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“There’s Jesus

After Sergeant Bernice Feagins was diagnosed with a rare neurological condition, she thought her life was over, but that’s when Jesus taught her what it means to truly live

By Alexandra Pollock

Bernice Feagins’ heart slammed against her chest as she came to a horrific realization: I have it. In 2004, the 29-year-old was walking to an Army training class at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, when her body pitched violently to the left, hitting the cold cement wall. Sweating and struggling to maintain balance, Bernice knew too well the early symptoms of spinocerebellar ataxia type 1 (SCA1), an untreatable genetic disease that causes degeneration in the part of the brain that controls movement. Over the years, she’d watched her brothers, sister, aunts and



nothing can't heal"

uncles slowly lose the ability to walk, speak and eat. "I had never felt more alone," says Bernice, who wasn't a Christian at the time and had never read the Bible. "I realized in that moment that life as I knew it was over." But little did she know, her life was just beginning.

AN ANGEL ON EARTH

For five years, Bernice hid her symptoms as she worked as an Army recruitment officer. "I was terrified of being discharged and of losing everything I'd worked for," she admits. But as her condition worsened, others began noticing her strange gait and slurred speech. After she was mistakenly accused of drinking on the job, Bernice was forced to face the disease—and her future.

In July of 2009, Bernice was formally diagnosed with SCA1 and was transferred to the Warrior Transition Unit (WTU), where ill and injured soldiers receive medical care.

"I was in such a dark place," Bernice recalls. "Most of the doctors said I was a lost cause and wanted to stop my physical training and discharge me from the Army." But Bernice's primary care doctor wouldn't allow it. "He believed in me and told me there was a 'higher power' who could heal anything," she says. "I was skeptical, but my doctor was so kind and motivating, I began to hope. Looking back, I believe he was an angel on Earth...he put me on the path to finding Jesus." ➤

In 2009, Bernice began physical therapy at the Warrior Transition Unit despite her grim diagnosis



➤ GAINING TRUE PEACE

Inspired by her doctor's compassion and faith, in 2010 Bernice began a spiritual search that led her to buy her first Bible. "It was pink," she smiles. "Oh my, the joy and peace that I felt just holding it is indescribable. When I opened it and read Isaiah 53, 'By His stripes we are healed,' I knew instantly that it had all the answers that I ever needed."


The more Bernice read, the more Jesus filled her heart. "I began to pray and He healed my spirit right then and there," she says. "If I never walked again, I knew I'd still have peace in Him.

That certainty and joy made me even more thirsty for God."

DISCOVERING MIRACLES

As Bernice grew closer to the Lord, she began to witness the miracles of His love. "The feeling of Jesus' safety and peace gave me the strength at the WTU," Bernice shares. "The doctors kept naysaying, 'There's no medication and no surgery to help this, you're done.' But I felt peace. I felt joy. I kept going." And to her doctors' surprise, Bernice's condition began to improve. By the time she was released from the WTU in 2011, she had defied all odds and fully recovered the abilities to speak, walk and drive.

FINDING NEW LIFE IN HIM

Today Bernice shows no symptoms of SCA1 and works as a health-care recruiter with the Army. Her nickname is "Happy Soldier," and for good reason: "I've been given a second chance at life through Jesus," beams the 42-year-old. "I've learned that He can and will heal us—it may not be physical healing, but His love and joy are capable of healing us in ways we can't even imagine. I'm proof that with Jesus, we never degenerate—we only regenerate!" 



Bernice is now symptom-free and loves spending time with her sister (left), and nephew