

Stripper ministry founder knows the joy of overcoming

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Victoria Teague had a horse when she was 13. A sports car when she was 16. And a cocaine habit by age 19.

The drug use began after two catastrophes. In February of 1978 her younger sister, Terri, died of cancer at age 12. A month later, just before her 16th birthday, Victoria says she was raped by a high school boy who was never charged.



JOEY IVANSCO/AJC
STAFF

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Victoria Teague, 42, who began stripping as a teen and continued for four years to fund her drug addiction, found faith and changed her life with the help of a Marietta couple. Now, she hopes to expand her ministry with a retreat at Lake Lanier, where strippers would get counseling and learn job skills.

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Confused, suicidal and headstrong, Victoria turned to drugs. Eventually, to raise money, she also turned to stripping.

She recently told her story to a women's group at War Hill Christian Fellowship in Dawsonville. It's hard to believe this demure brunette once made a living performing naked. But she's still an impressive performer, charming this room of females while describing her dark days.

"I survived a cocaine addiction for 11 years," said the youthful 42-year-old, dressed in a red tunic and black slacks. "I worked for four years in strip clubs, until a bold Christian lady named Pam Younker stepped in when I was at my lowest."

Teague said the Cheetah strip club had fired her when she dropped below 100 pounds. ("I wasn't holding the look.") After kicking cocaine, she began taking menial jobs, trying to earn enough money to move out of her dealer's house. In 1989, she met Younker while cleaning bathrooms at a furniture business.

"Her eyes were just haunting," said Younker, 50. "She looked lonely, abandoned, empty." Younker offered Teague tickets to a "singing Christmas tree" event at her church, Eastside Baptist, in Marietta.

Teague said she sat in the balcony, reeking of pot. "I looked around," she said, "and people were beautiful."

Later she called Younker, seeking an escape from her boyfriend's house. Without hesitation, Younker and her husband gave the former stripper a spare room

"There were a lot of raised eyebrows," Teague said, when she

moved into the Younkers' Marietta household and even more when she showed up at Eastside's discipleship meetings in short-shorts and spike heels.

At an Eastside singles' retreat in Hilton Head, S.C., Victoria met Jeff Teague, an orthotist and businessman who manufactures and dispenses spinal and leg braces. She didn't want a boyfriend. He was willing to wait.

Within two weeks of their first date, he proposed and she accepted.

"He had never set foot in a bar," Victoria said. "It was like putting the female version of Hugh Hefner with the male version of Mother Teresa." (He was no saint, said Jeff Teague, "but I was pretty strait-laced.")

During her 10th year of marriage to Jeff, pregnant with their second child, Victoria heard a whisper inside her head. "Jeff," she told her husband, "I think God wants me to go back to the strip clubs and tell the ladies about Jesus."

Bad idea, her friends said. Good luck, said her church, but we're not coming with you. So she went by herself, first bringing gift baskets to dancers at the Highlander in Virginia-Highland.

The baskets were a way to short-circuit the mercenary code of dance clubs, where every favor costs something. "I wanted to pay it forward, for what Pam did for me."

At churches around the metro area, she began to speak frankly about her life. Some helped by donating gift baskets. Others joined the outreach effort.

Teague has grander hopes, envisioning a Victoria's Village retreat on the shore of Lake Lanier, where dancers can take a break, learn job skills and get counseling. The money hasn't arrived yet, but she has her eyes on some land, and her enthusiasm is undimmed.

"She has never feared anything," Jeff Teague said. "After talking to her, you want to be around her. And that's it, in a nutshell."

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