

# Chapter 1

**S**even-year-old Jeff and eight-year-old Paul were silently trying to see whose legs could dangle down furthest over the sofa. I sat beside them, wishing my five-year-old legs were long enough for me to compete. But with sly glances, they let me know that mine didn't even count. I stared at my feet and resisted the urge to scoot forward because I knew I might draw Mom or Dad's attention to the fact that I wasn't really listening.

It was evening worship, and they were once again talking about how Jesus would be coming back soon. I wondered if my legs would almost reach the floor, like Paul's did, before Jesus returned. Dad said that probably none of us would become teenagers on this earth. If we did, we would never reach the end of our teen years in this world. I wondered if I would be able to make it through the Time of Trouble.<sup>1</sup> It sounded so scary, but they said it had to happen before Jesus would return. And then, what if I made it through the Time of Trouble but couldn't go to heaven?

One Friday evening I lingered on the sofa after a particularly long worship period focused on the second coming of Christ and watched my father sitting at his desk. He was wrapped in serious contemplation. With his back to me, head bent over the Bible and engrossed in thought, Dad didn't look scary like he usually did; in fact, just then he looked like a saint. I decided that, considering how much time he spent reading the Bible and the writings of Ellen White,<sup>2</sup> he certainly was going to be translated (that is, taken to heaven without dying) when Jesus returned. I, on the other hand, could hardly read, and I certainly didn't spend time studying like he did. How could I know I'd be saved?

Suddenly, a brilliant idea popped into my head. I jumped down from the sofa and ran to him.

"Daddy," I announced, "when Jesus comes, I'm going to make sure I'm standing close to you, so that when you start to go up, I can just grab onto your coattails and go right up to heaven with you!" The idea made perfect sense to me. But then Dad explained that nobody would go to heaven riding on someone else's coattails.

Most of the time, I was afraid of Dad.

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He was only five foot four, but to five-year-old me, Dad was a giant, especially when he was in one of his rages. Sometimes he'd stand in the middle of the living room, shouting at the top of his lungs. His knuckles would be clenched into tight fists, his normally white-looking face flushed a deeper crimson than his flaming red hair.<sup>3</sup> I'd stand transfixed, unable to move, hide, or tear my eyes away from his massive head, as with eyes squeezed shut and thin white lips curled, he'd raged on and on.

But when he was down on the floor playing a rousing game of horsey with my brothers, he didn't look so scary, and what they were doing seemed like so much fun. I would watch from my safe perch on the sofa, as my desire to play wrestled with my fear of him. Finally, I'd jump down and run over to join in.

"Let me play horsey too!" I'd cry.

But somehow, just at that moment, the fun would always end.

"Okay," Dad would say. "Game's over now. Time to stop."

"Let me play," I'd squeal. "I want a horsey back ride!" I'd struggle to lift my leg over his back, but to no avail because he would stop being a horsey and get to his feet.

"You're a girl," he'd say. "You might get hurt. Game's over."

"Daddy, play with me, too," I'd beg, but he always refused.

Dad liked to sit in the living room and read the newspaper in the evening. I was loitering on the sofa one evening, staring at the upright newspaper. Curiosity tugged at my mind about the man who sat in the stuffed rocker, hidden behind the newspaper.

An image played in my mind—a little girl I'd seen in church, sitting on her daddy's lap. I studied the back of the newspaper and wondered if I dared sit on my daddy's lap, too.

My throat closed tightly at the thought, yet the idea ignited a spark that propelled my feet across the short distance. Slipping between his knees, I ducked under the newspaper and pushed myself up on one of his legs.

Dad's reaction was swift. He dropped the paper and shoved me off his leg. He glanced downward, his face turning a flaming red. He shifted uncomfortably, then looked up and said huskily, "You're getting to be quite a big young lady—too big to sit on Daddy's lap like that."

Clearing his throat, he continued, "If you want to sit on Daddy's lap in the future, you must sit like this." And with that Dad put his legs together,

picked me up, and placed me sideways at the very edge of his lap, across both knees.

In an instant, I understood—the problem was rooted at the point where his legs formed a V. I sat there a moment, already mentally gone but afraid to move away too quickly.

“Do you understand?” he asked. I nodded and got down.

Never again did I try to sit on Dad’s lap, beg him to play horsey, or seek physical closeness with him.

Mom mainly stayed home because Dad said a mother’s place was in the home. But every now and then she would dress up in her nurse’s outfit and work a dayshift, leaving Dad to look after me. As soon as Mom left, I would go outside and play with my kitten Heidi, dig little holes with my plastic hand shovel, or make dirt pies. Other than using the bathroom—only when I simply couldn’t hold it another minute—I would stay outside all day long until Mom came back or my brothers got home from school.

One afternoon the sky clouded over and raindrops began to fall. I looked around for shelter and found refuge between the bushes under the overhang of the roof. I sat there with my legs hugged against my chest, hoping against hope that Dad would forget I was outside. After a few minutes though, he came out, looked around, and spotted me between the bushes. I sat stock still like a rabbit, staring at the ground.

After a pause Dad said quietly, “You don’t have to stay out here and get wet.”

“I’m fine,” I said too quickly, my voice squeaky and shrill.

Dad stood there a moment longer, just looking at me; then he shook his head, slowly turned and went back inside. Mom never worked on a school day after that.

Being alone with Dad was terrifying. On the other hand, being alone with my brothers simply didn’t feel safe. We were always fighting, and I could never win without my personal shield and protector present—Mom.

Mom was my one and only safe place, and I learned early on that she was also a powerful weapon in battles with my brothers. One Friday afternoon when I was very small, Mom and the boys were doing Sabbath preparation chores.<sup>4</sup> Mom pulled out the vacuum cleaner, and I struggled to lift the long handle to vacuum the floor.

“You’re too little to do the vacuuming,” Paul and Jeff shouted while trying to snatch the handle from me. I clung to it and screamed for Mom,

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protesting that I was a girl so I was supposed to do the vacuuming. Much to my delight and my brothers' outrage, Mom agreed and made them let go of the handle. Then she quickly got her camera and snapped a picture. Whenever I saw that picture—me standing in the living room dressed in a shirt and diapers, holding the vacuum cleaner handle with one hand, with my other fingers stuck in my mouth and my brothers unhappily looking on—I'd remember like it happened yesterday. So a few years later when Mom and I were looking at old pictures, I recounted everything that led up to that photograph. Mom was very surprised; she said I'd only been eighteen months old.

By the time I was five, though, Mom wasn't always around to save me from my brothers.

Once they got the idea of making slingshots from branches and rubber bands. They used a stone for the shot, and I found myself running for all I was worth to keep from being the target.

It was the same with the bows and arrows they made next. We were in the backyard one afternoon, and they proudly showed me their creations. I became uneasy though, as I noticed they had stepped back and turned in my direction as they picked up their stone-tipped arrows.

"You're not going to shoot those at me, are you?" I asked, my voice betraying me with a slight quiver. "I-I could get hurt."

"Well, then, you better run!" Paul said, as he and Jeff began fitting the arrows in their bows.

I started backing away, wailing in protest, "But if I run you're going to shoot at me!"

Their response was the same: "You'd better run!"

I fled like a deer.

In my mind's eye, I can still see those arrows arching gracefully through the air toward me. Of course, I told Mom, and they got in trouble.

Mom had stopped working on school days; instead, she worked nights once or twice a week and sometimes on Sundays. Dad also worked occasionally as a registered nurse, but usually on different shifts than Mom. Sometimes, though, they were both gone. Then, Paul, as the eldest, was in charge with Jeff second in command. Together they were supposed to keep things orderly and take care of their little sister. Of course, as soon as Mom and Dad walked out the door, their instructions were promptly forgotten and disorder and chaos reigned!

One such evening, Paul was telling us how he and his best friend succeeded in blowing a few spit wads through a straw at their teacher without getting caught. He retrieved a straw and a square of toilet paper to demonstrate. Of course, Jeff had to try it, so that meant I had to as well, and very quickly we moved from blowing spit wads to an all-out spitball fight.

Then Paul decided he could do better than spit wads—he could make a spit bomb! He pulled off about a half of a roll of toilet paper, soaked it in water and launched it like a rocket. The massive blob went “splat” on the ceiling—and stuck. As we stared upward in awe at Paul’s handiwork, it dawned on us that we were going to be in a heap of trouble if Mom and Dad came home to that display! We had been so absorbed that we had forgotten the time, and now it was way past our bedtime and almost time for them to come home. Working together at top speed, we cleaned up everything, including the white mass plastered on the ceiling, straightened up the living room, and dove into bed just in time to pretend we were fast asleep when they tiptoed to our rooms to check. The next day when Mom remarked at breakfast that she’d have to add toilet paper to her shopping list because it was almost gone, we all suddenly became engrossed with finishing our food. If she ever figured it out, she didn’t let on.

Our spit wad fights weren’t dangerous, but our book fights were. Mom and Dad had a tall shelf full of books, including large medical texts. Paul, Jeff, and I would stack a pile next to our individual “forts,” barricade ourselves in, and fire away at the “enemy”—which was anyone who dared peek out from behind a shelter. The thin books were easy to throw, but the big ones were more effective in convincing an enemy to stay in hiding. The first casualty—a book casualty, that is—happened when I poked my head from behind a stuffed living room rocker and narrowly missed being struck in the face by a fat medical thesaurus. It catapulted through the air and split up the spine as it crashed on the floor. That didn’t stop the full-fledged war, though, and soon victims with torn pages, dislocated spines, and bent covers lay scattered everywhere. With time once again running out before our parents returned, my brothers and I patched up the books as best we could with Scotch tape and Elmer’s glue, and carefully re-shelved them.

Within days, Mom remarked that some of her books looked like they had been in a battle. But when she asked us if we knew why, nobody had the slightest idea.

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Sometimes on summer nights when Mom was working, Dad would take the boys outside and point out things in the night sky. He would show them how to calculate the distance of a thunderstorm by counting the lag time between a lightning strike and the subsequent thunder roll. He would take them to the end of the driveway and they would watch the lightning display in the clouds and talk about the wind speeds and temperature. I stood in the front door and watched, but never attempted to join them.

Somehow I understood that though my brothers and I were growing up in the same house, we lived in very different worlds. They had privileges, like standing at the end of the driveway with Dad and learning about lightning, clouds, stars, and wind currents, because they were boys. I stood in the dark doorway and simply looked on because I was a girl.

There were many things a girl could not do.

I learned a humiliating lesson about this when I was just a toddler. Paul and Jeff were having a pissing contest behind the house to see who could shoot the furthest and aim the best. Determined to keep up with my brothers, I tried, and cried as pee ran down my legs. My brothers howled with laughter and shouted, “Dumb girl!” and I fled inside to seek the comfort of Mom’s arms.

The inferiority of being a girl was pretty clear to me by age five, which is why I decided I wanted to be a boy. Often, alone in my room, I would take a little red plastic thermometer which was part of my play nurse’s kit, hold it pointing out in front of my privates, and march around the room chanting, “I’m a boy, I’m a boy, I’m a boy!” I struggled hard to keep up with my brothers every chance I got. But I was always the youngest, the smallest, the weakest, and especially the dumbest—as they made a point of reminding me.

The difference between boys and girls was particularly clear when it had to do with private body parts. And when it came to me, that was always bad.

Once, as our babysitter was telling my brothers and me goodnight, I stuck my thumb into the waistband of my pajamas and pulled downward for just a second. My brothers said, “Ooooh!” and the babysitter put her hand to her mouth. I knew right away I must have done something bad. I went to bed feeling dread inside. But it was fear and utter confusion that I

felt hours later when the sting of two belts startled me from my sleep. It took a moment to remember what earned me a whipping from both parents.

Apparently, however, I was committing an even greater sin, though I didn't know it. I did know that at night it felt comforting, warm, and safe to tuck my hands under me just before I'd fall asleep. But holes began to appear in my underwear, and Mom got angry about it. Dad said she would have to start checking on me at night to make sure "that" stopped. Then one morning, still in my favorite pajamas, I wandered out to the living room where Mom sat on the sofa folding clothes. Something caught her eye and she yanked me by a hole in my pajama pants so hard that I flipped upside down in the air and landed on my head.

I was too stunned to cry. I sat motionless where I landed and just stared down at my ripped pajamas. Mom seemed sorry that she was so harsh with me, and she tried to talk to me instead.

"How did that happen?" she asked.

"I don't know," I quivered, too frightened to do anything but tell the truth.

"Well, I believe you," she said, seeming partly angry with herself as well as me. "But you better be glad it was me and not your dad that saw that, and you better never do it again. He already thinks you're becoming a Jezebel!"

I didn't know what a Jezebel<sup>5</sup> was, but it wouldn't be the last time I'd hear it. Of course, I couldn't read, and I wouldn't have known where to look for it if I could. But at least I was learning to spell some words.

The first word Mom taught me to spell was G-O-D. I was perched atop the olive green spread that covered the double bed in my parents' room when she pointed out the word in the first verse of the first chapter in the first book of the Bible. I thought that was pretty special, almost as special as being in Mom's room, which was normally strictly off limits. Only now and then when Dad was gone during the day and Mom was straightening up in her room was I able to go in there. Otherwise, the door to their room was always closed. In my mind, it was locked so far away that it didn't exist except on rare occasions. Even when I had nightmares, the thought never occurred to me to run down the hall and jump in my parents' bed.

So sitting atop Mom's bed one morning while she worked, I searched the whole first chapter in Genesis for every occurrence of G-O-D. I was so

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excited that I could read, even if it was only one word. Next, Mom wrote on a paper J-E-S-U-S, and I traced the letters until I could remember them by heart. But though I looked hard, I could not find that word anywhere in Genesis, Chapter 1.

Finally, she taught me to spell my name R-A-C-H-E-L, and she told me it meant little lamb. When she finished folding and putting away the clothes and we went back into the living room, she pointed to the picture on the wall of Jesus leading a flock of sheep, and in His arms was a little lamb. I saw the contentment in the lamb's eyes and knew without a doubt that I was that lamb. I was special to Jesus; I just wanted somehow to know who He was.

At that time, we attended church every Sabbath on the campus of Oakwood College (now Oakwood University) at the Ashby Auditorium, which was the gymnasium.<sup>6</sup> There, we'd sing songs like "I Surrender All" and "Jesus Paid It All." I couldn't put into words what the songs meant to me, but I'd feel something pulling at my heart, and it made me want to give in, to allow that something inside me. So I started asking to be baptized. Every week at the end of his sermon when the minister gave an appeal to join the church, I was the first, and often the only, person to go forward. Yet week after week, it was as though no one saw me. The minister and the deacons always seemed to be waiting for someone else. They would smile at me but then ignore me. I thought that maybe they forgot each time that I was standing there. So I would go back to my seat with my mother and father and wait until the next week and go up again. My parents never once stopped me from going.

One Sabbath the minister came over to my parents as they were leaving church and asked them why they let me come up front week after week. Mom and Dad glanced at each other and Dad half smiled and lowered his head, not responding immediately. I felt tension in the air and knew the pastor was annoyed—which didn't seem unusual; from what I could see, Dad and the preacher didn't like each other very well.

He usually tried to hurry Dad through the line of people who came to shake his hand and congratulate him on his sermon. Dad always had something to say, and the pastor never smiled about it like he did when people ahead or behind us spoke to him. Just a few weeks before, I had overheard Dad remark while gripping his hand, "Pastor, I thought I'd just

write down here,”—my father waved a tiny notepad—“how many times you mentioned the words ‘God,’ ‘Jesus,’ or ‘the Bible’ in your sermon.

“You know how many times it was?” Dad asked, leveling an intense gaze on him. The pastor’s jaw clenched tightly.

Without pausing for an answer, my father leaned in and spoke.

“Not one time.”

The pastor jerked his hand free and turned away as Dad ushered us out the door.

Now standing there with the pastor staring down at the top of my head, I held my breath and waited. Dad looked up finally and smiled tensely.

“Well, Pastor,” he said slowly. “The child wants to be baptized.”

“Do you really think a child that young really knows what she wants?”

“Ask her,” my father replied, gesturing toward me and taking a step back.

I looked up at the tall minister when he spoke, and I felt very small.

“Young lady, I understand you want to be baptized.”

“Yes, I do,” I said in a quiet voice. “I have been asking every week.”

I looked into his eyes. “Can I get baptized?”

He patted me on the head and asked, “Why do you want to be baptized?”

“Because Jesus died for me, and I love Him and want to give Him my life.”

“Well, that’s very nice,” he said, squatting down and smiling indulgently at me, “and one day when you turn twelve, you can follow Jesus’ example and get baptized just like him. Okay?” He patted me on the shoulder and nodded his head as if encouraging me to nod too.

Instead, my jaw dropped as I took a step back and stared at him in disbelief. I wasn’t sure I’d heard right! I knew better than to argue with grownups, but surprise made the words just come tumbling out: “Sir, Jesus went to the temple with his parents when he was twelve, but he wasn’t baptized until he was thirty. Do you mean that I have to wait until I’m thirty to be baptized?” My voice rose in shrill incredulity as I finished the sentence.

The pastor abruptly stood up. His face turned red and something seemed caught in his throat. He coughed.

I didn’t know if he was upset, and I snuck an anxious glance at Mom and Dad. Dad looked at me strangely but then smiled ever so slightly from behind the minister’s back.

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The pastor turned to my parents without answering me. “You can send her to baptismal class if you think she is ready. She can stay in the class and take the lessons and maybe, eventually, we’ll see about baptizing her.”

He turned quickly and walked away.

“Daddy?” I looked at my father questioningly.

He glanced after the minister, then again smiled strangely. “It’s all right, honey. You did just fine. I’m proud of you.”

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I never did attend any of those baptismal classes. I forgot because we didn’t go back to church anymore. Instead, we started traveling far away in our maroon Volkswagen van, twice even to California. We would travel in it by day and sleep in it at night. Even when we weren’t on the road, we frequently met and worshiped with small groups of people in different homes instead of going to church.

These meetings were fervent and intense and often lasted for hours. My brothers and I, along with other children who were sometimes present, were usually released after a while to go outside and “get some fresh air.” We weren’t supposed to play on the Sabbath, but invariably we did, because the adults were too preoccupied to notice. I was in the meetings long enough though to pick up on names that were mentioned often—Brinsmead, Andreasen, and Wieland and Short,<sup>7</sup> among others. Furthermore, many of the intense discussions centered on phrases I frequently heard: “righteousness by faith,” “present truth,” “the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation,” and “the reforms.” In the afternoon, there would be more meetings on health, diet, and natural remedies.

Once, after one of those day-long sessions, a group of us went out to the parking lot of a large Baptist church in Huntsville, Alabama, to “witness.” We placed pamphlets under the windshield wipers of cars and handed out copies of the booklet, *A Prophet Speaks to America*, as the worshipers came out. Later, a police officer arrived and asked us to leave. I did not understand much about the literature we were handing out but believed I was helping to warn the world of the very soon return of Christ. I felt the thrill of doing that.

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“Did you all know that eggs, cheese, and milk are all bad for you?” Mom asked the three of us one summer morning as we sat at the kitchen table. None of us responded. I waited silently, oddly feeling as though this was more than a casual question and that it might lead to something I wouldn’t like, though I couldn’t think of what.

“And did you know that potato chips, corn curls, and ice cream are nothing but junk?” she continued. “We need to eat the original diet intended by God for mankind in order to be ready for Christ’s second coming.”

Now I knew exactly where this was going, and my hunch was right—I didn’t like it at all. Corn curls were my favorite, and I loved ice cream. I stole a glance at the boys and could tell they weren’t happy either; they loved potato chips and liked ice cream, too.

Mom wasn’t done though. After dinner, she pulled out the vegan cookbook, *Ten Talents*, and read about the various chemicals used to make artificial flavorings for ice cream. The book said the vanilla flavor, my favorite, was made from a chemical that was also used to kill lice. I was stunned to learn what we had been ingesting.

The following Sunday—a day we usually got ice cream in the past—Mom, the boys, and I were heading for the checkout counter in a store when I spied my favorite ice cream cart vendor. In a flash, I broke away from my mother and ran up to the young woman, pointing a finger directly at her.

“So you’re the one who’s been selling all this lice killer!” I accused, my voice shrill and indignant.

Mom rushed over and quickly explained to me that the poor lady did not know what was in the ice cream any more than I had known; I must not think she was responsible for the unhealthy mix.

That same day, when we came home, Mom and I went through the refrigerator and dumped every egg, jug of milk, stick of butter, and package of cheese, one by one, into the trash can. That morning she had prepared, as she said, our “last unhealthy breakfast.” And it had been perfect—everything I looked forward to on Sunday mornings: scrambled eggs with cheese, fluffy buttermilk biscuits, and buttery white grits.

“What will we have now on Sunday mornings?” I asked Mom, looking woefully into the filled trash can.

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“We’re going to have a wonderful, truly healthy breakfast, that’s what,” she replied, looking with satisfaction at our handiwork.

The next Sunday, breakfast was without a doubt healthy, according to what Mom had told us healthy was supposed to be. However, it was anything but wonderful. Mom had attempted to scramble something that looked a bit like egg but tasted nothing like it at all. She had baked some whole wheat biscuits, which she insisted were far better for us than those ‘puffy white things.’ They were hard, flat, and nearly tasteless. The grits were yellow instead of white, and they were cooked without butter, but at least I could recognize them as grits.

One thing I knew for sure—wherever this healthy diet thing was going, I certainly was not looking forward to being dragged along. The other thing I knew for sure was that I didn’t have a choice.

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I was sitting on the floor playing with some imaginary animal friends when Mom quietly entered my room one morning. She opened my closet door and then sat down on the floor next to me. She took out a black book, one of the *Testimonies to the Churches* volumes by Ellen G. White, and began reading to me about modest dress. I listened, unsure of where this was going until Mom closed the book and pointed out that my dresses only reached my knees.

“Ellen White says that our dresses should be down to the foot,” she stated quietly.

I said nothing.

Mom added, “And in Revelations, Chapter 1, John says he saw Jesus clothed in a garment down to the foot. You want to be like Jesus, don’t you? If you want to follow Jesus and be modest in your dress, then you need to think about what the Counsel [Ellen White’s writings] says.”

With that, Mom rose and left the room.

I realized then that it had been a long time since I had seen any pants in my closet. Though I did not miss them, I liked my dresses and did not want to give them up. At last, however, I got up, went to my mother, and told her that I wanted to give up my short dresses and wear long ones because I wanted to please the Lord. It turned out that I didn’t have to give up my dresses, though maybe that would have been preferable. Mom simply sewed swatches of whatever solid color cloth best matched around the bottom of

each dress, and thus extended it to the foot. When I complained that the extension looked plain and out of place, she applied rickrack to the junction and said that made it look just fine. Soon she began making dresses for both of us.

It would be a full decade before I would wear anything other than long, homemade dresses and skirts.

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One day just before summer vacation in 1972, Dad went to pick up the boys from church school and saw Jeff dancing to a bouncy tune that a young boy was playing on a piano in the hallway. Dad angrily rebuked Jeff for dancing to “that boggie woogie music.”

Jeff wailed in reply, “But Daddy, that’s the principal’s son playing the piano!”

Dad came straight home and told Mom in front of us all that when the school year ended the boys were not going to go back.

That made me uneasy. I was to start school in the fall, but Dad declared that wasn’t going to happen. I sucked in my breath, crossed my fingers, and hoped with all my heart that they would change their minds by then. However, as that summer drew to an end, Dad brought home three old wooden desks and set them up in our small living room.

I felt very dismal when the first day of school arrived. My friend, Lisa, was starting school at Anna Knight Elementary. I could imagine her, surrounded by lots of other first graders, sharing the fun and excitement of being together. And here I sat at my small desk in our quiet living room with my brothers—who were both far ahead of me in school—as my sole companions.

If I was downhearted, Mom certainly was not. Using books from Wildwood, a self-supporting<sup>8</sup> sanitarium and school in Wildwood, Georgia, Mom started us on a vigorous program of memorizing passages from the Bible and quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy (the writings of Ellen G. White). The first passage I memorized was a paragraph from *Steps to Christ*, page 10: “God is love is written upon every opening bud, every spiral of springing grass. . .”

However, homeschooling was not legal in the state of Alabama in the 1970s. One day the phone rang: the principal of the Anna Knight School

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wanted to know where my brothers and I were enrolled. Mom said that she had taken over our education, and with that, the conversation ended.

Sometime later, a woman in a dark blue suit parked her car on the street and marched up to our door while we were having school. Her name was Mrs. Joiner, and she was from the local city government's board of education. The principal at Anna Knight had reported us. She said that she had come to deliver an ultimatum to my parents on behalf of the Board: either enroll us in an accredited school or risk having us placed in foster care.

Dad, a captain in the Air Force and by then a Vietnam veteran as well, said he wasn't going to be forced into either choice. Instead, in the middle of the night a couple of weeks later, our parents roused us from our sleep. They bundled us in blankets, piled us into our Volkswagen van, which they had already loaded with as many items as it could carry, and whisked us away to the Ozark Mountains area of northern Arkansas.