

Kidnapped for Christmas: A Deprogramming Testimony

Louise Schmidt Perlowitz and Joseph Kinney

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The following is a testimony by Louise Schmidt Perlowitz, a Pennsylvania resident who joined the Unification Church in 1971 and who was kidnapped for deprogramming during the holiday season of 1975. She was Blessed in marriage to Jeff Perlowitz in 1982 and has two children, Lana, 23, and Randall, 19. Louise works in the legal department at HSA-UWC (Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity) USA Headquarters and is looking to celebrating this year's Christmas with her husband and children.

In December of 1975, my parents had called me asking me to come to visit them and I thought it would be nice to spend Christmas with them. I was working at East Garden and was given permission to go home and visit my family. What I hadn't realized was that Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where they were living, was a hotbed of anti-cult and deprogramming activity.

My mother picked me up at the airport and drove me to my parents' home. She told me we were going in the front door, which I thought was strange, since we always used the back door. When we entered the living room there were four strange people sitting in the living room with my dad. This was really weird, since this was my first day home, and my parents would not usually have invited people over to visit right away.

Two or three of the male visitors were large and intimidating. One of the men said in an ominous voice, "Do you know why we are here?" Then I realized who they were. My immediate reaction was mentally to withdraw from what was going on and to try to figure out what to do. Since I was not a great speaker or a theologian, I did not think I could talk my way out of the situation. My decision was to see what they said, play along a little bit, and try to escape when the opportunity came. Also, I did not have a lot of time to waste, since I really wanted to be back in the Unification Church environment by God's Day, January 1st, and start the new year in God's camp.

The visitors presented their arguments, and I responded as well as I could, stating my views, but they were very persistent. I gradually stopped arguing and started smiling. It was getting along toward dinnertime, and my mother had prepared both a large ham and a turkey for dinner. I thought the stress must be getting to my mother, because she would never have made such a huge, expensive dinner under normal circumstances. I thought I should get out of this deprogramming situation quickly for her sake as well.

After dinner the deprogramming continued. When it came time to break for the night, the deprogrammers camped out in the house, and I spent the night in a bedroom with my mother.

The next morning, since I had pretty much stopped arguing and just smiled, they thought I was deprogrammed. It was decided that I would be taken to a halfway house in Ohio. A deprogrammer drove me to the home of a family who would look after me as I transitioned back into "society." This was Christmas Eve. The family treated me well, and even found a Christmas gift to give me on Christmas Day. However, I felt that I faced a very bleak existence unless I could get back to the church.

The day after Christmas, the family decided that I needed a chance to go shopping, since I was coming out of what they thought was a very restricted environment of the church. The whole family, the father, mother, and teenage son and daughter, drove me to the airport where I cashed in my return airline ticket. They allowed me to keep the money. They then drove me to a mall where we would go shopping.

It seems that everyone had to use the restroom, so we went first to the passageway where the restrooms were located. I came out of the restroom first and no one from that family was there standing guard, so I looked for an escape route. There was a mall exit down the passageway, so I raced out the exit and looked to see where I could hide. There was a movie theater across a four-lane highway, so I quickly but carefully crossed the highway, went into the movie theater, bought a ticket (I had money from my airline ticket) and went into the auditorium to hide. The movie hadn't started yet, so I went down to the front row of seats, near an exit door, and crouched down to hide in case someone came in the movie theater looking for me.

The movie started, but after about a half hour, I got restless and went to a pay phone to call Belvedere to see if someone could rescue me. An Ohio Church brother called me and suggested that I take a taxi and rent a motel room, then call him to give him the address of the motel. I did that and then called him. I asked how I would recognize that he was a church member, and he said he would whistle "The Lord into His Garden Comes."

The church brother rescued me, and I was able to take a bus back to East Garden. I made it back before God's Day, which was a real blessing. I felt I had been out in the cold and darkness and very much alone. Now I was back in the light and warmth.

I was welcomed back at East Garden by the True Children and the staff.

My parents came to visit me a couple of years later and then came to New York City when I was blessed in 1982 to my husband, Jeff Perlowitz. I did not feel free to visit them until years later when my mother became ill.



Joseph Kinney in 1975

Louise's Welcome Back Party



Welcome-back party for Louise Schmidt (far left), Joy Schmidt Pople, and Ye Jin Moon at East Garden.

The following is an account of Louise's welcome back party in 1975 by Joseph Kinney, who today is the senior project engineer at the New Yorker Hotel, and who witnessed her return to East Garden after her kidnapping.



Louise Schmidt cuts a cake at a party at East Garden around the year 1975. That year there were kidnappings every week.

In 1975, Louise Schmidt, one of the American sisters on the East Garden Staff, received a call that her father was gravely ill. True Parents said she could go tend to her family. At the time, Ted Patrick and others were kidnapping and attempting to deprogram about one member per day, which amounted to 700 members in two years.

The True Children were very concerned about the hundreds of stories about members being kidnapped, so they wanted to celebrate Louise's return. The three oldest girls, Ye Jin Nim, In Jin Nim and Un Jin Nim, used their own money and bought cake mix and ice cream. I watched as these young girls baked their first cake in the East Garden kitchen. It was as funny as watching any little girls try to bake a cake, but their mood was so serious and sincere. With a little help from the staff sisters, the cake turned out OK.

When the welcome-back party was held, and Louise was seated at the table with the True Children, I believe Louise began to cry first, but very soon all of us -- True Children and staff -- were sobbing. I think the True Children appreciate members' efforts more than we realize.