

Two

A Voice in the Barn



Jesus answered and said to him,
“Most assuredly, I say to you,
Unless one is born again,
He cannot see the kingdom of God.”
Nicodemus said to Him,
“How can a man be born when he is old?
Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb
And be born?” Jesus answered,
“Most assuredly, I say to you,
Unless one is born of water and the Spirit,
He cannot enter the kingdom of God...
Do not marvel that I said to you,
‘You must be born again.’”—John 3:3-7

Which way you goin’?” A young fellow-hiker approached me as I stood on a freeway on-ramp in Portland, Oregon. The cold Northwest drizzle had left me cold and shivering. Three months of poor eating and exposure to the elements left me thin, and I found it impossible to keep warm anymore. After relishing in my mother’s love during Christmas, I hit the road

again, still planning on going to the commune farm.

“I’m heading to Tennessee to a farm I want to check out,” I answered the friendly longhaired boy. “How bout’ you?”

“I’m headin’ for Colorado. There’s a huge gathering about to take place where the energy is going to be far-out. A lot of people have been waiting a long time for something like this. It’s going to be a chance to get in touch with each other and the Earth and have all this outasight unity. Come along if you like.”

“Yah, that sounds far-out,” I answered. To say the least, it sounded perfect. *This has to be it*, I thought to myself. *This must be where the answer is. Finally, the chance I’ve been looking for. To think, all these people wanting to get in touch with the Earth ... and God? —The very thing I’ve been trying to do.* Standing at that freeway crossroad, looking one way then the other, I glanced at this young fellow, who by now had plopped down to feed his dog some granola.

Then as I stood there, a gentle, unfamiliar voice not my own, spoke to my heart, saying in absolute clearness, “Don’t go to Colorado; the answer isn’t there.” Shaking off this peculiar nudging, I knew this was the moment of reckoning, the moment I had been waiting for, the moment I had been anticipating for so long. My golden opportunity stood smack in front of me, calling, beckoning.

And then without even knowing why, I declined the offer to go. The boy shrugged his shoulders, handed me a bit of granola and waved me a small good-bye. We went our separate ways, he off to a Colorado Rocky Mountain high, I going south, totally unaware that my seemingly undirected life was being governed by some unknown power.

With my stomach growling from hunger, I reached the south-bound ramp and dropped my pack to the ground. I pulled the collar of my coat tight around my neck in a futile attempt to stay warm. Unbeknownst to me, the *very* next ride would change my life forever.

As I stood waiting for a car to stop, another kid, this one only about fifteen years old, came walking up the ramp. “Mind if I join you?” he inquired.

“No, I guess not. Where ya’ heading?” I questioned.

“Los Angeles. That’s where I’m from. I ran away about a month ago, but I’m goin’ back to work things out with my mom.”

“Yah, that’s cool. Guess your mom’s pretty worried about you.”

“Maybe. Who knows?”

“Man is it ever crowded around here,” I mentioned to my new young friend, Lewis. Ahead of us, standing further up on the freeway, we saw a couple other hitchhikers.

“Sure you don’t mind me standing here with you? It could slow ya’ down.”

“Nah, that’s okay.” I said, patting him on the back. He didn’t even have a pack with him. *He must have up and left fast. Poor kid*, I thought. Just then, we saw an old, blue pickup pull over several yards in front of us then coast slowly along the gravel embankment. Thinking they were pulling over for *us*, we ran towards them but stopped when it looked like they hadn’t seen us after all but were stopping for the other hitchhikers. We watched as the two guys climbed in the back of the truck. And then, the driver of the pickup spotted us and waved us on. Lewis picked up my pack, and off we ran. Out of breath upon reaching the truck, we hopped in the back then dropped down on scattered bits of straw as the truck pulled out into fast moving traffic. Temperatures barely reached twenty degrees that morning, and with the wind whipping at our faces, it made for one blustery, winter ride.

Twenty miles out of Portland, the driver pulled into a rest area and offered a seat in the front for one of us. Well, since I was the only girl (though they’d taken me for a guy at first), the guys unanimously decided I should get the cab. I gave my blanket to Lewis then climbed into the warm cab.

As we rambled down the freeway, jaunting along at forty-five miles an hour, the two guys I now sat in between introduced themselves. The driver, Jered, was nineteen years old, the same as me. He had shoulder-length, brown hair and a cute Gerber kind of face. Tom, the other guy, was also nineteen. His long, straight blonde hair hung loosely around big brown eyes and tanned skin. Tom said little, leaving most of the talking to Jered and I, but his down to earth

smile and kind eyes warmed my heart. The two of them lived in a little town called Peoria, where they shared a small trailer. Both fellows worked in a mill for a local farmer for \$1.10 an hour. On the side, Tom raised sheep and a couple dozen chickens with the hopes of having his own farm someday. He was from Kansas—a place where I was sure farmers are as common as the corn.

After we dropped the other two guys off at their destination, Jered invited Lewis and I to stay at their place for a couple days through New Years. We took them up on their offer, and a couple days turned into six. During that week, Tom and I spent hours talking—it felt like we were kindred spirits.

“He’s beautiful,” I wrote of Tom in my journal, “a beautiful, sensitive person. Our ideas are so identical. We talk about farming, specifically about the plans for his farm. We talk about raising families, and although we never mention doing this together, it is as though we are asking one another if it sounds right; and it does, it surely does!”

Before I left, Tom and Jered told me to come back anytime, and I could tell they really meant it. One month later, they were utterly delighted to see me at their doorsteps one chilly afternoon. “How long you staying?” they asked with big smiling faces.

“Well, if I can earn my keep around here, guess I’ll stay awhile.” And that was how we became a family.

During the day while Tom and Jered worked at the mill, I took care of the chickens (and the dogs and cats) plus tended to any baby lambs.

I fell crazy in love with the animals. The guys raised the chickens for food, but I saw no way I was going to be able to eat them. To me, they were pets. However, Jered sternly warned me not to get attached, that they *would* end up on the dinner table before too long. Nevertheless, after some hard-hearted negotiations (I promised to bake chocolate chip cookies every day for a week), they agreed to let me keep one of the male chickens, to whom I gave the royal name of Henry. Henry stayed in a special place of his own, away from the other chickens. This way I could be sure he wouldn’t end up on our dinner plates some Sunday afternoon.

One day, much to Henry's benefit and my sheer relief, he laid a small brown egg, and Henry became Henrietta, assuring her of a longer, more productive life.

As the cold rains of February whisked through our lives, March snuck in, bringing the very first soundless signs of spring. It still felt like winter, almost looked like the dead of winter, and only the keenest eye could spot the nearly invisible hints that new life was about to burst forth. Tiny cherry buds peeking through the branches, the bare tips of the crocuses timidly pushing through the still cold earth and temperatures just a few degrees higher than they had been, spoke of winter's end.

One day, the man who ran the general store told me about an old woman in a nearby town who needed a hand on her dairy farm. Edith Stewart lived two miles outside of Shedd, Oregon, a town about as big as its name suggests and only a few miles from Peoria. I decided to check it out.

As I approached the forty-two acre farm a few days later, I spotted a rustic long-in-need-of-repair barn and a green antiquated house, which looked like something out of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. The house was seventy-three years old, Edith would later tell me, and had been built by her father the year she was born. The farm sat on the edge of the picturesque Calapooia Creek and was lined with patriarchal oak, maple and evergreen trees.

Sitting in Edith's dark, deteriorating living room beneath a multitude of cobwebs and dust that first day we met, I wondered what Dickens Pip would say at a moment like this. As Edith sat in an old stuffed chair in the corner of the living room, she leaned forward



A house much like the one on Edith's farm.

on her cane. Her dark, fierce eyes pierced me as she meticulously, with every detail included, recalled story after story of her father's courageous journey by wagon train from Ohio to Oregon, her husband's sudden death many years ago, and her blind aunt's tremendous ability to manage the farm almost single-handedly. Edith had been married once, and enjoyed only eight years with her husband before he was killed in a freak train accident. The one child they had was stillborn at fourteen pounds. Her blind aunt was the only one left to share in farm responsibilities. But now she too was gone, passing away with all the others, leaving Edith with a lifetime of memories and no one to share them with. Although most of them had happened decades ago, to her it seemed only yesterday.

Whatever I said about myself those first few minutes was really only heard by myself. Edith, more intent on studying me from top to bottom, carefully dissected, thoroughly analyzed everything she beheld: tall, thin, with long, straight, blonde hair and bright, blue eyes accented by blue overalls and rugged work boots. I doubted I was making a really great impression on this straight-laced, pioneer lady. I wanted so much to impress her too, hoping to get this job. I wasn't sure though how to tell her that I lived with two young guys *and* folks around town called us hippies.

However, Edith never asked about those things, and as I later learned, she didn't ask because she already knew. Before I'd even arrived, indeed minutes after we'd hung up from talking the day before, she made phone calls to all the right people, finding out everything anyone knew about Tom, Jered and myself.

"I can't pay you much cash, but you can have any spot in the barn to sleep, and I'll cook you two meals a day. How soon can you start?" I had just been offered room and board for exactly what, I wasn't sure.

With eager anticipation, I took the job. I could finally be on a farm and still be close to my new pals, Tom and Jered. My primary responsibilities included milking six cows twice a day, making sure all thirty cows and steers had hay available to them at all times, mending broken fences, planting a garden and about any-

thing else that came to Edith's fast-thinking mind, either in the barn or in the field. I was going cold turkey into farm life.

The following day I gathered my things at the trailer, then moved over to Edith's barn. Picking a large, cleared out corner near stacks of sweet smelling hay, my new sleeping quarters lay only a few yards from the cows nightly eating area. An old, yellow sofa that looked like it had been stored in the barn for a hundred years became my bed; my bathing spot was now the Calapooia Creek. I felt a little like the pioneers Edith had spoken of.

One day, an old vanwagon pulled into the driveway. As Edith's two Australian shepherds barked madly and ran in circles, out jumped a shaggy-haired, bearded man whistling a bouncy tune while he made his way to the house. A few minutes later he and Edith came sauntering out to the back, Edith talking this chaps ears off as only she could do. "John, you've just got to see these hog heads," Edith boasted of her butcher friend's recent gift to us, which I was reluctantly cutting up for sausage.

"Well praise the Lord," he said with a hearty laugh. "God never ceases to amaze me the way He provides." I peeked around the corner, said hello then glanced down at a book he held in his burly hand. The book was a well-worn black Bible.

This is one happy guy, I thought, never having seen anyone quite so radiant before. And I'd certainly never seen anyone so earthy looking carrying a Bible. When I thought of Bibles, I thought of big expensive churches, sweet perfumed old ladies and organized pompous religion that thought little of the poor, mostly of money and definitely not God. I had decided a long time ago that if there *was* a God, He positively wouldn't be found in some richly adorned church building with people who wore suits, ties and stuffed shirts.

As I took another peek at this jovial man, his very presence blew away my idea of a religious person. His eyes twinkled as he stood talking, overflowing with obvious love and concern for Edith. After Edith returned to the house, John approached me and asked,

"Have you ever read the Bible?"

"I've got one, but I've never read it." I thought he was rather

audacious to be asking such a personal question.

“Well,” he said. “Why don’t you try reading it? The Bible says if we really want to know truth we can ask God to show Himself to us, and He promises to do it.” What made this stranger talk of truth, for I had certainly not inquired, was beyond me. Nevertheless, these things he told me, I had never heard such things before. Yet it made sense that if there *was* a God and if we really wanted to know Him, He would be kind enough to communicate with us somehow. So I thought,

I will ask God to make Himself known to me, and if there’s no answer, then maybe there isn’t a God after all. In the middle of this conversation with John, I promised to at least make an attempt to read the Bible.

Over the course of the following several weeks, in between milking cows and preserving food, I read through the first four chapters of the New Testament in my old Bible. As I read about this Jesus guy, I was very impressed with some of the things He did and said. He spent a lot of time defending the poor, actually coming down hard on the religious leaders of the day. He hated hypocrisy and loved being outside in Nature. It was obvious He esteemed women as highly as men and treated them with equal respect. The man wasn’t afraid to speak his mind regardless of what people thought, nor was he too happy with the way the world system was operating. Moreover, he was a really radical guy with a lot of very strong feelings about matters of life and love.

I was reminded of other radical people I had heard about over the years. At one time, I had heard about a revolutionary group called the Weathermen. This group was known for its frequent bombings of wealthy establishments, denouncing anything that had to do with government and capitalism.

Now here was this man named Jesus who lived a radical life. He didn’t go around bombing places, but he blew apart men’s ideas of righteous living. Jesus denounced the arrogant



yet placed the humble in an honored position, and I could see He cared about man's suffering. The thought of Jesus as an extreme revolutionary never occurred to me before, but then I had never read first hand what the Bible had to say about him. The more I read, the more I came to see him as the most radical guy I'd ever heard about. There was just one problem, kind of a big one—he was dead. I mean the Bible said he rose from the grave, but that was a little hard to believe. Nevertheless, his teachings were cool and right-on, and that alone was enough to hold my interest.

John became a spiritual leader to me as well as to other friends I had made and would often expound on his interpretations of the Bible. I was amazed to hear how uniquely dissimilar his views were from what mainstream religion was. He believed living together for a man and woman was okay if a couple *felt* they were married in God's eyes. He believed marijuana was an herb of the Earth—an actual gift from God. He also spoke strongly against any kind of organized religion, that it was not genuine and at best could only fill churches with pews of hypocrisy. Although I later came to disagree with many of John's teachings, something was drawing me to the Bible like a bee to a honey-filled tree.

Eventually Jered decided to move back to his home state, Montana, and Tom moved over to Edith's with me. At Edith's suggestion, Tom built a small cabin on her property which became home for the two of us. Years later, I discovered the town's people appropriately nicknamed that cabin the *hippie shack*.

As summer came to a close and we prepared for hauling hay, I was still undecided over the matter, "Is there a God?" Nevertheless, I continued reading the Bible, determined to at least finish the New Testament. The week we started the hay hauling began as any other week. A lack of answers and nearly ten years of searching had left me feeling empty and exasperated. No matter how hard I tried, I could not come up with any concrete explanations. One minute I thought there must be a God, the next minute—nothing.

We set out that first morning just as the sun broke over the horizon, spilling reds and oranges into the pale blue sky. Our

friend Rob, who came along to help, suggested we read the Bible on our way to the fields each day and during our lunch breaks. That morning, as Rob began reading, something peculiar happened—every word he read seemed to be alive, jumping out of the page, aiming straight at me. I wasn't sure if the others were feeling this too, but I kept saying, "Wow! That's far-out!"

"Yah, it really is," Rob added. It was like we were all being affected the same way, but I couldn't figure out how that was possible. In all the reading I had been doing, I had not *felt* anything. I had not felt that someone was actually talking to me, yet now, it was like this book was alive and was trying to communicate with me.

Throughout the six hay-hauling days, we gobbled up every word we read. Every time we opened the Bible, the words seemed living, piercing my very soul. It was no longer just an ordinary book but rather one abounding with life. Yes, it seemed to be breathing—the words, the letters, the pages themselves. And yet, who was this? Whose voice was this I could hear? Was this God? I realized something very strange was going on, something I couldn't even give a name to.

One evening out in the hay field, as we prepared to hook up the loaded trailer from the tractor to the pickup, one of the tires on the trailer went completely flat. Exasperated, I let out a slow, weary sigh, as Tom and Rob jacked up the trailer and removed the flat. Then Tom took off to town to repair it. Rob and I clambered up to the top of the load of hay, plopped down then leaned back against a bale, resting our sore backs and soaking in the soon disappearing sun. We read the final words in the second book of Corinthians: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." *What a beautiful way to end a letter*, I thought.

We closed the Bible, looked up towards the setting sun and in astonishment, our mouths dropped open. In the horizon was the most incredible sight. The sun was just about to set behind the coastal hills and was partly covered with large, white, puffy and rose colored clouds. The cloud formation on the left side of the sun was identical to the formation on the other side of the

sun. It was as though someone had painted a picture and using the most brilliant colors available, decided the picture would be absolutely symmetrical. There was not even the least bit of discrepancy from one side to the other. What we were seeing was virtually impossible, that clouds jetting hundreds of feet into the air could have such perfection and be identical to another cloud right opposite to it. I knew what we were seeing was humanly preposterous, unless . . . Rob broke the silence. Slowly he glanced over at me then turned his eyes back towards the sky.

“Do you know what this means?” he whispered, almost afraid to say anything at all. And at that moment, as the words spilled out of his mouth, I knew exactly what it meant. At that very same moment we both knew. There *was* a Creator, a God, a Maker of us all, and He had just taken the time to paint us the most beautiful masterpiece I could ever have imagined! No way was this an accident of Nature, no way an unintentional event. Indeed there was no way it had been created by man. It was God. It was as if a light was turned on after my whole life of being in darkness. The benefactor who was responsible for giving me life in the first place was suddenly there revealing Himself to me while I sat on a pile of hay. The moment carried too much sacredness to talk and so we sat watching, knowing, each knowing what the other was thinking and feeling—words were not necessary. Awestruck, I trembled and believed.

By the time Tom returned, the sun had long since gone behind the hills. The sky, now a dusky gray-blue, left no evidence of what had occurred only minutes before. We fixed the tire and drove back to the farm. As I fumbled, looking for the right words to describe to Tom the event that had taken place, he looked blankly at me, smiled and said, “That’s nice.” This moment was too special to be destroyed with plain, everyday words, so I quietly relished in the absolute certainty that God existed.

When we arrived at the farm, the fellows went straight to the house to report to Edith. I headed for the barn to let in the bellowing cows. It was late, and they were irritable, but as each found her own stall and dug into their molasses covered oats, the

barn quieted down, and I began milking. The only noises were the quiet chewing of the girls along with the swoosh-swooshing sound of the milk machine. I sat on my little wooden stool next to the machine, stroking the side of a big red heifer, my back to the entrance of the room.

My mind wandered back to the day's occurrences and the stunning sunset that proved to me there was a Supreme Being. Yet I felt frustrated, not knowing who He was or how to approach Him, or if I even could. "Okay God," I quietly spoke. "If You *are* there, if You really do exist, then who are You?" As these thoughts poured through my head, I suddenly realized someone else was in the room. It was that kind of feeling of knowing someone is watching but not being able to see him. *Maybe one of the guys is in here*, I thought to myself. Slowly, I turned to face the doorway, sure someone would be standing there. At the very instant that I stared at the empty threshold, shivers went up and down my spine as a voice spoke. It was not an audible one but a voice so clear and defined it could well have been.

"It's me," the voice said. "Jesus." That was it, just those three words, but I knew it was real. And at that moment I knew the Jesus I had been reading about was not dead after all; He *was* alive! What the Bible said was true, and at that moment He stood in the room with me. I heard no other words that night, but a peaceful tranquility filled my heart. I was no longer aware of the sounds in the barn—the machine swooshing, the cows chewing. I only felt warmth throughout; I knew right then my search was over. All the years of looking for God since I was ten years old, not always even realizing it was God I was looking for, had culminated in this one glorious juncture of time. I had come close to believing the Earth itself was the answer, had thought for sure psychedelic drugs would illuminate my eyes, and thought for awhile it was in people themselves that truth could be found. But none of these things satisfied, none of them proved to me they were the way to life. I had been searching for a complicated answer and here it turned out to be the simplest one of all, a God who loved us, died for us and be-

came alive again to live inside us. “Why did it take so long to see,” I wondered aloud. “I am almost twenty and I never saw it before.”

I finished up the milking, put the girls back out to pasture then started running up to the house anxious to share my news with the guys. Halfway up the path I stopped dead in my tracks. *What am I going to tell them? “Hey guys, guess what? I just met God!” They’ll think I’m nuts. How do you tell someone you just met God? Would they even believe me? What, that Jesus Himself came to visit me in the barn while I was milking the cows? I didn’t understand phrases like born again or giving your life to Christ.* All I really knew was God had revealed Himself to me, and His name was Jesus Christ.

I decided not to say anything right then. I would continue to read the Bible and find out all I could about my new friend. Yes, I felt that close to God to call Him my friend.

As the red and golden leaves of autumn fell from the valley’s trees, Tom and I continued attending John’s Bible studies, growing marijuana in the fertile soil by the river at Edith’s (unbeknownst to her) and living together as though married. I fell in love with the Bible, reading page after page, getting to know this Jesus who was becoming my very best friend. Tom always went along with things, but he rarely said much, and at times, I sensed he thought I was rather fanatical to be taking this whole thing so seriously.

Summer ended and with its end came another change—I discovered I was two months pregnant. No sooner than Tom found out about the baby though, did he leave abruptly and return to Kansas for a visit with his family. He called me once a week, talking about coming back to get me soon and moving us to Kansas. I was against the idea completely, but John insisted it was my duty to follow my *husband* no matter what. Many of the teachings on pure, righteous living seemed to be excluded from his Bible studies but not the one of wives submitting to their husbands. It would be years before I was to learn the real meaning of a godly relationship between a husband and a wife and that God never intended for a woman to be without her own opinions and feelings. So without argument, without question, I left with Tom in November and moved to

the Midwest. I said very little about it, but my heart was broken. I had come to love Oregon, the farm and our many new friends.

As we drove across the miles and miles of prairie land, heading for Tom's hometown, I loved the simple beauty of this Midwestern state. But when we arrived in the city and I met Tom's parents I wondered if we had made a mistake. His mom and dad were commanding, powerful folks, and it was obvious to me Tom was afraid of them, especially of his father. But they seemed eager to help us get settled ... and married.

Without further ado, Tom's mother decided we would be married down at city hall just as soon as possible. It all happened so fast. We had no ring; I had no pretty dress to wear, and Tom was so drunk on the day of the ceremony, he grabbed his brother's hand instead of mine when it came time to say the wedding pledge. Ralph, Tom's father, had already seen to it that Tom cut his hair, and his mother tossed out half of my clothes days after I arrived. For the quick, city hall ceremony she dressed me in a polyester, tailored man's shirt, saying anything else made me look too pregnant. Quietly, I tucked away the pretty flowered blouse I had hoped to wear. It seemed as if our lives were no longer our own while staying with them.

Fortunately, Tom found a job with a farmer, and we found a century old farmhouse to rent for \$85 a month. This large, two-story house came with a barn, a chicken coop and a few acres.

We also managed to find a secluded spot for a marijuana patch. By spring, our *special* garden held over two hundred plants, enough to go to jail for, especially in Kansas. Nevertheless, we continued believing pot was a *gift* from God, and it was the conservative law that erred, not us.

Tom bought an old '51 Dodge pickup. I replaced my boots and overalls with new ones, and we bought chickens, a couple sheep and a few hogs. With the exception of not having our Oregon friends with us, we picked up where we left off, enjoying the pleasantries of a simple farm life. While Tom diligently scurried off to work each day, I tended to our big, white farmhouse,



Our rented farm house - It still stands today.

the animals and in the spring, a garden. Daily I read the Bible, and daily I smoked marijuana which I *knew* was giving me better insight. Soon I was full term with child.

Sarah Elizabeth was born in April. I hadn't the vaguest idea of what it was going to be like, but the moment I saw her I knew this was one of God's most magnificent miracles. I had never in my life been so overwhelmed with so much love for another human being. I was sure I loved her more than my very own self and could not get over the fact this baby had been created inside my body. I had entered the world of motherhood, the greatest job I would ever be privileged to carry out. In it would be my highest earthly joy and through it my most intense sorrow.

As a mother I wanted to do everything right—so afraid of doing anything that might hurt her. I really hadn't given sin much thought, at least not sin in my own life. In my foolish estimation, there was only one real sin of mine, and that was smoking cigarettes. I had tried quitting but was never able to manage it. Now with Sarah watching my every move I desperately wanted to be a good example.

Soon though, smoking cigarettes was no longer the only issue nagging at me. I had been tuning in regularly to a radio

program that came on once a week over a local rock station. The show broadcasted clearly over radio waves from a farm community in New York called Love Inn. This large hippie-turned-Christian farm reached out across America declaring a message of God's love. I saw only one problem with these radical people—they had a very strong anti-drug message, insisting marijuana was used not by God but rather by God's enemy, the devil. Bothered by their ideas, I wrote to them, hoping to set them straight. They replied with a two-fold answer: first marijuana was illegal which ought to be proof enough God did not sanction its use and secondly they said, "There are many herbs and plants on the Earth but not all of them are intended for normal consumption, some even being poisonous." Still not convinced, I tucked these concepts within my heart.



Then one afternoon in early fall while the baby slept peacefully in her crib, I sat on the couch, lit up a joint and opened my Bible. "Oh Lord," I prayed, as I turned to the book of Philippians, "please show me the truth about pot. I just don't know what to think anymore." No sooner were the words out of my mouth when I looked out the front window facing the road and much to my horror, saw a county sheriff car pulling into our driveway. Because we lived so far away from the city, a police car was a very rare sight. Jumping to my feet I raced to the back sunroom where nearly one hundred mari-

juana plants hung ominously overhead, drying. Panic embraced me at the realization of knowing there would be no way I could get them all down before the officer made it to the house, and there were still more plants growing outside.

Dear God, I prayed, they will take away my baby girl and put us in jail. Pushing my face firmly against the screen to get another look into the yard, I saw the car backing out and leaving. Not daring to move until the coast was clear, my heart beat fast and uneven as I watched until the car was no longer in sight.

Then one evening, as was our customary practice at the end of a day, Tom lit up a joint then handed it to me. I hesitated at first but then succumbed. After taking a drag, a strange, alarming sensation came over me. For some reason the drug was affecting me much too strongly. Feeling more like I was on a bad LSD trip rather than a high from a drag of homegrown marijuana, I thought about stories I'd heard of people who would have awful and frightening flashbacks. "Oh Lord," I prayed at that very moment. "If You will take this feeling from me, take away this high, I will never touch pot or any drug as long as I live." Instantly, as quick as the feeling had overcome me, I was back to normal with no high at all. The effects, whatever they were, disappeared. I stood up from the couch filled with a sense of awe and gratitude for this miracle.

Five years of pot smoking and psychedelic drug use ended that night. Whereas my whole drug era began with one single joint handed to me by a classmate, it all came to an immediate halt with one. God opened my blinded eyes, removing the deception that had often come close to destroying me. Drugs had clung to me like a leech in festering waters, often giving me a false sense of security and happiness, all the while sucking the very essence of life from me. The Lord healed me completely that day. In the nearly thirty years since then, I've never smoked pot or taken any other illegal drug nor ever suffered a flashback of any kind.

With drugs no longer a part of my life, my thinking processes cleared up right away. I began evaluating myself in a more honest

way, seeing several other things that needed changing. Tom and I had not been getting along too well, and now that drugs were no longer a common factor we grew increasingly distant. We had no idea how to communicate with each other. I would cry and become emotional while Tom would simply close up even more, saying nothing; I desperately wanted him to talk to me, but he just wouldn't do it. I felt lonely and angry, thinking he didn't care enough to try. No doubt, he was feeling miserable too.

One afternoon when winter's cold had clearly made its showing on the Kansas farmlands, we were driving home from visiting some friends. I did not enjoy these visits anymore because it meant sitting for hours watching everyone get high, breathing in the now wrenching odor of marijuana. Often this caused a lot of tension between Tom and I. As we traveled home, driving along a back country road, I began telling Tom how insensitive he was. Saying nothing at all, he kept his eyes straight ahead while driving. In a dire attempt to get his attention, to get him to respond, I suddenly grabbed the keys out of the ignition and threw them out the window into a field covered with a foot of snow. Tom cursed while hopping out of the stopped truck. We spent an hour looking before we found them. I was broken hearted, angry with Tom, and angry with myself. We drove home in silence.

On that cold, November night, as Tom sat in the living room watching television and once more getting high, I sat in anguished solitude in our darkened, unlit bedroom silently weeping. I fell to my knees in humble exasperation crying out to God. Misery, self-pity, self-hate all filled my heart. No matter how hard I tried, being good, doing what was right just couldn't be attained. My *self* was in the way of getting close to God. For the first time in my entire life, I saw a perfectly accurate picture of myself—a sinner, lost and miserable and unable to do what was right by my own strength. I felt like a hopeless case.

As I remained on my knees for what seemed like hours, I prayed to my heavenly Father. "God, there's not much good in me, but if You want me, if You can change me, then I give You my life

to do with as You want.” It was a simple prayer. There was no one to lead me in a *sinner’s repentance prayer*, but there in a big, old farmhouse in the middle of Kansas, all alone in that small dark room, God met me just as I was. Finally, when there were no more tears to shed, a tranquil sleep came. The gospel of Christ’s death for our sins became a reality to me, as it never had before.

Early the next morning, as I lay alone in bed, I awoke feeling brand-new. A strong sense of God’s love for me was in my heart. A small voice inside said, “Throw away your cigarettes.” And without a moment’s hesitation, I threw them away, just like that! I’d been trying to stop for over a year and suddenly was able to do it. I had no doubt in my mind that the strength was not my own.

A week later, Tom told me to go back to Oregon. He knew I hadn’t been happy away from my friends, but the biggest problem had become the fact that I no longer smoked pot, and he did. It had been the dominant component we shared together, and now it was gone.

The following day, as we hugged good-bye at the bus depot, we renewed our love and commitment to each other, agreeing this would only be a visit. Unknown to either of us at the time, the Lord had planned this trip. For during the next three weeks I came to experience a deeper kind of fellowship and communion with the Lord in a little country church that our friend Rob was attending

My heart became so full of joy and contentment, it was then I realized drugs had been a kind of pseudo-spirit, a fraud of the Holy Spirit. That was why so often while high I felt like truth was just barely out of my reach. Drugs imitated the Holy Spirit to a certain degree but then always fell short and would eventually lead right back to the original state—confusion and dark-



Peace and joy at last!

ness. The source of drugs and the high it gave was not from God as I had thought for so long but rather from the prince of this world, Satan himself.

For the first time in my life, I felt complete. I saw myself as a sinner, yet rejoiced in knowing that God had forgiven me. I saw God as the One who could take care of me and help me to become what He wanted me to be. It was like being a little baby who had just been born into a new world. Excitement captured me like a child going into a candy shop and being told, “Stay here as long as you like.”

Before heading back for Kansas, a small group of believers gathered around me and prayed. Having never had a praying hand on me in my life, it was an unforgettable experience. One of the women standing in that circle quoted a scripture, saying she believed it was a word from God for my life. It was from Isaiah 55 and spoke beautifully of going out with joy, being led out with peace and how the mountains and the hills “shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree” (vs.12,13).

I had no idea what all of that was to mean in my life, in my future. I did not know that cigarettes and pot weren’t the only things God wanted to take away. In fact, those would be trivial compared to the deeper work He planned on doing. I would come to find out that before the cypress and myrtle trees could rise within me, and in order for the briars to be destroyed, God would have to be allowed full reign in my life. Surrender along with unbounded trust in Him would be essential. The path would entail great suffering and sorrow, and yet these would be the very tools, the very fire God would use to destroy the thorns and briars. After that and only after that could the mountains and hills break forth into singing and the trees of the field clap their hands.

