

What was your experience of persecution? Here are some of mine

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Photo date and location unknown

This week's theme is persecution, or negativity. Not our favorite experience, but it used to happen a lot. What was your experience of persecution?

It may be hard to understand now what it was like. Walking from door to door in a small town, being watched from behind curtains as if you were green and eight feet tall with one eye in your forehead. People would stare at us as we ate lunch, convinced we were the strangest people they had ever seen, the Moonies. In Berkeley, one time when we sat down to talk to someone, they literally got up and ran when they found out we were Moonies. As if we had the power to make them lose their minds by looking at them and talking.

One sister who had children in school went to a local school board meeting and somehow 'the menace of cults' came up. She stood up to introduce herself as a community member, mother of schoolchildren who happened to also be a member of the Unification Church. "My God!!" one woman shouted "They're everywhere!" It wasn't uncommon for people to talk about you like that when you were right there. "They're brainwashed."

Once, at a drive in burger place in Senatobia, Mississippi, Sharon Pace and I were fundraising to a young woman.

“Wait! Are you Moonies? The Unification Church?”

“Yes, we are!” Sharon replied with a dazzling smile.

“Omigod!” she yelled, waving frantically. “Clare! Trisha! Come quick! It's a Moonie! It's a Moonie!”

Sharon stepped forward and offered her hand with another big smile. “Hi, my name is Sharon Pace, and I'm a human being, not an it. Nice to meet you.”

The girl was practically hyperventilating she was so excited. But Sharon slowed her down for a moment.

If you spent a long period of time, say three years, getting this kind of reaction from people every day, you kind of got used to it. Not that it didn't get to you on some days. On MFT teams, we would sometimes say “I was doing fine until they found who we are.” I would get mad when I heard this. People didn't know the first thing about us. They only knew what they had heard. But it was so easy for us to fall into the negative mindset, especially when you got it multiple times every day. And you never knew when it was coming.

As a result of this, when I started doing business and worked at a booth in Sears at the mall, it was a shock to go through a day (or even a few hours, for that) without someone yelling “Moonie!” in a nasty way. It took some getting used to being treated like a normal human being. Nobody staring, snarling, insulting you (I've had little old ladies curse at me), nobody herding their kids away from you like you have a deadly disease, nobody challenging you to a theological mud-fight. Nobody refusing to serve you at a restaurant, nobody buzzing you with their bike while you're trying to eat lunch on a bench, nobody throwing bottles at you on the street. Nobody calling you a heretic and a follower of the Antichrist.

When I joined the seminary, it was several months before I could hear “Jesus” without flinching. For 3 years in the deep South, most times I heard “Jesus” it was someone attacking and judging us, our church and Rev Moon. Jesus' name and holy words were spoken with a snarl, not with love