

## **A LIFE THAT HAS TAUGHT ME A LOT**

### **Klara: The Netherlands**

My name is Klara, I am 46 years old, I have been married for 25 years and I have two sons. We led a life in the world of swingers, where one meets many people who are on the same wavelength. A lot has changed – in a positive way – because our family became imprisoned. It was tough though, because your family is ripped apart. The prosecutor wanted 15 years for me, but the sentence turned out to be ten. I have spent six of those in prison and I am in the last one before my release on license now, spending it at the Exodus house in order to get things in order again. I have done time for the most serious offence possible, accessory to murder, and I am not proud of that. Unfortunately, my children also got involved. They are also on their way to being released now, and they are on the right track. They are being helped by monitored accommodation until they find a place of their own. My husband will have to remain in prison for some time and by the end of 2014 he will be transferred to a closed clinic for mandatory psychiatric treatment, so there is a lot in store for us before we are finished with this.

The crime should of course never have been committed, for everyone has the right to live, even though everything turns out different from how you wanted it to be. From one moment to another, you may find yourself in a situation that you have not asked for, and then you see your whole life change. You need to be careful then not to crack up completely, something I have seen many people do in prison. What kept me going is that I set myself a goal, something that I am very fond of and fight very hard for in order to make things right again. But it takes another way of life than before and you should not put your rose-tinted glasses on and believe that everything will be OK again anyway, because then you are dreaming.

During my time in prison I thought we had a lot of friends and acquaintances, but that wasn't true. I always say that you should not judge people too soon because you don't know the whole story about how they got into prison. Most people call us criminals, but I sometimes ask them, what is a criminal to you, actually they don't exist. You end up in a

situation, no matter what it is, where something went wrong in your life. Sometimes you relapse because people look down on you – something you didn't ask for. And anyway, managers as well as street bums are in prison so who is "a criminal" then? Well that is how it has been described in law and people have accepted that. The most difficult thing about being in prison is that you are constantly thinking about how you will be able to do it differently afterwards and how people will react to you. Like, for me it will be hard to find work because you always have to tell them what your situation is and that tends to make people wonder. I am finding out now how hard life outside is after almost six years inside a prison. Luckily, I get help from Exodus, and the chance to see my children and my husband so we can bond again, but it is still a very long way before we get to the finish line. My life has changed completely, in prison I have had the opportunity to study and work, which gave me some sort of feeling of leading a normal life. Right now my life is on hold for a while but I will need to get on with it again before long. I have a nice job now as a volunteer at a home for the elderly. It is really good, and people don't ask about stuff but take you as you are and accept your ability to help. My one dream – which I hope will come true some time – is to have a nice perfume shop. But you can be a normal family on one day and the next everything falls apart. However, the best thing is that we always have kept on supporting each other, by telephone and a visit every now and then, and what also helped is to keep on believing in the Lord, who supports you every minute of the day. This is my story and I hope that it will help you somewhat in your future, so that you or others will not have to experience these bad things.