

Tita's Story / Carolina's Story

Tita: Some of my earliest memories are of my grandfather...a very kind man with a passion to help women. He was a gynecologist...so he cared for women in hospital when they were having babies, but he also traveled to little far away country towns to treat women who could not pay for his services. When I think of him and how many women he helped during his life, I smile and feel very proud of him.

Tammy: Welcome to *Women of Hope*. I'm Tammy, and it's great to be back again with you. Today we have Tita here with us to share her story. It sounds interesting so far doesn't it Carol?

Carol: Yes...I'm looking forward to hearing more about how Tita's grandfather affected her life. He sounds like a very caring man.

And how are *you* today? ...I hope you're comfortable if you're sitting down to listen. Or maybe you're working as you share this time with us. Whatever you're doing, let's enjoy this time together.

Tammy: We have something a little different today. We've asked Tita to tell us about her life and some of the things she's learned. It's always good to hear another woman's story isn't it? So...welcome Tita. We're delighted you could come and share with us.

Tita: Thank you Tammy...and Carol.

Carol: It sounds like your grandfather has influenced your life a lot...

Tita: Oh yes – he was always helping people, especially women. He inspired me to find ways in which I could also use my life to help people. So...I studied to become a dentist...

Tammy: Now that's interesting. I don't always want to go to my dentist, because it can hurt.

Tita: That's true – but if you don't go to the dentist it will eventually hurt more.

Tammy: True!! (chuckle)

Tita: So I became a dentist because I found great pleasure in being able to take pain away from people...as well as helping to fix their dental problems.

Carol: That sounds like a good reason. Tell us more...

Tita: As a young, single woman I knew that one day I wanted to get married and continue working as a dentist. I have always been a very organized person. I like to make plans. I wanted to make sure that I had things well planned out for my future life.

Have you ever had a dream or a plan that did not happen as you wanted?

Well, I have. My plans didn't always work out the way I thought they would. Let me tell you about it...

I got married to a handsome South African man, which meant that I left my country, Mexico, to live in South Africa. Very soon I found out that I was not allowed to work as a dentist in this country without taking some more exams, and this would be a long process. Finally I passed the exams and began working, but unfortunately it was not for very long. The political situation in South Africa was very complicated at that time so my husband and I decided to start a new life in another country.

So we packed everything up and moved there. I still remember how scary this was because we didn't know anybody in this country...and we had very little money so we both needed to work. My husband began working for an oil company, but I was shocked when I found out that *again* I was not allowed to

work as a dentist! This was very bad news for us! So, I took any other jobs I could find since we needed the money. But I have to admit that I never found satisfaction in these jobs. I wanted to help people and believed I could only do this if I was working in my profession as a dentist.

With my husband's job we had to move to different countries from time to time, and everywhere we went the situation was always the same for me: I could not work in the job I loved...dentistry! I hated this, and became more and more angry and frustrated.

So the next time we had to move I decided to ask God to help me. I said to God: "God, you know that I want to do something with my life and I want to help people. So if you have something for me to do in this country, show me. I will do it. Every job I have had leaves me feeling empty and dissatisfied. I give up!"

Did you know that when you pray God listens to your prayers...and He answers them? Well...I know this, because He answered mine. A few days after I prayed, I was offered the opportunity to do voluntary work...with no pay. But by this time my husband's pay was enough to support us both. There was a group of international women, like me, living in this country because of our husband's jobs. These women collected money and my job would be to find a group we could help. I accepted the job and soon discovered a group of people I wanted to support...4 nuns who helped women involved in prostitution. For these women this was not a personal choice. They were mostly forced by their spouses or parents to earn money for drugs and alcohol...or they needed to earn a living to survive and had no other skills.

After so many years of searching, I had finally found my passion. Working with these women was the most wonderful experience in my life!

Carol: You're listening to *Women of Hope* and our friend Tita is here sharing her story. She found her 'passion' – the thing she most wanted to do – as she began helping women who had been forced into prostitution.

Tita: We helped these women with practical needs like accommodation, food, medical and dental help. We helped to provide schooling for their children. And we taught the women new skills so they could earn money in a dignified way.

But one of the most important things we did was to tell them about Jesus, God's son who came to live on this earth to teach us about God. He showed by his life that he cared about people too. In God's word, the Bible, we read many times about how he helped women when no-one else wanted to help them. And he gave his life for us...he died on the cross to take away the punishment for the wrong things we do. We told these women about him and how *HE* was the only one who could really heal the pain and the wounds they had experienced in their lives. We could help, and comfort, and provide for them, but we could not take away their pain. For me, the most satisfying part was to see women's lives changed when they invited Jesus into their lives.

This is just what happened with Carolina. She was one of 8 children in her family and from a very young age she experienced a very hard life of poverty and despair. She never had the opportunity to go to school. Every day her mum would go out and do any jobs she could find to earn money to feed her 8 children and support her husband. He had once had a job but he began to drink and soon lost his job. He never looked for a job again. The whole family lived in fear of this man because they never knew when he would become angry and aggressive and beat them.

As time went by things got really bad and at the age of 16 Carolina was so desperate that she left home. She thought that perhaps she could find a better life somewhere else.

Tammy: Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. Let's hear from Tita whether Carolina really did find a better life when she left home at 16.

Tita: Well sadly, like many girls who think they can find a better life away from a difficult home situation, she found herself in the streets with no money and no place to stay. But being a survivor, Carolina found some cleaning jobs and a shelter for the homeless where she spent a few nights.

It was here that she met Carlos, an unemployed young man who soon began showing her love and affection. When he found a job, they moved into a small room in a house that they shared with other people and as time went by Carolina had 2 children with him. She felt a bit safer for a while.

But during those first years she found out that Carlos was a drug-addict. He could not hold a job for very long and needed money to buy drugs. Carolina's money was never enough for all of them and before she knew it, Carlos had forced her to become a prostitute to support his drug addiction.

She hated this lifestyle but felt trapped in it! She needed to provide for her 2 children and if she didn't earn enough money Carlos would physically abuse her.

The night I met Carolina, I had gone with the nuns to the area of the city where Carolina worked as a prostitute. We met her and explained that we could offer her the opportunity of leaving her life of prostitution and provide her with a dignified way to earn money. She was very scared of disobeying her husband but took the courage and came to see us early the next day.

She joined our program at a huge risk. She knew that her husband would be furious but she knew she needed to escape that lifestyle. The possibility of a dignified life was scary but very attractive.

Carol: We've been listening to the story of Carolina here on *Women of Hope*. She left home at 16, hoping to find a better life. But she soon found herself trapped in a life of prostitution.

Tammy: But Carolina decided to make a very important choice. Although she was very scared of her husband's reaction she decided to accept the help that was being offered to her.

Carol: Tita we want to know what happened to Carolina...

Tita: Carolina and her children began attending the sessions with doctors and dentists, and the sessions with counselors who were there to help her deal with her pain, fears and sadness.

She began learning to read and write, but especially she began learning to make rugs that she could sell to earn money. Her children began attending the school that our program provided. Carolina also received a small salary as well as the money from rugs she made and sold. The only condition to receiving this help was that she would *not* return to work as a prostitute. She agreed to this.

Have you ever seen a beautiful flower that is looking sad and wilted? If you put it in water it comes back to life: it opens up and shows the beauty of its color, and its fragrance.

Well this is the best way I can explain to you how Carolina's life began to change. This began the day that Carolina invited Jesus to be part of her life. In the past I had shared with her how Jesus loved me and had always helped me through difficult times in my life. I also told her that she could have his help if she invited him into her life. So, one day she said, "Tita I am ready! I need Jesus' help in my life, this pain and fear I feel all the time are killing me. Nothing takes that away, and I don't want to live like this anymore. I want to have Jesus with me like you do. How do I do this"? It was very simple, all she needed to understand was that she needed to pray and ask him to forgive her for having done wrong things in her life and to be a part of her life. She did this...and from that moment she began to change!

In the beginning she felt so low, so inferior that she would not even look into our eyes when we chatted with her. But she began to learn that the lifestyle she used to live did not mean that she was worthless. She learned that she was a valuable person...in our eyes *and* in God's eyes. She learned to be more confident and to accept our love and hugs!

I loved to visit Carolina! She would run to me and show me her notebook and say: "Look Tita, I can now write my name... I can now write numbers from 1 to 100." It always put a smile on my face to see her discovering a better life. Her boys began going to school and instead of being sad and aggressive, they started smiling as they played and laughed with other children. As Carolina became more confident, the boys began looking up to her as their mother, with respect. Their relationship became a much more healthy one. They were slowly learning to be a family!

However, Carolina paid a high price for leaving her life of prostitution. Her husband made life very hard for her. On one occasion she arrived to her classes bruised and without her front teeth. He had attacked her...but that was to be the last time. She was now emotionally strong enough to make a very important decision. She left him and moved into a small house we had organized for her and the children.

She was a new woman! With new confidence she went out and found herself a good job. She began working at a supermarket in the fish department. She did so well there that soon she was put in charge of the whole fish and meat section, and to this day, she is still doing very well. Some time later, I was able to help Carolina have some new teeth made and now her smile is beautiful again.

Tammy: Here on *Women of Hope* today we've heard the story of Carolina whose life was changed. She was forced into a life of prostitution, but one day she met a group of women who cared enough to look for people like Carolina and offer them help.

Carol: Through this group she also heard about God's son Jesus, and how he could take away her guilt and pain. She and her two children found a new life. Tita do you have something else you want to share with us before we finish today?

Tita: Yes I do Carol... I don't know what *your* life looks like. Perhaps *you* are facing very hard circumstances. When I asked Carolina once, "How did you survive all those hard experiences?" she said: "It was simple, I never lost *hope* that one day something good would happen to me, and it finally did."

Let me encourage you: Don't lose hope...and trust that something good can happen to you too! Ask God to help you, no matter what your situation is. He loves you, and he knows that you are a valuable person.

Stories like Caroline's became my inspiration. And since those days, I have dedicated my life to speaking to people around the world about Jesus and his power to change their life. This is the best work I could have ever wanted. It allows me to help many more people than if I was still a dentist. I love working with Jesus: I do the talking and Jesus does the rest as He changes peoples' lives and gives them hope.

Personally, I'm grateful for my life experiences. I have learned that many times we make plans and want things to be the way we want them to be. However God has much better plans for us and is willing to lead us to them if we allow him to do so.

I also learned that I had different skills that I could use to help people. I would not have discovered them if I had been a dentist for the rest of my life. And when I think of the other jobs I did in the past, I finally understood that nothing had been wasted. I *had* helped people through these jobs, but in a different way.

Carol: Thanks Tita for sharing your story, and Carolina's story with us today.

Before we go I would like to pray for you. You may be struggling with a difficult lifestyle. Or you may be feeling that your life is not worth much, and you can't help anyone else. But I think we've learned today from this story that you *are* valuable to God. Through his son Jesus, he will forgive you for anything you have done that makes you feel ashamed or worthless. He can make *your* life new too.

Tammy: Do you remember the wilted flower that Tita talked about? If you feel like a wilted flower, remember that if you put it in water it will come back to life and all the beauty it had before will return. God has made you as beautiful as a flower and he wants to water your life with his love.

Carol: Let me pray for you...

Our father, God, thank you for making us like beautiful flowers. We all look different and we all have different skills...but we are all beautiful in your eyes. Please help our listener to understand that she is valuable to you. Help her to come to you and ask for your help. Please provide for her...everything that she needs. We ask this in the name of your son Jesus, who gave his life for us. Amen

Tammy: Thank you Carol. It's good for us to remember each day that we are valuable to God and that we can reach out and help other people. Thank you for letting us be a part of your life and lets get together again next week. Have a wonderful week and God's blessings on you.