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ISSUE 1 2025

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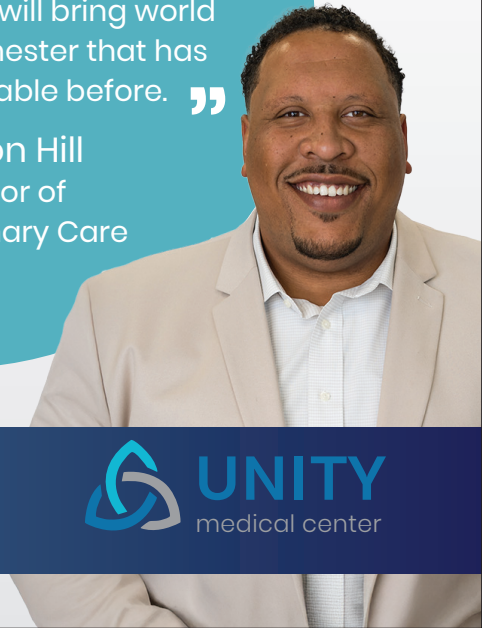
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The future of healing

The love and care of the past make our health care heroes stronger.

A NURSE WALKED down the hallway his mother walked decades before he did. *Beep ... beep ...* he could hear the sounds from patients' rooms. He kept a small keepsake pinned to his scrubs, a pin his mother gave him when he graduated nursing school. She had once worn the same pin. He became a nurse to honor her and to care for others, just as she had done before him. Years from now, the nurse's son would fasten that same pin to his own scrubs as he healed others with love.

A paramedic raced to the scene of an accident, her movements swift and practiced. This was her calling — running toward danger when others ran away. Yesterday, she saved a family from never-ending heartbreak. Today, she knelt beside a young girl, steadying her voice with calm reassurance. That girl would one day wear the same uniform because of that interaction.

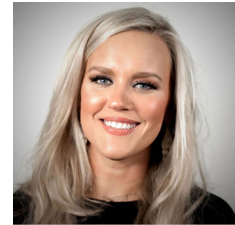
A doctor filled out a prescription in a quiet office, her hand steady and sure. The memory of her first patient came back to her — the blend of nerves and excitement she felt 10 years ago. Today, her experience and knowledge give another person a chance to live longer, to return home to their family, and to hold their loved ones close.

The health care workers of today stand on the shoulders of those who came before them. Their love moves from soul to soul. Their courage ensures that the love and care of the past are not only remembered but carried forward. The health care professionals around us make the world a better place not just today but also tomorrow. The future of healing will be in stronger hands as we pass the torch from the past.

This issue of Good News shares the stories that remind us that the future is one of health, love, and care. **GN**

Wesley Bryant,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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TASHA
HILL





THERE'S ROOM FOR REDEMPTION.

Tasha Hill's inspiring transformation leads her to help women reclaim their lives at Miriam House.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

TASHA HILL vividly remembers the moment that changed her life. She was sitting in a jail cell, lost in the throes of addiction, feeling utterly hopeless. With parents who also battled substance abuse, Hill found herself trapped in the same cycle of addiction, dysfunction, and eventual incarceration. She was so overwhelmed by life's circumstances that she believed her fate was sealed: a life defined by overdose and imprisonment.

"I probably had over 30 jail stays," she shared. "I thought that was my lot in life."

But in that cell, she encountered what she now believes was a supernatural encounter — a woman

who, to this day, she wonders might have been an angel. This woman ultimately inspired her arduous path to recovery.

"You don't have to live this way," the woman said.

The words pierced through the darkness, stirring the possibility of redemption deep within her. At that moment, she realized she had a choice to stop the cycle of addiction, broken relationships, and incarceration.

"It was like God walked right by me," Hill recalled. "From that day forward, I was different."

Hill, determined to change, joined a local church. She had heard of recovery programs but said they never truly transformed people from

the inside out. Her church provided the structure and support she needed to rebuild her life, believing that change was truly possible. Through ministry, she began to transform, grounding herself in biblical principles that guided her journey. Hill also confronted the deep wounds that had fueled her addiction.

"The Bible answers all of life's issues," she said. "As you become who you were supposed to be, you unbecome all the things you weren't."

Rebuilding relationships became one of the most vital and tender steps in her recovery process. As a mother who lost custody of her children due to addiction, Hill knew

Miriam House students Bridget Rendant, Hailey McMullin, Amanda Cluff, Bonnie Nunley, Kari Watkins, Melissa Barks, Shay Poellien, and Christy Newby gather with Director Tasha Hill (in green) at Canvas Community Church on Nov. 26



▲ Miriam House students Shay Poellien and Christy Newby (front); Hailey McMullin, Kari Watkins, Bridget Rendant, Amanda Cluff (middle); and Melissa Barks and Bonnie Nunely (back) gather around Director Tasha Hill at Canvas Community Church on Nov. 26

▲ Miriam House Recovery Specialist Ashantei Jean, Intake Coordinator Ashley Trimue, and Director Tasha Hill on Nov. 26

intimately the pain of broken families. But through faith and relentless dedication, she rekindled relationships with her family and found a way to help other women navigate the same painful path.

“I tell people, ‘No matter how long you’ve been in addiction or away from your family, you can turn it around,’” she said.

Following her recovery, Hill began volunteering in various ministries, eventually leading faith-based support groups at her church. Facilitating these groups amplified both her confidence and abilities. She was able to provide others with the extra support that she craved during her recovery journey. Each session made her vision clearer and deepened her desire to create a more comprehensive support program that offered faith-centered healing.

Encouraged by her church community and after a brief phone call with Pastor Caleb McCall, Hill manifested her vision into reality by joining McCall in opening Miriam House. In 2020, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, McCall named Hill the director of Miriam House. It was a step in her journey that they both felt she was destined to take.

“I have to point it all back to the Lord,” she said humbly. “He grew me from the inside out.”

Miriam House is a faith-based recovery center designed to empower and renew women through holistic healing. Through Miriam House, Hill helps other women break free from the chains of addiction and rebuild their lives just as she did. The program welcomes women from all walks of life — whether they’re coming from jail or the streets or simply need a life change — and offers long-term support.

“We teach them how to live again,” Hill explained. “We look at each woman’s needs — whether that’s getting their GED [diploma], parenting classes, or working on getting their children back — and walk with them through the process.”

Hill sees her ministry at Miriam House as a manifestation of overcoming heartache, immense growth, and a willingness to be led and disciplined. She knows the methods that work to heal others, and she understands their struggles because she has lived them.

As a proud mother of four sons, Hill continues to mentor women outside Miriam House and actively participates in community outreach through Canvas Community Church and initiatives like One Day of Hope.



As for the future, Hill has no plans of slowing down. She plans to expand Miriam House’s reach and help more women across the country access life-changing support.

“God has called me to proclaim the good news and set the captives free,” she said, referencing Isaiah 61:1-3, the scripture that has become her life’s mandate. “I want to see more women break free from addiction and find their true purpose.”

Hill’s story breathes vitality into what was once stagnant and hope to those in despair. Through Miriam House, she is rewriting her narrative and helping other women find the strength to write theirs. For countless women, Miriam House is a gateway to freedom, healing, and a brighter future. **GN**

MANCHESTER'S HEALTHY FUTURE

Martha Henley understands that true health care encompasses mental, emotional, and social well-being.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

IN A world where health care often feels like a race against time, what if the most important aspect of healing wasn't about the ailment at all? Martha Henley, the CEO of Unity Medical Center (UMC), poses this question at the center of the business's philosophy. Henley, one of Manchester's visionary leaders, believes that true health care is far bigger than treating physical ailments. It encompasses the mental, emotional, and even social well-being of each person who walks through the door.

For Henley, health care shouldn't be just about fixing what's broken; it should be about building what's missing.

With their guiding principle, "Your health matters," Henley and her team strive to provide personal and holistic health care. In an era when telehealth care might feel disconnected from personal care, Henley has created a culture where patients feel seen, understood, and fully supported.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF CARE

When you meet Henley, it's easy to see how her values have inspired both her career and the community itself. Her love for others is as much a part of her identity as her job at Unity Medical Center. And it's in the small, often unnoticed moments that her impact is most meaningful.

PROACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND EMPOWERMENT

When it comes to health care, Henley makes it accessible and proactive, partnering with local nonprofits, and volunteering her time to initiatives like Daily Bread Mobile Meals and Coffee Cares.

Daily Bread delivers hot meals to those who can't cook for themselves. Coffee Cares is a local nonprofit that raises funds to help people with medical bills so a single

medical emergency doesn't devastate a family's financial stability. Through these efforts, Henley makes even the most vulnerable members of the community feel seen and supported.

"We want to be sure everyone, regardless of their circumstances, has access to care," she said. "Whether that's through a meal, medical support, or simply listening to someone's concerns, we're there."

CREATING SPACE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

One of Henley's most groundbreaking projects is UMC's initiative promoting mental health and addiction awareness. Witnessing local residents actively participate in the program, master their conditions, and achieve meaningful improvements in their well-being brought her immense joy. She said it truly highlights the positive impact their efforts can make in people's lives.

Seeing the transformation in people who participated in these programs is one of Henley's most fulfilling achievements — further proving that health care is all-encompassing and far bigger than mere treatment for illness.

LEADING WITH HEART AND BALANCE

In a role as demanding as hers, Henley has had to learn to balance caring for others and caring for herself over the years.

"I've learned that prioritizing self-care is essential — not just for me, but for everyone around me. I make it a point to set boundaries and carve out time for things that recharge me, like spending quality time with my husband and children, enjoying my hobbies,

or practicing mindfulness and meditation,” she explained.

Henley is an advocate for mindfulness and meditation, and she leads by example, encouraging her team at UMC to take time for themselves. Whether she’s attending local events, working behind the scenes on health care policies, or simply spending time with her husband and children, she understands the importance of balance in creating a sustainable life. She also shares this philosophy with her staff.

“I also believe in promoting a supportive culture at Unity Medical Center, where we encourage our staff to take breaks and focus on their well-being. I remind myself and my team that when we take care of ourselves, we’re better able to care for our patients. Ultimately, self-care isn’t a luxury — it’s a necessity for providing sustainable, compassionate care.”

THE FUTURE OF HEALING

Looking forward, Henley sees tremendous opportunities for growth and healing within the Manchester community.

“We’re not only addressing immediate health care needs, but also working to tackle the deeper, often unseen factors that impact our community’s well-being, like access to resources, mental health, and education,” she said.”

She continued, “I truly believe that by standing together and offering compassionate, high-quality care, we can make a lasting difference. My goal is for Unity Medical Center to be a trusted partner in every person’s health journey, ensuring that everyone in Manchester has the care, support, and kindness they need to thrive.”

She also plans to build relationships with local schools, businesses, and nonprofits to create a network of support that uplifts the entire community.

For those looking to get involved in making a difference, Henley advises

“listening actively.” Take the time to understand what your community needs, and then find ways to help. Whether it’s volunteering your time, educating yourself, or advocating for resources, there are so many ways to contribute.

Henley’s legacy in Manchester is in the programs she’s created, the lives she’s

touched, and the culture of care she has created. She’s built a community where compassion is the solution and where every individual, regardless of their circumstances, can find support and healing. Henley is resolute in her belief that small acts of kindness can transform individuals and entire communities. **GN**

**MARTHA
HENLEY**



TRANSFORMING ADVERSITY INTO ADVOCACY

Mary Hazelwood's own trials prepared her to change lives in the criminal justice system.

By Jeriah Brumfield // Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

GROWING UP in a world of unpredictability, where stability was a luxury and trust a fragile commodity, was the reality for Mary Hazelwood. As a child, Hazelwood experienced the instability of the foster care system, moving between two homes for a year before her father regained custody. Through this tumultuous period, though brief, Hazelwood found the strength to rewrite her story. Today, as a forensic social worker, she spends her days unraveling the complexities of the criminal justice system as part of the criminal defense team, giving clients hope and a path toward a brighter future.

While Hazelwood now loves her work, her childhood was so chaotic that she couldn't imagine being in her current position.

"My childhood was so chaotic and dysfunctional that I really couldn't dream of anything," she said. "The instability led to me being placed in Department of Children's Services (DCS) custody for some time."

She didn't know it then, but her time in DCS custody would soon become the unexpected key to unlocking her dreams.

"It was while in DCS custody that I first met a social worker who made a lasting positive impression on me," she said.

With the pieces of her childhood and the inspiration from that social worker, Hazelwood began to write a new story. But fate had other plans, and her journey took another unexpected turn. At age 24, while working maintenance at a factory, she suffered a work accident that almost took her life.

"I had to be revived in the ambulance, LifeFlighted to Vanderbilt, and then put into a medically induced coma while I recovered from a traumatic brain injury," she recalled.

After numerous surgeries and years of rehabilitation, Hazelwood was finally healthy enough to pursue her education in 2018. She enrolled at Motlow State Community College for her associate degree in social work, then transferred to Middle Tennessee State University for her bachelor's and master's degrees in social work, with a new dream — to help others as a social worker once helped her.

Hazelwood said her decision to pursue social work, especially in the criminal justice system, felt predestined. One of the requirements for her bachelor's degree

was a 400-hour internship. When the internship she had lined up fell through at the last moment, her field advisor recommended the public defender's office in Coffee County.

"Without any other options, I decided to apply," she admitted.

Initially, Hazelwood imagined working with children or becoming a victim's advocate, so the idea of working with adults facing criminal prosecution didn't seem appealing.

"I went into the interview with absolutely no idea what a social worker would do in a public defender's office or whether I would be a good fit," she said.

However, as she interviewed with John Nicoll, the district public defender in Coffee County, his vision for the social work program moved her.

"It's now four years later, and I have fallen in love with this work," she said. "I've learned what a positive impact I can have on our clients' lives by helping them overcome adversity and rewrite their own stories just as I did in my own life."

Hazelwood can't imagine doing anything else. Making a difference in her clients' lives is her morning fuel,

pushing her to connect them with vital resources that can impact their and their family's well-being.

She spends her days between the jail, the courtroom, and her office, reviewing medical records, conducting client assessments, and coordinating services. She listens to clients' success stories with a sparkle of excitement in her eyes. The pride of watching her clients achieve something they didn't think was possible feels invigorating.

Most of Hazelwood's clients have faced more adversity than anyone should ever experience.

"Many clients are in the criminal justice system because they are battling substance abuse, mental health issues, homelessness, or unemployment," she explained.

Each success reminds her and her clients that they don't have to face this seemingly grueling process alone. This collective success benefited individual clients and also enhanced the quality of the broader program.

Together with her team at the public defender's office, Hazelwood has helped the social work program grow considerably. The initial stages were challenging, but now the office serves as a prototype for best practices in rural districts statewide.

"There were growing pains at first," she said. "We didn't have established models to replicate in rural communities, and it took time to educate other stakeholders in the criminal justice system about the role of a forensic social worker."

Since then, Hazelwood has contributed to interprofessional collaborative training for staff in 13 other districts, hoping to expand the use of forensic social workers across Tennessee.

Aside from the training programs, Hazelwood finds her greatest reward is witnessing the personal transformations her work supports. She is especially proud of three clients who, after completing treatment programs, now work as peer



MARY
HAZELWOOD

support specialists or house managers, helping others on their path to recovery.

"People can't change the past, but they don't have to be defined by it either," she said. "If I can help clients find their inner strength to make positive changes, our community improves, one client at a time."

In the future, Hazelwood hopes to continue expanding forensic social work in public defender offices across the state. She plans to grow the internship program

and eventually develop a curriculum to train future forensic social workers.

Hazelwood's story has evolved from the depths of uncertainty and disarray into a source of inspiration for many. Her trials have given her the insight and strength to help others learn to dream again and rewrite their stories. She has proven that healing and hope are always possible, no matter how bleak the path may seem. GN

FUTURE **of** HEALING



IN THE HANDS OF COMPASSION

Jenn Nogodula gives her home health care patients hope, dignity, and expert physical therapy.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEIGH NEWNES

WHEN A loved one faces a health challenge, transitioning into this new reality can be a daunting time for everyone. Questions about care, safety, and quality of life arise. You want to ensure they receive the best possible support, but the uncertainty can be overwhelming. Doctors and physical therapists assure you they'll be well cared for, but nothing prepares you for the moment you walk in to find Jenn Nogodula at their side — not only guiding them through the motions of physical therapy (PT) but lifting their spirits, making them laugh, and reminding them of the simple joy of feeling valued.

Many consider physical therapists like Nogodula a lifeline. She delivers expert care with an air of dignity, connection, and joy that many thought they had lost. In 2004, following in the footsteps of her mother, Kathy Keele, and motivated by her respect for older adults, Nogodula began providing intentional care to her PT patients in their homes. Her humble beginnings led her to PT school, where she found her purpose in geriatric care — an underserved population she chose to focus on early in her career at a skilled nursing facility.

But it was her transition to home health in 2007, after Nancy Graham Gunn recruited her, that made Nogodula's career truly fulfilling. After her first child, Jaydee, was born in 2009,

she became a full-time home health physical therapist. During that time, she found the flexibility needed to balance her work with her children's lives and, importantly, a way to bring personalized care directly into the homes of those who often felt overlooked.

"I thoroughly enjoy working with the geriatric population," Nogodula said. "I try to relate to them and provide PT services along with fun and entertainment in their home. I just want them to feel special and better overall. Often, the geriatric population gets overlooked, and they feel unworthy and unloved. I don't ever want that to happen."

Now, with a dedicated team at Adoration Home Health, Nogodula



Physical Therapist Jenn Nogodula ► assists Julia Vaughn with functional transfers from her armchair to standing at McArthur Manor Assisted Living in Manchester on Nov. 15

and her colleagues are enhancing their patients' quality of life and strengthening their community.

"I am overjoyed when I see my patients improve and become more independent in their homes," she said, describing her motivation to improve their health and wellness.

Nogodula moves with a unique grace, seamlessly bridging the parts of physical therapist, compassionate caregiver, and advocate. As a home health physical therapist with Adoration Home Health, she carries out their philosophy, blending medical expertise with empathy.

"There's definitely more to home health than PT and physical activity. There's an emotional and social aspect, too," she explained. "Many of my patients don't have family or friends to talk to, so they appreciate the social interaction. I have learned so much from them — they are so interesting to talk with."

Her patients often become dear friends and even family.

"I often become very close with my patients, and it's very difficult when they pass away due to the strong relationships we've built," she shared. "They become like family."

Her patients, many of whom are older adults living alone, light up when she arrives. Some days, the PT sessions become meaningful conversations, with Nogodula listening to their stories, sharing a laugh, and nurturing their emotional well-being.

Nogodula and her team at Adoration Home Health consistently go above and beyond, arranging transportation for appointments, coordinating meal services, and offering additional support.

"Therapists are trained to identify other needs the patient might have, like medical equipment or food," Nogodula said.

Among her most rewarding moments are the small wins — the pride on a



▲ Julia Vaughn practices gait training in the hall of McArthur Manor Assisted Living with the support of her physical therapist, Jenn Nogodula, and a gait belt, a tool used to ensure safety during mobility exercises.



Jenn Nogodula, physical therapist, in the lobby at McArthur Manor Assisted Living



Improving someone's quality of life and helping them become more independent and safe at home is what makes my job fulfilling.

- JENN NOGODULA

patient's face when they achieve greater independence or the joy in their eyes when they simply see Nogodula arrive.

"Improving someone's quality of life and helping them become more independent and safe at home is what makes my job fulfilling," she said.

In addition to her responsibilities as a physical therapist, Nogodula dedicates her time to enhancing the community's well-being alongside her family. Together with her husband, she participates in local initiatives, including the Dusty Elam Foundation and the Sportsmen & Businessmen's Charitable Organization. Through these groups, she has mobilized

resources to meet critical needs, like organizing pest control for patients' homes or building accessibility ramps. She believes wholeheartedly in the community's power to support one another.

Recently, when fire victims in her community lost everything, Nogodula and her husband provided food, clothing, and essentials through the Dusty Elam Foundation. She also supports broader efforts like One Day of Hope and Career Day for middle school students.

At the foundation of Nogodula's work are footprints of kindness and a desire to restore physical health and dignity in those she serves. She dreams

of a future filled with continued support for her patients and an even stronger community foundation for the next generation. Throughout her career, she has proven that health care means valuing each person as a whole and finding ways to heal the body and spirit.

When the time comes to consider home health care for your loved one, it can feel incredibly daunting. If you find yourself facing that challenging moment when your loved one needs PT, know that Nogodula and her team at Adoration Home Health are there to support you. They might just restore your family's hope when you need it most. **GN**

FUTURE *of* HEALING



LAUREN TOBITT

THE HEART OF PATIENT CARE

Lauren Tobitt offers a new perspective on how health care can honor humanity.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ASHLEIGH NEWNES

SOFT PINK and orange hues lingered in the sky — remnants of a sun that had just set peeked through the blinds. The sounds of the busy world outside faded into the background as Lauren Tobitt adjusted her patient's blanket, making sure the edges were neatly tucked in. She smoothed her hands over the fabric, checking for even the slightest discomfort. It was the end of another long shift, but Tobitt could hardly imagine doing anything else. Inside the room, she remained focused on the present, providing compassionate care to each patient, treating them with the same love and respect she would offer her own family. The ambiance here contrasted sharply with the commotion outside, where the noise of the world continued unabated.

After graduating from high school in McMinnville, Tobitt began her career as a certified nursing assistant at a nursing home. She had planned to begin her prerequisites for nursing at Motlow State Community College, but life, as it often does, had a different plan. Due to unfortunate circumstances, she did not finish her prerequisites and decided to continue serving older adults in the community.

Here, inside the peaceful reverence of the hospice wing, she found her gift. It has always been the simple acts of care that resonate most with her. She makes sure an Alzheimer's patient has their favorite chamomile tea sitting by their bedside, its steam curling and issuing comfort. She brushes their thin, silver hair, each stroke a lullaby from years gone by.

It all comes from the mindset that every resident deserves dignity and respect.

"Life doesn't end when you reach your golden years," she said. "It just changes a little."

Sometimes, the weight of that change could feel overwhelming, both for the residents and their families. But Tobitt's

gentle and insightful demeanor helps ease the transition into this new season of life, making it as smooth and comfortable as possible. Families find comfort in knowing that their loved ones are well cared for, while those without close relatives feel that their void is filled by the love and support of their caregivers.

"Honestly, it's the simple things again — like brushing someone's hair, fixing it the way they like, or putting on their favorite music to calm them down," Tobitt said. "It's the things we often take for granted that matter the most."

One resident's niece recalled a touching moment during her aunt's hospice care at the nursing home. Following her first shoulder surgery, she was unable to drive but felt a strong urge to see her aunt. The day before her aunt's passing, she patiently waited for a ride to visit her one last time.

When she finally arrived, Tobitt had already anticipated the resident's need for comfort. Knowing that the aunt's favorite CD player had stopped working, she gently placed her personal phone on the aunt's chest, playing her favorite songs to soothe her in those final moments.

Though staying by her side was not part of her official duties, it represented the compassion and love that Tobitt brings to her patients. This loved one described Tobitt as one of the most caring individuals she had ever encountered and expressed gratitude for her thoughtful actions.

"It wasn't Lauren's job, but that's exactly how she loves her patients," she said.

So, what motivates Tobitt to go above and beyond for her patients? Her response is as genuine as her caregiving style.

"It's more than a job to me. I love getting to know my residents. It's like having a lot of grandparents," she shared. "Once you learn about who they are, their favorite foods, music, or even what they did for a living, you can find ways to make their days special."

In the world of health care, those personal connections make all the difference, especially when communication barriers arise, which are constant in her field of work.

"With residents who have dementia or are unable to communicate well, those personal connections mean everything," Tobitt said. "It makes them feel at home, and that's what matters most — feeling comfortable, feeling loved."

These moments, these sparks of life bursting in the twilight, are what keep Tobitt going. And it is in these moments that she finds hope for a future where health care is not just treatment but a celebration of life.

Tobitt hopes other caregivers recognize the need for more time and resources to create impactful experiences, like outings in the sunshine and birthday celebrations with cake and entertainment. She hopes her work can serve as a model for other health care professionals and encourage them to connect deeper with their patients, even in the face of mortality.

"Just because someone is at the end of their life, it doesn't mean they should stop living and enjoying moments," she said.

She hopes for more time to create those small, special moments that define a person's experience in their final years. To this end, she imparts a simple piece of advice to new caregivers: "Treat them like your own family because, in essence, they are."

In her eyes, we are all connected, and in the end, it's the simple acts of love and care, how we make others feel, that matter most.

As the health care field evolves, Tobitt's caregiving style is a powerful model for how we can care for those nearing the end of their lives — with the same love, respect, and dignity we would offer at the beginning of life. It's clear that professionals like Tobitt, who care for residents with heart and compassion, will be at the forefront of creating meaningful care for generations to come. **GN**



BRADYN HERROD, AVIANNA AND KAYLA NICHOLSON, ADALYNN MOSELEY

RISING FROM THE SHADOWS

Inspired by her own transformation, Kayla Nicholson mentors others and shares with them her story of hope.

BY JERIAH BRUMFIELD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ASHLEIGH NEWNES
AND SUBMITTED BY
KAYLA NICHOLSON

KAYLA NICHOLSON looked down at the family photo on her phone as her eyes traced the smiles of her three children. After years of separation, each face under the same roof felt like a miracle. It hadn't been an easy journey — her life had been destabilized by addiction, loss, and years spent in a darkness she thought was inescapable.

As she stared at the picture, a new reality settled over her that her family was whole again. Still, the memories of the past tugged at her mind and reminded her of how close she had come to losing it all. The darkness she fought through wasn't merely the dim isolation of jail cells. It was a deeper, more consuming despair that had embedded itself well before her first arrest.

Growing up, Nicholson witnessed the turmoil of domestic abuse, which filled her childhood with instability and disarray. Abuse influenced much of her earlier life, leading her down a path to addiction. As a teenager, she became entangled in an abusive relationship and addicted to painkillers. Her life eventually collapsed into a torrent of news headlines, police raids, and the wrenching loss of her children. She ended up in jail, feeling like there was a void where her soul should've been.

"When my babies were taken from me," she said, "a piece of me didn't come back."

Incarceration forced Nicholson to confront herself. Alone with her thoughts and regrets, she faced the guilt of losing her children to addiction.

"I had no coping skills back then," she admitted. "It was almost tormenting the way I started thinking about how I wasn't a good mom. So I tried not to think about it."

Her time in isolation created a turning point as Nicholson began to recognize the broken pieces within her. However, it would take the right guidance and a life-altering encounter to set her on the path to restoration. That encounter came when she met Jeannie Campbell, a volunteer with Doors of Hope (DOH), whom she met at church. Campbell began ministering to Nicholson at church, leading her to seek the recovery she needed.

"She ministered to me and had some Bible studies with me, and her testimony is what pulled me out," she shared.

DOH is a program that helps women break free from incarceration cycles. The program eventually became Nicholson's foundation for a new beginning. For eight months, she attended counseling sessions and Bible studies. As she listened to others share their stories of recovery, she began to believe that change was possible.

After such a transformative experience at DOH, Nicholson decided to attend Blue Monarch, a long-term residential program for women and children overcoming addiction and abuse. In Blue Monarch, Nicholson once again found the support, community, and structure she needed to heal. Nicholson also found herself confronting memories and truths she had buried for years.

"Secrets only make you sicker," she said.

She knew she had to expose her past trauma, addiction, and pain — if she was ever going to find peace. Slowly, layer by layer, she opened up and revisited memories that had been locked away by years of coping mechanisms and survival strategies.

"I didn't even know I had a favorite color," she admitted with a laugh. "When I realized my favorite color was green, I cried. I enjoyed getting to know myself through all this."

Each step of recovery also taught her accountability. She learned about the triggers that could pull her back into darkness and actively chose a different path.

Shortly after her recovery process, she enrolled in psychology courses and mar-

veled at the mind's capacity to heal. Her studies became a way for her to process her own struggles, equipping her with tools to resist the temptations that once seemed inescapable.

The recovery program also helped her repair the broken relationship with her children. Her children returned to her one by one, and with every reunion, another piece of herself was restored. Five months ago, she welcomed her oldest son back, whom she had only seen on and off since he was 6 years old. Now 16, he joined his siblings under her roof, completing the family she had once feared she'd lost forever.

"I'll wake up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water, and as I walk through the house, I realize — all my babies are here, sleeping under the same roof," she said.

Nicholson's journey now reaches back into the very spaces that once held her captive. She said after her recovery, she felt called to help others, and she now volunteers in jail ministry alongside Campbell.

"I just knew I was called to jail ministry," she said. "I have learned everything I know through [Campbell]."

As a mentor and sponsor in a local jail ministry, Nicholson extends the kind of understanding and hope that Campbell offered her, illuminating the way for those still struggling in the darkness. Nicholson's transformation is inspired by renewal, community, and self-discovery. She is proof that broken pieces can come together, that light can emerge from the darkest of places, and that redemption is possible, even for those who feel lost beyond hope.

As she looks at the photo of her reunited family, she understands life may not always be picture-perfect, but it signifies a miracle of second chances and the ability to reclaim her life. For now, though, she is grateful to wake up every morning with her children by her side, the past behind her, and a future full of hope. **GN**

Christmas Spectacular - Dec. 13



Photography by Ashleigh Newnes

Duck River Dance partnered with Millennium Repertory Company and delighted audiences with a festive variety show featuring beloved songs, captivating dances, and hilarious skits on Dec. 13.



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