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Today's Christian Woman, September/October 2002

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I Was a Witch

But all my occult practices never brought me peace.
by Kimberly Shumate



Witchcraft, telepathy, levitation, spirit channeling, ESP, and a host of other paranormal activities were all I knew from early childhood. While we attended church every Sunday and called ourselves Christians, my parents started espousing Hindu beliefs and New Age philosophies. Soon, choir camp was replaced with psychic camp, and séances, Ouija boards, crystals, and pendulums became the norm

in our home. Every night around the dinner table, we discussed topics such as ghosts, poltergeists, and contact from the beyond. Yet as strange as it sounds, we still considered ourselves to be Christian.

Then, when I was 17, my mother's slow, agonizing battle with cancer ended. The void within me was too great to fill, so I found solace in my anger. To anesthetize my pain over my mom's death, I turned to black magic, voodoo, hexes, and curses. Since my future seemed so uncertain, I began reading Tarot cards to tell my fortune. I even took on a new appearance—I cut and dyed my light brown curls jet black. I wore white makeup, black lipstick, and black clothes. Eight holes pierced my ear—my new trademark.

My behavior changed as well. I quit high school and started hanging out downtown with all the other misfits and vagabonds. One of my best friends was a warlock named Stephen. Witchcraft became my haven, my identity, my lifestyle. Although my dad and I were close, he was too caught up in his grief to seem to notice the poor choices I was making. He later told me he was sorry he hadn't been more of an emotional support for me during the time my life started taking its downward spiral.

I considered myself a spiritual person. While I believed God is the Creator of all things and that Jesus Christ is his son, one



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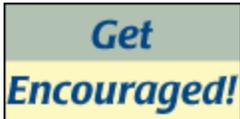
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important element was missing: reverence. I had no fear of God, no sense of accountability or responsibility to him. In my mind, hell didn't exist, which alleviated the consequences of evil.

As the years went by, I barely scraped out a living as a manicurist. I moved from place to place—Atlanta, Seattle, and finally Hollywood when I was 26 years old. With no money, no car, and no telephone, life was hard. The tiny room I rented on the Boulevard was hot and cockroach-infested. I stepped over used syringes and condoms each morning on my way to the bus stop. I didn't fill my father in on all these details because I didn't want him to worry. I persisted in romanticizing this colorful and sometimes dangerous lifestyle, but it was taking its toll.

Suffering from severe anorexia, my 100-pound, 5-foot-5-inch frame had its share of health issues. And with a weekly budget of fifty dollars, as the years passed, I wondered why the Universe wasn't taking better care of me. Surely the answer lay within the supernatural sphere of my mother's crystal ball, which my father gave me right after she died. Though it was quite large and expensive, the thought of selling it never crossed my mind, as it would inevitably become a family heirloom. Still, whenever I gazed into it, I received no word from the beyond. I sank deeper into poverty, and my health problems progressed.

A stark contrast to my growing misery was Joyce, a woman who frequented the salon where I worked. Her deep, sincere joy baffled me. I was in turmoil emotionally and physically, and unfulfilled spiritually. I wondered what Joyce had found that I'd overlooked. She didn't shove her Christian beliefs down my throat, but planted a seed by saying, "You need to come to my church."

I remember the first time I took her up on that offer. The service was held in the auditorium of a junior high school. I'd never seen people like those in attendance that morning—hands raised, singing, smiling. It was too much for me to take, so I left and didn't return for several months.

In the interim, I tried everything I'd missed the prior 29 years of searching, until there was nothing left to try. The Buddhists and the Hindus didn't offer the joy and peace I glimpsed in the people at Joyce's church. I didn't find the answers I sought in the psychic who "conversed" with angels, in the book *A Course in Miracles*, or with the Christian Scientists. The only thing I hadn't given a real try was found in that little church in the junior high. So, somewhat self-consciously and most unenthusiastically, I went back to find out more.

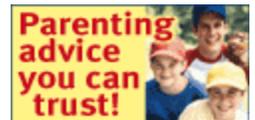
As I sat down, I silently shot up a desperate prayer: *God, please give me someone in this crazy crowd I can relate to. If you don't give me someone, I'm walking out of here.* At that moment, the pastor told the congregation to stand up and shake a few hands. I introduced myself to Lisa, whose dyed-



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red hair and nose ring suggested we might be at a similar place. My black-and-white hair and spiked belt told her the same. Lisa, a fellow spiritual seeker, and I became fast friends.

Looking back, I wonder how the church members stood having me in their midst for so long. I was angry and exasperated as I sat listening to their "good news." How could there be only *one* way to God? At the end of each message, I marched down the aisle to the pastor and began firing off an onslaught of questions. After three or four weeks of verbal sparring, he humbly offered the associate pastor's ear. I made my rounds from one elder to another, finally ending up at a Friday night Bible study looking for answers.

As I sat on the floor in the leader's living room, I felt a peace amidst this group of people who seemed to care about each other. After the study, Lisa sat beside me as Scott, the leader, patiently listened to my New-Age arguments. But one by one, the Scriptures I'd carefully prepared to punch holes in the gospel came back at me with hurricane force. Scott's words—but especially the Bible's words—confounded my cosmic view. After we'd sat there for an hour debating, I was exhausted. My hardened heart and argumentative nature finally had enough.

As Lisa drove me home, my mind ached as I replayed Scott's words. All the Old Testament and New Testament verses had one oddly familiar voice—one tone, one heart. I wondered, *How could a book written by so many different people over the course of hundreds of years fit together perfectly as if one amazing storyteller had written the whole thing?* The Holy Spirit began melting my vanity and arrogance with a power stronger than any hex, incantation, or spell I'd ever used. Suddenly, the blindfold I'd worn for almost 30 years was stripped away, and instantly I knew what I'd been searching for: *Jesus!* The same God I'd neglected, whose name I'd used as profanity, whom I'd flat-out rejected, was the one who'd sent his Son to suffer for me, to take the guilty verdict so I could be found innocent. My eyes filled with tears as I exchanged the darkness with which I'd grown so accustomed for the light of God's truth. It was such a personal moment between the Lord and me that even Lisa, sitting next to me in the car, had no idea what was going on.

I soon realized my life was filled with empty props, and it was time to clean house. My first act of obedience was to throw out all my books on witchcraft and the paranormal, as well as my Tarot cards. But the most important possession—and most difficult to discard—was my treasured crystal ball.

I called Lisa. She came right over, and we immediately drove to the Pacific Ocean. My heart pounded as if the demons themselves weren't far behind us. We stood at the end of Malibu Pier, our beaming faces reflecting the radiance of the setting sun. I unwrapped the crystal's black velvet cover, and light streamed out like rainbows as the thick crystal met the sun's fleeting rays. As I dropped the ball into the deep blue

water, I knew my future was secure. Now I had a Savior who would be with me always. It still moves me to tears to think he waited through all those years of anger, disappointment, fear, and bad choices. All the mistakes I'd ever made were wiped clean. It was amazing!

I'd attended church one week to argue with the members, then returned the following week in tears to pray the sinner's prayer in front of the entire congregation. It sounds astounding, but that's exactly what I did. One by one the Holy Spirit freed me from the trappings of my former life: the practice of forfeit religions, smoking, cursing, promiscuity, drug use, lying, and believing I was worthless. My old friends filtered out, and God replaced them with incredible new ones. He took me from that one-room hovel on Hollywood Boulevard back to my hometown and the security of friends, family, and a Spirit-filled church.

By this time, my father had recommitted his life to Christ. He was thrilled I'd found Christ, too, and knew it was true by the extreme change in me. A few days before he passed away from heart failure in 1997, I asked him if he would save me a place next to him at God's banquet table. He replied, "Sweetie, I wouldn't have it any other way."

My life has changed dramatically since my conversion 12 years ago. I've been healed of anorexia for several years, and I now help others with the same affliction. I hope God will open the door for me to work with others trapped by the occult as well.

There are times when I think back to my old life—the selfishness and the isolation of life without God. It reminds me of what the Enemy put me through. I wouldn't trade my new life for anything in this world.

Kimberly Shumate works for a Christian publishing company in Oregon.

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September/October 2002, Vol. 24, No. 5, Page 38

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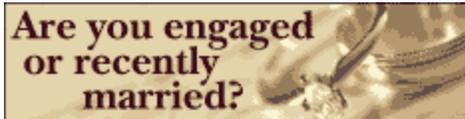
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