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Claremore resident Tamra Bissell went from a 34-year prison sentence to finding freedom.

Growing up, Bissell was raised by her father and stepmother, in what she believed at the time to be a normal childhood. This was despite being taken from her mother at 3 years old, due to drug addiction.

Bissell said she lived a sheltered childhood. However, at age 18, she found herself living a lifestyle of addiction.

“I just found the worldly lifestyle entertaining,” Bissell said.

This went on for 20 years. During this span of addiction, Bissell had children, to whom she tried to be a supportive mother.

“[I] tried to be the best mom I could be, and my goal was to always support my kids and be the mom that they need,” Bissell said.

However, Bissell continued to struggle with addiction. While her children were at their father’s house on weekends, Bissell would party, which led to her first paraphernalia charge, as well as losing custody of her children.

“That’s when my addiction and my partying became every day instead of just on weekends,” Bissell said.

At the time of her arrest, Bissell was the child nutrition director for Hot Springs School District in Arkansas, as well as a coach for her daughter’s softball league team.

“When the kids came back to school, it was mentioned that Coach Tamra got arrested and my daughter was really embarrassed,” Bissell said.

To minimize her children’s embarrassment, Bissell left her position as child nutrition director and continued the path of addiction.

Bissell came to Oklahoma to search for her biological mother. It was then that she met Rhonda Bear, founder of She Brews Coffee and Transition Program. Bear was mentoring Bissell's mother through a program known as Stand in the Gap.

“Rhonda was actually walking through my mom’s first-year recovery with her as her Stand in the Gap mentor, guiding her through recovery,” Bissell said.

Bissell said she was not searching for her mom to restore a healthy relationship with her, but rather to join her in a lifestyle of addiction.

“She actually stepped out of it, which is a God moment right there,” Bissell said.

Bear placed Bissell in a transitional home, but Bissell did not stay long.

“I made it here a couple [of] months, then I went back to Arkansas, doing what I was enjoying and knew best, which was the criminal lifestyle,” Bissell said.

While in Arkansas, Bissell faced many charges she said she could not escape. Bissell called Bear, and asked to return to the transitional program.

“I came back, not totally ready, just trying to manipulate the program,” Bissell said. “I made it only a month or so before I was exited out of the program for breaking all the rules.”

After leaving the program a second time, Bissell returned to Arkansas, where she eventually went to prison, also losing custody of her children.

Bissell was sentenced to 34 years in prison, but was able to get it reduced to four.

“That’s when I did about three years between county and prison on a four-year sentence,” Bissell said.

Upon leaving prison, Bissell continued her wild lifestyle for a while longer, before she eventually decided she needed to change.

“I finally got tired of the chaos, tired of the criminal lifestyle,” Bissell said. “I didn’t go to rehab because I wanted to, but it was either that or I was going to prison again. I wasn’t worried too much about going to prison, but I was just trying not to lose my son.”

Bissell went to a rehab facility for 30 days, and that's when her life took a positive turn.

"I reached out to my biological mom again to apologize and make amends with her for the way I treated her through her recovery," Bissell said.

During her final week of rehab, Bissell got a call from Bear, who asked her if she would like to participate in the transition program again.

"Immediately I said no, because I was embarrassed [over] the way I had treated her," Bissell said. "I [knew] everything I was doing wrong."

Bissell stayed in rehab for another 30 days, and decided she was willing to try Bear's program again. While it took time for Bissell's parole officer to agree, she was eventually allowed to reenter the program.

While in She Brews transitional program, Bissell began to work at the coffee shop, and found community. She also received mentorship from Stand in the Gap.

"I got surrounded by a Stand in the Gap family as well, which is four wonderful ladies who love Jesus," Bissell said.

Today, Bissell is married to her husband Robert, and is reunited with her children. She is the operations manager for She Brews Coffee and Transition Program, where she is now able to pour into the lives of women who have overcome similar lifestyles.

"I get to help build other leaders. ... I get to build confidence," Bissell said. "I get to train them to grow their professionalism."

Francois Cardinal, board chair for She Brews Coffee and Transition Program, said Bissell not only turned her life around, but is also helping other women attain success.

"Tamra, you could say, is the shining example of someone who has taken this second chance and has completely turned her life around, a true transformation and is now leading the other women in our program through this transformation process, modeling the transformation journey and outcome for them as a leader in our program," Cardinal said. "You won't find anyone more committed to our mission."