



MY COUNTY JAIL TIME

I was in county jail for two years before death row, except for a short stay in a mental hospital. My book *Will You Die For Me?* (the question Manson asked me with a knife to my throat) describes my nine months fighting extradition in the Collin Country Jail in McKinney, Texas, three months in Atascadero State Hospital and a year in Los Angeles going to trial, so justice could be served.

After hearing there was a warrant out for my arrest, I turned myself in at the Collin County Jail on November 30, 1969. I confessed everything to my Christian attorney, Bill Boyd, who was shocked like the rest of the world. I dropped in weight to 118 pounds before leaving for Los Angeles, where I would lose another twelve pounds, become depressed and sent to Atascadero in a catatonic state. In this mundane condition, the Lord assured me in a voice that whether I lived or died I was His. During the next three months, I put on a few pounds before returning to court where I was found guilty and placed on death row, “...dead in my trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

During this time, I was dealing with the fact that I took the lives of the victims and the vivid image of those two nights was too much to stomach. I could imagine the pain their families and friends were going through by the shock of what my family was experiencing. Mine could visit me, but their loved ones were gone, buried three months earlier and now left tormented by the murders. My local community wondered what happened to Charles Watson. The effect upon Los Angeles and Collin counties weighed deeply upon everyone. I was the cause of it all as I explained to my attorney.

MY EARLY YEARS

Born at the end of WWII, I had wonderful parents, who lived through the Great Depression. They wanted a better life for their children, so I was saving for college from birth. I was the youngest of three, following in the shoes of my siblings. When they left home for college, the pressure I put on myself to succeed became too much to handle as a teenager.

I was baptized at twelve, since I grew up going to church and Vacation Bible School. I memorized John 3:16 and sang “Jesus loves me this I know” and “The B-I-B-L-E, that’s the book for me”, but I never truly experienced the love and power of the Holy Spirit to cast out the spirit of fear that was driving me from an early age (1 John 4:18).

I was a successful high school student; on the honor roll, perfect in attendance, voted most likely to succeed, and a star athlete, but I thought my acceptance was based on my performance. Because I didn’t know and believe the grace and unconditional love of God, I felt I had to earn love, always without success. I medicated my emotional pain with alcohol and sex, looking for love.

In college, it got only worse. Being a lazy student, I feared not making the grade. Without realizing it, I chose to join a fraternity, dated and partied, rocking and rolling and drinking more; all for acceptance. After completing three years by working summers, I rebelled against my parent’s wishes by moving to

California. I feared failure and humiliation and “... the thing I greatly feared came upon me” (Job 3:25).

MY MANSON DAYS

I lived in California for only two years before the crimes. Enrolling in college to please my parents, I soon dropped out, because work and marijuana got in the way. I moved from my apartment on Glendale Boulevard to a house in Laurel Canyon and then to a beach house on Pacific Coast Highway in the space of a year. Making one bad choice after another, I picked up one of “The Beachboys” hitchhiking, took him to his home where I met Manson and smoked my first hashish, which soon progressed to hallucinogens. The rest is history!

Living with the Manson family was a whole new world. At first, I thought I was losing my mind with the brain washing of the “family”. I gave them all my possessions (even my truck), but Manson wanted my soul. After three months, I escaped with nothing but the clothes on my back in December, 1968. I lived with a girlfriend who dealt drugs in Hollywood, but I was eventually drawn back to him when I called the ranch. My friends thought I was crazy for returning.

Helter Skelter was coming down fast, and gone for three months, I had a lot of catching up to do, according to Manson. He and the others filled me in quickly on how the Beatles were prophesying, and soon, I was believing their indoctrination of lies and deceptions. I became willing to do anything he asked for the cause, even laying down my life. I wasn’t only dead spiritually, but as he sang “die to self”, well on my way to being a “dead man walkin”.

While looking for acceptance from the Manson family in August, 1969, I chose to take the drug “speed” in order to override my conscience to commit the murders, driven by the spirit of fear.

MY SALVATION

In the summer of ’72, the death penalty was overturned by the Supreme Court. After nine months, it seemed that God birthed me off the row.

I was classified by CDC for California Men's Colony, where the Lord would eventually find me. The colony was like going to a resort. I got a job, a hobby, family visits and more, but it would take nearly three years for me to receive Christ, all in His timing.

My mother never stopped praying for me, always ending her letters by sharing Christ. My mom and dad had become much stronger in Christ as a result of seeking God after my failure, to the point of evangelizing their son. Also, they asked many well-known Christians to send books, write and tell me about Jesus. It seemed Christians were coming from all directions with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In the visiting room, I overheard a lady quote John 3:16 to her visitor. I turned to my girlfriend and quoted it to her, but she wasn't receiving it. I had memorized it from childhood, and in agreement, said: "God [did] so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." My girlfriend said, "You don't believe that!" I said, "I do!"

Then, a Christian inmate invited me to Sunday service and over the next few months led to Thursday nights and to a week-long revival. On the last night of the revival, I raised my hand halfway, and that's all it took for an usher named Mel to grab me by the arm and take me to the altar. As Reverend Divito prayed, I received Christ's payment for my sin and the gift of righteousness. I was redeemed and forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. At last, I was accepted by Whom it mattered most (Ephesians 1:6, 7).

I went back to my cell that night, looked in the mirror, and my face was glowing. I said, "This is ten times better than drugs." Later, I found the Scripture in Daniel 1:20, stating, "... in all matters of wisdom and understanding... the king found them [Daniel and his brothers] ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers."

MY WORK OF THE MINISTRY

On June 1, 1975, I was baptized in a laundry cart and the Chaplain asked me if I'd like to be a clerk in the chapel. I thought about it, even prayed about it for a few days, and got a "yes", starting this work of the ministry you are witnessing today. My decision making had gotten much better.

I started in the chapel by sharing Jesus through various ministries. When my book *Will You Die For Me?* came out in '78, I put out a hundred newsletters to keep up with the mail. Because of the response, Abounding Love Ministries was birthed in '80, with a little help from my family and friends. They distributed books, brochures, cassettes and other materials, mostly to prisoners with the support of other saints.

I can relate to the apostle Paul, who said: "... I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." I'm not worthy to be called a Christian, because I destroyed so many lives. "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10).

The aboundinglove.org website made it possible to distribute everything online in '97, reaching over a hundred countries today around the world.

I'm no longer a "dead man walkin'", but alive in Christ, "He has made [us] alive together with Him, having forgiven [us] all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13), and still abounding in love a half century later, because of faith in God's grace.

WON'T YOU RECEIVE CHRIST TODAY?



DEAD

MAN

WALKIN'

*Testimony from a former
Manson Family member...*

It was like a breath of fresh air leaving the Los Angeles County Jail in a bus for death row after my conviction. We headed up the coast to San Quentin, which overlooks the San Francisco bay.

It was like yesterday, November 19, 1971, when an officer took my photo and assigned me an inmate I.D. number. I was escorted always by two officers, shouting, "Dead man walkin'!"

"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1:8,9).

Charles D. Watson
www.aboundinglove.org