

# Susan Binkley

## Blue Monarch: Moms Learning to be Moms

### What God Can Do with the Willing

**They come. Hopeless. Skeptical. Worthless. Angry. Lost.**

**They progress. Anxious. Realization opening pain. Newness bringing fear. Giving up a temptation.**

**They approach graduation. Hopeful. Uncertain. Excited. Valued. Unfamiliar success bringing fear. Self-sabotage an option.**

### Susan Binkley and Blue Monarch

Developing a recovery program cold, Susan Binkley, a professional artist from a horse-farm world, had no idea what she was doing. No social work training. No experience. No clear plan except what came from a vivid but confusing dream and an unexpected, three-hour business plan. No experience with that either. Years separated these stages in God's process.

Who in her right mind would tackle such a God-sized assignment? Not a woman whose theory was “never look God in the eye. He might send me to Africa. Watching missionaries from my young perspective, I decided that was about as bad as it could get. I grew up in church, playing piano for youth and for our choir. However, I went away to college and learned I didn't have to do any of that any more, so I drifted. For a long time. I didn't really have a sense of what a personal relationship with God meant; I feared God but not in a healthy way. Throughout the years, that all changed as God brought me into the path of what would become Blue Monarch and His miracles.

Who, indeed, tackles such a God-sized assign-

ment? A woman in God's path. A woman ultimately willing to put her yes on God's table. A woman willing to step out—though it be with reluctant, faltering steps—to take His assignment and learn by His doing. (It sounds a bit like the Moses story to me.)

Founded by Susan Binkley, Blue Monarch is a Christian residential recovery program for women and their children overcoming the horror of abuse and addiction. It's a long-term, residential and therapeutic community located in Coffee County, Tennessee. Blue Monarch has gained a reputation for providing a robust learning platform for women to become better parents, with one goal being regaining custody and restoring relationships with their children.

On-site counseling (or off-site when needed), daily spiritual development, coaching hands-on parenting, and a rich children's program have devel-



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oped Blue Monarch into a unique, life-changing opportunity—not only for the courageous women who come, but also for every precious child who crosses the threshold.



Blue Monarch provides priceless opportunities for women to trade generations of addiction and abuse—often having been taught to use drugs by a parent or grandparent and sometimes being pimped out to support the parent's drug habit—for healthier, happier lives. “A major part of the healing process is developing a personal relationship with God and effectively becoming healthier parents to their children, some of whom they haven't seen in months or even years. Blue

Monarch focuses on teaching moms to parent sober—when they haven't had moms in that role in their lives—which is part of what makes Blue Monarch unique. We strive to break the cycle. We like to say we rewrite the family tree.”

Since 2003 the Blue Monarch campus has grown from 50 acres and three homes to 108 acres and 14 houses. Binkley's husband, Clay, has been a great sport because Blue Monarch was not part of the deal when they got married. While he has always been supportive, he now manages the whole farm and all the houses and oversees all the maintenance at Blue Monarch.

Previously a bed and breakfast, the property came completely furnished and provided everything needed to immediately begin serving women and children looking for a new start. “Our unique focus on the child's recovery and effective parenting puts





**Women like Courtnesha, here with her son Zeke, are taught the love of Jesus and how to create a better life for herself at Blue Monarch.**

us in high demand, making it difficult not being able to meet the tremendous need out there,” explains Binkley. However, twenty years later, the donor-based, debt-free, no-government-assistance campus is expanding into a two story 24,000 square foot building, freeing up existing facilities for more residents. Expansion plans include a multipurpose building, an on-site daycare, and a commercial granola kitchen with larger capacity and greater truck access. Ground breaking began mid-March 2024. Excitement is palpable—excitement bathed in prayer!

Binkley says that Blue Monarch has saved the state of Tennessee approximately \$176 million by housing women who otherwise would have been incarcerated and their children placed in foster care—a great value to the state. Again, prayers of thanksgiving for God’s mercy, the God who provides (Genesis 22:14), abound. “One of our greatest challenges is that we are located out in the middle of nowhere between two cities that don’t really consider us local even though we take women and children off their streets. So, fundraising has always required lots of creativity and out-of-the-box approaches. I really can’t stand to do anything ordinary—so our entire campus is colorful, fun, and creative, even including animals and gardening. All of recovery doesn’t have to be dreadful.” Through her office window, Susan watches the kids playing in the treehouse. She smiles with gratitude.

“Women must be away from potentially violent situations for 30 days before they can come to Blue Monarch, and there is an admissions process that determines if the applicant is serious about turning her life around. “Because of what these women have endured in the past, living in poverty (even in their car), incarceration, and various types of treatment centers—they are shocked when they come to Blue Monarch and often cry when they see how beautiful it is.”

Out of the Blue Granola Opportunities “At one point of the healing process, women are given the opportunity to work in the on-site granola business. The granola is hand-turned multiple times for optimal flavor and texture using local wildflower honey. Residents learn valuable skills on-site and earn income, allowing them to get a head start on their independence. As a marketing tool, a single bag of granola, for example, has evolved into six-figure support for this non-profit healing and restoration entity.”

The bags of all-natural granola, each packed with a small card bearing a photo of a resident and a bit of her story, are sold at various stores and restaurants in several states, on line, at Whole Foods, and more recently at Publix, and the Pick Tennessee Products displays at various locations. These employment opportunities and business experiences are carefully integrated into the learning and healing of Blue Monarch residents. The business produces approximately 20,000 pounds of granola a year, but that number is rapidly increasing—hence the dire need for the commercial granola kitchen with truck access. In Nashville, Out of the Blue Granola is also sold in such locations as Turnip Truck, the Sunshine Shop, and Produce Place. Families giving gift bags for wedding favors often provide others across the country occasion to support Blue Monarch women because of that little card packed inside each bag.

“The pride the women hold because of their granola jobs is ‘very moving.’ Even though they most likely could make more money on the streets selling drugs, they are excited about their paychecks and are proud to show their children what they are doing to support their family. “The grano-



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la is a win—win—win—and win!” Blue Monarch Children. “Severe trauma and sexual abuse have increased exponentially during and after the pandemic; I have been especially disheartened by the dramatic increase in abused children. So, we have developed a stronger children’s program to more effectively address these issues. We focus just as much on the child’s recovery as the mother’s.”

In September of 2014, Blue Monarch established the Proverbs 22:6 Children’s Program, dedicated to providing the richest experience possible by focusing on specific needs of every child, including regular assessments, tutoring, mentoring, age-appropriate counseling, and how to be a child. They need to learn how to be children rather than being the parent figure in the home. They learn to play hide ‘n seek, draw on our sidewalks with colored chalk, climb on the treehouse, and play with the chickens and goats.

“Children often come here from extremely traumatic or unsafe conditions and may never have had the stability of an available grown-up. Blue Monarch strives to create stability and normalcy for our children and hopefully gives each child what may have been missed. Here, children learn that people pray for them and encourage them along the way as they develop communication skills, a sense of gratitude, and how to trust.”

“We have many organizations reaching out from many places, even as far as Canadian facilities, wanting to learn the methods we’ve developed” says Binkley. “We’d like to complete this master plan and become a training center to help others serve families in the same way and experience the same tremendous outcomes.” Since 2003 Blue Monarch has served nearly 1,000 women and over 350 children who have been reunited with their mothers. The statistic that makes Binkley the most excited is “seeing miracles that only God can orchestrate.”

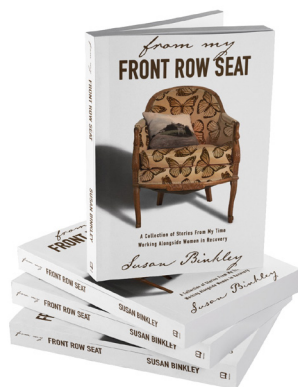
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**The Proverbs 22:6 Children’s Program, dedicated to providing the richest experience possible by focusing on specific needs of every child, including regular assessments, tutoring, mentoring, and age-appropriate counseling.**

### **From My Front Row Seat**

*From My Front Row Seat, A Collection of Stories from My Time Working Alongside Women in Recovery* is a collection of popular blog posts in which Binkley weaves an intricate tapestry of candid Blue Monarch life—as seen through her eyes—combined with her colorful life experiences. Binkley’s stories are filled with complicated realities of recovery, tragedies of generational abuse and addiction—and nowadays increasingly devastating witchcraft—along with general life struggles. Her voice is raw and authentic. As a degreed, professional artist and seasoned entrepreneur (former owner of The Blue Chair) with no education or experience in social work, Binkley continues to use her creativity and out-of-the-box problem solving to develop one of the most unique and effective long-term recovery programs in the country. “Like the title of my book, I feel that God has



**From My Front Row Seat quickly reached No. 1 best-seller status on Amazon in two categories, Inspirational Christianity and Christian Missions and Missionary Work. It is available in several formats on Amazon and in paperback on Blue Monarch’s website as well as select local outlets.**

given me a front row seat to the greatest show on earth. Putting this book together forced me to think about what’s happened here, and it’s overwhelming to think about the lives that have been changed. I’ve had a lot of different jobs over the years and can look back and see how each one helped me do what we’re doing here now. I often grieve over participants in my audiences who speak of feeling called to do something that they didn’t do. I grieve over what they and others may have missed out on. In God’s timing, however, it’s never too late. “The publication timing of Front Row Seat turned out perfectly because the book was released just four days before our twentieth anniversary. Looking back, it would have been great if I’d just planned it that way!

“I want the book to show that people can truly be healed of addiction and that they don’t have to white-knuckle their recovery the rest of their lives. We really want to change the way this country

treats addiction. We know this is possible because we see it happen; we get to see God in action in miracles. “Through the book, I also want to honor the journeys of the women here; I want to give hope for people who have similar struggles; I want people to see that miracles do indeed still happen; and that there is tremendous power in prayer.”

Drawn from life at the Blue Monarch and personal experiences, *From My Front Row Seat* is a great example of how God uses imperfect and even reluctant people to do His work.

For further information about Blue Monarch, visit [www.bluemonarch.org](http://www.bluemonarch.org) or call 931-924-8900.

— *Sheila E. Moss: author of Living to Matter: Mothers, Singles, and the Weary and Broken; Interrupting Women: Ten Conversations with Jesus; and international publications derived from teaching Bible and Christian ethics in Africa, Ukraine, Venezuela, and England; teacher of Bible classes for 35+ years; mother of five adult children and grandmother of eleven.*

