

# Victory Village Christian Academy

*Fifty-five Years of Showing God's Unconditional, Healing Love to Teen Age Girls*

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*Tish Horton, Director; Bob Friesen, Board Chairman*

*VVCA Newsletter, Volume 56, Issue 7 - July, 2025*

## **So Send I You!** by Bill & Carole

Words of Jesus that motivated us to start Heart Ministries 55 years ago are found in John 15:16 and 20:21; ***I chose you, I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit....Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.***

We have been going through stacks of files and letters, reminders of the goodness of God in allowing this ministry to continue, now into its 6<sup>th</sup> decade, and with so many changed lives! How thankful we are to have dedicated and competent leaders who will be able to guide its continuance after God calls us to Heaven. Although much of the decision-making is now wisely in the hands of our Board of Directors, we still feel God has work for us to do until we take our final breath. We often talk of living to be 100, but that is in God's hands. Our work is now more pastoral in nature—conducting chapel services, writing this Newsletter, giving spiritual guidance and encouragement to our students and staff, and occasional visits to supporting Churches as God enables us. We are wholeheartedly in solidarity with our Board, thankful for their wisdom and commitment to this ministry. **Bob Friesen** is a great Board Chairman. **Tish Horton** is doing a great job as Director, and all the Staff are working together harmoniously.

In 2015, **Kathy Hanks**, then an editor at the Hutchinson News, wrote a feature story entitled, ***Where Girls' Lives Change***. It was followed later by **Dan Deming**, former general manager of Radio Station KWBW, and a Reno County Commissioner, who called VVCA an ***Island of Inspiration in Eastern Reno County***. Words of these two friends continue to ring true, and we like to follow them up with real stories of real lives that have been impacted and changed here at VVCA.

Lasting fruit is what God appointed us to produce, and here is a story that fits that description. **Chelsie Reich** came to VVCA 19 years ago, and presently lives in Hawaii with her family, pictured here. The photo at the top of the page was taken in 2011, a few days after returning from

her deployment in East Africa. Chelsie first went to Africa with **Sandy Hilburn** on a mission trip to Liberia. Later, after joining



the US Army, she was deployed to a place in East Africa. Here are the words she wrote to us following that time.

***You are in my thoughts this fall. This photo was taken a few days after returning home from my deployment in 2011. Carole and Bill Cowell have followed the Lord's leading in sheltering countless teenage girls from all over the world. My life was transformed under their ministry when I was 15 years old. They endured several months of court and custody hearings, all for my sake. Never before had I experienced such unconditional love! Victory Village was the beginning of my long path home to Love, Destiny and Light.***

## **And There Was a Great Calm!**

**By Tish Horton, Victory Village Director**

At midnight on Monday, May 19, 2025, a tornado tried to take out my little hometown of Plevna Kansas. But God had a different plan!

I was in my basement with my mom Sondra, my husband Joe, and our neighbor Paul. The first indication that this was real was when the power went out. As the tornado passed over, there was really no noise. We could feel the pressure change a couple of times but no real indication of anything severe. Then we went outside! It was dark out and with the use of flashlights, we made our way through downed trees and power lines. The whole town was out-and-about climbing over trees, seeing if neighbors were okay, and assessing the damage. The only lights you could see, other than individual flashlights, were the flashing lights on the vehicles of the first responders and the head lights of the storm chaser's trucks. This was the scene for several hours as we all tried to take in what had just happened. **(continued on page two)**

## AND THERE WAS A GREAT CALM (continued from page 1)



The person responsible for sounding the tornado siren that night later retold how he caught a glimpse of the tornado by the light of the lightning around it. It was coming right for us and it terrified him! He hit the siren for the fourth time as he ran down the steps to get into the church basement with others who had made it there in time. From the news reports about the tornado before it hit, most people thought Plevna would be completely wiped off the map and that body bags would be needed! The tornado was thought to be wider than Plevna was long! There were, and continued to be, many signs that God calmed the storm that night. Yes, almost every tree was down or damaged. Some roots were partially gone or had huge holes in them. Windows were broken, sending glass everywhere. Our church lost the west side of its roof and the church parsonage was completely destroyed. The debris was scattered all around.

But there were no injuries!! It was also thought that the tornado lifted up a bit as it passed over town. It moved fast enough that its power had less time for greater damage. There was also no rain to ruin what open roofs exposed. After further inspection, there are several buildings in town that show they had been twisted and moved or that had been only seconds away from liftoff! We praised God for keeping His hand upon us that night!

How does this correlate to Victory Village you ask? It compares because we went through a bit of a storm during this past spring semester. But where the evil one tried to tear down, our Lord Jesus covered us with His powerful and loving hand. He had a different plan! He means for Victory Village to prosper, and we here at the Village have seen firsthand how He is doing just that! There is only one way to explain the calm that has been in me these past months. It's the same calm I had while I was in my basement during the tornado. The calm in me has had nothing to do with me and has had everything to do with the God in me!

***And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace Be Still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm ." Mark 4:39***

The waves that have hit us at Victory Village these past months would have been enough to personally sink me in years past. I've had to check myself with the next verse in Mark 4 which says, ***He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40)***

I've had to decide to trust in the God I am looking to! It's not that I haven't been afraid, it's that I have come to learn to

have faith in the God who walks before me and with me. He has been putting all things together for our good!

Things don't look exactly the same as they used to in Plevna or at Victory Village, but we trust in the calming hand that brought us through the storm! The same hand that is bringing beauty out of the change!

This looks like a happy family! **Nicole Estell** came to us in 2002 from Minneola, Kansas. Her life has not been easy, but she is a survivor and has weathered many of life's storms. Her husband **James** is working currently as a heavy Equipment operator. Their children are **Ganynn** and **Gracelynn**. They live in Colorado. We



enjoy keeping in touch with our former students, doing what we can to encourage them as they continue on the road of life. Nicole has reached out to us on occasions with important spiritual questions, and we have done what we could to encourage her. She wrote, ***I hope this finds you both healthy and well. I can never thank you enough for all you did for me! I love you both!***

**Staff and some family members** came to help harvest our potato crop. The potatoes will dry out on the floor of the dorm's downstairs Big room, and then will be stored in the walk-in cooler, hopefully lasting until the 2026 crop.





## ***How to Love Series, Part 2 (continued)***

***By Dr. Jessica Kerzner, WVCA Therapist  
Love **REQUIRES** you love yourself***

Love yourself by being positive. Speak your strengths, not your weaknesses. Some people are "Debbie downers" as they say. They are ALWAYS negative. Now, how do you love negatively. Spoiler alert...You cannot. You aren't loving yourself with negativity, and you definitely are not loving on others either. When you speak positively about yourself, you see the positives in others. Love requires positive glasses. Put them on. Attempt to see the good in everyone. It's there.... trust me. At this point you are thinking that I'm saying you cannot say anything that is not positive and I'm not. Love can have correction, but correction requires seeing a way forward which is positive. If your correction is not paired with the positives of the way to increase, prosper, or grow then maybe you should ponder on how to communicate it as you desire the person to receive it.

Finally, have hope. Hebrews 6:19 talks about how hope anchors the soul. Encouragement keeps us firm and secure. This is big for loving yourself. Without hope, dark emotions such as guilt, shame, and despair grow. Love yourself by knowing tomorrow is a different day that can have new outcomes for your good. Better is possible. This allows you to refresh every day without the past holding you back. You love others when you can LET GO and MOVE ON!! If you are unable to have hope for yourself then you cannot really relate to hope for anyone else. The mind won't see it as possible. The mistakes of yesterday are not too great so that a positive change is impossible. It happened but things change, and things change for the better. Time, moods, months and people change.

Love yourself with your actions. It starts in the mind, and the heart follows. Proverbs 23:7 states, ***As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*** The heart loves. Think love for God, others, and yourself. Be blessed! -Dr. Jessica Kerzner



David and Jessica Kerzner and their three children live on their **Kerzner Manna Farm** near Wichita. They have Honeybees, and raise and make other healthy products. Their website, [kerznermannafarm.com](http://kerznermannafarm.com), says, ***We are a small family farm in Wichita, Kansas that truly believes in what Revelation 22:2 says. "And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Products are all natural, handmade from our farm with love and pride in value.***

**The EtCetera Shop**, located at 22 South Main Street in Hutchinson, is a favorite place for Carole and me to shop, especially on Saturday mornings after we get the mail and go to the bank. A ministry of the Mennonite Churches in the area, the store is a very clean, neat and attractive place, full of bargains of every kind. The store is staffed by volunteers, and proceeds from sales go to the support of missions.



Here is **Delon Martens**, Director of the local store presenting a check to Victory Village for \$1,000. When you come to Hutchinson, or if you live here, we encourage you to stop at the store and see for yourselves what a delightful place it is. No doubt you will find several things to purchase, and the prices are very reasonable.

In 1999, we received a call from **Raven Sipes**, a young girl in New Jersey, asking if she would be able to come and attend WVCA. Soon, she was on her way via bus, and we picked her up after a very long ride at the bus stop in Wichita.

Now **Raven Petronick**, married with two children, still lives in New Jersey. Here is a family photo with her husband and their two children. Raven wrote,

***I've wanted to reach out so many times over the years. Well, here I am! I'm doing great! I'm married with two boys and still in New Jersey. I receive your Newsletter every month. Thank you. Looking at them brings back so many memories. I never thought I'd say this, but my time at Victory Village was one of the happiest times of my life. I just couldn't see it when I was there--probably because I was a teenager! You and Carole, and everyone there are truly amazing. You have left an imprint on my heart that will stay with me always!***



**A NEED BEFORE SCHOOL BEGINS IN AUGUST IS A NEW HEATING AND COOLING UNIT FOR A CLASSROOM LOCATED ADJACENT TO THE GYMNASIUM. PRESENT HEATING AND COOLING UNITS DO NOT REACH THIS ROOM THAT WILL BE USED FOR MATH AND LITERATURE CLASSES YEAR-ROUND. THE COST WILL BE \$1,156. LET US KNOW IF YOU OR YOUR CHURCH WOULD LIKE TO TAKE ON THIS PROJECT.**



# Victory Village Christian Academy

JULY - 2025



**Our 56<sup>th</sup> Year of Changing Lives for Jesus Christ and His Kingdom; Jesus said, I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)**

**Our Mission** is to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus. Inspired by His Gospel, we seek to make God's amazing love and compassion real to teenage girls, serving them without charge to their families by providing a clean and safe home, a good Christian and State approved education, nutritious meals, training in life skills, outdoor and indoor activities and sports, opportunities to be involved in the ministry of helping others, and an introduction to Jesus, who will love them forever. We affirm the worth of all, without prejudice, partiality or intimidation. **Victory Village Christian Academy** is located at 201 S Victory Road, Burrton, KS 67020, and is licensed by the State of Kansas, with qualified teachers and curriculum. Credits are transferable, high school diplomas are earned and recognized for entrance to colleges.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:** Bob Friesen, Chairman; Rev. Bill & Carole Cowell, Becky Goering, Patricia Macke-Dick, Dr. Jessica Kerzner, Gordon Goering, Rev. John Williams, Larry Chapman; **FOUNDERS & ADMINISTRATORS:** Bill & Carole Cowell; **DIRECTOR:** Tish Horton; **SCHOOL PRINCIPAL:** Arianna Valdois; **ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL:** Ahneka Valdois; **DORMITORY SUPERVISOR:** Ashley Penner; **SECRETARY:** Barb Hedges; **MAINTENANCE DIRECTOR:** Scott Hilburn; **THERAPIST:** Dr. Jessica Kersner; **ATHLETIC DIRECTOR & CASE MANAGER:** Kristi Colvin; **TEACHERS:** Irl Gilliland, Marla Johnson, Jerry Nininger, **COACHES:** Ernie Penner, Andrew Epp; **PART AND FULL TIME DORM STAFF:** Hadessah Eaton, Candi Wilson; Karey Weaver, Charis Valdois, Becky Valdois, Emily Moore, Felicity Reed, Melissa King, Emma Foster, Shannon Fitzgerald, Leigha Ensz, Karen Chatterton, Jennifer Smith, Ashlyn Lahman; **ACCOUNTANT:** Wilma Engle.

## VVCA IS SUPPORTED BY DONATIONS

The Newsletter is printed by Taylor Printing, Pratt, KS



Daughter and Board member **Becky Goering**, and some of her grandchildren picking peaches in the Village orchard.

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Nonprofit Organization  
US Postage Paid  
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Coach **Ernie Penner** and the **Cross Country** team on Awards Night, after a very successful season.



We were blessed by a visit from **Nancy Wilson Tennant**, her granddaughter **Lyrik** and great grandson **Hudson**. Nancy served as Dorm Mother at VVCA for over 10 years and endeared herself to girls and staff. In 2013 it was my privilege to conduct her wedding to **Jeff Tennant** in Kansas City.



Maintenance Director **Scott Hilburn** has been the Horticulture Teacher this year. They worked many days in the hot sun, but Scott had mercy on the girls when it came to picking peas. He pulled the vines and brought them to the backside of the school so everyone could sit in the shade and "pick peas"! The garden has done very well again, but it takes a lot of work.