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A PERFECT
PLACE

part 4



Swept Away!

By Shine (26,
of Tim), Detroit,
USA

The 20 years I spent in the System seem like a strange dream. When I tell people stories about it or recall events from that time, I find myself thinking, *Did that really happen? Was that really me?* Sometimes I think maybe it was all a bizarre movie I watched which seems strangely familiar. It was real though—at least as real as reality gets in that world.

It all started in a very small town in Pennsylvania. My mother has always lived a pretty wild life, and after I was born it didn't change. When I was a baby she was taking care of me and had quit doing drugs for then. Soon though, she and my dad got divorced. She started singing in bars at night for money, and so when I was two I went to live with my grandparents.

Punk parents

My mom was into the punk music of that time period. She was in a few different bands, doing drugs, living in a commune of musicians, and soon met a guy on the same track. They got serious and eventually got married. One thing I always remember from those years was my mom's and step-dad's hair. I think it was a different color or design (polka-dots, stripes, etc.) weekly! Once my step-dad dyed his hair like a skunk, all black with a white stripe down the middle!

A little while before I turned five and was going to start school, I began living with my mom again, and my step-dad

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Cover photo: Faithy (9) and Shine
witnessing at the Harley Davidson 100th
Anniversary Celebration, on a road trip
to Milwaukee.

For age 16 and up. Parents and teachers could read the first testimony together with their JETTs and junior teens, if the Lord confirms, as a teaching tool. If read with those younger than 16, please do so at a time when the testimony can be discussed and questions answered. Other testimonies in the mag can be read by those younger than 16 at their parents' and/or teachers' discretion.



Shine (26, of Tim) on the road in Cincinnati

also. My mom quit the bar and band scene to take care of me, while my dad kept it up to support us. He worked at other jobs, like fast-food restaurants, at the same time keeping up with the band.

He was still doing drugs though. I remember that for sure. He and my mom were doing some recording at that time. They got jobs singing jingles for commercials and other advertising. I hung out at the recording studios quite a bit when I was five.

Saved!

Then our lives took a drastic turn. When I was seven my mom met a pastor who was a nice man and she got saved. Then I got saved, and a while later my dad also.

At first when I got saved I was really excited and loved Jesus so much! I vividly remember going through my sticker book and ripping out all of my Michael Jackson stickers. I gave my mom my black leather jacket that had zippers all over it like Michael Jackson's and told her, "I don't want this anymore." No one told me to do it. I was just sure I didn't want it.

My mom was inspired too. Since she was such a good singer, she and I would travel around to different churches. For their Sunday night service she'd sing songs and tell them how Jesus had changed her so much and so fast. I thought that was fun. I liked to hear her testimony; I had seen it happen.

Another aspect of our new life that I really enjoyed soon after that was that my mom got very involved in the whole anti-abortion movement. She and I would go to marches and protests. We moved to New York, and she opened one of those clinics where a woman can have a free pregnancy test, get counsel on what to do, be given clothes and food, etc. I thought it was so fun. I felt like we were actually doing something right to help people.

Fire dying, rebellion growing

Slowly but surely, though, things started to die down spiritually. While we were in New York my dad started going to Bible school. He and my mom got jobs at the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) headquarters. They became quite churchy. Instead of going to protests or telling our testimonies, we just started going to church three times a week. My parents, both being musicians, got heavily involved in the music scene within the church.

When I was 12 the CMA headquarters moved to Colorado, so we moved with it. I was starting to question the hypocrisy and spiritual monotony I was seeing.

The only times I'd really enjoy were when I would hang out with one of my friends who had the same opinions as I did. She and I would drink cheap wine, watch anti-System movies, listen to Pink Floyd, Jefferson Airplane, and other hardcore psychedelic '70s music, and talk about all our ideals and plans for the future. We decided we'd get a Volkswagen bus and travel around together. We longed for any sort of freedom. We'd take our shirts off and run in the rain and sit around and

read books about people's experiences with drugs. I liked being with her. We became outcasts together.

My dad still forced me to go to church, but I refused to pay attention or take any of it in. I began to hate it. I began to hate other things too. Over the next couple of years I started losing hope in general. Everywhere I looked and everyone I looked at depressed me. I didn't want to be like my parents, my teachers, the people at church, the kids at school, the people on TV! I didn't want any of their cliques, money, "success," materialism, styles, intellectuality, fake smiles, and religion!

Sick of the System

I didn't know what else there was though, so I really went down! I started experimenting with strange eating habits and became anorexic and bulimic. I became quite suicidal and at one point even took a bunch of pills. I told my dad one hour after taking the pills, to freak him out that maybe I was going to die. He took me to the hospital, of course, and I ended up staying there for a month. I remember being mad because they wouldn't let me wear my combat boots. I also had to room with some really



With some of the young people in our Home

strange people, as we were all considered to have mental problems. My only problem was that the System was making me sick.

I got out of the hospital and quit all my crazy eating habits. I was a bit scared, because I was sometimes throwing up blood. In the hospital the doctor had told me my potassium level was dangerously low. I also realized that not eating was dumb and not helping anything.

Right around then my mom became very depressed herself. She got sick of the churches, and she and my step-dad divorced. We quit going to church, and she started partying again. The previous year she'd gotten her real estate license, so she was selling houses, and we soon moved into our own apartment.

My own search

I wrote poetry a lot: "I'm wandering through the darkness. Can you lead me to the light?" It was all along those lines. I'd sit in my bedroom with the lights out and 20 candles lit listening to '60s and '70s music, writing poem after poem.

I looked pretty weird around that time, also. I went to a high school that was in a higher-class area and full of rich white kids. I didn't like them, and I didn't want to be like them or act like them or look like them! I dressed as

weird as I could, a mix between gothic and punk.

I had a boyfriend for a year who I really liked. He was a musician and an artist, an odd individual like myself. But towards the end I was so confused and out of it myself that I wasn't very nice to him, and we broke up. I was in my own little world.

Then a few months before I turned 16, I had my first experience with drugs. It was the end of a school day on a Friday and one of the hippie guys at school approached me. "Hey, do you want to smoke some pot tonight? My friends and I can bring an ounce over to your apartment. It's on us."

It was common knowledge amongst the "party-ers" that my apartment was "open" on the weekends. My mom stayed at her boyfriends' houses and left me alone. Even though I hadn't done drugs yet, I had been drinking and various kids would bring beer or tequila or whatever to my apartment on the weekends. My mom didn't even care. She just told me that if anyone was drunk to make sure they slept over rather than drove home.

She was hardly home anyway! Once in a while she'd sleep there, and I'd wake to find a different guy in his bathrobe in the kitch-

en. Once the guy was only a couple years older than me! I was a bit taken aback, but got used to it.

Drugs, sex, parties

That particular Friday was the beginning of a part of my life that would change me immensely. A group of guys came over to my apartment. They did indeed bring a lot of pot. We smoked it all! I don't really remember what I thought or how I felt, but over the next few weeks I met with them consistently, and we always got high.

Since I had broken up with my boyfriend and had already lost my virginity with him, I jumped right into having sex with one of the guys. He was what you call a "stoner": high or stoned from morning till night, and I pretty much followed suit. Our relationship was short-lived.

Right before I turned 16 I befriended a group who used heavier drugs. I went to raves with them three or four nights a week. We would sniff crystal and dance for eight hours straight.

One night at my apartment one of the guys said we were going to do something different. He pulled out some needles and we all shot up. He had obviously done it before, so knew how. His girlfriend, who I also hung out with, really liked it. That's the only time I actually shot up. It felt very weird, and I couldn't eat or sleep for a long time.

The many days I went without eating or sleeping while snorting crystal screwed me up. I had a cold for a whole year straight. I tried to take herbs and vitamins to combat it, but of course it didn't help.

Harsh and hard

The week before my 16th birthday, one of the guys who had been partying at my apartment a lot came over. He wasn't one of my hippie and druggie friends. He was more of a football-player type who just came over to smoke and drink. I don't know why he came over that night when no one else was there. I didn't like him though. We talked a little and he started kissing me and climbed on top of me. I didn't want to have sex with him. I knew from before that he wasn't a very nice person, so I didn't know what to do. So I just started crying. I figured that would be enough to make him get the point to leave me alone.

He sure didn't get it. He finished, got up, zipped up his pants, and walked out the door. I was a bit sickened

by him, but knew that kind of stuff happened a lot. So I just got up, wiped my tears, and tried to forget about it.

There was a big party going on the night before I turned 16. It was in one of my friends' houses up in the mountains. His house was full of people and everyone was tripping acid. I had never done it before, and my friend came to me, gave me a little paper with a rainbow on it, and told me to put it under my tongue. I did it, and, boy, did I regret it! I was drinking beer and smoking pot, and after a little while I began to see things. I didn't understand what was going on, what was real or why I was seeing all of this. I remember that I kept seeing elves and rainbows out of the corner of my eye.

Then later into the night, I was walking around the party and I saw some people who looked like they were split in half, like they were half demon and half the way they usually looked. At that part it started to freak me out a little.

An unhappy birthday

Later on I went home with my friend and spent the night crying. I thought the world was ending and I had missed out on something. I kept having glimps-

es of everything beautiful—my friend with long hair full of flowers, the smell of incense, the sun shining, and children dancing all around. It looked like the perfect world, and I wanted to just jump into it, but I would see it and then it would vanish and I'd feel like I was alone and dead. It kept happening over and over.

At one point I saw Jesus flying through the sky, but a voice kept telling me, "You can't get there. ... They left you behind. ... You're dead!" I cried and cried and cried. In the morning I was so confused and scared I felt like I really was dead. My eyes were swollen and I was a mess. It was my birthday though, so I had to meet my mom.

She wanted to take me out to lunch, so we went to a nice restaurant. She wondered why I looked so bad. She knew I did drugs, but I didn't want to tell her about the night before. So I answered that I wasn't feeling well. I sat there during lunch like an empty shell. She had the waiters sing to me, and I felt like I was going nuts! We drove home and I opened the door to my apartment to "Surprise!" It was full of tons of people who regularly partied with me. My mom had told them all to be there, and then she said, "Okay, I'm leaving. If anyone's drunk they'd better sleep here!"

It was not what I felt like doing at all! Even the guy who'd raped me a few weeks earlier had the guts to show up. I felt sick. I told the people who were my actual friends to come with me. We went to my room, got out the bong (a water pipe used for smoking), and just smoked pot for hours. I don't know what everyone else in the apartment did, but some time that night or the next morning everyone left and I fell asleep.

Deeper and deeper

I continued going to raves and doing crystal regularly. I smoked pot from morning till night. Before that I had had sex with a couple of guys, but I started just sleeping with different guys whenever I felt like it. One day in particular I had sex with three different guys in the same day. They all showed up at my apartment at the same time wondering what was going on. I liked one of them, so I explained to the other two that it had been "just for fun."

I started getting serious with the other one, and he became my boyfriend for the next two years. We had a real crazy relationship, and we started doing a lot of cocaine together. We'd go to parties and raves, do ecstasy

weekly, get drunk every night, and if we didn't have any pot, life was terrible. He had an awful temper.

One day I had to call in sick from work because he had kicked my leg so hard the night before that I couldn't even walk on it in the morning. I still have a scar on the back of my head from the time he hurled a plate at me as I was leaving his house. I don't even remember why we'd get in such terrible arguments. It probably had to do with both of us being so screwed up, so high and then so low on drugs.

I tripped on acid a few more times and on mushrooms too. I had the same types of experiences. One time when I was 16 I traveled during the summer to a Grateful Dead concert and then to California with my friend. We did all sorts of drugs the whole way. By the end of the two-week trip my brain was totally fried. Again, like I usually thought when I did acid, I felt like I had died. I felt like this life is what death must be, and I longed for life.

Effects

After tripping a few times and doing plenty of other drugs, strange things began happening to me. For a few years, if I would look at any blank surface,

like a wall for example, for more than a few seconds, it'd start to turn into weird patterns and they'd all start moving. It really bothered me. Also, when I'd read, some of the letters would come forward and some would go back.

One time I was sitting with a group of friends. We were talking, and all at once like a freaky movie I saw all their heads turn towards me and start laughing. They wouldn't stop, and I got so freaked out I started crying. I think I closed my eyes for a few seconds, and then when I opened them everything was back to normal. They were asking me, "Are you okay? Why are you crying?" I didn't know what to say.

I read a lot. I soaked up books on any spiritual topic from astrology to Zen Buddhism to Shamanism—anything as long as it had nothing to do with Christianity.

I started seeing some stuff that was pretty eye-opening for me. One night my friends were doing a bunch of crystal, and one of the guys went totally paranoid for real. All at once out of nowhere, he thought that we were all plotting to kill him! It was so strange! He was a nice guy and I liked him a lot, but he just cracked. That very night, he hitchhiked to a city a couple hundred miles away and hid out with a girl. It was three months before he told one of us where he was, and slowly started hanging out with us again.

Another thing that really freaked me out was when a good friend of mine left for college. He was a nice guy, smart and clean till he started coming to my apartment and buying drugs from us. He partied a lot with me. Then one summer day he left for college. The next time we heard of him the police had found his car pulled over on the side of the road, and about a hundred feet away he was lying on the ground dead.

One of my friends had a dream that he overdosed while driving, and then went running out of the car freaking out until he fell over dead. I knew he had taken a bunch of crystal with him, as he was totally addicted to the stuff. For a long time I felt very guilty about this, even after I joined the Family. The Lord has spoken to me about it and I don't worry about it anymore, but at that time in my life it really affected me.

Moving on

At some point I discovered that my mom was getting into drugs again, especially crystal and coke and finally

heroin. She got involved deeply with bikers and they were all at our apartment from morning till night. She told me she was going to stop selling houses because she was making better money selling drugs. I told her I didn't think it was a good idea. She did it anyway.

When I was 17, I graduated from high school. That in itself was amazing as I smoked pot on the way to school and in between classes. I was always late, and many times I'd be passed out at my boyfriend's house and wouldn't even go to class. Somehow I finished school early. Of course, I never showed up for graduation or even picked up my diploma. It was the last thing on my mind.

My boyfriend moved away right after I turned 18. I got a VW bus. I had gone through a few jobs since I was 16. I got fired twice for sleeping past my alarm and past work. My mom said she was concerned with what I was going to do for a job, so she encouraged me to go to modeling school. I did and she paid for it. That was a funny experience, not exactly down my line. At the end I was invited to go to New York, but decided against it. The Lord must have really influenced me



Tim and me

in that decision, because that would have been a big change of direction, I'm sure for the worst.

At that time all I could think about was leaving home and traveling. I was so sick of everything. I wanted to be free. One night after work I went over to my friend's house to, as usual, get high. There were a group of hippies there hanging out and I heard them talking about wanting to go to Oregon. I'd had my eyes set on Oregon for a couple of months, so I took that as a sign. I told them I wanted to go there badly, and they were like, "Let's go!" I told them I wanted to save up some money first and they said, "No way! We'll show you how to get by." I told them where I lived and a couple days later one of the guys showed up at my place. A few of my other friends were there too, so they all slept over.

A fire and a change

That night we woke up to a room full of smoke. My mom was coming down off some sort of drug and late in the night had fallen asleep with a lit cigarette in her hand. She was lying on the futon in her room and woke up and saw a burning hole. She said she had put it out, getting the hole wet, and then went out into the living room and fell asleep on the couch. The fire had kept on burning through the futon though. When we all woke up

the room and living room were on fire. We woke my mom up and found our way out of the apartment.

The firemen and police came. They put the fire out and in the process they found a bit of drug paraphernalia around the house and also found out that we were being evicted. (My mom had lost all her money in a big drug deal with a biker, after which her cell phone was shut off, our home phone cut, her car taken by the bank right out of our parking lot, and we received an eviction notice for the apartment.)

My friends and I left in my bus, as the cops weren't interested in us. I think they took my mom, but just gave her a court date. I met up with her later and she told me, "Just leave town! Get out of here!" She went into hiding with some bikers and druggies. I visited her a couple of times and hung around town living in my bus.

Options

I started hanging out with a group of traveling hippies. They didn't do any hard drugs like coke or crystal or ecstasy or anything like that, so that was good for me. I quit those hard drugs then and there. I was sick of that whole world anyway.

One day before we left Colorado, we met a lady at a parking lot. Her name was Freedom. She bought us some food and beer and took us to her apartment. After we had eaten and drunk she stated, "Now we are going to wash each others' feet." I was a bit taken aback. She got out her Bible and read a few chapters from it and had us wash each other's feet.

She witnessed to me, but in a very cool way. Even though I was very turned off to Jesus, I didn't mind her. I actually liked her. She should have joined the Family!

Finally we took off—me and my bus full of hippies. We camped anywhere, and I learned a few trades: making hemp jewelry, clay beads, wooden pipes; and just plain asking people for money. I enjoyed camping and traveling around. I went all over the West Coast and made it to Oregon. I met a lot of interesting people, but I was still searching so desperately.

I started reading books about New Age, healing, prophecy, and other topics along those lines. I met so many different people on different trips. Some were incredibly wacky.

During that time I got into a relationship with one guy I was traveling with. He had done a lot of acid and had

Our Home's Candlelight Service on the eve of 2004



all kinds of strange visions and ideas. Usually when he talked about them, I felt I must've been very dumb, because none of it made much sense to me.

For a while in Oregon I hung out with a jolly old hippie named Rom-Tom. I liked him a lot. He was sweet and was always taking pictures of us naked hippie girls.

My mom's sad life

A few times I drove back to Colorado to see my mom. It was never a nice experience. She was doing more and more heroin and looked very bad. Her skin looked old and brown, and sometimes when she talked to me half of her mouth would be completely numb. Once when I was staying with her, she explained that she wasn't feeling well because she and her boyfriend didn't have enough money to buy any heroin. All at once I heard her boyfriend yelling in their bedroom, running into walls, hitting, and kicking them. She tried to explain that this happened sometimes when he was coming down. It seemed like complete hell to me.

A few days after that, I found out that she had stolen my friend's TV and VCR to sell for drugs. I

started to get somewhat disgusted by her and stopped visiting.

The next time I saw her was about six months later. She had gone through a detox program and was a little healthier. Soon after that, she went to prison for a month. When she got out she shaped up a little, although eventually she found out she has hepatitis (the kind you get from sharing needles), and to this day she's not doing real well.

A baby!

I traveled, living in the bus, not wearing shoes, picking up anyone, and eating whatever for more than a year. Then I became pregnant. I was so happy! I quit drugs completely. I was thrilled. My boyfriend and I stayed with my grandparents for the last four months of my pregnancy. I was able to find a really nice midwife with a birthing center where I could have my baby totally naturally.

I traded my VW bus for a school bus, got a job as a nanny, and saved some money so that after the baby was born I could get back on the road. Then we came up with an idea with a group of like-minded friends for my boyfriend and me to go to Alaska, where he had a surveying job set up to make some money fast. At the same time our other friends were going to school to

Alanna (1) and me at a farm where we take the kids to learn about the animals



learn organic farming and also saving money. We decided we'd meet in a few years and buy a bunch of land in the middle of nowhere to have a completely self-sufficient farm and commune. We were learning about solar power, and I was getting into growing and using herbs.

I was set on teaching my kids and keeping them far from society. I hated TV. I hated churches. I hated big businesses. I hated commercialism and globalization. I hated anything mainstream. I was a vegetarian and refused to eat anything with chemicals or preservatives. I was so against society in general that I disciplined myself to not even read any billboards on the roadsides as I traveled across the country. I believed anything like that was totally brainwashing. (That just might be true!)

When I lived with my grandparents I made them turn off the TV during commercials. They're real sweet, simple folks and they thought I was nuts. I was always preaching to them and anyone else I knew, about the terrors of pollution, chemicals, vaccination, mass farming, and on and on. Actually by the time I met the Family, I was quite stressed out about all of it!

Darkness

Spiritually I was in the dark. During my pregnancy I had chosen one particular "religion" to follow. My "Bible," which I adored and also preached about, detailed how to do different rituals, how to worship the earth and the moon, which I was very into, and how to use crystals for healing (which I thought was intriguing but never worked for me), and how to cast spells of blessings or curses. It all sounded and seemed very innocent to me at the time. I remember the first chapter really turned me on the first time I read it, as it was so anti-Christianity.

Other books I read along the same line also didn't say anything about being a witch or worshipping the Devil or anything like that. They simply spoke of Earth and the idea that there is no good or evil. I was really getting into it. My idea was that once in Alaska I would find a coven and learn to be a real witch, and teach my child the same.

The baby came, and when she was four and a half months we left in our school bus for Alaska. We had saved up some money, but the big old bus ate it fast. I remember sitting in the bus one day as I was holding my baby thinking, *What am I doing? Where am I going?* It was like I knew at that moment that I was truly lost.

An eventful stop

We were getting close to Indianapolis and decided to stop at a truck stop to cook a can of beans. Then we'd head north to Madison, as we'd heard we could sell our pipes and jewelry there. We stopped close to the city. Being mid-July and very hot, I decided to take my baby outside and nurse her on the curb.

I noticed there were some people watching me close by. It was a couple and a few kids. They were smiling, so I smiled back. Then the lady came over and sat down beside me. She was sweet and her kids were friendly. She started talking to me about breastfeeding, how she'd had nine kids and had nursed them all. I thought that was cool, unusual.

She gave me a poster with a quote about love, and I immediately turned it over to see who made it. "The Family," I read aloud. "Is that your church?" She explained a little to me. Then she and her husband invited us to their house for dinner and showers.

After I talked with her for a little while and she walked away, something really far-out happened. Before joining the Family I really tried not to believe in good and evil, God, and the Devil type of stuff. New Age and witchcraft teaches against it.

A couple of times I had watched the movie, *The Stand*. I liked the movie quite a bit, but at the same time something about it freaked me out. Maybe because things are so clear-cut in it. In the movie the Devil is a man named Flagg who always wears a jean jacket and cowboy boots. His hair is kind of long and curly and he has a very particular smile. When I was sitting there on the curb after meeting the Family for the first time, I felt like I saw Flagg.

There were truck drivers walking by me to their trucks. One in particular walked by very slowly and very closely. I noted his boots, his jacket, his hair; everything was the same as Flagg's in the movie. As I was looking at him, he slowly turned his head down toward me and smiled, and indeed it was the same smile. I was thinking, *Whoa, I've seen Jesus and the Devil in the same day!*

Something very different

Days later, Jonathan (that was the brother's name) said that they had actually planned to be clowning that day. They had a place reserved, but the day before Jonathan had lost his wallet and \$50. When he asked the Lord why it happened, He told him that He wanted to get his attention to not go clowning but go to the truck stops. I'm so thankful that he listened.

We went over to their house. I helped Lily make dinner as she told me all about her many years living communally and being a missionary around the world. It was impressive. I also spent a lot of time talking with Jonathan. I remember thinking there was something really different in his eyes, something I really liked. Neither of them pushed Jesus very much. Probably the Lord showed them that it wasn't a very good idea at first.

Then came dinner. We ate and then sat at the table for a couple of hours talking. We got into talking about the churches, and I had a lot to say. I told them everything I hated about the church and asked them many questions about things I disagreed with Christianity about. I remember thinking that they had such a good answer for everything! They even showed me verses from the Bible that backed up my opinions! I had never heard the Bible being preached like that. That night we watched *Countdown to Armageddon* and it also hit me pretty hard.

Glimpses of that new world

Before going out to the bus to sleep, Jonathan mentioned that he'd leave something for me to read on the table, and if the baby woke up before everyone else I could bring her into the house and read it. It must have been the Lord who woke her up bright and early! As soon as she awoke, I took her into the dining room, curious as to what I would find.

He left something as simple as the poster book on the table, and it had a big effect on me. I especially liked the pictures of the Millennium. It looked so much like the beautiful scenes I had had glimpses of while tripping. It was that new world that I had dreamed of. Later that day we read something from *DB8*. I don't remember what it was, but I remember getting really serious and thinking about what we were reading.

Day after day I kept saying, “We’ll leave tomorrow, if that’s okay.” Every day we’d read MLs, sing songs, look at old pictures of the Family, and I’d ask lots of questions. Every ML was amazing to me. It felt like this man knew everything I had wanted and needed. Each word was exactly what I wanted to hear, and I was hooked.

The crossroads

I remember one night deeply apologizing to the Lord for how much I had misjudged Him and everything He was about. It was like getting saved for the first time: Everything was new after that. After about four days there really weren’t any more excuses to not get on the road again, to continue my journey. I wasn’t so thrilled about that, but I didn’t know what to do.

That afternoon I went to do the provisioning with Lily. We were riding along, and out of the blue she said, “If you want to serve Jesus with us, you’re welcome to stay!” The past and the future seemed to flash before my eyes. Just a week before I was smoking pot, practicing my tarot cards, and had a deep hatred for Christianity. Now, giving my life to be one of Jesus’ actual

disciples would be doing exactly what I was so against for so many years. Or maybe it wasn’t.

I was never against love, freedom, hope, or any of those things. I was against the System, and I had never realized that Jesus was too. How deceiving the churches are! They make Jesus out to be a conformed, conservative Systemite, and it’s such a turn-off. One thing was for sure, I knew if I got back in that bus, back to my “search,” back to the same old thing, I’d regret it for the rest of my life.

Every ML was amazing to me. It felt like this man knew everything I had wanted and needed. Each word was exactly what I wanted to hear, and I was hooked.

Deliverance from the dark void

I had made my decision. The guy I was with also joined, but left later. The first few weeks weren’t exactly easy. Jonathan and Lily’s older kids were all out of the Family, but still living with them. At first when I got there they thought I was okay since I was a “traveling druggie” and that was cool. But when I decided to join the Family, a couple of them got pretty mean. It was a bit disheartening for me and a few times made me cry. I didn’t care though. The Word had me.

Soon I was able to move to a different Home to do my six months, which I was very thankful for. After I got the gift of prophecy, the Lord said that had been my first test—to hold on to the Word, no matter what the sample was of others around.

I had some heavier tests after that too. Since joining I never once felt like getting high or was drawn to any drug, but I guess some of the spiritual stuff ran a little deeper. I had a few weird experiences of hearing my name being called—not Shine, but my System name—from behind me, and one time I actually had a vision of a little demon calling it. It was in an annoying way, like when someone calls you and then pretends they didn’t when you turn around to answer. It made me very fearful.

Some nights I would get scared of everything! It was terrible. My shepherds at that Home got that it was most

likely from so much experimenting with witchcraft. It's funny how when you're into it everything is about saving the earth, worshiping the goddesses, etc., but once you step back you can see the dark void enveloping it all. Thank the Lord He totally delivered me from every bit of that, including all the fear. I also learned the power of the Word right from the beginning. Reading the Psalms at night helped.

Perfect

So much has changed for me. Now when I tell our friends and sheep my testimony, they look at me and say, "Are you sure that's you you're talking about?" I feel the same way. Now my life is like a perfect Heaven. Not perfect in that I have no trials, or that nothing ever goes wrong, but perfect in that I have freedom, love, vision, fulfillment, everything that comes from serving Jesus.

I'm married to Tim who's been in the Family since I was born. He and I come from totally different generations, backgrounds, cultures, countries, experiences, and families, but amazingly we're on the exact same wavelength, and the Lord has brought us together and made us one.

We have lots of children. Tim and I have had four kids together. I had one before I joined and here with us we have a beautiful blended family of 13 kids. Each of them is a special gift from Jesus, which I am thankful to have as a part of my life.

Living communally is definitely the best! It takes love, but the effort is worth it. I have so much fun with the people I live with. It is so revolutionary that we are a group of very different kinds of people from all over the world, and yet we live together and share everything. That is quite a testimony of what it truly means to be a child of God. There is something that draws us all together and makes us want to love each other more and more every day. We are not of this world!

I live with people who are totally dedicated to witnessing. Because of that, we have a very fun Home with lots of change and excitement. Years ago the Lord showed our Home to make road trips a big part of our witnessing. There are so many big cities around us that have no Family witnessing there! So for half of every year we take turns going on road trips, each around a month long. Our witnessing in all of these places is very fruitful. We have many sheep from different cities who we have met over the years that keep in touch with us, read the Word, and some help support us. The road trips are very exciting. Two of my many highlights from last year's road trips were the following:

I met a man from Ethiopia who is a high school chemistry teacher in the city we were witnessing in. At first he was not very open to the message, and let me know right away that he was not Christian or Muslim or anything. I told him all about the Family, how we are so different, and how we actually live like Jesus' disciples did. I also told him a short version of my testimony and he liked it. We talked for quite a while. He asked me lots of very deep questions. Then he gave me his e-mail address, and for the last six months we have kept in close touch. He has been reading the MO Letters and finds them very interesting.

Another memorable witnessing experience was while on a road trip to Wisconsin, when we happened to be in Milwaukee (the birthplace of Harley Davidson) during a weeklong celebration of Harley Davidson's 100th Anniversary. (See cover photo.) That was some interesting witnessing! There were thousands of bikers

from all around the world there. I had quite a few unusual conversations, and at least gave them something to think about!

One aspect of witnessing that I enjoy very much is preaching the radical words of David. I like going to universities, college towns, and places where there are intelligent, idealistic, young people who are searching. That is always very fruitful and challenging. I love it!

At one point shortly after I joined, I was planning on going overseas. I prayed and prayed, and finally the Lord showed me that even though I would love to experience a different country, He wanted me here in the States. He said that I am able to relate to many different kinds of people here, and especially to the young people who are in many of the same situations I myself have been in. I have seen this to be true time and again, and over the years that I have been witnessing here, my burden for the sheep here has grown and grown.

Another reason that our Home is so full of excitement is because the Word is constantly bringing positive changes to our Home. I am really thankful to live with such

Now my life is like a perfect Heaven. Not perfect in that I have no trials, or that nothing ever goes wrong, but perfect in that I have freedom, love, vision, fulfillment, everything that comes from serving Jesus.

new bottles who are willing to do whatever is needed to live the Word! Our Home is united in our desire to follow the Word (new and old) and to be Jesus' radical, dropped out, anti-System disciples of the End. I want to teach our children to be the same.

I teach and take care of the kids a lot, and it is so fun because the Lord gives me so much inspiration and a lot of fun ideas of things to do with them! The other teachers and I enjoy coming up with new ways to make their school time and Word time fun and interesting. Recently, we have added a lot more variety to our school curriculum, which I like to work on.

Every morning I teach three children who are in 2nd, 4th, and 5th grade. In the afternoon and evening (if I am not witnessing or helping with business), I take care of the littler ones. Training the kids is a big responsibility, and so important. No matter what decisions they make later in life, I want to at least be a good sample to them of love and truth.

Other than witnessing and teaching, I help out a little with the finances, I like to write testimonies, I help with making Home schedules and planning activities, I follow up on the sheep I've met, and do other things too!

For a while after I first joined, sometimes I'd ask the Lord, "Why couldn't I have met the Family when I was twelve and avoided so much?" The Lord clearly showed me that every single thing that happened, all the strange turns my life took and the crazy decisions I made, were leading up to this! He was preparing me to be a real disciple, sure of my path and my calling.

My life truly turned around from night to day. Jesus swept me away in an instant! I guess He knew it was time, and I'm so glad it was. It's hard to explain what it feels like to be searching so hard that it hurts. And after that, it's amazing to actually be content in my heart, positive as to why I'm here and what path I'm following. I am living a constant spiritual orgasm!

Professional Clown Now Working for Jesus

By Christo,
South Africa

It was December 2002. I had just finished my last year of school and had good exam results. I had also applied and been accepted to a four-year engineering course at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, and had been a part-time professional clown for several years. So I had my whole life ahead of me.

That's when I received a phone call inviting me along with 70 other entertainers, amongst them two Family members (SGAs Chris and Meg) and their children, to perform at a 20-day carnival in Qatar, in the Middle East. So I ended up going to a foreign country for 20 days with 70 other people who I didn't know. Now, I am an introverted person and don't find it easy to socialize with adults. But I love children and find it very easy to befriend and entertain them.

When I arrived in Qatar, I met four little girls and got to know them. Thank the Lord for engineering things so that Chris and Meg could bring their children. If it hadn't been for them I might not be here today. Looking back now I see what a miracle it was, because Chris and Meg were not going to take their kids with them, but at the last moment it was decided that they would come along. The Lord did tremendous miracles to make everything work out. *(See GV 153 for the full story on this adventure in Qatar, "So, Lord, where to next?" by Meg.)*

Anyway, I played games with the girls and made friends with them, but I didn't talk to Chris and Meg much. One day while playing in the playground at the hotel one of the kids had an accident. They were on the merry-go-round and I was spinning it very fast, when one of the girls flew off and hit her head very hard on the concrete sidewalk. I sent the other kids to call Chris and Meg while I calmed her down. They took her to the hospital and she got a few stitches.

For the next two days she had to stay behind at the hotel, and I took care of her while Chris, Meg, and the

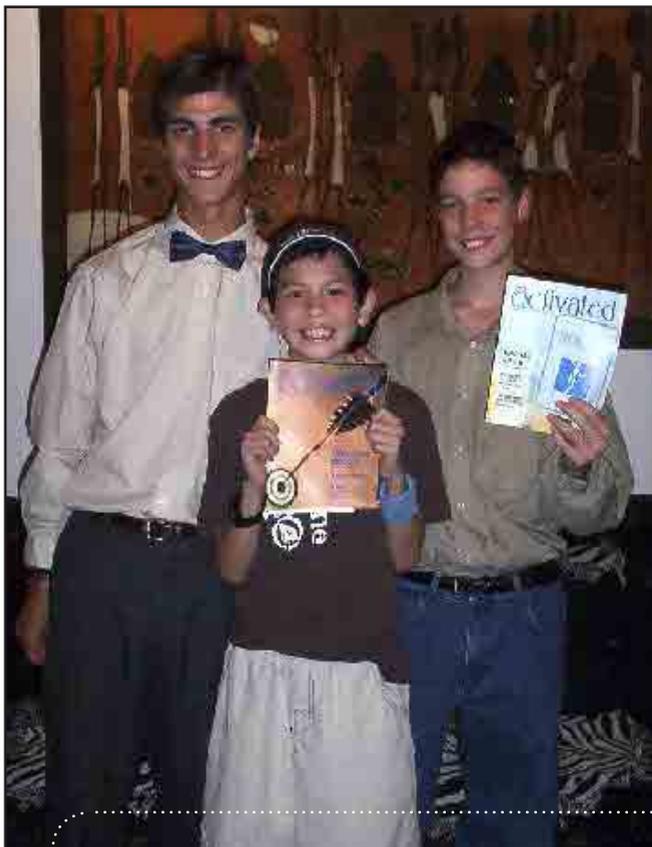
The Lord truly works in wondrous and mysterious ways.

rest of the kids performed at the carnival grounds. This gave Meg the common ground she needed to talk with me and witness to me, as I hadn't talked much with them before this.

The Lord truly works in wondrous and mysterious ways. I was in a foreign country and they were in a foreign country, and yet the Lord allowed us to meet and allowed me to receive the witness. I guess the Lord wanted to really get through to me the point that He had chosen me, and He made things happen miraculously the way they did to help me believe.

After the 20 days I went back to South Africa and started my course at the university. Three days into the course, I decided that engineering was not what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. It was meaningless. While continuing with the engineering course, I started looking for a different course to take, but soon realized that they were *all* meaningless. You see, it wasn't just the course I was taking, but it was the world I was living in that was meaningless.

Meg and I had contact through e-mail, and she invited me for a braai (barbecue). During the braai, they witnessed to me and



Christo doing Activated skits with JETTs

invited me to attend their Bible classes. I agreed, and after my first Bible class I wanted more! It took me three or four Bible classes to realize that what they were teaching me—the Bible—was the answer to everything.

While taking a break from class at school, I went on the Family Web site using a computer at the university. Of course I looked up South Africa, and an article written by Rachel (of Gideon) really touched my heart. It was a story about how they had provisioned blankets for a squatter's camp, and had gone down there to help out when the rains had flooded the place out. I was in the middle of a classroom full of other students looking up things on the Internet, but I was moved by the testi-

mony and couldn't help the tears in my eyes. I decided right there that I wanted to be more involved in missionary work and had the thought of serving the Lord full time.

When visiting Chris and Meg again, I had some questions on how the Family works and operates, but being very introverted and shy, I didn't want to ask these questions myself. Miraculously Meg explained it all to me without me asking. I thought that was amazing.

On my way home I prayed and asked the Lord for a sign or something to show me whether I should drop out of school and join the Family. I was then reminded of the movie *Bruce Almighty*, and the scene where he asked the Lord for a sign and the Lord gave him a message on a street sign next to the road. So I looked up and I saw a sign next to the road that said, "It's time for a change." (This was a cell phone service provider ad.) I decided then and there to join the Family full time.

During that week I told my parents that I was going to drop out and become a missionary. They were not impressed, and didn't take me very seriously. That weekend at the

I was then reminded of the movie *Bruce Almighty*, and the scene where he asked the Lord for a sign and the Lord gave him a message on a street sign next to the road.

Bible study I informed Meg that I was going to join the Family and that I had told my parents. She encouraged me in my decision, and that week I dropped out and started saving my money to pay my mom back for what she had spent for me to go to university.

When my parents heard that I wasn't attending university any more, they showed up at my flat with three bags, took me back home to their house, and forced me to attend university. Fortunately, it was the last two days of that term, so I attended both days. However, since I had dropped out of school before finishing the entire course of study (which I would have done in subsequent terms), my parents expected me to pay back the money that they had spent for the course of study that I had not finished. It was quite a large sum of money to raise, and I had to wait a few months before joining in order to pay all my debts.

I joined in January 2004, and since then the Enemy has really been fighting through my parents and some of my friends. My parents dug up loads of articles and books about the Family that are very negative, so please keep them in your prayers.

The Lord has been growing me up and showing me a lot. I recently received the gift of prophecy, and life makes more sense to me as I learn more and take in more Word every day. I must admit that I had doubts on various subjects—about prophecy, about "the New Wine," about Father David, about our beliefs on sex, etc. But the Lord has shown me a lot, and I'm confident about all of our beliefs now.

Thanks to all the sweet brethren here in the Home, I have found true joy in the Lord's service. It's not always easy to live communally, but I like it! We are a good team and we work hard. I'm involved in a Sunday school for over 100 children, a kids club for about 150 children, a teen club for about 60 teenagers, a personal witnessing team, a team that goes out tracting, a university ministry, and an Activated team. So

far I have had experience witnessing to Muslims, Hindus, traditional Africans, rich businessmen, secretaries, university students, and every kind of person you can imagine.

I have also started working through some

It's not always easy to live communally, but I like it!

CVC courses on Christian Studies, passed an AIDS education course, and been involved in AIDS education in schools. I do the food pick-ups and help to run the feeding scheme. I play the drums, and am part of our youth music ministry. At home I'm involved in childcare and, having experience as a clown, I'm also involved in our fundraising. Apart from that I have two and a half hours of Word time and half-an-hour prayer vigil every day. So there is never a dull moment, and my life is full of challenges and excitement.

Family life involves hard work, just like in the System out there, but the difference is that I'm working *for* something. There is meaning behind it all, whereas in the System I would have been working hard for money and that's it. There is no purpose in that kind of a life.

So now, a year later, I once again have my whole life ahead of me, but this time it's for Jesus!



Meg and Chris White and family

Muslim Finds His Best Friend in Jesus

By Paul (of Lilac),
Conakry, Guinea

I'm Algerian, from North Africa, and I joined our wonderful Family in 1975, at the age of 24. I'm married to French Lilac and we have eight wonderful children. Right now I'm in Guinea, West Africa, and since it's a tolerant and open 90% Muslim country, it is an interesting field for me. My heart's desire has always been to give His Word to Muslims, as I was raised one.

I know the Lord chose me before my birth to be His disciple, so I'd like to describe some of the main events of my life before joining the Family, events that led me to Jesus Christ.



Paul and Lilac and kids

Childhood

I was born in Algeria, in a remote mountainous area. My mother was an orphan and never knew her parents. My father stayed in France after having fought in WWII and came back to Algeria just to marry and have his first child, me. When I was around two years old, we immigrated as a family to France.

My parents were real believers, and trusted God for everything. I can truly say that they were shining samples of trusting and full-of-faith people, especially my father. They never went to school, never went to mosques, but I could see the hand of God in their daily lives. Their sample was my first stepping-stone to getting to know our heavenly Father.

In France, my first encounter with Jesus was in a Catholic church when I was four. A French woman took me to a church to look at the manger scene at Christmas. The Spirit of the love of Jesus came upon me while I was staring at the Baby Jesus, and I was filled with wonder at the scene.

I was a lonely little boy and my main interest at a young age was to sit on a little wall in front of our home for hours, and watch

people passing by. It was almost like I could read their minds and understand their lives.

At eight years old, at school I heard about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That was the greatest shock of my young life. I was severely hurt by the violence and wickedness of man. From then, I believe, my heart was thirsting for real peace, real love, and real happiness.

My mother taught me to pray the Muslim way, to fast, and told me “her” story of Abraham. From what I remember, the only religious facts that I learned with my mom were these:

—We go to Hell if we are “unfaithful,” like the white people (as she referred to the non-Arabs).

—We go to Hell if we eat unclean food, especially pork.

—We go to Hell if we don’t follow the Muslim precepts (including many dark traditions without scriptural foundations).

So I was already bound for Hell at a young age, because I had tasted pork with a neighbor! I had questions and doubts about the Islamic religion.

The second most important heavenly event that brought me closer to Jesus happened when I was around nine years old. During Ramadan (the Muslim fast month), there is a special night called “night of destiny” or “night of power” (Sourate AL-QADR- 47, *The Koran*). Usually most Muslims don’t sleep that night; they spend it praying and singing and praising God. It is the night when the prophet Mohamed received the words of the Koran.

During that night, however, everybody was asleep in my home. Suddenly a fantastic light appeared in my bedroom. I could discern an angel. My mother came from her bedroom and saw everything with me. The angel said that I could ask anything I wanted and it would be done. My mother urged me to ask for riches and money. But I, led by God’s Spirit, said to the angel, “I want wisdom and knowledge.”

The angel answered before disappearing, “It will be done!”

Then another important event that led me to Jesus was at school when I was around 11 or 12 years old. Our teacher wrote a sentence on the blackboard: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” He didn’t say anything about Jesus or God, from what I remember, but

those words became the standard of my life in most situations where I had to decide between caring for others or caring for myself.

Teen years and my last days in the System

Then my most difficult years started when I was around 14. I started to get fed up with school, and began drinking to make myself happy.

At 18 my father took me to Algeria, to marry me to a cousin in our village. Our marriage was decided by the elders and relatives and was a discouragement in my life. It didn't last very long, and I divorced a few months later.

From there my "hippie era" began. I became a hippie and traveled all over, from Istanbul to Amsterdam. My search for real peace led me to despair and close to suicide. Thank the Lord, Jesus had His hand on my life and He protected me from violent death a few times. He supplied my physical needs faithfully.

Being a hippie was supposed to mean love, peace, freedom, travel, music, communal living, sharing, and of course drugs. I had my share of all these, but without success, without complete fulfillment. All the ideals were just beautiful words and were impossible to put into practice.

Something was missing in my life and my friends' lives, and we were unable to live these magic words. In our hippie life, I found selfishness most of the time, treason, violence, robbery, and lies, exactly like the worldly System we were trying to escape.

So I felt myself going down, down, further and further into drugs. I found myself living in the spirit world filled with demons and evil spirits. I started to search frantically for answers in churches, in yoga, in philosophies, in books, in anybody's eyes, but, alas, I discovered that I was completely alone in this world.

I decided to leave the possessions I had behind, anything that could be a link with this world, and I began to walk through the mountains and the woods alone, searching for the true God. It was a hopeless time. I was physically sick, mentally insane, seeing demons most of the time, hearing strange voices, incapable of having a normal conversation, spacing out all the time, and scared to death. I had been forsaken by my sweet girlfriend, by my friends, and by my relatives. I



Gifts of clothes, medicines, and school materials to a Guinean deputy for his faraway village

started to roam as a beggar in the countryside.

One day I found a river in a peaceful wood, with a little waterfall, and I heard a voice telling me to baptize myself in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I did it without hesitation! This is when my real life began. My mind became clear, and my eyes opened to the beauty of God's creation. My heart started beating peacefully and my body began functioning properly. The miracle was that I really could feel all these beautiful emotions, thank God! I had found Him, at last!

Meeting the Family

Then things began to move faster in my life. After my experience in the woods, I went down to the city of St. Etienne, France, and started to look for people who had given their life wholly and completely to God—in the churches, in humanitarian associations, but without success.

A team of the Family (then the Children of God) came to the apartment of a friend, and I was invited to come and hear the Word of God. I went there, but the classes of Daniel they were giving were too heavy for me. I didn't understand a word.

Then I met another team later, in the same city. What touched me the most was the friendly warmth emanating from them. Even though I didn't understand a word of their literature, nor their preaching, I was won by their spirit of childlike simplicity and friendship.

Then later again, another team came to my town. One of the brethren seemed to be in a blue bubble of light as he smiled and talked to me. The sound of his voice was like the most beautiful music in the world. I didn't understand anything; I just remember that I knew he truly loved me. The other brother opened the Bible and tried to read to me some verses. But, alas, I was distracted by other voices coming from elsewhere.

After this, a close friend of mine joined the Family. He came to visit me and gave me the MO Letter "Choice" to read, which I did. I cried the whole night, because I heard God speaking to me clearly through that Letter. The next morning, I followed my friend to join the closest Home, 50 km away in Lyon.

If I could summarize why the people of the Family made such a difference in my life, to the point that I joined their movement, it was because of the light of true friendship they shared with me, and their simplicity. Like little children without complications, they accepted me as one of them.

New life in the Word

Since I joined the Family, I've seen firsthand the power of the Word in my life and in some Muslim friends' lives also. The Word of God has a powerful impact on the Arabs, especially the Muslims. I have witnessed many instantaneous changes in Muslims, and for me it has been the most beautiful thing in the world—to watch a Muslim read the Word, and especially David's Words.

When I joined the Family I was still spacing out sometimes because of my past with heavy drugs. But the Lord gave me a prescription: Read the book of Psalms as much as possible. Every day without fail I read them for months, and I can truly declare that the book of Psalms is the best psychoanalyst or psychiatrist you can find. I got my spirit and my mind back again!

Almost immediately after I joined, I was used in the ministry of provisioning. It was inspiring, because many times some businessman or director would change his mind and give abundantly, after having a talk with

me and tasting the fiery conviction of an ex-Muslim converted to real Christianity. Glory to Jesus only!

In Europe, I had a lot of experiences in the Family when I was arrested by the police. Being Arab, I was not supposed to do anything other than work at a secular job. I was preaching the Gospel, and the police authorities told me that, as an Algerian, I was not supposed to do this. From a few hours to a few days, I had the blessing of bringing the Gospel to many police officers and

many prisoners. All the many difficult situations I found myself in with the police always turned out for good, as I was able to win souls and friends and earn respect from authorities and prisoners alike. Praise be to Jesus! I went to a few countries of North Africa in the Family, as a single and also after being with Lilac, witnessing to Muslims and winning them to the Lord, and I saw many souls saved. I found that knowing the Koran with the Spirit of Jesus is a tremendous asset for having real sincere and clear communication with sincere Muslims. They love His clear and pure Word and His real friendship.

If I could say it in one word it is this: friendship. I don't know why, but it seems to me that we Arabs are longing for real friends. The world today doesn't promote this aspect of God's love. Real friendship comes from Jesus. He is our best friend, willing to do anything to win our lost soul and heart. "No man has greater love than this, that he lays down his life for his friends."

Distribution of prizes to the best students of a Guinean village at the end of the school year. They are lacking everything basic: writing books, pens, and pencils, and the teachers don't even have a schoolbook to help them to teach! They do it from memory.

