

From Teenage Hippie Spawn to Devout Catholic

By Anastasia Hunt

I was born to married teenage hippies in 1975, in Oklahoma City. I highly doubt we attended church as a family, for my parents were too busy getting high and just chilling out. (Well, my dad was anyway. I think once I was born my mom's priorities did shift somewhat.) My mom, Susan, didn't tell my dad she was pregnant with me, probably because she didn't want to be weaseled into terminating the pregnancy. I'm not sure if she told anyone besides her mom. I've heard many times how much of a surprise my birth was to most of her family.

My dad left us within a few months of my birth, swinging back by to visit (and to help create my brother Jason). Their divorce was final in 1978. For a while, my mom just kinda drifted a bit, partying and trying to raise two children who were still in diapers. In the summer of '79, my aunt Kathy was in town. She had been religious pretty much from the get-go (most of her family was Southern Baptist), and she was probably concerned for my mother. They wound up going to some concert the local Southern Baptist church was holding. Mom wound up "getting saved"; she decided that she needed to change, and she needed the Lord in order to do so.

We were Southern Baptist from then until 1985. My mom participated in everything, as well as getting her GED and starting college. She also made a lot of new friends. I learned a lot about hell before I was 10.

My mom felt called to drop everything in Oklahoma City and move us to Nashville, TN in 1984. (She wanted to be a Christian singer/songwriter.) She found a really good nondenominational church out there. I liked Nashville- it's a beautiful town, and the people are just super-friendly.

Financial difficulties forced us to return to OKC in 1986. We went back to the church that we had belonged to, and for some reason Mom didn't care much for it. From that point on, we pretty much stopped going to church, unless it was Christmas or somebody was getting married. My brother and I were pretty well left to our own devices as far as church went- just so long as we stayed Christian.

I wasn't terribly interested in church until I started college. (I had, in tenth grade, expressed an interest in the Catholic Church, only to be shot down by my well-meaning mother who honestly thought that Catholics were severely misguided.) I started occasionally attending a Methodist church near the University of Central Oklahoma. I liked the sermons being so kind and gentle (and not chock-full of references to hell and backsliding) but I somehow felt that something was missing.

The sudden death of my mother in 1997, when I was 22, was a severe trauma. I sank myself into a self-destructive lifestyle in an effort to not have to deal with it. I wound up getting myself arrested and spending a night in jail. That was my wake-up call.

I resolved to live sensibly. I got back into church, another Southern Baptist outfit in Norman. I also met a guy and got engaged to him. I submitted to being re-baptized, only to leave the church within months. My fiancé turned out not only to be really anti-social, but also a Wiccan. That engagement set the scene for what was going to be the biggest thing to ever happen to me.

I was in college in the fall of 2000. It was the only thing I had to look forward to-my engagement was not going well. I made some friends in the drama department. One of them, Theresa, told me that her church was having a college night of Mass and fellowship. By now I was skeptical about anything church-related. I had pretty well decided that I was not meant to go to church. She then mentioned that this was a Catholic church. This appealed to my rebelliousness and I found myself in a Catholic church for the first time in my life.

The feeling I had gotten while at Mass was the one I had always wanted to get at church. I felt, despite the fact that I didn't know the prayers or when to stand, sit, or kneel, that I was home. I know I was in the right place at the right time.

I started attending mass with Theresa fairly often. In 2002, I went on a church-sponsored retreat called SEARCH; it was a real turning point in my life. I decided to look into converting. I began RCIA that fall; however, my well-meaning friends and family (including my brother Jason) talked me out of it. I would still attend mass on occasion-usually at STM or St. Paul the Apostle in Del City, but for a long time it was my usual path of not going to church and simply being nominally Christian.

Last year, Jason started asking me questions about my desire to become Catholic. I answered as honestly as I could. I assumed the matter was finished, but he dropped a major bomb on me a few weeks later: apparently, he'd been learning a lot about Catholicism (in order to win arguments with his Catholic apologist friends) and, based on what he had learned, he had decided to convert. I immediately knew that it was time for me to resume my faith journey as well.

We attended Mass at a local church, and Jason was in the same position I was in at my first mass. He was astonished at how well I knew what was going on. I reminded him that I had almost converted. He apologized for having anything to do with my leaving RCIA.

In his quest to find a church home for himself, Jason decided to try another church in a nearby suburb. We went and immediately knew that this was where we were supposed to be. Jason made some inquiries and next thing you know we were in RCIA.

Our RCIA experience was tremendous. We bonded with the other candidates and catechumens, while being nurtured by the staff and volunteers who ran the various aspects of the program. The more I attended the meetings and the Breaking Open of the Word, the more I longed to be in full communion with this church.

The main difference seems to be in the attitude of the Catholic Church- it's one of love and unity. I'm sorry to say that doesn't seem to be universal with the rest of Christianity. I still couldn't tell you why Fundies hate Catholicism so much; I can only say that they don't even know much about our faith- their perceptions seem to be based on Jack Chick's infamous tracts.

Jason and I were received into the Church at Easter Vigil, 2006. It has been a long, strange journey for us both. It continues to surprise me at almost every turn. The non-Catholics around me have noticed positive changes in me- changes I can only attribute to my conversion.

I continue to want more of the goodness that the Church offers. I am currently discerning my vocation to the religious life- nothing would make me happier than giving of myself completely to the Church that has loved me and done so much for me. Whatever happens, I know that I was born to be Catholic, and I will be Catholic until the end of my days on this planet.