

Chapter 1

Lindsey

Age: Thirty-something Occupation: Corporate vendor When she left the church: 1978

Are you a Christian?

Yes.

What denomination do you consider yourself affiliated with?

Seventh-day Adventists. It's all I have ever known or been.

Would you consider yourself a good Adventist?

No.

Why?

Because I smoke. I don't go to church. I am not active or involved.

How long have you been inactive? Do you remember when you stopped attending?

Somewhere right after I left academy. I went to an SDA college for a little while. I couldn't do it. I didn't want to be there. I just went there because all of my friends went there. That's where you went to find your husband and live happily ever after.

You did eventually marry. Where did you meet your husband?

In a bar.

Did you feel guilty because you were marrying a non-Adventist?

At that point, it didn't enter my mind. I had been inactive for quite a while. It didn't really matter that much to me.

Do you remember the events that led up to your becoming inactive?

In college, my roommate and I would go places on the weekends. We would go to the beach, the mountains, and home. We would leave early Saturday morning and miss church. We didn't really party. We just never made it to church. I was about nineteen or twenty when this all happened. I enjoyed going to church - what I remember of it.

Even now I wake up on Saturday morning, and I think, I should go to church, because that's the way I was raised for eighteen or nineteen years. I guess I miss the social part the most - going where other people are. When I moved out of the house and got my own place, I started making new friends. They weren't Adventists.

TEN WHO LEFT

As I drifted away, I got involved in social things that occupied my time. I started drinking in academy, but not a lot. I started smoking when I was twenty-two or twenty-three, but I had already stopped attending church. I also started drinking more and did some pot. By twenty-four or twenty-five, I was doing the hard stuff.

Did anyone other than family members ever visit you after you left the church?

No.

Are your parents divorced?

Yes, when I was twelve or thirteen, they divorced. I felt devastated for a while. But I always felt I was loved. Especially by my dad. It seemed like he was always there. When I got off drugs and went to a counselor, she made me realize that I had a lot of issues to work out with my mom.

Today, one of your parents is an active Adventist, and the other isn't, right?

Yes. My mom was an Adventist because that's what she was supposed to be. It's like me when I went to college, because that's where everybody went to get married. That's where she met Dad. He was planning to work for the church. I know that she is a Christian, and she believes in God. With my dad, it's more obvious. He tells me all the time that he is praying for me. They both believe in God. They just show it in different ways.

How were you as a teenager? Were you able to make your own decisions growing up?

Yes and no. My parents were pretty cool about allowing me to make my own decisions. I went to Adventist schools all the way through up to college. Because of the controlled environment, I didn't have to make a lot of decisions - they were already made for me. In some ways, I think about the way I was treated as being a type of brainwashing. You were told what was OK and what wasn't. I did not like that part.

When I did get freedom, I went wild. Nuts. My life was fun but insane. Even dangerous. Guns getting pulled, getting arrested, fights - all that stuff made my life more intense and crazy.

Now, I realize that I have an addictive personality. I am an alcoholic. Sometimes I still feel drawn toward drugs. When I used them, drugs were more important than family, food, or sex.

TEN WHO LEFT

I still smoke. I want to quit; I'm just not ready. I'm still working on the issues of drugs and alcohol. I think about quitting all the time. I'm almost ready.

Picture yourself coming back to your home church this next Sabbath. What would be going through your mind?

The older members, I feel, would judge me. Though most of them wouldn't, I still think some of them would. I could relate, however, to younger people if they were around. They seem to be more accepting.

The services are too structured. I don't feel like I could relax. I would be trying to remember what we are supposed to do next: Are we supposed to stand, sit, kneel, pray, sing, or what?

Also, they still sing the same songs we sang when I was a kid. It's so structured. I couldn't feel relaxed. A church that is more relaxed and accepting would be very attractive.

Have you thought about going back to church?

I have thought about it a lot. I have attended church services several different places. I liked it very much. I know I should be attending church; it's just not that important to me.

Why is it important to attend church?

Not to please anyone, that's for sure. I guess because it's good for you - the fellowship, the support to keep going. I'm not saying that everyone who goes to church is a good Christian either. Some people go to church to show off their clothes or to see the plaque that shows how much they gave for the new organ. That's not church. It's almost a fashion show.

If Jesus were to come right now, what would He think when He sees you?

A mixed-up kid. Not a bad person.

What are you going to do when you see Him?

I am probably going to faint! [Laughter] I know in the back of my mind that He is coming. I just keep putting it off. I know that I am not ready to go to heaven.

What do you have to do to go to heaven?

Stop smoking, for one thing. It's not good for me, and I think it is really important that I take care of myself. I also think that I need to go to church - for me, because that's what you are supposed to do. I also need to pray more so I can grow closer to Him.

I pray now. When I'm driving in town and I go by someone's house and I know they have drugs, I have to pray to keep myself from going in. Not so much for the people, but because of the drugs. I don't

TEN WHO LEFT

do “alone” very well. I miss those people. They were my friends. I am driving down the road, and I want to see them. I miss their companionship. If I stop to see them, though, I know that drugs will be there. I pray and keep on driving, but I miss my friends.

What do you think of when you hear the word salvation?

Being saved.

How do you get “saved”?

I don’t know.

Were you prepared, within the environment that you were raised in, to live in the real world?

Not at all. Not at all. The world is good and bad. The world I was raised in was a school environment - it was a good life, but it was unrealistic. I did not know how to act out in the real world. It was fun, but I definitely found the good and the bad.

Do you want your children to be Seventh-day Adventist?

I have never thought about it. I want them to be exposed to it. I don’t know that I want them involved in it. It’s not bad to be an Adventist - I just want them to have a choice. They have been exposed to just about everything in the world, the good and the bad. I just want them to have a choice.

What do you think of Ellen G. White?

I think she was a prophetess. She had some really good things to say. But that was then. A lot of people misuse her. I don’t think she would have liked that.

If you could, what would you change in the church?

Older people who run the church are really hung up on a bunch of stuff. They say “E. G. White says ...” The world has changed a whole lot since she was alive. But they haven’t changed. They have become irrelevant. The church does not relate to the 1990s. A lot of E. G. White’s writings could be updated and still be true to her principles. It could be done. It needs to be done.

Doctrinally speaking, I still believe in the Sabbath and that when you die you are asleep. I don’t think God judges us on whether we eat meat or not.

Do you see yourself coming back someday?

Yes. I see myself trying to become an active member. I don’t know really what that means, but the church would have to be very accepting and patient with me. The people mean a lot to me.

TEN WHO LEFT

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Lindsey mentions that the social aspects of church are what she misses most. Yet no one visited her when she left the church. How can we explain this apparent contradiction?

2. What is your reaction to Lindsey's comment about how decisions were made for her? What can we do for young adults that provides an environment where they learn to make decisions on their own?

3. What can the church do to help those who struggle with substance abuse? Some have suggested that the church has denied there is a problem with alcoholism and drug addiction. Do you agree or disagree?

4. Is Lindsey justified in being concerned about members judging her if she were to come back to church? What about her comments about the way we worship? Are her observations valid?

5. Lindsey has a view of salvation that is based on her own behavior. Is she understanding salvation correctly? Where did she learn this view of salvation?