

"I hate it where I am. I just do. I feel like I was deceived... By my expectations mostly. And partly by the bill of goods the executive director puts out but does not act on. She wrote a book all about how God led her to help women successfully transition into life after prison. I see nothing but bluster and believe I traded a semi-safe community - my home - for the wilderness. And one where I have no one."

Those were my words. That's how I felt. Now let me tell you how wrong I was. I came to New Beginnings angry. Angry I had allowed my life to spiral to a place where I needed anyone. But somewhere in that anger I still had a fundamental faith in God. I just kept letting myself get in the way.

But let me tell you what New Beginnings has done for me. When I got out of prison, I had nothing. I had no resources, no money, no real support.

And while, yes, I had a family and friends who loved me, they couldn't give me what I needed to transition back into society successfully. Because if you didn't know this, you should: It's a full-time job. I had parole appointments to keep -- weekly ones. I had no clothes to wear. No hygiene products or toiletries. No social security card or ID. No transportation. No job. No prospects. And only a mustard seed of faith and hope through all these overwhelming list of "no's."

As I sit here today, I have all those things, for sure. Five months out of prison, I have my own clothes, a safe bed in a safe house to sleep in. I have a full-time job and food on my table. I have my driver's license and a car. I have a phone. I even have a dog.

But what cannot be quantified so easily is the acceptance I have here at New Beginnings. The sisterhood and the safe community I have. Because with that, even the most determined slip and fall. To put it succinctly, I have love. I have family. And I have Missy Denard who shows us so clearly that we are women of worth and that she has the faith in us to show us God's love each and every day. I have a chance to do this life all over again. Right, this time. And fulfill whatever it is that God has planned for me.

I was released from prison at the beginning of September and arrived at New Beginnings later in the month, once I was able to transfer my supervision to Abilene. I did almost 2 years on a 6-year sentence and will be on parole until 2019. I was pulled over and in possession of a large quantity of ADHD medication, which is also pharmaceutical speed.

I knew, like most of us here do, that going “home” just wasn't an option I was comfortable choosing. And prison was not an experience worth repeating. ANY place to parole to out of prison is difficult enough for women. A place like New Beginnings is probably one of a kind. We are re-integrated not through heavy hands and an institutional setting, but with love.

As a member of New Beginnings, I'm safe. And that's not a feeling most of us take for granted. Many times, for many of us, it's the first time in our lives it's happened. I can't tell you how important that is to all of us.

Missy has room for about 32 women in this program. But I know she would never turn someone away who needs her. She takes women who are broken by life and helps us learn to pick up the pieces. She holds us together until we do. Missy never waivers in her faith that we, too, are worthy of love and that God loves us unconditionally. She's touched untold lives, and every day I'm thankful to have her in mine.

Sincerely,

Lori Mellinger