

Lisa Take, Los Angeles, 1966



I grew up in Los Angeles in the Hollywood area, where my father, a hard-working laborer and hot-tempered Cuban from Tampa, Florida, and my mother, a headstrong, unyielding, well-cultured Armenian from Lebanon, raised three daughters. I was the eldest.

My parents did their best to raise us, but ours was an unhappy home. Throughout our childhood, my sisters and I witnessed our parents quarrel, swear, and threaten one another, usually over business matters, i.e., money or the lack thereof, or on business decisions, as they dabbled in real estate.

Naturally, this hostile environment spilled over to my sisters and me as we likewise engaged in our own melee but did our best to maneuver ourselves away from our father's wrath, lest we would get a taste of his belt or some similar object. Being the eldest, I was not always so fortunate and often was the subject of their parenting experiments. After an occasional spanking with a belt due to my bad behavior, and the punishment of being sent to my room, I remember crying out to God and to my guardian angels, imploring them for justice and compassion as I cried myself to sleep many a night.

During the day, my source of consolation came from practicing the piano many hours a day, which became an important emotional outlet – that and the visitations every summer to my Armenian aunt and uncle's home in the Hollywood Hills during summer vacation. Those fleeting visits were the happiest moments in my childhood. I loved going with my aunt everywhere she went even for the shortest errands, from which I derived great pleasure. In the evenings in her living room, I especially enjoyed hanging out with the visiting elders,

hearing them speak in their ancient language as they reminisced about the old days and sang nostalgic Armenian songs with the oud, a Middle-Eastern guitar. I didn't understand a single word, but I didn't care. I basked in the peaceful, loving atmosphere and like a sponge, soaked up the love and attention. In return, it gave me tremendous pleasure to play the piano for them – even if they weren't always listening – or to sing an old, Armenian-Christian hymn which I still remember to this day, basking in their love and nurturing environment. Those summer vacations were my panacea. They protected me as I continued unknowingly my search for love and the parental love I was denied.

In 1966, at age 19, while majoring in music at Los Angeles City College, I befriended a fellow music major who was studying the Divine Principle with Jon and Sandy Schuhart, who lived very close to my parents' home. I was already singing in a reputable choir at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, but my friend told me about this couple who were forming a singing group to sing Christmas songs for prisoners in the county jail in December. I jumped at the opportunity to do this, and meeting Jon and Sandy was my first introduction to the Unified Family (our name before we became the Unification Church).

Jon and Sandy showered me with love and attention that I could not easily escape. I visited their "center" about twice a week in the evenings when the members – all three of them – came home from work. I assisted on the piano, helping everyone to sing their parts as we rehearsed the Christmas songs, having so much fun and enjoying each other's company and Jon's silly puns which no one ever laughed at, except me. Jon and Sandy exuded such a loving atmosphere that after we finished our little prison concert, I continued visiting them at the center just to talk about life with them. I was never pressured to hear the Divine Principle.

Jon and Sandy were wise to realize that I was not an academic type but nonetheless gently suggested that I hear the lectures which I was more than willing to hear. But I was so enamored by their loving

hospitality and care for me, the lectures that Jon presented went in one ear and out the other. I know I was not a very good student. But Jon and Sandy always had an open door and made me feel that I could visit them anytime and talk about anything I wanted to with them. They had that kind of heart. It was that heart, that unconditional love that captivated me.

While living at home, I earned money from babysitting. But after babysitting until 10 or 11 p.m. at night, I often drove to a popular coffee house on Hollywood Boulevard, which was a popular thing to do in the 1960s with the advent of the hippie movement. I needed to explore and wanted to improve my mind by listening to people philosophize and debate. I was surrounded by pseudo-intellectuals but as naïve as I was, I just reveled in the atmosphere. I didn't smoke, drink, or do anything promiscuous, because I feared my father's wrath if I dared do anything bad.

But one evening I came home way too late from the coffee house, about 3 or 4 in the morning, and my father was there waiting for me, absolutely livid. I knew this was the end for me. One thing I always had difficulty doing was lying. I was an honest person but a terrible liar. Even when I told the truth, my father didn't believe me! I don't remember the words that were exchanged between us, but there was a lot of shouting and the next thing I knew, my father knocked me down to the floor in our living room and hit me many times as I cowered for protection. I remember my mother and sisters crying out loud and screaming as they tried to pull him away from me. Then he gave me the ultimatum: I had one week to move out of the house. I replied that I would do better and would move out right away. This made him even more furious, and he hit me again. When I recovered, I grabbed my purse ran out of the house to a phone booth and called Sandy.

I explained the situation to Sandy, saying that I needed a place to stay for only a few days and would move on. With total sympathy

and understanding, Jon picked me up in his old 1960 green Chevy with flowers painted all over it. (That car would have made any hippie proud.) I cried in the car, wondering what was to become of me, as we drove to the center. Jon and Sandy were very gracious, kind, and loving towards me. They never put pressure on me to hear more of the Divine Principle lectures. They were very wise and knew what I needed. Then one evening about two weeks later, in my room, Sandy told me her testimony. As I listened intently about how she and Jon joined the Unified Family, I suddenly burst into tears realizing that God had led me here. It was an epiphany, and at that moment I was committed in heart without knowing the entire Divine Principle or knowing who True Parents were. I decided to quit school, get a job, and support the center as the other members were doing.



Lisa Take poses with her supervisor, Miss Young Oon Kim, at the Upshur House Center in the early 1970s.

About a month after I became a full-fledged member, Sandy revealed to me that after that phone call to the center as I was crying and distressed, she hung up the phone and she, Jon, Margie Stahon and Ray Barlow who were members back then, jumped up and down ecstatically. They had been fasting and conducting prayer conditions

for several weeks for me and were overjoyed to have me back at the center.

After a short separation period, I managed to restore my relationship with my father. He actually became my spiritual son many years later. After hearing the Divine Principle lecture on tape with my husband and I at his side, my father signed an Application for Associate Membership on July 6, 1990.

On a humorous note, I feel sorry for God that he had to resort to such dramatic means to bring me in. I can envision Him saying now, "Dang, that girl is just not getting it...now I've got to use Plan B."

Forty-four years later, when I think back, if God saw something in this naïve and unremarkable, inexperienced 19-year-old girl who was searching for love, it must have been the sincere heart and – with the help of my ancestors – the ability to overcome all obstacles and still go forward. As a member of the 1800 Couple Marriage Blessing, I see that same characteristic in all five of my children. Although they are amazingly accomplished professionals in the corporate world

– making more money than me – I step back and marvel at the potential they have for the great feats yet to come in assisting True Parents and True Children in ushering the new world yet to come.