

ASSOCIATION OF CAMPUS CRUSADE FOR CHRIST
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WORLDWIDE

Challenge

THE CHICAGO STORY

Summer 24 college students converged on Chicago for a summer in the city to help feed and clothe people, and help meet the greatest need of all.





PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Pearl Willis used to pour alcohol into her baby girl's bottle to make her fall asleep drunk. Just so she could go out that night and forget the burden and responsibilities of motherhood. Just so she could go out and forget the burden and responsibilities of life.

Pearl hit the streets of Chicago at age 13. She "had to get out" from under the care of her parents, the presence of her 18 brothers and sisters, and experience life for herself. She was looking for freedom, and she was looking for love. "After all these years," Pearl, now 33, says, "I found out that the love I wanted I couldn't find in a human being. I could only find it in God.

"But it took being raped seven times; it took prostituting on the streets day and night; it took dropping pills and doing alcohol before I found out that it is Jesus who loves you. Now I share that with others."

In 1990 Pearl went back to church at the request of her dying father.

There she met Milton Massie, director of Campus Crusade's Here's Life Inner City ministry in Chicago. He was teaching a Sunday school class for the homeless at her church, and when Pearl told Milton she was serious about knowing God and changing her life, Milton introduced her to his wife, Cynthia. The two began to meet together for Bible study and instruction in practical Christian living. An eight-week study stretched into a year-long friendship that Pearl initially wasn't quick to embrace. "I was waiting for Cynthia to ask me for something," Pearl remembers, "because in my world, there ain't no freebies."

Pearl left her job and prior lifestyle and began to care for children in her home. As her relationship with God grew, so did the number of kids in her day care. Soon they wanted Pearl to tell their parents about the One she had introduced to their hearts. Pearl began a Bible study for the children's moth-

ers, some of whom shared her former habits. "I never intended on working with the moms," Pearl says. It's the kids who break her heart, "because I know all the pain that my three children went through."

"The women come because they've heard I have been changed by God," she says. "They come when they need someone to talk to or when they need to get away. They just come to be here. The greatest part is that they come just as they are." But the women stay because they've found someone who understands.

When Pearl went back to school and earned her high-school diploma, she then encouraged her disciples to do the same. "It's a good way to get the moms busy. They just lay in their homes and wait on the public-aid check," she says. "That's what gets them into trouble: They have nothing to do. They can't really help their children because they can't really help themselves."

It's the hope of ending that futile cycle that motivated Pearl to action. When God moved in Pearl's heart to provide more than day care, He provided more than enough room: a once-abandoned home now houses Pearl, the day care and whomever needs a refuge. Pearl leads Bible studies for the moms and Good News clubs for the kids, but the lock on the door is virtually untouched because of the around-the-clock traffic there. A building next door is beginning to look like a food and clothes pantry thanks to the Campus Crusade students who helped out this summer (see "The Chicagao Story" beginning on page 8).

And where God provides, He protects. "I have never had any trouble here," says Pearl of her home, sandwiched between crack houses in the dangerous Roseland community on the South Side. "When you're working with a drug addict's child, he'll be your friend because you're doing what he doesn't have time or doesn't want to do.

"I'm just grateful that God saw fit to keep me alive. I guess it's for this reason I am still living. While I am fit to do something, I am going to live for the Lord." ■ —by Judy Nelson

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In inner-city Chicago, two-thirds of African-American children are born to single mothers.
Cover photo by Greg Schneider.

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The Chicago Story

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on Chicago for a summer in the city
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