

Juan Carlo, Brazil

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PHOTO PAGE

Photo captions on following page.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN THE FAMILY WHO DID ALL THE NORMAL THINGS A REGULAR TEEN IN THE FAMILY DID, SHE WASHED DISHES, SWEEPED FLOORS, TOOK CARE OF KIDS, AND WENT WITNESSING. SHE DID NOT KNOW ANY OTHER LIFE, BUT HER LOVE FOR JESUS KEPT HER GOING.

By Nyx (19), PI

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Life as a missionary treated her well. She had no money, but it didn't matter. She had good food to eat, a bed to sleep on (even though she shared the room with five other kids).—All her needs were met. She loved going out and telling people about the Lord, about her unique life—one she was proud of. She listened to their heart cries and prayed for them. There was nothing more fulfilling than seeing a soul saved. When international celebrities would pass through the country, she'd do crazy, unconventional things just to be able to see them and tell them about the Lord, or to at least slip them a tract.

Never knowing exactly what miracles the Lord was going to do for her, each day that she went out by faith just made it all the more fun and exciting. Each day, something new happened; each day she made a new friend. And *being* a friend gave her many friends.

She was happy. What else could she ask for?

Ah, but there was more out there—she just didn't know it. This girl was quite talented, and that soon became clear when the world "discovered" her.

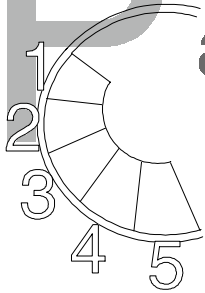
Her excellent training in the Family made it easy for her to communicate with people from all walks of life. She started by writing articles for various publications, attending press conferences and conducting interviews. Then, she was hooked up with a recording company and did advertising and promotions for them. No longer was she just the little "groupie" girl, now she went around with local famous artists as part of the entourage with a backstage pass.

From there, she moved on to work on illustrations for a developing generation X TV show and writing the scripts. The same company was establishing a radio show at the time and she immediately became involved—from brainstorming for content to script writing, editing to co-hosting the new show. By the time the first three months had passed, she had the whole season under her belt and the hints of nationwide recognition. Things were just getting better and better.

Needless to say, the months she spent working kept her busy nonstop. She was buried in projects up to her neck, her hectic schedule pretty much ruled her time. Things in her life had changed. Though it was just beginning, she was speeding uphill in this climb towards success.

But something else in her life had changed too. There was no more time for her former missionary activities and volunteer projects. Her friends everywhere hadn't heard from her in awhile 'cause she was just too busy for them. She'd stopped her prayer and counseling work and even her own

Photo aptions



1. Isabel (17), Gabriela (15), Irene (14), and Ariana (18), Colombia
2. Anisa (18) and Carina (15), ME
3. From left: Chris, Gianni, Martin Sheen, Mary Rose, Fortune, and Ruth, Canada
4. SGA Angela, Thailand
5. Andrew V. and Agnes, Uganda



A DAYCARE CENTER FOR STREET KIDZ WHERE WE PAINTED FIVE MURALS.

TEACHING LEN-LEN HOW TO DRAW.

READING A STORY TO CANCER PATIENT, KENNETH



personal prayer life had gone stale.

She wasn't a fulltime missionary anymore. She stepped back and took a good look at where she stood. She was becoming successful. Other young people her age, both in and out of the Family, envied what she was doing. After all, she was having fun. But did she really want to keep going on like this? Somewhere, underneath that smile she wore all the time, was this sinking feeling, telling her that in "getting a life," she was leaving the best one behind.

At this point, depression began to sink deep. Her heart was heavy and she didn't know exactly why. She tried to write out her feelings on paper, but they just came out in big globs of miserable, negative, dark words of frustration.

Then the call came. It was the same call that she had ignored the first time around. She had originally heard its gentle whisper in her heart when she started up the ladder of success. It was beckoning her to come back to the simplicity of serving others out of love for Jesus.—The life of the fulltime missionary she was born to be.

THE CALL PRICKED HER HEART AND SHE KNEW IT WAS THE TRUTH. SHE KNEW THAT THE FURTHER UP IN THE WORLD SHE CLIMBED, THE FURTHER SHE DRIFTED FROM GOD. BUT SHE KNEW WHAT OBEYING THE CALL MEANT: SHE HAD TO BE WILLING TO GIVE UP THIS SUCCESSFUL LIFE SHE HAD GROWN TO LOVE.

That scared her.

She had never had to forsake all before. That was the duty of her parents' generation, or so she thought. Did God want her to give up her job, her position, or even her loved ones? It was too much to ask! The cross seemed too heavy to bear. Could she do it? *Would* she do it? She didn't know.

As she looked once more at her past, present, and future state, something opened up her eyes and the picture started to get clearer. She had always wanted freedom, and now she had it. Or did she really? Sure, she was doing what she wanted, making a name for herself and having fun, but was she totally free? In the final analysis, the answer was no.

No, she was not free. She had lost that freedom to burn free with the love of Jesus. She was slowly fitting into a mold set by society, who laid down rules she was now obliged to follow if she wanted to become successful. She couldn't do those crazy things she did as a missionary kid to help get a lost soul into Heaven. Her zest for life was waning along with her convictions, and this ugly thing called compromise was beginning to rule her heart.

That was scarier.

She didn't want to keep on going on like that, becoming one of the "normal" citizens of society. She missed the missionary life. She missed the freedom it gave her. She missed the godly pride of testifying, "Yes, I'm a fulltime missionary!" And she missed the feeling of peace that comes from knowing you're in the center of God's highest will.



SO SHE FINALLY DECIDED TO HEED THE CALL.

Making the decision to go back to fulltime service and actually *doing* it were two different stories. It was a spiritual warfare, an intense battle that raged in her heart over the next few days that turned into weeks and months as she stalled doing the “immediate obedience” thing. But all the while, during the tempest of this life-altering decision, it was the words of Jesus she clung to, day in and day out.

When she soaked her pillow with tears at night, He was there beside her to comfort her and tell her she was going to make it. The day she went to work to inform her boss of her decision to quit permanently, Jesus was there too, giving her the guts to tell him she quit. Her boss admired her, held her in high respect, and encouraged her to go all the way for God.

As she packed her bags and said goodbye to her past, she knew for certain that her immediate future wasn't going to be a piece of cake. She wasn't going to be living the life of fame and plenty in the material sense of the phrase, but she didn't really care anymore. None of that mattered now. From this step forward, she was going where Jesus wanted her to go, and the thought of that simple fact made everything seem okay. She had to leave her family to rejoin fulltime, and that wasn't easy. She had to leave loved ones in the past to get a hold of her future and that was no smiling task. She had to put down her temporal job and sign up with her new Boss, which took some



deep contemplating.

But as she moved into her new home and became just a regular Family teen again—washing dishes, sweeping floors, piling leaves in the backyard, and pounding the pavement witnessing on hot days to raise funds for the rent—she knew deep down in her heart that the decision to serve the Lord in the Family again was the smartest move she could have ever made.

SHE WAS HAPPY. SHE FINALLY HAD A GRIP ON THE *REAL* LIFE AGAIN, AND WHAT GOD WOULD PAY FOR HER SERVICES AND REPAY FOR HER SACRIFICES WOULD BE MORE THAN SHE WAS EVEN DARING ENOUGH TO ASK FOR.

As she sits here right now and writes her story, something else comes to mind: She's always had a good life, as a fulltime member of the Family, and as a part-time one. Her story is not traumatic, and she didn't exactly pass through the fires of Hell to get where she is today. She experienced a pretty part of the System and was handed multiple career opportunities on a silver platter. You could say she got the best of both worlds. But what she has experienced in both of those worlds has only helped to strengthen her stance of knowing what she was born for—to be a missionary—for real, for good, for life!

Yes, this is my own true story, honest-to-God, fact-of-the-matter, no fiction, no frill experience—just telling it like it is. Although my life as a Charter member is just re-beginning, I've found out that real happiness comes from a certain inner state of the heart being at peace. And so, I think I can safely add this as my story's conclusion: I know there will always be battles to fight, but in spite of that, I'm about to live happily ever after.

Holy Smoke

From Piper SGA, WS

I hit a bit of a low point, not for any reason in particular, but just a general feeling of loneliness, and that nothing really mattered. I had finished my work early, so I went to my room for an extra hour of Word. I had been toying with the feeling that my life wasn't worth it, or that from my vantage point it wasn't what it was supposed to be. I started reading, and pulled down a box of praise kisses from a shelf.

On top of the box that they were in, lay Dad's old pipe that someone had given me. Curiosity struck, and I put the mouthpiece to my lips to get the feel of what it was like to hold a pipe. The smell of tobacco still hung on the pipe, and as I inhaled, a strange, electrical tingle went through my body. It wasn't slight, but caused my body to shake like a convulsion, and my eyesight to dim and blur slightly. It's hard to describe what I felt, though I'd put it as a mix between an electric shock, that really ecstatic feeling like you're doing something that you've always wanted to do, and the urge in the pit of your stomach when you're about to dive off a high place.

For a while, each time I put the pipe end in my mouth (it wasn't lit, by the way), I felt this peculiar wave or sensation and with it also came a ringing or static sound in my ear. It was like my bodily signals were being interrupted or were being phased out in waves. I somehow figured Dad must want to talk to me or appear, so I tried hard to see or

hear him, but I soon heard his voice saying, "Let go, let go. You can't try!" When I stopped pushing to see him, then his face started to appear ev-

erywhere.

It wasn't like I could see colors, but just his outline in dark and light spots. First I saw his shape on the curtain then on the light bulb and all the while each time I'd ask him a question I could hear him talking. Finally, I looked over to my roommate's bed and then I saw him even more clearly. He was sitting down, sort of hunched over his cane, like I'd seen him in pictures. He then stood up, and made his way over to me. I can't remember all that he said, but he said that he was happy to have me here. He said that everything would be fine, and that I just

work in photo-editing programs. For instance, only the dark extremities of his face and body would show through, but then I also had an impression of depth—much like the wire-frame or depth cues you have in 3D rendering programs. I could tell how far away he was, but there was no outlying texture. Each time I turned my head, I could feel the tingling in my body, but I no longer held the pipe. He kept talking to me, and moved over to my bed, sitting down by my feet where he told me this story:

"I can relate to you in a lot of ways. I'm an Aquarian, just like you, and have had a similar love life to yours. I once fell in love with a girl, and loved her so much it hurt to think of what she thought of me and that she didn't like me no matter what I tried. She didn't return my love at all, the pretty thing, but I fell all the more madly for her as each day passed. Sometimes I felt like casting myself off a bridge because of her, or more like because of the *pain* I felt, as she didn't love me and I didn't think life was worth it.

"But now when you think of me doing that, you realize how foolish that would have been of me—to kill myself over some love gone

sour,
when I
could've waited a
whole lot longer and had the
love and admiration of so many of the
beautiful people there are in the Family. Yet I
have the same perspective when I think of you, a
growing man, who's been
through much pain and will yet
pass through more. I can see
what you're going to be,
and trust me, any pain you
have to go through now
on Earth will be
worth it, because

needed
to remember
there were other "re-
alities."

Much of the way
he appeared was like
the layer blending ef-
fects seen when you

ke

the rewards are high. The Devil's playing for keeps with your heart, and he wants it all, so he can torture you the more. Don't let him! Keep it to yourself, and to the Lord Who will never fail you. I know, because He never failed me, and I'm a living testimony to what the Lord can do with us wacky Aquarians once we get ourselves out of the way!"

So that was the end of my episode

with Dad. I always wanted to meet him in real life, and in fact, now that I remember it, he mentioned this when I asked him why I was seeing him:

"I know you always wanted to get to see me, and yet you arrived [in WS] a few years too late. Not that it was your fault, and there are others that I would've liked to have seen, but time and circum-

stances didn't permit. Still, there's the whole of eternity available for viewing, and who knows, maybe in Heaven we can set up a Grandpa booth, where you all can come in for interviews! Ha!"

It's about the most spiritual thing I've ever had happen in my life, and the electric feeling was quite a rush. I kept putting the pipe in my mouth again to get the feeling, but once I had had this trip it didn't happen again. Oh well, I know it's out there for me someday.

One other interesting thing was when I was asking the usual "What's happening?" when I first started feeling queasy, and like I was about to faint. The answer I got was in a picture from the movie *The Matrix* how they sent a disruptor signal so they could locate him, but for me it was so they could block everything else out and so I could see

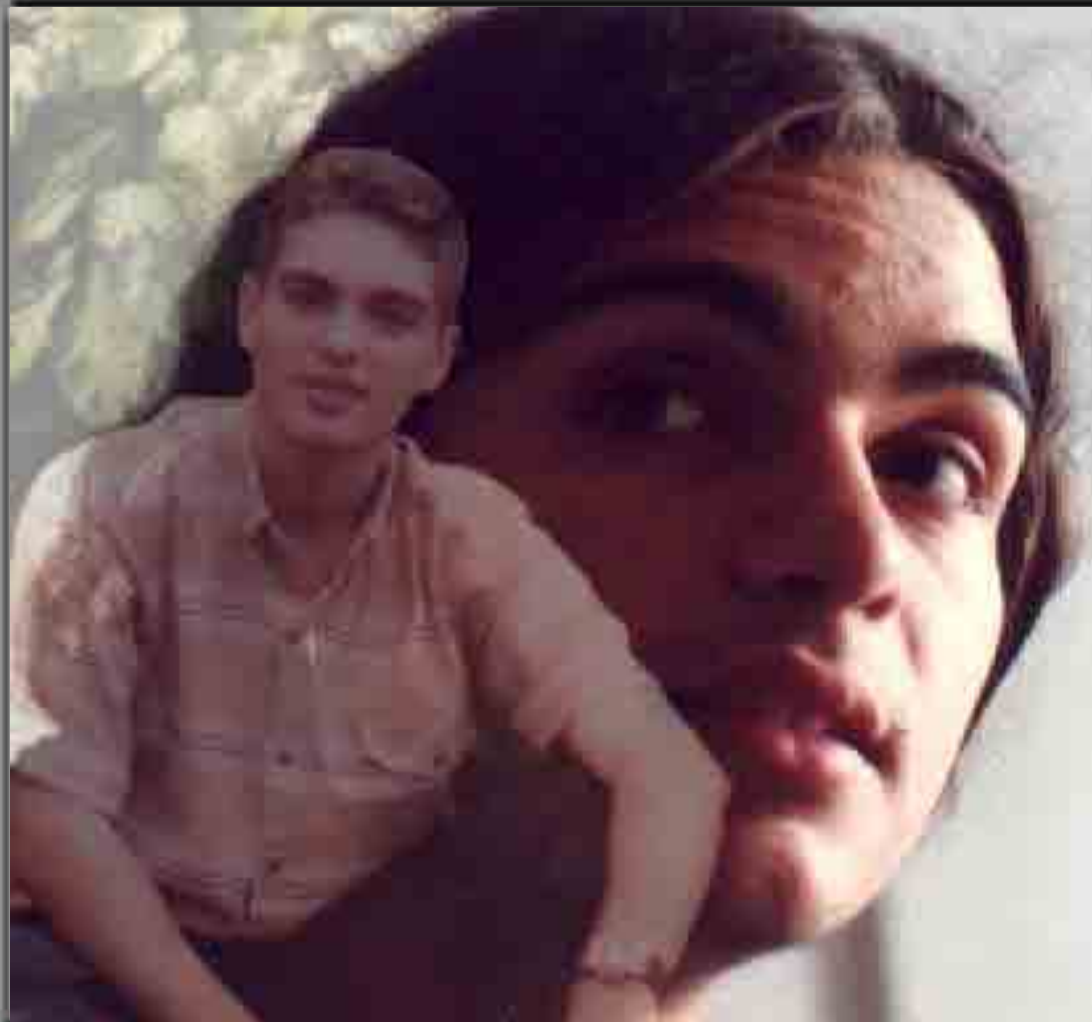
Dad. Well, I guess they tried hard enough, but I'm still a little too mortal for a clear picture.



Wow!
It's
really
YOU!



ART BY EVVE



Interview with Juan Carlo

Although our interview section usually features a well-known Family figure, we thought that since there are also many people on the field plugging along every day to do the Lord's work, we thought we'd interview one of you. Since many of you are now finding yourself in the field of outreach and wondering exactly how to go about it, we thought this would make an excellent topic. So here is the account of how Juan Carlo took the step towards being a fulltime outreach.

QUESTION

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself, your family, where you've grown up, etc?

My name is Juan Carlo. I'm 20, and am the eldest son of Jose and Clara. We are a family of ten. My dad is Peruvian, and my mother Brazilian. I was born here in Brazil, where I lived for about fourteen years. My family then moved to Peru where we stayed for six years. And now I'm back in Brazil.



QUESTION

What have been your main ministries in the Family? Can you give us a little rundown of your past few years and what you've been doing? What inspired you to get into outreach and fundraising and make it your fulltime ministry?

I've done just about everything that a normal Family teen does—childcare, witnessing, performing, and the list goes on. For the last couple of years I was cooking and working fulltime for the soup kitchen ministry we had in Peru. It was then that the Lord showed me to move to Brazil. And so I did.

When I arrived in Brazil I didn't have any particular ministry. I usually stayed at home cooking and cleaning and would go out once a week to witness and help with the CTPs, but it wasn't much.

I had the opportunity to go out more often, but I didn't go for it at the time, as I didn't find it so appealing. The reason I didn't like it so much was that I'm naturally pretty proud—a proud Leo—so it was really hard for me to approach people and get out of myself.

I believe there comes a time in everyone's life when you just get desperate with the Lord and you are no longer content doing the least you can. You want to stand up and be counted. I guess the Lord finally managed to strike that chord in my heart and got me in motion. It started around November '99.

I'm still very new in the "business" of outreach and fundraising. I started slowly in the beginning, and my faith started growing. When Christmas came around, that was my real faith booster, as people are so much more receptive and open. In my opinion, if you're new at outreach, Christmas is the greatest! It was about that time the Lord helped me to get over my shyness completely.

QUESTION

How has this changed your life? What are some of the main lessons you've learned from getting involved in outreach?

Some people who knew me before say I'm a completely different person now. I don't know about "completely different," but I feel like I've definitely grown in many ways. For one, it has made me more desperate with the Lord. I always wanted to get into outreach, but I was so into myself at first that it was hard for Him to work. So I guess one of the main lessons I learned from getting involved in outreach was surrendering completely to Jesus and letting His light shine.

Hearing from the Lord and trusting that His overall plan is so much more than what we see in front of us, was another "biggie" for me.

Adapting my way of dress to the people I was witnessing to was a major step I had to take as well. Probably the hardest part for me—the forsaking of my self-image. At the time I had long, beautiful hair and I wore an earring.—The sort of free, hippie look, I suppose. My shepherds were easy on me as far as improving my appearance went. They didn't pressure me into cutting my hair, instead they kept encouraging me. The Lord was sweet too.—He knew my long hair meant a lot to me, so He told me to only cut half of it off till I got used to the idea. Then later He asked me to cut the rest, but by that time I just wanted to do anything to get out there and witness. At first it seemed like a big sacrifice, but after praying about it and seeing that outreach was what the Lord wanted me to do, yielding to what the Lord expected of me was my only option.



QUESTION

Do you have the gift of prophecy? How does it help you in your work?

Yes, I do. I've had it for a long time, and it is something I definitely depend on. I guess I should give a little rundown.

I had been on faith trips and done witnessing before, but I was always just the partner. After some time a new family joined our Home and they had an eighteen-year-old son, Eman. Eman was into the gift of prophecy, but he was kind of in the same boat as me when it came to witnessing. When the Lord gave me the vision for outreach, I presented Eman with the idea of us going witnessing together. He agreed, and that's when it started.

Both Eman and I were both totally new at outreach, so we knew it just had to be the Lord. Slowly but surely we started getting used to hearing from the Lord about everything. At first it was kind of hard because we'd be in these crowded places and there was so much static. We'd stay there for sometimes ten minutes trying to get a yes or no.—Any answer would do. But now it's so much easier. We'll be walking and praying about something and pray, "Lord, what should we do?" Then we'll both turn to each other and ask at the same time, "Watcha get?" The Lord is always faithful to give us the same thing even when it's words of encouragement they are always along the same lines.

QUESTION

Do you have any outstanding witnessing adventures or supply testimonies you can tell us about?

I'm just your average Joe when it comes to outreach, and it's more the everyday testimonies I have in comparison to the outstanding, but I do have a testimony about how prophecy works.

On the weekends we usually hit the gas stations with the CDs, but this one Saturday we couldn't go to our usual spot. We prayed and the Lord showed us to go to a certain area of town. He said that it was going to be a day of testing our faith, but that we shouldn't worry about finances. So off we went.

We started the morning in high spirits, but as time passed and nothing went out we started to get really discouraged. We had been getting the message out, winning souls and getting *Activated* subscriptions, but Lord help us, we were still focused on bringing in finances. We wanted to get out our tools, but nada! By this time most everything was closed, so we decided to hear from the Lord. He told us again that we were there to get the Word out and not to worry about money. Once we accepted that, the Lord told us to go to this mall and that He would show us what to do there.

We went, and asked Him again if we should stay or go home 'cause it was already late, but He told us not to go home yet, as He had someone He wanted us to meet. He told us to go to the different shops and to stop before entering each one and ask Him if we should go in. We went to a couple of stores, but the Lord told us not to go inside them. In front of the third store He told us to go in. So we did and began witnessing to the people inside. There were four girls inside and they were very sweet. We gave them posters and prayed with them.

After witnessing for a while we said goodbye, and as we were leaving one of the girls called us back, and asked us if we had any children's material. We hadn't even showed them any of the material, or even mentioned the kids stuff. We were like, "Yeah! But how did you know?" We showed them our stuff and they really liked it. They ended up buying quite a bit of material and asked us to come back the week after so they could get more! We, of course, were in the clouds! It was so encouraging to see the Lord guide us through prophecy.

Another time we met this lady who asked us to come back the following day very early. We prayed about it and the Lord gave us the go-ahead. The next day, however, we started out on the wrong foot. We were both in pretty bad moods, and in spite of the effort we made to put on a good front for this lady it didn't come out quite right, and our attempt at presenting the tools was not the greatest. The lady looked at us and said, "You guys are kind of shy for being missionaries."

We were both terribly embarrassed, but she was super sweet, and when she listened to the CDs she was completely flipped out. She ended up taking 25 CDs and a few videos!

It just goes to show that it's only Jesus Who does it, and no matter what we do, or don't do, the Lord will have His way. We don't have to know what to say or how to say it—all we have to do is obey what the Lord tells us to do.



QUESTION

Do you have anything else you'd like to tell our readers?

A little something for all of those who are starting out in outreach, or want to get into it but haven't yet: It won't come to you, you've got to go for it! "God helps those who help themselves." That's not to say do it in your own strength. It's His power that will help you make it, but every sacrifice you make will seem so small compared to the blessings and satisfaction you'll get in return.

In conclusion, it has only been Jesus that has done something, if anything, through me. I also couldn't have made it without my shepherds, Jeho and Consuelo, who've had the faith in me and backed me up. Thanks to Lizzy and Mercy who were the biggest influence on me and showed me the ropes. For Danny who provided me with a little godly competition. And, of course, my partner, Eman, who was always there to pick me up when I was getting down.

So let go of your pride, hitch up with God instead and feel His power as you witness and win the world for Jesus. Enjoy it! It can be so much fun! I love you. God bless you all!

QUESTION

What is your basic mindset regarding outreach/fundraising? What is your main plan of attack, strategy, etc? How do you go about it?

Right now, I think outreach is just the greatest thing to do, at least for me. A basic mindset? Let me see ... I am nothing! God is everything! In three simple words, "It's only Jesus!" We can't do it without Him. As a matter of fact, we can't do a *thing* without Him. I've always known this, but lately it dawned on me that if every breath I breathe, and every word I speak is a miracle, then how much more so is a soul saved, or a person who is receptive to the Lord's message!

Secondly, I feel totally inadequate to even write this, but since that is also what the Lord wants me to do, what I have to say is simply this: Witnessing is awesome, and prophecy is the greatest thing that ever happened to me! Prophecy with outreach is just perfect.—Perfect in the sense that if you follow what the Lord tells you, then you don't have to worry about a thing, it's all in His hands from then on. He's working it all out, so it will come out exactly how it should be.—A strategy probably everyone in the world dreams of.

My main plan of attack is to always pray before talking to any person. The Lord usually gives me something to say to the individual, or tells me how to go about interacting with them. So after I explain the work and the material, the Lord does the rest. It all depends on the kind of witnessing I'm doing, but usually it's the more people you meet, the greater the response. That, and hearing from the Lord are my only strategies.



A spirit story...

Emotional Retake

BEEP,
BEEP, BEEP!!

Cory's eyes fluttered as her mind took a moment to register the blaring alarm. Slowly she reached across her bed to silence the resonant beep. A dreamy smile stole across her face, as she relived the last moments of her dream. It was the same as all she seemed to dream of these days—love, romance, boys.

Removing the blankets, Cory made her way to the window, pulled the curtains aside and let out a grateful sigh. "A beautiful dream..." she whispered. If only her dreams were reality.

A slight girl of fourteen, Cory has bright red hair, tousled in a tangle of curls and ringlets, matched by the freckles that lightly pepper her nose and cheeks. Her otherwise pale face is offset by large, piercing eyes and red puckered lips.

A shy girl by nature, Cory found interacting with boys difficult. She never knew what to say, and continually embarrassed herself in attempts at friendship with any boy she found remotely attractive.—A complex that had only become more apparent since Jared had entered her life.

He was charming, handsome, fun, and his winsome personality caught the girls' fancy. Before long, Cory found herself irresistibly drawn to him. For

all the charm he displayed, very little reached Cory. It seemed that to Jared, she was just another face in the crowd. Every day seemed a little harder for her, and she struggled to understand the confusion that confronted her heart and mind. She wasn't sure she could cope much longer.

There was nothing this day presented that gave her reason to believe it would be different from the last, but Cory simply decided that she would

do her best to be nice to Jared, as she always had been, in the hopes that one day he might show her even an ounce of attention.

"Hi, Jared!" Cory said, lending him a slight smile as he strutted across the room.

"Yeah, hi," came his response, without even a glance in her direction.

Cory's mind whirled. *He really doesn't like*

me, she thought. He can't even look at me. There must be something wrong with me.

The day had barely begun and she already felt overwhelmed by her emotions. Her eyes followed Jared as he made his way toward Matti; without hesitation he began talking to her, and before long both Matti and Jared were laughing. Cory sat there watching everything. It was too much for her. She left the room.

Interaction with Jared for the rest of the day was a simple replay of his indifference toward her. Cory's mind was a muddle of emotions, like a maze that she was constantly getting lost in. She wondered if it would always be this way.

Collapsing on her bed in tears was the main expression of her emotions these last few weeks. She wasn't sure how else to deal with the obvious lack of interest Jared

held for her.

"Why?" she sobbed. "Why do I have to love him? Why can't he love me too?"

Her bedroom door opened with a bang, and in strolled Kevin, her three-year-old brother. "Coreeeeeeeee!" his voice shrilled.

"Go away, Kev," her voice cracked, as she shoved her head under her pillow.

Kevin ran out of the room, and she could hear him relaying his interpretation of Cory's state, "Mommy, Cory's mad at me!"

Does it get worse? Cory thought, jumping up from her bed and quickly dashing to the bathroom, in an attempt to hide the traces of her tear-stained cheeks and red eyes.

When she emerged from the bathroom she had composed herself, though her eyes

were puffy and red. Her sister, Joni, sat on the bed deep in thought. Seeing Cory, she smiled and motioned for her to sit.

"I heard Kev's announcement, so I thought I'd visit and see if you needed a release valve, or something."

Cory managed a weak smile. *So Joni*, she thought.

Joni was over six years older than Cory, but they'd always gotten along well. Joni had a certain vivacity to her that made her company enjoyable, even when Cory was in her worst of moods. Cory knew that life hadn't always been easy for Joni, yet somehow her sister never showed it. *Supernatural*, had been Cory's favorite thought on Joni's attitude.

"Should I start guessing, or do I get some help?" Joni asked. "Do you want to clue me in? Who knows, I may get some divine explanations."

Putting her head in her hands, Cory sighed. "It's Jared."

"Well, that would explain it all," Joni said. "I know what that feels like."

"Whatever," Cory sighed.

"No honest! Don't think you're the first girl to be swallowed up in a one-sided love. I've got three accounts of my own."

"You what?" Cory sounded puzzled. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Aha, like I want to spill all these little personal secrets," Joni chuckled. "I didn't know if you were interested. But maybe if I'd uncover a thing or two for you now—it may actually help."

"But they were not Jared," Cory sighed. "I'm sure they were easier."

"I wouldn't be too sure," Joni retorted.

"So does it get better?"

"Seeing as I've lived through a few of them so far," came Joni's thoughtful response. "I guess I'd have to say they do, but not exactly like you'd think. It's not like you wake

up one
day and it's all
over, or like the guy
suddenly loves you. But
loving like this is something
everyone experiences at one time
or another."

"Well?" Cory asked impatiently.

"The truth is, it's all for a better end. I know it doesn't feel that way, but that's the general idea. We've always been told that the Lord uses different things to teach us things in life. And sometimes putting love in our hearts for someone who doesn't return the love is His favorite way of getting us to direct the love in our hearts toward Him. Think of it this way: It's like you're developing your love character. Whatever comes across the path of love in your life strengthens you to handle things up ahead."

"So I'm supposed to 'enjoy' this learning time?" Cory added sarcastically.

"The idea is to look beyond today. It's not like you're going to be jumping up and down squealing, 'Oh, it's so good to love and feel the hurt of rejection!' Sometimes survival is our goal at hand, and if we can survive, then we'll eventually pull through."

"I can't tell you that
it's going to be
easy, or that

Jared's going to wake up one morning and like you, unless that's the Lord's plan. But you can find a certain measure of peace by hearing from the Lord about all that you're feeling and going through. I probably have a zillion notebooks with prophecies and quotes that I got during those one-sided love times.

"You should try it too. At least it helps you realize that the Lord's not punishing you. He's just growing you up, and developing your love character."

"You make it sound so easy, Joni," sighed her younger sister. "But if I make it through a day without totally collapsing, that would be a bonus."

"I know," Joni answered, removing strands of hair from Cory's face. "You should ask the Lord some of the questions you have. It will encourage you, and I'm sure He'll have some neat things to tell you. And one day

you'll find someone who will love you as well, and there *will* be a happy ending."

Joni got up from the bed, kissed her sister on the head, and whispered a little prayer.

"You know where to find me if you need anything, right?" she said opening the bedroom door. "I'll always be there to listen or to wipe the tears. Mom did that for me some years back.—It feels good!"

When the door had clicked shut, Cory lay on her back staring at the ceiling. *So what's the reason?* she asked. *I could really use an answer, or even a word of comfort, Jesus.*

She reached over to her bedside table and pulled out a notebook and pen. After a few moments of silence

she began writing. The minutes passed, and she wrote on. When the last words were written, Cory sat up. "Thank You," she whispered. "I'm glad I have Your ideas and counsel on these emotions."

As she slipped into bed that night, recounting the events of her day, she knew that in time it would all pass. Even if now everything looked wrong and she was only feeling the hurt, she just needed to survive this time. In the end it would get better.

(Jesus speaking:)

Love is a special gift that I have planted in everyone's heart, a gift I want you to treasure, for it is one that will help you to grow and to reach out to those in need. Loving can hurt at times, but this is also part of the gift, for it helps you find Me, to draw closer to Me through these emotional battles.

I am the only One Who will love you no matter what. I have always loved you, and I always will. I want you to feel the great love I have for you, and to share the love we have with others as well.

I must teach you to love—to draw love from Me, and to make our love stronger. And so I use these workings of your heart to better our love, and to better your love for others, and mostly your love for Me.

(End of message from Jesus.)

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One of our sheep, Dan*, invited me to his friend's wedding in a small nearby town. Since I'd never attended a traditional Chinese wedding, I was anxious to go. It wasn't quite the traditional wedding, but different all the same. Both the bride and bridegroom were Christians, as were most of their close friends that were invited. We arrived there around 10 AM. The bride was already in the beauty shop getting made-up, and getting a highly complicated hairdo. I soon found out that at least one-fifth of the town were relatives of the bride.

At noon, the bride and her "sisters" went to her parents' house, while the bridegroom and his "brothers" (and me) made our way there.

As we arrived, the gate to the apartment was locked. The girls were all inside, yelling, "We will not let you in!" A whole game of persuasion took place, with the boys persuading the girls to open the door, and the girls playing hard to get. They would ask the bridegroom, "Tell us ten things you love

about your future wife," to which he'd respond, "She loves Jesus, she prays, reads the Bible, is considerate, loving, etc." It went on and on for some time, until the boys finally managed to get the key off the girls and get inside. "That was easy," Dan said, "last time we had to break the lock with a hammer!"

As we entered, we saw the bride looking so beautiful! She was sitting on the bed in her wedding gown, but she had no shoes on. The bridegroom's next task was to find two shoes, and fulfill a few of the bride's wishes, taking him almost an hour before he was allowed to kiss her. When he finally kissed

* Alias names used.



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her, the crowd wasn't satisfied, so they ordered them to continue kissing while they counted to 20.

"I thought the Chinese were conservative!" I said.

"Not the young," Dan said, with a smile.

We then had lunch, where everyone was given two little cups—one with tea and one with rice wine. I failed to inquire as to the meaning of the ritual. During this time the grandma gave offerings to the Lao Tian (old father of heaven) and the gods of the earth, fire and wind. The bride and bridegroom were supposed to do it with her, but they declined, telling their relatives they believed Jesus would bless their marriage. Everyone then set off for the restaurant, where we waited for about an hour-and-a-half for all the guests to arrive.

Traditionally, the bride is to wear all the jewelry she receives from her relatives, so as not to offend anyone. While the guests were approaching, each handed her red envelopes with money. The bride's younger sister kept track of the names and the amount of money they gave. This is for future reference; should the children of those relatives get married, they would receive similar amounts.

When everyone arrived, dinner was served. I love Chinese food! Weddings are very important in Chinese culture, often to the extreme of leaving the bride's family broke. Thank God it wasn't the case in their family.

Everything I have written up so far is the traditional Chinese wedding, but this next part was what I found unusual. As I wrote above, most of the "brothers" and "sisters" are Christians. They, together with the bride and groom, had planned to make this wedding a witness. If every Christian in China were as on-fire about witnessing as they are, in a couple of years the whole of China would hear about Jesus. Whoever we met that day—a relative, driver,



shopkeeper, waiter, they were all asked the question, "Do you believe in Jesus?" This was followed with a witness and a piece of literature.

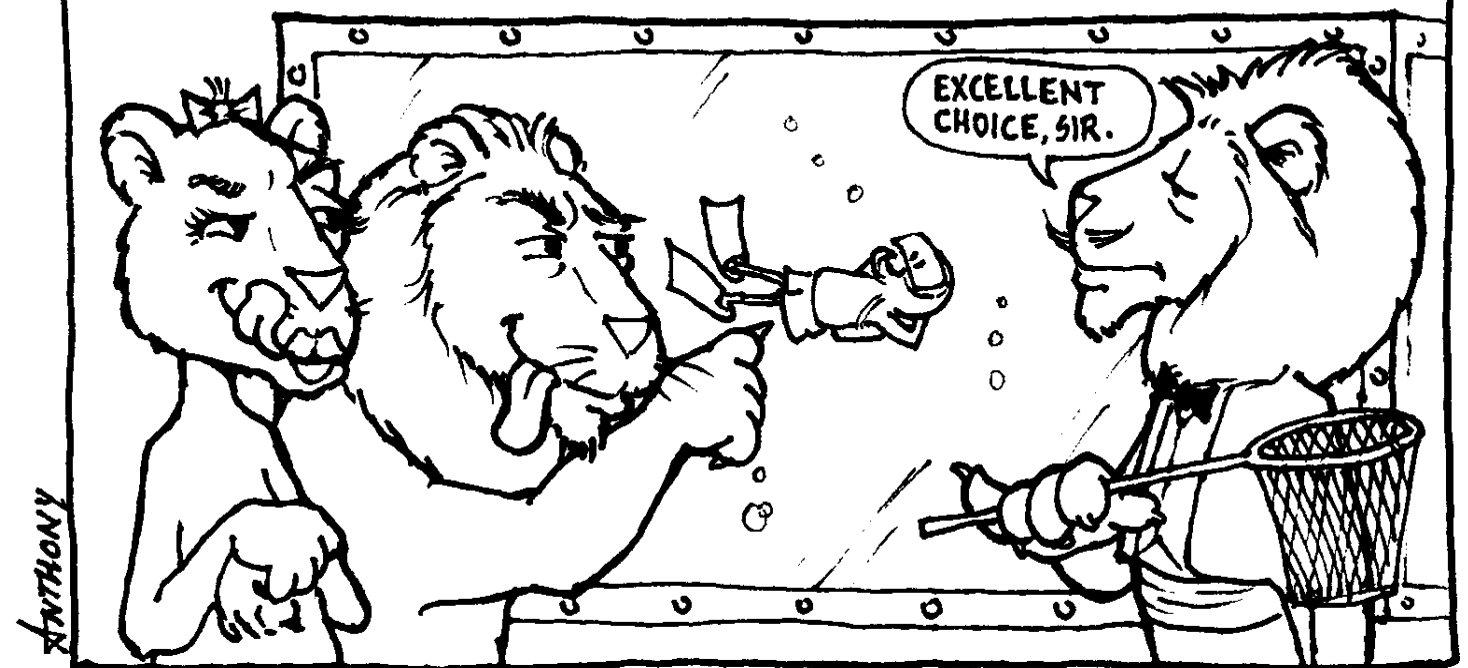
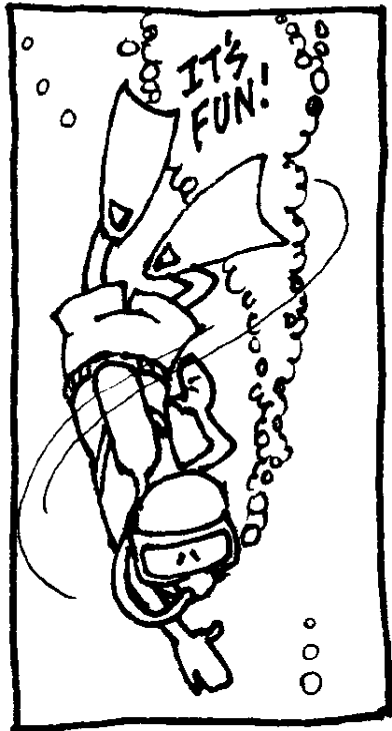
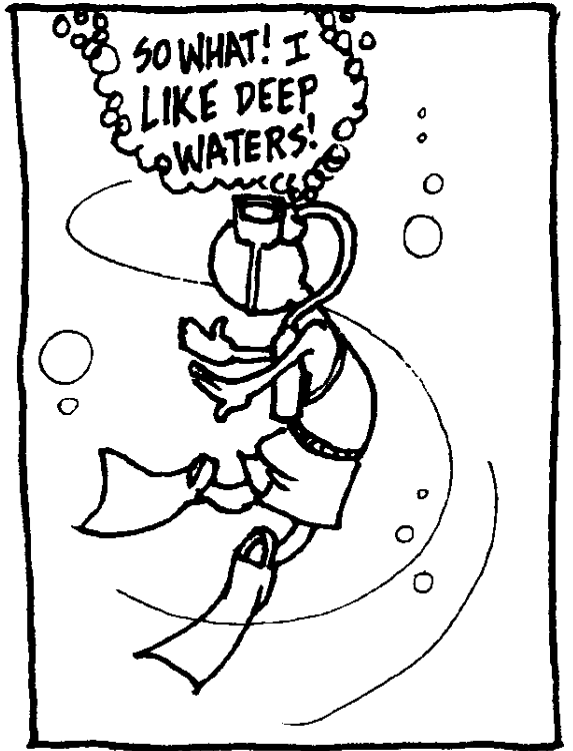
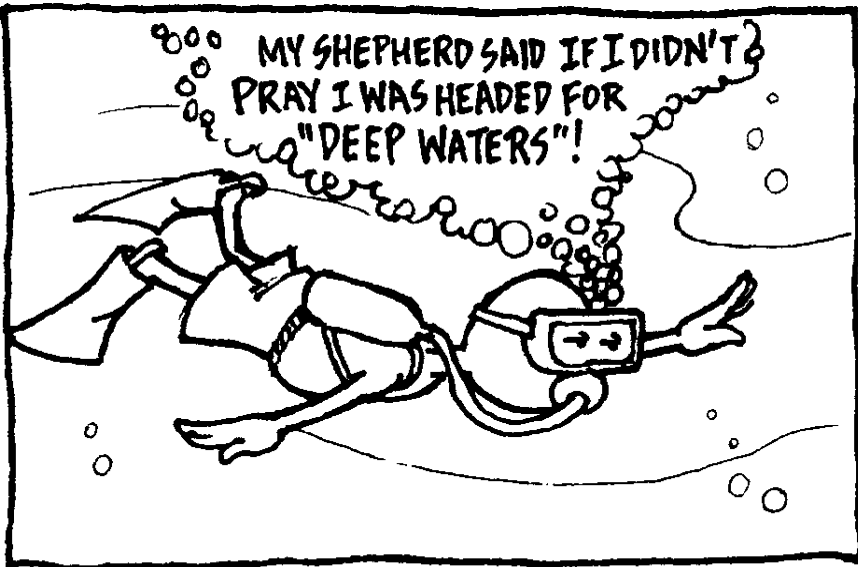
They had a big bag of lit and tapes to give to all the guests. The mother of the bride, being well-known in the community, insisted that they not do it. But despite the opposition, they got out the witness anyway.

The bride, groom, and their friends then got up on stage and sang Christian hymns, followed by a little witness. I asked Dan what people think of them, to which he answered, "They think we're strange." I was

amazed at their dedication to the Lord's commandment rather than their own culture and customs.

During the two hours while we were eating, Dan and several others were witnessing to different guests. It was interesting to see how they approached the witness, and handled it the Chinese way.

In closing, I would say that I learned more about Chinese people and their culture that day, than from reading any books or anything else that I've done. It was a fascinating day!



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