

Deprogramming Testimony

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Photo date and location unknown

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, "Do you know why we are here?" in an ominous voice. Then I realized who they were. My immediate reaction was to mentally "withdraw" from what was going on and 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 after cashing in 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. I appreciate all their kindness.

PS: My parents came to visit me a couple 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.