

Faith helps former alcoholic turn his life around, leads him to mentor inmates through Pathways to Freedom Ministries

Answering the call

By **SHERRI BORDEN**
Staff Reporter

BEFORE BOB dedicated his life to Christ, failed relationships, alcoholism, drug use and anger dominated his life. And, on top of that, severe depression also took a hold on his life.

So 2½ years ago, within a period of three weeks, the 40-year-old Lower Sackville man twice tried to kill himself.

"I saw myself as a lost cause, worth nothing, nothing to contribute to anybody. . . . I was going to remove myself from this world," said Bob, who requested that his last name not be used.

The first time he attempted to overdose by drinking three 40-ouncers of vodka and ingesting 200 pills of various prescription drugs. After that failed he tried to hang himself in his shed.

"Just as I was ready to kick the ladder out from underneath of me, my guardian angel came through the door," he said. "She's now my wife." It was inside a room at the Nova Scotia Hospital that Bob realized that despite his calculated attempts to kill himself there was a reason why he was spared.

"There was no medical explanation why; it wasn't like I had gone to the hospital and had my stomach pumped, because I didn't," he said. "I just fully . . . realized that there was something greater than myself that was instrumental in keeping me alive.

"I knew it was the Lord. There were no ifs, ands or buts. I was trying to take myself away at a time that was of my own choosing, not His."

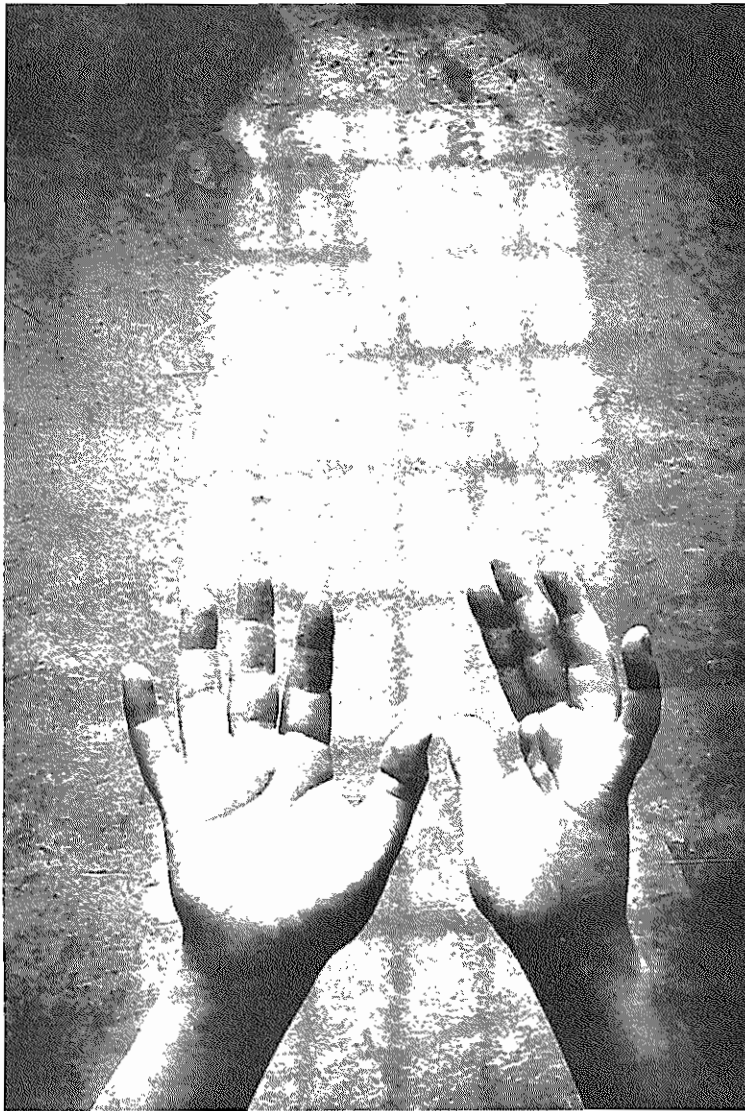
Just before his suicide attempts, Bob's first marriage was in shambles because he was an alcoholic and recreational drug user.

"I put a greater emphasis on those things rather than on the things that really should have meant the most," he said. "All my relationships before that, they weren't healthy relationships. I was also a very angry person and I didn't deal with my anger healthily."

One day, he finally hit rock bottom and his marriage dissolved.

Bob knew things needed to change. And, with little else left to lose, he began reading the Bible and praying.

He also widened his circle of friends to include his pastors and



begin.

Today, Bob, a burly man sporting a shaved head and a shiny diamond cross in his right ear, is celebrating three years of sobriety.

Last fall, he was asked if he would like to sit on the board of Pathways to Freedom Ministries. This Lower Sackville-based charity provides a one-on-one mentoring ministry that matches Christians with inmates and ex-offenders.

He agreed to sit on the board as treasurer and now serves as a mentor.

Little did he know that his brief stint in a military prison back in the 1990s would one day help other inmates. As an infantry soldier in the Canadian army, he had spent 45 days in a military prison for an altercation and conduct-related offences.

"With my background I knew that that was a way that I could start repaying the debt for everything that the Lord has done for me," he said.

Through Pathways, Bob mentors two inmates — one at a provincial jail and the other at a federal prison. He visits each at least once a month. During these visits, he usually has a 90-minute discussion with the offenders

to them very regularly, so I'm basically a positive friend on the outside for them."

And once the offenders are released, Bob will help them transition back into society by putting them in touch with resources, and take them to appointments and recovery programs to help break the cycle of criminality. Given his own personal battles, Bob, a communications specialist by day, relates easily to these offenders. "I know what's worked in my life to enable a change. So I try to use that as the example."

When asked why he spends his spare time in a federal prison, Bob's answer is simple: "I've grown quite a bit because I will travel to some of the federal institutions on a regular basis for fellowship night, chapel night. . . . Yes, there are some guys who have done wrong and they're there and they've accepted what they've done, but I tell you, there's some amazing, amazing people inside and they are an inspiration.

"Most guys that are in there, they're not the scary criminals that one would normally think of.

"They're guys with feelings, they're guys that have come across some hard knocks in life

OPENING DOORS FOR INMATES

Pathways to Freedom Ministries, Lower Sackville: A one-on-one mentoring program for men, women and youth currently incarcerated or recently released from correctional facilities in Atlantic Canada. Volunteers visit and hold monthly chapel services with inmates in institutions and at the youth correctional facility in Waterville.

Contact: Nancy Hynes, executive director, 497-8280

Website: www.pathwaystofreedom.ca

East Preston United Baptist Church Prison Ministry, East Preston: This ministry of 15 volunteers holds monthly services at the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility in Dartmouth and the Nova Institution for Women in Truro. The team has visited all the federal prisons in the Maritimes and the Nova Scotia Youth Correctional Facility in Waterville.

Contact: Joyce Ross, 435-1565

Website: eastprestonubc.ca

Ray of Hope Prison Ministry: This Halifax-based ministry, made up of members from Trinity Anglican Church, Cornwallis Street Baptist Church, Cobequid Road United Baptist Church, Victoria Road United Baptist Church, and Beechville United Baptist Church, visits and holds chapel services at Westmorland, Dorchester and Springhill federal prisons.

Contact: Lorna Crawley, 719-2529

Email: rayofhope2009@hotmail.com

Metro Community Chaplaincy: This Christian team offers spiritual care and individual counselling to prisoners and ex-offenders and helps them re-enter the community.

Contact: Ron Sullivan, chaplain, 429-2092

Email: mcchaplaincy@eastlink.ca

Halifax Community Chaplaincy Society: Trained volunteers work with the community chaplain to respond to the spiritual needs of offenders, ex-offenders, their families, Correctional Services of Canada staff and victims.

Contact: Sister Pat Wilson,