

Testimony

Richard D. Mangone Tells His Story

My Name Was on a Federal Most-Wanted List. Now It's Written in the Book of Life.

When the authorities caught up with my financial shenanigans, I went on the run.
But Christ caught up with me.

On September 13, 2013, I sat alone on the bunk in my cell, eating a cold egg sandwich at the federal correctional institution in Ray Brook, New York, a medium-security prison in the High Peaks region of the Adirondack Mountains near Lake Placid. It had been my home for 18 years.



I walked out of the prison reception building feeling almost numb. I was nervous waiting for my daughter Jessica and my sister Donna, who would drive me six hours to a halfway house in Boston. There was a bittersweet reunion in the parking lot, filled with hugging and crying.

I was 69 and had served my time without parole for serious financial crimes, catching the longest sentence ever for a white-collar crime in Massachusetts. Money had become my god.

Living the High Life

Growing up in East Boston, I never realized how poor my family was. My mother needed a job after Dad died of lung cancer when I was nine. She supported us four children working in a candy factory and earning \$1.10 an hour.

Following high school, I joined the U.S. Air Force, serving four years and getting married along the way. A budding talent for finance led me to major in business at Holyoke Community College in Holyoke, Massachusetts; and then in accounting at American International College (AIC) in Springfield, Massachusetts. After graduating from AIC, I worked for an insurance company before joining the Polaroid Employees' Federal Credit Union as controller. That decision spelled the beginning of the end.

In 1980, I helped launch the Digital Equipment Corporation's Employees' Federal Credit Union (DCU) as president and CEO. The business prospered, expanding to 20 branches, and I began investing in single-family rental homes and the stock market. Living the high life, I made millions legitimately.

Five years later, I co-founded the now-defunct Barnstable Community Federal Credit Union (BCFCU), which became a piggy bank for myself and several cohorts. I used the business to obtain fraudulent loans, bankrolling massive investments in Cape Cod real estate. For a time, runaway greed can generate excessive returns—in my case, a 9,000-square-foot mansion, a small fleet of luxury vehicles, a plane, and properties worth \$20 million. On many occasions I would race my red Ferrari around Cape Cod at over 130 miles an hour. I was out of control. Yet even with all that wealth I was still empty inside, always looking for the next score or hit.

Duping the DCU's board of directors opened the door to fraud on a grander scale. We hoodwinked everyone until auditors from the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) finally uncovered our illegal dealings in 1991. This resulted in my indictment and ultimate conviction on numerous charges of conspiracy, bank fraud, and money laundering.

On top of this, I was dealing with a loss like no other. My son Douglas had died in a tragic accident driving the BMW automobile I gave him. He was only 21.

My attorney stalled my sentencing for almost three years so I could set up a sports memorabilia business to provide income for my wife, Mary. But when the time came to appear before the judge, I found myself unable

to face the thought of spending years in prison and probably dying there. And so I made a momentous decision: to run away from my sentencing hearing and forfeit the \$50,000 bail bond. Four days before the hearing, I kissed Mary goodbye and called my regular limo driver for a drop-off at Logan International Airport in Boston. I taped 13 packets of \$100 bills around my body and stuffed \$2,000 into my wallet. I cut the probation office electronic bracelet off my ankle in the car.

Weather delays frustrated my escape plans. I flew to Dallas and then paid a bartender \$300 in cash to drive me to Houston so I could catch a plane to Nashville, my final destination. Paying everything in cash kept the authorities off my trail.

For the first six weeks, I skipped around to different hotels and motels in the Nashville area. Needing a new identity, I stumbled onto a scheme to buy a phony driver's license from California under a new name—Richard D. Infante. But my life on the run eventually earned me a place on the U.S. Marshals' most-wanted-fugitives list.

I burned through most of the cash in a year of partying, gambling, playing the stock market, and traveling around with girlfriends. I pawned my gold Rolex watch, worth \$16,000, for \$5,000, which I lost at the craps table in a Mississippi casino. When the money stream began drying up, suicide surfaced as the only remaining option. Still seeing a steady girlfriend but living alone in a dreary motel room, I decided I would kill myself by guzzling a bottle of wine, falling asleep, and piping carbon monoxide gas into my sealed SUV. I felt trapped like a roach in a corner.

One evening, I duct-taped plastic tubing from the exhaust pipe and into the rear of the vehicle, aiming at a painless death the next morning.

Yet while surfing TV channels that night, I paused on an evangelist preaching about Jesus on the cross. Placing my hands on the TV set and crying, I asked Jesus to forgive me for all my sins and receive me as his child. It sounds like a cliché, but I felt a great weight lifting from my shoulders.

Ready to Surrender

Since I had never been interested in religion before, I was unfamiliar with Scripture. Wanting to know more, I drove to a Christian bookstore and bought a Bible and Christian teaching tapes. For several months I devoured the Bible while hiding out in a trailer in Tennessee's hill country. But I could not rouse the willpower to surrender. I even visited my wife and daughter in Boston, poised to turn myself in to the U.S. attorney in the federal court building. It didn't happen.

Returning to Tennessee, I ditched my girlfriend and moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky—where, out of desperation, I confessed my fugitive status to a Catholic priest. He called four law enforcement agencies before convincing the authorities that I was a felon ready to surrender. An FBI agent arrived hours later at the church and took me into custody.

In November 1995, I entered the federal prison in Ray Brook, handcuffed and escorted by U.S. Marshals. I was 51 years old. I quickly connected with the prison chaplain and told him how I had come to Christ before surrendering. The first day in the chapel felt like being in a sanctuary. The chaplain mentored me and introduced me to discipleship courses that gave a solid foundation for my faith and encouraged me to share it with other inmates.

Soon after arriving, a fellow inmate blessed me with a new leather-bound Bible, donated by a local church with a prison ministry. I immersed myself in the task of studying Scripture, attending every chapel service and memorizing 2,000 verses. In total I completed 39 prison-ministry courses. The prison became a sort of monastery to me. I told various "cellies" (cell-mates) that I was in perfect solitude while cloistered and studying.

My faith strengthened slowly because the Lord needed to get rid of the junk inside me. I still had issues with covetousness from my past and with fully trusting the Lord. Case in point: My wife became very ill, and my daughter needed to sell her home. The thought of claiming some of the potential selling price of \$350,000 for a nest egg tempted me. Meanwhile, fellow inmates would badger me to reveal details about getting phony IDs, money laundering, and hiding money in overseas accounts.

After serving 15 years, I was still not ready to go home. I needed more counseling sessions with the chaplain. But whenever I meditated on Isaiah 51:14 (“The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread”), I felt my spirit lift. God’s Word gave me hope that I would not end up dying behind bars.

Opportunities to Serve

Trying to live the Christian life in prison is a life-and-death adventure. Temptations bombard you. Sex is always an issue. In my case God froze my sexual feelings, and I can only explain it as a miracle. The Holy Spirit empowered me to control my body.

Other inmates and the guards watch you closely, waiting for your fall. Some mock you and avoid being around you. I was even accused of being too happy. While working in the prison kitchen, I saw inmates steal food and utensils. Informing on them would mark you as a rat and leave you vulnerable to violent retribution. But God always sheltered me from harm.

And of course, you miss family. My mother and wife died during my incarceration. I was not allowed to attend Mary’s funeral, even though I was allowed to work outside the prison fence and was not considered a flight risk.

Through it all, I would spend two to three hours studying the Bible each day, supplemented by hours of prison-ministry courses on the weekends. This gave me the strength to grow and never give up. I began teaching courses to inmates and preaching to the prison’s Spanish congregation, with one of my cellies translating.

Leaving prison six years ago opened up a host of possibilities for serving God. Today, at 75, I volunteer with the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services System, counseling men in federal and state prisons. I’ve given talks about how to survive prison to as many as 100 convicted felons and their families. In 2016, I founded Bezael Prison Ministries to help ex-offenders readjust to civilian life.

As I reflect back, I can see how a dollar sign sat on the throne of my heart for many years. But Jesus sits on that throne today. I relinquished my life to him. Each day, as I am guided by the Holy Spirit, I am continually reminded it is Christ who rules and not me.

Prison gave me the opportunity to grow in Christ and to finally become the person God wanted me to be. In the future, I hope to minister to as many prisoners as I can, especially white-collar criminals who are so susceptible to attempting suicide. What remains of my life is dedicated to the Lord’s work. I’m at peace now, enjoying the fruits of helping others.

Richard D. Mangone is the author of *Busted: A Banker’s Run to Prison* (Bezael Prison Ministries)

. *Gleaned from Christianity Today*