelled from school in seventh grade for drinking on campus. Last June she entered Second Chance and is now in Phase IV, in which privileges most teenagers take for granted, such as talking on the telephone and going to the mall, begin to be restored. Further freedom and privileges are restored through Phase V, and then the teens graduate.

"I thought these people were crazy," Jessica said. "I didn't think I had a problem. I seriously didn't think I had a drug problem. It took me about two weeks to get motivated."

Jessica said she had "a lot of twisted thinking" before she entered Second Chance, including thoughts of suicide. She started using drugs in sixth grade, her grades fell, and she was resentful of her stepfather. She said she used marijuana, alcohol and "unknowns."

Jessica believes that Second Chance saved her life:

"If I hadn't come, I think I'd be dead."

Philip [REDACTED], 17, of West Memphis, also thinks he would be dead without the help he's gotten at Second Chance.

[REDACTED] came to Second Chance last April, after being kicked out of boarding school.

"I knew I was messed up when I came in," White said, "but I thought everyone here was crazy. They were flapping their arms and everything."

"Flapping their arms" is a method the staff of Second Chance uses to keep the kids motivated and energetic. Instead of raising their hand to speak, they have to snap their fingers while waving their arms above their heads.

[REDACTED] said it took him three weeks to realize that he needed to be in Second Chance, but when he returned home in Phase II, he relapsed for a day and had to return to Phase I.

"I knew then if I didn't do something, I wasn't going to make it. I would've ended up dead. I just thank God that no one gave up on me," said [REDACTED].

Barclay [REDACTED] stepson fled the program in Phase III and never returned. [REDACTED] of Memphis, and his wife, Leigh Ann, had two boys in the program at the same time. One of them completed the program after 2 1/2 years, but both of them are using drugs again today and are living with their father in Michigan.

The boys aren't counted in the 80 percent success rate, but the [REDACTED] say the program was worth all the time and effort their family put into it. And they say their children have improved even if they are once again using drugs.

"You relapse because you choose to relapse," Barclay [REDACTED] said. "You can't come up until you really hit the bottom, and we don't think our kids did."

The program requires intense parental involvement. Not only must a parent relinquish their child to someone else's care in Phase I, but they must then be willing to take let another troubled teen in their home to call them "Mom" and "Dad" as their own child advances through the phases.

Parents must also be willing to attend meetings with their children every Friday night, go to church services at Second Chance one Sunday of the month, and hardest of all, they say, bare their souls in Monday night "parent raps." This is a time when parenting methods are examined, roles are scrutinized, and mothers and fathers learn to be completely honest with each other as well as with their children.

"I remember leaving Second Chance feeling 2 inches tall," said Jessica's mother, Shannon [REDACTED]. "This program makes you look at yourself, and sometimes you just don't like what you find inside."

Cliff and Lisa [REDACTED] moved their family from Rogers, Ark., to Collierville when their son Trey, 18, entered Second Chance in August 1997 because they wanted to be a host home: Families outside Memphis cannot be host families and their child must stay with a local family throughout the program. Out-of-town families come in once monthly for weekend therapy

"We just loved it," Lisa said. "You really get to see how everything works when you've got another child in your family."

Trey finished Phase V in June and now only goes to Second Chance for his after care. His mother still goes to parent meetings.

"I'm still learning," she said.

Scotty Cassidy met with civic and church leaders in Phoenix last month, and he said he expects to have a facility there by Thanksgiving. Others will run the program, and Scotty will stay here. He'll pray that he receive the support from churches and citizens of Phoenix that he received here.

He doesn't think that support came through luck. He believes in something stronger than that, the something that brought he and Jean together 5,000 miles from their homes in Scotland, that saved him from his own demons, took him away from engineering and into recovery work, and that brought him to Memphis.

Scotty believes in second chances. And he believes the Lord grants them.

To reach Second Chance, call 368-LOVE.

Jennifer Biggs is a Memphis-based freelance reporter.

- Caption: photo (3)Photographs by Shoun A. Hill (Color) To keep participants motivated and energetic, Second Chance doesn't want a simple raising of hands to speak. Instead, the young people in drug rehabilitation wave their arms and snap their fingers. (Color) By the time families get to Second Chance, they've usually tried other options and are desperate, says Jean Cassidy, here counseling teens. "I'll ask them if they'll bring me the Mississippi River, cup by cup, if I ask, and by the time they're here, they will." (Color) Rev. F. Scotty Cassidy

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