

Kay Hughes-Benson, Berkeley, California, 1968



This is a testimony about me, Katherine (Kay) Hughes-Benson, and my late sister, Susan Hughes-Oliver, joining the church at ages 16 and 17 respectively, in December 1968. I am writing on behalf of my sister Susan as well (I call her Sue), since she passed to the spirit world in August 2010. She had also been a member for over 40 years, so I feel it is appropriate to do so. Also, we joined the Berkeley California “Unified Family” church together, at the same time, hearing the Divine Principle together. This testimony also has my brother John (Johnny) Hughes in it as he is the one, at age 20, who introduced Sue and me to the church.

My brother, John, and I were as close as two peas in a pod. My sister, Sue, and I were even closer. She was, and always has been, my very best friend. Sue and John were not particularly close, so it was John, at 20, and I, at 16, who used to sit around on Sunday afternoons reading the Bible and trying to understand the various parables and symbols therein. One afternoon my brother said to me “Kay, I think the Messiah is on the earth and I think I can find him. I’m going to search for him.” I replied, “Oh Johnny, when you find him, could you please tell me?” This conversation took place in total seriousness. I remember the excitement in his voice. I remember the incredible feeling in my heart of amazement at the idea of the Messiah being on earth and my dear brother possibly even finding him. Also, I remember cautioning him, “John, be careful; there are a lot of weirdoes out there you know . . . please be careful.”

At the time, my mother, sister Sue, and I lived in Oakland, California. Our dad had died tragically several years before. Our brother,

John, was attending the University of California at Berkeley. A few weeks later John called me. I'll never forget the conversation. He said with tempered excitement, "Kay, I think I've found the Messiah," and he began to tell me a little about the Divine Principle and the people who lived in the church center. I had many questions. I said, "Are they pure people? They don't do drugs do they? Are you sure about this? Are you sure, Johnny?" I continued to ask him a lot of questions. John explained that he had responded to an ad in one of the college newspapers, the *Berkeley Barb*. The ad had been put in by the center director, Edwin Ang. It said "New revelation from the East, come and hear." My brother told me he went to the lectures. He said he had heard the Divine Principle in its entirety and afterwards he was convinced that Sun Myung Moon was the Second Advent of the Messiah. All John was telling me took my breath away. Later that day, I told my sister Sue about it.

Sue and I very much wanted to hear the Divine-Principle lectures. Since we were only 16 and 17, our mother did not want us to go to the Unified Family house before she could meet the members. She invited the church members over to our house for dinner. There were about four or five members. We heard the Principle of Creation as it was taught from Young Oon Kim's Divine-Principle book in our living room after dinner. This was December 1968. During that month we heard the rest of the lectures at the church center in Berkeley, taught to us by Helen Ireland-Subrenat. The day after Christmas we signed the membership form. We were so happy and excited.

By this time our brother John had decided he did not want to be a part of the church. Much to my utter heartbreak, John died tragically four years later when he was just 24 years old. At the time that we joined, Sue and I were still in high school, so we could only visit the church center on weekends. I also remember members picking us up at 4:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings as we snuck out of our house so we could attend Sunday-morning pledge service. Our mother was very

accepting of the church at first, but when she realized what a commitment the church was asking of her daughters, it began to make her very uncomfortable. The following summer, my sister graduated from high school and she moved into the church center. I was so envious! After another year I graduated. By this time, my mother was very upset about the church. She would not let me move into the church center, as I was still 17. Finally, since it was legal for me to, I moved into the center on my 18th birthday.

After moving in I was only in the center for a short time before I was sent out on a "Bus Team." My sister had already been sent out on the Day-of-Hope tours. After that it was one witnessing or fund-raising bus team after another for me. Sue and I had very different life courses in the church. It always seemed I had the nitty-gritty work, while Sue had the being-out-front mission because of her superb speaking skills.

Also, because of our ages many brothers and sisters were able to be blessed before us. It seemed like the wait was forever for us two. While growing up we were raised very strict: "no drinking, no smoking, no sex before marriage," and we never had any relationships before the church. So, it felt like a really long time to us from when we joined in 1968 to the actual time of our engagement in 1979 and then another long wait until 1982 for our wedding. Finally, we started married life in 1983.

Sue was blessed to Berlin Oliver. They had three children. They have had a great deal of difficulty with two of their children. Their dear daughter has a mental illness which started at age 12, and one son is severely disabled. Miraculously, all three of their precious children have been blessed!

It felt too soon, but God does all things with the hand of love, and my beloved Sue went to the spirit world when she was only 59 years old on August 16, 2010. Even though I understand she has eternal life, I love her with all my heart and deeply miss her. We had been such a support and strength to each other.



Susan Hughes Oliver netting carp at Barrytown, New York.

I was blessed to Jeff Benson. We have five children, whom I totally love and adore. I am still hoping that some day they will want to be blessed. Unfortunately, Jeff decided in 1997 he did not want to be married to me. I tried to hang on to him for years with prayers, conditions, and counseling, but it was to no avail. This has broken and crushed my heart practically beyond recognition, but I do still love God and True Parents. Even though this incredible pain estranged me from the church for awhile, I always have loved Father in my heart and the ideals expressed in the Divine Principle. I went through the Rededication of the Blessing Ceremony this past February and put Jeff's name on the Blessing form with the hopes, still, that he will come back to True Parents.

Despite all the difficulties, I am forever grateful to my brother John for "finding the Messiah" and bringing Sue and me to the church. I am so grateful for the opportunity to help the poor and suffering people of the world with the new truth given to us through beloved Father. I pray our dear True Parents can be known to the world and honored as the King and Queen of Heaven they are in their lifetime.