



+ FSM =

A PERFECT
PLACE

part 1



"I have discovered no utopia on this earth. Yet the second I close my eyes and fall into Jesus' arms, I enter a perfect place."



A very big thank you—from Jesus and all of us

As we were preparing this FSM, it was evident that the ones writing here would not have given their lives to Jesus if it were not for all of you who laid down your lives to bring them in. We are so thankful that you did! You took the time to visit them, to pray for them, to write them, to respond to their note or phone call, to answer their questions, to be a friend, to point the way to Heaven and then to the Family as God's chosen path for them to serve Him. Without you, it wouldn't have happened! Our hats are off to you for your faithfulness, your love, and your sacrifice. We know that you'll receive great rewards in Heaven; please accept our heartfelt thanks and appreciation right now.

Have you recently joined or re-joined the Family?

If so, we want to hear from YOU! Please write your testimony, send pictures, and share with us how you came to be in our beautiful Family. It doesn't have to be in just the past few months, or even in the past few years—just in recent history.

Tell us what happened in your life that brought you here, where you came from, what you've done, where you've been, and where you're going. Share what caused you to make the change, and to keep on changing. As Dad said, everyone loves a good story and we want to know YOURS! Send your story to [fsm@wsfamily.com!](mailto:fsm@wsfamily.com)

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Falling into a Utopia

By Joe

Dreams and nightmares

There I stood atop a breathtaking snow-covered mountain peak. As the sun shone down through a translucent sapphire sky, a brisk breeze swept across my face and sent a stream of energy through every fiber of my being. The helicopter that had brought me to this exquisite destination was now just a memory.

Armed with the latest ski equipment, I envisioned the route of my descent. After confirming the course, I positioned the goggles over my eyes, dug my poles into the snow, and flew forward. Gaining speed quickly, I raced down the charted path and locked my sights upon a cliff with a sheer drop. At the edge I jumped powerfully and flew high into the air.

Could life get any better than this? My father was right. The American Dream was achievable!

There I was, a self-made millionaire, able to do anything, travel anywhere, and be any...

“Beep! Beep! Beep!” My hand fired in the direction of the alarm clock in

hopes of a direct hit on the “snooze” button. Blinded by the daylight beyond my eyelids, I delivered several misfires, so opted for a more direct solution by seizing the cord and yanking it from the outlet. After reveling in the silence and my victory over the torture device, I struggled into an upright position.

As soon as my olfactory senses came online, I detected the smell of onions and garlic lingering about me. It came from my garments, which I had unintentionally fallen asleep in and worn throughout the night. Visions of long hours the day before, spent mixing sauces laced with onion and garlic, slowly seeped back into my brain.

By day I was an exhausted, overworked 18-year-old, who took six courses in college and worked 45 hours a week as a sauce-and-fry cook in the local Mexican restaurant. And, by night, I was ... usually the same thing, with regular nightmares about my life during the day. Even unbelievable dreams about

Age: 26

Date joined the Family: March 11, 1997

Present location: Middle East

skiing were rare in my world. But hey, what can you expect? We're talking about the System here.

Twenty-six years old now, I look back upon my life in the System as if viewing a film on a two-dimensional screen. Did it really happen? Somewhere in the confines of my mind, I can verify that the movie in this mental theater did take place. However, when I search the spiritual realm of my heart, I can only find the true reality of love that I've known for the last five years.

Although having occurred on the same plan-



et, the two lives I speak of diametrically oppose each other. While there seem to be multiple destinies one can strive for, in actuality there are only two destinations. First is the tale of one: Welcome to the American Nightmare! Please keep your arms and legs inside the cart at all times. It's going to be a bumpy ride!

1991: Theology of fools

"Now I want to ask you a question." Some of the boys in the class actually came out of hibernation as our high school theology teacher, Father Olson, changed his tone from its normal drone to that of a more curious nature. "Let's say you are driving in your car," he started. Now the fact that none of us had driver's licenses at the age of 15 didn't affect our interest, seeing that Father Olson was certainly not on the beaten path. "And you realize that you've forgotten your watch. You have to make an important appointment and you are desperate to know the time."

He paused briefly and continued, "Then, all of a sudden, a clock appears on top of your dashboard. You find out that you need to go just a little faster to make the appointment. Therefore, you speed up. After arriving at your destination on time, the clock disappears and you can find no explanation for this miraculous event." He stopped again to give us time to ponder the brief, yet peculiar story.

Then he asked, "Do you believe this could really happen? Raise your hand if you think so." The second those words came out of his mouth, I knew that it was a trick question. Although I didn't know exactly what he was getting at, I knew he was going to make a fool out of someone. Out of a class of 15, I and about five other students slowly lifted our arms.

He then looked at us and shook his head as if in shame. "That is ridiculous! There is no way anything like that could happen. We're talking about reality here. Now the Bible may sound like a book of miracles, but

there is a logical explanation for every miracle in this book. First, take the Red Sea. Moses didn't part it, but in actuality blah, blah, blah," and on he went for a good half hour. His voice slowly faded into the background of my vivid daydreams.

1992: Utopian visions

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a "utopia" as a place or state in which everything is perfect. During my junior year of high school my friends and I spent a great deal of time discussing whether utopia was in fact imaginary or, on the contrary, attainable. After listening to Father Olson's theories about miracles and the spiritual realm, I knew neither the Jesuits nor the Catholics, for that matter, were any closer to a utopia than I was to Pluto.

Once the so-called preparatory school destroyed faith in a living God, these boys were directed towards the more practical and important things of life, such as a higher education, a high income, and finally, the high life. "Make yourself rich first, and then give from your abundance to God. Who better to give to than that institution 'ordained by God,' which

trained you to satisfy yourself first, 'with all glory to God'?"

While my mom remained a devoted Catholic, I watched my family one by one venture onto diverging spiritual journeys. My brother sought spiritual enlightenment through Buddhist monks and the art of kung fu. I saw him become more violent when he and I had arguments. After studying for over two years, he told me that although he had wanted to keep martial arts only as an art form, it was turning him into something that he didn't want to be.

My sister turned to psychology as her solution to the stresses of this world. She had gone bankrupt when she totaled her car at the same time that one of her car insurance payments was late. Working by day as a sales clerk at the *Victoria's Secret* shop in Beverly Hills, and going out at night to party was enough for her to leave it all and seek a career in psychology.

Although I never joined the ranks of the Unitarian Universalist Church, I quickly learned much about their philosophy through one of their most outspoken members, my father. The Unitarians were not secretive about their on-the-fence religion. In fact, they freely admitted they took truth from all places, such as Buddhist philosophy, the Koran, the Talmud, and even the Bible. It was a buffet religion where you only had to take what you could swallow.

From these books plus ideas of his own, my father had developed many key quotes he felt were important to impart to me, such as "Invest in yourself," "Pay yourself first," and "All roads will get you there." The last one he used often when talking about spiritual principles and important decisions one must make in one's life. It was true in the sense that all my family's religions were leading to the same destination of self-service, self-gratification, and just plain selfishness. If that's what was on the road to "there," then I would be terrified to journey to "there," much less know exactly where "there" was.

1993: The terror by night

"You're going to be late for work!" my mom said as she knocked on my door. *But that's impossible!* I thought. *I clearly remember just finishing my eight-hour shift!*

I was the first one at the restaurant, together with our manager. For the first four hours of my shift, I cleaned the entire restaurant single-handedly. No joke—that was my job! From scrubbing the bathrooms to mopping the floors, I did it all. Once we opened, I ventured into the kitchen towards hitherto uncharted territory (at least for that day)—the dish area. I was convinced that the morning prep cooks had a competition to see who could use the most pots and utensils and make the highest mountain of dirty equipment on my counter. It must have taken me a couple of hours to finish washing all that metal and plastic, on top of doing the dishes from the customers at the restaurant.

Once this mission had been accomplished, the commander in chief sent me on some special assignments, such as going through 15 pounds of boiled chicken and picking the meat off the bones, opening dried chilies and scraping the seeds out (“Be careful,” my boss warned. “Don’t rub your eyes!”), and picking up the 15 rubber mats encrusted with food in the stairway treads and spraying them off one by one in the back room.

One way or another, that company got their money’s worth out of me and then some. Well, at least I could crawl into the shower and go straight to bed after the daily sacrifice.

“You’re going to be late for work!” she said again. *What?* I looked at my watch to see 7:15 staring me in the face. *Oh no, I’ve got to be at work in fifteen minutes.* I hadn’t actually been working; I was sleeping! It was all a bad dream!

1994: Being high and a higher education

Going from dishwasher to sauce prep, and then finally to the highly esteemed position of enchilada maker, I slowly made my way up the ladder in the Mexican restaurant business. Of course, as I became more skilled in my profession, my time became more expensive. At first only being paid four dollars and fifty cents an hour, after nine months of high-tech training, I was now worth a whole six bucks an hour! Now that I had a cash flow, I figured it was time for some serious investing. And following the famed words of my father, “Invest in yourself,” I set off for college.

Upon entry into college, I found there was already a planned-out curriculum for students who wanted to graduate. As you climbed the ladder of education, you were allowed to choose your courses so that you could focus on your major. However, when you were still wet behind the ears, the administration would determine which classes you would attend for the sake of giving you a “broad base of knowledge.”

Two of these required entry-level courses, Philosophy 101 and The History of Modern Art, still remain fresh in my memory. While in modern art we studied the paintings of a man who not only haphazardly threw paint on a canvas but his cigarette butts as well, in philosophy class we dabbled in the spiritual realm.

“Let’s say there is a man in a hospital.” The tone of my philosophy teacher’s voice instantly gave me the feeling of *déjà vu*. A mental image of Father Olson and his “miraculous clock” story flashed before my eyes, which in turn sounded the “trick question” siren. I wasn’t going to be the fool this time.

"This man and his brain are separated by means of high-tech equipment. The brain is taken very far away and is put in a remote-control car. The man, linked to his brain by radio waves, is still able to control the brain and the brain is sent on a dangerous mission down a mineshaft. While the brain is still on its mission, there is a horrible earthquake and it is trapped inside the shaft. The link between the man and the brain is severed, yet he is still alive. Does this man still have a soul?" He allowed a period of silence to pass after he finished, to let us ponder the question.

Hey, wait a minute, I thought. I've already seen this episode of the Twilight Zone (a popular black-and-white science fiction show), and in that version things didn't turn out so good for the man.

Come on! We're talking about a higher education here! Between the slavery at work and the "monkey" education, I found myself in a car with a group of co-workers getting high for the first time on my 18th birthday. From then on, smoking marijuana just became a way to take all the shenanigans that were being thrown at me by the American System.

1995: Multilevel madness

I had never thought that an 18-year-old would be able to get himself into \$8,000 of debt with one swift move of his hand, but I somehow achieved this extraordinary feat. Right after I signed the contract, I was the proud owner of a 1990 Nissan pickup truck. It didn't take long for my wallet to feel the pain with a \$240 monthly truck payment, and a \$140 monthly insurance payment. On top of that, I was paying \$300 a month to my mom for my room in our house. In every direction, I was being eaten alive by this kind of economy. I was sick of dead-end jobs, college, my parents, alcohol, marijuana, and every so-called religion.

One day I was in the school library when someone handed me something. "I am looking for people who want to escape the rat race forever," read the fluorescent orange business card. I stared at the words "rat race."

I had no trouble envisioning myself in an oversized labyrinth designed to force small helpless creatures to compete against one another. Add a little fur and a tail and there I was—a full-fledged competitor in the international Olympic rat races. Maybe, if I worked for the rest of my life, I could win the gold. Yikes!

Trying to locate the man who had delivered this strange message to me, I scanned the interior of our college library only to find many faces buried deep in their studies. Looking down at the card, I spotted a 1-800 number at the bottom in bold lettering.

My fingers fumbled over the buttons as I dialed the number on the card. After placing the telephone between my shoulder and ear, I heard two rings followed by an answering machine. "Hi, this is Jeremy Rose. ... Please leave your name and number after the beep. Thanks!" ... Beep!

Jeremy and I met the next day, as I was so eager to find out what this deal was all about. At our meeting, he laid out a multi-level marketing scheme for Excel Telecommunications, which seemed too good to be true. I first was skeptical of the whole plan, but he continued to persuade me. "What do you really want, Joe?"

"I'm not sure," I answered.

"Oh, come on! Don't you want to be able to do any-

thing, go anywhere, and have anything your heart could desire?"

"I guess," I replied.

"Well, this plan can make that dream a reality. So, are you in or are you out?" Jeremy asked. When I heard that question, I knew the moment of decision had arrived. I looked at the paper on the table and tried to calculate the numbers in my head, but somewhere deep inside of me I knew this meant more than money. I then looked at Jeremy, a tall, blonde-haired, 24-year-old chick magnet and realized he was who I wanted to be.

Pausing for just one more moment of thought, I took a deep breath and replied, "I'm in!"

I was tired of being me. Every morning I would look in the mirror and find the same failure staring back at me as the morning before. This opportunity was the change I needed, or so I thought.

One month later I was attending a seminar given by the self-made millionaire and executive director of Excel, Al Thomas. I sat there in awe as he came up to me out of a crowd of 200 and asked, "What kind of car do you want, son?"

"A Toyota," I answered, and the crowd let out a moan of disappointment at my inexpensive choice. Then I added, "A Toyota Supra!" and the crowd raised their tone to an unexpected cheer.

"Well, you need to go down to the Toyota dealership and tell them you want to test drive that car. You need to feel your dream and drive your dream." I was sold, and immediately after the seminar, I set off for the car dealership.

That was that! I cruised down to the dealership and demanded I test drive the \$50,000 Supra. The dealers only laughed and asked me to show them \$40,000 before I test drove it. Discouraged, I drove home. When I recounted the story to Jeremy over the telephone, he insisted we call the dealers up with his three-way calling set-up, so he could give them a piece of his mind. Reluctantly I agreed.

When they answered, Jeremy claimed that he was my father and a multi-millionaire, accused them of turning down "his son" for test-driving an expensive car, and demanded that they let me drive any car I wanted. Afraid of losing a potential wealthy customer, they agreed and the lie worked. A little of that attitude rubbed off on me that day and greed started to poison my being.

I took that car out on the freeway the next day, going 90 miles an hour. A feeling of superiority overwhelmed me, and over the next couple of months, I became increasingly arrogant. I would go into malls, pass out my business cards, and get telephone numbers from anyone I could. I pressured my family to be my customers, constantly trying to sell them on the product. Quotes like "If you want it, then get it" inspired me to chase that elusive green dollar a little harder. However, the more I pursued it, the further it ran away. Gradually I fell into a pit of discouragement and despair, finding no relief in the pursuit of money.

One morning I was lying in bed and, having quit my restaurant job three months before, had no way to bring in any income. The telephone rang and it was Jeremy. "Come on, get out of bed! Why aren't you making money?"

"What money?" I retorted. "There is no money."

"You've got to constantly work! You can't stop until you get enough money to have whatever you want. You need to breathe it and think about it all the time!"

"Yeah, whatever!" I said, and hung up. The next few days were spent wondering if I really wanted to pursue this road to riches. Would it really bring me happiness? For the first time in a long time I cried out to God and asked Him to show me the way.

That same week I strolled into the office with the intention of confessing that I could no longer follow wealth as my philosophy and I needed to do something else. Yet before I could speak, the boss said that he was so proud of us and wanted to take us out for pizza that afternoon. I guess my resignation gave way to my empty stomach, and I temporarily delayed speaking my mind. However, it was all part of the Lord's plan, and the events of that day changed my life forever.

On the way home from the pizza restaurant, my friend and I spotted a young man in his early twenties pushing his motorbike along the side of the road. Our minds

conjured up the possibility of recruiting him into our business, so we pulled over and offered him a ride. Grateful, he put his motorbike in the back of my truck and jumped in next to it. When we arrived at his house, we proceeded to give him the business plan of our company. Uninterested, he pulled out his PR album and showed us pictures of a missionary group called the Family.

My friend, who was a devout Catholic, talked about his religion as well as his "good works." Having grown up in the Catholic faith, being completely turned off by it, and eventually leaving it when I officially became an adult, I steered clear of the conversation brewing. After half an hour passed, the time came to say our goodbyes and be on our way. To my surprise the young missionary, named Peter, asked me if I wanted to go out for a cup of coffee later that evening. Feelings of confusion wandered through my head. *Why would he want to talk to me? I'm not even that interested in religion or missionary work.* Then I figured, *Well, I've got nothing better to do, so why not?*

I picked Peter up at seven o'clock that evening and we went to the nearest Starbucks for a cup of coffee. While we were talking about everyday life and the happenings of the day, Peter fished a *Treasures* book from his bag. As he flipped through the pages, I wondered what possible answer this book could have to my problems. Then I saw it in a title: "The American Dream Is a Nightmare." Those were the truest words I had seen in all my life.

That evening I told him about all my troubles with my family, my work, and my school. He just said, "Here, read this book with me, and it will help you to understand the reality of the world."

Every word I read was like a drop of cold water onto the tongue of a beggar who hadn't drunk for years. After a couple of hours, I took Peter home. He was just about to get out of the car when he stopped and said, "I want to ask you a question."

"What's that?" I asked inquisitively.

"Do you want to go to Heaven?"

"Yes!" I quickly replied.

"Do you know if you're going?"

Now I had thought I was going to Heaven for sure a couple of times in the past. Either I did some saintly act such as forsaking my fudge bar to my brother's hunger, or working up enough courage to confess *all* my sins to the priest in the confessional. However, I was pretty sure my heavenly citizenship had been revoked during the past year, while I was in hot pursuit of the dollar. After some time I answered, "I don't think so."

"Well, you can go for sure," he said in a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

"How?"

"Just ask Jesus into your heart."

That sounded like one of those trick answers to a trick question. I didn't want to be the fool again. I gave Peter a look of disbelief. He answered my look by saying, "Come on! It's not religion or 'the American way.' It's just Jesus!"

"Just Jesus'? All right!"

1996: Two worlds collide

Now officially a member of the Heavenly Kingdom, I perceived my next opportunity as a way around the System. My brother and stepfather were hot on the trail of the American Dream

through their own business in plastic injection molding technology.

I quit college and my Excel job and joined the new family business with hopes of freedom from debt. For three months, I averaged a solid 16 hours a day inside our tiny factory. After spending the daylight hours at work, at night I would go to the nearest restaurant, play video games, and argue with my brother over spiritual principles. He armed with his kung fu techniques, and I with the *Growing in Love* booklet would often find ourselves at each other's throats. We gave the term "brotherly love" a whole new meaning, though, as somehow we managed to live and work together under the circumstances.

During my time there I picked up a strange, persistent cough. I was sneezing like crazy, and before I knew it I constantly had blood coming out of my nostrils. I got really sick, but refused to take a day off.

One day my brother saw me grinding up extra plastic and said, "What are you doing?"

"I'm grinding up the plastic!"

"Well, if you don't wear a mask while you do that, you'll breathe in the glass bits in the plastic that are thrown into the air when you grind them up. I did that for the first three weeks I was here and got some bad bloody noses."

The conditions were pretty bad, and we were only being paid \$100 a month, with the promise of a big paycheck in the future. My brother and I went to our stepdad and asked for more money. His answer was, "Game over! I want you out by tomorrow."

I prayed desperately, and unexpectedly my friend called me ten minutes later and asked me to go to Arizona with him. It had to be the Lord.

That friend was Peter. He and I escaped to Arizona and had many wild adventures together. He taught me how to provision, witness, pray, and basically live by faith.

If any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2Cor.5:17).

It only took one more System job for the Lord to set me straight and for me to realize that all the pursuits in my life were hopeless causes. I knew I couldn't live in two worlds at the same time. It was the most difficult thing to return to my miserable life in the System after having visited a Family Home, had fellowship, and spent time reading the Word. I was tired. The world had taken me, chewed me up, spit me out, and left me to die. I couldn't take it anymore, and I decided to leave one world to step into another. I joined the Family!

2003: Update—my new world

I've been here now for over five years and I can truly say that there is no greater place to be. Only when I joined did the Lord free me from my debt, which had been my shackle for the previous two years.

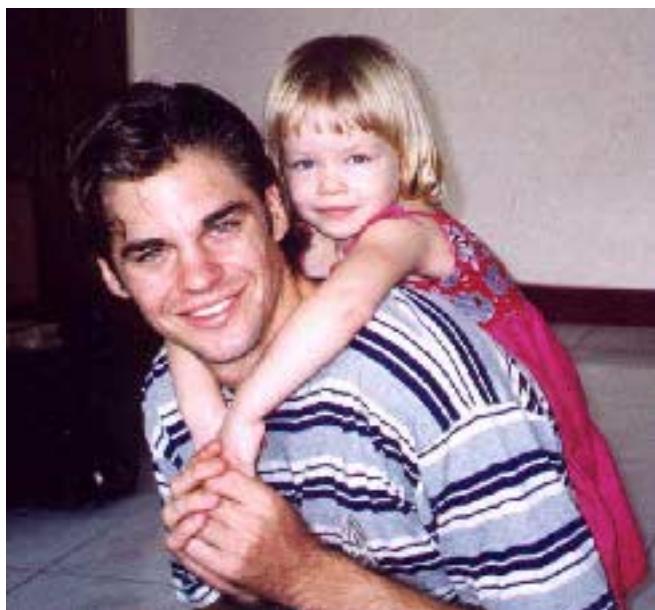
During the first year and a half, I was at Art and Becky's Home in California, where I witnessed, did dance shows, ballooned, and lived with 20 other people. It was revolutionary and I loved it! I spent a little over two years in Vietnam and witnessed firsthand

how the Lord supplies all our needs and performs great miracles even on a far-flung mission field. After that I was in Cape Town, South Africa, for eight months. There we got out tons of Word and reached hundreds of sheep through *Activated*. The spiritual world came alive as so many got saved, and one of our sheep was delivered from demonic possession. Then the Lord called me to the Middle East, where I have been for the past year. It has been such an exciting field, with a new culture to adapt to, a new language to learn, and a lot of spiritually hungry people to feed.

In my travels from the West (America) to the Far East (Vietnam) to the South (South Africa) and then to the Middle East, the Lord has never failed to supply all my needs and comfort me in whatever corner of the world I found myself. I have discovered no utopia on this earth. Yet the second I close my eyes and fall into Jesus' arms, I enter a perfect place. I can only try to repay Him by giving my life to lead others to this place.

After all my shortcomings and mistakes, I asked the Lord, "Why me? Why did You choose me?"

His answer didn't reveal secrets, but rather just showed His simple love: "Don't worry about it. Just be happy I did!"



My Goal—The Family!

By Gabriella
(18, Guatemalan),
Mexico

When I was 14, I saw a show by the Family in a shopping center. I really liked what they were doing, but since I lived with my father, who was quite conservative, I couldn't find out more about them. I thought about them a lot, though.

Four years later serious problems happened at home and I moved in with my mother. I finished the school year and began to work during my vacations. One day the supervisor where I worked sent me to the bank on an errand, and just as I was about to enter the bank I ran into some Americans who didn't speak Spanish.

I asked them if they needed some help, since I saw that they were trying to talk to people, give them little tracts, and the people were ignoring them. The older man said yes, and he gave me some of the tracts, which surprisingly had the name "The Family" on the back with their telephone number.

Two days later I called and I asked what they knew about the Family and how I could join. That same evening a lady and her two children came to visit me at work. They told me a little about how they lived and how I could help the Family. At that time I told her I wanted to join. She told me that I couldn't join just like that, but that I had to visit first and learn more about their way of life.

After a while I quit my job and started visiting the Family, but I didn't expect what was going to happen next! After a few weeks, a friend of my mother found some false information about the Family on the Internet, and my mother then forbade me to visit them. I had a lot of problems at home, but God was just testing my faith.

Afterwards my mother realized that it was just false information, and now I have joined the Family full time and I'm stronger than ever. I pray that God will help me to achieve my goals as a missionary in the Family.



Nothing to Compare

By Paul D.

Where to begin? I was born in California. My family (and I) moved to Oregon when I was about eight. My mom used to take me to different churches once in a while, but as I started to grow up she had to bribe me with candy to get me to go, as I found it quite boring. When I got to high school age, I stopped going altogether.

I guess it was with the hope of instilling some good Christian morals into me that my parents decided to send me to a Mennonite (Christian) boarding school.

The highlight of my boarding school experience was selling candy to the other kids and making money. I was always trying to sell something to make some cash. In junior high I bought gum, M&M's, etc. and sold them during school time for three times the normal cost. I would also sell my lunch tickets—anything for an extra buck.

I certainly wasn't interested in the Bible courses at the school. In fact, I received the worst mark ("F") in the Bible course. I'd always been a pretty good student, but I just wasn't interested in the Bible or Christianity.

One day someone broke into my candy stash at the school, so I decided to forget this Christian boarding school scene. I packed my bags, went down to the local public high school, enrolled myself there, then phoned my parents to let them know what I'd done.

I was actually a quiet kid and a bit introverted; if I had to talk to girls, this quietness would multiply times three! I could only spit out a couple of words when I had to talk with the opposite sex. (Praise the Lord, after Jesus zapped me, I got the victory in that area! ☺) So I had my few friends and that was about it. My favorite pastime was hacking into telephone systems so I could make free phone calls using Telnet, which used the Internet before the World Wide Web was established. That lasted until I got caught and got stuck with a \$6,000 phone bill. Needless to say, my parents weren't so

Location: A sensitive field

Age: 30

Status: Just got nabbed by a sweet angel—Magda

Sun sign: Cancer

happy. Thus ended my free phone-calling career.

I smoked a little marijuana, went out Friday and Saturday nights to the discos, and tried new experiences like going to a concert with people slam-dancing and hitting each other in the face, as they thrashed their heads around in beat with the demonic music. I soon realized this was definitely NOT my idea of a good time! (Because of this and similar experiences, I really don't buy it when people say they can listen to all kinds of System rock music and not be affected by it. I've seen normal-looking people turn into possessed maniacs in the blink of an eye when they would click on their Walkman with certain kinds of music.) Meanwhile my friend was getting into LSD and shaved his hair into a green mohawk.

My other favorite pastime was arguing against Christianity with those who I knew were Christians, especially as I began to get into New Age. It's not that I had malicious intent; I simply enjoyed winning debates against Christians. I actually always had a respect for Jesus. It was just that I didn't see how the story about

how He died for me connected with the reality of my life, especially as I looked at people going to church. They seemed to be just like everyone else, except they chose to listen to a boring sermon each Sunday morning.

God bless my mom. She was kind of worried about the wrong path I was taking. It could have been the fact that I told my parents I was considering becoming a New Age monk and living a life of spiritual meditation in a monastery. I was actually only superficially thinking about it, but I was starting to seek for the truth in life, and this is what led me to get into New Age.

So my mom had different pastors call me to try and invite me to church. Well, I was a hard nut! They'd ask me why I didn't come to church, and I would say, "Because I don't believe what you teach!"

I got into New Age by picking up a cassette about hypnotism. It sounded interesting, and I began to learn how to hypnotize myself, just for fun. I in turn offered to hypnotize my friends. This led me down the path into New Age—Eckankar, to be specific. Basically the idea of Eckankar is to put yourself in a trance, go on spirit trips (not exactly with Jesus!), and try to get linked up to the cosmic "godhead." Sound kind of far out? It is. It's a form of Hinduism and eastern mysticism.

Anyway, I was a dabbler—I didn't have too much success. Yet I was preaching about it to my classmates, and I even got a convert who started heavily getting into it! Lord help me!

Well, there was one thing that didn't sit well with me about Eckankar. It was the fact that if I wanted to become "advanced" in it and make progress, I'd have to open up myself to some unknown "spirit guides." I know now that if we have Jesus we can have good spirit helpers, but in New Age, these spirit guides would more accurately fall under the demon category!

I was getting so desperate to find the truth in my life that I started considering opening myself up to these spirits. At this time I really prayed to God. I said, "God, if You exist, please show me the truth!" I really prayed with all my heart.

During this time I was flipping the radio dial and heard a Christian talk show. I don't remember exactly

what they were talking about, but their talk about Christianity started getting me to consider the possibility of Jesus somehow being able to give me the truth and peace in my heart that I was seeking.

In all the experiences and New Age stuff I went through, I always felt an emptiness—like there had to be more to life. Especially in my last year of high school I was really trying to change myself—to try to be more friendly and be a “good” person, yet all the while I felt this nagging emptiness inside me that could never be satisfied. I wasn’t happy.

So I remember lying in bed, thinking about God and wondering what the truth could be. In this particular moment, as I was asking God with my whole heart to show me the truth, I felt that something inside of me was telling me that Jesus is the truth. I somehow knew in that moment that I could choose—to accept Jesus in my heart, or to continue on without Him. I chose to accept and follow Him.

As soon as I made that decision in my heart, I felt a TIDAL WAVE of love, peace, and happiness wash over, in, and all around me! I immedi-

ately felt so free and happy! I started to cry tears of joy because I knew I had finally received the truth I was looking for in my life—and it was Jesus! There was no doubt in my mind that my search had ended, and I was saved.

The next day I went to my friend’s house (the one who had introduced me to marijuana). As soon as he saw me he said, “What happened to you?!” He could clearly see I was changed. I never used to smile much, but now I was a total smile guy! I was happy! He could see the change.

I remember being in a state of euphoria after receiving Jesus. (Actually, I guess I’m still euphoric in that sense.) I’d walk around bouncing on cloud nine! I was enjoying Jesus and the total change of spirit He brought me.

This happened just after high school and right before I went to an aeronautical university to begin learning to be a commercial airline pilot. It had always been my dream to fly. I started reading the Bible on my own and was really gobbling it up. One day I decided I wanted to destroy all my worldly music tapes, as I felt they wouldn’t inspire me to be close to Jesus. So I drove to the gas station, broke all my tapes in half, and drove off. It was actually a struggle in my spirit to do that, but I knew that was what the Lord wanted me to do—and I felt so good afterwards!

After a short time at the university, it just hit me one day that I wanted to be a missionary and dedicate my life to preaching the Gospel. I wanted to live like Jesus. I met some fellow students who were Christians, and they took me to church. I asked the pastor what I needed to do to be a missionary, and he said I needed to go to Bible school.

So the next semester I transferred to Bible school in another state to study about becoming a missionary. I was very active and had my first street witnessing experience in a big city in downtown Seattle. The first guy I tried witnessing to was a homeless man. As I began to talk to him, he immediately put me in a headlock and said, “Tell me a good reason why I shouldn’t break your neck!” I don’t remember how I got out of that without a broken neck, but the Lord did it.

I felt the Lord allowed the Devil to test me, to see if I would give up on witnessing before I even got started! Well, it only helped spur me on, as I realized I must be bothering the Devil if he'd try such a stunt to try and get me to stop witnessing!

One day there was a missions seminar at the Bible school, so I asked the missions director what I needed to do to qualify to be a missionary in this particular denomination. He gave me some run-around about a long-term study plan of four or five years, and I don't remember what else, but his spirit was, "Son, you're just a spring chicken and you have a loooong way to go before you'd qualify to be a missionary in our hallowed denomination!"

After a year in the Bible school and becoming the sophomore class president (I was supposed to be there two and a half more years to get my degree in Missions), I became tired of using my time to study a bunch of doctrines and other university-type stuff that I felt I would never use anyway for Jesus, so I decided to just leave the Bible school and use my time to pray and go witnessing. This

was quite a big decision, since my dad was always extolling the virtues and necessity of higher education and getting a degree.

So I went back to Oregon to my parents' home and spent a lot of time praying, seeking God's will, and witnessing. Of course, in the churches they didn't really teach me how to effectively witness (no radical messages, no prophetic power, not much of a sample, etc.), so my witnessing was not anywhere nearly as powerful as it could have been, when compared to the awesome Family training we are all blessed to have.

I was also looking for a church to go to. I knew nothing about the Family at that time. In my search for the right church to attend I ran across a pastor and we had an "interesting" conversation. I explained my desire to be a missionary and how I liked to witness, etc. He said, "Don't worry too much about it. All your fire will die down as time goes on." I couldn't believe it! This was definitely not the church for me!

So to make a long story a little longer, I started going to a certain church and ended up going to Romania with a church mission group. While in Romania (about ten years ago), I saw a guy and girl (who I now know to be brethren from the Family!) standing on the street corner with a pack of colored posters in their hand. On the poster was a picture of Jesus with the Heavenly City in the background. People were taking the posters like hotcakes!

I had no idea who they were, but having been a dabbler in New Age in the past, I assumed by looking at that triangle in the sky they were some kind of New Age people. The posters just didn't look like the normal church literature that I'd seen before! At the time I didn't understand Romanian, so I couldn't read the message on the back.

I walked up to them with a really judgmental attitude and with a tone in my voice that probably set

And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd (Eze.34:23 KJV).

off their warning systems: "Churchy guy alert! Churchy guy alert!" I asked, "Do you speak English?" They said yes and that was our whole conversation, as they were quite busy distributing the posters, and probably didn't have time to waste with an inquisitive churchy guy like me! Ha! (I was quite churchy, in fact!)

The thing about that meeting was that though I thought they were from some New Age religion, I couldn't deny that I really saw Jesus in their eyes! I just couldn't understand it. Here I thought they were New-Agers, yet I could see such love and joy in their eyes! I could really see the Lord in them.

Anyway, I soon left that church mission in Romania, basically due to the ineffectiveness of the whole mission, and because I didn't like preaching mostly in churches. I wanted to do personal witnessing and follow-up.

Just as I left, I met a former member of the Family, though I didn't know at the time that he had been in the Family. He invited me to stay with him and his wife and child; they were staying in the house of a sheep they were witnessing to.

I accepted the invitation. (It turns out he hadn't been planning to go to that particular city where we met, but he had felt the Lord was leading him to go there at the last minute.)

As I was talking with him, I could tell he had the same vision that I wanted to be involved with—to preach the Gospel, do follow-up, win disciples, and live by faith! I could see that he also had such wisdom and training that was really from the Lord; it was Family training. I still didn't know anything about the Family at this point.

Well, he had some *Daily Breads*, which he eventually offered me to read. As soon as I started reading them I was flipped out! I read through them as fast as I could, because I just wanted to imbibe it all as quickly as possible! I could tell this was the WHOLE truth I had always wanted to find. The messages and Spirit of God I could see in the Letters were completely right-on and clicked with my spirit! I could tell the Lord was really in those pages—to a degree I had never found in any church writings or messages.

In the course of reading the Letters, I eventually realized that whoever was the author of them seemed to be the leader of a group. So I asked and found out for the first time in my life about the Family. I also learned that we were operating independently from the organizational side of the Family, but in spirit we felt like brethren.

In the course of the eight years that followed, I learned how to witness, live by faith, about the prophetic and radical messages of the Family, and so forth. In the beginning I had to be a bit "de-churched"! I don't think I was having trials regarding the aspect of any New Wine and radical things of the Family (in fact, I really liked them!), but it was more a matter of having to forsake some of my old churchy ideas. I guess I was trying to cling to my old wine as well as drink in the new that the Lord was giving, but obviously that doesn't work. Thank the Lord, I eventually got de-churched!

I also learned to greatly value the correction that was passed on to me, although of course not always was I an exemplary example of receiving it right away! In the churches I had never experienced someone

coming to me and pointing out areas in my life that I needed to improve in. No one would ever come and say, "Hey, man, don't you think you're a bit proud?" I think this is one reason why we're so blessed in the Family: Our brethren love us enough to point out when we're off track.

In the course of those years we had a number of disciples join us, some moving on some years later, and some sticking with us. I really grew to fall in love with the Family, though unfortunately we didn't have much contact with other brethren, as we operated independently.

After a few years with this brother, I was really desiring to join the Family instead of operating independently. Yet every time I prayed I felt the Lord saying to hang on, trust Him, and not to leave the home the Lord had built up over the course of some years.

Eventually, after about eight years of working together, the Lord showed this brother through a series of events that it was definitely time for him to rejoin the Family, and for the rest of us to join. We were not to consider ourselves part of the Family in spirit only, but to actually join and become CM.

Well, I broke down and cried for joy when I heard this! I was happy, to say the least! That had been my dream for many years.

Thus began our transition as a home to becoming CM about four years ago. After that I moved on to another Home in Romania for a pit stop on my way to a certain mission field that had been on my heart for a few years. The Lord finally gave me the green light to go for it, and now I'm in a country where you talk with people and they say, "Jesus? I don't know anything about Him. Can you tell me more?" I love pouring out to these hungry sheep who just drink in the Word!

Before coming to this far-flung mission field (yes, I'm not telling you exactly where on purpose!) I came across a blurb in the *Grapevine* about *LoveLines*. *Hmm, what's that?* I thought. I wrote in and found out it's for meeting potential wives (or husbands, whatever the case may be!). I was still single at that point, so I subscribed.

Through *LoveLines* I met my little angel, Magda. I think it was after the second e-mail that I asked her if she'd like to come and join me (she was on the other side of the world at the time). This was quite a heavy decision, but the Lord just really zapped me with a love for her and I knew she was the one. She says the same about me! Must definitely be the Lord! ☺

After a few confirmations with the Lord, she did her fundraising and flew over, six months after our first e-mail contact with each other. Obviously there were some butterflies in our stomachs before we actually met face to face, but once we did, we knew that was it. ... A few days after she arrived we decided to start our engagement period. We're now married and are completely dumbfounded at how the Lord did such an amazing miracle in putting us together the way He did! I feel so blessed in every way! It definitely pays to keep Jesus first!—Sooner or later His blessings come around!

Let that be an encouragement to anyone who may feel like I did—wondering *when* the Lord would bring along that someone special. When I was on my way to this far-flung field I was thinking, *How am I ever going to meet my other half way out there in the middle of nowhere?* But the Lord had an ace up His sleeve!

It just goes to show that when it's the Lord's time, He'll make it happen.

It's like a dream come true to actually be in the Family having desired it for so many years. I feel like I'm living in Heaven, especially after having tasted everything else. I wish I could upload a couple of my brain cells or something that contain the data of how I feel and what I've experienced to anyone who might be wondering what it's like out in the System—some who were maybe born in the Family and who wonder if the Family is really such a great place or not. Let me resoundingly say, "Nothing to compare!" It's like comparing light with darkness, truth with vanity, chocolate with dirt!

In the System, forget it! You can never find such wonderful brethren who are united in such passion together to live a life of love for the Lord and for each other. Nor can you find this in the churches, or even with those serving the Lord in a "good" way. There's nothing to compare with being a part of this wonderful Family and serving the Lord together in such sweet fellowship.

I feel so privileged to have access to the never-ending flow of the hot and pure Words of our sweet Lover and Husband, which are so abundantly poured out to us in the Family. You just can't find this unadulterated truth—so wild and free—anywhere else. I love it!

When I consider all the new weapons the Lord has given us in the Family, I know He definitely has a special job for us in these End times. I remember some years ago taking a trip back to the States for two weeks to visit my mom, and visiting a Christian friend who is very involved in the churches. He was listening to me and said of himself, "Where did I miss the boat?!" He could see the Lord coming through, all thanks to the Lord's Spirit and the precious Word which we're able to partake of in the Family.

I definitely know with all my heart that the Lord has chosen the Family to lead the way as His elite troops in these last days! I love you and am privileged to serve the Lord with each of you!

Someone's Prayers

By Hope (22,
Romanian),
Romania

My testimony is neither a spectacular one with visions and dreams, nor a very adventurous one with kidnappings, police, or hired spies. But my joining the Family is just as much a miracle as the more obvious ones. It's the type of miracle that happens slowly, due to someone's constant prayers—sometimes even for years—until one day when you least expect it, their prayers are answered.

The person that has played the biggest role in my life is my sister Angela. This is how it all happened: I received Jesus when I was very young, 11 years old. My sister came back one night from an evangelical meeting and very enthusiastically told me she had received the Lord and that now she had eternal life. I was her first convert.

In the years that followed, she took me to church, taught me, and was always involved in my spiritual growth, even

after she left and went to Timișoara to study. Two years later, I moved to Timișoara too, and started high school there. It was only Jesus that my parents allowed me to leave home and move to another city, as I was still very young.

In the meantime Angela had met the Family, so when I moved to Timișoara she introduced me to them. Soon after that, she joined, so for the next five years I visited her in the Homes where she was, during my holidays.

But I became so familiar with the Family that when I finished high school, joining was not in my mind. I always thought of it as something I'd do someday, in the future, but not very soon. I wanted to finish my studies first and go to university. I was living alone, and I had had a boyfriend for over a year, so I was quite satisfied with my life.

But then three summers ago I went to a camp for catacombers and live-outs on the Romanian sea-



Hope visiting in Peru

coast, and it was a real shakeup for me. I realized that Jesus was calling me *now* and that there was no time to waste my life on other things like studies. He wanted me to do more with my life than that. For me it was like waking up from a dream. I realized that Jesus had been talking to me for a long time, but I had been too preoccupied with other things to listen. I realized what I had almost missed.

So I made the decision to join and went home to tell my parents, as that summer I was supposed to pass the university exam. They were shocked (not that they didn't expect it) and furious, especially my father. I was their only daughter left after my sister had joined, and they had had great expectations for me. It was as though their worst nightmare had come true.

My father told me that if I walked out of that door, I might as well never come back, as I would no longer be his daughter. I knew that it was the time for me to join, and now I believe it even more. Right after I joined, my grandmother got sick, so my parents were involved in taking

care of her and didn't have much time left to try to get me back.

Now, after two years (my most wonderful so far) I'm still here in Romania, together with my sister and her family. I love the new direction in which the Family is heading; the Activated vision is really starting to roll here.

One of the biggest miracles that has happened during this time is that my parents have changed, especially my father. From not wanting to have anything to do with us, he's changed so much that now he comes to visit us with my mom. They support us, do shopping for us, and, lo and behold, last winter they paid for all of us to go to Peru and visit my brother-in-law's relatives! Such answers to prayer and more proof that the keys work!

Besides the big miracles, there are of course the everyday small ones (like me learning how to cook) that make our lives so exciting. Being in a small Home, I have learned to do a little bit of everything: from childcare to witnessing and outreach, and from cleaning and cooking to administrative matters. There have been battles (my sister's white hairs are proof of that!), forsakings, lessons to learn (like being faithful in the little things), but I can truly say that I wouldn't change my life with any other in this world! The Family is the place for me!

So this is my story. I hope it can be an encouragement for you to keep praying for the ones you left behind: brothers and sisters, friends, and other relatives, as prayers do work miracles. They did for me. As we forsake everything to serve the Lord, sometimes we leave behind loved ones and we just have to trust that He's going to take care of them. He does, and I'm forever thankful He did in my case.

Then saith He unto His disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest" (Mat.9:37–38).

My All in All

Interview with
Natalie (17),
Zimbabwe

What was the biggest transition for you when you decided to forsake all and serve the Lord in the Family?

When I finished school in 2001, my life seemed to be planned out for me. Everything was there, all the jobs were there, and everybody was asking me, “Do you want to work for me? I’ll pay you this much or that much.” But in my heart I knew there was something I was really seeking, something I needed to do for the Lord. Yes, I would go to church every Sunday, I’d do this and that, be on the team going to prison for worship services, but inside I was feeling, “Hey, I’m empty! There’s something missing.”

My biggest forsaking was all those jobs that people wanted to give me. I would think, “If I was working, I’d be getting all that money.” People were even asking me, “You’re going to be a *volunteer* worker? How are you going to get your salary? How are you going to survive?” That’s when I faced the real test of whether I believed I could live by faith alone.

What is your favorite aspect of Family life?

This is a tough one, because I like everything about the Family. I like the outreach, and I like the personal fellowship, because actually you don’t find that in Zimbabwe. There are a lot of racists here and people giving me looks, thinking, *How can this black lady be working with these white people?*

But in the Family there’s no color or creed. They just take you for who you are, and that’s what I like about it. You have some ups and downs, but hey, who said life was going to be a smooth road all the way? In the hard times you see the Lord working in you; that’s the only way that you see that there *is* a God and that He can work and that He is still working today.

Tell us some of the different things that you did before you joined the Family.

I’ll start with the good, ha! I would go out on outreach—not every day but whenever I’d find time to do it. I’d go out and talk

with people, see how they were, where they were at with the Lord, and how their spiritual life was progressing. I'd also help street kids. We had a group that would go to the street kids, talk with them, play games with them. I helped different people—not enough, but a little of this and that. I did what I could.

Okay, the bad things! Whoa! I was into fighting a lot. Nobody would mess around with me. If they'd do just a little bit of anything, I'd just give it to them!

What are your favorite Family publications?

I love the music! I've got my three favorite CDs—*In Love*, *Open for Love*, and *Always* (which happens to be the one I play every night when I go to sleep). And the books—I just love them all. I'm a bookworm and read every one that comes my way.

Do you have any personal goals or people you'd like to reach?

I heard somebody say that the Lord has a purpose for Africa, and I really believe that. I would personally like to reach the teens, because in our city there are those who think

that there's no hope for tomorrow, because if you go and talk to them personally and ask them individually what their goal in life is, they'll tell you, "We don't have a certain thing, but whatever is there for tomorrow is fine." They don't see that if you're in the Lord your life is planned before you, and you don't have to worry about what's gonna happen tomorrow—if you're gonna live or you're gonna die, if you're gonna go somewhere.

They have this feeling inside that Jesus is for old people. Some of them go to church and are taught different things in different churches, but if you ask them, they tell you there's nothing that they have gotten from that. They go just because their parents are going or their friends are going, or there's nice girls or boys there. But they don't really know the meaning of having the Lord inside you.

They think that if you go to church that's what makes you a Christian. They really don't know what it is like to have the Lord inside and how happy that makes you feel. They think, *This happiness I've got today is what will last*. But that happiness is only tempo-



rary and is gonna go away soon. But in Jesus you'll always have happiness. Even if you're having trials and temptations, there's always a happy smile on your face.

I would like to reach the teens with music. I am a teen and I really like music. Most teens don't like reading or preaching. They listen to all this blah blah music with no meaning and they think that will make them happy, but if you make music that really has a message to it, I'm sure (it might take a long time) that eventually they will change. If we change our part of the world, the world will be a changed place.

What's the greatest testimony of something that has happened to you since you joined the Family?

Before I joined I wondered, *These people are volunteer workers. How do they get their food? How do they get this and that?*

But Christy was telling me, "When you live by faith, you can see the Lord working." That's a big miracle that I've experienced since I joined the Family—how we always have food on the table and we're not lacking in anything. We



don't have to worry about tomorrow, because we always have faith that the Lord will provide.

14. What motivated you to join the Family rather than working with some other church or Christian group?

I was seeking for something that none of those churches could give me, because they all believed in going to church on Sunday, but never going on outreach every day like we do in the Family.

I admired Hannah and June [Family members] even before I met them personally, because I was living next door to them. I knew that what they were doing was something I'd be happy in, something that I would really want to do. People ask me, "Why did you join the Family to be a missionary when you're only 17? You haven't enjoyed life!" I tell them that enjoying life is when you're with the Lord, because without the Lord you're nothing and with Him you're everything. So I guess the Lord is my everything, my all in all.