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Cherie (Berry) Kropp

My parents, Dot and Ray Berry, were both second generation in professing families. Their parents first came into contact with the workers when my Mother was seven and my Dad was a teenager. I was born in 1948 in Martinez, California and was raised in a professing home. I inherited my beliefs from my loving, God fearing, faithful parents. While my grandparents had asked the questions, and searched until they found answers that satisfied them--I had the answers without ever asking the questions. In other words, I knew what was "right," but not why. For a time, I accepted these hand-me down beliefs as Absolute Truth without question. I was taught and believed that the 2x2 fellowship was God's only true way that came down in an unbroken line from the apostles.

When I was ten and my brother, Galen, was six, we moved from California to Jackson, Mississippi, which was my mother's home state. Within the year, our home became the first convention to ever be held in the state of Mississippi. With this privilege came certain status. Galen and I found we were expected to be "good examples" (role models) to other children of professing families. While this role suited my brother to a "T", it far from suited me! Most any professing child knew he was supposed to be an example to the "world"; we were also supposed to be examples to all the professing children. We set the standard, or so we were told! Often, the bottom line was, before you act, ask yourself: "What will people think--if I do this?" What a killjoy! I resented being forced to act out this role I did not choose and for which I was entirely unfit. With a child's tunnel vision, I only just saw what other kids could do that I couldn't. I didn't realize how much our parents permitted that others didn't.

My very closest friend was my first cousin, Judy. There was just three weeks difference in our ages, and we lived 180 miles apart. Judy and I discussed professing, and decided we would hold off; that neither of us would profess until late in our teenage years, after "we had some fun." However, when Judy was 12, she reneged and professed. My mother told me I shouldn't profess "just because Judy did." I didn't plan to, but to my surprise, two weeks later at convention I felt moved and really wanted to stand up. I cried all through the song when they tested the meeting, but remained in my seat. However, the next year, when I was 13, the pull was just too much, and I couldn't hold out any longer, so I stood to my feet. I'd have preferred that He had held off until I "had a little fun". I never could pray, as many often did, "Thank you Lord, for showing me your true way." Galen was 9 years old when he professed. I sometimes wondered what my life would have been like if I not been born to professing parents. Would I have chosen to be a part of this fellowship if it had just "come across my pathway" one day later

in my life?

My brother and I had looked forward to this move, but had NO clue of the tremendous adjustment it would be for us. We moved from a city environment where we had lived ALL our lives to the country. There were NO playmates near our new home. Not one! We were bored out of our minds! Neither of us was athletically inclined or lovers of the outdoors. We both took refuge in books and in playing the piano. For years, we were the only children in our meeting. In fact, the closest children of professing parents lived 60 miles away! When we moved to the country from the house we were renting, all the Mississippi and Alabama workers came and stayed at our place, as well as many friends. They swarmed everywhere, busy building the new convention grounds. Galen and I were right there in the middle of things, helping too.

One time I was helping Miss Mable, a sister worker, get a tent ready for the visiting brother workers to sleep in. After we set up the same THREE beds in THREE different spots, and made them up THREE different times, Miss Mable decided she better make sure they were a comfortable praying height. So she dropped to her knees and put her elbows on the bed in a prayer-like stance. Immediately, she declared, "Nope, this won't do. All these beds will have to be raised." Nothing would do, but unmake the THREE beds AGAIN and lower them. Trying to dissuade her, I said, "Oh, I don't think they're too tall!" She replied sharply, "Well, you're just a little girl. You don't know anything about conventions!" Maybe not, but I was sure learning! Her comment cut me to the quick and moved me to tears. I ran off immediately to cry on my Mom's shoulder. Mable told mom later that she had "used grace" in dealing with me. She never apologized. The elder of our meeting was also helping her move and remove the three beds. I felt his sympathy, and he accurately predicted to my mother, "Be a long time before that little girl gets over that!" About 25 years--that's all! In retrospect, I see that she really did me a BIG favor. I grew up with an accurate picture of workers, and I never became a worker worshipper.

From that point on I recoiled and kept my distance from ALL workers. They drifted in and out of our home, but I never let any of them get close to me. I didn't write to any of them, found them extremely boring, and was uneasy in their presence. I trusted very few of them. It was a no-win situation. They had the power to criticize and find fault with me AND they would always be "right," because workers are always "right."

Before I reached my teenage years, I had concluded from personal observation that workers were only human; they were not on a higher plane than the friends, and were a far cry from being perfect or infallible. I had seen some express feelings, or act in ways that were, to my way of thinking, not particularly Godly. Workers and Saints alike were at times irritable, tactless, rude, thoughtless, bossy, jealous; got angry, offended and miffed; made mistakes, blunders, goofs and screwed up; were critical, scornful, judgmental, hurt other's feelings without apologizing; were afraid of other workers; and resented anyone challenging their word or authority. Sometimes they gave good advice, and sometimes not so good. In short, I learned they were no different from other human beings, something many friends do not realize today. Little did I realize how this viewpoint and insight would help me in later life.

Mississippi has around 100 friends total and usually six workers, so the workers stayed with us a LOT. When the workers were there, my brother and I had to sit at the table after we were

through with our meal for what seemed like an eternity. We rarely made a peep. It wasn't that our parents told us not to talk--we just didn't care to. It would prolong the boring time at the table! Most workers at our table were not good conversationalists. Often there were long uncomfortable pauses, and laughter at unfunny things that I stubbornly refused to even crack a smile at. We endured these endless, dull meals wondering how much longer before we could escape to our rooms and pick up our books, through which we lived vicariously.

Sometimes after the meal was over and cleaned up, everyone went to the living room and chairs were arranged in a circle around the room. Instead of multiple conversations going on simultaneously, one person would speak while everyone looked at him. Then someone else would say something, and everyone would focus on that person. Frequently, there were uncomfortable pauses, and nervous laughter at nothing. Being shy, I never ventured a word, lest all those eyes turn on me! To this day, I get terribly uncomfortable and ill at ease when I'm sitting in a group in a circle, and there are not multiple conversations going on.

For a time, can-cans were a fad, so they were considered the height of worldliness. Can-cans were stiff half-slips usually made of a net-like fabric that made a skirt stand out. The sister worker in charge of the dining tent always held a meeting for the waitresses at each convention. Without fail, Miss Minnie would comment in an acid tone, "Of course, it would not be appropriate for anyone waiting on tables to wear can-cans or spike heels." Long after can-cans and spikes went out of vogue, Miss Minnie continued to make this comment.

Although married couples sat together during meetings at both Alabama and Mississippi conventions, the men and women were segregated in the dining tent! All the women sat on one side, while the men sat on the other. To enter the dining tent, the women had their door; and the men had their door. The men and women didn't even stand and mill around together while waiting to enter. One table was especially designated for mothers (but not fathers) with babies and small children. Many a mother had a terrific struggle at mealtimes, especially if she had more than one small child to feed by herself. I could never understand why this separation existed. It just didn't make sense! There was a strange undercurrent in those two states, and perhaps others, concerning male-female relations. Workers would say from the platform that convention and meetings were not the place to meet and socialize...yet they didn't allow some to participate, who married outside the fellowship! If convention wasn't the place to meet--where in the world was the place, I wondered? Some workers discouraged boys and girls from mixing and talking.

Once my husband and I invited two Dallas teenagers, a brother and sister to go with us to MS convention. Mr. Charles, a brother worker, was there who had made it his personal responsibility to do all he could to prevent marriages "for the kingdom's sake." He spied Andy talking to his sister. He went over to them and said something to the effect: "You know, this really isn't the place to be talking to girls." Andy looked puzzled for a moment, before he asked, "Not even to my SISTER?" We had a good laugh over that! Mr. Charles also put in an unwelcome appearance at my side one night while I was talking to a teenage boy after the last meeting. He let us know it was past the time (9:00 p.m.) when we should be in bed. Lights weren't even out yet! I was scared to death he would tell my folks. My heart sunk the next day when I saw who was to baptize me--Mr. Charles!

Most of the Bigshot Workers who are invited to a convention arrive by the weekend before the convention is to start. Galen and my bedrooms were always earmarked for visiting workers, so we had to move out to the dorms more than a week before convention started. The highlight of the whole year for most of us was getting together at convention with other young professing kids. We usually dreaded returning "to the world" (school) and leaving this warm, safe environment the only place where we fit in and were one of the group.

For the first few years, the women all slept in the house at MS convention. The first year, I staked out my bed in a cubby hole in the attic under the eaves. I was saving the two other beds for some of my friends. Miss Mable (Killjoy) came along and discovered my plans and objected strenuously. She told my Mom that my friends and I were all in a cliche, and she didn't approve of cliques. Mom told her, "Mable, EVERYONE is in a cliche!" She compromised. My friends and I got two beds, and Mable put two girls of her choosing in the other bed.

After they built the women's dormitory, I had a particular bed I always slept in each year with my cousin, Judy. The beds were built in squares, in groups of four double mattresses. Four double beds on top bunk and four on bottom. Everyone slept with their heads together--perfect for talking! One year the sister worker in charge of sleeping arrangements, Miss Evelyn, asked me who I had saved the three beds around me for. Just an ordinary, reasonable request. Little did I realize what my answer would bring about. I rolled off the names of six of my friends, and she wrote them all down. Next thing I knew, an old lady had climbed up the ladder, plunked down her suitcase, and started to make up one of the beds I had saved! When you have a year's worth of girl-talk to catch up on, the last thing you want is an old lady hearing everything you say. This would NOT do!

Immediately, I marched off to inform Miss Evelyn about her mix-up. To my surprise, I found she had assigned the lady to that bed--even though there were plenty of other beds available! I asked "Why did you do that? I told you I was saving them for my friends!" She replied softly, "Because it's best this way." Not a little bit distressed, I ran off to tell my mother about the way my plans were being disrupted! Mom found out Miss Minnie, the can-can sister worker was behind it all, and Miss Evelyn was just her pawn. Seems Miss Minnie thought I was "taking on a little too much authority" for a teenager! Those were her exact words. She actually felt threatened by a 16 year old! I KNEW Miss Evelyn was too sweet to do something like that. She was one of the few sister workers I ever found genuinely nice at heart.

Things went from bad to worse! Miss Minnie decided she would teach me a lesson and show me who was in charge. My friends arrived for whom I had saved the beds. They were assigned to sleep at a friend's house!!! Not only were they sent completely off the convention grounds, but they were sent 12 miles away--out of the county! UNBELIEVABLE! I was dumbfounded, and I objected strenuously! We had ALWAYS slept together, etc. The girls tried to shush me up and told Evelyn they just wanted to do whatever was best--to sleep wherever they were needed, to fit in, etc. Baloney, I thought!! It never occurred to me to say, "Well, I've decided I want MY room back. You'll just have to find another bed for that visiting worker you put in there!"

Miss Minnie taught me a lesson all right, but it wasn't the lesson she had in mind. I learned from her that the workers could be downright petty and MEAN. This means they were not always

"right". I trusted the workers less and less. It was becoming crystal clear they were not a cut above as some thought.

I allowed a professing girlfriend to have a great deal of influence over me, something I have regretted exceedingly. I suppose I had a crush on her. I yearned for her approval, and I thought the way to get it was to copy her actions, likes and dislikes. She was the most negative person I have ever known. She seemed to only have two reactions; either she loved or hated everything--mostly she hated. She was extremely critical of the workers and scorned them out loud. A real actress, she would put on the most gracious, respectful, interested face and smile when she ran into a worker at convention and seem so genuine in her conversation; but the minute their backs were turned, she would scowl and mutter all sorts of hateful things about them. So, we had in common that neither of us had much respect for the workers, and we both saw all sorts of flaws and inconsistencies with the fellowship. We were both rebels and didn't fit the mold they were trying to force us into. My experiences had confirmed to me the workers were not exceptional, so I followed her lead and took up the habit of scorning them also.

I was under her influence until I was in my 30's. Once she told me not to talk so loud, and to this day people often have trouble hearing me. One day I woke up and realized how much I had allowed this person I didn't really care for all that much to rule my life. After that, I made a conscious effort not to let the fear of "what she would think" guide me. I lived in fear of being on the receiving end of her scorn, even when my better reasoning told me I was doing the right thing! I know firsthand that scorn is a TERRIBLE habit that is extremely hard to let go. There is no doubt in my mind that it is a weapon of Satan--since it is the opposite of love, mercy and compassion. I was determined to instill a guilty conscience in my children concerning the practice of scorn. I often prayed that God would protect and keep my children from ever coming under that sort of bondage to anyone and to keep them from "sitting in the seat of the scornful." So I taught them from a young age to recognize scorn and that scorning others was terribly wrong. They still tattle: "Momma, he/she's scorning me."

It is considered an honor to be chosen to wait on the workers' table. Even though I was the daughter of the convention ground owners, and gave up my room for two weeks, I was never offered the position. I guess Miss Minnie never thought I was fit for that honor. However, I didn't feel slighted in the least--I was actually rather relieved because I never wanted to. NOT at ALL! Looking back, I see they usually put the girls they were grooming for the work on that table, like my cousin Judy.

Entering adolescence, I went through the usual period of pursuing, investigating, measuring, and evaluating the beliefs and values handed down by my parents. I had no problem accepting and following the teachings of my parents that were supported in the Bible. But I argued and argued about any teachings that had no Scripture to justify them. I was usually quelled with something to the effect, "When you are on your own, you can do what you want do, but as long as you're living under this roof....etc."

My FIRST serious disagreement involved the interpretation of the Old Testament verse that forbids women to wear the apparel of men. It all began about the first week of school when I was in the seventh grade and 12 years old. As I breezed through the kitchen on my way to

catch the school bus one morning, I remembered to inform my mother, "I'm supposed to have a pair of gym shorts before next week." BIG MISTAKE! This innocent statement was to have far reaching effects. A brother worker sitting at the breakfast table with my parents commented something to the effect that if HE had a daughter, SHE would certainly never put on a pair of shorts. I HAD to take gym class--it was required. The thought of being the only girl taking gym in a dress or skirt put me in supreme agony and anguish. I desperately wanted be like the others and not to stand out! I couldn't bear to think about it.

Salvation comes in unusual packages. Volunteers were requested to work in the school cafeteria and they would be relieved of taking gym class. So for the next six years, until I graduated, I served in the cafeteria line without pay, receiving in return only a free and plentiful lunch. However, I was given a grade for gym, a class I never took. Those high standards were never let down by me--I never wore a pair of those "worldly" shorts in a class of all girls--but what was the outcome? Dishonesty. I was a party to deceit. I took a grade I didn't earn because I was MADE to do something I didn't agree with, didn't understand, wasn't willing for and thought utterly ridiculous. I wanted to run track, but I wasn't willing to do so in a dress. I was prevented from doing the one thing at which I excelled modestly, and for years I was bitter that I was forced to give it up.

Did they really think God "who looks on the heart" would be pleased with something wrenched from a child who wasn't willing to give it? What value is any service, when it isn't given from the heart in love and willingly? Little did I know I had just begun a collision course where I would often battle traditions and inconsistencies for which there was no Scripture. I passed up going on our Senior Trip to the Gulf Coast, because I knew I would be the only girl who wasn't wearing shorts. Ironically, I was allowed to wear a swimsuit.

I could quote the verse, "Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever" from the time I was a small child. I naively thought this meant the fellowship was the same in every location in every way. I have lived in four different states (California, Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma) so I know this is far from being the case. Further, I knew that practices were not only different from state to state, but also from worker to worker! I was especially resentful when I could not do something I would have been allowed to do in California or Texas, like wear my hair down. I bitterly resented being robbed of this right.

When we left California, Mom and I left behind our slacks (which we only wore fishing or to the farm), our Christmas tree decorations, our radio, and probably more that I didn't realize. As children, we thought we left them behind because we didn't have room in the trailer. Little did we suspect the real reason was because in Mississippi, they were not approved. Later, I found out my parents had been uneasy about taking their movie camera, projector, screen and films of the family trips, scenery, baby's first steps, etc. However, they did. When Mom told one sister worker about them, she suggested they talk to a brother worker about it. However, they never did, because they fully expected him to say they should get rid of them, and Mom refused to do that.

I wouldn't describe my childhood as unhappy, but I wasn't happy either. Certainly I felt loved and wanted by my parents. Both our parents inspired my brother and me with self-confidence and self-esteem, one of the greatest gifts a parent can give a child, I am convinced. I suppose I was depressed, extremely bored and just plain lonely. As a teenager, I felt repressed, suppressed, depressed, oppressed and I expressed it. I blamed it all on Mississippi, my parents and the workers and lived for and dreamed about the day I would leave that state behind. Whenever I didn't get to do what I wanted, I would comfort myself thinking about my plans to leave home and Mississippi just as soon as I possibly could. I didn't want anyone around telling me when and what I could and could not do.

It seemed I was nearly always mad at my folks about something. It has long been my fear that my own children would treat me the way I did my parents. Although I know I richly deserve it, I don't know if I could stand it. I never found a friend at school that I felt very close to. When we moved from California, I had been a ring leader since first grade and was the president of my fifth grade class. I had thought being the "new kid" at a new school would be fun. NOT! The girls in the new school had been friends since they were babies in the Baptist church nursery. They had formed a tightly knit group that was well bonded (cemented?) which rarely opened its arms to anyone outside their faith. Nor was living way out in the country favorable to making close friendships. Of course, I wasn't allowed to date any nonprofessing guys; and professing guys were very few and far between in Dixieland. In 1963 when I was 15, I went to work part-time in a dime store, where the radio played all day long. Since we moved from CA, I had not heard the radio play, so I had been totally ignorant of the current popular songs the other kids at school discussed and sang. Being familiar with the songs made me feel not quite as "out of it."

Since my parents didn't object, long before I left home I had been openly wearing cosmetics--sparingly, as did the other professing girls my age also. Looking back, I am surprised the workers didn't say something. They sure didn't allow makeup in many other areas of the USA. I remember one time I deliberately baited Miss Mable, the bed-moving sister worker. I was 15 and had been baptized two weeks prior. I heard her coming my way, so I got out a compact and began to carefully powder my nose looking in the mirror and ignoring her. She said, "WELL! I thought you were saved from all that!" I looked at her coolly and said, "This is my MOTHER's compact." That shut her up. It was the truth!

When I was nearly 17, we made our first trip back to CA, where there were loads of young professing kids. Several of the friends where we spent the night had sons a couple years older than me, who appreciated my very Southern accent. Of course, there wasn't much my sharp eyes missed. I duly noted each and every difference in the do's and don'ts; could's and could not's; have and have not's. Like how many girls wore their hair down, and how short it was. While some did have very long hair without bangs, one girl's hair barely covered her ears in a pageboy. She claimed the beauty shop cut it off before she knew what happened. That excuse wouldn't wash in MS--where it was a sin to even GO to a beauty shop! I took notice of all the radios, stereos, and even a TV in one home, which were openly displayed. Before we came back to Jackson, I trimmed my hair the shortest it had ever been, and was crushed when I wasn't allowed to wear it down anywhere in public. MAJOR discontent entered my life after that trip! And I became more determined than ever to leave Mississippi, preferably for California, just as soon as I possibly could.

On the way home we were involved in a head-on collision. The impact caused my face to strike the hard, metal dash of our 1962 Chevy and my lower teeth went entirely through my bottom lip twice. Two of my upper teeth were chipped off and all my front lower teeth were knocked out. I also had a one-inch gash in my chin. Stitches, oral surgery, caps, root canals and braces and plastic surgery followed. And to add insult to injury, I had just had my braces removed before we left!

Barely a month later, in this condition, I met my husband-to-be, Dave Kropp. I had just turned 17, he was 21 and it was the summer of 1965 at Texarkana, Texas convention. His parents moved to Oklahoma where they had family when he was four years old. They began to attend gospel meetings, and professed soon after. At the time I met him, he was working in Dallas for Texas Instruments and lived in an apartment with three professing roommates who were all worried about being drafted. Sure enough, when he returned from convention, his draft notice was in his mailbox. SHOOT! He was to report to the army in six weeks. He came to see me twice before he left for Vietnam for a year. I was hoping he could come to our convention, and was warned that if he did we couldn't sit together, even though he wouldn't know another soul there. We planned to be married sometime after he returned.

Judy called me one day and said "Cherie, have you seen the newspaper?" I replied, "no." She said a picture of Dave and article was on the front page of the Memphis newspaper. A reporter had interviewed Dave in Vietnam and many newspapers across the country carried the report and Dave's picture. Friends all over recognized the article was about a professing Conscientious Objector. He received hundreds of letters. My fiancée was a hero! For years afterward, little old ladies would come up to him at convention and smilingly say, "I recognize you. I've got your picture in my Bible."

The year Dave was in Vietnam was the longest year of my life. While he was gone, in 1966, I graduated from high school. My parents were willing for me to attend a local junior college nearby or business college, but I only wanted to leave MS and be my own boss. I went to work in an office, where fortunately, another girl worked who also had a fiancée in Vietnam. We became very good friends and did things together which helped while away the time away. Soon after I went to work I went shopping for a radio. I bought the smallest one I could and kept it in my car. When my brother discovered it and ratted on me, I assured my parents I had never taken it in the house on those holy grounds.

During my last year at home, my relationship with my parents smoothed out. I don't know if they gave me more freedom, or if I grew up some, mellowed or what. But it was a time of peaceful waiting. We actually grew fairly close. Not that I wavered in my intention to leave Mississippi or anything like that!

In nine months of working after we graduated, Judy and I had saved enough money to venture out on our own. Our goal was to move to a city where there were lots of young friends, as well as fewer 2x2 restrictions. Dave had a job waiting for him in Dallas, and he urged us to move there. Since my Dad was from Texas, and we had several relatives living there, we often attended Texas conventions. I knew Texas was far more liberal, so Dallas sounded OK to us. My parents approved our choice since Daddy had two professing sisters living there.

Judy's parents were opposed and tried every way possible to talk her out of moving. Judy had not yet discovered that parents could be wrong. Judy continued to feel terribly guilty even after she moved, but hid it from me. On the other hand, I had no doubts, whatsoever! After all, where did the Bible say, "Thou shalt not move to Texas"? If it was so terrible, why did several ex-workers, my uncle included, make it their home? Apparently my folks thought it was OK, or they would never have encouraged us to move there!

After Dave returned from Vietnam and was assigned to San Antonio for his remaining six months duty, Judy and I moved to Dallas, 400-600 miles from our homes. Dave drove 280 miles to Dallas every weekend to be with me. Judy and I leased what we considered to be a lovely apartment. I was shocked when Judy's sister worker aunt considered it extremely "worldly" because it had a swimming pool. This was a new one on me.

Judy and I were both professing, but we also had big plans to do "whatever our hearts desired." However, we actually did very little different! Dave escorted us to the drag races a couple times. I tried one cigarette which came in a "Welcome" sack and nearly choked to death. (I'm allergic to smoke.) We both began to wear mascara and bought some very modest two-piece swim suits. We brought our radios "out of the closet." We had attained our lifelong dream. AT LAST--we were on our own! We were heady with our new freedom, high on being career girls in a big city, being our own boss, going to bed when we pleased, doing things our way, etc. We thought we had no one but ourselves to answer to, but found this wasn't exactly the case when we skipped a Wednesday night meeting. The Relatives all called pronto.

However, all was not well on the horizon. We had hardly settled in good when Judy's aunt, a sister worker (now deceased), and companion descended upon us. She was hardly in the door good, before she went into her preamble. It was something like: "Judy, when I get to Heaven and you're not there, I would always feel very badly unless I spoke to you about this." She then proceeded to throw a hissy fit right in our living room! We should be ashamed that we even THOUGHT about moving away from Mississippi! Surely, we weren't so ignorant that we didn't KNOW it was a SIN for us (and Judy in particular) to leave a place where there were so few friends, and move to this "worldly" state where they didn't need any more friends! Oh, she really read us her "right act." Judy and I were so dumbfounded at this unexpected tirade that we both went absolutely mute, while she raved on and on and on.

Furthermore, Aunt Sister Worker had talked with several very wise friends who said they would rather have their daughter live ANYWHERE but in Dallas, Texas; that it was a horrible, wicked, worldly, evil, &*\$%# city! (Funny there were no less than 4 ex-workers who made Dallas their home at that time) And, what on earth possessed us to choose it over lovely Mississippi, where we were so needed? She intimated she knew for certain we had been doing things we shouldn't. But we both knew there was no way she could have known about the few questionable things we had actually done or tried in private.

Aunt S.W. suggested (demanded) we have a Bible study, and she chose a particular Scripture passage for reasons known only to her. The four of us each read a few verses. I didn't see any connection in the study and her former ravings, whatsoever. During a lull in the conversation, I figured I might as well make the best of a bad situation and ventured to ask a question I had

long wondered about: "Where does the Bible say it is wrong to wear make-up?" Apparently my spiritual understanding was retarded. She seemed exasperated and pointed to one of the verses we had just "studied," and said, "Haven't you been listening? Isn't that what that verse XX says, which you just read?" What was plain as day to her was clear as mud to me. Bewildered, I hardly opened my mouth again that evening. I have wished since that I could remember which Scripture she referred to.

Aunt S.W. hinted that she was, of course, guided by divine intuition. And she was gracious enough to let us in on some of that knowledge. Oh yes, she knew all about how extremely unhappy and miserable Judy had been since the day she came to Texas! Didn't Judy realize that this feeling would only escalate? That she could only look forward to being more and miserable in the future? Things only get worse when you're out of God's will, you know. Why Judy's only hope was to pack up and go back home to MS right this minute. And she would be glad to help her--let's go call Judy's parents right now and ask them when they could drive over and move Judy back!

Although we had been blissfully happy with our lives before Aunt S. W. arrived in righteous indignation; and even though Judy and I knew each other so well we could often read each other's minds, Aunt Sister Worker was so convincing that I even began to wonder about Judy's state of mind, as Aunt S.W. elaborated on the lengths and depths of Judy's unseen misery, unhappiness, shame and guilt, etc. Maybe Aunt S. W. was right? Maybe I had read Judy wrong--maybe she WAS miserable. Surely NOT! We knew each other so well--how could I have missed it? For once, I couldn't read Judy's expression, and her face gave me no clue as to her feelings! Our apartment was so small that the two of us could not get out of Aunt S.W.'s presence without it being very obvious we wanted to talk about her. So finally, while we prepared supper in the kitchen, I opened a cabinet door so Aunt S.W. couldn't see us, and whispered, "Do you really feel like she said?" "NO WAY!" Judy stormed. I was extremely relieved, to say the least.

That night Judy and I sacked out on pallets on the living room floor and gave the workers our bedroom. Aunt Sister Worker sent her companion in to ask Judy wouldn't she like to sleep in the bedroom with her Aunt so they could have some time alone? Judy politely refused. Judy said to me disgustedly, "No way am I going into that lion's den!" The companion returned a short time later and begged Judy to trade places with her. Judy's lovely gracious, southern manners came to her rescue. She replied so sweetly in her southern drawl, "Why, Alice, there's no way in the world I would be able to sleep, knowing a sister worker was sleeping on my floor, while I slept in a bed!" I nearly applauded. Right on Judy! Not one to give up easily, Aunt S.W. sent the companion in a third time! Again, Judy adamantly refused, and Aunt S.W. finally gave up. Suffice it to say that any remaining illusions I harbored about workers being infallible or being privy to special revelations died with that visit!

After she left us, Aunt S.W. called Judy's parents and told them Judy had gone stark, raving, wild, and that they better get themselves out to Texas FAST. Furthermore, Judy was sporting a most "outlandish hairdo" and was wearing ridiculously short dresses! Ironically, Judy had selected her dress for the Aunt's visit with the greatest of care. It was one she had worn in Mississippi, and was the longest one she owned! A week later, both our parents and Aunt S.W.

converged upon us at Texarkana, Texas convention. The folks were prepared for the worst possible scenario. However, they scratched their heads in perplexity as they found the same, sweet Judy sporting the same hairdo she had worn in Mississippi before she left, wearing some of the same clothing. She didn't appear changed in the least.

I never really understood the bee that Aunt S.W. had in her bonnet that weekend until this year! It became clear that Aunt S.W. had long entertained visions of Judy becoming a sister worker, and had been "grooming" Judy for the work for years. Therefore, she viewed me as no small threat to her plans, a very bad influence, and a very real ENEMY.

Texas didn't disappoint us!! There was liberty in TEXAS and life was much more to our liking. TEXAS was my hero, my deliverer, my liberator, a breath of fresh air. I finally felt as though I could BREATHE! For me, Texas still stands for freedom!

Joe Crane was the head worker in Dallas when we moved there and for several years after. Joe was a very good speaker, a real comedian and was actually FUN to be with. A worker who cut up and whose jokes were actually funny! This was certainly a new twist for a worker! Imagine a worker you enjoyed being around and listening to! Judy was amazed beyond words! In Texas, it was not a sin to own or listen to a radio! Some girls wore their hair down. One could go bowling, skating or swimming without censure. Workers never said a word about women wearing red shoes--any color shoes for that matter, hairpieces, spike heels, styles that were in fashion, etc. Joe Crane even teased the boys and girls about their sweethearts. Back home, the workers wouldn't have thought of mentioning any boy-girl relationships. Why they didn't even mention an impending marriage until it was a fact.

We noticed these lovely wood cabinets in the majority of the Texas friends' living rooms, often taking up one entire wall! Stereos were everywhere! It was not uncommon for the emblems to sit upon the stereo during meeting in the elders' homes. I heard about a man who moved to Dallas from another state who was outraged at this practice. He thought it bordered blasphemy. Stereos were common place because the Overseer of Texas, Gus Jeanson, adored music. Eventually Gus left the work and married. Hubert Childers took his place and went about gradually shaping the Texas friends to fit his mold and standards. Right up there near the top on his list was "eliminate all stereos." Some moved them OUT, and others moved them further IN--to their bedrooms.

Within the year, Dave and I entered into Holy Matrimony, and Judy entered into a new lease with a new roommate. I became worried about her when she started missing meetings. I believed some people in her apartment unit were having a bad influence on her. When she found herself in a financial strain, I encouraged her to move home. I hoped her folks could get her back on the right track. She decided to move back to MS and asked her folks to come and move her things back. Guess who was visiting them at the time? Aunt Sister Worker. They insisted on bringing Aunt S.W. with them, because "she knew the roads". I told Judy I would have refused if SHE had to come. But Judy was depressed, and it didn't seem to matter to her. I missed her sorely. However, moving back didn't do the trick. Within a year after moving to MS, she quit professing, and married a divorced man who had custody of his three children. She helped raise the kids (now grown) and they all regard her as their mother. They have been

married over 20 years now. Judy never reprofessed.

Hubert rearranged the meetings so that we were a part of a meeting composed entirely of young couples where the oldest one was 35! We were all pleased and proud of our meeting. Dave and I were offered one of the rotating Wednesday night meetings, with the stipulation that I let down some of my hemlines. There were many other young couples in the area with whom we went out to eat, had get-togethers, New Years Eve parties, etc. We exchanged dinners with over thirty different families. We were quite content with our lot in life. We were "Texans by choice," if not by birth, and proud to be identified as one.

Our families did not celebrate Christmas in the same way. I had never so much as heard of ANY professing people who didn't exchange gifts at Christmas time. I loved that time of the year, and looked forward to it. I simply couldn't imagine life without Christmas gifts. On the other hand, Dave had been raised in Oklahoma where Christmas was no different from any other day--no gifts, cards, decorations, dinner, special eats, etc. In fact, celebrating was considered sinful! We didn't discover this until the first Christmas we were married which was a disaster. I happily bought presents and gaily wrapped them and left them laying on the fireplace hearth in the living room. Whenever someone was coming over, Dave would hide all of the presents. We resolved to ask the workers about this before the next Christmas rolled around.

When Hubert Childers and Lecil Sullivan came for a meal, we each told them exactly how our family had viewed and celebrated Christmas. Our problem was obvious. We told the workers we had decided we would do whatever they suggested. My parents had decided they would also. Neither Dave nor my parents thought we would ever celebrate another Christmas with gifts. I still appreciate what Hubert said. "There is never ever anything wrong in giving gifts--at any time." He asked Lecil if he agreed. Lecil did. He also told us that when we had children, we would need to be "wise with the little ones" with regard to Christmas. That settled it for us. Dave's parents told Joe Hobbs, an Oklahoma brother worker, what Hubert said. Joe replied, "Oh, I'm positive Hubert would never have said that. They must have misunderstood him." The misunderstanding was all in Joe's mind. A clear example of the unity that doesn't exist.

Dave's sister married an "outsider." She continued to take part in meetings in Dallas. However, Joe Hobbs sent word through her parents that she wasn't to take part in meetings when she was visiting in Oklahoma. Neither was she to wear "those high heels." And they were only medium high! I wonder if Joe had something against Texas or a particular Texas worker. Apparently, unity wasn't high on his priorities.

I worked for ten years after we married. While I was the Contract Manager for the M-K-T Railroad, I learned to scrutinize the fine print in contracts. When I scrutinized the Scripture, I expected everything to be clearly spelled out in its fine print. NOT! I had seen too many errors in the workers' judgment too many times to believe everything they said was right. Neither did I believe their interpretations were without error, especially when they could not support them with Scripture. I had faith in the Bible, but what I did NOT have, nor does the Bible recommend, is faith in the word of men!

I worked under a wonderful, brilliant lady at Katy Railroad who became my mentor. She was the

first employee I'd ever worked around who truly worked "for the company," putting the company first. Many times she accomplished minor miracles or the seemingly impossible. I watched her closely for clues to her method. Her secret was quite simple--she asked. She "knocked" on doors that appeared to be closed up tight with no admittance, and they often opened right up to her. All because she asked and didn't assume. She didn't take "no" for an answer, didn't go by what others said, and insisted on seeing for herself. Her motto was: "Never assume nothing!" She also got a great deal accomplished because she didn't insist on taking the credit herself. She knew more was accomplished by leading, planting ideas, and praising--than by driving, pushing or force.

Raye had many enemies because she was always being noted for some new accomplishment or brilliant idea. One of her most remarkable feats was how she dealt with her enemies. She is the only person I ever saw who truly practiced "Love Your Enemies." Over a period of time, I witnessed her love one enemy-lady to the point they became close friends! She eventually had her eating out of her hand! When we sing the hymn "Strong in the strength of gentleness", I always think of Raye. She made others strong; her strength was in her gentleness. She taught me by example that gentleness is stronger than force. She became the first female Vice-President of the M-K-T Railroad. Every time she was promoted, she pulled me up with her into the position she vacated. Besides my parents, there has never been a person who has taught me any more valuable lessons about life than she did. Many, many times I have been thankful for the seven years we shared.

Dave worked at Texas Instruments and went to college. He graduated in 1976 with a Business degree, majoring in Accounting. Our son, Kelly, was born in 1977, two weeks before our tenth wedding anniversary. We loved Dallas and didn't plan to ever leave it. We had even bought our cemetery plots in Restland, where "One Call Does All". HOWEVER, in 1979, Dave took a new job with Continental Can, and we moved 140 miles east of Dallas, to Longview, Texas. "The best laid plans of men and mice, etc...." Population 72,000, quite a change from Big D. Our daughter, Julie Krista, was born a month later.

We lived in Longview for nine years, and didn't plan to ever move from there. The fellowship in Longview was very different from Dallas. There was very little interaction among the friends, unless you were into Shaklee products. Over the years, we became close friends with two couples, but on the whole, we didn't find the friends very friendly and they rarely invited anyone over. Our elder never once invited us for a meal, except to a pot luck they held for the whole church. Consequently, most of our friends were "outsiders." We opened a custom picture frame and craft shop, which I managed for 5-1/2 years.

One lady who worked for us was a member of the Church of Christ. I had a great deal of respect for Mrs. Dodson, and the feeling was mutual. I was impressed by her sincerity, values, lifestyle, and conduct. We sometimes discussed things we had noticed in our Bible studies. After going to gospel meeting with me to hear some sister workers, she confessed that she just could not understand how we could believe in women preachers because of the verses: "I suffer not a women to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" 1 Tim. 2:12, and "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak," 1 Cor. 14:34. This was the first time it really hit me that the practices of having women preachers was

at odds with these Scriptures. I gave her some notes I found regarding women preachers, confident they would convince anyone.

Her husband, Mr. Dodson, was a college speech professor, and had studied to be a preacher. He wrote me a letter concerning the notes I sent. He shot down the notes with very reasonable, valid points. He showed how one would have to "leap" to conclude these Biblical women were ministers from several of the passages given in my notes. For instance, Anna the prophetess, who was living long before Jesus ever sent out the disciples, etc. I was quite surprised. I began to seriously question whether or not women preachers were "right."

Given the notes and Mr. Dodson's reply, one brother worker recommended not replying. He indicated it was like "casting your pearls before swine." Given the same, a sister worker who had been a recent college graduate and who had traveled all over the world, replied, more or less, that women preaching was "right" (1) because it feels right and (2) because it has endured. If it wasn't right, it wouldn't endure. Another brother worker showed through various other passages that Paul didn't REALLY mean that women shall not teach. Part of his reasoning was based on differences he attached to the terms keeping "silent" and keeping "silence." He went to great lengths to prove this passage didn't mean what it said. So why do they take the passages about long hair and jewelry at face value? Why don't they look into them long and hard, and prove they didn't mean what they say? The inconsistencies were beginning to drive me crazy!

Except for Hal Lindsey's best seller *The Late Great Planet Earth*, I had never read any religious books. I was enthralled with it and didn't realize I shouldn't be reading it. I loaned it to some of the other friends and gave it to a sister worker for her opinion. I was anxious to learn the workers' position on the rapture; pre or post. I expected her to take the book with her when she left and get back to me after she read it. About 5 minutes after she took the book to the bedroom, she came and gave it back. With a bored manner, she dismissed it saying that it was just like all the rest of books written by worldly men on that subject. She hadn't even read it! I thought her reply was very strange, to say the least.

As long as I can remember, I used to "space out" in meetings into a fantasy world where I daydreamed, to escape the boredom. After I professed, I struggled to break this habit. For 20 years or more, I went to convention after convention and could not remember a single thing I heard. I'd wake up about the last meeting and scold myself, "Well, Cherie, you blew this one, just like all the others, didn't you?" Eventually, I began to make a concentrated effort not to tune out the speakers, and to listen carefully and take notes. I found the same old things were being said most of the time. I rarely heard anything I didn't already know. Time after time, I left feeling puzzled with precious few notes. I can only remember three outstanding sermons during those barren 20 years that have stayed with me. Later, I was shocked when I came across all of them almost verbatim in books by outside Christian authors! Some suggested something wasn't right within me, but I didn't believe that. Not after praying so very diligently and earnestly for food for a whole month before I went. And I really did listen intently to every speaker. God promised that "if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Was I the only one who felt like they were in a famine? I remember identifying my soul with the word "barrenness".

I went to one convention with high hopes but left feeling particularly empty. I reported to my mother that all we heard about was The Convention itself. How they had looked forward to it; how it was such a privilege to be there; how it could mean so much to us; that it could be our last; that it could be ever so meaningful if we let it; that it could bring about great changes. They talked about what they hoped to get there; what we could or should do with what we heard there; what God thought about The Convention; speculations on what would happen after we left there; pity for outsiders who knew nothing about Conventions. The Convention was like a book with only a prologue and epilogue, and no material in between. The Convention was idolized, glorified, honored and worshipped, but where was the spiritual food I was so hungry for? Conventions were devised and created by men. They were never commanded in the Scripture. It seemed to me man was worshipping his creation, The Convention, more than his Creator.

It wasn't only at conventions, however, that I found no food. After I opened our shop, it was a tremendous effort to get the family ready to go to Gospel Meetings or Wednesday Night Meetings. It became harder and harder to push ourselves to make an effort to go to these places "for nothing". We were expected to attend two Special Meetings 100 miles away, and in 9 years, we made maybe 5 out of the 18 expected. Eventually, we attended only the Sunday meeting, and the Wed. Night meeting held in our home once a month. We rarely went to any gospel meetings, unless they were SUPER convenient. I didn't know it, but I was starving spiritually.

Mrs. Dodson loaned me some religious tapes that I really enjoyed and found informative. For my birthday, she gave me the book Righteousness Inside Out. I couldn't refuse it! It opened up Jesus' Sermon on the Mount to me in a way that I'd never experienced before. I wondered how could this man write such a wonderful, enlightening book, and not be saved? I realized there was no way I would ever have heard everything contained in that book from the workers. No worker ever speaks over an hour, and the workers never continue a sermon, so no subject was ever covered in depth. I began to realize teaching was not the strong point of this fellowship, nor its priority, nor would it ever be! Yet the Scripture said, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;" Eph. 4:11, 1 Cor 12:28. The workers are evangelists preaching to those who are "lost". Where were the teachers? Who is teaching those who believe? No one! In this fellowship, the position of the evangelists is combined with that of pastors and teachers. Where is the Biblical authority for that??? No wonder there isn't any food.

My son was close friends with a neighbor boy his age. His mother, Doris, and I became close friends. I had not thought it possible for an outsider to truly understand my lifestyle, but she had been raised in the Assembly of God Church, which had many of the same rules as I observed, so she understood quite well. She raved over a book she had just read and practically insisted that I read it. It was Ordering Your Private World by Gordon MacDonald. Since I had pressed various books on her, it seemed only fair that I read one she recommended. Again, I marveled that an "unsaved" man could write such a spiritually enlightening book! I knew his message was "right on" because I had picked up on some of the same things myself. These books I was practically forced to read opened the way to where I began to read other Christian books also. Here where I found a spiritual feast outside where no one was supposed to know anything!

I was totally shocked one day when Doris told me she was just "hungry" to learn more about the Bible. Here my friend was regularly attending a church and was spiritually starving, and I hadn't even realized it! She had attended a couple of meetings with me and declined more, saying she wanted more than the milk they preached! Milk, huh? Supposedly, I had God's answer at my fingertips, she wasn't interested in it! From another woman who worked for us, Gail, Doris learned about a local in-depth Bible study. I had a hard time thinking of Doris, Gail and Mrs. Dodson as "unsaved" just because they didn't attend the same church I did, so I just didn't think about it. Their sincerity and actions told my heart otherwise. Then, Doris dropped her bombshell on me. She announced she wanted US to attend the Bible Study that Gail attended. To say I was extremely reluctant about complying with this idea of hers, was to put it mildly, but I finally agreed. I believed if we studied together, perhaps I could help them see the way I believed was "God's only right way".

The study is called Bible Study Fellowship (BSF for short). It isn't a church, but a completely independent Bible study. It's interdenominational, that is, it is not affiliated with any particular denomination. Your church affiliation is irrelevant, as it is in a college class. We three enrolled, but just Gail and I were placed and Doris was put on the waiting list and never did get placed that year. Disgruntled and extremely uncomfortable, I attended the first few weekly sessions, hoping fervently that they would find room for Doris soon. I told myself I could drop out any time I wanted to. After all, this was HER idea, not mine! Under "Amount of Previous Bible Study, I brazenly checked the category "extensive." I was certain the study would be a cinch for me, as I would probably be the only one who had ever studied the Bible much anyway! NOT!

Was I in for a surprise! On the first day, 300 ladies showed up--without any advertising. They all heard about it by word of mouth, like we had! I wondered how they could draw 300 ladies who wanted to learn more about the Bible, and yet often the workers couldn't get even one outsider to come? The study that year was the "Life and Letters of Paul" (Acts and Paul's epistles). talk about thorough! I didn't feel a part of the group, but more like a spectator with different goals, taking what I wanted out of the sessions. Two entirely different camps: Those who THOUGHT they were saved--and me, fortunate enough to be in "God's right way". You can imagine my surprise when many of the ladies had BETTER answers than mine to the questions!!

Well, I'd certainly never studied the Scriptures like this before! They called it "expository" which meant studying verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and we also learned about the relevant culture and history. I really looked forward to going to BSF each week, a feeling I never had about going to meetings. I remember hearing a professing man say, and I believe he was totally sincere, "There is no other place on earth I would rather be than in this meeting today." I thought, "Boy, I sure couldn't say that. I'd rather be most ANYWHERE than here." But I COULD say that about going to BSF! For the first time, I found myself actually wanting to studying the Scriptures. In meetings, we only got bits and pieces, and no overall view of the Scripture. Through BSF, many puzzle pieces began to fall in place, and my understanding grew and I reveled in the experience. Finally, I found spiritual food--and look where it came from!! I later told Harry Brownlee I attended BSF and that I had learned more in those studies than in all the meetings I had sat through in my whole lifetime put together. Now, I am a real champion for BSF, and I encourage EVERYONE to attend. For one nearest you, call or write Bible Study Fellowship, 19001 Blanco Road, San Antonio, Texas, 78258 (512) 492-4676. They also have a

website.

When we studied Paul's letter to the Galatians in BSF, I recognized the friends and workers! They had fallen headlong into the same error as the Galatians had; that of believing certain "works" were required to merit salvation, or that salvation is conditional upon works. That we have a chance at eternal life because of Christ' sacrifice, and if we work hard we may be rewarded with salvation. In other words, Christ didn't finish the work of salvation, and we must do so. If we must work for our salvation, why did Jesus need to die? Paul adamantly stated it is "not of works." We can't work for it--it is God's free gift (the meaning of grace) to us through faith. I also learned about the nature and work of the Holy Spirit, who had been a vague enigma to me. He guides all believers into all truth. Since we have the source of wisdom and guidance IN us, we don't need anyone else to tell us what we should and should not do!

I read *The Hiding Place*, the biography of Corrie Ten Boom. Corrie and her sister were some of the most tenderhearted, Godly women I had ever EVER heard of. Their actions revealed beyond all doubt to me that the Spirit was surely dwelling in them. I read the story of the founder of BSF, Audrey Weatherell Johnson and about the Christian Martyrs. After I was in BSF for two years, it began to dawn on me that those ladies had the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, and anyway, who was I to say whether or not they did or didn't?? I came to the conclusion that there were definitely others who were saved besides those who were in the same fellowship I was, and I began to look upon these women as my "sisters in Christ." I also looked back at all the really good people I had known in my lifetime (that I had thought were not saved) and saw them in a new light. Why, some I had mourned for were probably in heaven! Many folks I know now are also going! What JOY! Heaven was going to contain far more people than I had formerly thought, and that was GOOD NEWS to me! I never had been too sure I would like being cooped up with just the friends anyway. I began to resent the friends and workers making fun of other Christians. I still felt this fellowship was "right" for ME because it was the closest way, but that it very well could not be the "right way" for my children.

I began to feel an urgent need to teach my children all about the Scriptures. I wanted them to be well grounded and to know the basis for the 2x2 teachings. As I faced this task, I felt very helpless. Where to start? The Bible was a maze. How could I be sure I taught them everything, with the right emphasis? If only there were some sort of outline, guidebook or map for professing parents! I decided I would write a Daily Bible Study Program geared solely for children of the friends and use my own children for guinea pigs. Friends who had children similar ages were enthusiastic, and wanted to try it out. They encouraged me so I began. I told one worker about my project, and he said he thought it was a splendid idea!

My goal was to write one lesson a day. I started with the subject "church." And I realized with surprise, that the point of the verses in Acts 17:24 and Acts 7:48, "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" was not that church buildings were sinful or false. But rather the point was where God does live; i.e. in the hearts of His children: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" Eph. 3:17. It was saying "You're looking in the wrong place--he's not over there--he's inside you!" I saw that the 2x2's had distorted the real intent of this passage. Their emphasis missed the point entirely. They had "magnified a pine needle to 70 foot tall!" It wasn't saying God abhorred church buildings! Studying churches lead me to

temples, tabernacles, synagogues, the old law, and eventually back to the nature of God, where I should have started in the first place. I found myself spending half of each day and often longer working out these lesson plans. I was thoroughly enjoying it and learning hoards myself. I had never enjoyed studying my Bible before. I had often wished I did, but I didn't. While I was enthralled, my kids were less than enthusiastic about being my guinea pigs!

I had never believed God intended for women to keep their hair uncut and pinned up! I never could understand why women weren't supposed to wear CERTAIN cosmetics, no pants, and CERTAIN types of jewelry. After I left home I began wearing even more makeup and also slacks or shorts when I thought the occasion warranted it. I was sure the Scripture passages they gave for long hair, slacks and jewelry didn't mean what they claimed they did, but I didn't know what they DID mean! The whole business about jewelry was so inconsistent! How was I supposed to explain why I didn't wear necklaces or earrings when I wore hair jewelry, huge elaborate pins, a gold wedding ring with diamonds, and a gold watch? And I sure wasn't going to give up any of them, just to be consistent with their incomprehensible interpretation!

Up until I was 21 years old, I had never heard of any friends or workers who believed women's hair should never be cut. All the other professing girls I knew trimmed their hair, and most kept it about 6-8 inches past their shoulders. So I naively thought girls did this everywhere. Dave objected when he found me trimming my hair after we were married and told me he had heard Joe Crane say, "Shame on a woman who would put the scissors to her hair!" I told him to work out his salvation, and I would work out mine.

Since the sixth grade, I had worn my long hair put up. At first it was only in a pony tail. During my teenage years, I longed to wear my long hair hanging loose, (not pinned up on my head). After I left home, I knew I would feel ashamed if some of the friends saw me with it down. So fear of what others would think kept me from doing anything much to my hair. I also had several bad experiences with hairdressers, and beauty shops intimidated me. I'd never had any qualms about cutting my hair, probably because my mother had kept my hair trimmed and thinned all my life since it was so thick and hard to manage. In my 30's I developed what the dermatologist call a "liver spot" on my forehead, and I began to wear a few wispy bangs to cover it up. Later, Doris tried to persuade me to give her hairdresser a try. She didn't have to try too hard! Freda layered, permed, and fixed my hair to where for the first time in my life, my long hair really looked good worn down. I began to wear it down to work and gradually extended that to almost everywhere I went, except to meeting. I noticed some of the friends attitude cooled towards me after I cut bangs.

I began to wonder how sincere Christians of other faiths interpreted 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, the hair chapter. I asked Mrs. Dodson and Gail what they thought those verses meant. They both said they believed those Scriptures were meant for the people of that day--not for us in our day. Well now, I had never thought of it in that light! That sure explained how they could do otherwise in good conscience. Our BSF study of Corinthians had a reference to a book by G. Campbell Morgan. For the first time, I went into a religious bookstore in search of a book that wasn't a Bible. I hadn't any idea there were so many helpful books available. I found the book, and it confirmed the answer the ladies had given me. It was really quite simple! The 2x2's believe the instructions found in this Corinthian passage were intended for ALL women believers for ALL

times. Others believe these instructions were intended only for the first century believers to whom the instructions were originally written (the Corinthians). Whereas 2x2's believe this Scripture pertains to the present; other Christians believe it pertains to the past. The 2x2s had not considered the cultural context, historical background, or the occasion and purpose for which the Scripture is written. They hadn't even considered WHO Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthians TO! That was like reading mail addressed to someone else, without taking that into consideration!

I realized something was terribly wrong with the system. The best explanation I could come up with was that it had "fallen into the ditch" or derailed. At this point, I still believed it was what the workers said it was: God's only way which came down from the apostles. Therefore, I believed I HAD to be in it if I wanted eternal life, and, of course, I wanted eternal life. When it is this fellowship or hell--there is no real alternative. However, I was certain the workers had misinterpreted some things. I also thought there must be a good reason somewhere for the requirements I didn't understand or find Scripture to back up; but the reason must have been lost somewhere down the line, while the tradition was passed down.

Meanwhile, Dave's employer was involved in a hostile takeover and they moved the entire accounting office to Omaha, Nebraska. This was comparable to the North Pole to us! He began to look for another job. We had said many times we would NEVER move to our home states. Well, he was offered two positions: one with a competitor in his home state, and a another in Dallas, Texas. I was thrilled. If we had to move, Dallas was my choice. Then the Oklahoma company offered to buy our house, at a time when the real estate market was very slow! It was like the Red Sea opened up for us, and there was dry land clear to Oklahoma City (OKC). Dave accepted the job in Oklahoma, which was the position he actually preferred. It was 1988, the year I turned 40 and the kids were 9 and 11. Dave went off to OKC to begin his new job--one year to the day that we had moved into the dream house we had built and planned to stay in forever. The kids and I stayed while I liquidated our custom picture frame and craft shop. We moved four months later.

Since Dave grew up in Southeast Oklahoma and his parents still lived there, I knew firsthand that OK was extremely legalistic. History seemed to be repeating itself. We were moving our kids to a repressive state when they were about the same age I had been when we moved to Mississippi! Before we moved, the kids and I took a trip to OKC. While there, I really outdid myself getting to a gospel meeting. Dave had to work. I hardly EVER drive after dark, but I did. I drove on strange freeways, in a strange city, at night, completely across town with my two children, and I was coming down with the flu. That's how anxious I was to meet and greet the friends in our new home city. After meeting, two workers we knew spoke to us. That was it! That was our welcome! We hung around for awhile, but not another person ventured to speak to us. I found out later several knew who we were. I was very disappointed, to say the least! The prospects ahead were looking dimmer and dimmer...

However, my spirits began to rise when I found out there were no less than SIX malls and also SIX meetings in the OKC area--as many as there were in Dallas! Since I would not be owning and managing a time-consuming business in OKC as I had for the last five years in Longview, I would have time to develop new friendships with the friends! Why, it COULD even work out to

be similar to our happy days in Dallas! This just might not be so bad after all. I really shouldn't prejudge OKC. Maybe things have changed. A former Texas worker was the overseer. Maybe they had loosened up some. I bought a country sign to hang in my OKC kitchen that symbolized my hopes. It said: "Sit Long--Talk Much." My hopes would soon be dashed.

Back at home, Doris began to seriously quiz me why women weren't supposed to cut their hair, wear jewelry, make-up, etc. She found out I didn't believe it was necessary. So why was I doing it? I felt foolish, and in January of 1988, I vowed to myself I would get to the bottom of all this. I WOULD find out exactly why women had to have long hair, and wear no jewelry, slacks or makeup. I WOULD discover what exactly God required of a woman, in order to be saved. She asked me, "Did you ever wonder if `it was meant to be' that I came into your life?" I had.

I had often heard it said: "The truth is so simple a child can understand it." Yet, here I was 40 years old, no longer a child, and I still could not comprehend my faith. Furthermore, NO ONE COULD (or would) EXPLAIN it to me, in a simple way that created conviction in my heart--much less, convince a child! I resolved: I was GOING to understand this faith I was a part of, if it was the last thing I did. Armed with Jesus promises in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you", I prayed for guidance, and firmly believed God wanted me to understand His will and way, and that He would enable me to do so.

Dale Spencer and Herbert (Hermie) Barnett, brother workers, came to our area. Both were excellent speakers and I often listened practically spellbound. I did some serious studying and came up with all sorts of inconsistencies between the system's requirements regarding women and Jesus' principles. I typed my thoughts and gave them to Dale for his evaluation, and later the workers came over to discuss my notes. Dale agreed with me that long hair wasn't necessary for salvation. He also volunteered a most interesting statement: "Even though some will say otherwise, long hair for women is NOT "doctrine"! As to why women are to wear their hair up, Dale said, "Some believe women are to wear their long hair pinned up, because the Bible says long hair is to be a covering for the head--NOT the back." I burst out laughing. It was incredible and so stupid that it was funny! He had quoted the Scripture earlier to me about "wresting with the Scriptures," so I exclaimed, "That is a good example of `wresting with the Scriptures!'"

I pointed out the 2x2 fellowship had fallen into the ditch; that women are forced to look odd to the point of appearing "dorky"; that the rules prevent some women from obtaining jobs for which they are well qualified; single women who really need good jobs to support others. That requiring this extreme of women is a far cry from temperance; that these enforced traditions are making women appear as Pharisees who did "all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, Matt. 23:5. I knew many women who refused to come into this fellowship solely because of these customs. It really concerned me because these customs were keeping some from eternal life--people I LOVED, like my cousin Judy. I knew many others also who had told me this was their reason. I pointed out how these customs were counter-productive to what the workers' hoped to accomplish in their missions. To him, those women who looked "dorky" were those "who hold high God's standards"; and those I said went "to extremes" were those who "bent over backwards to be

right." Then he named off some of the few nice looking women in the group we both knew.

I had invited the workers over, prepared to brighten their day with new and additional light with far-reaching ramifications for professing women. I thought I would be providing welcome data they had never before stumbled upon, and with which they would be delighted. HA! They were even resentful! I had believed that the workers valued truth above all else. After careful examination, I believed they would drop any belief proved to be "untrue" and embrace the new truth. I received replies to my questions like: "This is the way it is" or "This is what we believe this means", with no explanation as to why my points were incorrect. I soon saw it was useless to argue or ask any further questions or to press my points--these traditions were written in stone. I sat there mute with disappointment while the workers droned on and on. Naively expecting my newfound information to be accepted with open arms, my illusions were fast falling down like Humpty Dumpty, and "couldn't be put together again." It was an understatement to say I had seriously misjudged their values and priorities. I was devastated when I learned how far off I was.

I have since come to realize that the workers believe they have a monopoly on Truth; that is there is no truth other than theirs and they alone have been given True Revelation. Believing they are in a "way" founded by Jesus Himself, they are supremely confident of their mental capacities and judgment. Extremely zealous guards of the system's status quo, they simply block out and ignore counter considerations. Therefore, from their point of view, the only possible right response is to agree with them! Even though they have no Scripture to verify this, many workers believe they stand in God's stead or are his representatives. So they view anyone disagreeing with them as disagreeing with God. Undoubtedly, to disagree with God would be foolish, but to question man? Ps 118:8-9: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

In the end, Dale summed up my problem. This matter was my personal "thorn in the flesh" which I needed to accept and submit to. I must have looked strange, because when they rose to leave, one of them eyed me carefully, and asked hesitantly, "Are you all right?" I felt completely drained and just wanted to be by myself. I said, "Yes." He asked if I was sure. I was! They let themselves out the door, and I went into depression and probably shock accompanied by a migraine headache! I had gone from being super high to super low in thirty minutes. I was utterly crushed. I went to bed to keep from thinking and to get away from my thoughts and despair.

I had foolishly hoped for so much! It never entered my mind I might meet with this type of response. My hopes weren't just doused--I felt as though freezing cold ice water had been thrown all over me. I walked around in a dazed depression for about a week. And then I cried out to God. I remember it like it was yesterday. I was standing in the living room by the piano. I looked up and made this vow to God, **'Lord if you will help me understand--I will help others understand.'**

Little did I know what those words would mean in my life. Like Daniel, the Lord came for my words. Daniel 10:12: "...for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand...thy words were heard and I am come for thy words." I would later write a book and create the website Telling The Truth to help others understand, as part of fulfilling my vow.

Dave was away working in OKC. I didn't go to any meetings for the next eight weeks. This was the FIRST "Leave of Absence" I had ever taken from meetings. No one called to check on me. They probably thought we had moved away. I realigned my assumptions with the "real truth" I discovered that day. I tried to reconcile these inconsistencies in my mind. Finally an explanation cropped up in the form of a sneaking suspicion: Perhaps the reason things are the way they are is just because the workers WANT them to be this way, regardless of what the Scripture says. And they have no good reason. I wrote an analogy titled "Would You?" on this subject, showing the double standards.

Dave soon became tired of being an Oklahoma bachelor and accused me of "resisting" this move and dragging my feet. Certainly I was NOT anxious to leave Texas. But finally, all our possessions were loaded on a North American moving van. The night before we moved, all four of us went to gospel meeting, mainly to see everyone for the last time. Dale then realized I had been living in town for the last 8 weeks and hadn't been to a single meeting (positive evidence of a deeper "problem!"). No doubt, he was relieved that "problem" was taking herself off to Oklahoma where he wouldn't have to deal with her!

In the very first Sunday meeting we attended, a man said in his testimony that while we weren't subject to terrible persecution like they had in Bible days, still persecution did occur in the lives of God's people at times. For instance, it was hard on the children at Christmas time when everyone else was celebrating and receiving presents, but they didn't, etc. Immediately, I was assaulted by a child on either side elbowing me sharply in the ribs, and whispering in alarm and distress, "Does this mean we can't have CHRISTMAS any more????"

We were well respected in California, Mississippi and Texas. After all, Dave was THE Vietnam hero, and I was the daughter of convention ground owners. Dave's parents, as well as his sister and husband with three professing children, were also living in this same state and had a good reputation. Even so, we found ourselves ignored by many of the friends. Many Okies at gospel meetings didn't speak to us or try to make our acquaintance. Eventually, I decided I would meet THEM. At each gospel meeting I would go up and introduce myself to a few of the friends. Some said, "Oh yes, we know who you are." Although Harry Brownlee disagreed with me, I believe the reason we were not accepted was because my daughter and I didn't meet and follow the Okie standards for women's outer appearance. It griped me because we were compelled to place hypocritical license plates on our cars which read: "Oklahoma is OK!" It was NOT!

Some of our friends from out-of-state visited us. The mother and daughter dress very plain, and wear their hair slicked back in buns on the back of their heads. On the way to gospel meeting, I thought about warning the family not to expect anyone to come up and introduce themselves after meeting, but I kept my mouth shut. Was I ever in for a surprise! I couldn't have been more wrong! The entire meeting practically fell all over themselves shaking their hands and introducing themselves to OUR guests. What was the difference? Their outward appearance!

I had been aware that SOME of the Eastern friends didn't believe the Western friends were saved, and in particular the California friends, but it was news to me that the salvation of the TEXAS friends was suspect. While discussing the upcoming OK conventions, an Okie told me

dryly, "Perry is the true Okie convention; Bradley is infiltrated by TEXANS!" I brightened at that! That convention was the first time I felt "at home" since moving to OK!

Intentionally, we had never told our children about most of the do's and don'ts; could and could not's; have and have not's; and all the other idiosyncrasies we didn't agree with in the fellowship. I didn't want them to feel guilty doing or not doing these things. I believed the way to see that these things were eradicated was to eliminate the guilt. I hoped they would forge ahead and help to break down these ridiculous traditions. We also never taught them that the fellowship was "the only way", because I was afraid they might repeat that to their friends who would tell their parents that we thought they were not saved! I had done that as a child. What we DID tell them was that there were many "ways" or churches, and one must find what was right for them, and we thought this was the right one for us. When they accepted Jesus, we wanted them to feel a dimension was added to their lives by their own free will. I didn't want them to feel as I had growing up: that the faith bore an invisible sign stating "living prohibited"; that everything pleasurable was a sin and forbidden; to feel a great impoverishment, instead of a blossoming and a fulfillment, accompanied by joy. When a child is forced to give up what they never had, they often feel cheated, stripped, violated. I know--I've been there. I was cheated of my childhood. We allowed them to do most anything any good parents would have permitted. They didn't feel different from other children.

Krista has naturally curly, extremely thick hair which tangles easily. She is also extremely tender-headed, unfortunately. Combing her hair every day was no fun for either of us. One day when she was just 3 or 4, she threw her brush down on the floor and shouted, "I HATE my hair!" My mother and I both burst out laughing--our sentiments exactly about our own hair!

We usually spent the weekend with Doris when we visited Longview. I was combing out Krista's long hair, and Doris came bounding up the stairs hearing Krista's screams, sure she had been badly hurt. Only to learn, "Oh, this is normal procedure when I comb Krista's hair." Doris was horrified, and called it child abuse. I laughed then, but I didn't forget what she said. What was abuse to Doris was the norm for many little girls raised with professing parents. But, it WAS abuse! Why was it considered necessary? Because I had hardened myself to her screams, cries, and tears, and grown immune to her pain, she was sure to picture God as being very mean, and wind up with a distorted, bitter view of God. "If God's loves me, why does He hurt me so?" "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (NIV) Prov. 4:23. How was I doing at "guarding her heart"? Pretty lousy. By blindly following this cruel custom beyond reason not based in Scripture, was I "offending a little one"? "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Matt. 18:6. One day my husband had all he could take. He grabbed the brush, hugged Krista to him to comfort her, and yelled, "STOP IT!! THIS IS CHILD ABUSE! It has GOT to CEASE--FOREVER. NO more EVER." Compassion and reason were victorious over men's traditions that went against God's commandment of LOVE. The next day, Freda cut Krista's thick hair off above her shoulders, layered and thinned. If we err--it will be on the side of compassion.

All my life I had questioned and fretted over things in the fellowship that didn't line up. If this was The Perfect Way, as claimed, why did these discrepancies exist? There is no place for

discrepancies in perfection! I knew all the do's and don'ts were what kept many people from becoming a part of God's only true way--people I LOVED. I was extremely concerned because I believed some would be lost eternally and all because of some man-made traditions that weren't even Scriptural! I didn't buy "some things you have to accept in faith." I accepted without question what the Scripture said, but I could NOT accept everything the workers said--especially when they could not support it with Scripture.

Off and on for years, I questioned and searched for the original intent of 1 Cor. 11:1-16, which is the passage used to require women to wear their hair long. I never received any answers that satisfied me when I asked workers questions about this and other prohibitions placed on women. I received many replies to my questions that were not answers that rang with truth. Since this fellowship claims to follow the New Testament teachings ever so closely, there SHOULD be a Scripture to back up every belief or practice. However, replies to certain questions never gave a Scripture as their reason. Some replies evaded my questions, while others attempted to divert my attention from the subject. Some replies were obviously faulty reasoning, merely experiences or analogies; others were verbal attacks on me personally. Some attempted to make me feel ashamed as if I wasn't worthy to have my question answered, or that I had committed a faux pas by asking. It was implied that my spiritual life was lacking or defective; that I wasn't what I ought to be, therefore, I had no right to ask the question.

To the question, "Why are women not supposed to wear slacks?" the following are examples of some replies that are not answers:

"If you had the right spirit, you wouldn't even ask that question."

"The reason you can't see it is because you're unwilling"

"Some things we just have to accept in faith."

"When you question, it shows you have a wrong spirit."

"It's not good to argue/wrest with the Scriptures..."

"Don't you think the workers know more about this than you do?"

Not one of the replies gave a Scriptural reason. When you are looking for truthful Biblical answers, fallacious reasoning just doesn't "get it." I felt I wasn't being leveled with and I was determined to figure out what was wrong with this type answer. So I studied the replies that didn't satisfy or ring with truth until I noticed there were certain questions that brought on this type reply, while other questions were answered with explanations of Biblical verses and precedent. Once I told John, a worker, "That answer is just a cop-out." He said, "No, it isn't!" and I said, "Yes, it is." I was at a loss as to how to reply and show what was wrong with his answer. All it would have taken to totally satisfy me was a Bible reference, provided it was interpreted in context. I was frustrated. How was I to get my legitimate, honest, sincere questions answered?

I looked up the subject "arguments" at the library and was referred to "logic." The logic book was an intimidating maze with all sorts of symbols and circles overlapping each other. I couldn't make heads or tails of it--it was way over my head. Soon I found myself enrolled in college taking "Introduction to Logic." Most logic textbooks (also debate, argumentation, rhetoric and speech textbooks) contain a section identifying faulty arguments. This section may be headed: fallacious reasoning, informal fallacies, deceptions in reasoning, obstacles to clear thinking,

pseudo arguments, whatever. The word "fallacy" originally meant "deceive," but has come to mean errors in reasoning. More than 100 fallacies have been identified. Some have been recognized for so long, they are called by Latin names! Guess what??! Each of the unsatisfactory replies I had received were perfect examples of notorious fallacies described in my textbook. The workers constantly make use of these well known tricks of persuasion, crooked thinking and stratagems to divert, distort, confuse and persuade people to accept their viewpoint and customs. No wonder many answers didn't ring true or click! They were counterfeit arguments which are so well known they have long been identified by their own individual name!!!

I had found one of my answers, but I still didn't know WHY the workers did this! Why didn't they just give a straight Biblical answer? All I wanted was the plain truth. Why did these ministers of "the truth," resort to fallacious reasoning with certain questions and not with others? Why not just give the Biblical basis, and be done with it? That's all it would take to satisfy me and get me off their back! FINALLY, I knew "why?" Because there is no Biblical basis. And if there is no Biblical instruction, that means these beliefs or requirements are merely the preference or tradition of men! I wondered: How many of the beliefs I'd accepted in this fellowship truly had Biblical basis? I began to focus on and study into the beliefs that were peculiar to this fellowship, in writing my children's program.

Even though it was far from what we expected life to be like in Oklahoma, things went smoothly for awhile. Then an unforeseen, persistent hitch surfaced. Bear in mind that we were extremely liberal when compared to most professing parents. Even so, we had refused to let Krista pierce her ears which she had wanted to do since she was in pre-school. Krista began to earnestly question us, reason with us, and beg us to let her pierce her ears when she was in the fifth grade. She was the ONLY girl in her class who didn't have pierced ears. I can't begin to tell you how important this was to her. It was all she talked, lived and dreamed about. I showed her the two New Testament Scriptures on jewelry (1 Tim 2:9: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;" and 1 Pet 3:3: "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel.") Was I really so naive to think she would accept that?

"No problem Mom, I won't wear gold or pearl earrings. Actually, I like the painted, cutesy ones better. How come you and Daddy wear gold wedding bands and gold watches? Why is it OK to wear pins, but not necklaces, rings and bracelets when the only thing different is the way you fasten them on? How come it's OK to wear hair jewelry? And so on. I had taught her to think critically, to question, to reason...and look what happened! She was using it on ME! Talk about something backfiring...! They say, history repeats itself in the next generation. But I wasn't prepared for my children to press me for good reasons for customs I didn't understand or agree with!

I tried some of the worker's stock standard answers that hadn't satisfied me, but got nowhere. "Mom, that's silly! I mean, do you have a GOOD reason why?" I had drilled my children, "Don't believe it unless you see it in the Bible." And here I was. I couldn't see "it", and I was supposed to teach "it" to them--and convincingly too!! HOW?! How could I teach my children certain things

were imperative to their salvation, when I didn't believe they were the least bit necessary? I felt dishonest. The words stuck in my throat. I couldn't do it. It was intellectual dishonesty. Meanwhile, Krista continued to beg and reason. "Daddy, you have your TV and you're not supposed to. So why can't I get my ears pierced?" To which her Dad replied, "Because you can't take off your ears and put them in the closet."

I could still remember exactly how I felt as a child when I was not allowed to do some things I felt were reasonable and which meant a lot to me. I was years in overcoming the resultant resentment, hardness and bitterness! However, due to my experience, I made a resolution that I would make sure MY children avoided the pitfall of being poisoned with bitterness, as is recommended by Prov. 4:23: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (NIV) I had no idea this hard-learned priority would conflict seriously with the workers' opinion. I agonized, "If we refuse, how will it affect her?" I identified my experience of not being allowed to wear my hair down or to take gym, with her intense unfulfilled desire to pierce her ears. I felt certain she would bitterly resent not being able to do this, just as I did. I certainly didn't want to be responsible for causing her spirit to become bitter. So I was willing to let her, and stand back and watch what happened! Wasn't that why I kept from them the knowledge of these unwritten rules? So they wouldn't feel guilty violating these customs? Wasn't this what I had secretly wanted my children to do? To challenge the old traditions? Break new ground? Harry Brownlee said if she was his daughter he would tell her she could do what she wanted AFTER she left home...but until then, etc. This is faulty reasoning called the Fallacy of Time. Piercing her ears at 18 could NEVER make up for the pain of being the "odd man out" NOW.

Why must the children suffer for the parent's faith? Why are they forced to give up what they never had, and aren't willing to give? How could the God who looks on the heart be pleased with something a child was forced to give up? Why must this fellowship present God and Jesus to the children as someone mean who takes away everything enjoyable? A God who robs them of their childhood pleasures? How can we disregard God's commandment to "guard your heart above all else" in favor of following hard, uncompassionate traditions of men that have no Biblical basis? It's not only the Pharisees who: "...reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" Mark 7:9. Well, Dave finally agreed to let Krista pierce her ears. She was on Cloud Nine and thought he walked on water. I told Harry of our decision and said, "I consider guarding her spirit against bitterness far more important than two tiny holes in her ears." I spoke from experience.

Oklahoma City has a terrific Christian radio station. A couple of my friends were fans of Dr. Dobson, so I began to listen to him. After Dr. Dobson went off the air, Malcolm Smith came on, a preacher with an English accent. I sometimes heard part of his program before I switched stations. Then, I began to listen to all of Malcolm's program every day. Then I began to arrange what I had to do, so that I wouldn't miss Malcolm's program. I was hooked! I learned some things from him every day. He was funny, informative and so knowledgeable. He has an extensive tape library. I ordered some tapes and enjoyed listening to them whenever I pleased about whatever subject I chose. So different from hearing only in meetings about whatever subject someone else wants to say to you!

Malcolm Smith's series on the Pharisees really opened my eyes to see that the fellowship was

full of modern-day Pharisees! HORRORS! He also addressed the Galatians trying to merit salvation by their works while giving up their liberty. What were the requirements for women, if they weren't works???? If these things aren't required, I wondered, what DOES God require? What does He want of us? The age-old question: "What must I do to be saved?" What is essential? And what is commendable?

I decided to make a list of every single one of Jesus' commands in the gospels. To my surprise, I found Jesus made very few direct commands. Instead, Jesus usually said "IF ye will be my disciple, then do thus and so..." Like a shepherd, He gently leads and never drives or forces. He prefers people choose to do things for him out of love, instead of from duty, force or fear. It was a real eye-opener to me to discover that THE primary principle both the Old and New Testaments were based upon was the command to Love God and others as I did myself. That meant this command was the most important concept in the whole Bible regarding our conduct. WOW! This was certainly a new slant to me. From sitting in meetings all my life, I had assumed that self-denial, suffering and submission were the most important issues...

Avidly, I studied the Scripture, jumping from one subject to another, searching for understanding to something I couldn't identify. I knew I would recognize the answer when I saw it, but I couldn't frame what I was looking for in words. I was driven, seeking something vague, the answer to an unknown question. Eventually an incident caused me to realize that what I was searching for was the answer to the question: "What is the doctrine of this fellowship?" ("substitute the word "teaching" for "doctrine")

A stranger questioned my mother about her beliefs, and asked her if she believed in the Godhead. She didn't know what the "Godhead" was, and neither did I. He substituted the term "trinity." "Oh, yes", she said, "We believe in the trinity." Later she wondered to me, "Or do we? I don't think I know what we believe about the trinity!" (Or anything else for that matter it seemed.) We looked up the definition of the trinity and the Godhead in the book: "All the Doctrines of the Bible" by Herbert Lockyer. We were astounded to learn that some believe God is composed of three entities: God the Father (which we had always believed); but also in God the Son and God the Spirit. Did that mean they thought JESUS was GOD??? It was inconceivable! Incredible!! Some find it hard to believe that this concept was utterly foreign to us. We had never, ever heard of it previously and had no idea anyone believed this anywhere. We were also totally ignorant of how many Christians believe this!

Some North Dakota friends told me their local newspaper carried an advertisement about a book about the fellowship! I was dying to read the book. However, I didn't know the name of it, and I didn't know how to get a copy of it. Many others have had this same experience. Some said it was a dangerous book; others burned copies given to them; still others said reading it only increased their faith. I had no idea what it was about. In 1990, we received a flyer advertising The Impartial Reporter articles which was mailed to many Oklahoma friends by Threshing Floor Ministries of PO Box 9899, Spokane, WA 99209. Through them, I FINALLY located the book: The Secret Sect. NEVER, EVER IN A MILLION YEARS would I have guessed what it actually contained. I had never in my life doubted that the meetings were God's only true way, and the literal continuation of the apostles' ministry. Now I found out the truth: that William Irvine started this fellowship at the turn of THIS century. While it claimed to be 1900 years old, in

truth, it was less than 100 YEARS OLD!!

We had been deliberately tricked! Betrayed! The agony of deceit is crushing and extremely painful. I felt as if a rug had been pulled out from under me. I felt robbed, ripped off, swindled, gyped, and cheated. We were intentionally deceived by those we trusted above all others--and furthermore, the practice continues today! The sole reason many of the friends chose this faith over other churches was because they believed it was the original apostolic church--Jesus' only true way which had continued in a direct line from the apostles through workers up to this very day! We were told and believed it was the only genuine church in existence. And that was a lie.

One thing is certain--NOW I can truly empathize with a child discovering there is no Santa Claus. The workers caution parents NOT to teach their children the false tales about Santa Claus. Then they go and teach the friends false stories about how this fellowship began. The child is hurt and devastated, likewise the friends. Discovering the fellowship is not of apostolic succession, and not even 100 years old, damages their trust in their parent or the worker. Why did they lie? The answer? Regret? Apology? NOT! Insult is added to injury! More times than not, the true story of the origins is denied. Some give insipid, ridiculous reasons so transparent a baby could see through them in an attempt to placate, mollify and soothe the outraged friends. It's a wonder some haven't been tarred and feathered or lynched for the countless lives they've wrecked and ruined! A Canadian lady raised in this fellowship suffered unbelievable misery because of this belief system. She wrote her life story and said that it was a good thing William Irvine was dead, because if he hadn't been, she personally would have gone to Jerusalem and killed him. Many can identify with her feelings.

I could no longer trust anyone, but God and the Scriptures to lead me--no matter how Godly a person might seem. No man is infallible. No man is a mediator between God and me. What if there were other things that were misrepresented or omitted? I began to check out EVERY THING I'd been taught in this fellowship--to see for myself if and where it was supported by the Bible. I discovered unexpected joy in proving these things; in exploring all my inherited, hand-me-down, unexamined beliefs and making them my own full personal beliefs; in knowing the Scriptural basis for all my beliefs. I proved: "If ye KNOW these things, happy are ye if ye do them." John 4:42; 1 John 2:26-27; 1 Tim. 4:7, Matt. 22:29.

Many other questions began crowding into my mind. What difference does it make that the fellowship was founded by a man, and not God? It's still "the closest way" isn't it? A neighbor and I were discussing the reasons we had chosen our respective churches. I was astonished when she stole my line! She said they chose to become a part of the Church of Christ because IT was "the closest way to the church of the New Testament days"! I pointed out they had a church building, while the New Testament Church met in homes. She didn't see WHERE the church gathered had anything to do with following closely! It seems "closest way" means different things to different folks.

On the other hand, reading The Secret Sect did clear up many mysteries for me. FINALLY, things clicked. The discrepancies and things that didn't line up, add up, match up or fit existed because a MAN started this way, not GOD. Things were the way they were because a man started this fellowship. That's why there was no Scripture to support so many practices. They

were just his interpretations, preferences and opinions! I always believed God could create a "perfect way," and that He had the power to keep it perfect. Yet the 2x2 belief system was riddled with imperfections and claimed to be God's only perfect way! When I learned it began with a man--well, it all made perfectly good sense. That's why everything didn't line up---because it is the imperfect creation of a man!

Though the facts in *The Secret Sect*, sounded very well documented, I am the type who has to see things with my own eyes, preferably in writing. I had in mind making a trip to Ireland some day to verify the facts. Then some of the friends shocked me with the information that Garrett Hughes had mentioned the beginnings at some of the North Dakota conventions from the platform! Garrett was one of the Top Eastern USA Overseers! If anyone knew, he did, and he was telling it! No need to go to Ireland now! I also heard about a worker from Ireland, Joshua Gamble, who astonished everyone when he discussed the beginnings in a California convention. Some other ex-workers acknowledged that they became aware of the beginnings while they were in the work. After all this and more confirmation from additional sources, my faith in this fellowship had well-nigh slipped.

Fortunately, I discovered there was a whole network of friendly folks out there just full of encouragement. And finally, I discovered someone who thought like I did: David Stone aka Kathleen Lewis, author of the book *The Church Without a Name*. Reading this book was like reading my own thoughts in print! What a relief! My "radical" viewpoints were held by someone else! I give most of the credit to that author for showing and convincing me that the 2x2's were not "the closest way." For pointing out the 2x2 ministers PLUS church in home, PLUS following their man-made rules does not equal the closest way. The workers have placed themselves between God and man as mediators, when the Bible says there is no mediator between God and man except Christ. Hats off to David Stone aka Kathleen Lewis for driving these points home in a superior manner. I believe I would have eventually figured these things out for myself, but that book saved me many, many years of frustration, and perhaps a nervous breakdown!

We learned Harry Brownlee was to be over Oklahoma. He stated in the first gospel meeting that he was anxious to get to know each family, and would be going down the friends list alphabetically, and spending 2-3 nights or more with each. I planned to ask him several questions. We were no longer keeping our discontent to ourselves, and both our parents were getting concerned about our spiritual state. Unknown to us, both our parents contacted Harry and asked him to talk to us. Periodically, I checked to see what letter of the alphabet Harry was visiting. I found he wasn't sticking to alphabetical order. Some friends he went to quite frequently, while others he had never visited. Finally though, they called and asked to come for our promised visit. Would it be okay if they arrived for lunch? Certainly. I studied and crammed so much Dave said I was "prophesying." The workers asked about Dave and seemed surprised to learn he was at work. Harry said he knew we had some questions, and he knew we had read *The Secret Sect*. However, I didn't ask any questions during lunch because I wanted Dave to be present. After all, we had all evening (I thought). Well, about 3:00 Harry looks at his watch and jumps up exclaiming that they better run or they will be late, etc.

I was shocked: "Where are you going? Aren't you going to spend the night?" Harry apologized profusely for the misunderstanding, but no, they had other plans and they must leave

immediately. I was dumbfounded. Didn't the true Shepherd leave the 99 to bring one back? More cracks became obvious in this "perfect" system. Harry went away to special meetings, to convention rounds, and overseas somewhere before returning to OK. Finally, I decided to write him and ask my questions, so he could come and be prepared to answer them. That letter has made the rounds, and is known as my "Dear Harry letter." I requested a detailed Bible Study, verse by verse, of 1 Cor. 11:1-16. Finally, Harry and his companion arrived for an overnight visit. Harry never mentioned the study I requested, so I brought up the requirements for women. Further details of this visit are written in "Harry's Reply."

I asked Harry how he could reconcile preaching that the meetings were the only right way to Heaven when it was founded by William Irvine around the turn of the century? He went into the story about how his family heard the gospel and wound up with something to the effect: "As to whether or not there were others before William Irvine, I don't know, because I have never looked into it. I am satisfied that this way is the true way of Jesus, and I don't see any sense in wasting time checking into it further." In the next breath, he assured us he was not claiming it was of apostolic succession. Talk about inconsistency!

I said, "Harry, you said in gospel meeting that there are only differences in tradition--not in doctrine. Tell me, is long hair for women doctrine?" He immediately said, "Yes." I replied, "Your former companion, Dale Spencer, stated to me that long hair for women was definitely NOT doctrine." Obviously Harry's claim was false--the workers didn't even agree on what doctrine consisted of! He ignored the inconsistency, and began to relate some amusing incidents about Dale.

I mentioned how the spirit isn't allowed to guide the friends in the 2x2 way. "Quench not the Spirit." I told him, "Believing as I do that others outside are saved, if I went to meeting dressed like I believe a professing woman should be able to do, you would ask me not to take part." He asked me how I thought I should be able to dress. I said, "No different from any other respectable woman in the world around us. I think a professing woman should be able to have short hair, wear jewelry and make-up." Harry said, "Cherie, you're wrong. I'd be very disappointed if you came to meeting like that, but if you had bread, I would NOT take away your part. If there is a gulf made between us, it will not be because I have pushed you away, Cherie, but because you have chosen to do so." I was quite surprised at his reply.

I invited two couples from our Sunday meeting over for dinner who had been friendly to us. I explained in detail why I wasn't coming to meeting anymore. Soon after, some professing Texas friends came to visit us and we went to Harry's gospel meeting that afternoon. I hadn't been to a meeting in three months. I was a captive audience and Harry took advantage of it. He preached straight at me, addressing things he could only have learned from the two couples I invited for dinner for I hadn't even mentioned them to him. After meeting, our Texas friend jokingly said "Don't you need some water to cool those "coals of fire" he heaped on your head?" I wasn't the only one who had noticed. Afterwards, Harry thanked me for coming to the meeting. I resolved that I would NEVER be a captive audience again.

I wrote both our folks letters explaining my decision. It was the first time either of our parents had ever heard any details about the 2x2 founder, William Irvine. My last Sunday meeting was

Memorial Day weekend, 1990. Dave left a few months later. Dave's parents were upset; mine became progressively more understanding.

In 1990, both Galen and our family went to MS for the Christmas Holidays. The folks had decided the convention grounds was just too much for them to take care of. Daddy was retired, and he didn't even have time to go fishing for taking care of the place. They were thinking of putting the place up for sale and moving completely off of it, if we all agreed. We did. They contacted William Lewis. My folks endured endless frustration, bewilderment and confusion due to workers being involved with the sale. Three workers were giving directions, approval, disapproval, orders and they didn't get together on their stories or instructions. It was unbelievable and somewhat traumatic. My folks said if they had it to do all over again, they wouldn't involve the workers at all. They would put their place on the open market. However, a year later, the sale was finally completed to some local friends.

To the surprise of many, my folks moved clear out of state to a suburb of Oklahoma City twenty miles from us. Within the year, my brother, also moved to OKC and bought a home. Not one of us ever dreamed that all the immediate Berry family would be living within thirty minutes of each other! Fancy that--in Oklahoma, of all places! Neither my mother or Galen returned to meetings after they moved to OKC.

Six months after I left, I sent a 6-page letter to my closest friends and relatives letting them know why I was not attending meetings. I received some nice and some nasty replies. Some who were already aware of the history and William Irvine wrote me about their learning experiences. To some, the idea that this fellowship had a founder was simply inconceivable. Others provided their viewpoints, arguments and expressions of regret, kindness, understanding, compassion, scorn, reproof, pity, judgment and warning. To show I was not nearly as gullible as some seemed to think and to show how very thoroughly I had investigated this matter before making my decision, I gathered up and sent them evidence proving William Irvine originated this fellowship around the turn of this century. This evolved into what is known as my 52-page letter (plus 22 attachments), which I sent out a year later.

What do I believe now? I can honestly say my faith in God is stronger than ever. However, I have utterly lost all faith in the workers and in the 2x2 belief system. I still profess to be a child of God. I believe the Bible is God's Word, and it is my guide for conduct and living. I believe Jesus Christ is the Way to heaven, through his sinless life and His sacrifice on the cross. I believe that God is interested in a relationship--not a religion. That salvation is by grace through faith and trust in Jesus Christ. That belief involves our minds, emotions, and a commitment to a personal relationship with Him. That His church is a common fellowship composed of everyone who does that.

Irvine's experiment to "restore" God's true way to earth wasn't an original, unique or novel approach. It was the same ideal embraced by most of the leaders of The Restoration Movement in the early 19th century: to restore the church to its original state; to restore the essential marks of the primitive New Testament church; to return to the faith and practices of the Apostolic Age;

and to return to the simple teaching of the Bible alone for the Christians' guide and rule. They abandoned all man-made creeds, traditions, confessions, teachings and doctrines, and they took no name for their assembly. They called themselves "Christians" only; however, unlike Irvine's movement, they did not believe they were the only Christians.

Choosing a new church home was a family decision. We now regularly attend a Christian Church, a conservative group with many of the same principles as the 2x2 fellowship. The preacher openly refers to their founders, Alexander and Thomas Campbell. The preacher's style of preaching is usually expository. The kids are very content in the youth program, and have made many Christian friends. They both enjoy going on the trips and to church camp with the youth group. In the same service both children, at the ages of 13 and 15, made their choice to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and were baptized within 30 minutes, by immersion. There was no waiting; no conditions; no proving themselves; no promises required that they would or would not do thus and so! Both realize by their choice they entered a permanent relationship (not a religion) which will remain constant, regardless of what church or group of people, if any, they choose to assemble with.

My motives are often questioned so briefly, I'll state them. To do all I can to help others have a closer walk with God. To do unto others what I wish had been done for me. To do everything I possibly can to make the origin and history of this fellowship common knowledge to every person connected with this fellowship, for they have a perfect right to know all about it. I must speak the truth when keeping silent protects a lie and aids deceit. If I don't, then I have joined the conspiracy.

May the Word of God be your guiding rule, and the glory of God your goal. As someone has said, In essentials, may there be unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity.

By Cherie (Berry) Kropp

June, 1993

Notice: □ **This account went through 1993.**

Many events have taken place in the 25 years since that are not included.

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Links to:

[Cherie's Mother's Story \(Dot Berry\)](#)

[Cherie's Brother's Story \(G.R. Berry\)](#)

[Cherie's Cousin's Story \(Judy Montgomery Bates Temple\)](#)

[Click Here](#) to read Cherie Kropp's Exit Letter

[Click Here](#) to read Cherie Kropp's Letter to Harry Brownlee

[Click Here](#) to read Harry's Visit and Reply

KEY:

Aunt Sister Worker is Exie Montgomery

Miss Mable is Mable Linqvist

Miss Evelyn is Evelyn Wilson

Miss Minnie is Minnie Gilbert