

Joy Schmidt Pople, Washington, D.C., 1970



“Please join us for a picnic on Memorial Day,” Mary Ellen Holmes [now Schick] said during her weekly phone call about the new movement she had recently joined, the “Unified Family.”

I had moved to Washington, D.C., the year before, after growing up in a Mennonite community in Virginia. I had encounters with the Divine while gazing at Dali’s painting of the Last Supper at the National Art Gallery, listening to gospel music at the National Cathedral, and praying at the Friday night charismatic gatherings at Catholic University. Until I got some guidance from heaven for the future, I was working to repay college loans.

Mary Ellen’s persistence paid off, and I agreed to come. “What is this all about?” I asked. She embarked on a saga about how the long, gloomy, cosmic winter was passing, and a cosmic spring beginning. New truth was needed for this new age, and God was revealing himself in new ways through a Korean man, Sun Myung Moon.

“Oh dear, where was this leading?” I thought.

“God the Creator is infinite, invisible Spirit and does not appear fully in any finite or visible form. Nevertheless, it is given to man to see God,” Mary Ellen continued. The Principle of Creation, as she explained it from Miss Young Oon Kim’s book, *Divine Principle and Its Application*, had uncomfortably oriental overtones. But the final section was compelling: God had made us to be mirrors reflecting His likeness, and we had turned away, shattering his image and breaking his heart. But we still bear the divine spark and seed. Throughout history, God has been grieving over his lost children, seeking us as much as we seek Him. He is calling us to reunite with him and to

establish His kingdom of love and joy.

Sitting in my study room at the Library of Congress Annex that week, I mulled over these ideas. Try as I might, I couldn't focus on the tasks at hand. I had been a research assistant for a historian of Islamic architecture, but he had died suddenly a few weeks before. There were many projects to bring to completion. My academic studies had been in language and literature, and I needed to expand these skills to the analysis of architecture and art.

After a week I went back to the center on Upshur Street to hear the next lectures, which were on the Fall of Man and the Mission of Jesus. I was living in a large house with seven other young women, whose project it had become to introduce this country girl from Harrisonburg, Virginia, to big-city life. Several of them were trying to break up the marriages of some selected men in the hopes that they would marry my house mates. But if they succeeded, could they expect fidelity? They didn't want to reflect deeply on that.

The Fall of Man lecture was the most cogent argument I had found against hedonistic culture. However, the Mission of Jesus lecture asserted that Jesus didn't come to die on the cross, and that belief in Jesus did not offer full salvation. I left in a huff.

Each day I passed through the Library of Congress' Main Reading Room, surrounded by corridors of the published wisdom of the ages. The paintings in the dome above showed the great civilizations of the past. In 1969, the first Americans walked on the moon. However, outside the walls, some corridors of the city were still blackened and boarded up from the riots following the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. I had been tear-gassed in the marches against the Vietnam War. To the generation of the 1960s, our nation and world were in a mess.

The next time I ventured to Upshur Street, the lectures were about history. God was operating in history, and the familiar Bible stories were links in a large plan. Abraham's willingness to offer his son, Jacob's

offering his wealth and bowing down to Esau were grand moments in this scheme, with lessons that we could apply to restoration of any relationship. Six thousand years of providential history unrolled in six hours. From the introduction, I could guess where this was leading, and I didn't want to deal with the proposition that the Messiah had come. Again, I left in a huff.

Back on Capitol Hill, I read the Bible and Divine Principle instead of indexing photo archives. The infinite beauties of nature and the ecumenical spirit of the charismatic movement had earlier convinced me that God was bigger than the confining Mennonite dress code. The Mennonite theology of radical discipleship had much to offer the world. My parents had spent World War II in Paraguay, South America, helping refugees build a new life in the Grand Chaco. Other relatives had served overseas, and we often had international guests as I was growing up. I longed to spend time in far-flung parts of the world, learning people's language and culture, and finding ways to communicate God's word in ways they could understand. I was interested in a higher ideal of marriage.

I had seen the hand of God on the canvases in the art galleries and the stones in the cathedrals. At the Memorial Day picnic at the P Street Beach (a prime cruising spot for the local gay community, as it turned out), God touched my heart, and introduced me to a grand family of faith. I couldn't say no. On July 6, 1970 I signed the membership form of the Unified Family and eventually moved into the center.

The next year, I was recruited for professional positions at the Library of Congress and Smithsonian Institutions and was amazed that I could turn them down without looking back. Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his wife, whom I honor as being sent with heaven's mandate as True Parents, came to America on December 18, 1971, and invited us to trek across the country with them on a "Day-of-Hope Tour." I packed a suitcase and sleeping bag and began a decade and a half of nomadic life that took me to various parts of the United States and Mexico.

To my relatives I was an apostate. It was eloping to go to Korea, be introduced by Rev. Moon to John Pople, and to get married along with 1799 other couples in 1975. My parents tried to deprogram my sister, Louise, and threatened to do the same to me. With our two young children, Stacy and Jason, John and I moved to a small town in central New York State two decades ago to raise our family near his parents. Perhaps, we are ultimately meant to live as one family in one global village.