

FROM WITCH TO CHRISTIAN

The Testimony of Shari Setzer

I was born into an unchristian family. My father felt he was too educated to be duped into believing the mythology of any religion and my mother was preoccupied with the symptoms of her mental illness. Various forms of abuse were served out daily, so by age five I believed this was the way of the world. The only Christian influence in my life was my paternal grandmother. She took my brother and me to a small country church infrequently for about four years. But after she developed Alzheimer's, we stopped going to church completely. Time passed and the abuse continued.

One night, at around age eight, my mother could be heard spiraling down into a depressive fit of rage soon to be doled out onto my older brother. In my room, I lay in my bed weeping, searching for someone to turn to for help, for protection and for love. I recalled the pictures of Jesus in my children's bible. He was surrounded by children, happy children who ran into his out stretched arms. I wanted to be apart of that picture more than anything. I sat on the bed in my darkened room and prayed. As tears streamed down my face, I prayed for Jesus' love and protection, begging to have someone, anyone to care for me. I slept more peacefully that night than I ever had before, and I awoke early the next morning to the sun rising. I was filled with a quiet calm that I had previously never known. I knew there had been a change in me, but what that change was I could not tell. I was able to recall this event in my life for only a of couple years.

Meanwhile, there had not been a change in the trials of my life. Time passed, the abuse and neglect continued, and I slowly became suicidal. I was full of shame and a self loathing that cannot be described with words. I saw death as an escape, the only escape. I fantasized about the various ways to achieve the means to my end, but in my childlike manner, I always found an excuse not to go through with it. Put the shotgun to my head? No, who would clean up the mess?...Overdose on pills? No, if I didn't succeed I would be in worse trouble than when I started...Jump off the bridge into the river to drown? No, what if I missed the water and hit the bank only to break my leg?... Hang myself? No, you're not heavy enough to break your own neck Shari, you would just strangle to death....Sit in a tub of warm water and slit your own wrists with a razor? No, I knew I couldn't stand to see all that blood...In the end there were only two things that kept me alive. One was the fear that I would burn in Hell by committing self murder, I didn't think Jesus would want me to commit such an act. The second was the cat. I

rationalized “Who will feed Twinklepaws if you kill yourself, Shari?” That cat kept me alive for years.

More time passed and at age eleven the best thing to ever happen to my young life occurred. My brother and I came home from school to the news that our mother had been killed in a chainsaw accident. I shed not a single tear. I saw no point in it. People thought I was just too young to understand the implications of her death, but they had it backwards. They were the ones who didn't understand. I felt like dancing. No more constantly walking on eggshells, no more unexpected, violent fits of rage, no more of her suicide attempts, no more bulimia, no more watching her flaunt her extra marital affair in my fathers face, no more of the divorce proceedings....it was all over. Much of the cruelty was gone, but to say it was now a loving home would be a lie. My father, brother and I lived like ghosts. We simply shared the same space as one another. Time passed.

Soon, my brother moved away to college and I became a teenager. By age fourteen I was doing the bar scene. My friends were in their 20's and 30's, consisting of alcoholics, drug addicts and ex-cons. For four years I experimented with drugs, alcohol and sex. I was full of shame and self loathing and still lacked a will to live. That was until I met him.

Randy was an unusual sort of man. He was intelligent, had an odd sense of humor, and he showed a genuine affection and concern for my well being. I had never met anyone like him before. It took a lot of work on his part to convince me that I was worthy of love, but he eventually succeeded. At eighteen years of age, I moved away to college and Randy followed. Two years later, we became married, happily married. Randy had also come from an abusive home, so we worked very hard not to perpetuate our parents mistakes. We compromised instead of argued, we talked instead of isolated, we loved instead of hated, and we always found something to laugh about. We believed we had saved each others lives.

Randy and I lived in love, but not in God. He had been saved in the Methodist church as a teenager, but he had not found his identity in Christ and soon left his faith behind. He jokingly considered himself a ‘heathen Methodist’. I had no identity in Christianity either, so we made few attempts at attending church or at including God in our lives.

While in college I was exposed to many new ideas and concepts. But without a firm foundation in faith, I was open to believe anything. That was when Randy and I met them, people who seemed to have all the answers. They fascinated me. Their belief system centered on balance, healing and love, things I was searching for in my life. For even though I was happily married, I was not happy. I still lived with the shame I suffered from the abuse and neglect at the hands of my parents. And I was searching for something to fill the void I felt in my

life, the void of having no God. So when I met these people I liked what they had to say and I clung to every word. These people were Wiccans.

I immediately started reading all I could about 'The Way of the Wise'. I bought books and all the trappings of the occult including incense, bells, oils, potions, idols and tools. I hungrily dove into my new belief, and in 1994 dedicated myself to the Goddess and to Witchcraft. And in doing so, I slammed shut the door to Christianity, and bolted it tight. Christians now became the enemy. Creatures to be feared, loathed, and avoided. They were after all judgmental, unenlightened, narrow minded individuals who history proved to be out to hunt down and destroy pagans like me. The only information about Christianity I absorbed was the type that I could use to chip away at the enemy's defense system. Knowledge I perceived as contradictions, fallacies, and horrific historic events involving the persecution of non-Christians.

Meanwhile when it came to Witchcraft, I did it all. I cast spells, I read tarot cards, I carved runes, I cast the sacred circle, I summoned spirits, I worshiped the sun, moon and stars, and I celebrated the pagan holidays and more. I did it all but join a coven. I was what you called a solitary practitioner of The Craft. I was a lone witch.

The years passed and as time marched on I gave birth to a son, and dropped out of college. I was still unhappy in my faith, but each time I felt myself slip I would stubbornly dive deeper into witchcraft. I would make myself study some new aspect of Wicca that I had not yet uncovered, but the void never seemed to be filled. For nine years I studied The Craft. Then something slowly began to change.

In January of 2003 I did an incredible thing...I picked up my Bible and I began to read. I can't recall exactly why. I know I was worried about the upcoming war that America was to be involved in, I sought solace. I also saw a morning Christian television program that featured an amazing woman. Her name was Beth Moore and I had never heard of her nor seen anyone like her before in my life. She was filled with faith, a faith that I envied. I ever so slowly began to approach the door to Christianity that I had slammed shut so many years before... Meanwhile, my husband Randy did strange things. He called all his family and talked to them for great lengths of time; he organized all his belongings and he increased his life insurance policies. Life was good...then it all fell apart.

January 28th 2003 Randy was late getting home. I knew it would take him time to run his errands that evening, but three hours was just too long. I first became angry that he wasn't considerate enough to call me, but as time passed I knew there had to be a reason for him not to call. I knew something was terribly wrong, and I would find out either by a phone call or by a knock at the door. They came to the door.

My heart sank as I watched the Missouri State Highway Patrol cruiser pull down my driveway. I went out to meet them. The first man to step out of the cruiser was a state patrol man I knew. His little girl was in my son's kindergarten class. For a split second I thought the man riding with him was Randy, but I was wrong. This second man was introduced to me as a pastor. My worst fears had been confirmed, Randy had been killed in a car accident; he was never coming home again. The pastor started up the steps to my home, and I wanted so badly to stop him. My son was inside I protested, it is his birthday this weekend, we can't do this to him, I said. I had an irrational idea; if we just stayed outside I wouldn't have to face my child...it wouldn't be real. But we of course went inside and a hundred thoughts filled my mind not the least of which was *'There is a Christian standing in my living room. It is going to look close enough and find me out.'* And that's what he was, an It. One of Them, the enemy...here. *WHY? Where is She? **WHERE IS SHE?** Where is the Goddess that I have served so faithfully for nine years?* I don't feel her, I don't see her, I have no where to turn. At this time in my life when I need her the most and she's not here? Anger and doubt entered my mind. *Does she not exist?* I thought. The door to Christianity slowly began to open...

On any normal day I would have felt nothing but animosity toward the Christian. It was after all the worst of its kind...a Christian, a man, and having an authority equivalent to a High Priest in my faith. It had power. It would judge me. It would criticize me. It would hate me. I would have done anything to get rid of It. But this was no normal day. This was the day I had lost the one human being who had ever loved me completely. This was the day my husband, my best friend, my every thing had died. I had bigger problems than a Christian standing in my living room; I had to tell my son his Daddy was dead.

My five year old son sat on the couch looking intently at the police officer and the strange man standing in his home. He knew something was wrong. I sat down next to him and oddly enough the Christian followed. I was filled with dread...I looked up at the Christian, and I spoke to It. "I don't know what to say? How do I tell him?" I asked sorrowfully. At that moment the Christian did an amazing thing; he offered to tell my child for me. He offered to do this horrible duty for *me*. I now understood. He was there to help, to offer compassion not judgment, to show concern not hate. The Christian was no longer an It...he was human. My hardened heart began to soften and the door to Christianity opened a little more... I said, "No, I'll do it...it's my job." And I did. I told my little boy that his Daddy was in a terrible car accident and that he was now in Heaven with Maggie, our dog who had died two years before. Many Wiccans believe in an after life, generally called Summerland, but for the sake of Christian in-laws and the Christian standing in front of me, I called it Heaven.

My son showed little emotion at the news that his father was gone forever. He apparently didn't comprehend the gravity of the situation. I had been prepared to comfort him, but instead I was the one comforted by the person I least expected. The Christian looked at me with genuine warmth and said three words, "You did good." Those three little words did more for me than he will ever know. Telling my child he was fatherless was my first act as a single parent, and the Christian was there to give me hope. The door to Christianity opened a little more...

I still had much to do. The evening news would soon be on, showing the accident, and I didn't want family and friends to learn of Randy's death in that manner. I began making phone calls, one horrible phone call after another informing people of Randy's death. I remember them all, but one conversation I recall vividly was to a loved one in Idaho. His name is Scott, he was the Best Man at our wedding and I had little contact with him. Randy communicated with him more than me, but I knew he needed to be told about the accident. Unbeknownst to me, Scott had recently become Born Again. I spoke to him through sobs, "Scott," I said, "Randy has been killed in a car accident; I don't know what I'm going to do..." The first words he spoke were words *NO ONE* had ever said to me in my thirty years on this earth. He said, "Shari, God loves you." *And time stood still*. For just a few moments time froze...and the door to Christianity opened a little more... Friends and family soon arrived to my home, the officer and the Christian had to leave. But before he left, the Christian set down his card, incase I needed to find him. I still have that card...

I was too full of grief to sleep that night. I walked into my bedroom, took one look at the pagan alter on my dressing table and I wanted to vomit. I was filled with loathing and repulsion. I opened the top drawer to my dresser, raked in all the idols, libation dishes, incense and candles and I then slammed the drawer shut. The door to Christianity opened a little more...

The following week was a blur of funeral arrangements, sympathy cards and phone calls. I was lost in an unfathomable abyss of space filled only intermittently with grief. The only human to ever love me completely was gone and I had no faith to draw upon. My Goddess did *not* exist. I was living in Hell. I had no one to speak to, no where to turn to except... the card. That little card the Christian had left. I picked it up; it told me where to go and what time to be there, and so I went. I actually went to church, me, a witch. Every time I went, every time someone said a kind word, gave me a hug, or prayed for me, the door to Christianity opened a little wider, until it was wide enough for me to walk through. March 17, 2003 I went into the Christian's office and told him I needed to be saved because I was a witch...I'll never forget the look on his face. That Christian has since become my pastor and treasured friend. He baptized me April 6th, 2003 and still helps guide my walk in Christianity. Soon after visiting him for the first time I

recalled the prayer to Jesus in my bedroom as a child. I now believe I had been safe and protected the entire time I had been rejecting Christianity. I had left Him, but He had never left me. I live in hope not fear, love not hate. My void is now filled with peace and faith in God, my Christian God, the *only God that truly does exist*.

Testimony by Shari Setzer written June 2003