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REJOINED!

Part Three



FSM #15
APRIL 2005

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[Editor’s note: Some of these testimonies are of young people who left the Family in spirit, not having physically left. Although a few of these testimonies have been posted on the MO site, we’re including them here for your inspiration as well.]

Cover art by Sabine

You really have to have the feeling that it’s really worth dying for!—Any mountain—the mountain of this life, the mountain of accomplishment, the mountain of obstacles, of difficulty—if you’re going to climb them, they have to be worth dying for, to brave wind and cold and storm, symbolic of adversities. But on the mount alone, you feel so close to the Lord! The voice of His Spirit there is so loud, it’s almost like it’s thundering!

Only pioneers climb mountains—people who want to do something that no one ever did before—people who want to get above the multitude, beyond what has already been done and accomplished.

Beaten paths are for beaten men, but mountain peaks are for the mighty. Mountain peaks are for the mighty pioneers.

If you take the mountain, you’ll leave the multitudes behind, and then you’ll know who the disciples are! When [Jesus] went up into the mountain, the only ones who had the priceless privilege of hearing the world’s most famous sermon—the only ones who really heard from Heaven that day were the ones who left the multitudes and took the mountain—the ones who followed Jesus all the way.

—Dad, “Mountain Men” (ML #B:3,5,11–12)

Recommended reading for ages 14 and up. May be read to younger ages at parents’ discretion.

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“Such a Profound Love”

By Olivia (16),
Guatemala

At the age of 12 I began to get a taste of the world. It started with what I thought was harmless System music, System novels, System guys, and the list went on. My mind began to fill with expectations of what could be a “perfect” self-made life in the System. I gradually began to lose interest in the Word, and my perception of right and wrong went downhill. I stopped paying attention during devotions, and got little or no spiritual food for the rest of the day.

Around this time we decided to hook up with another family and travel to El Salvador. I wasn't too happy about it, but I went with the flow. We passed through Guatemala just in time for a teen camp. I was pretty excited as there were people there I had known from before.

The camp was a lot of fun, and I was so impressed by the young people. They were very on-fire about witnessing and being in the Family, quite a change from the young people I was used to hanging around with.

While there, one of the SGA girls gave her testimony, and it brought me to tears. I was amazed to see that on-fire dedication in a young person still existed in the Family. I knew that I wanted to change and have that kind of fire too.

Sad to say, soon after we arrived in El Salvador and moved in with the rest of the team, I was influenced by wrong attitudes, and once again I slid back into a wrong lifestyle. Right away I made System friends and started filling my mind with System music. I'd go out at night for partying, drinking, smoking, making out, and all of this right under the adults' noses.

Our Home began to have problems, so it broke up, and my sister and her best friend left the Family. I took it pretty hard, though I didn't show it. I covered it up by convincing myself that she was going on toward her freedom. My mom, younger sister, and I, then moved to Guatemala. I made a conscious decision that I wouldn't stay long in the Family, as my once posi-



tive outlook on the teens there had turned into the cold assessment that they were “just a bunch of spiritual losers.”

As soon as I got there I looked for the ones who were halfway “normal”—more like me, ha! Soon enough, I found ways for my disobediences to continue, and figured it wouldn’t be so bad to stay after all. Our Home was a bit far away from the other Homes and from most civilization, giving us a lot of time to do nothing. I started getting into philosophy, Tantric eroticism, and ancient religions. I also had a passion for dark, evil art, and hard rock music.

My outlook on life began to change drastically. I lost my faith and what little conviction I had left. Gradually, my taste for music changed as well, and I began to listen to depressing music.

I lived in a twisted state of mind, where good and evil were one and the same, for who was I to decide right from wrong? I couldn’t witness, for how could I make people believe in something that didn’t mean anything to me? I was living a lie.

To the eyes of the adults I was just your typical “problem case,” but it was a lot deeper than that.

Day by day my mental and spiritual state grew worse. I had lost the joy of my salvation as well as my reason to fight. I felt like I was in a cage, and that if I stayed one day longer I’d go insane. I broke just about every rule in the *Charter* and didn’t care. I was so confused. I hinted to several of my friends, in and out of the Family, that I had to get out and that if I didn’t, I’d lose my mind.

I had a lot of System friends (mostly guys) who would call me frequently. We would have long conversations about what it was like in that great big world. I started to tell one friend in particular my view of this “trap” I called the Family, and how unfulfilled I was. He sympathized with me and tried to find a way to help me.

I told him that if I had a way to live and work to support myself in Guatemala, I could leave. (I was pretty opposed to the States and had no desire to go there, which seemed to be my only other choice were I to leave the Family.) He told me I could stay with him and he would help me get a job. At first, I was taken aback by such an extreme proposition, but as time went on, I began to take it more seriously.

At this time I was 15, so if I were to leave the Family, that would likely mean having to go to the States with my mom and sister. I knew that would be a really difficult time for them. I knew my mom valued her place in the Family, and I didn’t want to take that away from her.



Olivia with other members of her Home

I felt that if I were to make her and my sister leave the Family, and live some meaningless life in the States, it would break her heart. I figured, “Well, I’m constantly being told that I’m such a rotten apple and a bad sample, and my mom is always crying because she is so disappointed in me, I might as well just leave.”

On the night of January 20, 2004, the night before the Feast began, I ran away with all my belongings. I left a letter for my mom explaining why I’d left, and how I thought it was to everyone’s benefit. My friend came to pick me up and we sped off into the night.

I was calm, pretending like everything was cool, but deep down inside I knew I was doing something that would change my life. On the way to his house we even got stopped by the police (we were speeding), and it was then that I remembered I’d forgotten my passport or any sort of identification. Also, the guy who picked me up didn’t have his driver’s license on him, so that added to the hassle. The police were a bit suspicious as to where we were going with a bunch of luggage, but they warily let us go.

We first went to a friend’s house and

“When I would do drugs, I could see another side of people. I can’t explain it, but it’s as if the moment I would get high, the people I was with would transform; they couldn’t cover up.”

smoked. They put on some dark, trippy music. Then at about 1 AM, we went to his house and I met his mom. She started to sort of “witness” to me. She said things like, “I don’t know what you’re going through, but God does, and He is going to care for you. He loves you,” and stuff like that. I was shocked, but it felt good. Her son, on the other hand, didn’t believe in God and made fun of his mom when she talked about it.

The next day I dyed my hair black, pierced my nose, and changed my name and age. I had to somewhat disguise my appearance so that I wouldn’t be recognized. Not like that was much of a difference, but it worked. I started two jobs, one in the day teaching English, and one in the night as a bartender. I met a lot of people in my night job and became quite popular.

I was doing what I wanted, drinking and doing drugs liberally. I was invited to dance (I was quite well known for the way I danced) and act in different plays, and also to be the lead singer in a famous local band.

My mom wrote me right away, telling me how much she loved me. She told me that once during inspiration she’d had to leave the room and cry because it made her remember me and how I used to sing so loud and with my whole heart. Tears streamed down my face as I read her letter, reminded of the memory of the love I felt when I sang to Jesus together with people who really loved me. But I quickly dried my eyes, and the faithful ol’ Devil started throwing his bombs of negativity and discouragement. He reminded me of how unhappy I was there and told me I could never be fulfilled in the Family. In my heart I wasn’t ready to return; I still had to open my eyes to the sick, polluted nothingness of this damn world!

From a superficial standpoint my life was what I’d always wanted: freedom, independence, popularity, sex, drugs, music, art, etc. However, the reality was that

these were actually lies. Freedom? I had become just another animal living in a cage. I had freedom to destroy my mind and body with drugs. I was entering the constant cycle of the System. Independence? Sure, I depended on myself for something to eat, for a place to sleep (I had moved out of my friend's house and was renting a house), to not get killed when I left my house (the location of my house was near one of the most dangerous areas of Guatemala), etc. But I *had* to look out for myself because there was no one else who cared.

Popularity? The biggest lie. People don't actually care about you; they're just looking for a way to get ahead. They couldn't give a damn if I was cold, hungry, or needed help. Everyone liked me because the person next to him or her liked me—they're robots! There is *no* originality with the Devil! Not to mention you grow old fast, and then you're no longer a novelty.

I smoked joints, and started taking Ecstasy. While on Ecstasy I would jump from extremely high balconies of bars to the other side by just hanging on to a little pole. I would do it for the rush and be-

“The gunshots were getting closer, as were his footsteps. We scrambled on our bellies under the nearest car.”

cause it freaked everyone out. When I was climbing over to the other side, my friends, too scared to reach out and grab me in case I fell and pulled them down with me, just sat there staring with huge, fear-filled eyes. I saw my death in their eyes. I didn't care whether I fell or not.

When I would do drugs, I could see another side of people. I can't explain it, but it's as if the moment I would get high, the people I was with would transform; they couldn't cover up. Everything they did, every facial expression, would reveal their inner self. No one else would notice, so I thought I was going crazy. I couldn't stand many people because what I saw in them was so negative, so sick.

Once while I was high, this one guy started talking to everyone. It was nothing out of the ordinary, just some normal topic. When people talk in Spanish I don't usually understand everything, so I tune into the person and imagine his thoughts. I realized that this guy was a manic depressive and was thinking about suicide.

I asked him if he wanted to kill himself, and everyone in the room went quiet, completely clueless as to why I had just said that. I said, “It's true, isn't it?” I looked at the guy and he was staring at me with a murderous smile as if I had just betrayed his deepest, forbidden secret. He had an extremely evil spirit, and I became quite uncomfortable sitting anywhere near him.

Then some of the other guys were trying to ignite this lighter, but it had absolutely no gas in it. Then that weird guy asked to see it, and in one try he made this huge flame that lasted for a long while. Another time I was walking alongside him and all of a sudden I tripped and would've hit the floor if I hadn't righted myself in time. It had felt as if someone had pushed me, and when I turned around, I saw that same guy looking at me from a distance as if he had made me fall. He gave this sinister laugh, then turned away. It was so creepy. The strange thing was that I was the only one who

noticed; everyone else seemed to think he was normal.

The Lord kept trying to help me realize that I was out of His will. The Devil was fighting so hard to kill me. He wasn't satisfied that I had left the Family; he wanted me dead.

One time, a group of us were in front of a local nightclub at around two o'clock in the morning. One of my friends and I had gone to a nearby gas station to get something to eat. Upon returning to the entrance of the nightclub, we had to pass in between several parked cars and a barbwire fence. But we were stopped in our tracks by a man standing about ten meters away, gun in hand. He began firing away in our direction. We couldn't have hit the ground faster!

The gunshots were getting closer, as were his footsteps. We scrambled on our bellies under the nearest car. We were completely underneath; there was nowhere else we could go. My heart was pounding so hard that I thought surely anyone within a 50-mile radius could've heard. Screaming wasn't an option—had I even wanted to, it was impossible; I was way too scared.

“I look around me at the young people in the Family who have never left, and I am awestruck.”

I whispered a prayer, as I watched his feet getting closer, and his gun was still firing. He was yelling incoherently, and I was sure it was the end. Just as he was about to reach us, a car pulled up and the door opened. There were a few more gunshots before the guy jumped in, and that was the last we saw of him.

We waited a while longer under the car, trying to calm our nerves, and then slowly crawled out, half expecting something to jump out at us at any second. As we walked back to the club, our friends were staring at us as if they had seen a ghost. They explained that had it not been for the guy's bodyguards arriving at that precise moment, we would have surely been killed. We had similar experiences with shootouts in different parts of the city, but each time the Lord protected me. He had so much mercy on me even though I was out of His will.

I was becoming so sick with this world, and began thinking more and more about the Family. People would ask me about my background and how I grew up. Instead of saying my usual made-up story, I started to tell them about the Family. Although I wouldn't say the name of our group, I would tell them what it was like. Most of them would ask me why I'd ever leave something like that. It sounded so nice to them. It would break my heart each time they'd ask me that, and I wouldn't know what to say. I felt like crying because I knew I had left my calling, my purpose in life, and that I would never be truly happy until I returned.

I now realize that all of us in the Family, even those who've left, as was my case, have Jesus in us, and that makes us different. In my case, no matter how hard I tried to hide it, they knew I had something that they didn't, and that perhaps I had answers to some of their problems. My friends would tell me their problems, and I would try to help them. I felt it was my responsibility in a way.

Around this time, a friend of mine wanted to meet the Family. Considering everything I had told him, he

said he would love to join a group like that. He was going through some major things in his life, so I figured that the Family was probably just what he needed. We decided to meet up with the Family and maybe go to a Bible class.

I called the Home and found out where my mom was going to be ballooning that particular day with several other members of the Home. I was overjoyed to see them. They invited us over the next day for a cookout and we heartily accepted. It was like a taste of Heaven seeing them again.

The next day my friend and I almost didn't make it to the house, as they live about half an hour out of the city. By the time we got to the winding road that led to the house, it was already dark, and we were on foot. That area is not safe for walking in the dark, so we'd usually try to hitch a ride, but this time no one was stopping for us. I was then reminded to pray. I told my friend, "We are going to pray for a ride." He merely shrugged in agreement.

I was a little worried, as this was the first time I had prayed aloud since I'd left, and I wasn't sure it would work. Plus, if it didn't, I

thought it could wipe out what little faith my friend had. *Oh well, I'll give it a shot*, I thought to myself. I started out asking the Lord for a ride, then I called on the power of the keys and asked that He give us a ride at that very moment.

No sooner had I said "amen" when we saw the headlights of a vehicle in the distance. We stuck out our thumbs and the truck came to an abrupt halt. We happily climbed in and I silently thanked the Lord. My friend, on the other hand, didn't take it so lightly—he was shocked! He told me he would never forget what happened.

We got to the house and everyone gave us a warm welcome. I was seeing what real love was again. After we'd eaten, they brought us to the living room and one of the SGA guys took out his guitar. Before I'd left, I couldn't stand this particular guy, but here I was sitting in front of him, dying to hear what he was going to say. He told me that the Lord had asked him to play "No Mires Atras," for me. The moment he started I burst into tears. I was crying inconsolably. The Word spoke right to my heart. Then his wife told me that she wanted to put on the song "Broken Wings" for me. I felt real love coming from them and I was so happy. I knew at that moment that I wanted to serve God for the rest of my life. How could I not when He could make me feel such a profound love, true happiness, and fulfillment?

I dried my eyes and have never been the same since. Sure, I still have battles and trials, but now I know Who to turn to—the Guy Who will never turn me away, and Who will always have the answer.

I look around me at the young people in the Family who have never left, and I am awestruck. I find it amazing that they took it by faith that there was nothing to the System and stuck it out in the Family. They didn't try it out for themselves, and yet they're still content with their decision because they have so much faith in what the Word and the Lord say.

There really isn't anything out there. Aye, it might look nice, but that's only on the surface. If it weren't tempting, we wouldn't have anything to fight against, right? It wouldn't be a test. So if you're going through something and you think you can't take it anymore, go to Jesus or to someone in the physical who can help you. I love you! Keep fighting for Jesus!

My Road to Rejoining the Family in Spirit

By Renae (19),
Guatemala

The real truth in life for me is to know the freedom of the Spirit and to be a disciple for Jesus. I didn't always believe this and would often wonder what made others in the Family so dedicated to what they believed in. Now I know.

I'm the youngest of three. My mom is Sara Beloved. I grew up in the States until I was 15. I remember when I was little having a love and fervor for witnessing and winning souls. But other than my boldness in witnessing I was a pretty shy kid, and would often keep to myself when new people were around.

When I was 12, I moved to a big Home in an area with many Homes. The JETTs and teens there were very different from those I'd previously lived with. The temptations of the world had affected a lot of the young people in the area, and I soon started to see differences between those who followed the world and those who did not. Those who compromised were popular and had the most friends. Being an insecure, shy Leo girl, I wanted to be like them, and craved attention. So what started off as a quest for popularity and attention eventually led me into disobedience and depression.

Instead of doing what I liked to do, I would do what the "cool" ones did. If I liked a guy, but none of the popular girls did, I would act as if I didn't either. It seems ridiculous now when I think about it, but pride and peer pressure got the best of me.

At first, the things I was into seemed harmless. I dabbled in System music here and there, wasted time at the mall, watched some TV, and stuff like that. But these things opened the door to other influences of the world.

Then when I was 14, I moved to a Home in North Carolina. There was only one other teen girl my age. We started smoking, basically because it was something cool and wasn't allowed. We often stayed home alone, spending hours watching TV, mainly music video channels. My appetite for music started to change.

Around this time, my friend's older brother, who was a former member, came to visit. His ideas on life influenced me greatly. He started to call me gothic and say things



like, “She’s on the dark side.” But it wasn’t in a way that made me not want it—instead, I reached for it. I didn’t realize at first what being gothic was. The fascination with death and the dark side of life interested me. I was interested in the style of dress and the attitudes. The music I listened to and the many books I read had an effect on me.

When I was upset, I would often dress in black and wear dark makeup. Darkness became my interest, my refuge, and somehow made sense of what I felt—or so I believed. These decisions opened the door to deep negativity, which became a serious weakness of mine throughout the years.

I buzzed my hair, wrote depressing poems, and dressed in black, all in an attempt to be different. I didn’t like people who stuck to the Word. I vowed I would never be “spiritual.” At this time I decided to leave the Family. I didn’t yet tell anyone except for this former member and my friend. I believed I would have to live with my grandma, and that was a nightmare for me. So I decided to wait and see what other options I could have.

We moved again, this time to Mexico. I was

“I buzzed my hair, wrote depressing poems, and dressed in black, all in an attempt to be different.”

depressed, confused, and trying to understand life. Every day was a search for “fun.” I’d sneak out at night to have sex with an outsider, drinking, smoking. But I wasn’t finding the happiness I so desperately searched for.

Around this time, my older brother who had left the Family came to visit from the States. I remember telling my mom that I wanted to leave the Family. I wasn’t getting along well with her at the time—I wanted to live my life the way I thought best, and I thought she was in the way of that. Anyone’s opposition to my way of life was met with my rebellion and anger. My brother offered to let me go back to the States with him, where I could study and work. We could buy a house together, I could do what I wanted to, and we could have a cool life. This appealed to me.

I was ready to accept, but for some reason I told him, “Yeah, I want to do that, but I’ll go later on.” I did want that. But I decided not to at the time. It was then that my mom and I were invited to a Home in Guatemala. I decided to go to try something different.



Renae (far right) witnessing to Hooter waitresses

When I first got to Guatemala, I hated it. It wasn't my idea of fun and it wasn't what I wanted. The young people there would memorize, they loved the Word, they obeyed the rules, and they were turned on to outreach. I thought I'd landed amidst a bunch of spiritual freaks.

The only Word I would read would be in devotions, and even then I wasn't listening half the time. I didn't care about the rules. I didn't care what my shepherds said. My mind and heart were full of bitterness toward them. I couldn't accept counsel from my shepherds. This was my life; why did they care? I wanted to live it without their interruption.

My attitudes and my ideas didn't stop with my own spirit. They were an influence on others. I continued on in my darkness, oblivious to the light that was all around me. I couldn't decide to leave, but I didn't want to stay either.

What first helped me to look at things differently was the love and care one of the adults was faithful to show me. I became close to him through the love and counsel he gave. He was like a dad to me. His love and understanding saved me from spiritual death,

“I moved three times in five months, trying to find the perfect place. It was then that I decided to visit my mom in Guatemala.”

and helped me to know somebody cared for me. Even though I looked like a mess and like I couldn't possibly make it, someone was there to help me and love me through it all. Thank you, Jordan! I love you so much.

I started to make changes in my life after a camp that was held here. I started to have a desire to serve the Lord. But I still didn't care about the rules. I thought they were for those who could obey them, and if you couldn't, it didn't really matter. I then moved to another Home in the area, where an FM guy I knew was visiting. We started a relationship that was short-lived. A hickey proved I was stepping outside of the Charter guidelines, and I was asked to stay at another Home for a time, and he was asked to leave the Home.

It was a very hard time for me, as I was in love with this guy. I drew close to the Lord through this heartbreak and grew a lot in spirit. My convictions became stronger and I started to desire the Word and prophecy.

More young people started coming to our Home, and each one's attitudes started to influence the others. We



Renae and Angie

would go to a park near our Home every afternoon, and there we would spend a lot of time with System young people. I was interested in the attention I got from the guys I played soccer with. I became close to one of them, trying in my own strength to keep the rules. I started to compromise.

We had new disciples, but the sample in our Home didn't help them see the fruit of real discipleship. All three of them ended up leaving, as compromised as they had been before they joined—if not more so. Soon, because of the lack of shepherding and the different misdemeanors of people in our Home, we were put on Probationary

“When I arrived in Guatemala, I met somebody I had been writing for a few months. I admired him for his dedication and love for the Lord.”

Notice, and all of us young people were asked to find other Homes. Before leaving, I ended up having sex with a guy I was close to.

I moved to the States with this on my conscience. I was 18. There, I decided to confess to kissing an outsider. I had gone to the States desiring to start anew, but confessing just a little bit of the sin is not confessing all of it, so I left the door wide open to more disobedience.

After confessing, I was placed on partial, but I didn't take it seriously. I had a decision to make: Would I obey the Word and have conviction, or would I join in on the “fun”—better termed disobedience? Sadly, my connection with Jesus and my convictions were weak.

I was offered a drink one night with a few of the young people, and I took it. After that, I didn't care. I felt some guilt about being disobedient, but I didn't let it get to me. I continued drinking and making out with a few of the young people. I also had sex with a nonmember who was staying at our Home. The sad thing is that at the same time I was becoming very self-righteous and proud, and hard to be around. My eyes were blinded to what a mess I was. My convictions were gone and I was going down the wrong path.

I then moved to Mexico, trying to turn my life around, trying to be good, but it was all a show. I wasn't right with the Lord, as I still had all these unconfessed sins on my heart.

I would over-drink with the young people in the Home, while at the same time telling them not to. I was double-minded in all my ways. I loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him, but I would often think of what I would do if I left.

I moved three times in five months, trying to find the perfect place. It was then that I de-



Renae at a home for mentally challenged children

cided to visit my mom in Guatemala. I didn't have a Home at the time. Before moving, my friends asked me what I was going to do if I couldn't find a Home there, and I told them that if that happened I would leave the Family. I was discouraged and felt like giving up. I didn't feel like searching anymore.

When I arrived in Guatemala, I met somebody I had been writing for a few months. I admired him for his dedication and love for the Lord. I wanted that, and it drew me to him. I fell in love with him, and we started a relationship. Different attitudes I had begun to change, and I started growing closer to the Lord. I asked the Home if I could join, sincerely wanting to become a dedicated disciple. I wanted what I saw in this guy. They decided I could stay there. When we first started our relationship, the Lord showed me that I must keep Him in first place. I thought I was doing this—I really loved the Lord and loved His Word. But I put too much of my focus on my boyfriend, and we started off way too fast without much counsel or prayer.

After a while he decided to break up with me, telling me that he needed

“Jesus rocks my world! I can’t deny His existence when I look at the miracle of the new life He has given me. The Lord changed me, and I never want to go back to the things of the past.”

some time. I didn't want to be alone and I didn't want to lose him. But the Lord knew that I didn't have Him in first place, and that the real joy in life is Him. I needed to learn that.

After breaking up, I became possessive and jealous. I still hoped for something with him. We started to argue a lot, mainly over the way I thought he was treating me. I learned what not to do. He had asked for time, but I couldn't understand why. I wanted him to love me, but instead of keeping him as a friend, we could hardly talk to each other without arguing. It became a weight on the Home, but just when it seemed like too much, we would have times when we'd get along and things would seem fine.

During these times, I often felt condemned about my past sins, but I didn't want to confess them because I didn't want to lose him. I was sad all the time, and everyone saw it. I didn't think this time would ever end. People would tell me that the light at the end of the tunnel was just around the corner, but I didn't think so.

We eventually started to get along again and things were going well between us. We didn't argue and we were praying about getting together again. During this time, the Lord started pricking me about these sins I was harboring in my heart. But I didn't want to listen. This guy meant so much to me, and confessing these things could cause my losing him. *I haven't done them in a long time*, I reasoned. *I've changed*. But the Lord didn't agree with me on that.

One night, my boyfriend started to talk to me about my need to focus on the work and not so much on him. I couldn't take it. I didn't like what he was saying (even though it was the truth), so I started to argue with him about it, and we ended up arguing over many things. At the end of the argument, he told me that he didn't want

to be with me. It was a pretty heavy argument that lasted a long time.

The next morning, he talked with the shepherds about it. They talked with me about many different areas in my life that I needed to change. He and I agreed to not talk with each other, as I needed to learn to focus on Jesus. They also asked if I had anything on my heart I wanted to share that would help me to gain some victories. My fears of being excommunicated and of going back to the emptiness of the world, which I now hated and didn't want to be a part of, held me back.

The "Choices and Consequences" GNs came out, and the warnings stuck in my mind. One heavy experience was when I went to see the *Passion of the Christ*, and during the part where the demons are tormenting Judas, I started to feel this huge wave of fear. I felt tormented. I knew Jesus wanted me to come clean, but I just felt I couldn't, and the weight of saying no to Him was becoming too much for me.

Well, thank You, Jesus—despite all the things I held onto, I finally confessed. I couldn't take it anymore. No matter if all

"I want others to know the beauty of Jesus and His love. He has filled my being to the full with love and happiness. I want others to feel this and I know it comes from yielding to Jesus."

my fears about confessing came true, I had to confess. So I did, and the huge weight that had been on my mind was finally lifted. I was free and I was so happy.

I started to gain victories regarding my former boyfriend. The Lord showed me I needed to move to gain greater victories, so I moved to another Home in the area. Since I've been here, the Lord has been working in my life to free me from my past feelings and desires I thought would never go away; the Lord has washed me clean, and reignited a deep desire for Him. If there would be a chance to change all that I went through, I wouldn't. All of the beautiful things I've learned were worth it.

The cherry on top of the cake was when Mama came to visit, bringing with her prophecies received by those in WS for all of us here. The words in the prophecy I received were everything I needed to know. I finally understood. The beautiful thing was that the channel didn't know what I was going through, and yet there were the answers to feelings and confusions I had never told anyone I felt.

Jesus rocks my world! I can't deny His existence when I look at the miracle of the new life He has given me. The Lord changed me, and I never want to go back to the things of the past. I feel changed; the negative mindset I had is gone, even though it's a continual fight to keep it that way. I'm finding fulfillment in witnessing with *Activated*.

I want others to know the beauty of Jesus and His love. He has filled my being to the full with love and happiness. I want others to feel this and I know it comes from yielding to Jesus. I pray my testimony is a help and encouragement to any of you who have gone through or are going through any of the things contained herein. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. You will see the fruits of your labor. Don't give up!

Out of the Darkness

By Eman (19, of Juan and Ana), Guatemala

Being in the Family was not something I considered a privilege in my younger years. I was in the Family because it was the only life I knew. I went through days doing my jobs, going on outreach, having my 14- and 15-year-old trials with rebellion and not wanting correction. At that point, I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I didn't see myself becoming much. I was a smart kid and I went along with my schooling not really caring about what I was learning, just storing it in the back of my mind for later.

I had a family who loved me, and good friends. Even though I didn't have a specific desire to be in the Family, to me it was a life I had to live. So I got into System music, drinking, and smoking.

Things got worse after that. My attitude turned. I changed from a teen battling with decisions to a definite rotten apple. Not many people I lived with had the patience to put up with me, so I stayed behind my "bad dude" front and only became worse.

The thing that tipped me over the edge was when my mom passed away. *[Editor's note: Eman's mom died of cancer.]* After that I totally hardened myself to everything that had to do with love and emotions. I hid my hurt and turned my heart into stone.

What made it hurt even more was the fact that I tried to keep going every day with the same routine.

I wouldn't let anyone know what was going on inside of me, and that made me hate my situation even more. I began having thoughts of bitterness against the Family, my personal family, and even God. To me it seemed that He was trying to do everything bad to me, that He didn't care, so I got the attitude of, "If He doesn't care about me, I'm not going to care about Him."

About a year after my mom passed away, my dad decided to remarry. I knew that he needed someone, but the fact that I wasn't getting my mom back continued to hurt me. I got hit heavily with depression and even considered suicide. Never once,



though, did I ask for help, and I kept all of these feelings inside.

Just when I was about to go off the brink, I came across what I thought was the answer to everything. A former member who was visiting our Home offered me drugs and I took them. They seemed to give me freedom from thinking about my pain. When I was on drugs life's problems didn't seem to exist, and I felt happy. The bad thing was that I was only happy when I was high, and when I would come down all my feelings were there waiting for me, which caused me to want to get high all the time.

I was willing to do anything for that feeling. I thought that they would be the "answer" to my problems.

From then on, my life became a lie. To my Home and my family at that time I was a good guy—willing, happy, helpful, and responsible—but all of it was a fake, just an act to keep people in the dark about my *real* self. It was at this time that my family decided to move to the field, so the next year or so was full of hard work, but I didn't mind as long as I got my fix. Arriving at our new Home on the field

and meeting a couple other young people who were into some of the same stuff made it very easy for me to continue in my ways.

By this time I was 17, the Lord was the farthest thing from my mind. I didn't think about Him—until He started to move His hand in my life. I began to feel guilty about my ways. I felt bad about deceiving the people in my Home. But I could see no way out. Even though I hated the life of lies I was living, I didn't think I could give up drugs.

It took a lot of very heavy experiences and going through feelings of extreme guilt before I finally reached the point where I couldn't take it anymore. I was about to go crazy. It was then that the Lord allowed my sin to be exposed, and oh, the relief I felt at being questioned. I denied it at first, but after a few days I couldn't take it. I poured out my heart and finally found peace.



Sharon and Eman—brother and sister

I knew I needed to change, but I didn't know how. I decided to change, but I tried to do it by myself. I didn't think I needed the Lord's help, even though my shepherds had made it clear that there was no other way to deliverance. In my deeply ingrained pride I thought I could handle it on my own. That was when the spiritual attacks started, and in myself I was not able to make it. After seven days of not being able to sleep from the withdrawals I was having, I went right back to my old habit, and it felt so much easier than fighting, and now the feeling of guilt was gone. Now everyone knew what I was, and besides being embarrassed about it sometimes, I really didn't care.

It was at this time that I went back to the U.S. on a fundraising trip for a few months. While in the States I got even more into drugs, and I decided to stay in the States for a while. I didn't know how long, but I didn't want to go back to the field. The Devil was letting me have a good time doing my own thing, but the Lord is always a step ahead of the Devil.

The Lord opened the doors for me to get a ride

“I got even more into drugs, and I decided to stay in the States for a while. I didn't know how long, but I didn't want to go back to the field.”

with some brethren who were returning to the field, and my dad said I had to go. I really didn't want to. I knew on my return I would be under supervision, and I would have to re-start my PE. All these thoughts built up as I traveled on my way.

What made it even worse was that I got back during the Feast, when everyone was all “spiritual,” and right away they started talking to me about making decisions and choosing. To which I replied, “You guys better stop or you're just going to push me out of the Family.” I continued to be supervised, but somehow I still found ways to do drugs. I thought to myself, *Well, if I get caught again, I'll just leave the Family.*

At this time two SGAs were opening another Home right next door. They would hang out at our place every evening, and started spending a lot of time with me.

It was awesome for me to see some young people who were actually dedicated to the Family and loved



Sharon, Eman, and Mercy—brother and sisters

the Lord out of their own free will. I enjoyed talking to them. One day one of them told me that old quote: “It’s better to die for something than to live for nothing.” He told me that I would never be happy trying to make myself happy, what I really had to do was give my life to Jesus.

I struggled with these thoughts for a few weeks, but I couldn’t shake them. I could hear the Lord calling out to me in my heart. The Lord had brought me to the point of decision. Once again the sin in my life got exposed, and that day I spoke to the Lord.

I said, “Lord, I know I already let You down once before when I tried to do it in my own strength. I couldn’t do it—I was way too weak. I didn’t even put up a fight. But now I know, Lord. So, Jesus, I will give myself to You if You’ll take me. I will try You, Jesus. I’ve tried many other things and I’m still unhappy. But, Lord, I need You to help me. I know I can’t do it. The Devil is holding me too tightly for me to break free on my own. I need Your power, and if You help me, if You deliver me, I will serve You for the rest of my life.

“I can’t live like this.— It’s not working. Help me, Lord. Please deliver me

“I don’t need my will. I’d done my own thing for years. I’d been so far from the Lord that I thought He wouldn’t even remember me. But He did. He not only remembered me, but He took me in and forgave me.”

from my past; heal me. Help me to become a new man, Jesus. Give me a new heart—the one that I have is too hard. Change me, give me love, Jesus. I am nothing right now, all my pride is nothing to me. I’d rather be happy. I haven’t been happy in a long time. I’ll do whatever You want me to. Just help me, please. I can’t do it on my own, so I give You my life. If it’s worth something to You, please take it.”

I cried as I said this prayer. I hadn’t cried in years. Somehow I knew that Jesus was there with me and that He had heard me.

That night I went to bed and I slept like a baby, in perfect peace. The craving was gone; the desire was gone. I had no drugs in my system, but I was happy! I felt like spring after winter, with sun on the leaves. I knew Jesus had my life. I felt like the person in that song that says, “Now all I want to do is serve Him.”

Now I know with all my heart what a privilege it truly is to be in the Family, where even the sacrifices make you happy. I am so happy now! The only way I can explain it is that it’s a result of letting Jesus run my life, without any will of my own. I don’t need my will. I’d done my own thing for years. I’d been so far from the Lord that I thought He wouldn’t even remember me. But He did. He not only remembered me, but He took me in and forgave me.

I thank Jesus every day for bringing me out of the darkness and into the light. Thank You, dear Jesus, for giving me a new life to live for You and others. Thank You for the happiness I get from serving You. Help me to do this job, and to undo all the wrongs I’ve done in people’s lives. Thank You for Your freedom, for setting me free with the keys of deliverance. I am eternally grateful. “I can’t pay You back, Lord. I just want to love You with all of my heart.”

“I Was Living a Nightmare”

By Natalie (19),
Guatemala

(Written 2003, in the U.S.:)

My parents were full-time missionaries in many different fields, and that was pretty much my life growing up. I lived in big Combo Homes with fun inspirations, big witnessing trips, and singing groups. Life to me couldn't have been any better. But all of this drastically changed when we moved to the States. I hope this story helps you to see how fast what you think you really want in life can change, and how you can also find out what makes life worth living and how to hold on to it.

Ring ... Ring! ... The alarm sounds, and it's still dark outside. Everyone in the house will be sleeping soundly for the next couple of hours, but my day has already begun. Fifteen minutes later I'm in a classroom sitting with some 30 other half-asleep girls. The one thing I share in common with these other girls, besides the sleep deprivation factor, is that we all want to be number one in the class, and we would go to any extreme to achieve that.

In this prestigious Catholic girl's school it wasn't good enough to just be an "A" student—"A" students were a dime a dozen! No, I couldn't have settled for being anything anyone ever considered "average," so I took Honor classes and AP classes, for which we received college credits. While taking these courses, I was only getting three hours of sleep a night. School got out at two o'clock, and for many of those girls, their day was finally over, but mine was only half done. With hardly a minute to spare, I would rush home to change. Many days I didn't even have time to greet my mom before I would be out the door again and on my way to work. Working at a department store, the hours would go by pretty slowly, but finally the time would come for me to go home and



conquer my unending pile of homework.

I would step outside and stare in amazement at the one reason I had been slaving away in the building behind me for the last hours—my dream car! Many people have a dream car, which they hope to one day be able to afford, but not me. Again, I had to be different. I was determined that no matter what, I was going to have my car as soon as I could.

Three days after my 17th birthday, I financed a red, soft-top Jeep Wrangler. I thought the hardest part was behind me now—that of convincing my parents I was responsible enough to make

“All of that wasn’t enough to make me feel satisfied. I had to add one more thing to the picture in order for me to be completely satisfied, and that was a boyfriend.”

all the payments, and even better yet, finding the exact car of my dreams—and that my future now only held fun and excitement. Man, was I ever mistaken!

I learned many lessons after making that purchase, which I could write a book on, but I’ll just give you a few mental pictures about what it was like: Speeding was oh so fun!—Sometimes it even came in handy with my hectic schedule. But those six hours in court, surrounded by criminals, and then dishing out \$350 to pay my ticket was really not my idea of fun. But unfortunately, that experience was not enough to stop me from rear-ending a lady at a red light.

Another biggie was gas! When I first got the car I thought gas was pocket change, something you put in the car every blue moon and then it would just run for weeks. Well, I was also rudely awakened with some-



Natalie personal witnessing in Guatemala

thing called “mpg” (miles per gallon). I soon found out that around the city I was lucky when I got eight mpg. Yes, I said eight! That’s the price I paid for the look of a Wrangler.

The insurance for a 17-year-old girl to drive my car was just as expensive as my car bill—and that was before my ticket and accident. So my insurance payments also went up. Those weren’t the only expenses of owning a car; that was only the beginning! The list goes way up once you put in breakdowns, blowouts, checkups, maintenance, and yes, even burglary! You name it, it happened to me.

So now back to those long-hour workdays. Let’s just say they barely made ends meet. But you know the good old System, they don’t want you to feel like you work all day to barely break even. Oh no, they want everyone to have their heart’s desires, right? And that’s why they invented credit cards! I figured, like the other millions of in-debt Americans that I would pay it back later when I had a few extra dollars. Well, “later” didn’t come around too often, but interest charges did!

All of that wasn’t enough to make me feel satisfied. I had to add one

“Most of the time I couldn’t even sleep because of the stress I felt from the bills that were due, and the tests I would have to wake up at 4 AM to study for. I would even worry about who my boyfriend was probably sleeping with.”

more thing to the picture in order for me to be completely satisfied, and that was a boyfriend. Just like all the other things in my life, I wasn’t going to settle for anything less than what I thought was the “pick of the litter.” So I began going out with someone who appeared to me to be the hottest, most popular guy I knew.

It was great at first, until I realized I was not the only girl who thought my guy was hot, popular, and who loved those thrilling rides in his fast new sports car. The only thing that set me apart from all the rest was that I was the “lucky one” who had the “girlfriend” title. After that we were all in the same playing field, as far as he was concerned.

Meanwhile, while I was living this day in and day out, my best friend had a completely different life than



Teen night (L–R) Benji (15), Carrie (16), Sharon (14), Teresa (13), James (14), and Andrew

mine. She had chosen to stay in the Family and was still living with her parents. Her parents had a lot of kids, and instead of moving away to a place where she could have more fun with people her own age, she decided to stay and help raise her younger siblings.

At first I thought that what she was doing was stupid and that she was simply throwing away all the fun she could be having somewhere else. But after only about three years of the life I was living, I took another look at my best friend's life and saw I was the stupid one! By then my best friend had a wonderful fiancé, and together they were heading to the mission field.

I knew by looking at her that when she went to bed at night, all she was probably thinking about was how she couldn't wait to get up the next morning and serve Jesus with her whole heart. I envied her so much. She had not a care in the world, it seemed, and I wanted her peace. When I went to bed at night, most of the time I couldn't even sleep because of the stress I felt from the bills that were due, and the tests I would have to wake up at 4 AM to

“The Devil tried everything in his power to get me to quit and take my old life back. My ex-boyfriend apologized for the wrong he'd done to me, and in turn promised me the world.”

study for. I would even worry about who my boyfriend was probably sleeping with that night.

I finally came to grips with the fact that all the things I thought were going to make me happy were making me miserable. I wanted the happiness I saw in my best friend. So like all the other times in my life when I wanted something, I went all-out to find out how I could have that same happiness and joy.

I bet all of you can guess just where I found it—*Jesus!* He was my Answer Man! He took all the burdens, stress, hurt, and pain; He lifted it all and He gave me love in return. Up to that moment in my life, I had done very little to deserve all the joy and love I found just by giving Him my burdens. At that point I was ready to do anything, so I made the decision to serve the Lord a couple of months before graduating. I left my boyfriend and started on the rough road to being a disciple. I thought it would be easy, since I would only be giving away things that were bringing me misery.

Well, the Devil wasn't going to let me go that easy. The bills kept coming, and I still wanted to graduate after all the work I'd put into it. But I started making cuts, no more spending money, and lots of time in the Word. Many things helped me through these trying times, but if I had to name the main thing, it was the Word. It always had a promise, answer, or guidance for any trial or doubt that came my way.

The Devil tried everything in his power to get me to quit and take my old life back. My ex-boyfriend apologized for the wrong he'd done to me, and in turn promised me the world. My job wanted to promote me all of a sudden. I graduated salutatorian (second best graduate) of my class and received offers to many colleges. These were all things I'd wanted so badly before. So you can see the Devil wasn't happy and

wasn't going to let me go that easy. But I was determined once again to get something in my life, and nothing was going to stop me.

The Lord did a lot of miracles to get me to where I am today, but one stands out the most in my mind. I thought this miracle was just the most amazing thing I had ever seen.

In making the decision to serve the Lord, of course I had to sell my Jeep. I put it in the paper and was confident it would sell right away. I'm not sure if this was the Lord's way of crushing my idol, but I received no calls for a couple of weeks. I began to freak out, because I wanted to leave with my best friend in a few weeks, but the car hadn't sold yet. There was no way I could leave without selling the car. I trusted that the Lord would sell it because I knew it was His will for me to go, so I didn't get too desperate with Him about it—until it was five days before our day to leave and I still didn't have a bite on the Jeep.

I asked my close friends to pray with me desperately for the car to sell. That night I got a confirmation from the Lord that the Jeep would sell

“If you're wondering if I ever made it to the mission field, I did! I moved to a sweet, loving Home in Guatemala City. This victory was finally won!”

before my set day to leave. It seemed impossible, but I believed it. So the next day I was expecting to sell it, of course—but again, no calls. Two more days came and went with still no calls. I was convinced I was a false prophet, and I wasn't going to sell my Jeep, so I canceled my trip with them.

But the Lord is faithful, and He always keeps His promises, regardless of how we doubt Him. On the morning that all my friends were packing up the van to start their five-hour journey south, a lady called to see my Jeep. She came over at 12 noon and saw it, then came back at 3:00 PM and offered me exactly the amount I had been praying for! However, my friends had left without me, and I learned the biggest lesson of my life about trusting the Lord. Prophecy is simply amazing, to say the least!

All this to say, that if there are any of you out there who are contemplating getting that higher education, or thinking that a car, cell phone, and unlimited amounts of worldly treasures will make you happy, or maybe that that hot boyfriend with the fast sports car is what you want, read my story and see what the behind-the-scenes looks like before you make those choices.

My life looked great to everyone around me, and I know many people who envied me and wanted to be like me. But to myself, I was living a nightmare. The Enemy knows how to paint the picture so pretty, but once you're part of his picture you're also in his trap and you have to play by his rules, which is a lose-lose game. You never win; nothing you do will ever make you eternally happy as long as you're playing his game.

If you're wondering if I ever made it to the mission field, I did! I moved to a sweet, loving Home in Guatemala City. This victory was finally won! I know that there will be many more.

(Update, summer 2004:)

There are many things that make a Family Home exciting and fun to live in. It might be a fulfilling ministry, inspiring road trips, an expansive *Activated* ministry, a large CTP program, or fun outings. These are all things that liven up your spirit and make your days brighter. Well, I have something that livens up my days and really makes them exciting; actually they are seven “some things”!

These “some things” are the JETTs, junior and senior teens here: Teresa (13), James (14), Sharon (14), Benji (15), Carrie (16), Andy (16), and James F. (17). I have come to realize that my life never has a dull moment with this bunch around! They have a way of turning the most potentially boring situations into memories I never want to forget, and many that I wish I could even relive.

What I like most about these teens is how much

they love the Lord. They do so much for Jesus; it’s incredible! They basically hold the fort on all house jobs, they cook most of the meals, they’re eager to go personal witnessing, and the list could go on and on. I know you’re probably wondering where we found them, and how can your teens become this on-fire? The answer is easy: You just have to make serving Jesus fun!

With all the joy that these teens brought into our lives, we—Eman (19) and I, who are their shepherds—wanted to do something for them in return. We prayed about it, and of course the Lord broke through with an amazing idea that has been an inspiration to them and us ever since. We took the ideas that the Lord gave us and turned them into what we now call “Teen Night.”

Teen Night happens almost every night. After dinner we get together for a couple of hours and we have fun in so many different ways. We play board games, charades, do skits, campfires, inspirations, “memory bees,” “show and tell,” sing karaoke, and have talent nights.

Something else we do once a week is pick each other’s names and play the “Guardian Angel” game all week with the name we drew. Making my bed in the morning has never been one of my habits, so I can honestly say how much I appreciate my “angel” when I see my bed so neat and tidy!

One time we had an early Teen Night. After quiet time, Eman and I gathered the teens and we all made a very special dinner together. All of the teens loved teamworking with each other and the results were delicious! The teens (as well as the rest of the Home) look forward to the next united cooking. These are just some of the ideas we have come up with so far, and I know that the Lord will keep inspiring us with new and fun things to do as we seek Him!