



**ABANDONED,
TORTURED BUT...**

REDEEMED

An inspiring story of survival

The Story of Leila James told by Vince Wall

Leila James taught music at the Catholic Convent and was the organist at the St Joseph's Catholic Church in Gunnedah. I first met her when she attended a ladies Bible study held in the town. Over the years she would speak of her tragic past.

Leila's parents worked on a farm in outback Queensland near Longreach. She was born in 1929. At the age of four she went all dressed up with her parents to the railway station at the town of Barcaldine. When the train pulled into the station Leila's mother got on board and her father told her to stay where she was and that he would be back. Leila played with some bottle tops in the dust as the whistle of the train sounded and it pulled away from the station. She waited until darkness fell and all alone the little four year old took shelter in the waiting room never to see her parents again.

Next morning the Station Master found Leila and took her to a local convent where abandoned children of the Depression years were housed. On that day a new chapter of her life began; a chapter of cruelty at the hands of Irish Nuns in the Sacred Heart Charity home. Leila said, "I lost my freedom in that place".

Leila was disciplined harshly from the very first day. The weapons of choice for the nuns

were the strap, the cane and large strings of rosary beads with a black cross that they carried around. At the age of thirteen Leila received twenty-four lashes of the cane on her hands and she had to walk away holding them out so that the blood would not run down on her uniform. She did not cry; she was never allowed to, and it was three days before she could hold a pen.

Leila was also verbally abused. She was called a pagan and was told that she was full of mortal sin and was going to Hell. She began to believe what she was told and that she would end up eternally lost.

Outside the convent building was a hedge that separated Leila from the outside world. At eight years of age, a nun had told her that one day she would hop over that hedge and find another world waiting.

One day the Reverend Mother decided that all the children should learn music but unfortunately the piano to which the children had access didn't have any insides and could not produce a single note. One day, at the age of nine, Leila went into the nun's music room and had the chance to play a piano that worked. The Reverend Mother was called and Leila was enlisted thereafter to play music for the Mass.

When Leila was two weeks away from her fourteenth birthday the Reverend Mother told her that she must leave. Leila was to travel by train to Brisbane where she was processed as a Ward of the State and given

to an older couple, a Mr & Mrs Verry who ran a boarding house.

The next seven-year stage in Leila's life, was very traumatic. The Verry's were sadistic, beating her and telling Leila that she was not even fit for the gutter. Mr Verry swore at Leila saying she was "filth walking". Some names he called her can't be repeated but despite these difficulties Leila found work playing the piano to pay for her own school expenses. Without a piano to practice she used a pretend keyboard made from a Weet-Bix box.

When Leila was twenty years old she was physically attacked by both Mr and Mrs Verry at the boarding house. So horrendous was it that the attending doctor told the police she had been tortured and she remained in hospital for five weeks. When discharged from the hospital she returned to the boarding house, gathered her possessions, and thanked Mr Verry for giving her a roof and a meal sometimes. She also thanked Mrs Verry who cursed her and hit her across the face with some ration books. Leila ran from the house, never to return.

In 1949 Leila was married to Les James, a returned soldier who had sustained terrible injuries in WWII at the hands of the Japanese. In January of 1951 she gave birth to their son Gary and for years they worked on farms before moving to Gunnedah in NSW. Les passed away in January 2000.

At Gunnedah Leila taught music at the Sisters of Mercy convent for eighteen years

and played for Masses each week as well as at Weddings and funerals in the Catholic Church. The Sisters at Gunnedah were kind and not like the Irish nuns in Queensland.

In 1990 Leila was living with fear and began to question the Catholic faith. After Les died in 2000 she was invited to a KYB ladies Bible study and the ladies were helpful to her but she still was afraid of dying in mortal sin and of being cast into hell for her wickedness, as she was reminded in her childhood.

In 2003 Leila suffered a major stroke with clots lodging behind the retina causing blindness and a major stomach hemorrhage in 2004. One day I thought I should call and see how Leila was after her illness and talk to her about the Lord. Leila was recovering at home, an old raised house in the flood zone of Gunnedah. I climbed the stairs, knocked on the door, and Leila answered.

After some conversation I asked Leila how certain she was of going to Heaven? Leila replied that she was not good enough even for Purgatory. She said,

“I haven’t atoned enough, I have too much sin to wipe away. The Sisters who reared me told me daily I would burn in Hell and that I was a Pagan”.

I said, “Leila you don’t have to atone. There is nothing you or anyone else can do. Jesus has done it all - for all - on the cross of Calvary. You only need to believe.”

I showed Leila Ephesians Chapter 2 in the Bible and explained that salvation is by grace:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”(Eph.2:8).

Grace is the undeserved favor of God shown to unworthy sinners. I explained that salvation is not gained by our works but by simply trusting Christ’s sacrificial death for us on the cross and that Leila could know there and then that she could have eternal life in Heaven.

Leila was stunned. In all her life she had never heard anything like that. As the revelation of the grace of God dawned on her, Crystal, one of her guitar pupils, arrived and I left. Leila told Crystal what I had just explained to her and Crystal said, “It’s so true, Mrs James. It’s in the Scriptures!” and she invited Leila to go to Church with her. When Leila heard the Bible expounded by a visiting preacher she was amazed. God’s Word changed her life (Rom.10:17) and eventually Leila was convicted she needed to leave the Catholic church. Leila said:

“The challenge unsurprisingly was in fighting the indoctrination of my earliest years...however by the grace of our Saviour Jesus, and the constant love and support of so many wonderful people, I was able to leave it all behind”.

When Leila told one of the nuns in Gunnedah that she was unable to find peace in the Catholic Church; that confession provided no comfort; that the fear of punishment had been drummed into her by the Irish Nuns and she had believed that she was so sinful that she would go to Hell fire, the visiting nun took Leila's hand and wept. Leila explained she had found what she was searching for; she did not have to atone for her sins; Jesus had done it for her; it was true; it was in the Scriptures.

Leila says: "My faith and trust in our Saviour Jesus Christ has grown each day. How gracious was He, for I knew very little of Scripture and had no relationship with my Redeemer...By His grace alone I have been given stupendous faith, an unstressed life, freedom of my soul and mind, and the knowledge that I am loved by Jesus and so many caring Christians."

Leila remembers the hedge at the convent that separated her from the outside world and she was told that one day she would hop over that hedge and find another world waiting. In 2004 Leila discovered that world and a new life that is untried by many; a new life she now enjoys through faith in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you are like Leila; hedged in by religious traditions that give no assurance of heaven or of sins forgiven? The Scriptures plainly indicate that earthly priests are

incapable of taking away sins.

“And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins”(Heb.10:11).

The GOOD NEWS is you don't have to atone for your sin. A full atonement was made once for all on the cross by God's beloved Son our REDEEMER. All that God requires is that you turn to Him and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Jesus said:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

It is **by grace** you are *“saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”* (Eph.2:8-9). It takes one step of faith to be sure of heaven.

No works of merit now I plead,
But Jesus take for all my need,
No righteousness in me is found,
Except upon redemption ground.

The FREE book, **Tradition or Truth** by Vince Wall has helped numbers of Catholics to find freedom in Christ. Ask for your copy.

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