



'I have a purpose'

JCJC student Lauren Bush overcomes 21-year meth addiction

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Lauren Bush was 16 years old when she first used meth. She had been sexually abused, and the drug made her feel better.

"The first time it hit my head, I felt powerful, I felt strong — but it became my ultimate weakness," she said.

Clean and sober since February 2016, Bush, 36, has overcome a 21-year addiction to drugs that not only included methamphetamine, but also heroin, cocaine and just about anything else she could get her hands on.

The Jones County Junior College student does not want to forget those times because they made her who she is today.

"I was a full-out junkie, and I lost everything — my home, my kids, my self-respect," she said. "I went to jail and I had prayed to God to get me out of my situation, and I knew he put me there. I had no chance to bond out."

The year was 2015 and Bush was incarcerated in Jones County jail for possessing the ingredients to make meth. She also was facing charges in Stone County for possession of meth with intent to sell. As grateful as she was, it wasn't quite her time to get clean. She said she used dope in jail, which made her realize she couldn't count on being behind bars to stay off drugs.

Bush knew it was up to her to make a change. She began working on the road crew, walking 25 miles a day and picking up garbage.

"It cleared my head, showed me I could work — I wasn't useless," she said. "After you pick up garbage for five months, you can do anything."

Bush was released from jail when her boyfriend accepted responsibility for her charge. She returned to her parents' home in Laurel and experienced feelings of pure terror, not knowing how she was going to fight her drug addiction.

That's when she decided to enter Laurel's ZAC House where she spent six months working a Christian 12-step program.

"I learned who God says I am," she said. "I did all I could to let go of my past and surrender myself. I experienced the peace of Jesus Christ for the first time."

That experience helped Bush completely turn her life around.

"I know my identity now," she said. "I'm not an addict. I'm not a waste. I have a purpose."

Bush now peacefully and happily lives in Laurel with her parents and two of her three children.

She works part time as a barista at a local espresso bar and attends welding classes at JCJC.

Bush was introduced to JCJC through the MIBEST program, which gives students the foundational skills they need for careers.

"We try to be that help they need to stay in school," said Wendy Evans, MIBEST program director. "We try to give them no reasons to drop out."

Evans realized Bush just needed a little help to get started. She had graduated high school, but didn't have many job skills. Evans got her enrolled in a first semester welding class where she was one of the few females.

"The welding thing — God told me to do it," Bush said. "I love art, and I saw people building awesome things out of scrap metal.

"I thought I'd check this program out, and I fell in love with it."

Bush had to get one thing out of the way first. She was on house arrest for six months for her drug charge in Stone County. She remembers coming to JCJC to inquire about the welding class with her ankle bracelet still attached.

Currently on parole until 2021, Bush is in her second semester of welding and will earn her career certificate in December. She can get a national certification if she takes a third semester.

"She's a great student," welding instructor Bill Clark said. "She's everything you would want in an employee.

“If she wanted to get a job right now, she could. She could work locally pretty much anywhere she wants. She’s even got enough skills to go to Ingalls (Shipbuilding in Pascagoula).”

Bush has an entirely new outlook on life. She stays sober by immersing herself in the Dying to Live ministry through Laurel’s Christ Church.

“I have so much more confidence,” she said. “I have a skill no one can take away from me, and I got it by going after it. There’s no telling what God is going to do if I keep going one day at a time.”