

A Story of 2 Lives

Velazquez Polk and Janet Kuzmaak both grew up in Portland, Ore., but the two could not have been more different. Tom Hallman Jr. told their story in an article in the *Portland Oregonian*.

Polk was a tough street kid who joined a gang at age 10, and was eventually arrested for selling drugs.

Kuzmaak was an honor roll student from an upper-class neighborhood, and a figure skater. In 1980, Kuzmaak's sister was raped and strangled to death. Authorities never found her killer. Kuzmaak came to regard every criminal as her sister's murderer.

Kuzmaak eventually became a nurse at a major medical center. Polk, released from jail in 1990, was given a job as her surgical aide. She was furious. She didn't believe in rehabilitation for criminals. "Well, give him time," she thought. "He'll mess up."

But she noticed that when Polk's gang-member friends tried to entice him to rejoin their ranks, he refused. He told Kuzmaak he wanted to flee his old life and join a program to become a nurse's aide, which he had done.

Kuzmaak remembered that her sister had once befriended a man on parole. She lobbied the hospital to pay Polk's tuition while she continued to monitor him.

One day, Kuzmaak heard an elderly cancer patient sobbing. She saw Polk clasp the woman's hand and whisper. Kuzmaak couldn't hear what Polk said, but the woman replied, "You made all the difference in the world just by being here for me." Kuzmaak felt a surge of pride.



Polk and Kuzmaak became great friends. She helped him gain entrance into a world that he once did not know existed. He helped sweep away the bitterness that had once poisoned her heart.

The lesson: Change and growth are always possible – if people first turn away from evil.

Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:22).

– Beecher Hunter