

My Road to Becoming A Woman Warrior



by Tina Coolidge

I want to dedicate this to my granny for the faith and inspiration she gave to me to never give up.

If there is one person reading this that may be going down a tough road, I pray this will give you courage and strength to put all your trust and faith in God.

Jesus saith, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."

– Mark 10:27

The picture on the front cover was taken in Boone, NC near Hebron Colony Ministries, Inc.

On April 18, 2007, I went to church for a meeting before the service. A friend came to get me out of the meeting. She said it was important and could not wait. We went into the office and she told me my husband had been arrested for DUI and that I needed to call the police department. She left and I sat at the desk to make the call. The officer I spoke with was very nice. He told me I should come by as soon as possible and pick up some papers in order to get Eric's truck from the tow company. He told me if I didn't get it the next day, I would be charged a daily fee until it was picked up.

I did not leave church right then. I stayed through the sermon, although, I don't think I heard much of it. I kept thinking, "I sure wish Pastor Kelley was here." He had been the pastor of our church for 15 years until he passed away in October of 2008. He was a wonderful pastor. Everyone loved him and he loved every one. I was always amazed at how he could remember people's names. I had been to see him a few times for counseling. You knew he truly cared about you and what you were going through. He made you feel as if he would do anything he could to help.

Surprisingly, I was calm after hearing Eric was in jail. I guess, because I knew the day would come. I was waiting for it and the wait was over. I don't know how many times I told Eric, "You are going to get a DUI!" After he was released from jail, he told me he had taken his truck for "one last joy ride" when he was pulled over by the police. It had been for sale and someone came by that evening wanting to buy it.

When church was over, I picked up Dylan from AWANA and had to tell him what happened. It broke my heart to have to tell him that his daddy was in jail for drinking and driving. He cried, of course, and I cried with him.

The next day, Dylan wanted to know if he could tell his teacher. He was in the first grade at school. I wanted him to be able to talk to someone if he felt he couldn't talk to me so I told him he could. I was always honest with Dylan. I didn't tell him everything, of course, but I could not keep Eric's drinking from him. He lived with it and saw it day after day. I could see his little heart break when we would walk in the door and his daddy would be drunk. I would get so mad at Eric because he lived with an alcoholic father. He knew what he was putting Dylan through and I felt like he just didn't care. I thought he could stop if he wanted to.

I knew what it was like to be addicted to something. Before Dylan was conceived I was addicted to cigarettes. When Dylan was 18 months old, he picked up a writing pen, held it between his two fingers, put it to his mouth and said "Look, mommy, I'm 'mokin'!" That was all it took for me. The Lord convicted me and I have never picked up another cigarette. I thought if I could stop something just like that for the sake of my child, Eric should be able to do the same. I kept wondering, "Is it because he just doesn't care?"

Eric had to be in court on May 31, 2007. He pled guilty of DUI. In the state of South Carolina there are certain laws for DUI convictions. For a first offense, your license is suspended for 6 months and you must have SR-22 insurance to get your license reinstated. You must also attend an Alcohol & Drug Substance Abuse Program (ADSAP), which is \$500 up front, plus a per session charge. Eric also had to pay a fine.

At this time Eric had begun working for my uncle. From April 19 to May 31 Eric had not had a drink. The next day when he came home from work, he had been drinking. I called my uncle and told him if they were going to keep this up then he could take Eric home to live with him. I said I was not going to put up with it. I was mad at my uncle because I knew he was an alcoholic and he was not who

Eric needed to be around. What could I do? All I could do was pray. I prayed and prayed, but I felt like God was not listening. I wanted to know why *I* had to go through this. What had *I* done to deserve this? God was listening, and he was answering, just in His own way and in His time.

Prior to Eric's DUI, I tried to keep anyone from knowing about Eric's drinking. Any time I would visit my parents or other members of my family I would make up an excuse why he stayed home. I did not want anyone to know what was going on. He had me believing that his drinking was, somehow, my fault. When I finally realized that it was not my fault, I then knew there was no reason I needed to hide anything. I had done nothing wrong. Eric was the one with the problem. Then I started questioning, "Could he really be an alcoholic?"

I started dreading the thought of going home. I would pull in the driveway and get an awful feeling. I could walk in the door, take one look at Eric and know immediately whether or not he had been drinking. I tried to keep Dylan away from it more than anything. I didn't have to say anything. Dylan knew when he was drinking too. I knew he was embarrassed. Dylan never asked to have friends over. He even got to where he didn't want to spend the night away from home, I think because he didn't want to leave me. Over time, I could see the resentment toward Eric building in Dylan more and more. My heart was tearing apart for him. I felt like I was not being a good mother. I felt like I needed to get Dylan out of the whole situation. I worried about how it would affect him over time. At the same time, I felt God telling me He wanted me to stay. I struggled with this for a long time because I wanted to do the right thing. More than anything, I wanted to do the right thing for Dylan.

Quite often, Dylan and I would go visit my granny. She knew exactly what I was going through because she lived it herself. My

granddaddy had been an alcoholic for many years. I don't remember very much of his drinking days because I was very young then.

My granny would tell me to have faith. (I call her "my granny" because we were very close. I felt like she was all mine.) She'd say, "God will not let you go through something you can't handle." She always told me to never give up. I don't know where I would be today if I didn't have her during that time to lean on. She told me she prayed for Eric (and others) every single day. I knew she had a close relationship with the Lord. I had heard her say, more than once, that she could hear the Lord speak to her as plain as if He was standing in the room with her.

There were also quite a few people at my church that were praying for Eric and for our family. I counted on their prayers. Every time one of them told me "I'm praying for you" I felt a glimmer of hope. I knew God would answer prayers but I wanted answers right then. I wanted this all to be over with. At times, I felt as if I could not go through one more day.

One day, I decided I was going to call my daddy ask him to change all the locks on the doors at our house. I was not going to let Eric come home. I had had enough. On the morning of June 1, 2007, I took Dylan to daycare and got back in my car with the intention of calling daddy when I got to work. But, as I was getting in the car, my mom called. My granddaddy was in the hospital and she told me he had been diagnosed with lung cancer and it had metastasized to the bone. The doctors had given him 30 days to live. I fell apart. I felt like my whole world was tumbling down on me. I thought, "Lord, what next?!" I went on to work but I don't remember anything else about that day. Needless to say, I never gave another thought to having the locks changed.

During this time, my mother was caregiver to my great uncle. He was married to my daddy's aunt. He had no family left since our aunt passed away in 1997. He was 83 years old and had gotten very feeble. He went into the hospital and was there for a very short time when he passed away on June 13, one day after my mom's birthday. I tried to help her get all the details taken care of because I knew she wanted to spend as much time with her daddy as she possibly could. Granddaddy was on hospice for only two days before he passed on June 28. We had his funeral on July 1, 2007.

For about a year, before granddaddy passed away he and my granny had been in and out of the hospital time after time. It seemed like we all lived at the hospital that year. When they weren't in the hospital, they would be sitting together, each in their own recliner. Granddaddy would sit in his recliner and look out the window all day.

Granddaddy came to the hospital one day from a rehabilitation facility to have a test done. While he was there he came to visit granny. She was lying in her hospital bed and when granddaddy wheeled through the door they both just held hands and cried. They just missed being together. Everyone in the room cried with them. I remember thinking, "Will I ever feel that way toward Eric again? They made it, maybe we can too."

One day Eric told me he wanted to get help. I started searching the internet. I didn't know where to go. He had been through ADSAP and another program for alcoholics. Neither of those programs turned out to be the right one for him. Then I found a place in South Carolina that he could go to and stay for a while that was structured toward people with addictions. Getting him to agree was not easy. He thought once he was away from the house, I would never let him come back home. I told him as long as he was

willing and trying to get help, I was willing to try to keep our marriage together.

A little while later, we were having revival at church. I came home to get ready to go and was waiting for Eric because he was going with us. He had gone to Pastor Shumpert's house. Pastor Shumpert was Eric's Sunday School teacher and since Eric was saved in January 2008, he had been discipling Eric. He was a very caring pastor and was concerned about Eric and his drinking also. He would call and ask me if there was anything he could do to help. I was so comforted by his genuine concern and thankful that he was spending so much of his time with Eric.

Before Eric came home that day, he stopped somewhere along the way home for a drink. I left him home and went to church. Church had just begun when Eric walked in the back door and came in and sat down beside me. I just knew every person in that church saw him and knew he had been drinking. I was embarrassed, angry, upset. I thought, "That does it! That is the last straw!"

I went home that night and called mom and asked if Dylan and I could stay with them for a while. I didn't know for how long, I just wanted to get out. So, the next day I packed up and Dylan and I left. We stayed with my parents' for about six weeks. During this time Eric was on a waiting list with the facility that provided help for addiction. I planned to move back home once he went into the program.

On the day Eric was to go to the facility, I took Dylan to school then went to pick Eric up. All the way there I prayed that this would be the answer for him. When we got there they asked for his doctor's excuse for some medication he was taking. That's when I found out there had been a huge miscommunication. I thought they

wanted an excuse for Eric to be able to keep taking his medication while he was there but they said, "No, he needs a doctor's excuse to go off the medication." Well, that was not possible. Eric could not go off the medication. I was not happy. We came back home and I thought, "Lord, what now?" I had already moved our stuff back home and didn't want to move again, so we stayed.

Then, on the evening of February 20, 2009 I received a phone call from a Richland County officer. He told me Eric was at Palmetto Richland hospital getting checked out, then he would be taken to the detention center. He had run into the back of another vehicle after leaving work and had been drinking. I was just so thankful that no one was injured badly or worse. I was so afraid I would get a call one day that Eric had been in an accident while drinking and a fatality was involved.

Again, I kept telling Eric he was going to get another DUI. He would come home from work drunk almost daily. I called Eric's employer to tell them he was in jail for DUI and they said he would not be able to come back to work for them. At first I was furious. I knew they were "having a drink" with him. I couldn't blame them for his problem, but I did blame them for contributing to it. Eric was convicted of a second DUI on May 12, 2009. In South Carolina, each offense after the first carries a stiffer penalty. There was another fine and his license was suspended for a year. He also had to attend ADSAP again. The truck was totaled in the accident.

I was worrying so much about our finances. I didn't know what we were going to do. I knew the verses in 1 Peter 5:6-7, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." I thought, "How do you do that? How do you hand your worries off and forget about them?" That was very hard for me to do.

My mom retired in May 2009 to stay with granny full-time. Mom's sister-in-law was staying with her during the day and mom and her sister would take weekly turns staying at night. Mom had been thinking of retiring for a while and felt that this was the right time. She wanted to be with granny and take care of her. My mom and her sister did not want her to go to a nursing home. They wanted her to be at home. In July granny was put on hospice care. I spent as much time as I could with her before she passed on October 13, 2009. All of her children, her grandchildren, and even some of her great grandchildren were by her side.

I was happy for my granny because I knew she was ready to be with Jesus and we knew that's where she was. She had said many times that she was ready for the Lord to take her home. At the same time, I was so very sad. I wouldn't have my rock to lean on anymore. Little did I know at the time, she had already instilled in me to have faith. Any time I needed her, she was still there in my heart and my mind telling me not to give up.

One day Pastor Shumpert mentioned a place in Boone, North Carolina called Hebron Colony Ministries. He said he didn't know much about it but he had a family member to go there many years ago. I looked it up gave the information to Eric. He called them. He had to fill out an application and have a medical form signed by the doctor before he could get on their waiting list. First, we made sure they would accept him with the medication he was prescribed to take. In April, 2010 he submitted the application and the medical form. He had to call them once a week to stay on that waiting list.

I was hoping and praying again this would be the answer. Eric called the facility every week to stay on the list. He was worried about being gone for 10 weeks so far from home. I was still worried about money. We were getting deep in debt with him being out of

work and me moving out. We were still paying off expenses for both DUI's. I prayed and asked the Lord to please take care of us. I thought I'll worry about the money later if he'll just answer this prayer.

I was a state government employee at this time. I had been with the agency for 25 years. We were going through budget cuts and had lost more than 30 people over a period of two years. I needed three more years to be eligible for retirement and was scared I could be the next to go and lose out on retirement benefits.

Our executive director called an agency-wide meeting. Everyone was speculating, but no one had a clue what was going to happen. I was getting ready the morning of this big meeting and the song "God is So Good" just kept playing over and over in my head. I didn't understand at the time but it made perfect sense later.

I went to the meeting and we were told there would be certain people that would be offered incentives for voluntary separation and/or voluntary retirement. There was money from the sale of property that could be used to offer these incentives. I was one of those people. I thought, "Yes! God is So Good!" I didn't think twice. I was ready to sign those papers. My official last day of work was set for June 1, 2010. I was so excited. I was going to be able to stay home with Dylan during the summer and be there for him. I was also starting to believe God really was listening and answering my prayers. I would not have to pay for Dylan to stay at a day care for the summer.

I had decided my last day at the office would be Friday, because the following Monday was a holiday. Why come back for one more day? On Thursday, May 27 I was at home cooking supper. Dylan was spending time at my parents. Eric usually got home by 5:20pm. By 6:00pm he had not come home yet. I called

his supervisor to see if everything was okay. He told me Eric had left work early that morning. I got a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach. I drove around thinking maybe he got into an accident. He was driving a moped since he had no driver's license. I couldn't find him anywhere.

I went back home and with a lump in my throat I called Lexington County Detention Center. I asked if they had Eric Coolidge. The man said yes. I asked why. He said "DUI." I don't remember the rest of that conversation. After I hung up the phone I cried. I call his supervisor to tell him. He assured me then that Eric would still have a job. I sat in the bathtub that night sobbing. I said "Why, Lord, Why?!" I prayed and cried. I said "Lord, I can't do this anymore. I don't want to worry about our finances, or anything else." Then, with total sincerity I said, "I'm handing it over to you. It is ALL in your hands now. You're going to have to take care of it all."

The next morning my devotion was titled "*God Will Take Care of You.*" I knew then, without a doubt, that He was listening to my prayers. I went to work as planned. My coworkers were going take me to lunch to celebrate my retirement. I kept expecting to get a call from Eric to bail him out of jail. Once lunch was over I went home. I still had not heard from Eric so I called the detention center again. They told me his bail was set at \$25,000 since this was the third DUI. I thought, "How in this world am I going to afford to get him out?!"

That afternoon I called Hebron Colony Ministries in Boone, NC. I wanted them to know why Eric would not be calling, so I told the director where he was and why, but that I had not spoken with Eric yet. I was struggling with whether to leave him in jail or not. The director told me that would probably be the best thing for Eric.

He also said if I left him there and he would write a letter to them once a week, he could stay on the waiting list.

The rest of that day I struggled over what to do. Should I leave Eric in jail? What would Dylan think if I left his daddy there? Would it hurt him terribly? Would he be angry with me? Even though Dylan resented Eric's drinking, I knew he loved his daddy very much. I was glad Dylan was at my parents so I would have time to think things through before I had to tell him, again, his daddy was in jail.

The next morning the title of my devotional was "*When 'Helping' Is Hurting.*" I thought, "OK, Lord, I believe you're answering again." I knew right then that I had to leave Eric in jail. If I got him out I would be hurting him more than helping. He needed time to sit and think about what he was doing to himself, to Dylan, and to me.

My mom and dad brought Dylan home that afternoon. I had already told them about Eric but asked them not to say anything to Dylan. They waited while I took Dylan to the bedroom and told him about Eric. He got that hurt look on his face and said "He's never going to stop drinking!" We talked for a little while and as I have done all along, told him we just have to keep praying and asking God to take care of it.

I did not hear from Eric all weekend. I thought he was too scared or embarrassed to call. Then, on Monday, I received a call on my cell phone from a bail bondsman who had Eric on the line. Eric could not remember our home phone number because it had recently changed. The bondsman told me that I could bail Eric out for \$1,500. I told him I could not afford it, and I could not do that. Eric was on the line and was begging me to get him out. I felt terrible, but I knew I had to obey God. Then the bondsman told me

that Eric had an accident on his moped and was hurt pretty bad. Then, I really felt bad. I almost changed my mind about getting him out, but I didn't.

Eric called home the next day still asking me to get him out. I told him no. That's when I found out exactly what happened. Eric had gone to work that Thursday morning, but was drinking so he left work to go back home. On his way home, he wrecked. There were two witnesses who said it looked like he lost control. The police and an ambulance were called to the scene. There was no one else involved in the accident. I was so thankful for that.

I requested a copy of the incident report and the records from the ER visit. I found out he had lacerations on his legs and head, and a contusion on his head. He also had 4 fractured ribs, a fractured scapula, and an AC joint separation. After reading about all of the injuries I felt even worse about leaving him in jail, but after Eric had been there about a week, he told me he was glad I left him there. He said he thought I did the right thing. I was so relieved. I told him about my conversation with the director of Hebron. He said he would write them every week. He wanted to stay on that waiting list.

My mom and dad acquired two rental houses after my great uncle passed away. One was empty and in need of repair/remodeling. While Eric was in jail, this was her way of keeping me busy so I wouldn't spend my days thinking or worrying. I think she felt she could also use that as an excuse to give me money and say it was my "pay."

I started feeling like it was time to bail Eric out of jail. I knew that he had plenty of time to think and I knew we would need to have his income too. So, on July 2, 2010 I paid bail and he was released. When Eric talked to his supervisor, he was told they didn't

have a place for him right then. He would have to wait. That aggravated me because he had assured me Eric would still have a job when he got out. Then I thought, maybe Eric doesn't need to go back to that job. Maybe he needs something different. So, I began praying for the Lord to put him in the right job. Eric still called Hebron every week after his release.

I was starting to feel like things were falling into place. I felt God working in our family. Every time I turned around, God was blessing us by providing for our financial needs. A few weeks after being released he got a call from Hebron telling him to be there on July 30. We had just a few days to prepare before we needed to leave, but that was okay. We decided to take Dylan to Carowinds since it was on the way. Eric would be gone for 10 weeks so we wanted Dylan to have something fun to remember. We left on Friday morning and went to Carowinds then spent the night in Charlotte. The next morning we went on to Boone, NC. Eric did not want us to hang around. He said if we hung around he would not want us to leave without him. So, we stayed just a little while and then headed home.

The first two weeks, Eric was not allowed to call or write home. We went to visit Eric the third weekend he was there. I wasn't quite sure what to expect. He seemed to be doing well. He was, of course, missing us and a little homesick.

The next time we went to visit, Eric's parents went with us. After that visit I came home feeling like he was starting to get back to his old self. I wrote a letter to him and told him I was actually looking forward to him coming home. I had not felt that way in a very long time.

While Eric was at Hebron, I started attending a fitness class. I think the incentive came from all the work we did on the rental

house. In this class, we were doing things like kicking and punching bags. I thought to myself, "I could have really used this a year ago. It was a great way to relieve stress." During some of Eric's drunken nights, I would imagine using one of those old cast iron frying pans. I didn't want to break bones or anything. I just wanted him to hurt, like I was hurting. I told a couple of my friends about it and was ashamed for feeling that way. They both told me stories of friends or family they had known that had lived with alcoholics but who actually carried out their thoughts. After that, there were a few times we just had to joke about the frying pan.

Eric had been at Hebron about 8 weeks when he let us know his graduation date would be October 9, 2010. They would have a service that evening and he would be free to leave when it was over. I realized later that date was also my granny's birthday. I firmly believe it was no coincidence that Eric graduated from Hebron on my granny's birthday. The next time I talked with Eric I told him that would have been the best birthday present anyone could have ever given to her.

That night, during the service, each person that would be going home had to give their testimony for the time they spent at Hebron. It was a wonderful service. Eric stood up and gave his testimony and I was so very proud of him for sticking with the program and finishing it. Dylan and I were there along with my parents and Eric's parents. We all cried, but it was a joyous cry. Everyone was so happy and proud of him.

Over the next few weeks I knew that something was different. I could really see a change in Eric. Other people at church told me they could see a change in him also. Eric told me that while he was at Hebron they helped him to see that alcohol addiction was not just a disease, it is a sin.

God gives us freedom to make choices. We can either choose to do right or we can choose to sin. There was also a change in Dylan. Over time, he started losing that resentment toward Eric and I could see the love I knew he always had for his daddy.

Eric started choosing God instead of a bottle. He started going to his shop every morning to spend time alone with Him. I know that doesn't mean Eric is perfect or ever will be. He did mess up a couple of times after he left Hebron, but since January 2011 he has not had a drink.

In January 2011 Eric started karate and fitness classes. Dylan had been in karate for about 4 years and Eric thought that kind of discipline was what he needed in his life. It has been very good for him. I think it helped give him focus and determination like I had not seen before.

The motto at the dojo is "Never Give Up." What no one there knew was my "never give up" started long before joining the dojo. In July 2011 I began karate classes. I thought if Dylan and Eric were doing it I might as well join them and make it a family affair. Not long after I started I read a book called *Dojo Wisdom*. In the book the author talks about being a woman warrior. I didn't even get past the introduction of the book when I thought, "That is me! I am a woman warrior!" The author stated, "Being a warrior means living with courage and integrity, and facing difficulties with dignity, and finding joy even in sorrow."

I am a woman warrior. Not because I am learning basic techniques, self-defense, or kata. I am a woman warrior because I put all my trust and faith in God and I never gave up.

There was one incident that really helped Eric see what he had been doing to the people that loved and cared about him. He was trying to help out the owner of the dojo and my cousin at the same time. Without going into all the details, the dojo needed some work done and my cousin wanted some side business. My cousin ended up not showing up on the appointed day because he was still drunk from the night before. The owner of the dojo was angry and Eric was embarrassed for recommending him.

After it was all over Eric asked me, "Is that what I was like? Is that the kind of things ya'll had to put up with from me?" I said "Yes."

At the beginning of the year we started filling out applications for Eric to find employment. He was willing to try anything, I think. Every day I was on the internet searching for job openings. I even submitted a few that I don't think he would have liked doing.

Eric had to go to court on April 7, 2011 for the last DUI he received. He had been in contact with the assistant solicitor since his release from jail. She knew he had been to Hebron and was trying to get his life straight. He was sentenced to 30 days (time served), ordered to attend ADSAP again, and had to pay the minimum fine, which wasn't so minimal to me. It was over \$2,500, but, it could have been worse. By this time, I wasn't worrying about finances. I was just happy that Eric was not drinking and I knew God would take care of us. I thought "We might be in debt from this for years to come, but we'll take one day at a time."

One thing I think I learned from all of this is how to be content. In Philippians 4, Paul says ¹⁰*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.* ¹¹*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state*

I am, therewith to be content. ¹²I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

I can honestly say I am content. I truly understand what Paul was saying. Now, I'm not saying I don't ever think about going out and buying some new shoes, or going to have my nails done, or buying something just for me. Any of that would be nice, but I don't *need* it. Yes, it would be nice to have a new car also. But the one we have gets us where we need to go. I am content. I am so thankful for what the Lord has done for our family. All I wanted was for us to be a family again. We have that and that is all I need.

On April 19, 2011, Eric started working at Lowes as a part-time seasonal employee. He would have that position for 6 months. I was dreading the end of that 6 month period because I didn't want to have to start all over with the job search again.

On September 26, 2011, Eric became a full-time permanent Lowes employee. I am so thankful! Eric seems to really like his job and I believe God put him right where he needed to be.

As I look back, I can now see God's hand in everything. Eric didn't get into the right facility until Eric was ready to get the help he needed. Not because I wanted it, because he wanted it. I thought I could make things happen, but when I truly gave it all to God, that's when He made me see that He is the One in control. He placed certain people in our lives at just the right times and I am so thankful for each and every one of them.

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

-Isaiah 40:31

If you've read this and you want to comment, or want someone just to listen, or would just like for me to pray for you, please contact me at tinacoolidge@att.net.