



+ FSM =

A PERFECT
PLACE

part 3



My very different life

By YaGe, China

I hope that you can read this not as being from YaGe, but from a Chinese disciple, and that by learning where I came from and how my life was very different from yours, you can understand more about the Chinese.

There was no Buddhism, no Christianity, no religion at all in the small village in the north of China where I was born in the early '70s. People there did believe in something—they believed in power and money. They were totally worldly people.

My father was a teacher in a primary school. My mom worked in the fields all day. At that time our family had three children, and we only got a little money every year; my father was paid the equivalent of US\$1 per month. My family was the poorest in the village. Before the '80s we were always lacking food, yet we still had to give some of our food to a family

that had more laborers and thus did more work. This was the policy of the socialist community: The more work you can do, the more you will get; the less work you can do, the less you get.

Our life was very hard because we were so poor. Our extended family treated my parents very badly. My father knows a lot about Chinese medicine and is an amateur doctor, which is not uncommon in the countryside, but many people didn't appreciate what he tried to do for them, but took advantage of him and his kind heart. So with all this, my parents felt they had no hope for changing their lives. They put their hope in me, their eldest son.

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The only way for me to get delivered from life in the village was to go to college, so I studied very hard. Sometimes for weeks at a time before exams in high school, I would only sleep four to five hours each night to have more time to study. Then when I was 19 years old, I got the chance to go to college.

What made me study so hard was not so much my interest in knowledge, but my desire to leave the village. I gave up almost all the fun that a boy of my age could have had. When I got to college I found that people's lives in the city were so different than in the village. I thought the world was just unfair.

I wasn't happy about college either, and I thought I could do better than that. I passed the exams and was admitted to one of the best universities in China. My parents' hopes were fulfilled, and my own desire was fulfilled too. I didn't need to study hard anymore. I didn't need to think about the people around me anymore, as they would not treat me badly as the people in our village had. So then I didn't have any



more initiative to study! It was at this time that I started to think about the meaning of my life.

Once I asked my teacher, "What are we studying this for? What does this mean to my life?" I thought he was a very wise man, but he couldn't even tell me the answer.

He said, "You came here to study, so just study."

Then I started looking for the reason why I was living. I knew philosophers always talked about those kinds of topics, so I started to read philosophy. It didn't take long for me to give it up. Most of those books were very boring, and the rest were full of pride.

Then in 1996 I turned to religion—Buddhism. I didn't know any Christians, and I had no idea about Christianity either. My university was next to a very famous Buddhist temple. Every week I went there two or three times and listened to a monk preach to the people. I even came to the point of thinking about becoming a monk. I thought it would be good, because you could just concentrate on the spiritual world and not be bothered by the outside world. I always believed that there is a spiritual world that is as real as

this physical world. But I didn't become a monk, because my parents had sacrificed a lot for me. I loved them, and I felt that when they were old they would need me.

At this time something happened. My professor asked our class to write a paper about how to read and understand the Bible. I had heard the name "the Bible" many times, even when I was in primary school, but I had never read one or even seen one, although I knew it was a very important book. He cut up the Bible and gave us each a portion to read, along with a book of guidance. I got the Gospel of John.

But later a rule came out that we couldn't write about the Bible, because it was about religion, so we stopped. It had looked like a joke anyway: Unbelievers who never read the Bible would write about how to read and understand it! But God's way is not man's way. Through this exercise, I got to know a little about the Bible, which made me want to know more.

It was like a miracle how very soon after that,

I found a Bible in a bookstore. I bought it right away. That was the first time I had a whole Bible, and I began to read it by myself.



During my last term in the university, I was working part time as an instructor there, and that is when I met A. She was in my class, studying Chinese along with two other Family girls. One day after class, I asked A. if she knew somebody who wanted a tutor, and she said, "I do!" She taught me English in exchange for learning Chinese. I would go to her apartment every week, where she lived with the two other Family girls.

The first time that she taught me any English, she started preaching to me about the Bible. That was one of the subjects that I really wanted to know about, although I didn't necessarily want to accept what she said. I just wanted to know what was in the Bible, since I didn't understand the little part that I had read. I wanted to know what standard the Bible had for life.

Every time I went there to visit the girls, they were always happy and that was a good sample to me. A. played guitar and sang songs to me, and each time I left their apartment, they would say, "Have a good sleep," or "Have a good weekend," etc. Later they started to give me hugs! These things really touched

me, as in China we never say things like this to people or hug each other.

One day A. gave me a written prayer to accept Jesus. I still have it. I didn't realize that praying that prayer would make such a big difference in my life.

Today, I think what attracted me most to A. and her friends was their happiness and the love that they showed to each other and to other people. I didn't actually go to their place very often, but they were very sweet and would phone me and ask me to come over. That made me feel I was important to them. Most of the time when I went to see them, we read *Treasures*. Sometime we took a walk together, and A. would talk to me about the Lord. Sometimes we watched a movie together.

“I think what attracted me most to A. and her friends was their happiness and the love that they showed to each other and to other people.”

It was at this time that I watched the movies *Brother Sun*, *Sister Moon*, and *Ben Hur*. I had a lot of questions, because my brain was full of so-called knowledge from System education. But I am very thankful for A. and the others; they were so patient with me.

I started to love to be with them, because they could help me grow in the spirit; I could feel that. For example, for a long time I hadn't realized that I had a problem with arguing, until one day J. (another Family member) told me sweetly, “Do you realize that you always say ‘but’?”

All of them preached to me, so I knew they were missionaries. Throughout Chinese history a lot of missionaries have come to China, and I knew that's what they were. I didn't know they were with the Family, but I knew that they had a lot of courage to come to China to preach the Gospel, and I respected them.

I wanted to know how and why they had this kind of courage; I wanted to have it too. I thought that if I had this kind of courage I could go anywhere in the world and not be afraid of what would happen to me. I didn't necessarily want to be a missionary at that time, but I wanted to have their courage.

One day in 1998, they explained the Family to me a little bit, but I didn't fully understand what it meant. And honestly at that point I really didn't want to join any organization, because in China there is a lot of propaganda against anything like that, and I had never heard of a good organization. So even though I loved them, I didn't want to join.

But the more Word I read with them, and the more time I spent with them, the more I wanted to be with them. Then finally I realized it was my dream to be like them.

Actually I didn't know so much about the Family at that time, except the name and that it is a missionary group, but what I learned was about love, faith, prophecy, etc.

In 1998 J. asked me to go to another city of China to open a Home with him, but because I didn't have the faith, I didn't go with him. I needed to support my younger sister, who was in college, and lighten my par-

ents' financial burden too. I felt that if I quit my job, I couldn't even support myself. But thank the Lord, He was so patient with me!

In 1999, J. and A. started to feed me more meaty food, like about Dad and the Law of Love. Yet at the same time, I was getting sucked into the System more and more. There were more and more things that I felt I shouldn't do but I had to do, more and more people I didn't want to be with but I had to be with. Finally, I realized that if I didn't take the first step, my life would never change. So even though I didn't know what would happen to me, after knowing the Family for two and half years, I began to think about quitting my job and joining.

Of course, it wasn't easy. I'm the eldest son in my family, and I have a duty to support my parents. But the prophecy that the brother and sisters in the Family got for me strengthened my faith. Here's a portion of what the Lord told me:

Make sure you are following My voice and then go ahead with no fear and no doubt, but trusting. Trust in Me for every step you take.

Trust in Me for your future. Trust in Me with your whole life. Trust in Me for your family. Just trust in Me. There is a lot ahead and you will come out from it as pure gold, as a beautiful, beautiful diamond.

I gained the faith to live this life by a gradual process, through reading the Word day by day, and through the example that I saw in the lives of these people—that they were kind, loving, and happy.

Introducing the Family!

GBY, YaGe! We love you and are so happy to have you on board with us.

YaGe explains how the concept of our greater Family was introduced to him, and the China Desk added the following note:

To the Family in China: We want to stress that each situation is different and we are not promoting one particular method for telling your friends or potential disciples who we are. Each situation has to be handled very prayerfully.

Of course, in most of the world, it is important to use the Family name and be upfront about being a member of our worldwide work, as the Lord emphasized in the "Conviction vs. Compromise" series.

However, in very sensitive fields, where Family members could be imprisoned or deported if wisdom and the Lord's leading is not used, this note from the China desk would apply. But if you are not in such a sensitive situation, please remember the Lord's counsel encouraging us to use the Family name, as He will bless as we obey His leading and introduce people to our Family. Please see "Denying Association with the Family," ML #3364: 123–154.

Love, WS

During this process, Polly (now my wife) was an important factor as well. Actually, the first time I met her, I fell in love with her. When we met we had a very good talk about life, history, etc., and I felt we had a lot in common. But we just stayed good friends for a long time. Polly moved away, and we lived in two different cities quite far away from each other. She was

very faithful to feed me through the mail, sending me a lot of letters. Her love helped to keep me from going astray from the Lord and to not get involved with worldly girlfriends.

In 1999 we visited each other, and expressed love that went beyond friendship. This only gave me more conviction to join. Maybe it was not only the love that I had towards the Lord that brought me into the Family! But anyway, today I thank the Lord so much that He accepted me. He called me out to serve Him, and He worked it out for me. Praise the Lord!

I want to also thank the other dear brothers and sisters who helped me and fed me the Word. Thank you so much for being the love of the Lord for me. I love you all and always keep you in my prayers.

The best trip

**By Paolo
Alleluia, Rijeka
Home, Croatia**

My life without Jesus was a horrible nightmare! I got saved when I was 19 years old, and it was a true liberation. I had been raised in the Roman Catholic Church, but never knew the Lord personally. When problems and difficulties started arising when I was around 15 or 16, I had nobody to turn to. I had many things this world could offer—cars, money, nice clothes, girls, friends to hang out with, good job opportunities—but still, that feeling of emptiness deep down in my soul was hard to get rid of. It was suffocating me.

My difficulties in opening up and freely communicating with others led me to drink too much, as I thought alcohol would help me through. One night when I came back home drunk, I realized I had just had a “great” evening and should have been the happiest person in the world, but ... I wasn’t! I thought of killing myself, since I had “everything” but was unable to be truly happy. Then I thought about Jesus and how my grandma used to teach me to pray. I decided to give Him an ultimatum.

“Change my life and show me something worth living for, or my life will end very soon!” I said to Him.

“That feeling of emptiness deep down in my soul was hard to get rid of. It was suffocating me.”

In the next few months, lots of incredible things happened. I finished high school and was waiting to go to the military [mandatory in Italy], when I met some friends who had just come back from a humanitarian mission to Mostar (in Bosnia—Hercegovina). I started attending their meetings, hoping to find the spiritual feeding I desperately needed.

The Mostar crowd put me in touch with another group of volunteers who were working on a project in Split (Croatia) in the refugee camps. I went to Split with them to help out on the project for 20 days, and my life started to change. I was surrounded by different kinds of volunteers—some more involved in the political aspect, others more involved in pacifism. But two guys who were talking about Jesus got my attention.

In the beginning, it wasn't even the things they were saying, but mainly their loving attitude and the spirit they were carrying that impressed me. I wanted to know more about them. (These two guys were Stefano and Sandro. A few years before, Stefano had been witnessed to by Paul Fighter—aka James Paradiso—an FM brother who recently went to be with the Lord. He was also in contact with other Family members and had adopted many of the Family ways of witnessing. Stefano wasn't in the Family back then, but he joined later in Rijeka and today is serving the Lord in Turkey. Sandro never joined the Family, but was still mightily used to draw me closer to the Lord.)

We started talking, and they witnessed to me. I received Jesus, started reading the Word, and a new life began opening up before me. The Lord answered my cry! He showed me the way! I now knew what to live for, and that feeling of emptiness was filled with the love of Jesus.

I quickly went back home, forsook all (to the surprise of my parents, my sisters, and my friends), and returned to Split.

Let me explain why my family was so surprised. Before getting saved, I was into things and very materialistic. All that I owned had to be the best; there was no halfway, only top quality. I had a cupboard full of clothes, and I was very possessive of them. When I got home from school, I used to go to my cupboard and check if my sister had touched something! I had a big collection of tapes, LPs, and CDs, and I counted them every day to make sure that none got lost. I was so trapped by the things I owned. I was also very selfish and expected the whole world to rotate around me.

So when I went back to see my parents and my sister, they were shocked at the idea of me being a missionary. I told my sister that I had received Jesus and that in giving His love to others I had found real happiness. I then gave her all my clothes, and she couldn't believe it.

I started destroying the music I had. One day my father found me in the garage while I was busy

scratching and ruining some Madonna LPs. He didn't say anything, but looked at me with an expression as if to say, "You are crazy, son."

I also saw some of my old friends and of course I witnessed to them all. I told them everything I was doing and how Jesus is the best trip. Some of them thought I was gone; another invited me to go out with him that evening and find some new chicks; others listened, and we are now still in touch and I'm ministering to them. The guy who invited me to go out to get some girls recently wrote me to ask if he can come and visit me!

One thing I learned is that I should have been a little wiser in my interactions with others there at the beginning, because in my enthusiasm and desire to tell them all about the Lord, I scared them away most of the time. I was actually blasting them. This is a lesson that many new disciples probably have to learn.

For example, one evening my father seriously asked me, "So tell me now, what do you want to do with your life? What are your plans?" I

"It was through all those refugees that I felt the voice of Jesus calling me to give my life to Him."

grabbed the guitar and sang to him at the top of my lungs: "Now all I want to do is serve Him! Oh, oh, oh, oh!" I thought I did great in answering like that. My dad left the room and went to bed without saying anything else.

Unfortunately, because of this and other similar situations, I still have to pick up the pieces today, and help people understand things that I explained very unwisely in the beginning, Lord help me!

So I went back to Split and I stayed there in a Muslim refugee camp for a while. Then I moved to Mostar where I lived for almost two years, from January 1995 to October 1995, and afterwards from January 1997 to September 1997.

Life was still very difficult in Bosnia at that time. The most intense part of the war was over, but people were still being killed by grenades and bombs. There weren't as many bombs as there used to be, but still five or six every four or five days. For me it was scary enough!



Paolo (left) and Stefano (right) in the center for young people in Mostar (June 1995)

There was no running water in the houses and no electricity. And I was used to having everything! When I first arrived in Mostar, it was New Year's Eve and the town was dark. Some Muslim kids took me for a walk, and because it was so dark, I couldn't even see where I was walking and kept tripping against the edge of the sidewalk.

The situation was shocking and tough, but definitely healthy for me spiritually. After a while I got used to it and began to truly enjoy living

a simple life, without all the luxuries of the Western world.

The destruction that surrounded me made a big impression on me, and my heart broke for those poor people. It was through all those refugees that I felt the voice of Jesus calling me to give my life to Him.

There were no Family teams or Homes around there at that time, so I didn't have a chance to get closer to the Family right away. I had some experiences with other churches that were working in Mostar at that time.

Then in October 1995 I had to go back to Italy to do civil service (instead of the military service). I was sent to an old folks home, where I was asked to help the old people eat, walk, as well as to organize activities and excursions for them, etc. In that institution I shared a room with two other guys—and so I basically spent all my time there. I just had 36 hours free every weekend, when I could go wherever I wanted.

I was witnessing full time and I had a lot of fun, even though being alone with nobody to pray and



With a group of young people after a prayer meeting during my time in civil service (December 1995)



(L to R:) Marco, Paolo, and Stefano in the "White House," their home in Mostar (1995)

with them afterwards and witness to them. At other times I would stay up late at night to pour into the people on the night shift. It was so much fun.

I had dedicated my life to Jesus and I considered this civil service a step in my walk with the Lord, so I gave all I could to it without counting how many minutes it would take me to do this or that, as the other guys were doing.

That aroused the interest of many people, who asked me why I was doing that, and those questions opened the door for me to witness to them. A lot of people liked me; others thought I was crazy, but generally it was a favorable situation for me. (Later the management asked me to stay and work there for them, but it was time to move on.)

The joy of meeting the Family

It was after being in civil service for about a month that I first met Family members, in Milan. What a joy! Their Home became my home, and every weekend I went to their place for rest, Word time, and fellow-

counsel with was hard at times. That helped to strengthen my relationship with the Lord and taught me to lean only on Him.

A lot of people were interested in the Lord, I found, and so I began giving Bible classes to the most receptive ones. I was supposed to work six or seven hours a day, but I was basically there the whole day, helping and witnessing. At times I did extra jobs for the workers in order to be able to stay



Devotions with visitors during summer camps in Rijeka (August 2003)

ship. God bless dear Giorgio and Sabrina (and Samuele, Lily, Spring, and John Little of the Brescia Home) who took care of me so faithfully.

After finishing my civil service I went back to Mostar with Stefano and Marco, another crazy disciple that Stefano had won to the Lord in the meantime. Together we were a tight and united team, and we had a great time and so much fun!

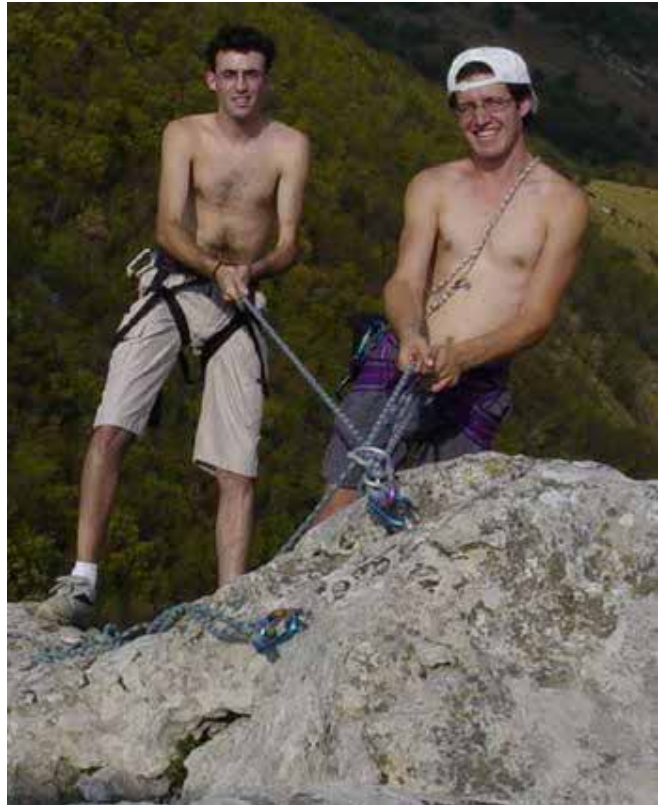
During the summer of 1997 a team from Rijeka came to Bosnia to help us with some concerts and summer camps for young people there. In September our projects were about to finish in Bosnia and I asked to join the Home in Rijeka. Stefano joined about two months after I did, also in the Rijeka Home.

I knew little about Family rules. I found out only upon my arrival at the Home that I was supposed to forsake any romantic relationships for a while. Oops! I thought I had forsaken all already! (The Lord had someone very special for me, though—the person who introduced me to all the meaty doc-

trines of the Family, even the most controversial—the person I later fell in love with. ... But that's another story!)

His protection for His plans

Another thing that comes to my mind when I tell my testimony is how the Lord kept me and miraculously protected me many times during my 19 years in the System, to preserve me for the special calling He had for me. My grandfather told me that when he was a soldier during WW2, he almost got sent to Russia. The Italians suffered great losses there, and none of his friends came back. It was just because of a “little” decision of a “little” person that he stayed in Italy and survived. After that my



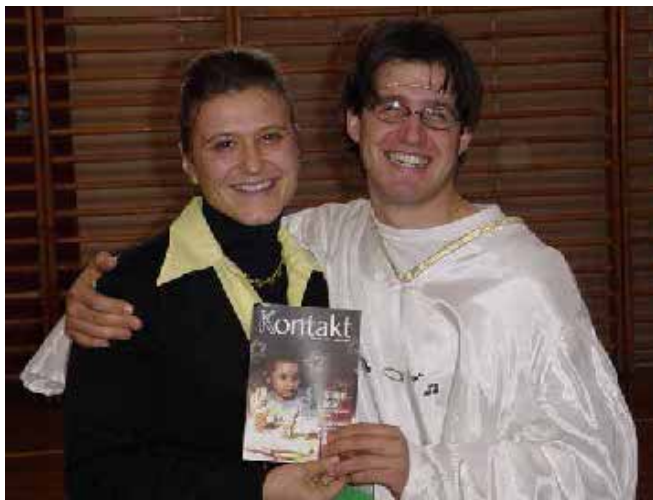
Some fun with the visitors—free climbing near Rijeka (August 2003)

dad was born. The Lord knew I had to come to earth, so He spared my grandpa's life. Since 2001, he is now happy in Heaven.

Before I joined, I had a great passion for the mountains and always dreamed of becoming a mountain guide. Being on the edge of a cliff gave me the adrenaline rush I needed to keep on living.

Once I was climbing a difficult cliff and I was securing my friend who was climbing in front of me. I was looking upward towards him, and then suddenly I turned my head towards my stomach where I had all the ropes and equipment attached. At this moment, a rock fell right on top of my head—it could have easily broken me in two pieces if I hadn't been wearing my helmet and if I hadn't turned my head downwards at that split second!

I also used to go skiing a lot, especially on out-of-the-ordinary routes to explore new paths and to descend the deepest snowy cliffs I could find. That was risky not only because of the crazy places I was



With Irena, an English teacher in a Croatian school near Karlovac, after a Christmas show in December 2003

skiing, but also because if I had fallen and broken some bones, nobody would have been around to help me out.

*

Now I'm still in Rijeka, the Home where I joined, and I couldn't ask for a better place to serve the Lord. I'm surrounded by beautiful, on-fire, dedicated disciples, and I'm honored to be here with them.

After I finished my first six months the Lord started sending young new disciples coming from Italy especially, so I helped in taking care of and shepherding them. As a Home we have a lot of visitors coming from Italy (see our testimony in FSM 408, "Establishing a Fruitful Follow-Up Work," page 9), and when they are here I help in taking them around to meet people here and in feeding them continually.

I do follow-up here, helping with the implementation of the "reach the rich" vision and with building a national church. I also go to Italy for follow-up and provisioning every month or two, and I help with the mail ministry.

What a life! What a Family!

Worth the wait

By Sunny (24),
the Blade Home,
Japan

I moved into the Blade Home on May 15, 2002. It had been three years and four months since I decided to be a full-time disciple of Jesus in this Family! I'm so thankful for those of you who faithfully kept me in your prayers. I'm sure that I couldn't have made it without your prayers and support.

I first met the Family when I was a 19-year-old college student, through the True Colors youth ministry, in April 1999. I found that my house was close to their Home, and that helped me to visit them often.

Actually, I was not so interested in Christianity at that time, but their heavenly, loving spirit got my attention: It was something I had never seen before. Right after I met the Family, my U.S. history teacher, who was a sweet Christian, suddenly passed away from a heart attack. I was shocked and told a Family member, Isamu, about it. He and others read me the story of the butterfly from the *Treasures* ("Death!—Our Graduation!"), and explained to me about Heaven. That day I prayed the salvation prayer with them. Even though I didn't totally understand what I actually did, it opened my heart and made me receptive to their words about God.

I was a busy student, but I tried to make time to join their Bible classes when they offered them. Later I saw that their prayers truly worked, and that increased my faith in the Lord. In fact, I was going to go to the States to study after I graduated, but in answer to everyone's prayers, nine months later (January 2000), I decided to join the Family to serve the Lord. I felt the call and couldn't help but answer it. Even though I couldn't join immediately, as I had expected to, through it all Jesus faithfully trained, led, and showed me His way through the members of the Blade Home.

The reason it took so long for me to join is in the verse Matthew 10:36: "And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." My family couldn't understand what I had found, especially my mother, who was offended by my unexpected decision. So my parents tried to keep me in their so-called

real world. In May 2000, I actually left my home and joined the Blade Home, but five days later my mother came to take me back. After that I had to get a job in the System.

A year and a few months later I quit my job and again asked my parents to let me go, and again my mom didn't permit it. At the same time, she saw my conviction to join, so she told me that I could go to the Blade Home every day from morning till dinner.

Since then (July 2001), I have been waiting for the Lord's time to move in, and served Him every day for almost two years as an Active member. During those years, I learned so much about Jesus, the Family, and myself. It has been a great joy for me to serve my dearest Savior. To



Sunny takes care of Masaki (4) and Nozomi (4)

“I was a typical proud System student, I guess, but everyone’s faithfulness and prayers and love in Christ changed my life!”

leave my beloved family was the hardest test, even though I had the faith that it would be worth it and that if I followed the Lord He would take care of my household. I know now that all the tests, big and small, during those years, were a blessing in that they helped me to grow spiritually.

Jesus is everything for me, and I'm so thankful that He has chosen me so that I can work together with you all! I've been doing a little bit of everything in this Home—teaching and childcare, youth ministries (so that we can activate more of the youth of this coun-

try!), as well as cooking, and of course, witnessing! As a babe in the Family I'm learning, studying, and reading a lot.

I must say I was a rather hard one to win, even though I was interested in the Family and the Word. I was a typical proud System student, I guess, but everyone's faithfulness and prayers and love in Christ changed my life! So I sincerely ask you to find these people who are waiting for you but don't know that they are, like me!



Sunny with two of her Japanese and geography class students in the Blade Home. Left is Yoko (16) and right is Eiko (12).

Down the memory lane of a mis-educated individual

By Michael
Witness (aka
Zambian Mike),
South Africa

A lone soldier

(Written two and a half years after Mike joined:) Hi! I am 27 years old, single, and only visiting this planet. It can only be the Lord who led me to the Family. Before then I was a lone soldier, waging a war far from the battlefield and from the main body of the army, engaging in minor skirmishes of my own.

I walked alone. I never had any noteworthy pals; I just knew lots of people and lots of people knew me. I never consulted with anyone about anything (except in exceptionally rare circumstances); I just did things my way. I ran my life by my own conceptions of what was good and right. If it's good for me, it's good for me. If it's the right way for me, it's the right way for me!

And whatever you think, that's your opinion!

The Lord and me? Well, looking back over my recent past, I know that deep down in my innermost being, by the Lord's mercy, I managed to maintain contact with Him, however frail it was most of the time. Yes, I knew the Lord back then, except I didn't know Him as I now do. I experience Him now to a greater extent, and in a more real way.

Back then, God was just this "force." I had an awareness of His intan-

"What I was really trying to do all along was get back to God, only I was trying to figure out the way and make it by myself."

gible presence that I couldn't shake off, but I wouldn't allow Him to play any part in my affairs. I ran the whole show, for I was seeking achievements of my own, something I could show the world that I had done, something I could have the credit for.

I guess what I was really trying to do all along was get back to God, only I was trying to figure out the way and make it by myself. I had my own program, my own agenda, and it was very, very, important. However, mine was unlike other pursuits that you hear of in these parts.

Truth at any cost

It all began in 1996 when I was accepted as a student at UNZA (University of Zambia), an opportunity that I hoped would enable me to resolve the fundamental problems of life, the nature of the universe, and everything. Mine was a quest for truth and my motto was expressed as follows: "To get to a knowledge of the truth, the secret is to want the truth really bad, no matter what the cost."

But what truth? To put it bluntly, I loathed the world and everything in it. In general life sucked, I thought. I hated it and was a pessimist. I despised modern civilization in its entirety. Mine was a concerted effort to develop a philosophical exposition that would describe the ideal and ultimate way of life and state of existence, and then show how it would be possible and could be attained, in as logical and rational a manner as possible. I would thereby expose the



current status quo for the farce that it is.

I was so proud of being a student at UNZA studying political science and philosophy. This was my mission. I wasn't at university to be a highly educated and successful degree holder, with the prestige and material benefits that come with it. No, I was there to collect knowledge. I was doing research of my own, and I often deviated from the course material that my lecturers were giving me. Like Descartes, I was searching for a certain foundation of knowledge that could not be doubted.

A Rasta rebel

By the middle of my second year, mentally I lived in a totally different realm than most everyone else—a world of abstractions, theories, conceptions, ideas, notions, and concoctions of notions. I soon began feeling, however, as though my efforts were being frustrated and my thoughts manipulated by some unknown force. I was short on time and resources. I became paranoid, and I longed for a hideout where I could work in total isolation from the rest of the world.

I began to deviate from the norm in almost all spheres. I became an eccentric and an oddity, but I couldn't have cared less. I had a mission to accomplish. Hoping to find anything meaningful I could grasp on to, I began a personal study of the religions of the Orient. I delved into Buddhism, Hinduism, Krishna Consciousness, the science of reincarnation, Chinese philosophy on the Tao, etc. Something mysterious seemed to be throwing whatever literature and material I needed across my path. I pretended not to notice, dismissing it all as coincidence, happenstance.

I hung out with a Rastafarian group, a rebel society with their own position. I joined a group that called itself "BLACKDIFFICULTMADNESS"—and yes, we were black, difficult, and mad. We dressed in black, did everything in black, and even my mind was black. I would spend most of the semester high on booze and weed, and the nights smoking endless cigarettes.

I was a rebel without a pause, in search of a cause. I soon began feeling like a traitor, though, to what I felt I stood for. I claimed to be Rastafarian, and indeed I was, for I had been initiated into their doctrine and ideology, and from my secondary school days had been hooked on their message in the heavy reggae music of Bob Marley and the Wailers. (For those of you who might not know of the Wailers, they were a roots reggae group from Jamaica in the '60s and '70s.)

As a Rastafarian I should have been living *outside* the System, on the fringes of society. Yet I was still very much living *in* it and *like* it, totally failing to get out and live the level that I knew of and still insisted could be reached.

I was desperate to drop out, but somehow there was a hold on me so strong that it hindered me from hastening my escape. I didn't know what to do next. I felt trapped and like I could go insane. I was on the brink and barely managing to contain myself. I needed to get away—fast, totally, utterly, radically, like breaking away from a world of time into a world of timelessness. I just needed to make everything stop.

Awesome words

Toward the end of that year, on one particularly miserable day, a friend of mine came to me with a tract. He was visibly excited, saying he had met these two girls (Kathy and Anna) on campus. He described them as down-to-earth, and was impressed by what they believed, as they said you didn't have to go to church to have a relationship with God, as you could worship Him wherever you were.

Interesting, I thought, as I began to read the tract. It talked about Jesus' love for us and how He knows our spirits intimately. (It was "To You, with Love!") What struck me the most was how the Lord *knew* me personally and how (I inferred) if He

knew *me*, then it was possible also for me to get to know *Him*, this character of the Bible, who made such high claims about Himself.

There was an address on the back of the tract, so I wrote and poured out my heart to them, explaining my sickened state of mind. They wrote back and invited me to visit them, which I did. And I have never looked back since then, except occasionally just to reflect.

On the first visit, I met Kathy, who had helped write the reply to my letter. She was very sweet and understanding. Then came this fiery-looking fellow named Jace, and he just blasted away at me with "Mountain Men" and how the System has its hold on the lives of many. Tell me about it! It was just awesome listening to the words this guy was speaking.

Jace played some songs for me on his guitar, among them "The Room," which became one of my favorites. He led me in a prayer to receive Jesus, and I accepted the Lord into my life. Walking semi-dazed back to campus afterwards, I could hardly believe that I had at last stumbled upon the way out. I was overwhelmed with joy and a sense of relief.

A dropout

Back on campus I simply abandoned all my work. I was in my third year, first semester. We were three weeks away from semester exams and I had assignments and tests pending. Yet I had already made up my mind: I was leaving school and that was that.

When people I knew started to hear of my intentions and that I was not attending classes, they were shocked. "You can't leave just like that!" they'd say. To them I obviously wasn't thinking straight and everybody kept trying to talk me out of it and get me to come back to my "senses." "Don't do something you're going to regret!" they'd say. "There's still a chance you can make it! Go and talk to someone at the counseling center. Tell them you've been skipping classes because you've been under a lot of stress lately, and they'll let you take the exams anyway!"

"Walking semi-dazed back to campus afterwards, I could hardly believe that I had at last stumbled upon the way out. I was overwhelmed with joy and a sense of relief."

I wasn't fainting with exam terror; in fact, the exams were the least of my worries. In my mind I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had found what I was looking for—the answer to everything—and nothing else mattered.

I had heard about Jesus many times before, but it had taken me up to this point to realize that He was the absolute truth of the universe that I had been searching for all this time. I didn't just grasp this truth intellectually—I *knew* it.

At last it dawned on some people that I had my mind made up. One of my friends asked me what I was going to do next and how I was going to live. "I don't know," I replied. "I'll just survive."

Before this point I was at my wits' end. I was simply fed up with the head stuffing and the mindless tedium of it all. So I moved out and in with a fellow student living off campus in the nearby Ng'ombe compound.

Meanwhile I continued going over to the Family Home, where I read more amazing stuff like, "Who Are the Rebels?" "There Are No Neutrals," "Not a Sermon but a Sample," and "The Revolutionary Rules." These doctrines just blew me away and I was more than eager to join as a disciple. The Home also received a prophecy for me that spoke directly to me. It was so far out I was flipped. That was it. There was no doubt about it—the time had



Mike witnessing in Zambia

come. I was leaving behind all my life up to this point.

I hadn't yet told my folks at home that I had dropped out of school, as I thought my mom would freak out. When I finally got around to bringing myself to spill it out, however, she took it quite calmly. Apparently she had been praying for me to come back to myself and quit masquerading with this Rastafarian hocus-pocus. She was happy with my decision, and encouraged me to join these missionaries.

No longer a renegade fighter

Since March 2nd, 2001, I have been living my life in service to the Lord. In my first Home I went out witnessing, taught Bible classes, went on CTP in the Ng'ombe compound (where we were building a mission school for disadvantaged kids), and helped around the Home. I love this life and wouldn't trade it for anything! I believe it's the ultimate and I am ready to face the future and whatever it has in store for me.

I have been renewed in mind, body, and spirit

“I love this life and wouldn't trade it for anything! I believe it's the ultimate.”

and have overcome my old habits and my addiction to nicotine. (The Lord delivered me instantly. From the first day I moved in I have never craved a cigarette.) I believe I am now a better person, transformed from the introverted individual that I was. “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Psa.27:13). PTL!

When I came to know the Family and everything they stood for, I knew this was it. I was ready to leave behind my quest and my past. It was time to rejoin the rest of the army; my days as a renegade fighter were over. After all, it is not by the seeking of knowledge that you enter into this Kingdom—it is by faith.

New horizons and greater lessons

Some time has advanced since I wrote the above. Now after two years and six months in the Family, the Lord is still working in my life and teaching me new and greater things—the importance of utter dependence on Him, greater love, humility, and yield- edness. He is constantly opening up avenues for witnessing and service. It's been a tough, rough, and rugged road that, however, has not been without its share of joy and blessings.

At the time the Home and work in Zambia closed down, it was a bit of a trial to trust the Lord as to where I would end up and what would become of me. The Lord had given no clear indication of where I could go, and meanwhile everyone else was vacating the field! I had received an offer to go and join a young people/SGA Home that was opening up in Johannesburg, South Africa. The only problem was I couldn't make a move as I was missing some vital information for my visa application.

The Namibian team (Philip, Meekness, and family, originally from Poland) were at the time passing

through, and were also applying for visas to South Africa. Finally my long-awaited info arrived, and Philip and I made a trip to the SA Embassy, where we were told both our visas would be ready on the same day. Lo and behold, the Lord presented me with a one-year visa and I didn't have to pay anything for it. A sweet break, as I didn't have any money. Ha! It was an absolute, total miracle, one we had been praying hard for, calling on the keys.

To top it all off, the following day I got a ride with the Namibian team, and off I was on my way to South Africa! The Lord's timing and setups are amazing!

The trip was exciting and we had lots of fun. The Lord supplied accommodations and meals at an exotic hotel at Victoria Falls on the Zambian side and at a nice lodge across the border in Botswana. On our way through the Chobe Game Reserve, we asked the Lord to bring out some elephants, calling on the keys. Nothing happened till dusk, when a whole herd of the mammoth creatures started

emerging from the bush by the side of the road, an awesome sight as they made their way across silently. We were stuck for a good 10 to 15 minutes, safely tucked away in Philip's VW Combi and in the Lord's protection.

On January 31, 2002, I arrived in downtown Johannesburg, on the second floor of an old warehouse/factory building, the "Loft Home." It was here that I was to continue my walk with the Lord, experiencing many things and growing in many different areas.

Our work there revolved around witnessing, mainly to the students at nearby universities where we gave Bible classes, held regular seminars, etc. During May and June we witnessed in Lusaka, Zambia at a Christian leadership-training seminar. Back in Johannesburg, Carole and I were invited to man the booth at the World Summit, where witnessing was a blast! The Lord opened another door for witnessing at Woodstock '04 in Heidelberg, outside of Johannesburg, where we got out a good witness and lots of people got saved. For a time, the Lord led me to take part in the prison ministry of Steven (of Mary), giving the Word to inmates of a nearby correctional facility.

The special highlight for me this year was getting to know Mama and Peter through the videos. It was a treasured privilege. I love you, Mama and Peter!

A nosedive—ouch!

The close of 2002 saw our team heading into the Congo (former Zaire) on an Activated seminars/witnessing trip to the cities of Lubumbashi and Kinshasa.

As we were winding up our witness in Lubumbashi, I was experiencing heavy discouragement.

"It's been a tough, rough, and rugged road that, however, has not been without its share of joy and blessings."

ment and disillusionment. My vision had become blurred, and I was in confusion and darkness about many things. I felt I couldn't go on as CM. I still loved the Lord—oh, how I love Him so! I wasn't leaving Him; I was just going to go it on my own—as FM. So I left the team, got a ride with Aaron Actor up to Kapiri Mposhi, and made the rest of my way down to Lusaka, where I stayed at my parents' house for a week. Aaron tried to convince me to come with him to Tanzania, but I had my blinders on and my pride wouldn't allow it.

After my stay in Lusaka, I got on a bus to Johannesburg. I was going to pick up the rest of my things, head off into uncharted territory, and spearhead my own missionary endeavor.

At the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa, I fell miserably sick. If you've ever had malaria, you have some idea of what came upon me, but this was unlike any malaria I had ever had before. I have no words to describe what I was going through. I was very, very ill, and on top of the malaria had

a severe, head-splitting, nerve-wracking, multiple migraine attack that lasted a week. I do not exaggerate. I think the Lord lifted His hand of protection and allowed the Enemy to zap me and let me have it. I don't know how I managed to survive through the border and all the way to Johannesburg.

At the station in Jo'burg, I was suddenly hit with the realization of how alone I was. I felt vulnerable, exposed, and very, very helpless. It was all I could do to make a call to the Home of Steven and Mary and ask them to pick me up. Even making the call was a battle.

The Home was delayed in coming to get me, and due to my discomfort, I had to force myself to start moving. I started off to the home of Marie, an FM sister. I had to make my way through the streets of downtown Jo'burg to get to the station where I could get a taxi that would take me to where she stayed. To make a long story short, Steven and Katya (of Steven and Mary's Home) finally made it to Marie's, and there they found a distraught, shaken, and crushed Mike.

Five days into my illness, the Lord showed me that I had left His highest and best for me, and that the situation I had left was exactly where He had wanted me to remain. I had blown it big time, to say the least, but the Lord is merciful and presented to me a choice: Either I could go ahead the way I had wanted to, or I could come back and begin the fight to find His highest once again.

I believe this experience changed me in a significant way, and here I am. I feel I lost something though, as I went from being in the center of the Lord's will and knowing it, to feeling like a fish out of water for some time.

Since I had decided to go on for the Lord as CM, I was re-started on babes' status, here in Steven and Mary's Home where I am at present. I continued to go with Steven to witness at the prison and to help with childcare in the Home. Attending the NAFM was a real inspiration, meeting and getting to know more Family members.

As you can see, my time in the Family has not been without its share of ups and downs, and the

“In the Family, I have found the greatest opportunity of service to mankind.”

Lord has been—and still is—working in my life to show me my pride and self-righteousness, and trusting in my own arm of the flesh (a hangover from years of brain damage in System education). Praise God, though! I know He will do the miracle and make me a new creature. (I like the sound of that—Michael Newcreature.—Ha!) Please pray for me. I am determined, by the Lord’s grace and mercy, to go on for the Lord, in spite of myself and my many NWOs.

I am thankful for the Lord’s love for me, His great mercy, His patience, His help to make me see when I wouldn’t see, to love when I wouldn’t love, and to give when I wouldn’t give. I am thankful for the wonderful brothers and sisters I have in the Family, the kind of people I most definitely would not find anywhere out there.

This is the one driving passion that keeps me going for Jesus—to see the vision of the one true and righteous government of God’s Kingdom, established and fulfilled upon the earth. “And the government shall be upon His shoulder” (Isa.9:6b). Since time immemorial, man’s systems of government have failed miserably and come to naught, but “the God of Heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. ... And it shall stand forever” (Dan.2:44).

In the Family, I have found the greatest opportunity of service to mankind. Keep fighting, all! I love you!

