"Laughter is good medicine."
**Proverbs 17:22**

Chaplain Jill Bryan: “Re-firing, NOT Retiring”

By Sherry Kaiser
Cross Times

TORRINGTON -

Describing her recent road trip to the International Conference of Police Chaplains in Cannon Beach, Oregon, Chaplain Jill Bryan says that the trip also produced an impromptu performance at a school assembly, followed by a Wednesday night God Squad for seventy children. But that all seems to suit Bryan just fine, describing herself as a “jumping Jillybean” as she finds that instead of slowing down, she’s actually jumping back into life. She even managed to find some time during the trip to do some dog-sitting for her sister and brother-in-law.

Reflecting on some of the storms of life in a recent interview with radio host Russ Garrett, including stage 3 breast cancer, Bryan says she’s been through “some ups and downs.” “Car accidents, horse accidents, difficulties in life, loss and pain and you know, I’m thinking I’m getting older, I can’t do this anymore, but the Lord has impressed upon my heart, ‘I’m not done with you yet. My plans are far greater than you will ever imagine.’”

Bryan’s life already seems bigger than the imagination, with a story that includes difficulty, dramatic twists, and unexpected turns. By the time she was a teenager, she had turned away from her childhood faith to partying with high school friends, though she says she was able to hide her “double lifestyle” thanks to an outgoing personality, school involvement as a cheerleader, and her ability to maintain good grades.

As a nineteen year old, Bryan married young, but was forced to flee her abusive marriage after only a few years. Things only went from bad to worse because even though Bryan says she worked hard and actually became a chef, she was also supplementing her income by dealing drugs and was frequently jailed.
But Bryan’s life was about to take another unexpected turn, this time in a better direction. “I finally came to the end of my rope and cried out to God for help.” Promising to serve Him if He would deliver her from her jail cell, Bryan states that it was actually another year before she began fulfilling her end of the bargain. “On May 20, 1983, I rededicated my life to Jesus Christ. At that time, I promised God I would serve Him, I really didn’t know how to, so I began doing Jillybean. Jillybean is the nickname that my brother used to call me,” she states on her website. Bryan tapped into that outgoing personality and energy from her youth as she began developing the buoyant, fun-loving character of Jillybean, and a host of other characters, by ministering God’s love to children and families through comedy, illusions, music and ventriloquism. After three decades of ministry that took her all around the United States and the world as Jillybean, her battle with cancer and a significant car accident a couple of years later looked like the end of her outreach.

Instead, her ministry took on another dimension, that as a Chaplain in Goshen County, Wyoming which allowed her to employ her energies closer to home. As Chaplain, Bryan ministers to public safety officers in their time of need. This includes agencies such as the Veteran Fire Department, the Torrington Police Department, Search and Rescue, Banner Health, and Regional West Medical Center in Nebraska.

The Bible says in Proverbs 16:9, a man may make his plans but God still directs his path. Instead of having to choose between Jillybean or the Chaplaincy, Bryan is discovering that the digital age is affording her new opportunities to combine her talents and ministries, and even to continue her global outreach.

Jillybean Enterprises, Inc. (JEI) is a not-for-profit (501-c-3) organization that encompasses the multi-dimensional aspects of Bryan’s life including her latest endeavor, Cool Beans Productions, a growing collection of videos on You Tube that feature Bryan as Chaplain Jill, Biker Baby, or Jillybean with a variety of her puppet friends.

A new website that is still being developed will offer devotionals for adults and children, possibly including down-loadable coloring pages in the future, and more. Bryan says that God is bringing people alongside of her to do the administrative work so that she can focus on what God had called her to do and continue doing more of what she loves to do, and that means making people laugh.

“As a Chaplain, I volunteer quite a bit with different national organizations and love serving in Goshen County and Wyoming,” she says. That even includes, on occasion, riding with the Wyoming Pony Express.

“I’m not busy,” she reflects.

“I’m just available for God.”

“Every pain, every loss, every hurt, every difficulty molds us more into the image of Christ. We’re gonna have struggles in the world,” Bryan acknowledges.

“When we go through the pain and loss, and we try to hide it and push it down, a root of bitterness can grow up at any time. Satan wants to feed that. But when you forgive and you let it go, and when you are washed by the water of the God’s Word, you’re whole and you can become a conduit of God’s love. That’s what I see in my past.

“My past is my passion. I’ve survived beatings, pain, and death and even suicide in the family. I’ve survived hurricanes, accidents and great loss. But like John Wayne always says, ‘Get back up in the saddle.’

“In the loss and pain, I don’t hide it or throw it away. I use it now to help others because I’ve gone through that. I’m a good listener,” says Bryan.

“Since rededicating my life to Jesus Christ, I just want to tell others about Jesus. I’m a Chaplain and I’m enjoying the journey.”

Pictured at right, Chaplain Jill Bryan at an International Conference of Police Chaplains representing the Torrington Police Department, and (at left) at a school assembly with her puppet, Chopper, at the Pacific Beach Elementary School in Pacific Beach, Washington.