

How the “Other Woman” Led Me to Christ by Tracy Crookston

I grew up in a wonderful home---an only child until age ten; raised lovingly by my mother, aunt, and maternal grandparents. I was precocious, spoiled, and curious about the world around me. My mother had me baptized in a Methodist Church when I was four, but we only attended for a couple of months. My mother, aunt, and grandparents provided for my every need and taught me the values of integrity and respect for authority. Because I had very little formal religious training, I was left to my own devices on how to find spiritual truth.

Intrinsically I knew there was a God and that He was All-Powerful. I believed He could do anything. When a beloved pet would die, be it a turtle, lizard, parakeet, chicken, or duck, I would run to my room, drop to my knees, and pray to God that He would keep them safe and let me see them again in Heaven. Only twice did I briefly worry that there was no God; the first time was at age eight when my mother confessed that Santa Claus was a hoax (if grown-ups lied about Santa were they lying about God too?); and the second time at age thirty-nine when leaving the Mormon Church.

God was a little scary to me. My mother had bought me a book of Bible stories with pencil-sketched drawings in it. The drawing of the Flood showed terrified naked people crawling over each other to escape the rising waters. One story told about a sick boy in the hospital who saw Jesus by his bedside before dying. The couple of times I had been to a Catholic Church, I saw the figure of a bruised, broken, and bloody Jesus hanging on a cross. Frankly, as a child with no formal religious background, those pictures and stories frightened me.

My family was typical of most. They enjoyed an occasional beer and now and then let a swear word fly. My mother enjoyed smoking. I was taught that pre-marital sex was okay as long as you loved the person. I had no desire to do those things and consequently, I felt different from others. Those feelings were even more pronounced after my mother re-married when I was nine.

My mother and grandparents carefully and conscientiously sheltered me from the social chaos of the sixties and early seventies. I only became aware of the Vietnam War when I entered junior high school in 1972. Bumper stickers were as abundant as hip-huggers and bell-bottoms. Almost every locker had one plastered on the front reading “Bring Home our P.O.W.’S” or “God Bless the M.I.A.s.” About that time my best friend began asking me to attend the Mormon Church with her. Every Wednesday Liz would invite me to a mysterious meeting called “M.I.A.” (*Mutual Improvement Association*). I asked her what the acronym stood for and she didn’t know. The only thing I knew was that M.I.A. meant Missing In Action. I wasn’t about to go to some strange church meeting and never return home! Eventually though, common sense won out, and when Liz invited me to a square dance at her church, my love for dancing prompted me to accept the invitation. It was incredible! I felt like I was coming home! The people were warm and friendly; the kids my age were accepting and not driven by worldliness. Here were people – LOTS of them – who were just like me! I finally felt like I fit in.

When I got home the night of the dance I excitedly told my mother that I wanted to get baptized. She wisely advised me to wait until I knew more about the church. Disappointed, I answered that all I wanted for my fourteenth birthday was to be baptized a Mormon. Immediately I jumped into full church activity with my whole heart and soul, becoming the darling of the Canoga Park Second Ward. During the following four months I asked just about every adult in the ward who would listen all about the “gospel.” By the time my birthday approached I was just a “dry Mormon.” The bishop informed me I was required to take the formal missionary discussions. The Stake changed their whole baptism schedule so that I could be baptized on my birthday. It meant a lot to me to be “spiritually re-born” on the day I celebrated my physical birth.

While the missionaries, Elder Peterson and Elder Backsendale, taught me the basics of LDS doctrine, I kept plying them with meatier questions; “When is the Second Coming?” “How can I get my ‘Calling and Election made sure?’” “What is the ‘white stone’ we’re given in the next life?” Much to my dismay they insisted on sticking to the official lessons and stated that they really weren’t supposed to be teaching me deeper doctrines; they said I needed milk before meat.

My baptism was held on the sunny Saturday afternoon of my fourteenth birthday. There were about 40 people in attendance to see nine of us getting baptized; four “children of record” and five converts. When the group began to sing the LDS hymn *The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning*, the air became electrified to me. It sounded like angels had joined in the chorus to celebrate the occasion.

As a True Blue Latter-day Saint I began to have longings to join the bulk of church membership in “Zion” along the Wasatch Front. Specifically I longed to live in Provo. It had been nicknamed Happy Valley Utah. “Provo” the name was music to my ears! I remember a young man in my California ward being called to serve a mission in Provo, Utah. The whole congregation burst out laughing when the call was read over the pulpit. It took several minutes for the bishop to get everyone under control. We all “knew” that the only people living in Utah were the Saints! Who was this poor boy going proselyte? Farm animals?

My dreams of Utah, meeting Donny Osmond, and living happily ever after were about to come to fruition. Or so I thought. My family had grown weary of smog, crime, and traffic congestion, so in August of 1975 my grandparents and parents put their houses up for sale and by the end of September I was living in Zion! I began attending Provo High School and set about to make friends. I learned there was a difference between Utah Mormons and "mission field" Mormons. Instead of finding everyone excited about "living the gospel," it seemed to me that many Utah Mormons were complacent about their faith.

My ward was great though. Of course, my perceptions may have been colored by the fact that I attended the same ward as the Osmond family. Every Sunday was a thrill, especially sitting as close to the front as possible hoping to catch the eye of Donny as he sat at the Sacrament table. Once in a while I would be rewarded by his captivating smile. Gathering up all the courage I could muster, I even invited Donny to a "Girl's Choice" dance. To my surprise he smiled and said yes! Unfortunately, he had to break the "date" because of a concert. It also broke my heart. Another chance to go out with him never arose, as Donny was often on tour with his family. The opportunity for him to fall in love with me didn't arise so I decided I'd have to settle for a mere ordinary man. I met the returned missionary (eight years my senior) who would later become my husband (after dating 4 of his 8 brothers) (I couldn't help it_ They were all so *wonderful*_)

Having ambitions to become rich and famous recording artists, Scott and I moved to Las Vegas two years after meeting. I also had the ulterior motive of getting Scott out of the clutches of "the other woman." I was 15 and Scott was 23 when we met. The following four years were emotionally turbulent ones. About the same time Scott began dating me, he also began dating a young woman named Becky, who closer to his age. Neither of us unsuspecting girls knew about the other until we were both head-over-heels in love. As you can imagine, two marriage-hungry females fighting for the same guy made life miserable and painful for four long years while Scott made up his mind which one of us he wanted to spend eternity with. He was afraid of making the wrong choice. He reasoned that if he said yes to one girl, he was theoretically turning down a million others. Scott had grown up being taught that the most important decision a person could make was choosing an eternal companion. Becky and I both left Scott within a week of each other, but I came back (yes, I know---I'm a glutton for punishment). Scott and I were married in our Bishop's home shortly after I turned nineteen

We strove diligently the first year we were married to prepare for getting sealed in the temple. I kept praying that neither one of us would die before we got to the temple, lest we spend an eternity apart from each other. I wanted to be righteous enough to be an eternal family and daily lived so as to be worthy of the blessings of the temple. My husband and in-laws had forewarned me that the endowment session was somewhat unusual and that some people feel uncomfortable the first time through. Scott had taken out his own endowments before his mission and told me as much about the ceremony as he could without violating the sacred oaths of secrecy he had made. I felt prepared and excited to finally be going to the temple.

The much-anticipated time arrived. I took out my endowments in the Salt Lake Temple so that I could go through a "live" session (with actors instead of the movie) and the next day we were sealed for eternity in the Provo Temple. Even though I anticipated some unusual things about the ceremony, I was troubled by the blood oaths (we covenanted to suffer our lives to be taken in gruesome ways if we revealed the signs and tokens) and wondered why we needed to learn special signs and tokens to pass by the angels to get into the Celestial Kingdom. Did that mean that if an outsider found out what these signs and tokens were that he could sneak into heaven? Would an Omniscient God really need these signs and our "new name" in order to recognize us? Why did all the women (and all the men) get the same name on any given day---I thought each person would be given a special and unique name. Why would our eternal destination be altered if we revealed to others what went on inside the temple? The thought certainly carried an element of fear with it. We set those questions aside and forged ahead to rear a righteous family.

Over the following twenty years of our marriage, Scott and I were fully immersed in church service, sometimes holding up to five callings at a time. It was a challenge, but we were glad to serve and felt honored and humbled that the Lord found us worthy to contribute in various capacities. Besides regular temple attendance (traveling two hours each way until a temple was built locally), I served in the children's Primary for over seven years, was involved in the Cub-Scouting program, belonged to the ward choir and a local LDS community choir, sang special numbers for Sacrament Meetings, assisted in the library, led the music in Relief Society, taught in Relief Society for six years and served as Relief Society President my last year in the church. My husband held a variety of callings; playing the organ or piano for meetings, leading the choir, serving as a ward financial clerk and as a counselor in the Elder's Quorum Presidency, as well as teaching in the Primary and the High Priest group.

Our experience as members of the church was very positive and we enjoyed the fellowship we had with other members. I took church membership and the gospel seriously, raising our children to walk uprightly before the Lord as best as I could. I had six children by the time I was a twenty-nine and nine children by age thirty-eight. We had decided when we got married that we would not limit the size of our family for personal or selfish reasons and that as long as my health was good, we would welcome all the "spirit children" of our Heavenly Father and Mother that He wanted to send to our home. At times Scott worked two jobs so that I could be a full-time mother as the church's prophets taught that good Latter-day Saint women should be. I practiced honing my skills as a homemaker by sewing a lot of my older children's clothing, baking bread,

and making crafts. I became diligent in preparing for the End Times by trying to live frugally, learning to can and dry fruits and vegetables, taking first aid classes, and familiarizing myself with prophecies in scripture and by church leaders. My few attempts at canning were somewhat disastrous, but at least I learned how to do it. For example, one time I took two of my young sons with me to shop for a canning pot. As we were driving, Jeff accidentally released pepper spray from my self-defense canister. Fumes quickly filled the car and....that's a story best left for another time. But I will tell you that our painful excursion resulted in our returning home with two finches from the pet store, along with a big pot for canning. No, not for canning finches.

My daily life and thoughts revolved around the church. Although the truth of Mormonism was never supernaturally manifested to me by an overwhelming "burning in the bosom," I believed the church was true. One of my "gifts" seemed to be believing on the testimony of others, which I did wholeheartedly. I figured that was my test in life; to "know" without *really* knowing. As a matter of fact, the closest I ever got to a "burning in the bosom" was when leaning over a hot stove ☺ Some of my friends told me of visions, dreams, voices, and even seeing the spirits of the deceased in the temple. I was disappointed because I didn't get to see dead people's spirits or have extraordinary supernatural manifestations. I often wondered what was wrong with me. Despite the lack of frequent spiritual phenomena in my life, I frequently bore my testimony in "Fast & Testimony Meetings" and in private to my children. I *knew* the church was true because it seemed right and felt right.

After the first few years of marriage, I noticed that Scott rarely got up to bear his testimony in church. He started a night job and began listening to a Christian radio station while he worked. Everyday Walter Martin in his role as the "Bible Answer Man" would come on. Often this program would revolve around the Mormon Church and other religions considered cults by mainstream Christians. From what Scott told me several times a week, Dr. Martin would spew all kinds of vitriolic blasphemy from his mouth about the LDS church, The LORD'S Church. I couldn't stand the guy – this misinformed heathen. "Just wait till he gets to the other side," I would tell Scott, "boy, will he be shocked and embarrassed when he finds out he was wrong all these years! Boy will he be kicking himself when he ends up in the lowest kingdom!"

One day while Scott was on a "pokey-stick" walk (that's "dumpster-diving" for you uninitiated folk), he found the book entitled, ***By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus*** by Charles M. Larsen. Scott began reading it and reported to me what he was discovering. It appeared as though Joseph Smith had mistranslated a pagan funeral document by turning it into what is now one of the Mormon Church's volumes of scripture. I was really shaken up by the information. I remember driving to get groceries one evening and sitting in the car crying over what it meant. Could it be possible that the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price was a fraud? How could the prophet have gotten things so wrong? What if he wasn't really a prophet? That would mean that the church was not true! The concept was too deep to fathom. There must be a logical reason for the seeming error; maybe it was a test of our faith. Maybe Satan was just trying to discredit God's work. I told Scott that I didn't know how to explain Joseph's botching up the Book of Abraham, but deep inside I knew the church was true and we just had to press on in faith.

It began to grate on me that Scott wouldn't get up in church to bear his testimony. He also never really talked about his mission. His 2-year mission for the church was a real eye-opener for him. There were lots of politics and brown-nosing in his particular mission and it disillusioned him greatly. I wanted our sons to go on missions of their own and felt that they needed their father's example and encouragement. How could I help them develop strong testimonies of the church when their own father would not express his own? Scott finally admitted that he didn't have a solid testimony. He *hoped* the church was true, he *wanted* it to be true, he *believed* it was probably true, but he said he would feel like a hypocrite getting up in front of our kids and in church to testify that he *knew* it was true. He confessed that it kind of irritated him that church members always used the word "know" when there is no way they really *could know* based on warm fuzzy feelings.

Despite Scott's weak faith, we were both committed to teaching the children the principles of the "restored gospel." We had daily family prayer and scripture reading from the Book of Mormon, memorized the thirteen Articles of Faith, had regular family gospel discussions, and participated in all the church activities we could. We believed that the building of the New Jerusalem in Jackson County Missouri and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ would be in our lifetimes. We wanted to see that our children were well-taught and worthy to be called to build Zion.

I had always been diligent to follow the counsel of all the LDS prophets to prepare for the events of the Last Days, often sacrificing comfort and extravagance to make sure we had food and clothing storage. As it got closer to the year 2000 (and a possible Y2K computer disaster) I was doing all I could to finish getting a year supply of food and emergency items. I became increasingly interested in prophecies regarding the Last Days, including dreams and visions that many individuals were having. I had read an LDS woman's story about her dreams of a devastating earthquake that would put Utah and Salt Lake Valleys into economic and geographic upheaval. She wrote about her deceased sister appearing to her to warn her of these things. What disturbed me about her story was that she said the leaders of the church would call in everyone's food storage and then turn it over to the United Nations. Of course I didn't believe that part and was amazed that someone could be so deceived. I began to pray quite often that I would not be led astray. Matthew 24 foretells that in the End Times many would be deceived and I did not want to be one of them; I wanted to hold fast to the faith until the Second Coming of Christ.

In November of 1999 I was called to be the Relief Society President. I knew the call was coming six weeks before the Bishop asked. It was the oddest thing. Our Relief Society President had passed away, and as I was sitting at the luncheon after the funeral, I got the distinct impression that I would be the next president. I tried to avoid the bishop from that point on! What in the world could the bishop be thinking (or the Lord for that matter)? I was not Relief Society President material – we were in the lower economic class, had nine children at the time, home schooled, wore the same clothes to church every week, didn't have an immaculate house, nor did I shop at Deseret Industries for second-hand clothing. However, I was diligent about putting family first and lived by the "K.I.S.S. Principle," **Keep It Simple Sister**, which later became our motto as a Relief Society presidency.

Being called to a leadership position was a serious matter not to be taken lightly or unworthily. Even though being a member of the church had been a good experience overall, I somehow always felt like I did not measure up. I often doubted my standing before the Lord. Was I doing enough? Could I be trying harder? Would I really make it to the Celestial Kingdom? What about the times I raised my voice at the kids or didn't feel like going to church (even though I went anyway)? What about drinking caffeine sodas while driving on long trips? Would it count against me? Was I really "valiant in the testimony of Jesus" or would I only go to the Terrestrial Kingdom? Did Heavenly Father really want someone like me as a leader over the sisters in the ward?

Furthermore, I was discouraged and mad at the Lord for slowly killing my son's fish. It was autumn of 1999 and my 11-year-old son, Curran, had worked hard all summer for the neighborhood ice cream man to buy an expensive, but ugly (actually it was butt ugly!) fish – a Jack Dempsey. He had the fish for about two weeks when we decided to go to the park as a family. We were gone for a couple of hours and when we came home Curran declared that the fish was gone! A diligent fish-hunt ensued and the Dempsey was found floundering on the windowsill. The poor fish had taken a swimming leap to capture its goldfish dinner, but with no lid to stop him, kept sailing right out of the tank. Amazingly, it was still alive, though barely.

I knew my son was heart-broken as he came to me asking what he should do. I recommended putting the fish back into the tank to see if it would revive. The Dempsey sunk to the bottom and lay there, its great sides heaving with every "breath." I wanted to tell Curran to pray for the life of his fish, but I was afraid that if Heavenly Father let it die, it would shake my boy's faith in prayer and in the Lord.

Have you ever felt like your prayers were bouncing off the ceiling? So often I had gone to Heavenly Father in prayer, asking for answers to problems. I followed what the D&C said about making a decision, presenting it to God, and then waiting for a burning in the bosom or a "stupor of thought." I'd tried everything to "hear" the answers, but they never seemed to come. Maybe this time it would be different. Maybe this time, for the sake of my little boy, heavenly Father would answer my prayers. Privately I shut the door to my room, kneeled at my bedside and wept before Heavenly Father in behalf of the Dempsey. "Please," I prayed, "please heal the fish miraculously so that my son's faith in thee will be strengthened, but if not, then please make it die quickly so it doesn't have to suffer." I checked on my son and his fish. Curran had propped the Dempsey up against an undulating plastic pirate ship that gave the aquarium a nice, homey feel for its residents. It seemed the fish might actually recuperate.

The next day brought no change in the Dempsey's condition. As a matter of fact, there was no change at all in the ensuing days other than the wretched creature would sometimes flop over and have to be propped back up. Daily I prayed for that fish, anticipating the great miracle Heavenly Father was going to perform. It would be a defining moment in our lives, something Curran would reflect on when he was a General Authority giving a talk in General Conference. I could clearly envision that future prestigious moment;

"Yes, brothers and sisters," he would testify at the grand pulpit, "I knew there was a God in Heaven the day He healed my fish. That was the moment I determined to serve the Lord for the rest of my life. That was the moment I gained a testimony of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints_blah, blah, blah." And I would beam proudly from the front row, nudging the Saint sitting next to me, "That's my boy up there! The Miracle of the Fish happened over 30 years ago and look at what my son has become! Yes, that's my boy!"

Secretly I harbored the thought, "If the fish revives, then I will absolutely KNOW that the church is true." Sadly, the fish lingered in that nether land between life and death for almost two weeks. The heavens were like brass. I became discouraged. What kind of pleasure did God take in the suffering of this fish? Didn't He love us enough? I'd heard of other miracles; one Education Week story about a dehydrated pet frog that miraculously regenerated after being prayed over by a child. Were we so unworthy as to not merit this one favor? Was my child's testimony not as important as the boy's whose frog re-inflated?

Finally the day came that we either had to flush, bury, or barbeque the Dempsey. We buried it. I was still mad at the Lord. It was about this time that I was called to be the Relief Society President. At the time, I was eagerly awaiting a call from the

Oprah Winfrey Show, telling me that I was one of the chosen few who would be getting a "Millennial Make-Over." I'd already sent pictures and the days were crawling by. The phone rang as I was heading out the door for a class. I wouldn't have answered it at all had it not been for my hope of quasi-stardom. It was the bishop.

"Sister Crookston," he greeted, "do you know what the Relief Society Emblem is?" I'd been teaching the lessons for 6 years, but I really hadn't the foggiest notion. "Two stalks of wheat," he answered. He then asked if I knew what the Relief Society flower was. Frankly I didn't know there was a Relief Society flower. He asked if I knew the Relief Society colors. Boy, was I batting a thousand! I was sure he thought I must be a complete dunderhead. I took a wild guess, reasoning within myself that the Cub Scout colors were blue and gold, so maybe there was a connection. I got the answer right. His next question was regarding the motto of the Relief Society. I didn't know it, but supposed it had something to do with charity and said as much. He replied, "Yes. *Charity never faileth.*"

"Really," I said, afraid of where this conversation was heading. "Well, I've learned something new today." The bishop then asked me about my philosophy on home schooling---probably trying to ascertain whether I was a zealot---and what I thought about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. He asked about my family. I was getting antsy to get to my class as it was the last one for the semester and the teacher was bringing Krispy Crème doughnuts. I told the bishop that I hated to cut short this scintillating conversation, but I was going to be late to the college.

Driving to class I sat a little straighter, walked a little taller, and began to feel a little "presidential." If people were going to begin looking to me as a leader, I had better start acting "leaderly." It was hard to look leaderly though, in holey jeans, a toddler-stained tee shirt, and my uncombed hair in a ponytail. The morning had been so hectic I'd forgotten to properly groom myself. How embarrassing.

The following day I checked Oprah's website and saw that they already had the guests lined up for the make-over show. I was really disappointed, but deluded myself into believing it was a sign that I would not be called as the next Relief Society president. If my greatest dream wasn't going to come true I reasoned, then neither would my worst nightmare. Not only wasn't I good enough to be in Oprah, I probably wasn't good enough to be a leader. Even though I didn't *want* to be called to a leadership position the thought was still depressing.

Three days later the bishop called from out-of-state where he was vacationing with his family. He asked if I would serve in the capacity of Relief Society president. Of course I accepted; that's what good church members are supposed to do. A calling from the Bishop is considered a calling from God. The bishop later confessed to me that he had reservations, but that the Lord made it clear to him that if he did not call me to be the next president he would be under condemnation.

I truly felt like a fish out of water! My only hope was that Heavenly Father would not let me flounder like the Dempsey. I chose two counselors who were almost as unorthodox as I was. We all home schooled, we all felt like the Second Coming was near, and we all felt that the sisters needed more focus in their lives on the simple things. Trying to juggle husbands, kids, callings, and everything else, we often joked among ourselves that we must have been the most dysfunctional Relief Society presidency that the ward had ever had!

A few months later, in February of 2000, I again attempted to get on the Oprah Winfrey Show. The theme was changing your frumpy clothing wardrobe into something more stylish. Well, I could do frumpy --- that was right up my alley. I had my daughter video tape me singing "The Frumpy Clothes Blues." I changed the words to the old standard "Ballin' the Jack." It was just hokey enough that two days after sending the tape by overnight mail someone on Oprah's staff called me and asked how I would like to visit Chicago! It was quite an experience. Imagine a poor, jean-clad, "frumpy" mother of nine being transported by limousine to a Five Star hotel and dining at one of Chicago's finest restaurants! Then I had to attempt to be "dainty" while eating instead of shoveling in the food. Even while trying to eat carefully, my bosom still ended up looking like a snack tray. I discreetly brushed away crumbs and chunks and heaven knows what else. The trip was a dream-come-true; Harried Housewife transformed into Glamour Girl (and that's *harried*, folks, not *hairy*).

Well, the Lord works in mysterious ways. The evening that the show aired (February 11), I got a phone call from an unusual and unforgettable person. This person had once been my mortal enemy --- the "other woman" from the love triangle of 20 years before! Although the emotional scars had healed, I still didn't like her very much. Becky had lost track of us over the years; however, on the day that the Oprah Show aired, she came home early, turned on the TV and hit the VCR record button --- something that she usually didn't do. She hardly ever watched television, let alone Oprah. In that exact moment I came out onto the stage. Becky sat down a while later to watch the tape and took a double take. "*Could that really be Tracy?*" she thought (of course I looked the same drop-dead gorgeous after 20 years ☺) The guest wardrobe designer mentioned my first name, number of children, and the city I lived in. Becky looked me up and called.

We had a pleasant conversation, although I was shocked to learn that Becky had left the church. She was a several generation Latter-day Saint from pioneer stock and as True Blue as they came; no R-rated movies or colas, expert in cooking and sewing, a straight arrow if ever there was one. I thought, "The Lord has arranged this so I can bring her back

into the church." Becky explained that she had been reading the Bible and was led out of the church. I made a commitment to read the Bible myself to see what could possibly be in there that would lead her astray.

Over the following months we kept up a correspondence and Becky would always tell me about what the Lord was doing in her life. She kept expressing that she had never felt as close to the Savior as she did then and that the "truth had set her free." It certainly puzzled me as to why Heavenly Father would lead her out of His "true church." Not only that, but apostates were supposed to lose the Spirit completely and become dark, bitter, empty individuals. Instead, quite the opposite had happened; she was calm, peaceful, and had an assurance about her standing with God. I kept looking for a chink in her new armor, evidence that she was being led astray by the devil, but could find none.

As the summer wore on I began to pray to know the truth. Not that I doubted the Church --- I just wanted know how it could be that Becky and others could have a close relationship with the Lord *outside* of the church, especially as "apostates!" Could it be that there was more than one way to the Celestial Kingdom?

On one of our evening walks my husband posed an intriguing question; what if the truth was that the church was not true? After pondering for a moment I responded that I would not want to know. If the church wasn't true, then what *was*? The very foundation of the world as we knew it --- our lifestyle, belief system, and way of thinking --- would crumble. The mere thought of it was too scary to contemplate!

In August I attended the church's Education Week at Brigham Young University. The classes were inspirational, as always. While in Provo I arranged to meet with the woman who had visions concerning the End Times and claimed to have had a visitation from the spirit of her deceased sister. I wanted to see what kind of person she was. If she and Becky and others could be deceived, then it was possible that I was also at risk.

After an intense five-hour discussion I ascertained that she was indeed sincere and did not appear to be a charlatan. How could someone who had been excommunicated get visions and visitations from the dead, another person who left the church on her own have the peace that passes all understanding, and faithful church members all be getting a "spiritual witness" that the course they were on was the "true" course? People of many different faiths have "spiritual experiences," so experiences cannot be the basis for finding truth. That was when I decided that I had to know the truth at all costs. I prayed that Heavenly Father would reveal the truth to me. I told Him that if the church was true I had to know *beyond* any shadow of doubt so that I could continue to press forward in faith in preparation for the Second Coming; and if it was *not* true, then I needed to know that too, so that I could be on the correct side when Jesus came again. When I prayed I wouldn't be deceived I never considered the possibility that I already *had* been deceived---by the LDS church!

Well, God took me at my word---that I really desired truth---and a few weeks later I remembered my sister-in-law had once told me about a paper she had come across that *if it were true*, she said, was the scariest thing she had ever read. She said she was reluctant to send it to me because she did not want to be responsible for "shaking my testimony." She would only tell me was that it was about the temple ceremony. I assured her that I had my free agency (free will) and that I absolved her from all blame. If what was written was true, I needed to know! If it were not true, then the Lord would give me discernment.

A few days before October General Conference, the long-anticipated "paper" arrived. It was about seven or eight pages long, written by a man in Southern Utah who quoted Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer saying that Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet. It also made references to the temple ceremony being copied from Masonic Temple rites. That information was mildly interesting to me, but for the most part I dismissed it as the exaggerated ranting of a very deceived individual. What *did* grab my attention though, were some alleged quotes by Brigham Young concerning blood atonement.

According to the author, Brigham said, "*Suppose you found your brother in bed with your wife, and put a javelin through both of them, you would be justified and they would atone for their sins, and be received into the kingdom of God. I would at once do so in such a case; and under such circumstances, I have no wife whom I love so well that I would not put a javelin through her heart, and I would do it with clean hands_*" Young goes on to say that "*the blood of Christ will never wipe that out [adultery], your own blood must atone for it_*" (**Journal of Discourses, vol. 3, p. 247**). I was absolutely incredulous. This was obviously misquoted or taken out of context.

Right away I began calling people in my ward to see who had the Journal of Discourses in their personal library. I had tried using *Gospel Link* but it did not contain the full text. As soon as the books were located I jumped into my van and headed for a member's home. I had written down some references and began a determined search through several volumes. To my amazement and shock I found that the quotes were genuine and not taken out of context. I looked up other topics as well; the Adam-God doctrine, blacks and the priesthood, monogamy condemned. Contrary to what I'd been told, the Journal of Discourses had First Presidency approval at the time of publication (**Volume 1, first page**) and for a century since. Not only that, but all the sermons in the Journal of Discourses had been printed in the Church newspaper/magazine prior to being published in book form. Up until the mid-1970's, church members were encouraged to own a set for family

study. I found many outrageous doctrines before leaving this ward member's house. Brother B___ asked me before I left if I found what I was looking for. I replied in the affirmative. Indeed, I found a *whole lot more than I was looking for*. He looked at me quizzically and I brought up the Adam-God doctrine, to which he replied that President Young had only speculated on it publicly a few times. After researching further, I learned that Young taught it as a revelation for over twenty-five years, stating that all who did not accept Adam as our god would be condemned!

I came home quite shaken. What President Young taught was not the gospel as I thought I knew it. What about the woman taken in adultery who Jesus forgave and comforted, "Neither do I condemn thee, go thy way and sin no more?" He did not say, "Okay, folks, go ahead and stone her! I cannot atone for her sin and there seems to be a shortage of javelins around here."

Calling my friend Becky, I asked her for the web address that she had recommended months before for explanations; a web address that I blew off because I already "had the truth" (www.hismin.com). Along with the Internet I checked out some books from the library; *Mormon America* by Richard Ostling, *In Sacred Loneliness* by Todd Compton (LDS author and researcher), and *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* by Michael D. Quinn (Former BYU History Professor, now an Independent Scholar). My husband and I read voraciously for weeks checking every reference we could with church records, histories, and official publications to verify for ourselves the many contradictions, inconsistencies, and revisions. All the while I prayed fervently that God would guide me and not let me be led astray; I only wanted to know the truth. I emailed several Ex-Mormon websites asking for answers to my questions. I sent away for pamphlets. I visited with Institute teachers and relatives active in the church whose opinions I respected.

When I read for myself the almost word for word similarities between the temple endowment oaths and the oaths taken in Masonic rites and Satanic rituals, I removed my temple garments. I figured that if I was wrong that the Lord would forgive me because my intentions were pure, but if I was right, *perhaps the garments were actually shielding me from receiving the truth*.

The final straw was when I learned that Joseph Smith had married several women who were already married to men still living. Incredibly, he had also threatened teenage girls with eternal damnation for them *and their families* if they refused to become his plural wives, and exaltation for them and their families if they consented. I decided that if that bit of history could indeed be verified, then I would know that Joseph Smith was not true prophet of God. It was verified through the diaries and writings of Joseph's wives and those close to the Mormon prophet (see *In Sacred Loneliness*, a compilation of historical accounts).

The foundation of Mormonism quickly unraveled from there. I learned that much of the time Joseph Smith did not even have the gold plates in his view while "translating" them. Instead he had a "peep stone" in his hat, which he claimed gave him revelations – not the *Urim and Thummim* allegedly found with the plates, but a stone he had found while digging a well for his neighbor! From what I knew of the occult, I recognized the practices of "channeling" and "automatic writing" and knew they were of a demonic nature. I also learned that there were *many contemporary resources available* to Smith to be able to author the Book of Mormon on his own or with the help of educated and well-versed friends such as Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon. The Book of Mormon has themes and passages strikingly similar to the writings of Ethan Smith and Solomon Spaulding; preachers who a few years before spun many tales of Indians being descendents of Jews who migrated to the Americas by ship.

I began a concentrated study of the Bible in earnest, reading commentaries, listening to study tapes (available free from www.firefighters.org), learning the background of the individual books of the Bible and ancient Hebrew and Greek cultures. There were many Bible verses that had been taken completely out of context by the LDS Church. For example, Ezekiel 37, when read in context, speaks of God bringing together the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel, making them one nation, NOT bringing together the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The Lord was removing the scales from my eyes and peeling back the layers of years worth of indoctrination in false teachings.

This was probably the most difficult period of my life. *There was so much at stake!* Whatever decision I made would affect generations. If I left the church and was wrong, I would be responsible for the spiritual demise of my posterity; yet, if Mormonism was *not* true and I stayed, I would be leading my children to hell. I couldn't take the chance of being wrong in either direction. Whether I stayed in the church or left the church I had to know for sure that it was God's will and that I was not being deceived. *The decision I had to make was not taken lightly.*

Day and night these matters weighed upon my mind. There was scarcely a moment that I was not thinking about it, discussing it, studying, praying, and even dreaming about it at night! I was scared and sobered over the implications of my quest, yet underneath I felt a peaceful assurance that this path – wherever it ended – was God's will. But, oh, how I wanted the church to be true! "Heavenly Father, *please, please let the church be true,*" my breaking heart cried out, *"nevertheless, not my will be done, but Thine. Just lead me to the truth and I will follow it."*

There were so many questions to be answered and finding the answer to one of them seemed to spawn a dozen more questions. I made new friends over the Internet (how I thank God for their patience and long-suffering) whom I emailed *daily* asking questions, *demanding proof*, rehashing subjects already covered. They made me a part of their daily prayers, pleading with the Lord to remove the scales of spiritual blindness from my eyes and give me new sight.

With Thanksgiving around the corner, visiting family would be a good excuse to travel to Salt Lake City for further investigation. Scott and I were up until two or three a.m. discussing the issues with relatives. Although I had tried to hide my doubts from our children, just in case I was wrong, they noticed I was no longer wearing my temple garments and were quite concerned. That final week of searching was an emotionally tumultuous one. We were being told by extended family members that we just needed more faith and to rely on the good feelings we had about the church prior to all of this. One of Scott's brothers went so far as to tell him that his doubts were arising from unworthiness and if he would just repent he would know that the Church was true. Scott replied that his worthiness had no bearing on whether or not Joseph Smith took other men's wives or repeatedly lied to Emma and church members about his plural marriages. Scott asked his sister-in-law what it would take for her to leave the church *if it could be proven* that these things were historically accurate. She admitted that she didn't know. Some people seem to think that if you only believe in something hard enough, it will become true.

I set up an appointment to meet with Dennis and Rauni Higley of *H.I.S. Ministries*, an outreach for Mormons questioning and/or leaving the church. They had been devoted Mormons until Rauni discovered that the church's *doctrines and histories had been revised many times over the last century*. She had full access to church archives through her work of 14 years as a Finnish translator for the LDS Church. Scott and I were at their home for over seven hours bombarding them with questions, looking up the facts in the many church publications that filled their bookshelves. It was truly a "spiritual warfare" that left them exhausted. The thin veneer of Mormonism split open as I saw for myself that The Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints was not "God's Restored Church" as it claimed to be.

I was devastated and jubilant at the same time; relieved that the search for the truth about Mormonism was over, yet saddened by the realization that I had been worshipping a God who did not exist – a glorified man who had worked his way to godhood and whose wife (one of many) birthed my spirit. If the god of Mormonism did not exist, then who was I? Did I have a purpose? Who was this new God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob --- that I knew nothing about? Did He love me? Did anything really matter anymore? If the LDS Church wasn't true, then what was?

I wasn't about to "throw the baby out with the bath water." If the LDS Church had lied about being the One True Church, then it had also lied by implying that no other belief system was correct. I had to go back to square one; I knew there was a God. The absolute miracle and intricacies of life on earth could not have come about by mere happenstance. I also knew that God sent His Son that we might have eternal life; the historical, archaeological, prophetic, and spiritual evidence was overwhelming (see ***New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*** by Josh McDowell, or ***The Case For Christ*** by Lee Strobel). On the hour-long drive back to my brother-in-law's house I gave my heart and life to Jesus Christ of the Bible, crying in gratitude over His love and mercy, and singing praises to His name along with the worship CD I had playing. It was going to be bittersweet journey, but I looked forward to getting to know my Savior.

The following day my nephew set up an interview for us with his Institute Director, who had once worked in the Church Historical Department. We asked him if we could record the conversation so we could later reflect on his words. He told us he would rather not be recorded because of whom he worked for. These were *some* of the major issues troubling us. We brought up several of them in the discussion. The following was just the *tip of the ice berg* that sank the "**LDS TITANIC**":

- Why was it okay for Joseph Smith to "marry" and have sexual relations with other men's wives?
- Why did the church send out a survey to a small percentage of recommend holders before changing the temple endowment in 1990? Did the Lord really need an opinion poll taken before issuing a revelation to the prophet?
- Why are there pentagrams (occult symbols) on the temples? Why disregard God's command in the Bible, which prohibits making any images of sun, moon, and stars? (As an aside, there are pentagrams all over the new Nauvoo temple and woven into its tapestries. The temple, including the occult sunstone with a face, was patterned after Smith's vision of it; Sacred Stone, by Heidi Swinton, Deseret Book, p. 68)
- Why are the emblems/marks of "Satan's power and priesthoods" on the garments (in the "live" session of the previous temple ceremony, one could see the garment marks on "Satan's" apron)?
- Why was there no archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon? If two great civilizations with over two million people came to their end at the Hill Cumorah (which many LDS prophets have taught is in New York), why have no bones, weapons, or other evidence been found? And why has "Lamanite" DNA been linked to the Mongolians and Chinese, not Hebrews? (this website has a new DNA video available that presents scientific facts; www.MormonChallenge.com)
- If Joseph was prophet, seer, and revelator, how could he have gotten the Book of Abraham (published as the "Pearl of Great Price") so wrong? He claimed it was written by Abraham's own hand. Modern scholars and Egyptologists (some hired by the church) have discovered that the papyrus is nothing more than a pagan funerary document on preparing

the dead for the afterlife. And, if the church is headed by real “prophets, seers, and revelators,” why did it have to hire scholars to translate the papyri in the first place?

- If Joseph Smith was a true prophet, why did many of his specific prophecies not come true? The bible teaches that one false prophecy makes a false prophet.
- Why did “prophet” Brigham Young say by way of revelation that black men were never to hold the priesthood until after the Millennium because of their spiritual unworthiness and “prophet” Spencer W. Kimball give them the priesthood in 1978? Did God change His mind (again)? Did Joseph Smith not know this “decree of heaven” when he ordained a black man to the priesthood?
- Why did Joseph partially “translate” the metal plates found in Kinderhook, Illinois proclaiming them to be the ancient writings of a Lamanite, when in actuality the plates were a hoax, made and buried locally by men seeking to expose Joseph Smith as a fraud?
- Why was the church buying forged documents purported to be written by early church leaders from Mark Hoffman in the early 1980’s? This alleged church history proved to be embarrassing to the church. How come Gordon B. Hinckley didn’t know as an “agent for God” that the documents were fraudulent?

The Institute Director conceded that many of those things really happened, but that it did not matter to him. He said he could easily have traded places with us in our questioning. God allowed it all to happen, probably to test our faith. Then, in the same pattern of every other active Mormon we spoke with, he proceeded to attack the Bible. We said, “Whether the Bible is translated correctly or not is not relevant to the issues we brought up.” Our nephew who had come with us left smiling – his testimony strengthened by the blind faith of his mentor. I left more convinced than ever that it was *more important to be loyal to the truth than to be loyal to an organization*. As we were about to leave Utah to travel back home, my ten-year-old nephew was overheard warning my just-turned eight-year-old son, “Your mom will never let you get baptized [as a Mormon]; she’s an *apostate* now!” That barb was only a precursor of things to come.

This intense process of searching for and discovering truth took place over a period of about seven weeks. I could hardly stand to continue attending church; now knowing it was a counterfeit Christian religion, in other words a cult. I was supposed to teach a Relief Society lesson in November and decided to go out with a bang. I could not leave the church until I had an opportunity to teach truth. The lesson I gave was *Beware of False Prophets*. I gave the lesson in such a way that those who had ears to hear would hear and those who did not would not be offended. The bishop already had an idea I no longer “had a testimony” because my counselors had told him I was acting strangely and had made a few comments that made them suspect I was leaving the church.

When a counselor in the bishopric came in and sat in the back, I knew the bishop had figured it out. I decided to soft-pedal the points because I did not want to be excommunicated and lose my credibility with church members. They generally don’t listen to or associate with “apostates.” When I left the church I wanted everyone to know I was a member in good standing and that I *requested* that my name be removed from church records. The lesson went over well with the women (I was sure it didn’t go over so well with the First Counselor; I cracked some of my best jokes and he didn’t even crack a smile!), but I don’t think anyone had “ears to hear.” Perhaps some seeds were planted. The interesting thing about Brother P___ sitting in on the lesson is that the Bishop told him to sit in on the lesson and if he felt “prompted by the spirit,” to ask me to speak in Sacrament meeting the following Sunday. Afterward the counselor approached me and complimented me on my lesson. He then asked if I would speak in church the following week. So much for his spiritual “promptings” and priesthood powers of “discernment.” Of course the Bishop didn’t allow me to speak, but I was amazed that they did not even catch the irony or implications.

That afternoon I told the bishop I needed to be released as Relief Society President because I found out that the church is not true, and is not what it claims to be. By the end of November I turned in my resignation letter to officially terminate my membership in the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Then began my quest for a new church home, one whose teachings were strictly biblical, which I found in December of 2000 after much prayer and visiting a variety of wonderful Christian churches. I learned that *Christ’s true church is not a specific denomination*, but is comprised of the body of believers; those who have been saved by His grace. I was baptized a Christian in February of 2001, taking upon myself the name of Christ. Real baptism is an outward statement of an inner commitment. Over the ensuing months I came to understand the true gospel of Jesus as set forth in His Holy Word. I learned that Satan leads people down many paths that all end in spiritual destruction. *Probably his most insidious trap is to lead sincere people who love goodness to the worshiping of false gods*. He gets close enough to the truth that it is difficult to recognize it as counterfeit Christianity.

December was the last time I attended my ward, because I was singing a special number in Sacrament meeting and being officially released from my calling as Relief Society president. No one asked me why. No one from the ward reached out to me, with the exception of one woman who tried to convince me that the Journal of Discourses and other church publications were too inaccurate to use as references---she ended up saying she didn’t believe the church was true either, but it was good for her kids and husband because it “makes them think right.” Also reaching out were my Visiting Teachers, who after a couple of visits were instructed by the bishop not to have contact with me any more and not to discuss religion with me. The abrupt dismissal of me by fellow Mormons couldn’t have been greater if I had had fallen off the face of the

earth, despite many people telling me on a weekly basis how “wonderful” I was and how much they “loved” me while I was still one of them. Two of my three closest friends of 16 and 18 years quickly faded from my life. One of them was a friend who had been there through thick and thin. We had shed tears together, took care of each other’s children, shared homes, talked for hours each week, traveled together, worked, played, and gone to church together. She invited me out for lunch a couple of times soon after I left the church and carefully avoided the topic of religion. And that was it. The End. But I knew the risk I would be taking when I turned my life over to Jesus. The loss of close friendships both in and out of my family still hurts, but God has been so good to bless me with new friendships based on His love to replace the ones based on condition of religious agreement.

The same week that I gave the bishop my letter of request to have my name removed from the records of the church, I sent letters to my husband’s family informing them of my decision to leave the LDS Church. I wanted them to get the story straight from “the horse’s mouth.” One of Scott’s brothers told him he “could see it coming.” Our only discussions together over the years had been “gospel” discussions and sharing “testimonies,” nothing negative at all. Scott replied, “How could you see it coming? I’ve been married to Tracy for twenty years and I didn’t even see it coming!” Another brother said our marriage wouldn’t last more than two years after we leave the church (he was wrong. Temple marriage is no guarantee that a couple will stay together. As a matter of fact, divorce rates for LDS couples are the same as that of the general population). A brother-in-law told Scott that “some people just can’t live up to the standards of the church. It requires a lot.” That’s like saying, “The law and commandments were just too much for some people and Saul just couldn’t hack it as a Pharisee---that’s why he left Judaism to become Paul, a Christian.”

Besides criticism from extended family, there was criticism “given in love” by my Bishop and other church members; I felt like my intelligence, motives, and parenting were being insulted, as if I would jeopardize my family’s eternal salvation on a whim! Why, they wondered, couldn’t I just go my own way without exposing my family and others to the devil’s dastardly schemes? I was told that my upcoming baptism in my new church was nothing more than “taking a bath.” If only they knew Who they were really mocking! Then there were all the comments made to my still-LDS children; like their poor mother must have been offended, or had some unresolved sin, or never had a testimony, or drank one too many caffeine sodas in her life, and other nonsense.

I guess the axiom is true, what goes around, comes around. When Scott’s oldest sister and her husband left the church years before and separated, we were saying the same things. Like their marriage couldn’t hold together without the church. Or concerning their leaving Mormonism, we “could see it coming. Remember back in 1980 when we saw them at Disneyland on Sunday? Sabbath-breaking should have been a clue.” Never mind the fact that we were at Disneyland on a Sunday; but that was different, you see.

And when people were leaving the church in droves over the Book of Abraham mistranslation or “Blacks getting the priesthood” or over the Hoffman forgeries or the temple ceremony changing---man, we *pitied* those people! Poor misguided fools we thought. Can you imagine leaving The One True Church over such trivial things? These are the Last Days all right. As painful as it is to admit, I was ignorant and arrogant (thinking myself to be humble and nonjudgmental) “reading by the lamp of my own conceit.” I thought, just as I had been told, that when people leave The Church it is because of immorality or because someone offended them or because they just couldn’t hack it, or because Satan had led them astray. It didn’t even cross my mind that people could leave for legitimate reasons. It had never occurred to me that maybe I didn’t *really* know church history and teachings. It never entered my imagination that Truth (with a capital T) had been in the Bible all along and had never been lost. Now it was my turn to be judged as I had judged others.

The first year after I left the LDS Church was very hard on my marriage and children. My newfound faith and the Biblical doctrines it was founded on were often under attack. Many family “discussions” ended in tears from either my older children or me. I decided when I left the church that I would take the four youngest children (ages 8, 5, 2, and newborn) with me to a Christian church, but I would not keep my older children (ages 10, 12, 14, 16) from attending the ward. My 18 year-old son was preparing for a mission and my 19-year old son had been inactive for some time. My 14-year-old daughter seemed to be taking things the hardest. We had always been close; now she was tearfully saying, “Mom, I don’t know you anymore. You’re drinking ice tea. Next thing I know you’ll take up drinking!” I knew she secretly wondered if I would also begin smoking and prostituting on street corners.

Although Scott could not see *how* the church could possibly be true in light of the evidence against it, he still had a hard time accepting it. It hurt too much. He was unwilling to let go of a lifetime of tradition. He was unwilling to let go of the dream of becoming a god and having an eternal family. It was hard for him to accept the Biblical teaching that we would not be married forever (Matthew 22:30). We began a weekly discussion/study with our home teacher, who was an attorney. Scott was hoping that with a lawyer’s analytical mind, Brother E___ would be able to refute the evidence against the church. The bishop asked me “as a friend” if he could hold on to my name removal request, just in case I could yet be persuaded to return. In deference to our friendship I agreed.

The months went by and we were not any closer to being able to dismiss all the historical and doctrinal problems of Mormonism. Scott asked the home teacher if it could be proven that Joseph Smith was proposing to young teenage girls and promising exaltation for them and their families if they married him and threatening them and their families with damnation if they did not; and if Joseph was “marrying” and having sex with other men’s wives, would he admit that it posed a major problem? Brother E___ paused, chin in hand, and nodded mildly, “Well, that *would* seem inappropriate.” Scott shook his head in disbelief and told me later, “If a church leader took Brother E___’s wife as his own and had sex with her, I think Brother E___ would feel strongly that it was more than ‘inappropriate!’”

By April I decided that the “study” was going nowhere fast. There were so many problems with Mormonism that we could conceivably be meeting an hour weekly for years. I wrote another request for my name to be removed and gave it to the Bishop. I didn’t hear anything for over five weeks, long past the 30-day waiting policy prescribed in the church’s *Handbook of Instructions*. One Sunday in early June, the Bishop came over with the home teacher and an envelope in hand. He shook his head sadly and said, “This is not the letter you’ve been waiting for.” My heart sank. Without opening it I knew what it was. I was right; it was a summons to a church disciplinary court for “apostate activities.”

Just what constituted “apostate” activities proved to be interesting indeed. When the Visiting Teachers were over a week before, they shared their testimonies with me, trying to convince me that the church was true. In turn I shared *my testimony of Jesus with them*, along with the reasons the church was *not* true and told them I was in the process of having my “Exit Story” posted on the Internet. One of them told me how the book of Hebrews had really strengthened her testimony of the church and challenged me to read it and let her know what I thought. I read it and wrote to her how it showed that the Mormon doctrine on priesthood is in error because Jesus was the last High Priest, with an untransferable priesthood. In addition to sharing my new knowledge with my Visiting Teachers, I had joined an email support group for Mormons questioning the faith and making a transition into Christianity (www.IRR.org/mit). For several months I had been posting questions, seeking answers, and sharing some of the trials I was going through. *Does honest questioning and the exchange of ideas with other people really make one eligible for excommunication?* According to current Mormon leaders it does; unlike early church leaders who challenged members to compare the gospel of Mormonism to the Bible.

“I’m not going!” I exclaimed. “This is incredibly unfair. If you had removed my name like I asked you to back in November this wouldn’t be happening! You asked me as a friend to hold on to my request and now you’re betraying me!” By this time I was crying. The bishop explained it was a “court of love” and he didn’t want to have things come to this, but he had given it careful thought and prayer and felt this would be for the best. I learned that along with the “spirit” telling him to hold a church court on me, he was instructed by higher church authorities to do so. Bishop L___ had already informed two of my teenage sons he was instructed to hold a church court. That he would disclose something that confidential to my children was incredible to me! I told him that I already knew the verdict would be excommunication. Trying to control my emotions, I told them they could see themselves out; then I ran to my room, threw myself on the bed and wept.

Hurt and upset, I considered my options. I had heard about a lady named Kathy in Salt Lake City who helped people who were having trouble leaving the church. I contacted her and shared with her my predicament. She asked me if I was willing to go to the media or to court over it. I firmly answered, “You bet!” Since I had already stated in writing in November and again in April that “I [was] terminating my membership,” I was legally no longer considered a member of the LDS Church. For the church to bring disciplinary action against me would constitute defamation of character. She instructed me to restate in writing that my church membership had been terminated in November and that I would not hesitate to go to the media or to court if necessary. She then advised me that she would call the church membership department and my stake president first thing in the morning.

The following afternoon I took the letter to the bishop’s house and was about to leave it on his doorstep when he opened the door and invited me in. He was on the phone with the stake president discussing the situation. Before I could hand him the letter, the bishop said, “Sister, I was up most of the night praying about this, and the spirit told me I should not proceed with the court” (as though Kathy’s calling the stake president and threatening a law suit had nothing to do with it. But maybe the “spirit” didn’t know I would press charges when he told the Bishop to hold the church court in the first place). The bishop also said that they would process my request for name removal right away. A couple months later I received the official letter confirming that I was free!

Overcoming that hurdle was the first among many. I met a wonderful Christian woman (Marsha) who came to my home weekly for months to mentor me and help me make the transition to real life. I continued to grow as a Christian; getting involved in Bible study at my new church, listening to study tapes, and reading scripture voraciously at home. The Bible was so alive to me that I could hardly put it down! I loved church for the first time in years; Sunday became my favorite day of the week. As a Mormon, Monday was my favorite day of the week because then it would be six whole days before we had to go to church again. It is hard to describe, but there was a feeling of “heaviness” there and the people seemed devoid of joy. I just assumed it was because of some inner failing on my part, until I became Relief Society president and realized that many other women there felt the same. According to studies, Utah has the highest prescription rate for antidepressants in the nation (see archives for *The Salt Lake Tribune* on the Internet).

Christ taught that the “truth shall make you free,” and I never experienced that until I left Mormonism. Suddenly the world was brighter, life was fuller and more meaningful; there was a lift in my step and a smile on my face. Truly the Lord said, “Take my yoke upon you_ for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Jesus paid it all_ That leaves me free to worship, praise, and thank Him with all my soul_ I wanted so much for my husband and children to have that same joy, that same peace. I felt so bad that I had taught my children to believe without question, to “just have faith,” and to “follow the brethren.” As taught in a general conference speech back in the 1940’s, “When your leaders speak, the thinking has been done.” I had taught them that truth could be determined by a “warm feeling,” when the reality is that *subjective feelings cannot be trusted*. The way to measure truth is by the yardstick of God’s revealed Word, the Word that warns against those who would preach another gospel and another Christ other than what the Bible teaches.

Everyday my heart ached over my children still entangled in Mormonism. How I wanted them to see the truth and come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ! I tried talking to them, challenging them to read things, trying to make them see. The more I tried, the more they resisted. Finally I backed off and “gave them up” to God (now that’s a novel idea!) I prayed like crazy that God would remove the scales of darkness from their spiritual eyes and I put their names on prayer lists at church and on the Internet. Everyday I would think of 2 Peter 3:9, which reads, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise_ but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish_” I knew that He would draw my children to Himself.

From the time my children were babies I had conditioned them to believe the Mormon gospel and subjected them to continual indoctrination by the church; therefore, I was constantly anxious over their salvation. Over time though, through the Lord’s leading, I came to realize that God could have led me out of the LDS Church years prior, but there was a reason He did not. First of all, I’m sure I would not have had as many children and I can’t imagine life without any one of them. Second, the salvation of my children is even more important to the Father than it is to me. God’s timing is perfect; He is never early, never late---but always on time. If I had never been a Mormon, how could I effectively minister to those coming out of Mormonism? Had I never known all the commandments and requirements of the Mormon gospel, I would never have appreciated God’s grace so much. There were things to be learned by everyone in my family.

So I waited on the Lord. He said, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (**John 10:27**). Eighteen months after leaving the church, I had the joyous blessing of seeing two of my teenage sons come to the Lord. A month after that my teenage daughter came to Him; and a month following her salvation, my pre-teen son rejected Mormonism and embraced Jesus. In October of 2002 my oldest son wrote a letter home to his wife saying, “I found the real Jesus Christ; tell my mom she can rejoice!” My husband decided to celebrate his 50th birthday by being baptized, along with 6 of our older children! That wonderful occasion took place in February of 2003. I know that God is faithful and will bring my remaining “hold-out” to Him when the time is right.

As for “The Other Woman?”---My archenemy? She has become one of my dearest friends. “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*” (**Romans 8:28**) God is not only a God of miracles, but He has a sense of humor!

To those of you who are questioning, have courage! There *is* life after Mormonism---the Abundant Life! Just because Mormonism isn’t true, doesn’t mean there is no truth to be found. That would be like finding out your spouse is unfaithful and vowing to never marry again because you assume all men (or women) are jerks. Just because you’ve been deceived in the past, it doesn’t mean you cannot find truth. Don’t “throw the baby out with the bath water!” You *can* have a genuine relationship with God, a relationship that is based on real knowledge. In the eternal scheme of things, it is more important to be committed to the truth than to tradition. Don’t be afraid of the truth, “For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a *sound mind*” (**2 Timothy 1:7**).

Although it is not easy to lose friends, your standing with your LDS peers, and the respect of your loved ones, the pain is but a small moment. It is soon swallowed up in the joy of a personal relationship with the Creator of heaven and earth. I know my standing before God. I know my salvation is secure in Him. “*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.*” (**John 10:28-29**) Nothing in my experience as a Mormon compares to the incredible peace and joy I have now. Jesus lives! He wants a relationship with you, not a religion.

Coming to know God and receiving eternal life is simple, as simple as trusting the Lord completely for salvation and not relying on our own efforts. When the poisonous serpents began afflicting the Children of Israel to death in the wilderness, Moses raised a pole with a brazen serpent in the air. God instructed him that those who would just *look* would not die. Brass is the Levitical symbol for judgment and the serpent represented sin. It was a model (or type) of Jesus Christ, who “became sin” for us and was judged in our place. Many of the Israelites perished because they didn’t believe they could be saved just by looking, believing, and trusting.

If you are not yet resting in Jesus, then look to the cross and live! In prayer lay your faith at the feet of Him who “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” confess your unworthiness---that you are a sinner---and ask Him for salvation. It is *that* simple. For “_if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.’” (Romans 10:9-11)

Resources:

www.hismin.com

www.frontiernet.net/~bcmmin

www.mormonchallenge.com

www.irr.org/mit

www.utlm.org

www.mormonchallenge.com

Books:

Studies of the Book of Mormon by B.H. Roberts

One Nation Under Gods by Richard Abanes

In Sacred Loneliness by Todd Compton

Mormon America by Richard and Joan Ostling

The Case For Christ by Lee Strobel

The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell

The Holy Bible NIV: New International Version or NKJV: New King James

Glossary:

Apostate: Former Mormon who has rejected Mormonism

Bishop: equivalent of a Pastor

Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants (D&C), Pearl of Great Price: In Mormonism, these “Standard Works” are considered authoritative scripture being superior to the Bible.

Celestial Kingdom: highest degree of heaven where worthy Mormons become gods and goddesses. Presided over by God the Father and goddess wives. Great place!!!

General Authorities: apostles and hierarchy over the world-wide church

Institute director: director of adult religious studies off-campus

M.I.A.: old moniker for the youth organization/activities

Mormon Jesus: Spirit brother of Lucifer, earned godhood, cannot atone for all sins. Early church leaders taught that Jesus practiced polygamy, and was conceived by “God” having sexual intercourse with Mary.

New Name: special name given in the temple to patrons as part of the covenants they make.

Outer darkness: hell. Eternal suffering. Reserved for Satan and his angels. Also for “those in this life who gain a perfect knowledge of the [Mormon] gospel cause_link themselves with Lucifer and come out in open rebellion [against it].”

Relief Society President: president of the women’s ministry

Stake President: presides over the stake

Stake: consists of about six to ten wards

Telestial Kingdom: lowest degree of heaven where murderers, liars, thieves, and adulterers will go after they suffer for 1,000 years for their sins. Presided over by the Holy Ghost. Not so bad. Better than earth.

Temple sealing: ordinance performed to unite a couple and their children as a family unit throughout eternity.

Terrestrial Kingdom: middle degree of heaven for lukewarm Mormons, Christians, and honorable people of the earth. Presided over by Jesus Christ. Good place!

Ward: congregation determined by geographical boundaries. About 300-500 members

Year’s supply: suggested amount of food, clothing, and fuel (where possible) to prepare for the “Tribulation” before the Second coming of Christ. It is also for preparation for personal crises such as job loss, etc.

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