

T. W.'s Story

I first remember becoming aware of God when I was about 5. I went into the living room late at night after everyone else was asleep and I remember being rather scared about something, I knelt down in front of the couch and told God that I was his, I then told the devil he couldn't have me because I belonged to God. Odd memory I know, but it has stuck with me throughout my life.

At the time my mother was a Jehovah's witness in Michigan, my mom was what you might call a seeker, throughout her her life she has jumped from one religious fad to another never seeming satisfied. Around the time I turned six mom converted to a born again Pentecostal. Shortly thereafter she divorced my biological father, who was never really around, and about two months later she married a man she had met in her new church, then to keep my sister and I away from our "heathen father" they fled to Florida.. After we had lived there about a year they blackmailed him with back child support so that he would sign off his parental rights and our dad could adopt us which is what happened, our biological father didn't really put up much of a fight.

Once in Florida they joined a little church called Sanford House of Praise. They started a homeschool/school there, my dad was the principal and my mother was the teacher, it was basically a homeschool curriculum with a school setting. I was always a bit of a fanatical reader, and my parents never really understood me very much so they labeled me as "the bad one" my sister "the good one". The problem was that I really wasn't convinced that so la Scriptura made any sense, and so I asked a lot of questions which they chalked up to an utter lack of faith.

The fact that they did this is what really made me question them, I felt they should want to know the answers to the questions I was asking as well. I was young but looking back on it I was already beginning to think like a Catholic, I was wondering why there was no visible church, I asked about the keys God gave to Peter, I asked about their idea of how a person became a Christian... this is what I think really made them dislike me.... when my dad said Catholics weren't Christian, I made the mistake of challenging him on it.... I said "they believe Jesus was the son of God right?, Why aren't they Christian then? How is the Jesus prayer the only biblical way to be saved?".

I pointed out Act 16:30-34 "Acts 16 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." And even I at that point missed the significant role of baptism, but I did see that nowhere had they asked Jesus to "be their personal Lord and Savior". This began my first lesson in anti-Catholicism as my parents bombarded me with horror stories of the Catholic Church, about how they worshiped Mary and the Pope, about how the Catholic Church was the whore of Babylon mentioned in Revelation. And many more awful

things. I had nothing to argue with because I really didn't know anything at all about the Catholic Church, so I let it drop.

I was Baptized when I was eight years old in a swimming pool in Florida, after this I went to my parents filled with joy to tell them how wonderful I felt, that I felt like a new person, they scolded me and told me there was nothing different about me, that baptism was symbolic only. I really didn't think that it was, but I felt to good to argue so I let it drop (See a pattern? Most of the time with my parents it really was the best thing). When I was 11 we moved to North Carolina, we church hopped a lot while we were there but my parents finally settled in a church called Manna (non denominational) and started a children's church program there. They put on really fancy full-production puppet shows and I learned how to do them and actually enjoyed it quite a bit so I was content there. I should add here that my parents were big fans of Hal Lindsay, the secret rapture and every prophetic message they could get their hands on, they bought into that whole 88 reasons why the rapture will be in 88 and tons of other crazy notions. This is important because it really affected the way that I perceived my parent's religion as not being quite sane.

It was also around this time that I got kicked out of Sunday School.... as an aside recently my husband and I found an Anti Catholic message board, we joined it and very politely corrected a lot of the misconceptions that were there, we weren't trying to convert anyone and we were not being argumentative and we even posted in their "debate" thread. They quickly deleted all of our posts and banned us from the board.... This is pretty much the same reason I got kicked out of Sunday school permanently, I asked questions that the teacher didn't want to and couldn't answer. He told my parents that I utterly lacked faith and not long after that I started hearing whispers about the fact that I hadn't "truly" been saved. My parents even attempted to have me exorcised, basically a group of people stood around me praying in tongues and two of them came up to me and squeezed my stomach really hard in an attempt to get me to "vomit out the demons within". This whole thing hurt because I always had faith in God and Jesus and the Holy Trinity, I started wondering if they were right, maybe I wasn't one of the "elect", that no matter what I did that I couldn't receive salvation, these doubts sent me into a tail spin.

I graduated high school (homeschool) when I was 15 (we had just moved to Indiana) and left home shortly thereafter at the age of 16. I managed to make my way back to North Carolina on my own, for almost two years I simply had set aside religion, I still believed in God and the Holy Trinity, I just didn't believe in people, I was convinced that there no longer was a church, that the entire world had become Sodom & Gomorrah and that we were all doomed. Pretty depressing I know, but I had nothing else to turn to.

While in North Carolina I met my future husband, he asked me to marry him two nights after we met (he says now that he knew he was going to marry me the first time he saw me). I thought he was crazy, but for some reason I couldn't say no, I just felt like it was the right thing to do. I don't like to think about what would have happened to me had I not married him had I gone off and stayed on my own, I can only know that God was looking after me and trying to bring me home, to this day I think he sent David after me

like a shepherd in search of a lost sheep. We got married by a Justice of the Peace on my birthday July 18th. My husband was a Catholic, He had attended the seminary in hopes of becoming a priest. He realized that it wasn't his calling before he took his vows, I feel that this may have been because I was his calling in the manner of my conversion.

He was also having a crisis of faith, because leaving the seminary was hard for him even though he knew that he was not intended for the priesthood. We never even seriously discussed Catholicism till a year after we had been married. And then we fought over it because he was desperate to return to the church, yet I felt blindsided by his desire and all my misconceptions rose to the surface. He took those as a personal criticism (which I can fully understand now) and things turned a little messy. But neither of us are the type to stay angry for long and finally we came to an agreement. He would attend a protestant church with me (we just happened to live near one of the many I had attended as a child ~ Manna) and I would attend a mass with him. We attended mass first and although I had no idea what was going on, I just tried to follow along as best I could. I could not deny feeling the overwhelming presence of God. But since I had not been to church of any kind in quite some time I figured it may have just been more about that than anything. So we attended the Protestant church I had attended as a child, and it was obvious that the feeling of God's present at mass was not just a fluke.

From that point on started our journey of my conversion and his return to the Catholic Church. It was a long journey that we like to call our "7 years of wandering through the desert" but it was definitely worth it. I was amazed by how many misconceptions about the Catholic faith that had been fed to me. Although in hindsight since I realized even then that protestants were wrong about many things it should have come as no surprise that they were wrong in that regard as well, but old habits die hard. But the best part was I finally was able to find all the answers I had been looking for! I was never told that I lacked faith because I had questions but rather presented with dozens of wonderful answers! The Church was alive and it was The One Holy and Apostolic Catholic Church! I was finally accepted into full communion with the The Church, our marriage was validated and our kids were baptized, all at the same ceremony. It was an amazing day for all of us :) And as a bonus it was on July 18th! The best birthday present ever!