



### **It's Safe To Come Out Now, From Behind That Wall**

*Interview with Bonnie Kickasola*

"Buena man dies in Galloway Township collision." "A 48 year old Buena man was killed Tuesday morning in a two-truck collision on an icy section of Rte 30..." read the headlines of The Press of Atlantic City. Our hands touched softly, stroking the worn news clippings. For a moment, it was as if Bonnie was letting me hear John's last breath that she had hidden in the yellowing papers. My hands trembled over the picture; here was the reality of her intense pain and deep loss spread out in the Region section, for all of South Jersey to see. "It was January 7, 2003...he left for work and never came home", Bonnie told me. Just as Gonzo, John's driver, could not possibly have seen the back of the truck in front of them over the sun glare bouncing up from the icy road, so too, I could not have

seen how I was skidding into Bonnie's tears until they fell down my own cheek.

"I usually didn't say 'thank you' to John when he did things for me...but that morning I remember...", she says, "I noticed he was particularly happy...he had a skip in his walk all morning...I was preoccupied with news about the weather forecast...I was sensing an uneasiness over the weather...he was just very happy that morning...he changed my tires before leaving and I said 'thank you'...just six months earlier we had our 25th anniversary."

Gonzo made a sharp turn to avoid the back of the truck, but the turn pushed John in direct line with it. It took hours to get him out. When the State Troopers arrived to speak to Bonnie, it took them an hour just to explain the accident. "Your husband's been in a fatal accident", they kept repeating to her. Bonnie could not comprehend the meaning of "fatal". It just didn't make sense. It seemed that as suddenly as John's life was taken away, there was a moment when suddenly Bonnie 'got it', she says. "I could not walk...literally, it knocked my legs out...I fell to the floor." She recalls making a demand of God. "The first time I cried out to God, I demanded that He give me some assurance that John was with Him." And just as suddenly, it seems her home was filled with people. So many loved John and Bonnie.

"Gonzo's here" was echoed through the crowd of friends later that evening and it broke her trance. Bonnie instantly ran to the window and glanced out. Gonzo was surrounded by family. Of Mexican descent, it was not unusual that he had a short -stature, he was only 27. There he was coming up her walkway, and not a scratch on him! "He looked like he was going to a hanging...like he was getting shorter with each step closer to the house", Bonnie explains. "Now was the second time I cried out to God", she said, "God help me to not destroy this kid...help me have compassion." Everyone went silent. "Everyone was watching me to see what I would do", she continued. Then God gave Bonnie the confirmation concerning John she had cried out for earlier. "Peace, peace, compassion...it filled me...it was like a rush of water washed over me...I could feel it...I knew in an instant that it was okay to give him compassion...It didn't come from me...I know that...It confirmed for me that God was so very real...that John was with Him...so I could give compassion to Gonzo." "I don't blame you", she said to Gonzo, in a private moment when she took him aside. He was inconsolable.

It was standing room only at the funeral. There were piles of comforting notes, cards, and letters telling of John's turn toward God and first hand accounts of his relationship with Christ. And only the Lord knows the count of the tears piled up to His throne those days and following. "You have taken account of my wanderings, Oh Lord, You have put my tears in Thy bottle; are they not written in Your book?" Psalm 56:8

"The hardest thing to face was dinner time", Bonnie recalls, "the silence was deafening." John's buddy, his dog Barney, sat by the sliding doors for four months, waiting for John to come home. Bonnie

continues, "I thought grief was going to kill me...It really scared me, the grief...I sobbed so hard my ribs would hurt." "Society today expects you to have a kind of drive-by-grief experience, or go through some kind of drive-through grief." "So I spent the next two years stuffing the pain behind walls I was building...I just kept busy...Mom had a stroke two months later so I poured myself into helping her." Bonnie just "toughed it out" for two years, trying to establish a routine of strong denial, one wall after another. They were easy to construct, "all you feel is numb, shock, dazed, and resentment for not doing or saying this or that before John left the house that morning", Bonnie confesses.

Trying to stuff the pain helped brace up the walls, but cracks began to show when Bonnie experienced panic attacks. She'd wake up suddenly for lack of air. "He's gone!", came the crashing sound all over again in her thoughts, as if the accident was in perpetual motion with each racing heart beat in her chest. She knew the panic was telling her that she was not dealing with John's death, just hiding from it. Like the sun glare blinding Gonzo that day, so too were Bonnie's walls blocking her view of the healing that waited just on the other side.

How difficult a journey she had taken since January 7, 2003. She trusted God to provide her with enough compassion for Gonzo, yet went two years blocking it for herself. "Building up the walls", Bonnie tells me, was her job for so long. Then God brought new circumstances in her life and she met Paula Ackley at Lighthouse Church. They began a mentoring/counseling relationship and Bonnie was ready to test her walls.

The walls began to crumble when her panic took a hit from Deuteronomy 33:27, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will drive out your enemy before you saying, Destroy! Destroy!" Then every wall began to lose its strength with each 'destroy' declared over it. God's word swung like a mallet against the foundation of the walls. Bonnie was learning, as she quoted from her notes, "Grief is not something that can be fixed; it's you're expression of your love for someone", so she didn't want to hide behind it's cracking walls anymore. "I knew God had me", she smiles, "it was like God was saying to me it's safe to come out now, from behind that wall."

On Route 30, or your own highway, between mourning and healing, waits a bypass of resentment, of questioning your faith, and doubting what you believe. For the Christian, as Bonnie puts it, "we have hope that our relationship isn't ending here ... Christians do not believe in the end of faith ... faith cements our future in heaven forever!"

As she came out from behind the walls, she allowed grief to complete its work, through the healing of comfort. I saw in her eyes a brightness that reflected off the glare of the Son of the Most High! Comfort only comes, rather, comfort can only accomplish its best work when grief has broken the heart. Death leaves a hole there that is filled by our tears and comfort builds the bridge "over the hole in your heart", as Bonnie says. God does the bridges, we do the walls. "Through Christ", Bonnie said, "He builds a bridge over this hole in our heart so we may give comfort to others."

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem (Bonnie) for rejoicing, and her people for gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem (Bonnie) and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and sound of crying." Isaiah 65:17-19

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