

Kent's Story

For thirty five years I believed I had led a "normal" but somewhat strict childhood. I knew I had been raised in a "church" that met in the home, had no name, and sent out "Gods disciples" two by two just as Jesus had done two thousand years ago. These tenets I believed without question, and until I read *"The Secret Sect,"* I believed "The Truth" was God's one true way.

The shock of finding out that everything I "knew" was true was based on lies was like finding out that $2+2=5$ which meant the whole equation of life was different. The weight of the world left my shoulders when I found out I wasn't a sinful person and was not "condemned to an eternity in HELL," as I had been told repeatedly in my childhood years. I am not a religious person but felt the need to learn more about how I was raised, what I believed, and why did I have such destructive and dysfunctional attitudes about life. Twenty years of drug use, alcoholism, and failed social and personal relationships had made me eager for the truth. I am not going into the history of the church but only tell of my experience.

From my earliest memory, visiting workers in the home and getting ready for convention were the high lights of my young life. The joys of "anticipated spiritual healing" were felt throughout the house. It was a time for new convention clothes, notebooks for convention notes, haircuts, and the warning about the belt if we were not on our best behavior. My sister and I lived in fear of the thick black cowboy belt with the silver buckle and tip that would sting and welt the flesh. I was probably only hit with the belt 3 or 4 times but the threat was always there, conveyed with a glance or glare.

Convention was exciting, seeing my friends, the meals with the clanging of pots and pans and the humble murmur of 600 saints and servants waiting to sing "grace." (I remember the thrill of getting a "job," helping peel potatoes, serving food or helping with the dishes. Jobs were assigned by a worker and it seemed the hotter or harder the job, the more of the "right spirit" was shown to the world. The meetings were time for "spiritual healing" for adults, but were a time of stress and terror for the children. Hard benches, humidity, and repetitive "fire and brimstone" preaching either lulled children to sleep or kept them, rapt, on the edge of the seat with fear of "eternal damnation" or the more real fear of ones parents if they felt the child was not paying attention.

After the night meeting there was cocoa and doughnuts and as I grew older this was a time to "pair up" and sneak off for some heavy petting and kissing. Romance in the "Truth" was often a long distance affair with me writing letters to a girl all year but only seeing her at convention. Often one's feelings had changed and sometimes the girl had found some one new who lived closer. Then it was time to try and find another girl and start the whole letter writing romance again. I feel this lack of commitment in my adolescent years has followed me my entire life. I have lived "in sin" with several girls but these relationships, like my marriage, were passionless and of short duration.

Other memories of convention include the intense feeling of camaraderie among the young men in the "Truth." I believe most of us felt persecuted in the every day world, but when we got together it was a contest to see who could endure the most pain, suffering and self denial for "Christ's sake." I remember when I was about 10 years old having contest with other boys rubbing our knuckles in the grooves of a cinder block wall to prove how able and

willing we were to endure pain. Whoever had the bloodiest knuckles at the end was the winner. That pain was very visible and real.

The pain caused by being different in the world was not so visible. When one feels different they tend to direct their anger at themselves. The conflicts I had were about being too spiritual for the real world, and too worldly for the spiritual world. I felt like an outcast from both worlds. Because participation in sports, clubs or dances was frowned on by the workers, (and my father used to be a worker), I feel many of the children were socially and politically stunted. I didn't know how to deal with girls or school work, (these things were not important), and I had no clue about politics or current events. It was during these times of conflict that I drank my first beer and smoked my first joint. I felt the need to belong some where and the "stoners" weren't going out for sports or clubs either. I was almost 14 years old. For the next 22 years I never looked back.

I professed at Utah convention when I was 12 years old. I remember going to my bed that night knowing I should pray, but I didn't know what to pray for. I started worrying that same night about giving my testimony the following week. The next two years were spent leading a double life. I tried hard to be submissive and "bend to God's will." I tried to be a "light unto others," to stay on the narrow path and to "deny myself so that His will could be done." IT WAS HELL!!!

There was a constant knot in my stomach from worry of having to speak and pray in meetings. I would try to find something in the Bible that might somehow relate to something I had done or might do, and hope there would be a moral to the story that had affected me so I could learn to be more humble and submissive. I knew if I practiced more self-denial I could be more humble, submissive, and Christ-like, and DAMN this takes up a major part of your life when your only 12 years old!

On the other hand, it was 1970 and mini-skirts, free love, hippies and dope were everywhere. At a time when one identity whether "hawk or dove" was easily distinguishable, I had no identity. I couldn't hang out with the "jocks" because I couldn't go out for sports. I couldn't hang out with the "brains" because I couldn't join clubs and worldly education wasn't important. I couldn't hang out with the good kids because they were Catholics, Protestants and "sinners." The only place I really fit in was with the other social misfits and drug users.

I would go to school one hour early just so I could get "stoned." It was something I could excel at, and when I was "high," worldly and spiritual problems didn't matter. For the next 20 years I got "high" every day and there was no "new high" I wouldn't try. I never heard a worker ever say anything about alcohol or drug abuse, but I know I wasn't the only professing child with this problem. The names are not important but I can only think of one person professing in my age group that didn't try drugs. I would steal pills from the medicine cabinets where we went to meeting. We would sneak off and get "high" after Wednesday night meeting. "Sings" and pot luck dinners were a chance to see who had the best drugs. There was nothing we wouldn't try from sniffing paint to eating pills that we didn't know what they were just to get "high."

I never heard a worker say any thing about homosexuality, incest or pedophilia but these too are real problems in the "Truth." I believe that the workers thought all sex was wrong, so these dysfunctions were not any worse than normal sexual relations. All

sex was to be denied except for procreation. Workers and Elders sometimes used their power to seduce other men, women, and children. I should know--my father is a documented pedophile. I don't remember my father ever abusing me sexually but this may be a classic case of denial. My father was a child molester when he was a worker before I was born. The documented incidents of molestation involve a 12-year old boy who was repeatedly abused over a two-year period. My father would sneak into the boys room and molest him while the family was asleep in the other rooms. When the "head worker" was told, his response was *"Well...the workers aren't married and sometimes these things happen."* I didn't know this until I happened to contact Threshing Floor Ministries in August of 1993. I had been told by my mother in 1984, after their divorce, that my father was a homosexual who hadn't made love to her since 1968, and she showed me a letter he wrote to prove it.

As I remember, the letter was mostly evasive and a denial of the issues except for the reference to something that had happened before they were married. (I think now that this was the mentioned molestation.) With regards to this, he had written, *"well...maybe in that way my heads not screwed on right."* That is as close as I have had to an admission of guilt. I heard rumors of other incidents but like usual the truth was suppressed by my father, the workers and the victim.

Looking back now I can think of other times when maybe things weren't quite proper. As an "elder," my father was often the chaperone for camping and ski trips. The parents thought their children were in such good hands. They didn't know how true that was. My father was always willing to lend a hand to young men in their time of need. (Now it looks more like his time of need.) Looking back they all had the same type of dysfunctional personalities. They always looked poor and hungry with an eager-to-please and never-question attitude toward my dad. This abuse will probably continue until he dies, gets killed by an irate parent or goes to jail. At this time he is still going to meeting, giving his testimony, and is in apparent good standing with workers and other members of the "Truth." It's like he has no regrets about all the lives he has destroyed. I don't think he knows a 29 cent postage stamp is all that stands between him and prison.

We had Sunday morning meeting in our home in Utah, and Wednesday night meeting in our home in Colorado. I've learned now that it was a "privilege" to have a meeting and be an "elder," but to me it just meant more chores. The house had to be vacuumed, furniture had to be moved to make room for the folding chairs, and I had to be showered and sitting quietly an hour before meeting started.

On Sundays my father would cut the crust off of a piece of bread and put it on a plain white plate. He would take a small glass and fill it with Welch's grape juice, and then both would be placed on the coffee table in the middle of the room. Chairs were lined around the outside of the room rather than in rows. When the sacrament was brought to the table, all horse-play stopped, and we would sit quietly hoping to gain "the right Spirit."

Being the son of an "elder" meant I had to work that much harder to gain parental and worker approval, and I was often told to be a "good example" for others. When there are 20 people singing in your living room, the whole neighborhood can hear, and as I got older this was an embarrassment when my friends would walk by. People already thought I was weird for having such short hair and an out of date wardrobe, so the singing was just another nail in my coffin. I never preached to my friends because I did not know what I believed, and even if I did, I thought them all to be "sinners" with no hope of salvation.

The meetings in the home are basically the same world wide. The worker or elder would choose a hymn to start the meeting and then ask if some one else had a hymn they would like to sing. Then he would say "let us pray" and all who were able would kneel in front of their chairs. As a child, looking around, making faces, or not showing the "right spirit" was good for a knuckle rap on the head. I think I still have lumps from this.

One by one all professing would say a short prayer. There were no set prayers and I would just repeat things that I had heard since childhood. The elder was always the last to pray, praying a little longer and louder than everyone else. When he would finish, all would say "Amen" and return to their seats. Another hymn would be chosen and then it was time for "testimonies." This was my own private hell from week to week. On Sundays after the elder would speak we would usually sing two verses from a hymn before passing the "bread and wine." All persons baptized and in good standing were allowed to take part.

The elder was the last to partake and then he carried the "bread and wine" from the room. When he returned we would sing the last two verses of the hymn and meeting was over. Every one from the smallest child to the oldest widow would shake hands, thank each other and leave. No one made to much small talk because they didn't want to lose the "spirit" of the meeting.

Some times after Wed. night meeting, (basically the same without the sacrament) the families with younger children would stay after for ice cream or a root beer float. It seems to me that if there were workers or elderly saints present that root beer or ice cream were never mentioned. As a child it was always best to be "seen but not heard" when visiting saints or when the workers were present. "Being seen and not heard" was one of the major rules of growing up. I believe this is one of the reasons I am so unassertive and accept many things as "that's just the way it is."

Another main rule for the children was "to always clean your plate and be thankful for what you have." To this day it is hard for me to leave anything on my plate. I am over weight and still won't leave the table until my plate is clean.

Prayers before meals were either given by professing family members or sang together as a family. The larger the family, the louder the prayers. We were also expected to read a chapter from the Bible and say our prayers every night before going to bed. We were expected to rise early enough in the morning to read the scriptures and pray before going to school. Prayers were not usually of thankfulness but rather asking to be more "submissive to God's will," a better example unto others, and to be a "light unto others in this world of darkness." Prayers usually started with, "Our Heavenly Father," and ended with, "This we ask for Jesus sake." Prayers before meals usually include the phrase, "Bless this food to our bodies use." I never heard "The Lords Prayer" until I was a teenager, but these other phrases I still remember 25-30 years later.

I remember traveling long distances to go to meetings. Every 3 weeks in Utah we would drive 100+ miles one way to go to meeting in Kemmer, Wyoming. A little old lady named Ivy Miller lived there and was the only "friend" for miles. People came from all over to meet in her home. (The workers must have had their eye on her estate.) Wednesday night meeting in Utah was 20 miles one way; and in Colorado, we would think nothing of driving to Denver, Albuquerque or Cheyenne for "Special Meetings."

Special meetings were like a one-day convention with workers, bag lunches, and the excitement of seeing friends, (Girls), that you only saw once or twice a year. We would also drive to Chugwater, WY, Salt Lake City, UT, and the western slope of Colorado for convention. Many of our vacations were spent going to conventions or visiting "friends" in other states. When one is a "friend" they are welcome at meetings world wide and our trips were often plotted around where we would go for Wednesday and Sunday meetings.

It is scary to look back and know that there were children all over the world who were as regimented, humiliated and terrified as I was. Wherever we went, I could fit in with the "friends" children because we were all like little robots trying to win parental and worker approval. My parents were far from the worst and I knew of some kids that were beat almost weekly whether they needed it or not. The children learned, not thru support and encouragement, but thru fear and forced submission. A proper outward appearance was needed so one could blend with the other terrified, brain-washed children of the "Truth."

Of all the abusive families, Dave and Donna R. were the worst. Dave was the only father that scared me more than my own. He would get a PSYCO glare in his eye and seemed to thrive on beating his many children into submission. He would make the entire family watch when he would kill the pet chicken for the dinner table. He would hold the chicken by the head and swing the body in an arc so when the body hit the ground "it would run like a chicken with it's head cut off." Where Donna ruled her house with an "iron fist," Dave ruled it "with a club." I don't think Dave and Donna were raised in the "Truth," and that is why they dealt such harsh punishment on their children. They knew the "sinfulness" of their young lives and beat their children into "holy submission," for the benefit of their own salvation. I can only hope that the children realize what a dysfunctional up bringing they had and don't pass the abuse on to their own children.

Many parents that were raised in the "Truth," (like my own), had no clue as to the "worldly" pressures put on their children. Parents had never smoked, drank, or done drugs, and like the workers could not intelligently interact with their children on these subjects. They pretended that these and other problems did not exist. If you didn't talk about sex you couldn't get pregnant. If you had short hair, you didn't do drugs. If you didn't talk about physical and sexual abuse, it never happens. Civil rights, war, poverty and politics, starvation and shattered lives did not exist, for "we are not of this world." This blanket denial of problems have resulted in generations of children who are politically, socially, and sexually ignorant, who believe that if they turn their backs, cover up, or ignore a problem that it doesn't exist.

This is the way I behaved most of my adult life. I had never voted, didn't watch the news, and never really had a strong opinion about any thing. I was proud of being a slut who would screw any one. I figured I was "going to hell," so my motto was "LIVE FAST - DIE FAST." I just did not care. I ran with "bikers, hookers, and other social outcasts. I had **very** long hair, pierced ears, and tattoos. I had a BAD attitude about myself, others and the world.

I still have the hair, tattoos, and earrings, but after reading the information from Threshing Floor Ministries, I now realize most of my problems are rooted in my childhood in the "Truth." I think if I had been allowed to join sports, attend school functions, and was encouraged to do well in school, my life would have been different. I'm just thankful I'm not in prison or dead from a drug overdose or motor-cycle crash, I have a much better attitude now and would be interested in corresponding with other ex- 2X2's who went the same rebellious route as me; or parents who feel that is the way their children are heading.

Thanks to all at Threshing Floor Ministries,

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