

***Elisabeth Seidel,
Milan, Italy, 1970***



My hometown, where I grew up as a child, is La Chambre in Savoie, in the French Alps. I remember vividly my father forbidding me to go to church. In this small town of La Chambre, which was beautiful in itself and close to nature, every day on my way to school I obeyed my father's instruction by crossing over to the other side of the street opposite the local Catholic Church, thus avoiding being in front of the church.

Yet, I became intrigued and anxious to know what it was that they taught there that I was not allowed to discover. All my school friends went there on Sundays and Thursdays when there was no school. I was hearing comments such as: "Satan will take you if you do not go to church." My father said I could choose my religion when I became 18 years old.

My family went through a lot of turmoil, and my parents divorced when I was 17. I would tell my school friends that I was going to travel around the world and find something marvelous — I would find the truth. They would look at me in amazement. I went to work and study in Greece, England, France, and Italy. I felt some guidance during the summer of 1970 when I worked as a tourist guide. I took people to vacation spots, and again this intuition came over me that I would find the truth, but I would have to work hard; my life would not be easy. Yes, there is a spirit world. So during the last week at the vacation spot, I reveled in the ocean water under the sun of the Spanish island of Minorca, enjoying a beautiful vacation before starting my mission.

In Milan, Italy, I shared an apartment with a former Catholic nun. Although we were both in our early twenties, she already had

experienced a religious life, and I had many questions such as: "Does God exist? Is there life after death? Where can I find true love?" She said she knew a group that could answer all my questions, but because I did not have a religious upbringing, I would not be able to understand their teaching. I insisted that she please give me the address of this group, but for a long time she resisted. She said all her life she was told Jesus came to die for us, and now they said he should not have died; it was not necessary for Jesus to be crucified.

Finally, after pleading with her, she gave me the phone number of the Unified Family. I called right away and was asked to come the following week for a conference. I asked if I could come immediately, but I was told to wait. Finally the D-day came, and I became excited and very happy. I remember that I had just found a coat that had belonged to my grandmother, Marie, when I visited my parents in France, and I took the coat with me as it was again in fashion.

It was October 1970, exactly 40 years ago. I put on the coat that day and ran to the address I was given. I interrupted my run to dance in the street. The atmosphere seemed so high, like many people were with me rejoicing. I entered the center and walked immediately towards the picture of a man and asked, "Who is he?" I was told, "You will know after you understand his teaching." On the bottom of the picture was written: "I will teach you how to pray." It was a black-and-white picture.

For a couple of months, I went there a few times every week to study the Divine Principle in the Italian language. At the conclusion of the teaching, I felt shaken and at the same time I really wanted to connect deeply. Unfortunately, the national leader at that time, Rev. Martin Porter, had to close down the Milan center. So, again I was faced with another obstacle — what should I do? I decided I would ask my boss at the tourism agency to send me to Paris with some Italian tourists for Christmas. Although I did not prefer to go there, I

figured out that I would contact this group in Paris and continue my study of the Divine Principle there.

I arrived in Paris one evening at the HSA-UWC headquarters situated on the Rue le Sueur (Road of Sweating) in the 16th district and asked if I could resume my studies. They asked me to wait for a while at the door. I found out later that they thought I was a spy and were wondering if they should let me in. They did let me in, and for the following week I studied every night with Rev. Reiner Vincenz who became my spiritual father. I suddenly felt many tears coming. I cried nonstop. I could not stop crying. Every night I cried. The teaching was intense, and I felt the burden of God for the whole world. We were a bunch of youngsters to whom was given a new revelation to save the world. It was too overwhelming. I had to learn to compose myself again and go back to Italy to quit my job, give away my stuff, burn the letters which belonged to my past, and make a fresh start in Paris.

God's Day, January 1, 1971 is very special for me. Reiner asked me to be there for the midnight prayer on December 31, 1970, the beginning of my spiritual birthday. I had to arrange with my colleague to take over my job, to show Paris to the tourists, so that I could attend this prayer meeting and start the New Year with God. In order to get there I had to run through Paris, because the roads were blocked for the New Year festivities beginning at midnight. I ran to the church center, arriving one minute before midnight with relief in my heart. I had made it on time.

The members were making conditions to attain a membership of 21 by God's Day, 1971. I was among the few who joined at that time. My life became a religious life, strict, rigid, with many days of fasting, a lot of prayers, hard work, and little sleep. To top all of this, there were many spiritual attacks and physical attacks as well. We worked during the day and witnessed at night. On the weekends, we made many [sacrificial] conditions such as going to small suburbs of Paris

with no food or lodging, or praying while walking around Paris the whole night through.

We had signs also in St. Germain des Pres, the Latin quarter (student quarters). We walked with signs on our back saying: "The Messiah is on earth." The Communists in France in the 1970s were powerful and violent. One night in Lyon, as Mr. Henri Blanchard was giving a talk in a public place, they were forcing us to leave physically. I found 12 spiritual children in about two years' time, and then I worked as a secretary at the French Headquarters for Reiner Vincenz and later for Henri Blanchard.



Elisabeth Seidel

Father Moon announced a "Matching and Blessing" to take place in February 1977. When I was introduced to my husband, Dietrich, and I looked deeply into his eyes, it was like a spiritual experience going through a tunnel all the way to heaven and sensing God and His profound love. God was looking at me through Dietrich. For these two days of celebration, I truly experienced the kingdom of God on earth. I was smiling non-stop so that a few days later, I even felt muscle cramps from smiling so much. As the 74-couple Blessing group at the New Yorker Hotel, we felt close to each other as true brothers

and sisters. Tasting God's love through True Parents at the Blessing ceremony is the peak of one's life. Our couple was from Austrian-German and French backgrounds, and we were well aware of the enmities between our nations. We are working for world peace and God's Kingdom on earth; thus, on the way all things need to be healed with lots of forgiveness, repentance, and new beginnings.

From the first class of seminarians at the Unification Theological Seminary, Father Moon chose 12 students to pursue a Ph.D. degree and my husband, representing Austria, was one of them. Thus, Dietrich and I started our family life in Toronto, Canada. We had many students from the University of Toronto who came to our apartment, and we taught them the Divine Principle and showed many videos about our movement. I recall that also professors came and wanted to know more about Rev. Moon. We even had one TV interview.

Our children, Chris and Diesa, were born in Toronto. I will always remember going with my babies to visit professors in their office and tell them about our church. We had good relationships with the professors and hosted several events for them in our apartment or the church center. We moved in 1987 to Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) where Dietrich began teaching theology courses.

We continued witnessing and organized "Community Dinner Talks" and took care of student families. Also, we responded to the need for taking care of ministers with Interfaith Prayer Breakfasts and holding marriage and family seminars, which initially started at UTS and then moved to our home. Father Moon gave us the blueprint of how to live in the Kingdom of God, and we were able to experience God's love and the love of True Parents.

How can we love people so that they too can experience the true love of God as we did? Despite rejection, mockery and attacks, we still love people. As I look back, above teaching the Divine Principle comes the love of God. Loving relationships come before teachings. True love is a decision, not just a feeling. In our tribal mission work

now in Europe, we first make sure that everyone gets the feeling of being part of the "family" like children do. Our reconciliation events between France and Austria-Germany bring many people together, and we share our hearts at these events, giving out Ambassador for Peace certificates while creating eternal loving relationships and taking away any traces of resentment.

I never ever thought that this path could be so difficult, that so much pain, many tears, and heartaches would be my destiny for following a religious life. I never thought it would be so difficult to follow those whom God had sent as the Messiah, the returning Lord, the true Man, the Savior for all religions, and the True Parents of heaven, earth and humanity.

How fortunate I am to recognize him, since it is now almost to the day 40 years ago when I ran through Paris to find him. I thank my angels, my spirit guides, and all the helpers who work with me, saving me from attacks and dangers, and always finding hope again and trust and faith. During those 40 years, I never doubted and always had faith.

"The one who has faith never fears."

Thank you, True Parents.