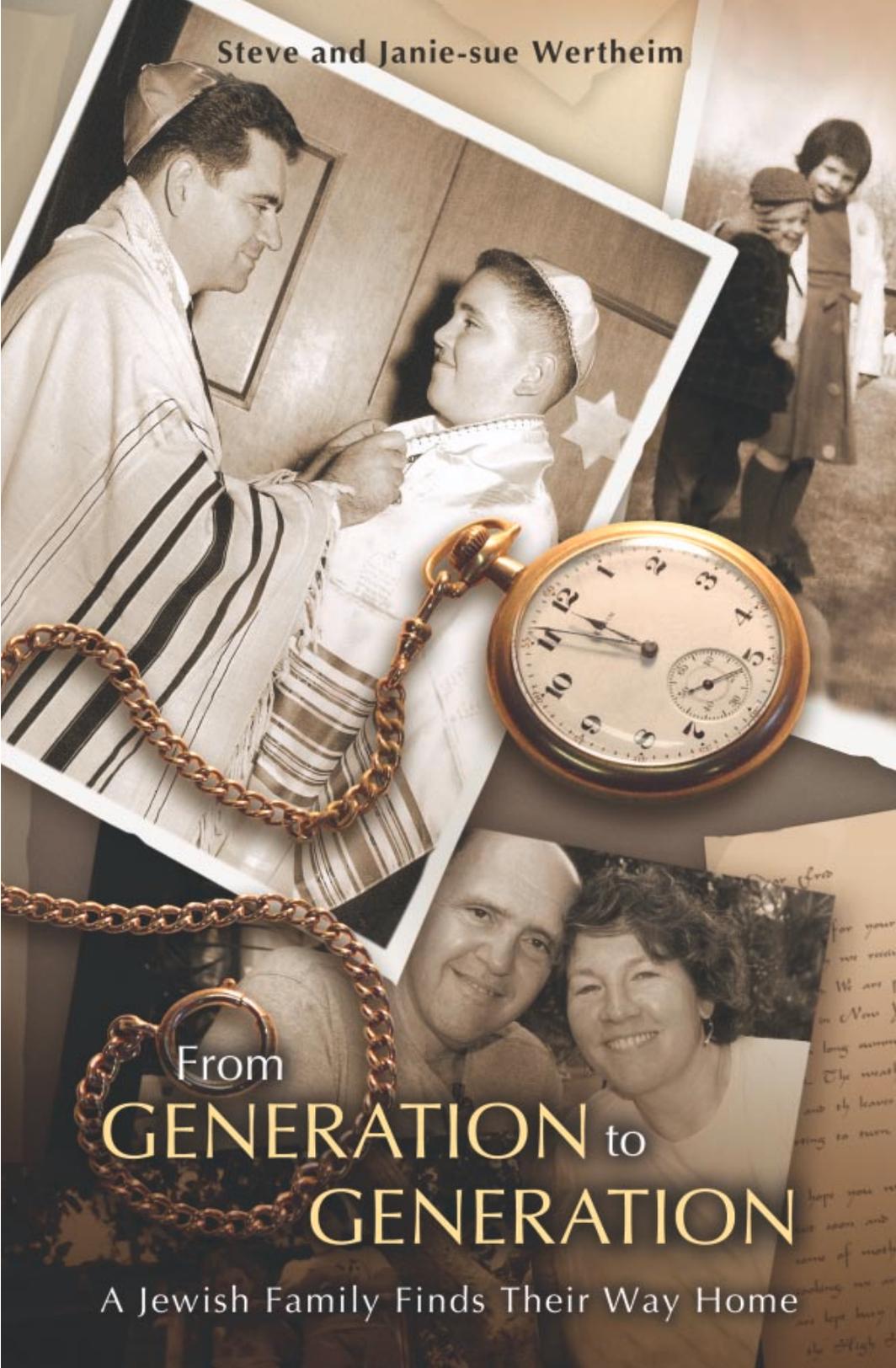


Steve and Janie-sue Wertheim



From  
**GENERATION** to  
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A Jewish Family Finds Their Way Home

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Edited by Ruth Rosen



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# From GENERATION to GENERATION

A Jewish Family Finds Their Way Home

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The following is the story of two Jewish people who found Jesus and then found each other. . .

## **Steve's Story**

My name is Steven Peter Wertheim. I was born August 3, 1951 in the Bronx, New York—but our family actually lived in the upper west side of Manhattan, where it seemed like everyone was either Jewish or Catholic. When I was seven- or eight-years-old, regular fights broke out between us neighborhood kids. There would be an argument—usually over something innocent like choosing teams for stickball—but as things heated up, invariably “one of them” would call “one of us” “Christ killer.” I had no idea what “Christ killer” meant, but I knew it was something really ugly, and I always insisted that I wasn’t one. If nothing else, I knew it meant a fight. The name-caller and “name-callee” would go at each other and a couple more guys would jump in to defend their friends and . . . next thing you knew it was time to go home and explain the bloody nose to Mom and Dad.

It was all my mother could do to keep from going after the bullies herself. Sometimes she would come downstairs and yell at the kids or their parents if the fights were loud enough and long enough to get the attention of the adults, which occasionally they were.

I asked my parents why the kids who weren't Jewish were so mean to those of us who were. They explained that many Christians hated Jews simply because we were Jews. They would remind me of history and especially the Holocaust. My parents are from Germany and had experienced Nazi hatred firsthand.

My parents were careful to make sure that I knew about Kristallnacht in November, 1938, and how my grandfather's business was taken away from him along with everything he owned. I remember hearing how the Nazis took my grandfather away and how my dad, his sisters and their mother thought they would never see him again. My father often told me how they were the last Jewish family in their community and how they were despised by the majority of the townspeople. And my father told me how later, as an American citizen, he joined the army to help fight the Nazis. He had returned to Europe, landing on D-Day at Omaha Beach. Later, he was captured and put into a prisoner of war camp. He came very close to being shot on a number of occasions.

Mom and Dad could not explain why the Nazis hated us. They could only tell me about the cruelty they suffered from "the Christians."

My parents drew no distinction between "the Christians" and "Gentiles." To us, if someone wasn't Jewish, they were Christian. Today, I would challenge any anti-Semitic person who might claim to be a Christian because I know what Jesus taught and how he expected his followers to treat others. But as a child, I only knew that I had to defend myself for being Jewish and I could never understand why.

I felt angry about the things my parents suffered, and I felt angry about the animosity that I experienced, even though it was on a much smaller scale. At the same time, I felt helpless and hopeless about it. It was like a dull ache, a general feeling of living with something painful that I was powerless to change.

That is not to say that we were enemies with all the non-Jews in the neighborhood. Of the two families we were closest to in the neighborhood, one was a Jewish family and the other was Italian Catholic. We even got together occasionally to celebrate holidays.

Hanukkah of course was a great time of year to be with my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. We would go to one another's houses, exchange gifts, light candles and eat *latkes*. The Hanukkah story meant a lot to us, not just because of the history, but because we knew what it was like to have to fight for being Jewish. It was very satisfying to celebrate our people's victory over those who had tried to assimilate or exterminate us. Of course the smell of the potato *latkes* and the anticipation of presents was exciting. And if there was snow on the ground, so much the better.

We also enjoyed celebrating Christmas with the Italian family in our building, the Marrones. We were so very close to the Marrones, the kids Johnnie and Louie were like cousins to my brother Rob and me, and the parents were like our aunt and uncle. They always had a tree, which to us little boys, seemed enormous. An electric train ran around the bottom of the tree, and the bright lights were warm and inviting. The food was terrific and I remember not wanting to leave. I remember falling asleep with the other kids, all of us around the tree with our blankets and pillows while the grown ups chatted.

It was nice that we got to share Christmas with this family, but I always knew that it wasn't "our holiday." I didn't understand the songs they sang about Jesus, but I knew that they believed things about him that Jews were not supposed to believe. In fact, Christmastime was kind of tough at my elementary school, P.S. 189, because we had assemblies where everyone would sing Christmas carols and I always had the feeling that I shouldn't be joining in. I wondered aloud to my friends why

they never sang songs about Hanukkah, but I didn't have the courage to ask the adults.

At any rate, we had days off for holidays like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—not just us, but all the kids, as New York City public schools were actually closed on those holidays. It was the one thing our non-Jewish classmates seemed to respect and appreciate about us.

When I was eight-years-old, I started going to Hebrew school three times a week in preparation for my *bar mitzvah*. Two of those times, I was allowed to leave public school early which was a real treat. I learned to read and write Hebrew and began attending synagogue, even by myself on Saturday mornings.

Many people at our synagogue were from Germany, and the adults there spoke more German than English. Each week, I listened to the rabbi giving his “sermon” which was usually his commentary on a current event. The services seemed so long, maybe three hours each Saturday. But there was always a *kiddush* (refreshment time) to look forward to after the service. It was especially good when someone celebrated their *bar mitzvah*, because the family would make a special *kiddush*. Everyone would load up their plates with food—the men and children of course would sit and eat. Then there was a group of women, usually older women, who would sit down, carefully wrap the food in their napkins and put it in their purses, “for later.”

To me, the Hebrew school and synagogue were all part of being Jewish. If you would have asked me, “Do you believe in God?” I probably would have said yes. I didn't think he had done anything in particular for me; somehow I just sensed his presence. I never thought much about what he might expect of me or vice versa.

In the summers, we went up to “the country” or what some fondly referred to as the “Jewish Alps”—the Catskills. It was a time to

escape the heat of the city, the concrete and the subways. We stayed in a bungalow colony near lakes and swimming pools. Everyone there was Jewish. The dads would come up from the city after work on Friday evenings, and drive home on Sunday nights or early Monday mornings. The kids and their moms would stay all week until Friday night when the dads would come back up. Saturdays were the best because we had all kinds of activities during the day, and often a barbecue at night with movies afterwards. Sometimes our family skipped out on those things and went off with our neighbors from Manhattan (they stayed at the same bungalow colony) to the Chinese restaurant in a nearby town.

My grandparents (we called them Oma and Opa) on my mother's side, were really "old country." They mostly spoke German and only broken English at best when I was younger. I learned to understand German, though I never learned to speak it. In fact, when I was about 14, I told my parents that if they didn't want me to know what they were saying, they were going to have to learn a new language because I could understand their German conversations.

I never really knew my father's parents. Opa died before I was born. Oma lived with us for a while until we couldn't take care of her anymore. Looking back, I believe she had Alzheimer's, which back then was simply known as hardening of the arteries.

My father and my Uncle Erich ran a German grocery store until I was about six-years-old, when they lost their business and my dad started working at the post office. Uncle Erich's wife, Aunt Alice, was a great favorite of mine. Shortly after I was born, my mother had to have her gallbladder removed. Aunt Alice took care of me while she was in the hospital, and afterwards during her recuperation. We must have bonded because Alice seemed to take a special interest in me. She was more Americanized than most of my relatives and easier to talk to. And unlike some of my other

relatives, she didn't pinch my cheeks! She was a short, pleasantly round lady and her warm and inviting house was a place where you would always be comfortable and cozy. As my father's older sister, she often made his favorite dishes, including potato soup.

My Aunt Edith and her husband, Julius, kept kosher. When they came to our house they ate off of paper plates because we didn't keep kosher. Uncle Julius always told my parents that we weren't Orthodox enough and he used to tell everyone else how to raise their children.

My life seemed to take a radical turn after my *bar mitzvah*, which was in the autumn of 1964. The service was held in a synagogue in Queens, as we had recently moved there, and the reception was in a synagogue hall in Manhattan. I was happy and relieved when the rabbi congratulated me on the service and told me that I'd performed better than any of his *bar mitzvahs* thus far.

As far as the celebration, it was quite an affair. My mother had labored for many months to make sure everything was perfect. All the mothers of *bar mitzvah* boys would look to outdo one another for these events. Mom visited different places and knew exactly how she wanted every detail. She chose the place, the decorations, the food, the music and the photographer with the greatest care. I know that everything looked beautiful and tasted delicious, but my mother probably remembers more about the event than I do. It was the biggest deal that had happened in our family since Rob and I were born—like a wedding.

For my part, I felt shy and embarrassed by all the attention, though of course I was happy and appreciated all the effort and expense. The music was pretty traditional and, as was usually the case for these affairs, more suited to the adults than those of us who were young. I remember the Beatles had just come out and you might

have expected their records to be prominently featured at a teenage party—but a *bar mitzvah* was different. The dance music of the day was the hokey pokey and the *hora*.

For weeks and months when I attended synagogue they called me up for an *aliyah*, (which was an honor) and it was nice to know that people liked to hear me chant the prayers before the Torah reading. But as I said, after my *bar mitzvah*, my life seemed to take a radical turn.

I'm sure some of it was teenage angst, combined with our recent move, but life definitely changed for me after I turned 13. For one thing, having “become a man” made me responsible in ways that I hadn't been before. I took on a series of part-time jobs. I worked as a stock clerk and a delivery boy in a drugstore when I was about 14. I did errands and custodial work in a printing shop across the street from my high school. I worked for a messenger service in several places in mid-town Manhattan, finding my way all around the city via subway and public transportation. I think minimum wage was \$1.35 an hour, and that was my pocket money. The greater part of it went for gifts for family at holidays or birthdays. I liked having my own money to buy presents. But there wasn't a lot of time for playing or doing “kid” things.

I missed my friends from Manhattan and, as a teenager, I did not find it easy to make new friends. My self-esteem plummeted and what little belief I'd had in God seemed to disintegrate as I saw no evidence that he cared enough to help me with my problems.

My relationship with my family grew to be intolerable. There was constant fighting—a lot of yelling alternated with angry silences. Much of that was probably due to normal generation gap issues. But in addition, we were so very close that friction was inevitable and seemed constant. Whereas many families have problems with

a lack of communication, I felt like we had more than enough communication. Everything was a family decision; I was brought into every conversation and expected to participate as an adult in whatever we did.

In retrospect, I'm sure that my parents were expressing respect for my "adulthood" but in fact I still was, and wanted to be, a kid. My brother, who was seven years younger than I, was even more a kid than I was, and with that age difference came a huge gap in our experience and interests. Yet my parents seemed to expect me to be Rob's closest companion, an expectation I was not prepared to fulfill. They could not understand why I resented taking him along when I had free time. Feeling tied to my little brother caused a lot of bitterness on my part, and resenting a family member made me feel like a very bad person.

Looking back, I think that my parents' experiences in Germany had an unseen effect on our family dynamic. Many Holocaust survivors were robbed of their childhoods and perhaps would have a limited idea of what a normal childhood is or should be. And for those like my father, who'd had nearly lost his own father and later had several brushes with death himself, it would make sense to hold very dearly to whatever life they could rebuild. Plus, knowing so many people who lost family members left and right would cause those who were more fortunate to be extremely focused on their loved ones. I certainly felt the pressure of that extreme focus, but I didn't have the wherewithal to appreciate what might be behind the tight grip I felt my family had on me. I just knew that I wanted some distance from all that closeness.

I became something of a loner, but unfortunately I didn't seem to enjoy my own company any more than I enjoyed the company of others. I didn't like school, was not motivated and my grades were poor. I couldn't wait to be out of school so I could move away.

I made it through high school “miraculously” but by the time I graduated, the Vietnam War was in full swing. I had not prepared myself to get into college and my parents wondered aloud whether I should leave the country if I didn’t get into a college. They were afraid—and with good reason—that I would be sent to Vietnam. However, I was finally accepted into a school in New Hampshire that doesn’t even exist today. After a year, I transferred to C.W. Post College, which is part of Long Island University. Over the next three years, I earned my college degree in history and education. However, I hated being in debt, and decided that paying off my student loan was more important to me than getting a job in the profession I had been preparing for during the previous three years.

I worked in the post office alongside my father, which I had done several times during my summer breaks. I paid off that student loan in record time, about ten months. My parents encouraged me to continue working for the government, which could have been a lucrative job. But I wanted one thing: to “escape” from New York City and my feelings of loneliness and frustration. My grandfather, a gentle and very generous man, laid out a good sum of money enabling me to buy my first car—an orange Volkswagen beetle—during the summer of 1974.

That September, I packed my bags, and with my father in tow, I left New York and drove out west to “find my fortune” in sunny Southern California—which I figured was as far away as I could get from home. We arrived there a week or so later and checked into a motel in the Fairfax district of Los Angeles (one of the Jewish neighborhoods). We stayed for about a week while I went job hunting and apartment searching.

I did not have a career in mind but just wanted to find whatever honest work would pay the rent. Eventually I ended up at Security Pacific National Bank (which also no longer exists today). A young

manager asked, “What makes you think you’ll stay with us longer than six months, which is average? Don’t you know that half the people who come to Los Angeles from New York end up going back because they don’t like it here?” I replied that he could count on me to stay because I had been planning for years to leave New York. He told me that I was overqualified and I replied that I didn’t care—I needed a job to establish myself in California. He hired me and I became a bank teller.

My salary back in 1974 was all of \$600 per month. Nevertheless, I outlived the tenure of the person who hired me. He was to leave a few short months after I arrived. I was to begin a week or so thereafter, so my next task was to find a place to live.

The apartment hunt was very interesting. I had one contact in California—someone I had never met. His father, whom I knew in New York, told me that his son Scott could advise me about finding a place to live. Scott lived on the Westside in an area known as Brentwood (which I later found to be somewhat pricey and exclusive). Scott told me that there were several areas I should avoid. One was Hollywood because, according to him, “You have weirdos living there.” My friends back in New York had already told me that I was moving to the land of fruits and nuts! A second place to avoid was the San Fernando Valley because it was too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. A third location I should stay away from was the San Gabriel Valley because of all the smog. Scott never did tell me where I *should* live but I could tell that I would not be able to afford his neighborhood.

My father and I roamed around several areas of Los Angeles, in close proximity to my new employment. We happened upon a building with an apartment for rent on Cahuenga Boulevard in Hollywood, above the Hollywood Freeway. I looked at the studio and wasn’t overly impressed. The managers, Lily and her husband

Burt, were a friendly, middle-aged British couple. Lily and my father established a quick rapport while I was inspecting the apartment. Dad confided in her that he was nervous about my being so far away from him and my mother. Lily assured him that if I lived in her building, she would “keep an eye out” for me. In fact, she said, if he gave her his address and phone she would let him know if I got in any trouble. He obviously enjoyed her and after we left, he encouraged me to take the place. I wasn’t too keen on this particular apartment so we looked further. But the more I looked, the more discouraged I felt about the places and the prices I saw.

Later that day, I “gave in” and we went back to Lily and Burt’s building, filled out the application, rented the apartment and closed the deal (making my father very happy). He was to leave Los Angeles the next day and was very pleased that he knew where I would be working and where I would be living, not to mention the fact (very much unknown to me) that he had someone keeping an eye on me.

I brought Dad to the airport the next day, knowing that it would be some time before I saw him or any other family member again. While I was happy to be independent, for the first time I experienced a few qualms about being “on my own.”

Over the next few days, I went about the business of settling in. I began the new job, made some friends (or at least acquaintances) at work, did some sightseeing on my days off and was pleased that I was getting my bearings in my new home. Within a few weeks, Lily and Burt invited me to their apartment. They explained that they had invited over a couple about my age who had just moved to Los Angeles. The husband was Jewish and originally from New York. They thought we might have some things in common. I was certainly happy enough to meet some other young people away from my employment, and so I went over that night. I’m an inquisitive person and when I meet new people I normally

ask lots of questions. So when I met Baruch and Marcia Goldstein, I did the usual. I discovered that we had friends in common back in New York, even though we had never met one another. Somehow though, I curbed my curiosity and did not ask these people what they did for a living. I liked them and yet, I had a suspicion that I didn't want to know their occupation.

We parted that night having exchanged addresses and phone numbers. They promised to keep in touch with me and I was glad. A few weeks later, I received a phone call from Baruch, inviting me to their home in Santa Monica for dinner. I came bringing flowers for Marcia. I discovered on entering their home that there were two other people living with them. One was a fellow by the name of Mitch and the other was a young woman named Joan. I thought it odd and yet, this was California, and I had heard that in California they live freely in every sense of the word.

We sat down to eat, at which time Baruch said he hoped I wouldn't mind, but it was their tradition to pray at mealtimes. I found this odd because I knew from my uncle that in traditional Jewish homes you would ordinarily pray after you eat. I couldn't quite understand how what I perceived to be a rather liberal living situation fit with the spirituality my hosts were exhibiting. They seemed like hippies, yet there was a groundedness that again, didn't fit the picture as I perceived it. (Eventually, I figured out that Mitch and Joan were only friends and that the living arrangement had nothing to do with—well, what I thought at first.) At any rate, I didn't care if they prayed, but at the close of their prayer I heard three words that shook me up: "IN JESUS' NAME."

As we began to eat I asked them to explain that prayer. They told me that they were Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, Baruch and Marcia said they were working with Jews for

Jesus. I blurted out, “Just a minute. You can’t be Jewish and believe in Jesus!” They of course begged to differ with me. We had a rather heated discussion at the dinner table. Still, I thought I should be somewhat tolerant for just one evening. I didn’t think our “friendship” would continue beyond that. As the evening progressed we spoke about other things. Later, they mentioned that they were beginning a Bible study on Friday nights. “Whew,” I thought. I worked late on Friday nights so I had a ready excuse to turn down the invitation.

On my way home that night, I remembered something that had occurred a few months earlier. I’d been delivering mail in midtown Manhattan, and during my lunch break, someone wearing a “Jews for Jesus” T-shirt handed me a pamphlet. Maybe they knew Baruch and Marcia. I decided not to give it more thought since the evening was over and there was no need to continue the relationship in light of their strange beliefs.

Before long, Baruch called to invite me to the aforementioned Bible study. I reminded him that I worked late on Friday nights. He said that they didn’t begin until 7:30 p.m. and that it was casual so that no one would mind if I arrived late. I declined his invitation but thanked him for thinking of me. He continued to think of me and to extend other invitations, for which I made other excuses.

But the truth was, if it weren’t for their belief in Jesus, I would have liked to be friends with these people. After a while, I asked myself what was the worst that could happen if I went to one of their Bible studies? If I hated it I could leave and not go back. So, one evening in October 1974 I accepted the invitation to the Bible study. I met a half a dozen or so other young people, mostly university students or recent graduates. Some were clean shaven and conservatively dressed while others were more of the “hippie” genre.

It turned out that Mitch was a seminary student and he was teaching through the book of Matthew, the first book in the “New Testament.”

Now I was raised to believe that there were just two kinds of people, “us” (the Jews) and “them” (the Christians). In my mind, the two were mutually exclusive. As far as I was concerned, the people I met had given up being Jewish in order to become Christians. I voiced that thought, and was politely but firmly corrected.

On my way home, I couldn’t help thinking that these were nice people, although somewhat misguided. I found myself wondering why they needed to stop being Jewish to believe in Jesus—and why did they care about me, having never met me before? These questions had me wanting to go back.

So, a few weeks later, I reappeared at the Bible study. After that, I started attending regularly. I found my belief in God resurfacing as I heard these people describe what he had done in their lives. Hearing about their journeys to faith and the love they had for God moved me in a way I had not experienced before. I began to look forward to the Bible study. I also accepted invitations for an occasional meal at the Goldstein house. One evening Baruch asked if I wanted to meet with him for a one-on-one Bible study. By that time, I’d actually become interested enough to do some reading on my own. So I invited Baruch to my apartment for dinner and a study the following week.

In the meantime, I had let my parents know how I was getting on, and the fact that I was studying the Bible on Friday nights with a Jewish group. They were quite astonished, since I had previously made it clear that I had given up on God and all things religious. Nevertheless, they were pleased that my new friends were Jewish and that I had become interested in God once again. I had not told them that these people believed in Jesus. How could I explain it to them when I didn’t quite understand it myself?

About three months into the Bible studies with the group as well as individually with Baruch, a conflict began growing inside me. Baruch was giving me assignments to read in the Bible and I found the Scriptures to be a source of strength and comfort. Things these Jews for Jesus believed were starting to make sense. Being able to discuss the Bible with others who saw its value and who cared about God—and who were Jewish—meant a lot to me. These friends had known me for a short time, yet we were at home with one another and could discuss things that mattered. No one had pressured me about my beliefs, yet I found the Bible was very convincing.

And that scared me.

These feelings seemed to culminate at Hanukkah and Christmastime, 1974. I attended a Hanukkah party that was being co-sponsored by a Christian campus group at UCLA and Jews for Jesus. I had never felt more affirmed in my Jewish identity. I met so many people who loved and accepted me for who I was and in that same breath loved this Jesus, who I myself was feeling drawn to. What was I to do?

All I could think of was my parents, who would never understand if I came to believe that Jesus was my Messiah. I remembered all of the details of all of the things that, as far as my parents were concerned, had been done to us by “the Christians.” I knew that I could never become a Christian. I felt I could not afford to think any further about Jesus.

I thought it would be best to stop associating with anything or anyone having to do with him. So, in January 1975, I started absenting myself from the people I had become close to.

A few weeks went by and I found it more and more difficult to stay away from the Bible studies. It wasn't just the quality of the

people, but what they believed that drew me into a relationship, not only with them but with a God I had never really known before. I began to feel that perhaps I couldn't afford to NOT think any further about Jesus.

I began attending the Bible studies again. As an amateur photographer, I even took photos when some of the people went to hand out their gospel pamphlets.

I remember one Friday night—March 7, 1975—after the study I sat down on a sofa with Joan, one of the housemates. I told her, “I feel like God is standing at my door, knocking as though he wants to come in and be with me. It seems like all I need to do is let him, but I don't know if I'm ready.” Joan listened intently, nodded and made it easy for me to keep talking. I found myself expressing to her that I was at the point of making a decision, but felt unable to do so. As much as I had longed to be independent from my parents, I loved them deeply. The thought of the irreparable break that this would probably cause was unbearable. So I left the study with a heavy heart.

I drove home feeling very confused. By this time, I had gotten into the habit of praying. I asked God to help me be certain if Jesus was true, and to give me the courage to live according to what was right and real, even if it had painful consequences. After a restless night, I was still experiencing tremendous turmoil. I got in the car the next morning with no particular plan and found myself near the beach. As I said, it was March and oddly, whereas there would normally be sun, it was overcast.

I parked at the beach and walked around for a good long while. Water, sand, sky—all seemed grey, and it fit my mood. When I left the beach, I drove to Baruch and Marcia's house, hoping, as I pulled up to the curb, that they would not be home. However, when

I rang the bell, Marcia opened the door and welcomed me. She didn't seem especially surprised to see me, but told me to go on back to Baruch's office, which was behind the house.

Baruch asked how I was doing and I responded that I wasn't doing very well. I told him I was torn. I knew that Jesus was the Messiah but I wasn't prepared for what would happen to me if I believed in him. I said that I couldn't give up my family, who were very important to me. At the same time I said that I didn't know what I needed to do in order to follow through on this new belief in Jesus. He responded with calm assurance and let me know that if I really believed Jesus was the Messiah, it would probably be a good thing if I would confirm that before God through prayer.

It was at that time that I made the most momentous decision of my life. I prayed with Baruch, asking God to forgive my sins on the basis of Jesus' atoning death. And I asked God to help me to follow Y'shua (that's the Jewish way to say Jesus) and live a life that would please God. Afterwards, I knew my life would be changed, and changed it was. I felt a peace that I had not experienced before. I was so excited, that very night I was out in Westwood handing out pamphlets to tell other people about Y'shua. But I have to admit that before long I had some other feelings as well. Soon enough, the uppermost thought in my mind was that I had to tell my parents what I believed.

We were a very close-knit family even though I lived on the West Coast and they lived back East. It was nearly time for Passover and my brother Rob, 16 at the time and in high school, came to visit me during his spring break. I had planned to attend the Passover Seder at Baruch and Marcia's home, and Rob came with me. We got to the third cup after dinner, along with the *afikomen*. Baruch told how Jesus had taken this cup and the matzo that traditionally point to the Passover lamb, and used them to point to his body and

blood. Jesus also told his disciples to remember that whenever they took that bread and cup. Baruch explained that those who believe that Jesus' sacrifice was an atonement for sin now use the bread and cup to remember what he did for us. Some call it communion or the Lord's Supper, and we were about to have that remembrance right there, during Passover, like Jesus had with his disciples. Baruch made it clear that only those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah should participate at that time. I hesitated and then took the cup and the matzo in front of my brother.

Rob was very quiet on the drive back to my apartment. I asked if there was anything wrong. We began to discuss the evening and he asked me questions, not the least of which was whether I believed in Jesus as the Messiah. I told him that I did, but that I had not yet told our parents about it. We discussed it quite a bit more and then dropped the subject. The rest of his visit was pleasant and as I dropped him off at the airport, I asked him to not tell our parents what I believed. I explained that I wanted to do that myself. He agreed to honor my request, for which I was grateful.

Rob returned to New York, and the next time I spoke with my parents, I felt a strain in our conversation. I asked my parents if my brother had "told them." My mother then responded by asking, "Told us what?" I said, "About my believing in Jesus," I replied without any preparation whatever. My mother said that she didn't know what I was talking about. What I perceived as a strain in the conversation was simply my own feelings of guilt for not telling them what I had come to believe. We didn't talk much more about it at the time. But that didn't mean the subject was closed.

When we spoke about two weeks later, it was not a pleasant conversation. It was an hour long, long-distance fight. The accusation that I was no longer Jewish alternated with cries of, "Oy vey, how did we fail, where did we go wrong?" Suffice it to say that

we didn't get along as a family for some time to come. I later found out that following the phone call, my parents wrote me a letter which they never sent. That letter basically said that they wanted nothing more to do with me and that they preferred that I not contact them until I came to my senses and stopped the *narishkeit* of believing in Jesus. Even though they never sent the letter the relationship was strained at best.

That summer, my parents scheduled a visit to California with my younger brother and they intended to spend time with me. I realized that they didn't want to hear about my faith, but I wanted so much to explain what I believed and why it was so important to me. Before the arranged visit, Baruch and Marcia Goldstein were going to be in New York, and they offered to meet my parents. I mentioned this to Mom and Dad and at first, the offer was refused. Later on, they reluctantly acquiesced and agreed for the Goldsteins to come visit. My father told me prior to their coming that he wanted to throw Baruch off their terrace. (My parents were living on the twelfth story of an apartment building at that time.) The evening came and instead of throwing the Goldsteins off the terrace, my parents offered them coffee and Danish pastries, and they had a rather pleasant evening. My family even called to let me know how much they enjoyed their time together. I wasn't surprised, but nevertheless I was relieved. I felt that our relationship could only improve after they met the Goldsteins and realized that I wasn't involved with a "cult."

It seems before the end of the visit, the Goldsteins invited my parents to a concert being given by The Liberated Wailing Wall in Washington Square Park in lower Manhattan. My parents agreed to go. The Liberated Wailing Wall is part of the Jews for Jesus outreach; their concerts consist of Jewish gospel music, some dramatic pieces and usually one of the members takes five minutes or so to explain how he or she came to believe in Jesus.

The Saturday afternoon of the concert, rain was expected. The sky was very dark and overcast as the team set up their equipment. They presented their program in the park. My parents seemed to enjoy the presentation. The concert ended, and as the team put away the last of their sound equipment and instruments, the rain began pouring down and didn't abate for the next two days. My parents later told me that they believed that this was an act of God and that he held back the weather just so they could hear the team sing.

Within a few weeks of the concert, my parents and Rob came to visit me in California. We were together for a total of three weeks, two of which we spent away from Los Angeles. While we were away traveling, it became quite evident to my family that I took my belief in Jesus very seriously. They allowed me to tell them what I believed and why I believed it.

This was before the days of cell phones, and when we returned to Los Angeles we learned that my father's mother had passed away during our travels. The funeral had already occurred and there was no point in his returning to New York early. I felt that the fact that she died while we were away together as a family was an act of grace. My father had experienced trauma that made it especially difficult dealing with death, but he felt comfort being surrounded by his own immediate family and for this we were all grateful.

We spent our final week together in Los Angeles, and my family joined me in attending the Bible study at the Goldstein home. After everyone else had left, we sat having coffee with Baruch and Marcia in their living room. My father, out of the blue, turned to my mother and said, "Laura, what would you do if I believed in Jesus?" After a moment of contemplation my mother responded, "I'd probably leave you." The discussion didn't last much longer, and neither did our visit. Soon enough, my parents and younger brother returned to New York.

By this time, unknown to the family, Rob had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. However, still being in high school, he didn't feel he could voice his decision without risking being thrown out of my parents home. So he quietly and patiently waited.

It was 1975 and Jews for Jesus was just opening its branch office in New York City. In September, my family was invited to Bible studies there in Manhattan. My father was eager to go and my brother went right along with him. My mother was not interested but went because of her attachment to my father. Sam Nadler, the leader of the New York branch at that time began to meet with my father personally for Bible study. The gospel began making sense to him as well. One night while he lay in bed, my father (who was not and is not prone to visions) felt like he had seen Jesus standing in the doorway beckoning to him. Likewise, one day on his way to work he saw the words, "Jesus saves" in graffiti as he'd never seen them before. With all that had been taking place in his heart and mind, he could no longer deny what Jesus meant to him.

Dad told Mom that he too, believed in Jesus. Mom did not leave him, but tensions in the family began to heat up. My brother, having seen that my father now believed, no longer feared the consequences of his own faith in Y'shua and confessed that he, too, believed in Jesus.

Up until this point, my mother had endured the Bible studies and the "Jesus talk." Now that the whole family had, to her way of thinking, "turned," she let us all know that she had had enough. She resented the Bible studies, and didn't want to hear anything more about Jesus. Her parents were still alive and I think that she was experiencing the same kind of struggles I had undergone with how my family would react if I believed.

One Tuesday night, my father planned on meeting my mother after work, taking her to dinner and then going on to Bible study. My



Above: Baby Steve Wertheim



Above: Janie-sue (left) with baby brother Stuart



Above: Steve (right) with baby brother Rob



Right: Steve (right) with his dad



Above: Janie-sue learning to fly



Above: Janie-sue and Stuart:  
hug or headlock?



Left: Janie-sue carving  
the turkey



Above and right: Steve's bar mitzvah



Left: High school graduation



Above: High school graduation



Above: The wedding



Above: Steve teaching from the Bible





Above: Fred and Laura Wertheim

Below: Philip and Rose Arotsky (AKA Paul and Rae)



Below: Steve and Janie-sue Wertheim



Right and Below: Benjamin Wertheim with little sister Rebekah

Bottom: The whole Wertheim mishpochah: center: Laura and Fred; left: Rob and Sandy and the kids; right, Steve, Janie-sue and the kids



mother decided that she didn't want to go and informed my father that she would make her own way home from work and would see him later. After work, she went to the subway only to find that the trains were indefinitely delayed. She went back upstairs to take alternate means of transportation home and found that because of the situation with the trains, it would be impossible to get home in a reasonable amount of time. She then called my dad, had him pick her up by car and they proceeded with the original plan of her attending Bible study.

That was a turning point. My mother saw a film about Corrie ten Boom, a Christian who had hidden Jews during the Holocaust, and it deeply touched her. She realized that her reasons for "holding out" from what the rest of the family believed didn't so much have to do with who Jesus was as who she thought Christians were. The film helped her to see that people who truly love Jesus also love the Jewish people. Within a couple of weeks of that time, my mother also embraced Jesus as her Messiah and sin-bearer.

Who ever would have believed that our entire family would be reunited as Jews who are all for Jesus!

It wasn't long before I found myself wanting to go back to school to learn more about the Bible and my new faith. I enrolled in Talbot Theological Seminary having received an enabling scholarship from Jews for Jesus (and graduated with a MDiv) in 1979.

I also married a Jewish believer in Jesus, and my story is not complete without hers . . .

### **Janie-sue's Story**

My name is Janie-sue (Arotzky) Wertheim. I was born in New Haven, Connecticut on August 20, 1955. Both my parents are Jewish. My dad managed the auto parts departments of various

dealerships in New Haven and Ansonia. As I was growing up, I probably knew more about cars than a lot of boys my age, which was a source of some satisfaction.

My mother worked part-time in a kosher bakery in Westville. Mom wasn't the greatest cook in the world, but she knew how to bake fresh *challah* and coffeecake. She especially loved to bake and decorate birthday cakes. Some of my best early memories are of beautiful birthday creations that Mom made for my younger brother Stuart and me.

Uncle Harry (Mom's brother) who was mentally retarded also lived with us. Uncle Harry was employed by Goodwill Industries and worked hard, helping the truck drivers pick up donated goods. Life with him taught me a lot about respecting people whom others, in their ignorance, laughed at or ridiculed.

My earliest memory of family togetherness is celebrating Shabbat. My mother would make a roast beef or roasted chicken with potato *kugel*, string beans and homemade *challah*. For dessert there was fruit compote, so that we could enjoy something sweet on Shabbat. My dad would come home from work, change into nicer clothes, put on his *kippah* and do the *kiddush*. As Dad raised his glass, he encouraged us to sing along. Then he chanted the prayers in his beautiful, strong voice. (When he was young, his rabbi tried to persuade him to go to cantorial school.) The fragrance of Mom's freshly baked *challah* filled the house and made each week's celebration warm and inviting. Fresh baked *challah*, with its shiny golden brown crust, will forever remind me of Sabbath rest.

I knew that we celebrated Shabbat because we were Jewish, and I knew that Jews were the chosen people because my dad had told me so. Yet his life had been rather difficult, so I got the impression that we were chosen for *tsuris*, not blessings.

When it came to the synagogue, I never saw my dad eager to go—but go he did, very dutifully. He chose the little *shul* (synagogue) where my grandpa *davened*, on Greenfield Street, in New Haven. It was extremely Orthodox and the members would frown when we came in, probably because we were invariably late, and also because many knew that we never walked the whole way, but parked a block or two away.

Most of the people didn't realize that my dad was an amputee (his right leg), and it would have been very difficult for him to walk the twenty blocks from our home to the *shul*. Dad's artificial leg was a good one, and he walked with a fairly normal gait, which is why most people didn't know about it, or why we drove.

How Dad came to lose his leg is a story in itself. He was about 12 and was quickly approaching his *bar mitzvah*. It was wintertime and the neighborhood pond had finally frozen solid. All of the kids were excited about going ice skating for the first time of the season. For some reason, my grandma didn't want Dad to go, but the pull of friends and the promise of fun was hard to resist, so he snuck over to the pond anyway. He skated with a pair of borrowed skates, but somehow, he cut his foot. He didn't want to admit that he had disobeyed, so he kept his mouth shut and kept his dark socks on so that his mother would not see the blood. As a result, my dad ended up with a raging infection. The type of aggressive infection he had would be challenging to treat today, and this was before doctors had all of the wonderful antibiotics that are available now.

Nothing the doctors tried worked. The infection spread, and Dad ended up with a severe case of osteomyelitis, basically, a bone infection. So a relatively minor cut during a forbidden outing turned into a 13 year illness. Dad was in and out of hospitals. The doctors tried everything they could to save his leg. (And apparently, according to Dad, they tried some things that, by today's medical standards,

would have been malpractice.) Finally, when Dad was 26, the doctors proposed yet another invasive and painful procedure to “see what will happen.” Dad said, “Enough. It is not ever going to get better, let’s just take it off and be done with it.” The whole childhood illness and of course, the loss of a limb certainly had its effects.

At any rate, come Shabbat, there was no way to make an inconspicuous entrance into the small sanctuary. The beadle would tell us in accented and not-so-hushed tones what page to turn to. Dad would find the place in his own *siddur*, then turn to the appropriate spot in a *shul siddur* that he would then hand to me. With *siddur* in hand, I had to leave my father and find my way to the women, who were set apart behind a translucent screen. The screen let the light in so the women could see the pages of the prayer book, but it distorted images so that those on the other side could not see the people who turned pages, prayed and gossiped behind it. My dad explained that this enabled the men to concentrate on being holy, undistracted by the beauty of the women. Most of these women were of an age where their looks would probably no longer pose a distraction, but the screen remained an important part of synagogue tradition. Besides, can you imagine telling these ladies that the partition could come down because time had faded their beauty as effectively as any screen?

The rabbi delivered his sermons in English, so while I may not have understood much of the liturgy, I could understand his messages. He spoke mostly about how Jews should fulfill the law and do what was right, and he chided the congregation for not doing what they should to honor God. There was a heaviness about Rabbi Shokatovitz that began with his somber, dark clothing, and extended to the shadows formed by the crease of a disapproving brow. Try as I might to be good, when he talked about wrongdoing and wrongdoers, I felt that he was pointing right at me.

Then came the High Holidays. Unlike Shabbat, which filled our home with comfort, cheer and rest, the High Holidays seemed to bring tension and anxiety. It started with Rosh Hashanah, which seemed to spark fights and quarrels from out of nowhere. Part of the tension, I now realize, was a sense of divided loyalties. My mother would go to the little *shul* at the Jewish home for the aged where my zaide (her dad) lived. My father, as usual, would go to Greenfield Street to *daven* with Grandpa (his dad). Often, I felt torn between my parents, and where I should go. My grandpa had lost none of his mental acuity. He knew the *siddur* by heart, spoke a half dozen languages and was well respected by the men of his congregation. My *zaide* had not fared as well with the years. He didn't really recognize us all that much anymore, and often seemed confused or else just unaware. The Jewish home was filled with people in wheelchairs and walkers, some with bright alert eyes and others with sad or vacant faces. It made me unhappy to be there, and it was hard for a little girl to sit quietly and behave.

The chapel in the home did have beautiful stained glass windows. Sometimes I would stare at the rich blue and gold and orange designs—and daydream about Disney films that I had seen. Mom bought me every Disney record that she could find: *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Pinocchio* and the rest. I spent hours and hours listening to them, memorizing the words and then singing along with them. I could almost play the soundtracks in my mind, so when things were dull or depressing, I would tune out and listen to the music in my head!

Then there was Yom Kippur. I remember one year when I was nine or ten and I went to the *shul* with my father. During a recess, he took me out for a walk and brought me to a restaurant for a snack. He handed me an envelope from his pocket to pay the woman at the counter. Dad stood outside while I was eating, and when I was finished we walked back to the *shul*. I asked my dad, “Why do

people fast on Yom Kippur?” “We fast for forgiveness of our sins,” he told me. “Then why don’t children fast?” “Because they are too young to fast.” I didn’t really understand that. As the older sister, (my brother was about four years younger) I thought that I was plenty old enough. Most of all, I remember asking, “When you fast, do you know that God has forgiven you?” My dad looked at me and with a sad smile said, “I really hope that he has.”

I realized with no small sense of shock that my father, who usually knew everything that was important to know, did not know if he was forgiven or not. It left me wondering, if Dad doesn’t know, how will *I* ever know?

The break fast was always a relief because people were much grumpier than usual when they were fasting! I was glad that it would be another year before we celebrated Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I tried not to think too much about whether God had forgiven my sin.

When I tried to imagine God, I pictured a rather large face that looked a lot like my Grandpa Louie. Grandpa enjoyed a good joke, but I didn’t see him laugh very much, probably because I usually saw him in *shul*, or after the service in his apartment. He took religion very seriously and didn’t have a lot of patience with little children who were full of curiosity and the desire to explore. When he would put his *tallit* over his head to *daven*, he looked mysterious—and certainly you would never interrupt him for anything while he was praying. My grandpa would look at Stuart and I with disapproval if we were too loud, too restless or just too inquisitive. He seemed unapproachable, and since Grandpa was the most godly person I knew, my impression of him carried over to the Almighty. I perceived God as unapproachable and stern, disapproving of my behavior and perhaps my person, just as Grandpa was.

My mother's faith was more of the "knock on wood" variety. She, like my father, was a first generation American, and to her, God was like a good luck charm. She was rather superstitious and whenever she complimented anyone, immediately she would say, "*kainahorah!*" and then spit to ward off the evil eye. Mom worried about keeping the rules of *kashrut*, but had no problem going out to a Chinese restaurant and eating unkosher food there. She seemed to delight in "breaking of rules," and besides, it was not our home. It seemed like Mom tried to "figure out" how she could get God to hear her prayers, or work the spiritual world to her advantage. I didn't see anyone in my family operating with a consistent sense of faith in God, so I did not learn to believe in or trust him.

Then came my first real exposure to the Holocaust. My mother's family was from Poland, and if they hadn't come here when they did, they would have died in the Holocaust and I never would have been born. However, my parents had not told me much about the Holocaust, I think because they wanted to shield me from the awful truth. So I learned about it in school and it hit me like a ton of bricks to see pictures of emaciated survivors who had been liberated from the camps, not to mention the mass graves and photos of the destruction of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. I realized that these were my people and it was almost too much to bear. I didn't understand how God could have allowed it.

Meanwhile, I was struggling with something else. A Jewish mother is the heart of the home, and when I was in the fourth grade my mom became mentally ill. The bottom began to drop out of our family life and our religious practices. For example, we still celebrated Passover, but Mom just couldn't see the dirt and the *chomaytz* (leaven) anymore because her reality had become so disordered. We couldn't have a really "kosher" *Pesach* (Passover), and my dad would get very angry that things weren't right. Mom's personality changed; she had constant mood swings and sometimes

she became violent and lashed out at us verbally and physically. My dad began spending more and more time at work—and less time at home. My mother’s behavior began to isolate our family. We rarely went to *shul*.

There was cleaning and cooking that was going by the wayside, and as the big sister I felt I should fill in the gap. But I was young and did not know how to do things “right.” I began to feel it was my fault that things didn’t get done, that our house was not “normal.” And I felt that I was responsible for the unhappiness in my home. It wasn’t a logical thought—but a deeply felt sense of responsibility that I could not shake.

We moved several times because of Mom’s illness—the apartments and flats we rented would get terribly dirty, and I remember two instances when we had to move because the landlords were upset about the mess. My mother was depressed most of the time and just didn’t seem to see the dirt or to care. Other times, like a sudden change in the weather she’d go into a rage. We never knew what might set her off. Then again, at times she would energetically throw herself into baking. Her disposition would be sunny and bright as she eagerly watched us taste a new coffee cake from a recipe that she’d just found. Mama still loved to bake and feed people around her when she could.

We never had a clear diagnosis about her illness. My Aunt Bea told me years later that my mother had had a psychotic break and was schizophrenic. She was on a lot of heavy-duty drugs when she was getting outpatient treatment from the local mental health center in New Haven. While various family members tried to pinpoint a time and place it all started, I grew up with it, so it was like putting a cold pot of food on the stove and watching it go from cold to warm to hot, without being able to mark an exact moment in time when it actually heated up.

My mom's illness brought us closer to Dad in some ways, and kept us distant in others. He would try to explain why Mom was the way she was, and in the process would talk with me about many things that children are much better off not knowing. For example, I was well aware that our financial situation was precarious. I knew that the neighbors had complained to Dad that the laundry Mom hung on the clothesline was dirty and not clean. Knowing about things that really should have been the concern of the adults in my life made me worried and preoccupied. Dad talked a lot about how he saw the world, particularly about politics and "those people who are ruining the country." He didn't talk so much about the problems that my brother and I faced, or what was happening to Mom. Since he had been ill for so many years as a teenager and a young adult, Dad's family had revolved around his physical condition. Maybe it was hard for him to take his focus off himself and give it to Mom, who really needed help and support and someone to take care of her.

Meanwhile, my cousin Ellen, who was older than me, was preparing for her *bat mitzvah*. She had received a copy of the Jewish Bible as a gift, and passed her old one on to me. I didn't expect much. To this day, I am not even sure why I began to read it—but as I did, I was quickly gripped by the fact that God was involved in people's lives in Bible times. When they called out to him in their trouble, God would answer with miracles and wonders. As I surveyed the wreckage of my family, I found myself wondering, "Does God still work miracles for his people? Why don't I see them?" I thought back to all the Passover Seders where we talked about those "miracles and wonders" and found myself thinking that either these things happened, and God is real, or they didn't—and he isn't. I desperately wanted to know, because things were getting darker and more difficult by the month as my mother grew worse. I continued reading the Bible, hoping to understand something about this God that it spoke of, the one who actually talked with his people and was so close and personal with them. I wondered if he would ever do anything for us (my family) or for me.

In my freshman year of high school, my friend Karen, who was going through a difficult time of her own, underwent an amazing change. Karen's parents had gone through a bitter divorce and she was devastated. She was a Gentile, and although she went to church, she did it much the way I had gone to *shul*—because that was her family background and it was something she was supposed to do. But I began to notice some differences in Karen. Nothing in her home life had really changed and yet she seemed peaceful—even joyful. I noticed that she was carrying a Bible along with her schoolbooks and was reading it between classes. I had stopped reading the Bible, so that seemed weird to me. I asked her what was going on.

Karen said, “Well, Janie, I used to be a Methodist but now I am a Christian!” That made absolutely no sense to me. “What in the world are you talking about? I don't get it. Aren't Methodists Christians?” I asked. Karen explained to me that Methodists and Baptists and all kinds of “ists” were technically Christians, but that it was possible to attend any of those churches and be “religious,” without actually having a relationship with God. Karen had grown up as a Methodist because that was the church her family attended and she was expected to accompany them. Yet she had only recently heard (at a Billy Graham meeting) that Jesus had died for her sins and that if she asked him into her life, he would take away those sins and give her a new start with God. As a result, she said, she had come to know Jesus in a personal way, and her life was changed.

I told her I thought that was fine for her, but that I was Jewish and Jews don't believe in Jesus. She looked at me and said, “Well, I don't see why not. After all the Jewish people are expecting the Messiah.” Then she took her Bible and opened it to Isaiah 53. She handed it to me and said, “This is one of the promises from your Bible.” I was stunned because what I read sounded so much like Jesus—yet Karen told me this passage had been written 750 years

before Jesus came. Then I remembered that I had stumbled across this same passage during my own Bible reading—and had actually checked the front of the book to make sure the version I was reading was “kosher” (a Jewish Bible and not a Christian interpretation). I was surprised that this was in the Jewish Bible but didn’t think much more about it at the time. Now Karen was telling me that her Jesus was my Messiah, the one described by the Jewish prophet Isaiah.

I was angry and unsettled. I knew that Grandpa Louie left Russia because of the anti-Semitism there, and the things done to our people in the name of Jesus. And there was Karen, telling me that this Jesus was my Messiah—what *chutzpah!*

And what was all this about sin? I was a good Jewish girl who tried to do the right thing. I saw sin as breaking the Ten Commandments, especially the big ones like committing adultery and stealing. The latter, I felt did not even apply to petty thievery such as a candy bar, but only to the Bonnie and Clyde type of bank robbery that makes the evening news. I thought that compared to a lot of people that I wasn’t so bad and in fact, I was a pretty good person. I knew I was far from perfect, but I didn’t see sin as a problem for me personally.

Karen didn’t try to argue or convince me that she was right. She continued to be my friend even though I disagreed with her. Whenever I mentioned a particular problem or concern, she would tell me that she would pray for me. I began to see God answer in amazingly specific ways as Karen prayed for me the needs of my family. It was too much to be a coincidence; it had to be God at work, personally, like in Bible times. I wanted that kind of relationship with God where he would be near and real all the time. So I began asking Karen questions, sometimes challenging her, sometimes genuinely curious. She answered my questions to the

best of her ability, and when she didn't know something, she'd hunt down the answer for me. She suggested that I read the New Testament for myself, compare it with the Jewish Bible and come to my own personal conclusion about who Jesus was.

Reading about Jesus was a revelation. I expected him to be some kind of anti-Semite because my Grandpa Louie had told us lots of stories about the “Christians” coming to his village and attacking all the Jewish people. But everything Jesus said and did seemed so Jewish. He spoke with love about “the lost sheep of the House of Israel,” and he especially cared for those who had been marginalized by people in positions of power. I found this Jesus to be very convincing. He was Jewish, he was loving and compassionate and he could do things that only God could do.

Isaiah 53 was not the only passage that stunned me in terms of Jewish prophecy, though it was probably the one that hit hardest. Daniel 9 also made quite an impression because it gave a time line for the coming of the Messiah, including the fact that Messiah would come before the destruction of the Temple. If Y'shua (Jesus) was not the Messiah then we totally missed it, since the Temple was destroyed after he came.

As I continued reading on my own, I also began going with Karen to a Bible study for young people. Somewhere in the midst of it all I became convinced intellectually that Jesus was the Messiah—but I didn't want to take it any further, not like Karen had done. One evening, the whole group was invited to attend a church meeting in Milford, Connecticut—they were having a special speaker. I didn't particularly want to go home, so I went with my friends. We arrived a bit late and the church was full—except for seats right up in front on the right. There I sat in the front of this church, and of all things, the speaker began talking about Isaiah 53.

Once again I thought how amazing it was that this seemed to describe Jesus. And once again I thought it didn't make much difference to me because I was not one of the sinners who needed that kind of forgiveness. Then suddenly, I remembered an event that had occurred several years before.

I was in fifth grade, and my brother was in second grade. Mom's illness was really becoming very apparent but she was still able to work. She had a part-time job at the kosher bakery at the Crown Supermarket a few blocks from our house. So, Stuart and I were latchkey kids during that time. A few houses down, there lived a boy named Tommy who had taken quite a dislike to us after learning in his catechism class that Jews were "Christ killers." Tommy was a grade or two ahead of me. One day, he grabbed my brother when I wasn't around and really hurt him. Stuart came in the house, crying because his nose was bleeding copiously. The next thing I remember was running to Stuart's room and rummaging in the back of his closet until I found his baseball bat. I ran down the stairs and saw Tommy standing near the tree in front of our house. I began to swing the bat in a very threatening way. I was so furious and full of hatred that with all my heart I wanted to make him suffer, and to beat him with that bat until he was dead.

I never got close enough to hurt Tommy but I remember swinging wildly and screaming at him, "You stay away from my little brother. You touch him again and I swear that I will take this bat and bash out your brains there on the sidewalk! You hear me?" Tommy laughed at me, but I also saw fear in his eyes. He left, and he never touched my brother again.

I believe it was God who flashed that whole scene into my mind in the moments that I was considering Y'shua. All at once it hit me: I was a sinner. I had wanted to murder Tommy! I realized that I truly did need Y'shua's forgiveness, because my hatred and desire to see

Tommy dead had offended a holy God. I later realized that we all think, say and do things that are offensive to God, almost on a daily basis. But for the moment, I just needed to be confronted with that one ugly episode to understand my need. I asked Y'shua to take my sin away, and I acknowledged him as my Messiah and Lord.

That was May 3, 1970, and the only reason I know the date is that Karen told me to mark it on my calendar, that I'd want to remember. I was in my freshman year of high school.

I felt a sense of peace that was remarkable—kind of like a warm blanket covering me and filling me with well-being. The uncertainty I had as a child about whether God forgave me was gone. I experienced real true joy for the very first time. God did something for me right off the bat that helped me know that he cared for me and was near, just as I'd hoped he would be. He healed me completely of a problem that had caused me a great deal of shame, embarrassment and ridicule for many years. I had a problem with bed-wetting. From the night I prayed to receive Y'shua, I never had another episode—to my great relief and everlasting gratitude.

Of course it was not an easy thing, being Jewish and the only one in my family to believe in Jesus. My relationship with my dad became very strained. Whereas he had once confided in me, now he barely spoke other than to say things like, “Pass the salt” or “What time are you going to be home?” In fact, my dad was thinking of formally disowning me, but my Aunt Bea said, “Paul, don't be ridiculous, this is your daughter, and anyway, this Jesus stuff is just a phase. She's young, she'll outgrow it.” (It's been over thirty years and I think my dad is still hoping I'll outgrow Y'shua.)

At first I didn't understand or know much about how my Jewishness fit in with my new relationship with Jesus. I also didn't know of

any other Jews who believed in Jesus, except the people I read about in the Bible, and since they weren't alive, they weren't much help. It wasn't until I decided to start going to church regularly that I began to really learn and grow—and change. The more I gave of myself to the Lord, the more changes he made, and my parents saw those changes as positive and good (even though they didn't credit them as having anything to do with God—they thought I was just growing up).

A huge turning point was when a friend from my church, Pearl Hatch introduced me to Ruth and Isadore Margolis. They were Jewish believers in Jesus who had meetings in their Bridgeport, Connecticut home. Pearl took me to visit them regularly. They showed me from the Scriptures how I could believe in Jesus as a Jew, and why this was the most Jewish thing I could do from a biblical standpoint. Ruth and Isadore wanted to sponsor me to Moody Bible Institute when I graduated high school. But my parents refused to give their permission, and the Margolises did not want to go against their wishes. That was a great disappointment to me, but as it turned out, it opened other doors for me instead. After a few temporary jobs, I became a medical secretary. Still, I wondered if that was what God wanted for my life.

In September of 1977, I went to a weekend event held by Jews for Jesus where Jewish believers in Jesus from all over the East Coast met together for times of worship, learning and just the fun of getting to know one another. I had a wonderful time and participated in the talent show, singing and playing (on guitar) some songs I had written. Jews for Jesus founder Moishe Rosen came up to me right afterwards and asked if I ever thought about going to Bible College, or doing some kind of work that would help others to know about Jesus. Of course I had, but I was at a loss for words (very rare for me). I barely managed to say “Yes!” and Moishe asked me to write out my story (how I had come to

believe in Jesus) and send it to him in California. I did so and he sent me back a sweet letter saying that he'd enjoyed reading what I wrote.

A few weeks later, Mitch Glaser called me from Los Angeles. He was the leader of Israelight, a part-time Jews for Jesus music team, and he asked me to send an audition tape. So I got one together and sent it. Mitch played it for the other guys who were on the team. Now living in that same house with what were to be my fellow team members there lived a seminary student named Steve Wertheim, whose story you have just read. Steve was eager to meet me—I guess he liked my voice!

Steve remembers:

To me, her voice sounded like the best thing since Joanie Mitchell. I was in my mid-twenties, unattached, looking for love and as soon as I heard her voice I thought, "I've got to meet this girl!" In fact we did meet the day after Janie arrived. We quickly became very good friends. (Janie says, "Steve became my best friend in LA, really") and a few months later, we realized that our friendship was deepening into something more.

We met one another's parents, and I bought the engagement ring. It was April 24, 1978, and I was scheduled to have a Greek exam the next day. Everyone knew about the exam, including Janie. I told her I wanted to take her out to dinner and she said that I should stay in and study—that we could go out another time. One of my roommates, Joel told Janie, "No, you better let him take you out." I brought her three roses: one yellow, one pink and one red to tell her I loved her today, tomorrow and

always. We went to Santa Monica where we overlooked the beach at sunset. How different it was from the grey day I'd walked the beach, wondering how I could possibly allow myself to believe in Jesus. With the backdrop color, as the sun literally 'sunk slowly in the west,' I dropped to one knee and asked Janie to marry me. Before I could finish asking the question, she said yes.

We were married November 25, 1978 right around Thanksgiving, and that seems appropriate because we are very thankful for one another.

We are also thankful for our two wonderful kids who are young adults now, serving God in their own right. Ben was born in December 1980 and Bekah in January 1984. Both of them believe in Jesus, having been taught from a young age, but going through their own spiritual journeys as well. Both of them have been involved as volunteers in our children's and youth ministry and Steve and I look forward to seeing what will be next for them.

Having Steve's parents, Fred and Laura for my in-laws has been wonderful. They were already believers in Jesus when Steve and I married and having parent-type people who, as Jews, could understand and affirm my faith has meant more than I can say. It has helped to ease the pain of my own family situation.

I would like to add though, that parents are never too old to surprise you. Back in 1989, my mother was having some hip and joint pain. She said that she had fallen when she got out of the bathtub and her hip had been hurting ever since. When Stuart brought her to the doctor, he was shocked. My mother had actually broken her hip and yet had been walking on it for weeks—in more pain than any of us knew.

While the doctor was examining Mom, she became short of breath, so he called an ambulance, and they brought her to Yale New Haven Hospital. She was admitted to the ER where they quickly realized that she had a fast moving bone cancer—in fact it had eaten through the bone, which was how the hip broke. I was thousands of miles away when I heard all this. Mom was supposed to have surgery and the doctors had been given a “do not resuscitate” order in case anything should happen. I was really upset. Mom was in the hospital for a few weeks before the surgery. Steve and I were trying to work out child care for our kids so we could both go out there. I called Mom the night before the surgery to tell her I loved her and to try to offer her hope in Jesus one more time. (She had heard the gospel over and over again from me, and from many of my friends.) She responded by screaming things I will not repeat, and then hanging up.

God was gracious and Mom made it through the surgery well. They pinned her hip, and Steve and I flew out to Connecticut the next week. We were shocked at her appearance. She had been a very heavy woman for years, and the cancer had made her very, very skinny. I looked at the bag on the other end of her catheter and the fluid was almost black. That told me everything I needed to know about Mom’s condition—she really was going to die soon.

Amazingly, Moishe had just recently given a leadership lesson on dealing with those who are dying. I marvel to this day at the timing as this was so helpful for us. When mom saw us she was almost surprised—even though I had spoken to her the day before and told her that she would be seeing us the next day. I don’t think she believed it. When she recovered from the shock, she said, “So tell me the truth...am I gonna croak?”

We replied, “Well, Mom, we aren’t doctors but from the looks of things, you are probably going before the rest of us do.” Her eyes grew wide

with the realization of what this meant, and she said, “So, OK, tell me what I’ve got to do.” At first we were confused, then surprised, then overjoyed when we understood what Mom was saying. After all this time, Mom wanted to hear about Y’shua! So we shared the good news very simply with Mom and she prayed with us, asking for her sin to be forgiven, and expressing that she trusted that God would forgive her because of Jesus’ sacrifice. The peace of God flooded her heart and the whole room. Five or so days later, she passed. I know that she is in heaven, no longer suffering, but filled with truth and joy.

Steve and I grew up in very different worlds, but before we ever met, we shared some things in common. We both felt that we needed to take responsibility in our families when we were still children. We both found, as we became reconciled to our “Father” in heaven, that we could be more to our parents and siblings here on earth. And while our families were angry and hurt about our belief in Jesus at the outset, three of our four parents and one sibling so far have come to share that faith.

Whereas we taught our own children about Jesus, they are also very aware of their Jewish heritage. They did not have to go against their parents wishes when they each decided to follow Y’shua, for which we are all grateful. Even so, they both know what it is like to be ridiculed for their beliefs. It gives us *nachas* to see them stand up for what they believe, unpopular as it might be, being Jews who are for Jesus.

What about you? Have you been wondering about Jesus, feeling drawn to him but worrying what the consequences would be if you were to let him into your life? We can’t promise you that it will be easy, but we can promise that God will be with you every step of the way. If Jesus is true, turning away from him will not be good for you or for your family. If you are unsure, please ask God to show you if Jesus is, as he claimed to be, the way, the truth and the life.\*

\*If you find that you do believe in Jesus but are not certain how to follow through on that belief, please turn to the back flap of this booklet.

If you would like to read other stories of Jews who are for Jesus, check out the Jews for Jesus web site ([www.jewsforjesus.org](http://www.jewsforjesus.org)), write for more information or e-mail Steve at [jfj@jewsforjesus.org](mailto:jfj@jewsforjesus.org).

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For titles such as those below, check out Purple Pomegranate Productions ([www.store.jewsforjesus.org](http://www.store.jewsforjesus.org))

**Books:**

*Testimonies of Jews Who Believe in Jesus*, Ruth Rosen, Editor  
*Jewish Doctors Meet the Great Physician*, Ruth Rosen, Editor  
*The Last Jew of Rotterdam*, Ernest Cassutto  
*Between Two Fathers*, Charles Barg, M.D.  
*Bound for the Promised Land*, Haya Benhayim with Menahem Benhayim

**Booklets:**

*Drawn to Jesus: The Journey of a Jewish Artist*, David Rothstein  
*Who Ever Heard of a Jewish Missionary?* Bob Mendelsohn  
*Loss to Life*, Susan Perlman  
*Nothing to Fear*, Karol Joseph  
*Hineni: Here am I, but Where are You?* Tuvia Zaretsky

**DVDs and Videos:**

*Survivor Stories: Finding Hope from an Unlikely Source*  
*Sam Rotman Concert Pianist: The Music and Testimony of a Jew for Jesus*  
*Forbidden Peace: The Story Behind the Headlines*

Whether you consider yourself Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, religious or not, if you are looking for a personal relationship with God, please consider the following:

**1. God is concerned with every aspect of your life.**

*“Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands . . .” (Isaiah 49:15,16a).*

**2. You can't truly experience God's love because of sin.**

*“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).*

**3. God provided Y'shua (Jesus) to be your sin-bearer and Savior.**

*“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).*

**4. You can receive forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with God by asking Y'shua to reign in your heart.**

*“. . . if you confess with your mouth the Lord Y'shua and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9,10).*

If you believe these verses and want to follow Y'shua, there is a prayer on the inside cover that will help you begin a new life.

**“God of Abraham, I know that I have sinned against you and I want to turn from my sins. I believe you provided Y’shua as a once and for all atonement for me. With this prayer, I place my trust in Y’shua as my Savior and my Lord. I thank you for cleansing me of sin, and for giving me peace with you and eternal life through the Messiah’s death and resurrection. Please help me be faithful in learning to trust and love you more each day. Amen.”**

(Please print)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (      ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

- I have read the texts from the Bible and have prayed the prayer to claim the abundant and eternal life that the Messiah Y’shua can give me. I sign my name as a commitment to make him my Savior and Lord.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- I really don’t understand or believe these texts yet. Please contact me, as I am seriously willing to consider and seek what God has for me.

- I am already a believer in Y’shua and want to know more about Jews for Jesus.

- I am Jewish       I am Gentile

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