

My Testimony by Kay Downs

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By Katherine (Curtis Arvig) Downs

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EARLY LIFE BACKGROUND

Born the second and last child. (first girl) to William and Adda Curtis, who then lived in the back of a paint and wallpaper store in Brainerd, Minnesota, a town of 12,000 people, I had ideal parents and fairly good environment. That was in 1912 –the year that the Titanic sunk. It was an age when horses hooves could still be heard clip-clopping up and down the brick streets delivering ice, milk, and groceries.

My dad, the owner of the store, was proud of the fact he'd been a Methodist all his life, and therefore did no work on Sunday. Even though he very seldom attended church, he was serious about being honest and worthy of respect.

Mother had been raised a Baptist, but she changed and became a Methodist in the hope of getting Dad to attend church with her. It didn't work! But Mother then became popular in the church as occasional pianist, soloist, teacher, and children's, program director. As a result, Dad only withdrew that much more. He was a shy man, and so when they mingled with people, most others would rush to greet Mother, and Dad felt left in the wings.

Their first child Wayne was five years old when this intruding little sister came into the family and stole the show simply because she was the baby. He had been used to receiving not only all of the attention but also a special brand of it, because he'd been a premature baby weighing only 2-1/2 pounds at birth, and in those days it was extremely rare for such babies to live to be five. It may be partly for that reason that this brother and I didn't seem to feel quite as close to one another as some sibs do. He's now 81, living near our birth place.

EARLIEST AWARENESS OF "RELIGION"

When I was two and a half years old, some traveling preachers came into town and held tent meetings every evening. These two men were members of a group that started in about 1901 in Ireland. At that time most of the well known churches were going through a dead, dry period, and this group with all good intentions had hoped to start anew, correcting the errors, and eventually leading all to the more perfect will of God. They thought they were now going about it as shown in Luke 10 in the Bible, but while they went Two by Two carrying as little as possible as they went, they did not preach about or attempt to "heal the sick" as mentioned in the 9th verse. The group developed the idea as time passed, that their belief and doctrine (which is very much like Baptist practices) is the only "way" of the Lord in all the earth. Unlike Baptists, they have no church buildings and the preachers have no homes of their own. Neither do they marry. They live among the "saints" or the saints provide for them a small, temporary dwelling place, sometimes rented. It was these two preachers who convinced my mother that she should turn from all fellowship with others and give whole heartedly to this teaching.

MORE ABOUT THIS "NEW" GROUP

They believed they were following the New Testament by worshiping only in house groups, homes of the saints, and then having a yearly 4-day gathering of all believers who lived within a radius of a few hundred miles. Also there would be a one-day "Spring Meeting" within a smaller radius. At these gatherings the preachers who were lovingly called "Workers" or Servants, were the main speakers who sat on a platform under the big tent, or in a prominent part of the room in a Spring Meeting. The only other chance we had to attend "church" was in home meetings on Sunday mornings where, as a rule, there were no preachers present. The saints took turns testifying, telling what they'd read in the Bible and how they applied, or hoped to apply it in their own lives. These meetings were then, and still are, held in as many homes as needed to accommodate up to 15 or 20 people. An elder, usually the husband or hostess in the home, conducts the 1-1/2 hour meeting.

MY LIFE IN GENERAL FROM THAT BEGINNING

By the time I was five my father's health seemed to be hampered by chemicals in paint, and so he sold the store, and we moved to a farm 20 miles from Brainerd. Our nearest Post Office and Grocery Store was 4 miles away at either Lake Hubert or Nisswa. This was far from a high school, and because of that, my post-elementary schooling had to wait awhile. In the meantime, as a 4-H Club member and Junior Leader I won a trip to the Minnesota State Fair in St. Paul, and then in turn won several firsts in the State. This boosted my confidence to where, alone, I found my way to the office of the Superintendent of the University of Minnesota's Agricultural School, which was then also a boarding school for people like myself. I will never forget that moment when Supt. J.O. Christianson held my gaze and promised me, "Katherine, where there is a will, there is a way."

That was "during the depression", and Dad had lost money along with many others, but he managed to scrape up enough to send me to the school for three months, as suggested by Dr. Christianson. By that time the school had made arrangements to give me their

most important long-term scholarship which, for as many years as I needed it, paid my tuition, books, board, room, laundry, and even an amount of school entertainment. Along with my diploma in 1936, I was given the job as Scott County 4-H Club Agent (termed "temporary" because all of us agents then worked only during the six summer months). Scott County is within 40 miles of Minneapolis, and has much of the richest soil for agriculture in the state, and so this was a real challenge for me. I held the job successfully for four years, after which time I was tired of struggling to top last year's records once more, and yet did not want to disappoint "J.O." and the others who had given me such chances to succeed. What could I do about it? I could move far away!

WHEN WAS I BORN AGAIN?

At such a feeling of crisis in my life, I prayed as never before. I felt almost too daring when I brought myself to tell the Lord that I wanted, at any cost, to know how to be in His will, even if it could possibly mean I wasn't already in "the only right church in the world". That was in the fall of 1939, and although at the moment I didn't realize my "new birth" any more than an infant does immediately after taking its first breath, now I'm pretty sure that was when the miracle happened. From that moment on, I felt the Lord directing me Personally in ways I had never known before. Drastic changes began taking place, including my move alone, from Minnesota near my family, to California to be with people I had never met before. God was working out His plan for me.

In California I soon had a job to be proud of—teacher for Singer Sewing Machine Company in Beverly Hills where my pupils were, among others, a few prominent movie stars. As I see it now, the Lord needed to allow me these flattering responsibilities to heal and replace the inferiority complex I had picked up as a result of the years of "put-down" in the religious group I'd been affiliated with. More and more I learn to love God because He first loved me!

While still innocently a part of the above mentioned group I met Ted Arvig who had been a "worker" in the group for the previous six years. Before he met me, he had already made up his mind to find ways to change, just as I had done, and was secretly looking for a wife. I fell deeply in love with him and we married in 1941. We had 26 happy years together before his passing away in 1968. Our first baby, a boy, died at two months of age; and our only other child "Teddy" (named for his Daddy) was born soon after. I praise the Lord for the fact that Teddy and I are in harmony Spiritually. I am proud of him! He has become a self-made man, (worked his way through college) now in a prominent position with Southwest Research Institute of San Antonio, Texas. We have both been blessed physically and materially as well.

BACK TO MY LIFE WITHIN THE GROUP

My mother and brother and I could only hope, at best, to attend the church of Mother's choice once in two weeks by driving ten miles over country roads. During five months of the year, the roads were usually impassable due to snow and ice. By that time my father had started going to church – the little community church four miles from home. It was agreed that he and Mother used the car on alternate Sundays. There was no Sunday school where we went, and so the only thing we could look forward to for a happy time with Christians was "Convention".

At these, events held usually on some farmer's property, the big tent that held then from four to seven hundred people, was quite a sight to all surrounding farmers. Most of the attendants who brought their own bedding, slept on straw ticks in temporary bunks built in the barns and sheds of the owner of the farm. All was done so that no one could accuse them of owning any "church property", for by now they had made one of their chief aims to be noticed by the fact they were not like any other church group. It was also for that reason that we females were supposed to keep our hair long, and uncurled, dress, including hose, of a modest color (certainly not flesh color!), no costume jewelry or finery for decoration, and of course no make-up. The men could dress as they pleased, however. We women alone were the ones who must carry the banner of being noticeably "unlike the world" around us.

Three 2-hour meetings were held each of the four days. And to this day the attendants of all ages look forward to this event as the greatest time of pleasure of their whole year. I think sometimes this is because we had so little pleasure such as others enjoy: no parties of any kind (excepting maybe around a birthday cake or other such celebration within families), no Christmas or Easter celebrating, no radio (or T V of course), no movies of any kind, –in fact nothing but food-eating among themselves, and hymn singing around a piano or organ,-and possibly going for walks or rides.

They didn't like for anyone to refer to these gatherings as "camp meetings" because that was what Pentecostals had. They would bend over backward, so to speak, to avoid being like any other church, all of which they referred to as "false Churches". Other ministers were spoken of as "hirelings" (John 10;12) if they took up an offering or were on a salary. Rather than being impressed, as a child, to be like Jesus, I was given the idea that first and foremost I was to be "unlike the world". That seemed to be the only way we knew how to "be a good testimony" to others, showing how we were the only people on earth who were living "The Truth". And that title was one of the very few names we used among ourselves in referring to our group. However, they will deny having any name at all, known by outsiders, because they claim to be "just like the New Testament believers who carried no such name."

TODAY the sect carries on in almost the exact, same way that it did 70 years ago. I'm qualified to make this statement because I can remember attending the conventions as early as 1916 and through 1952. Now, 37 years later, I receive reports and photos of their gatherings by way of members, friends, and relatives, and by the news media. For example, the Los Angeles Times printed more than a full page of photos taken at a recent convention, accompanied by a true and lengthy report, (true to what I remember).

HOW DID I COME TO BREAK FROM THEM?

God gave my husband and me a hunger and thirst for His Word. Beside studying my Bible I searched libraries for anything I could find written about the Book. As a result we began questioning the profession and practices of our leaders. We noticed especially that their resultant "fruit" was not as commendable as that of some of the very churches they condemned. Then the Lord sent across our way

several others who had been in the group but left it for the above reasons. Some lived close enough to fellowship with us occasionally, and others corresponded with us by mail, several from over-seas who had seen the error from its roots. Thus, we began discovering the truth about "The Truth." The day that our leaders knew we knew these things, they excommunicated us.

That was in 1953. What they did to us after that is too depressing to dwell on now, when in comparison I have such bountiful blessings to think of and talk about. But to leave no room for guessing wrongly, I'll mention part of it briefly. "It" apparently is the same evil spirit-dwelling in people who persecuted others recently, who gave reports after departing from various ones such as the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and yea even the Southern Baptist Convention. They gave "the left hand of fellowship" to some of our beloved evangelists and teachers including Charles Sympson and Jack Taylor, both of whom I've worshiped with in person. The latter two got it for confessing they had "received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit" in recent years. And so even tho it's not over the same issue, it's the same ear-mark of that spirit.

What does this spirit cause its subjects to do? First, it is the leaders of the group who hint lies about us, and then the followers take over and exaggerate the lies to unbelievable proportions. By then even our most loyal and closest friends in the group are so confused and fearful lest the same happen to them that they avoid any contact with us, so as to keep in good standing with the leaders. Soon we find that most all of our lifetime friends and relatives have cut us off, (and we had no close friends in "the world") –if not a complete separation, at least in any measure of warmth. Absolutely no conversation is to be passed between us about our Lord or the Bible. It will not be accepted even on a printed Christmas card.

My mother was warned not to ever visit me again, but she didn't realize they intended to carry out the threat so she visited us anyway. As a result she was excommunicated to the day she died. It was the same from my husband's family, and because his was larger and most of them were prominently involved in the sect, his was a harder blow to be taken. Also because his family lived near us while mine lived 2,000 miles away, the hurt was so acute that he developed bleeding ulcers. Fifteen years later these turned into cancer and took his life in 1968.

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

God's timing for our benefit is marvelous! Less than two years before the death of my beloved husband in 1966, I asked for and received in no uncertain terms, the Spiritual baptism. I mean the experience that Paul spoke of in Acts 19:1, and 2, asking the believers if they'd yet received it. I'd love to have space here to write a book on how, as the old hymn goes, "Floods of joy o'er my soul like the sea billows roll", even to this day when ever I give the Lord time for that close fellowship personally with Him. Since then I really want to communicate with Him "without ceasing", (I Thessalonians 5:17) and this is where praying in an unknown tongue is a great benefit. To so communicate for long periods of time would add stress to my reasoning mind and would soon exhaust my vocabulary. It was simply because I didn't understand, that I opposed it those first years. As Paul stated in I Corinthians, 2:14, one's will has to come for it first, shown by asking. Otherwise, "things of the Spirit are foolishness to him."

DARK THREADS IN THE TAPESTRY

Perhaps I should explain how it comes that I bear the name " Downs" as my last. Two years after Ted passed on, I married a man whose wife had also recently died. This man was a deacon in the Southern Baptist Church I was then attending. But we were together only a few weeks when he told me he was very uncomfortable with my beliefs and attitude toward God. He was the one who applied for the divorce and we parted soon after. Practically ever since, I've been attending, as a member, a lovely little interdenominational church.

Those dark times only drove me closer to the Lord and as a result I have experienced abundant joy ever since. I'm sincerely contented day and night, never knowing what it feels like to be bored or lonely. Some tell me this is God's "gift of singleness" to me, perhaps what Paul was explaining about himself in I Corinthians 7:7,8.

A HAPPY ENDING UP TO THE MOVEMENT

Now for the last four years I have been employed by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service. I couldn't imagine a more pleasant job nor a more congenial, kind group of people to work with! At first I worked in the mountains at a recreation park at the visitor's center, directing hikers to various trails, taking groups on guided hikes, and teaching crafts. When they found out that I could type and do other simple office work, they put me in the district office at Glendora, CA, where we take care of all business for San Gabriel and Mt. Baldy recreation, resources fire prevention, education, etc. This is on the Angeles National Forest. I look forward to every workday with pleasure. Recently my employers and I agreed that I cut down on some of the time at the office so I'll have more time to enjoy my later years, and I spend the extra time by going camping in those same mountains, several days at a time. It is there where I feel specially close in fellowship with my great Creator.

WHAT DO I LONG TO TELL THE WHOLE WORLD?

1. That God's whole purpose in the first place – for creating us, was to have loving children in His eternal family who delight in fellowshiping with Him now and will do so forever. Example: Isaiah 26:8,9.
2. That each of us needs not only to receive "the joy of salvation" FROM God, but to also be a joy TO HIM by fellowshiping WITH Him. Joy continues only in this circuit fashion. How foolish to argue over the doctrine of "eternal security"! What matters is not the initial point of "getting saved", but it is whether we fellowship with Him thereafter.
3. Even before the fall of man, God's purpose was to have a loving bride for His Son. Then Jesus had to die for us to get us back on the right track again, so that He might still count on us to be His loving bride. But who would want for a bride someone who seldom

fellowships with him? In Matthew 7:23 Jesus warned that even those who believed they had eternal security could be in danger of hearing Him say "I never knew you – depart from Me!" Why? Because they hadn't fellowshiped with Him.

4. That therefore, our purpose for receiving salvation is not merely that we may escape hell, and not merely that we go to heaven when we die, but it is chiefly that we bring joy to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, by getting to know Him whom to know is to love and desire more and more. "And THIS is eternal life, to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent," John 17:3. (I never witness to anyone by beginning with the question, "If, you were to die tonight would you go to heaven or to hell?" To me, such a selfish thought cannot hope to bring into God's kingdom the kind of children He planned to have in the first place.) Maybe I'm a Calvinist, but that's me!

5. That while this is not a Fairy Tale, it can turn out to truly be what Fairy Tales promise: That along with the Father, and with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit, we are going to...

LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Dated: 10-25-88

Signed: Katherine C. Downs

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In February, 1989, I started attending a bigger church that is only a mile from home. (My one eye is not good, so I needed to avoid driving the Freeway the 7 miles to the Church mentioned). I dearly love attending this "Assemblies of God" church and its Sr. pastor James Swanson. It is independent of the A. of G. churches, but has the same type of doctrine. Has 4 other pastors; none is "big Boss!"