Creation
Kudos to Nathan Brown, winner of the AnchorPoints essay contest (see “The Whole Universe Dancing,” Jan. 21 Cutting Edge Edition). It was brilliant, buoyant, like a breath of fresh air. Especially inspiring was the quotation “At the heart of the universe is a smile, a pulse of joy passed down from the moment of creation.” In order to absorb its beauty, I had to read the essay several times.
—Daniel Kubrock
Elmshaven, California

Cheering a Baptism
I enjoyed reading every one of the Cutting Edge Meditations (Jan. 21), but one statement drew me up short. Please let Bonita Shields know that her “dream” can be realized if she would visit the Lakeview church in Powder Springs, Georgia, during a baptism. Every new believer is welcomed with cheering, clapping, and loud amens as they emerge from the water. We are not an ethnic congregation, but a very cosmopolitan church in the suburbs of Atlanta.

Following our most recent evangelistic effort, 10 persons were baptized at one service. When Elder Cavins asked one of them, Mary, if she had any family present, she said no. But then she turned toward the congregation and said, “But I do have my new church family.” Instantly the entire congregation stood to their feet and began to clap and cheer! The standing ovation continued as the pastor lowered Mary into the water. The energy in the room was electrifying. It’s a wonderful thing to join the celebration when it’s party time in heaven!
—Glenda Medford Sutherland
Austell, Georgia

A Sabbath Honeymoon
I much appreciated Allan and Deirdre’s January 21 X-Change column (“Jesus Christ, MVP”). I believe Jesus would be pleased with this picture of the Sabbath as “honeymoon” time with Him.
—Virginia Collier
San Diego, California

Gambling’s Many Forms
Jonathan Gallagher’s “Betting Their Lives” (Jan. 21) was excellent, but he stopped short of touching on an addiction within the confines of the Adventist community—multilevel marketing “get rich” schemes. I have seen not only my family impacted by this addiction, but many other Adventist families as well. It is just as destructive as going to the casinos or other forms of gambling.
—Name Withheld

11 Million Murdered
What happened to the other 5 million? I refer to Jeffrey K. Thompson’s reference to “the extermination of more than 6 million Jews” (Jan. 14 World Edition). More than 11 million people of all races and nationalities were murdered in the Nazi death camps, but all we ever read about are the 6 million Jews. The 6 million Jews comprised about half of the Jewish population of the entire world, and it is understandable that they refer to this as “the Holocaust.” But it is sad that the other 5 million, which included some American and Allied prisoners of war, have almost completely disappeared from history.
—Walt Cason
Angwin, California
Health Care and the Adventist Name

Regarding Bill Knott’s “A Bridge So Near” (Jan. 14 World Edition). As a registered nurse who has worked for Florida Hospital for 25 years, I feel the hospital does indeed do an important service in bringing the Seventh-day Adventist name to the general public, usually in a very positive way. As the mother of a critically ill young adult who spent seven months in and out of the hospital receiving the best treatment available for cancer, I am grateful to them for being on the cutting edge of medicine.

However, in the midst of one of his stays, we were disappointed to find that 3ABN had been taken off our viewing selection, although another Christian station was available (broadcasting nothing Adventist—only PTL, 700 Club, Benny Hinn, etc.). Upon addressing this, we were informed that the things being broadcast on 3ABN were too “strong” to be used as an introduction to our faith. They are working on programming for a hospital station, but I find it amazing that we should have to sugarcoat or buffer the Bible truths seen on 3ABN. People need our truths, especially when facing illness.

—Susan Danforth Jones
Deltona, Florida

Two Teens

Don Pierson’s “A Tale of Two Teens” (Jan. NAD Edition) really hit home. I was glad to see that the church policy is not “to drop anyone without having a discussion with them.” Unfortunately, this has not always been practiced.

In 1972 my 18-year-old daughter was dropped from membership without anyone discussing it with her. She wasn’t doing anything against church rules, but she wasn’t attending, and her membership added to the Ingathering goal. A letter was sent to her, but since she had moved to another state, she learned of the disfellowship after the fact, as we also did. The pastor and members could have found out her correct address if they had asked us for it. Unlike Don Pierson’s sister and daughter, our daughter died of a rare disease in 1980 and never had a chance to rejoin our church. I have always felt bad that she was never given the opportunity to say if she wanted her membership continued.

—Name Withheld

It seems to me that often we could use a different method for dealing with folk who just seem to disappear. Instead of voting them out, might we be able to define some category in which they would still be members but not on any church list counting toward conference goals?

—Stanley Murphy
Zephyrhills, Florida

Labor-saving Devices

In “Adventists and LSD” (Jan. NAD Edition), Robert Granger did an excellent job pointing out a subtle but pervasive risk factor in our society and church today. Since Adventists typically boast higher education and socioeconomic status, we tend to gravitate toward the technological whizbang kind of gadgets and labor-saving devices that he mentioned.

One study showed that something as simple as walking to deliver a memo instead of sending interoffice e-mail could result in substantial health benefits from the accumulated physical activity over the course of a year. Hopefully this article will cause us to reflect on our own personal use of LSDs and start incorporating more physical activity in our daily lives.

—Ernie Medina, Jr., Dr. P.H.
Loma Linda, California
n the middle of a miserable three-week stretch I glimpsed the road to glory.

Coming off the holidays, I unexpectedly found myself stressed professionally, strained interpersonally, strapped financially, and, compliments of the flu deluxe, struggling physically. My wife, Cindy, kindly joined me in the last two categories. Everything seemed to unravel at once.1

About the time our feverish nighttime hallucinations became feverish daytime hallucinations, Cindy and I concluded—via a rambling, incoherent conversation—that our 1-year-old, Ally, would receive better care 80 miles north at Cindy's parents' house. “Sure!” said Grandma Griffin (“Mimi”) when we phoned with the idea. “Bring her on up this evening. We'll meet you at Cracker Barrel at 9:00.”

Kissing a blanketed Cindy goodbye—me for two hours, Ally for two nights—we rushed into a cold wind toward our recently purchased minivan.2 After strapping in Ally, I popped in Michael Card's Early Works, a collection of old favorites. I've had this album for years, but resurrected it hoping to learn the lyrics to the final track—a beautiful melody called “Now That I've Held Him in My Arms,” sung from the standpoint of Simeon—so I could sing it to Ally at night. I had tired of my standard sing-a-few-bars, hum-a-few-bars routine.

By the time our van climbed the gentle slopes of northern Maryland, I had replayed the track four times and could now sing out with confidence: “'Now that I've held Him in my arms,'” I rasped, “'my life can come to an end . . . '” With all the front seat crooning, Ally might well have wished that her life would come to an end. But she didn't show it. Instead she just smiled and syllabled as her father communed with his Father in a way he hadn't done in a while.

We crunched into Cracker Barrel restaurant/country store 20 minutes early—apparently, the louder I sang, the more I accelerated—and I remembered Cindy's suggestion of having a treat with Ally.

“Two?” said the host.

“Yes,” I said. “Near the fireplace, if possible.”

Our server was a middle-aged woman with a kind but stressed face and matted black hair. She looked tired. “It's daddy/daughter night,” I said. “We'll take the small blackberry cobbler.”

“How could I resist?”

Minutes later, after an abbreviated game of throw-the-saltshaker-on-the-floor, I barely remembered my woes and worries. I alternately spooned cobbler and ice cream into Ally's mouth, then mine, I sat there wondering. Does life get much better than this? No computer-generated graphics; no Chuck E. Cheese entertainment. Just one glowing fire and two grinning faces. A disciple of simplicity in writing, I vowed afresh to seek simplicity in living. Did we really need all those magazines? (A part from the Review, I mean.)

Our check came to two dollars and change. I opened my wallet: a one, a five, and a 20. Normally, I would have just left the one on the table and used the five to pay at the counter. Normally, that's me—too stingy, not too generous, just meeting society's standard. But on this night I thought of the server—how exhausted she looked. I also had waited tables at a Cracker Barrel for a while. Much of the customer base was interstate traffic; the tips weren't real great. Once, though, someone had tipped me $5 for a modest-sized meal. I remembered how surprised and flattered I had felt—it buoyed me all the way home. I tucked the five under the plate and swung Ally high. For the first time in days her daddy was feeling good again.

Yes, I know—the Matthew 6 blessing for good deeds kept secret. But it's the Matthew 7 blessing—the narrow road—that's my focus here. On this one night, anyway, I had sampled the communion, the calm, the caring, that I believe defines that road. And it buoyed me all the way home.

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1 I had also planned a passing mention of the Vikings' collapse against the Falcons, but I've decided to let the Far Right dictate my every word.

2 Our friends tell us that we're no longer young adults. “You can be missionaries to young adults,” they say. “But with a minivan, you're no longer young adults.”

3 This was before my Far Right Awareness Program (FRAP). Another time I'll detail my Far Left Awareness Program (FLAP).
Don’t Read What Ellen White Wrote Unless...

You want to know why Jesus came into this world—
“To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love—to be ‘God with us’” (The Desire of Ages, p. 19).

You want to know how Jesus feels about you—
“In the person of Christ we behold the eternal God engaged in an enterprise of boundless mercy toward fallen man” (The Faith I Live By, p. 98).

You want to know why sin exists—
“God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son” (The Desire of Ages, p. 22).

You want to know if Ellen White had a sense of humor—

You want to have more effective prayers—
“If the loving-kindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would have far more power in prayer. . . . When you consider His goodness and mercies you will find that He will consider your wants” (Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 317).

You want to know exactly what God wants you to do—
“Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet” (The Desire of Ages, p. 330).

You want to know how to make family worship more interesting for your little ones—
“Let the seasons of family worship be short and spirited. . . . Family worship can be made pleasant. . . . A few verses of spirited song may be sung, and the prayer offered should be short and pointed” (Child Guidance, pp. 521, 522).

You want to know about inspiration—
“The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. . . . Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself” (Selected Messages, book 1, p. 21).

You want to know how to study Bible prophecy—
“The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture, the student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts” (Education, p. 190).

You want to know why there is a lot of emphasis on health—
“The great object of hygienic reform is to secure the highest possible development of mind and soul and body” (Counsels on Health, p. 386).

You want to know how, as a church, we could reach the world—
“If Christians were to act in concert, moving forward as one, under the direction of one Power, for the accomplishment of one purpose, they would move the world” (Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 221).

You want to know what will happen to this earth when Jesus returns—
“Our little world, under the curse of sin the one dark blot in His glorious creation, will be honored above all other worlds in the universe of God” (The Desire of Ages, p. 26).

May I suggest you read (or reread) the first chapter of The Desire of Ages for a summary of the plan of salvation from sinless heaven to sinful earth to, again, a sinless heaven. When you have finished, you will undoubtedly read the entire book and, indeed, the library of books and compilations of messages on hundreds of topics written by this amazing woman with a third-grade education. And you will be blessed.

* Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible prediction of a last-day gift of prophecy (Rev. 19:10) has been fulfilled in a remarkable way through the Holy Spirit’s work in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White. She called her writings “a lesser light” (Colporteur Ministry, p. 125).
In this feature Adventists share their church-related dreams.

MINISTRY TO MOMS: Just where will a mother of young children, new to the Adventist Church, go for biblical counsel that will transform her daily life? Not church. Admittedly, my children love cradle roll. But I have received no personal instruction since leaving my Sunday school (see Titus 2:3-5). Imagine how difficult it must be for the unchurched! This must change to ensure their discipleship. Surely each church has 16 people who would volunteer, in teams of two, to baby-sit during worship once every eight weeks. I know from experience that nothing spiritual is gained walking around the foyer.

— Rhonda Bryant, Ellijay, Georgia

ADVENTIST LIFE

During one particular children’s Sabbath school class our team of teachers was discussing the importance of Bible study. We asked the children what things kept them from studying God’s Word. They had missed the concept of TV, so we began to provide clues.

“It is something some boys and girls do too much of.” A pause. “It’s in your living room.”

To this a child responded, “Candy?” True, we said; that would cloud one’s mind to the clear study of God’s Word, but it wasn’t quite what we were looking for.

Suddenly a 5-year-old piped up excitedly, “Chasing the cat!”

— Carla Schultz, Leduc, Alberta

READ THE REVIEW . . . AND GET MARRIED

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT? Brought together by an Adventist Review article 21 months ago, James Jordan, of Maryland, and Kim McQueen, of Iowa, were married this past December. James, a General Conference employee and Harley rider, appeared on the cover of our March 6, 1997, issue (see “Running With the 24/7 Gang”). Shortly after, Kim e-mailed him. After their honeymoon, the Jordans enjoyed a wedding shower at the General Conference. Here they visit with William and Noeleen Johnsson. “While matchmaking isn’t the primary ministry of the Review,” says William Johnsson, editor, “we’re glad we could help bring James and Kim together.”

HATS OFF TO ADVENTIST YOUTH

To be considered, submissions to this feature must include a photograph—either posed or, preferably, in action.

Being the only 13-year-old boy in the Shoals church in Florence, Alabama, doesn’t bother Matthew Ringer. A junior deacon since age 9, Matthew has been known to operate the sound system, arm and disarm the burglar alarm, clean the church, water the flowers, and help distribute evangelistic materials. “Matthew is always there,” says member Ruth B. Potts. “Sometimes he’s the first to unlock the church for meetings.” In his free time Matthew also directs parking, greets visitors, walks the babies, plays the guitar. . . . Anyway, Matthew, thanks for going the extra mile for God—and look for your Review cap in the mail.

A nyway, Matthew, thanks for going the extra mile for God—and look for your Review cap in the mail.

ILLUSTRATION BY TERRY CREWS
Ever wondered what's on the hearts of Adventist college students?

Letters to God

They came on tissue paper, tithe envelopes, notepaper scraps, greeting cards, and expensive personalized notepaper scented with perfume. About a third of them came across the Internet. All are letters to God—heart-opening pleas for help, wisdom, hope, and peace. Or towering pillars of praise. A giant stack of them now rests on a special shelf in my study. Every few days I pull them down, listen to a few hearts, and then blend my prayers with theirs.

The journey that God has taken me on during the past 18 months has been one of the most exhausting and energizing of my life. I have traveled to four continents, spoken for Weeks of Prayer at six Adventist colleges/universities, and participated in many other special events for youth and young adults. At each location, instead of just making the expected "call," I have invited the students and faculty to speak of their spiritual commitment by writing a letter to God—and allowing me to be the mail carrier. Because the letters are so inspirational and challenging, I am sharing a few with you. (Only the names and locations have been changed.) What's here to learn? I'll let you judge that for yourself. For me, the process has focused my preaching and served as a transfusion of hope.

Let me know what you take away.
—Dick Duerksen, duerksen@bigfoot.com

Dear God,

I’ve lived and learned that I can’t live my life without You. I need You to direct me and guide me. Please make me a humble servant and use me to do Your will.
—Greg

Dear God,

As you know, I’ve grown up Adventist and have had a semideep relationship with Jesus, but never really what I feel it should be. He’s been my friend, but I’m not sure He’s been my best friend—for which I’m very sorry. I desire a closeness that I’ve never felt before, a closeness that will last my lifetime. I want to be ready for His return.
—Lynell

God, just hold my hand, and I’ll be O.K. Thank You.
—Ralph

G’day, God.

Here are my thoughts on Your Son, Jesus: I want Jesus to be in every aspect of my life, but it seems no matter how hard I try, He is only there, or more likely, I only depend on Him when there is a difficult time in my life, or when I succeed in a difficult situation, but I want Him to be there for all times, even the normal everyday times. I want to renew my relationship with Him, and I want Him to know that He is welcome in my dorm room anytime.
—Brent

Dear God,

Hi, it’s me again. I need help. I don’t know what to do.
with life. Everything that seemed so certain a little while ago isn’t so certain anymore. All I know is that I am not happy here and that I have no idea where to go to feel like someone cares about me. I’m sick of being dominated by my mother and tired of feeling used and overwhelmed by all the things I feel obligated to do. There’s so much I would love to do, but I feel so restricted. Please help me put my life in order.

Show me what to do with my summer and next year, and make it obvious, because sometimes I just don’t see things like that. Lord, help me. Please.

—Samantha

Dear God,

I know You are always impressing me, but for some reason I don’t always hear what You’re saying. Could You be more forceful sometimes? Even though that might be a violation of my conscience or will, it would make my life so much easier. Thank You.

—Eddie

Dear Jesus,

Well, I once again feel that I need You and that I am ready for a conversion experience. But God, why can’t I feel like this every day? Why does it seem that I have to try to live on my past conversions, those past experiences with You, to make it through today? I want to be able to have a new experience with You every day!

Once again I was a failure today. At least I am successful at that. I totally relied on myself and tried to accomplish the act of being a “Christian” so that others would notice my pious lifestyle. I keep hoping that someone will look my way and say, “Wow, you sure have given up a lot to follow Christ!”

Please help me believe! I love You, but I just don’t know how to show it. I hate living like this. Please?

—Dave

Dear God,

Before someone can truly surrender their heart to You, they must have a broken heart. The love of my life broke up with me! Is that how You repay those who, after wandering in the world, finally decide to come back to You?

They say time heals all wounds, and I’ve given it a good four months, God, but I’m still just as much in love with her as I ever was, possibly more. I try not to be, but I can’t help it. I see other girls around, but they don’t mean anything. It’s destroying my life, God, this depression. I want to be normal, God— not just act normal, but be normal.

I miss her, God, and I’d do anything to have her back at my side. She’s so beautiful and she loves You so much and she’s such a great person.

I used to be a very good student and get top grades, but not anymore. My GPA is sliding through the floor, but everyone seems to think I’m fine. It’s hard to even believe in You.

—Lonny

Dear God,

I was introduced to You early in life—so early that I can’t remember not knowing You. I remember talking
Dear God,

A s a 21-year-old there are things that I want to happen in my life. I would love to finish school in only two years. I’m planning on getting married that summer—ssshhh, don’t tell Nancy! But Lord, do You know what I’m feeling? I know heaven is greater than anything the world has to offer, but am I wrong to desire these things on earth? Lord, it’s almost as if I want You to hold on for just 10 more years. I don’t really mean it, but sometimes I think that way. Work on me, dear Lord. Give me that desire for You and for Your kingdom.

— Garrett

Dear God,

You know how often I willingly go to the edge of hell, then need to deal with all the guilt when I step back. Please, grab me first and drag me back into Your own arms.

— Barb

Dear God,

You have been there for always. It’s as if my fingers are loose from whatever it is I’m holding on to. Be my parachute.

— Yolanda

God,

I am really sorry for being so upset with You when my father passed away. I should have been thankful for the healthy years I had with him. The way things worked out, I now have more hope that someday I will be able to spend forever with him and You all together—a dream that never became reality here on earth.

— Sal

Dear God,

The last time I wrote You I was 7 years old. I “mailed” the letter between the books in the bookcase by our fireplace. I’m sure You got it, since it was gone when I looked for it later. Seven years old . . . and sure I’d be in heaven sliding down giraffes’ necks before I was 10.

I remember searching the sky one evening when the clouds were coming from the east—unusual for our town—and I was sure You were in one of those clouds. I even measured them with my tiny fist. Excited, I told Mom that You were coming to get us that afternoon. She informed me that You couldn’t be coming, because we hadn’t gone through a time of trouble yet. I’m sure my disappointment matched those of our church founders. Such was my childhood faith. Surely You remember.

Now I am a cynical 22-year-old. I am lukewarm, and I hate it. I hate passivity, and yet I am so good at it. You have given me so many gifts, God, and here I am, sitting on a big pile of treasure, trying to sort the rubies from the sapphires while the rest of the world (Aventist or not) is drowning.

I’m no good at being Christlike. A nd I’m supposed to let go and let You, but I “can’t.” So please—pry my fingers loose from whatever it is I’m holding on to. Be my parachute.

I have felt You, I have heard You, and in my mind’s eye I have seen You. Always vigilant, always loving, always waiting. Always. I don’t deserve it—it doesn’t make sense. A nd when I really think about it, my throat aches and my eyes water from the perplexity of it. If only I could be so constant!

I love You, God. Restore my childlike faith—my hope, my enthusiasm. Mold me to be Your disciple. Don’t let me become comfortable. I want to do “exactly” what You have planned for me. I can’t wait to find out what it is because I’m sure it will be “beyond-my-

— Andrew
I want to be beautiful in the eyes and beauty of the world. God, me. It is funny how I get pulled into have done to this body You have lent — Rachelle

Dear God,

I need to apologize for the damage I have done to this body You have lent me. It is funny how I get pulled into the eyes and beauty of the world. God, I want to be beautiful in Your eyes.
— Susan

God,

I don’t believe in You, but I know You are a fact. Please help me feel the friendship You offer. I am so lonely that I am dying inside. I want You to hold me and soothe me and make me Yours.
— Lori

Dear Jesus,

I really need You right now. I’m losing my burning fire and energy for being a Christian. I wish You could send down some great fireball or give me a vision — anything that would give me the power to be a good Christian. I just don’t know what being a Christian is all about. Does being a Christian mean I can curse? Or watch any movie I want? Or that my decisions are always right because I have You as a guiding inner light? And thanks for being there.
— Charlene

Dear Lord,

Thank You for all the beauty that is around me now. And thanks for meeting me on this hillside and letting me share the morning with You. Today I’m making a decision to reach out forever to You and put my life into Your nail-pierced hands. Help me never to be ashamed of my decision. I want to serve You forever. Your scared and excited child—
— Nadia

Dear Lord,

I feel so close to the precipice. Please help me (us) to the solution that will help us both, and that will be best for the children. You know my hurt, anger, and sorrow. Please impress his heart so that he will go to the counselor with me.
— Ann

To my Best Man,

The main thing I need right now is for You to embrace me with Your healing grace and power. Lord, I am worn out from being sick this long. Often I wonder what it would be like to go one day without taking all these pills. I feel different from everyone else, and I want to be normal! I really want to be healed, Lord. Please!
— Sharon

Dear God,

Please give me Your strength, God, because I seem to have lost my own.
— Kelly

Father God,

I am an addictive personality, and food is my drug. Lord, I need Your strength to stay away from the chocolates!
— Ben

Dear Lord Jesus,

Sometimes I am so confused — I don’t know where I stand with You anymore. Sometimes I feel so in love with You that all I want to do is praise You. Sometimes I feel that life just keeps getting slammed in my face. Sometimes I feel alone, so very alone. Sometimes I feel I am living on the edge of hell, and man, that’s when I need You to be just totally working in me and using me and bringing me back. Sometimes, all times, I’m glad I’m not alone. Thanks for being there. I am Yours. Keep leading.
— Todd

Dear God,

We need Your help, God. Please heal my wife’s past. Let her feel Your forgiveness so she can forgive her family.
— Sarah

Hi, Father,

I really like writing that. You’re the only Father I’ve ever had! Thank You for the few who have helped me to see You as my loving friend.
— Jared

God,

This is a big company where I am working, and there are very few Adventists here. I am in desperate need of a special friend. I feel disconnected, wrenched from my humanity, and very lonely. At nights I cry my heart out in frustration.
Can You help me? I call to You from the deepest chambers of my existence!
—William

Dear God,

Today I realized how involved You are in my life—how You take care of all the little things I often think are so insignificant and unimportant.

You organize a lift for me when I'm late for class.
You cheer me up when I'm homesick.
You remind me that I am not alone.
You have time for me even when I forget You.
You don't treat me like I deserve to be treated.
You love me because that's the kind of person You are!

Thank You.
—Jenny

Dear God,

Some would say I am luckier than others. They might say I am better looking, smarter, wittier, etc. But I know I am still human. I laugh when tickled, bleed when pricked, and ask questions when confused.

Lately I've been asking many questions about You. How can a religion worship a God who exists only in culture and clichés? I want much more! I want a God who is real. Is that You?

As You know, I am a rebel, searching. When I get the answers I guess You will be where You have always been. Under me. Carrying me.

Hold on.
—Jim

God,

At the age of 7 I lost my father. At the age of 11 I lost my mother. Since then life has never been the same. I always wanted someone to love me and tell me now and again that they loved me. Sure, I knew about You and had heard that You loved me, but it always felt like that love wasn't real for me.

But now that I've got Jesus, I finally know what love is like. This is all I ever hoped for! Boy, do I feel good to be loved by You. It is the greatest experience in my life! Thank You!
—Melissa

Dear Father God,

My relationship with You is based mainly on desperate prayers. I think these prayers are very common to teenagers, but they are the times I feel closest to You. Isn't it strange that I feel closest when I'm hopeless?
—Keri

Dear God,

My mama's dead. You know that. But I'm so empty that lately—can You imagine it?—I kid myself by saying, "Mama's gonna write soon." Hear me, God. I'm hurting!
—Denise

God,

I want to be with You.
I need to feel Your love.
I'm trying to be Your child.
I've decided in my heart, but I'm confused and want help.
The world is sucking me in.
Pray for me.
I don't know what to pray for!
—Tricia

God,

I have decided that You are the only answer to my problems and want to let You take control of my life.
—Adam

Dear God,

When I think of You, my mind boggles!
—Nate

Dear God,

I'm in a hurry! I desperately need You to help my girlfriend. She needs to make some big decisions in her life about me! You have no idea how important this is to me!
—Kelvin

Dear God,

With this prayer I say yes to You and ask for You to lead me through the rest of my life. Be my best friend and make my life worth living.
—Melanie

Father,

It's nice to be royalty!
—Alicia

Dick Derksen is director of spiritual development for Florida Hospital, Orlando, Florida.
I know the Bible says stuff about marrying and dating people of your own kind. But doesn’t that mean religion? I’m dating an Indian, and I’m Filipino. The racial difference has caused some friction in my family. Does it really matter? He’s an Adventist, and so am I. What else should there be?

Allan’s reply: Second Corinthians 6:14 is often referred to regarding relationships with people who are different from us. As best I can understand, it is counsel for believers to avoid being “unequally yoked” with unbelievers. That’s good advice. I’ve seen many a relationship filled with anguish because one person loves Christ and the other does not.

But to quote that verse to somehow support racism is a perversion of Scripture. The Bible in no way, shape, or form supports racism. Christ’s relationships with Gentiles is among many vivid examples of His setting the standard that we are all one in Him.

It’s still wise to be sensitive to your family’s discomfort, however. If the “friction” is based on their understanding of Scripture, you may want to study with them to get a better understanding of where they’re coming from. If it’s simply that they have prejudicial feelings against your Indian friend, then hearing them out and acquainting them with your friend is worthwhile. Your relationship with your friend will benefit from your gentle sensitivity to your family’s concerns. Share with them that Christ is the common denominator in your relationship.

Send your questions about young adult life, Christian lifestyle, and Generation X culture to: The X-CHANGE, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; or via e-mail to dream_VISION_ministries@CompuServe.com.

Deirdre and Allan Martin are cofounders of dre•am VISION ministries, dedicated to empowering young people in Christian lifestyle and leadership.
A Tale of Two Courtships

This isn’t about what was done wrong. It’s about what was done right.

BY SHERYL MOORE

The name of the church where it all happened is not the important part of this story. Nor are the names of the couple at its center. The important part is what the church members did and what they did not do—and how the couple reacted.

Now for the story itself, which we’ll tell after we choose some generic names for our real-life characters as well as a universal locale for the very real church. We’ll call our leading lady Bev and our leading man Steve. Short, crisp names so that you’ll never guess who they really are. And the church we’ll name the Pleasant Village Seventh-day Adventist Church. Why not? It is certainly a pleasant church.

Bev first appeared at Pleasant Village church on a Sabbath in March of 1994. Did she live in Pleasant Village? No, she told the people who welcomed her that she was from a faraway state. She was visiting her parents in town—inactive members, she called them. Bev and her three boys, ages 3, 10, and 13, probably stayed for hospitality dinner afterward (who can remember?) and then went on their way. Would she be back?

The next two or three Sabbaths Bev returned. If they, the Pleasant Village members, were curious to know the reason for the extended visit, they did not ask for an explanation. They warmly welcomed this bright and attractive thirtysomething whose musical talent had already become apparent.

Bonding with the members was beginning. Bev participated in Sabbath school class, contributed special music with her sons, and eventually started a Sabbath afternoon singspiration. Early on she volunteered the information that she had been the accompanist for a women’s sextet in Faraway State. Could such a group be put together in Pleasant Village, perhaps?

The rehearsals began at the home of one of the members of the Pleasant Village church. From Sabbath to Sabbath the sextet added numbers, eventually becoming a women’s chorus. All the while, as the singing went on, so also—to no one’s surprise—did the talking and then the praying. Here was a woman who had needs and was sharing them. They added hers to theirs. Did any of them ask about Bev’s marital status? No doubt. Does a form to fill out exist that doesn’t seek that information? Is there ever a conversation with a newcomer that omits the “Are you married?” question? That’s how they came to know about Steve; he was back there in Faraway State. Then one Sabbath Steve showed up in church for a weekend visit. He sat with his boys, maybe even with Bev.

Sooner or later it came out—Bev had decided not to go back to Faraway State. At her parents’ house there was room and to spare for her little
family. There was food and to spare. Married very young, she was now trying to finish college, first by correspondence, then on a nearby campus. Here with her parents she could study and have help with the youngest offspring.

**Separated by Irreconcilable Differences**

She and her husband were separated by irreconcilable differences as well as by distance. What had led to this estrangement? Over time Bev shared some of the reasons: illness after illness; Steve's unemployment and the attendant financial crunch; Bev's isolation and overload as she tried to finish her degree; Steve's depression over his jobless situation; and failed counseling. Let us not enumerate further. The fact remained that Steve and Bev were now separated.

Meanwhile the singing group (they did sing a couple times for church service) had become Bev's support system. They did not counsel; they listened. They did not pry; they prayed. Here was a single mom groping to find her way, study for a degree, take care of the boys, handle her financial problems—a woman dear to the Lord and now becoming dear to her new friends in Him. If once or twice, in their loyalty to her, they hinted of disapproval of Steve, Bev was quick to say, “But I want you to like him.”

As it turned out, Steve was not hard to like—witty; capable; good-looking (hair to die for); talented in a variety of ways, including musically. The women of Pleasant Village church discovered these things about Steve when, after five lonely months of separation in Faraway State, he packed up and moved to Pleasant Village. He had told Bev of his plan to move, and he found a job and an apartment. He kept appearing at her doorstep, and the more he did this without resolution of those unresolved (and unenumerated) issues, the more Bev became entrenched in the separation. In the end they were divorced.

What did the church think of that? Whatever the members thought, at least one leader was troubled. “We can’t have this,” he said. “Something must be done.”

Most of the members smiled and asked, “But what?” No one was inclined to say to Bev, “You can’t attend here.” Or to Steve, “Go on back to Faraway State; you can’t come here.”

True, Steve had at first felt some resentment toward “those women” who were “on her side,” especially toward the host at the home where the singing and the talking and the praying took place. But he soon found that no one made him feel unwelcome, prejudged, rejected. In fact, the members drew him into fellowship. He sang solos, and Bev accompanied him. He joined the choir, and Bev was assistant director. She led in Pathfinders, and he became assistant.

If some reader is now questioning the wisdom of electing a divorced woman and a divorced man (from each other, that is) to church office, that is no surprise. But you have to understand. The church members loved Bev. They loved Steve. And Steve had settled down in Pleasant Village and was there for the long haul. If things were made unpleasant for him and for Bev, well, it wouldn’t have been Pleasant Village any longer, would it? Steve wanted to be with his boys; he wanted (though who knew) to be with Bev.

Oh, there were some awkward moments, to be sure, where this unprecedented situation posed (it has to be said) problems. But this story is not meant to rehearse these problems. A nd meanwhile, not a single Pleasant Village member took sides. The problems and struggles of Steve and Bev were not the subject of gossip. They were the subject of prayer.

Somewhere in the more than two years of separation (Bev and Steve living apart, but in a sense, still together) Steve's handy ways came to light in church needs, in the needs of various members. The host had sold her big house (she was downsizing) and was moving into a condo. Who better than Steve to direct packing, to help muscle all those boxes into storage, and eventually to move them out and into the refurbished condo? It wasn’t long till he became the right-hand man of the host herself, and she became a special friend and confidant, as Bev had already become. The host listened to each in turn as they shared their concerns. Her listening ear was always available to either, her counsel evenhanded and wise. One day when the possibility for reconcil-
iation seemed at its most remote, the host said to Steve, “When you and Bev get married again, I’ll give you the biggest party you’ve ever had.” Could he believe that? Would it ever really happen?

The Romantic Part of the Story
Steve and Bev continued to find themselves together in church fellowship and in service and in the upbringing of the boys. Spiritually uplifted and nurtured by their new church family, they were ever so gradually drawn back together. Attitudes changed.

Had Steve been insensitive to Bev’s needs? Had Bev driven too hard for change, for goals? Anger, resentment, temper, stubbornness—where was guilt, where was blame? The Spirit of the Lord was doing His softening work.

Steve was ever helpful to Bev at fix-up jobs in the home where she and the boys now lived after she finished her degree and got a teaching position. He was always there when she needed his strong arms, his laid-back unflappability. Bev remembered his birthday, baked the traditional cake, and helped the boys make gifts. Never-before flowers came to Bev’s door for special occasions. Steve stopped saying “We’ve got to get this family back together again” and began hinting that maybe he could ask her for a date once in a while. Then in September of 1996 she attended a women’s retreat. It was in a class related to romantic relationships (which she had entered almost unintentionally) that Bev came to a sudden and startling realization. She wanted to have dates with Steve. She wanted him to court her.

Thus in October a new relationship began—unrevealed to anyone. It would not have been prudent to build up anyone’s high hopes and expectations. It had to be only a trial run, but it was indeed a courtship.

In February the Pleasant Village Seventh-day Adventist Church had a Valentine’s Day party. The program consisted in part of stories told by different couples and a description of the inevitable proposal. In a climactic moment Bev and Steve announced they were engaged to be remarried. If a vote had been taken right then, the tale of Bev and Steve’s two courtships would have won the award for the “most romantic.” And during the telling of their story one of the secrets of their second courtship did come out—on the previous Christmas Eve Steve had actually proposed on bended knee. Bev confessed she liked the second proposal better.

At the marriage license bureau, after the June 27 wedding date was set, the happy couple filled out the obligatory application (with no marital status box unchecked). When they wrote down the same last name, the clerk’s eyes turned into question marks. Bev and Dave just smiled and left her puzzled. Figuring that one out, they decided, would give the clerk a break from tiresome paperwork.

Now, before they ride off into the sunset, you’ll want to know: Did the host remember her promise to give the couple a big party? Well, of course.

Sheryl Moore is a pseudonym.
Only a boy named David, only a little sling . . .”

It’s a catchy tune, and I’ve sung it myself. There’s more to the story than we sing, however. We usually stop short of depicting David’s chopping off Goliath’s head and holding up the dripping trophy, or describing just what happens when the Israelite army “routs” an enemy, how a man looks and sounds when he’s dying, and how a man looks when he kills.

In addition, when we cheer and laugh about Goliath’s slaying, we should be aware that some children (and adults) may infer that there are good people and there are bad people, that God doesn’t love these bad people as much, that they deserve the bad things that happen to them, and that maybe it doesn’t even matter if I add to their pains. This isn’t an inevitable inference; it is a possible one.

Does God guide and guard only His chosen few? No, God looks after everyone. He doesn’t “take sides” that way. Jesus affirms this when He tells us that to be followers of God we must love our enemies, for the Father “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45, RSV). God makes His sun shine on the bottle-sucking infant who sleeps in a crib and on the bottle-sucking infant who abuses his wife. He sends blood coursing through the veins of those who love Him and those who despise Him.

The belief that God looks after only His favorites, the freshly scrubbed and honey-scented, the exclusive remnant, is as wrong as the belief that the sun orbits the earth. God can look after us better when we allow Him to do so—by following His directions, for instance—but that’s not God’s choice; it’s ours. In the book Mere Christianity C. S. Lewis writes, “He shows much more of Himself to some people than to others—not because He has favourites, but because it is impossible for Him to show Himself to some people than to others—”

I like the conversation that takes place in chapter 5 of Joshua. Joshua is planning to conquer the walled city of Jericho when he looks up to see someone holding a sword.

Joshua: “Are you with us or against us?”

Angel: “No, I am of the host of heaven.”

To the angel, the question is irrelevant. It’s the same for us today. The question isn’t “Is God on our side?” but rather “Are we on God’s side?” The world of sports provides a stunning laboratory for the “God is on our side” phenomenon. Each time a victorious player exults, “God was with us,” I get the impression that if God was on their side, then—Mark Twain’s “War Prayer” calls this “the unspoken part”—God wasn’t on the other team’s side.

What a devastating implication, and a surefire way to build resentment against God. In every contest He would be against half the participants. But could God have been just as much on the losing team’s side? Might He be “with me” just as much when I don’t find my car keys, when I don’t make the field goal, when my dad doesn’t recover from cancer?

God becoming Immanuel, “God with us,” is a fact not necessarily borne out by victories or defeats. In this context “us” isn’t the Seahawks or the Screaming Eels, nor is “us” our country or our denomination. “Us” is the human race, all of us, all of God’s children.

God does take sides. Against the rulers of darkness. Against powers and principalities that inhabit an unseen world. Using His timeless weapons, God battles lies with truth, despair with hope, and venomous hate with liberating love. Along with David’s slingshot victory, let’s make certain we teach that God is “with us” when we lose, and that God so loved the world that Jesus died for all those people we don’t even like.

1 In a January 17, 1999, Associated Press article, retired U.S. Army Col. Harry Summers observes, “It always makes it easier to fight a war if you demonize people so that you’re not killing human beings, you’re killing the devil.”


Chris Blake teaches at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. Win or lose, he loves God.
At 10 years old, Gnavassi Fonyalco was labeled as mentally disabled even though her early academic results had been good.

In Togo, where primary school classes can be very large, it is common practice to put the smaller children in the front of the classroom and the taller children in the back, guaranteeing the smaller pupils a good view of the blackboard. Unfortunately for Gnavassi, as she grew taller and therefore was pushed toward the back of the room, she strained more and more to see the words and numbers written on the blackboard.

As her academic performance deteriorated, Gnavassi became known as a student with mental impairment. Students like Gnavassi are often ignored and instructed not to interfere with the rest of the daily routine.

In May 1998 children in the Togo school received special testing. The outreach team of Glei Adventist Eye Hospital (GAEH) arrived to teach all the children in the school about eye diseases and screen them for eyesight problems.

While the staff of the outreach team organized the pupils for the screening process and eye health lessons, Christina de Oliveira, one of the hospital directors, noticed that Gnavassi and other students were not lined up for the visual acuity test. A teacher explained that these children were mentally impaired and not included in the activities.

De Oliveira insisted that all students should be screened. When it was Gnavassi’s turn, the doctor realized that the little girl’s problem was short-sightedness. Shortly afterward, Gnavassi received her first new pair of glasses.

Immediately she burst into tears, saying that this was the beginning of a whole new life for her, providing an opportunity she once enjoyed at the front of the class years before. Sadly, Gnavassi’s story is an exception. Most eye problems in developing countries go undetected, reports de Oliveira.

More than 17 million cases of blindness are reported in Africa every year, with the number escalating by 2 million each year. Even though approximately 30 percent of persons with eye problems in developing countries have preventable diseases, disease is too often accepted where simple preventive measures could have tremendous public health impact.

Doctors often find this to be the case, especially for young patients coming to the hospital. “Years of a potentially fruitful life are destroyed by preventable or easily curable eye diseases that simply come to our attention too late,” Christina’s husband, Dr. Edgard de Oliveria, says. “In addition to the impact on the individual, blind family members represent a considerable economic burden to any African family.”

GAEH was established in 1992 with funds from ADRA/Sweden and Christoffel Blindenmission, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) specializing in care for those who are blind and disabled. The hospital is run by the de Oliverias, a husband-and-wife team of eye specialists from Brazil. With 16 beds and 25 staff members, it is the only specialized hospital in Togo. People from as far
Trinidad: Adventist Church Deplores Thusia Movement Actions, Announces Joint Anti-Drug Program With Hindus

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Trinidad has dissociated itself from the actions of a splinter group that attacked Hindu beliefs and provoked a combative response.

A group calling themselves the “Thusian Seventh-day Adventist Church” targeted Hindus, distributing literature allegedly hostile to Hindu beliefs, which prompted the declaration of a holy war from a prominent Hindu religious leader.

“We dissociate the Adventist Church from the reckless approach of Thusia, and state positively that we condemn their approach comprehensively,” said Clive Dottin, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the Adventist Church in Trinidad, during a meeting with the Hindu group Maha Sabha on February 10.

As a result of the Adventist-Hindu meeting, the two groups agreed on a cooperative agenda to fight crime and drugs in the community, as well as developing projects focusing on health, family life, and education, reports Dottin.

Speaking of the combative approach used by Thusia, Israel Leito, Inter-American Division president, called for higher principles of religious liberty.

“It is a sad thing when we find people with such a low level of tolerance toward the beliefs of others,” said Leito. “They must understand that religious freedom is not only for any one group, but that we must respect the beliefs of other faiths as well.”

“Once again offshoot groups and extremists have used the name Seventh-day Adventists in a way we cannot support and must condemn,” said John Graz, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the Adventist Church. “Their lack of Christian courtesy and their provocative proselytism have caused much damage for the church. Christian extremists, like other religious extremists, are enemies of religious freedom. The Seventh-day Adventist Church wants to make clear that we condemn this kind of approach.” — Adventist News Network.

Walla Walla College and Quiet Hour Cosponsor Philippines Series

Walla Walla College, in College Place, Washington, in conjunction with the Quiet Hour ministry and the North Pacific Union Conference, recently sponsored an evangelistic series in the Southern Mindanao Mission, Philippines.

Held in the city of Barbell in southern Mindanao, the meetings ended on January 2 with 1,023 baptisms. The
Nature’s Dark Side

BY MICHAEL D. COE, JR., ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, ADRA INTERNATIONAL

It was a morning like any other for the Austrian ski resort in Galtuer. Lots of the white stuff brought tourists into the area for an enjoyable vacation with their families. They expected a terrific weekend of skiing, relaxing, and spending time together. What they got was tragedy.

The mountain started to tremble, and a dull roar could faintly be heard above the laughter and festivity. As the roar became louder, authorities scrambled to get as many people as they could off the mountain before devastation hit, but nature acts quickly when it wants to, and the avalanche came down like thunder and lightning.

Houses were sliced in half by its fury, as if a giant razor blade had severed them. People were buried alive in their bungalows or while skiing on the mountain. Cars were tossed like Matchbox toys. Entire villages were swallowed as the snow encompassed them.

Rescue workers scrambled to find bodies and rescue whomever they could, but they knew that time was not on their side. More snow fell, and another avalanche hit the area the following morning. This one rolled into the little hamlet of Valzur, seven miles to the northeast, flattening 11 houses and killing dozens.

Life is precious. Earthquakes in Central America, drought in Africa, and war in Europe—these are but a few of the tragedies that snuff out lives in a sickening instant.

When we hear of such tragedies, we are prone to become anxious and fearful when we think that there might be a calamity waiting for us. These thoughts should remind us of the comforting words of the psalmist found in Psalm 46: “God is our refuge and strength. . . . Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea” (verses 1, 2, NIV). No one can stop nature, but we can remember that God is our rock in adversity. In His hands nothing eternally bad can happen to us.

ADRA Worker Dies in Shooting

An Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) worker was among those killed after bandits attacked a public transport vehicle in Haiti on February 10. Enks St. Fleur, an ADRA maternal/child health facilitator, was on route to Cap Haitien when the attack occurred.

St. Fleur had just finished some personal business in Port-au-Prince and was on his way back to northern Haiti, where he works on ADRA’s MCH projects. “After stealing whatever they could, the bandits then shot the passengers,” reports Ed Baumgartner, ADRA/Haiti director. “St. Fleur was shot twice in the neck and later died as a result of his injuries.”

St. Fleur began working for ADRA/Haiti in June 1993. He was recently transferred to his current position with the MCH project. He was a member of the Temple Adventiste Church. His immediate family is based in Carrefour.

Church Announces Latest Country Website

With the addition of the latest Seventh-day Adventist country website in Slovakia, the number of country-specific websites operated by the Adventist Church now exceeds 40.

“We appreciate the commitment of church organizations in different countries to make Adventist material available where they are, and in the local language,” says Jonathan Gallagher, webmaster for the church’s global website at www.adventist.org. “As a church we are dedicated to
São Tomé and Príncipe President Commends Adventist Church

Miguel Trovoada, president of the Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, welcomed the January 19 visit of Adventist world leaders from the General Conference and Euro-Africa Division (EUD) to his country, and expressed appreciation for the activities of the Adventist Church in São Tomé. The São Tomé and Príncipe islands are located off the western coast of Angola.

"I am very happy to welcome you," said Trovoada. "The work of your church in our country is very much appreciated because of the beneficial influence it exerts upon its population. Our democratic policy promotes the practice of religious liberty as far as it lies within the framework of respect of the citizens’ rights and duties and promotes man’s moral values and dignity."

The delegation included Ulrich Frikart, EUD president (whose territory includes São Tomé), and Maurice Verfaillie, director of the EUD Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty.—Adventist News Network.

Teen Smoking on the Rise

Young people under the age of 18 became daily smokers at the rate of more than 3,000 per day during 1996. That’s a 50 percent increase in the rate of daily smoking by teenagers since 1988. And if current trends continue, more than 5 million people currently under age 18 will eventually die of smoking-related diseases.—Centers for Disease Control.

Heart Attack Symptoms Often Ignored

While most people are aware that chest pain is a heart attack symptom, other indicators—including numbness or pain in the arm, shortness of breath, sweating, nausea or vomiting, dizziness or lightheadedness, and five others—are less understood by the public and often ignored. The issue is critical, because clot-busting drugs are available that can reverse a heart attack in progress, but these drugs become less effective six hours after an attack begins. Almost a quarter of all heart attack patients delay seeking care for at least six hours.—Archives of Internal Medicine.

For Your Good Health is compiled by Larry Becker, editor of Vibrant Life, the church’s health outreach journal. To subscribe, call 1-800-765-6955.
Is It Just an Ideal?

How one experience opened my eyes on unity.

BY JENNIFER WYNN

The following piece was one of two runners-up in our AnchorPoints essay contest on the fundamental doctrines of the Adventist Church.—Editors.

I OPENED MY SUITCASE OF UNWASHED clothes and smelled Venezuela. The odor was of heat, dirt, and sweat—made bearable only by the pleasant experiences that it recalled: smiling faces bringing bright-pink watermelon and the occasional hug; the buzz of easy conversation between crew members as they rumbled down the road in a tired, rundown bus; the unfettered acceptance between believers as each sought to contribute to God's work in their uniqueness. With closed eyes and an open mind I smelled again and detected the fragrance of the Holy Spirit woven in between.

Flooding my memory was a mission project in Venezuela in which I participated at the close of February 1998.

The experience was a first for me, and I flew home with a collage of images filling my mind and a few trinkets in my bags. But it wasn't until I opened my suitcase and rummaged through the dirty laundry and wrapped gifts that I realized the souvenir God really wanted me to bring back, namely, a better understanding about church unity.

I laughed. I'd ventured thousands of miles from home to catch a glimpse of what a unified body of people could do when driven by the Holy Spirit.

But then a sobering thought hit me: Why did I need to go so far to see that? Wasn't it evident in my own backyard?

I define Christian unity as that sometimes fleeting, and usually elusive, moment when all individuals in the church have the same goal: the gospel of Christ. It's when differences between believers are erased through the like-mindedness of the Holy Spirit. It's when, in Christ, biases do not exist, spiritual gifts are not hierarchical, and personal agendas are unknown. The only thing that matters then is God. If the Adventist Church is to make headway to share the truth about Jesus, then it must function as “one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4, 5, NIV). Without this spirit, the work of God withers like a dead vine.

It sounds good, this lofty definition. But as we hear so often, head knowledge without Christ is simply that—it's all in your head.

Satan Was Laughing

From personal experience I already knew what unity was not. The church I attend has just emerged from its own time of division. During its own “Dark Ages” I had had a front-row seat at the “Colosseum” and witnessed Satan’s dark and whispering spirit. Factioning and politicking had taken the place of the true work. No vision existed, and relationships were strained. I learned some valuable lessons then. First, everybody’s responsible—and I mean everybody. Second, it doesn’t matter who’s wrong or right; no side wins when the collective body’s identity...
Visiting South America, I became reacquainted with unity. And for the benefit of my congregational family—which is really just a microcosm of the world church—I knew God wanted me to bring back a personal introduction of my "new friend."

I was struck by unity's familiar appearance—an ageless, androgynous, composite "everyperson." A perfect blend of all humanity. Global. I saw a pale reflection of myself in that face. But two things stood out about unity beyond my limited definition. Unity has an unobstructed, sweeping vision and knows how to create relationships.

Let me explain. A year ago I decided to take part in a survival-type excursion designed for the very-nineties need of personal exploration. Strong bonds are formed between participants in these programs, they say, because of the shared experience. If the extreme physical exertion and sleep deprivation doesn't bind your group, the close quarters with new and—shall we say—interesting personalities certainly should.

But it didn't really. The adventure was fun, personally revealing, and physically challenging. But strong friendships forged in the fires of sisterhood? Hardly. The common experience, while valuable and important, did not provide the same glue as having a common goal. We were 10 women who each had our personal reasons for being there. Once those reasons were satisfied, we had no need for the others in our group.

But enter Venezuela. Many people, one objective: build a church. A bit of a loner, I was surprised at how quickly camaraderie formed. It was easy to laugh and talk with those on your work crew as each worked on his or her particular assignment. Our personal motivations for being there were left unspoken—they were largely the same anyway.

Not only that, but the local people were warm and affectionate, and I will always carry in my memory my encounters with them. It felt good to be welcomed and appreciated, regardless of my gender, race, economic status, or level of skill.

It stands to reason, then, that a shared vision and godly relationships are intrinsically linked. When the true objective is embraced through the power
of the Holy Spirit, the parameters for relationships are set. Little issues melt away. It becomes less important to pour energies into carrying grudges and personal jockeying. Although we already are equal in the sight of God, we begin acting like it to one another because Christ is in our hearts.

It Dawned on Me

In the Venezuela experience I realized that, however imperfect, here was an example of the Holy Spirit’s desire for all levels of God’s church—from the smallest groups to the General Conference. Many people, one objective: share the Word. Sharing the gospel of Christ is the building of the church. Not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual one. Without a personal acceptance of Christ and His vision for His remnant, Adventists are nothing more than a group of people loosely tied together by doctrine. It may be a nice experience, but it doesn’t create action; neither are other people equal in the sight of God, we begin acting like it to one another because Christ is in our hearts.

Personal acceptance is an operative term here. It’s a deep condition that is hard to characterize, but it is created only when we allow Christ to make us Christlike, as defined in Philippians 2:5-11. With God’s inspired servitude and humility, you make us Christlike, as defined in Philippians 2:5-11. With God’s inspired servitude and humility, you create action; neither are other people equal in the sight of God, we begin acting like it to one another because Christ is in our hearts.

Unity in the Body of Christ

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.

Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Matt. 28:19, 20; Ps. 133:1; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Acts 17:26, 27; Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 3:10-15; Eph. 4:14-16; 4:1-6; John 17:20-23.)—Fundamental Belief No. 13.

My pastor shared with me some words that helped put my jumbled thoughts about my short trip into perspective. When you know your time is finite, he said, your emotional experience is intensified. That’s true. But those words are even more far-reaching than I first thought.

Aren’t we all engaged in a mortal, transient mission project in our daily lives? If we as a church truly believe our earthly time is short, then shouldn’t our work take on a heightened intensity? If we really embraced the idea of finite time, then maybe more people would realize that it’s not worth it to stay involved in personality conflicts—and how precious unity really is.

More than just taking action, unity is about leveraging time. It’s the church’s witnessing tool. Conflicts between church members make us a laughingstock before the world and slow down the work. In contrast, the efforts of a cohesive body are more efficient and effective. Sometimes that cohesiveness comes only when people are willing to apologize or to be vulnerable—even if they’re right—for the preservation of the team.

Thank God too that the work is different for each of us. Unity does not equal uniformity. We each have our spiritual gifts to dedicate to the kingdom. God is limitless in creative powers. He is specially sculpting each one of us with an artist’s gentle hand. Like a craftsman, He adds a piece of Himself into His works. A nd with our uniqueness He has given us the ability to be embracing of those differences.

To Catch the Vision

So I asked myself again: Why did I need to go so far to observe unity’s genetic makeup under the power of a heavenly microscope? I know now. It was God’s intention to broaden my perspective and help me bring back the vision to my local church family.

I have sorted through these Venezuelan images and am not utterly naive. I know the local people are not immune to their own frailties. I know the short amount of time I spent there could never have revealed the divisions that surely exist there too. Lack of harmony is a human experience, not a geographical one. I am also aware that the relationships with those with whom I worked side by side were more superficial than what I see each Sabbath year round.

But it’s just that I was able to lose the “church leader baggage” and see the simplicity of unity. And because my time was short, I could afford to look through rose-colored glasses and see only the parts that God intended. However momentary or even unrealistic, in my insulated existence I could see the ideal. It was a gentle reminder to rise above artificially created issues and take the high road.

I am proud to be a part of my local congregation. It has rallied around the banner. We are staging a comeback. We have rediscovered the goal and the relationships created within it. We have a vision, and its name is Christ.

Yes, we’re only in the toddler stages of our healing process. But by the grace of God I want to humble myself before my brothers and sisters. I want to help point our eyes to the goal: the spreading of the three angels’ messages. I’m going to do whatever is in my power to help my church family realize that Christ can take us even closer to the cross of unity and help us realize our golden potential—if only we’d let Him. I know we will.

All this because I took a little trip to Venezuela to help build a church! Imagine that. Satan isn’t laughing anymore.

Jennifer Wynn, 30, writes from Puyallup, Washington. She is a registered sales associate with a national brokerage firm.
Have you ever seen a prairie dog? They live on the prairie, where there's lots of grass to eat and plenty of flat land to build their towns. Maybe you've been to a zoo that has a prairie dog exhibit, and you've watched them sit up and look around or pop in and out of their burrows.

Prairie dogs are not dogs. They don't look like dogs. They don't act like dogs. They aren't even remotely related to dogs. Why are they called dogs? They sound like dogs. Prairie dogs are noisy little critters. They chirp and whistle and call. They also bark. They got their name because of the barking noise they make.

One of the coolest things about prairie dogs is the way they build towns. Prairie dog towns are like people towns, only they are underground. There are long tunnels, like roads, leading to neighborhoods of family burrows. Each prairie dog family builds a burrow, which is like a house. Each burrow has a main tunnel, which is like a hallway, leading to different little rooms. There are sleeping rooms, a nursery, and a toilet. And up near the entrance there is a room where they listen to see if it's safe to go outside.

Prairie dogs go outside to eat and play with each other. Prairie dogs really like to be with other prairie dogs. That's why they live in families, that's why the families live in neighborhoods, and that's why prairie dogs build towns. They look out for each other. They keep each other company.

That's why people live in towns too. That's why we have families. We need each other.

The Bible talks about a special kind of family—the family of God. In this family God is the Father and we are His children. The Bible says, “He loved us so much that we are called children of God” (1 John 3:1, ICB). Other people who love God are our brothers and sisters. This is a big family.

It's important to get together with our family. Sometimes we need to be with other people who believe the same things we do. So we go to church. We go to church to worship the Father with our brothers and sisters. We keep each other company. We take care of each other. We are family.
In this feature Adventists share what’s on their heart. We welcome your brief but deeply spiritual stories, insights, struggles, even drawings and photos. Send to Cutting Edge Meditations, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904. As with Give & Take, we don’t pay for or return submissions to this feature.—Editors.

Of Ice Cream and Love

Everything went well with the Sabbath lunch in my friend’s lovely home. Then came dessert—a burned pound cake. She moaned softly as she cut one slice after another to find that the bottom was black, crusty, bitter-tasting. She was about to throw the whole thing away when I said, “Stop; we can make something with it.”

We then cut the cake into thin slices, layered them on each dish, and topped them with a lot of ice cream. The guests enjoyed the delicious dessert, and no one even noticed the bitter crust.

Driving home, I thought about the ice cream and burned cake—how love can be like the ice cream. It can cover up faults and mistakes, imperfections, and even bitterness.
—Maruja Barrientos, Riverside, California

Let It Snow?

I was lucky enough to watch the results of the New Year’s winter storm from the warm comfort of my basement in College Heights, Alberta. When I flipped past the weather channel and the news shows, I saw not only cars stuck in drifts and people working their snow shovels, but also the devastation brought to air travel. Places such as Pearson International Airport in Toronto had ground to a halt in the snowstorm—with people huddled on chairs and sleeping on the floor.

But as I switched to the local news, I discovered that it wasn’t easy to be removed from a weather disaster half a country away. At the Edmonton International Airport, only 60 miles (100 kilometers) up the road, the lines were also long and people were also stranded. CNN interviewed a New York family in similar straits—stuck at the airport and wanting to get home. It made me think about the interconnectedness of air travel.

Then I thought about the interconnectedness of our lives as Christians—about how I can serve the Lord in Canada and you, maybe, in Phoenix or New Orleans or London. With our profound interconnectedness, each of our storms—be it personally interrupting or spiritually unsettling—can affect others as well. I’m reminded that we constantly need the warmth of each other and the warmth of the Son in every part of our lives.
—Stephen Payne, College Heights, Alberta, Canada

Love Letters

It was Valentine’s Day, and my classroom was a jumble of hearts, hanging Cupids, and third graders scurrying around the room with their precious cargo of candy hearts and cartoon love letters. I watched as each student carefully selected small white envelopes for their classmates and dropped them into their paper bag “mailboxes.”

Finally it was time to collect each bag and open up the treats. There was a frantic ripping of paper, then a quiet pause as each message was read. “You’re number one on my team, Valentine,” said one card with a picture of Troy Aikman’s smiling face on the front. “I hope you have a spottacular Valentine’s Day,” a bright 101 Dalmatians card declared. “I’m
going batty over you,” said Batman, blazing across another card.

Then I saw one student open up a larger Valentine with great care—neatly unsticking the edges of the envelope, then plucking out the pink card inside. After reading the words on the inside of the card, she popped out of her seat and ran over to a boy. “Do you really mean what's inside the card?” she said excitedly.

“Let me see,” said the boy, grabbing the card out of her hands. He read the message: “Will you be my Valentine?” With a careless toss of the card and a nervous laugh, he said, “Of course not.” The girl’s face fell and her smile disappeared as she picked up the card and trudged back to her desk.

“Does God declare His love for us in a book that has been read by millions? However, unlike the heartbroken third grader, we know what God will say when we ask, “Do You really mean it?”

“Yes, I, God, so loved the world that I gave My only Son to die for you. If you believe that I love you, I have eternal life waiting for you.” He’s never ashamed to be our Valentine.

—Melanie Rondahl, Chico, California

Absentee

It’s been said that our church lacks young people. Where are the people between 18 and 25? Why do they leave? Everyone asks, and nobody is left to answer. Here’s where some of us have gone.

Now 20, I’m caught in a world that I don’t understand. I’ve been raised with church for my entire life. I’ve been told what is right and what is wrong, and deep down I know what God wants for me. But church is not my entire life—nor do I think it should be. I attend university and am thoroughly enjoying myself, yet I can’t seem to find how my religion should fit into my life.

My church does not condone homosexuality. My peers tell me that I’m a homophobic if I don’t accept it unconditionally. (To be a homophobic in my age group is somewhat like being a leper.) I still don’t know exactly what I think on that subject. Can I fully support a church that makes me look to the public as though I am hateful for not accepting people?

Is there a God? I don’t think it’s wrong to question that. I’ve been raised with that belief, but I have to believe it for myself. I refuse to have my parents’ religion. This has to be my choice. And I’m terrified when I ask, “Does God exist?” What if it’s all a huge farce? What if I get too involved and get pointed out as a fanatic? What if it’s all like the TV preachers—all smoke and mirrors—and I look stupid for believing it? I want so badly to be taken seriously that I’m afraid of taking a leap and losing all respect.

How do you take something from your childhood and transfer it into your adult life? How far and how seriously do I take my religion? Is it the dividing line between a healthy Christian experience and fanaticism? I want to fit in, to fit church into my life. I desperately want to believe, but in illogical terror I run.

It is asked often where the young people are. I don’t have all the answers to that, nor do I have the solution to keeping my age group in church. Perhaps the first step is to understand what we are feeling. Don’t tell me to reject my society, because I have to live in it. Just show me how the two come together.

—Patty Froese, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Touched by an Angel

In our retirement years we sometimes run into difficulties with our medication. Once I become very distressed. My whole being was sorely upset. In my anguish of soul I prayed to our heavenly Father for forgiveness of sins and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. As I knelt by my bed I felt a hand lightly touch my shoulder. I had no fear and felt the Lord had sent an angel to comfort me and answer my prayer.

It was a wonderful experience—one I shall never forget. Now I pray, “Lord, keep me humble and be there when I stumble.”

—F. Edna Myer, Apopka, Florida

All Yours

Evin, a beautiful little boy of 19 months, was tragically killed in an accident. At the funeral his grandfather shared a poignant memory and hope.

He and Evin had spent much time together the last few weeks of his life. While Grandpa held him, Evin would reach down and pull from Grandpa’s pocket his shining gold-rimmed glasses. Dangling them in front of his eyes, Evin would wistfully ask, “Mine?” Each time Grandpa would say, “No, Evin; they’re mine.” It became almost a game, but each time Evin would be more hopeful when he begged, “Mine?” and more sorrowful when the answer was no.

“I’d like to believe,” said Grandpa at the service, “that when Jesus comes, He’ll take Evin in His arms. Evin will reach up to touch Jesus’ shining gold crown and wistfully ask, ‘Mine?’ At which point he’ll hear the answer he’s been waiting for.

‘Yes, Evin,’ Jesus will say lovingly, ‘it’s all yours.’ ”

—Florence J. Mitchell, Coarsegold, California

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Literature Requests

Imagine having church or an evangelistic series without written material or visual aids. The following persons and institutions have requested denominational literature and would be grateful for your help. This list is for literature only. Please discourage any solicitations for funds by the recipients.

**BOTSWANA**
Pastor Thomas Magaka, SDA Church Southwest Botswana, Private Bag 017, Molepolole, Botswana: Bibles, Spirit of Prophecy books (Steps to Christ, The Desire of Ages, The Great Controversy), and church magazines.

**GHANA**
Samuel Amoah, P.O. Box 9358, Accra, Ghana: Signs, Bibles, Spirit of Prophecy books, sermons and songs on tape, film strips and projector, Picture Rolls, and children’s teaching aids.

Pastor S. A. du Gyamfi, SDA Church, P.O. Box 31, A'mmasu, Dormas, Ghana: Picture Rolls, Early Writings, Education, Testimonies, Adventist Reviews, Church Manual.

**KENYA**
Benson Kibochi Nganga, P.O. Box 16417, Nakuru, Kenya: church magazines.

Evans Nyamari, P.O. Box 619, Keroka, Kenya: Bibles, church magazines, tracts, church books.

Johnson Otieno Olooo, P.O. Box 33, A sumbi, Kenya, and Kennedy A gwanda Otieno, P.O. Box 84, Karungu, Kenya: literature and other materials for witnessing.

Nelson Onchomba Nyataara, P.O. Box 3658, Nakuru, Kenya: Bibles, Signs, and Spirit of Prophecy books.

**LAOS AND VIETNAM**
Dorothy Walter, Laos and Vietnam, c/o Southeast Asian Union Mission, 251 Upper Serangoon Road, Singapore 347 688, Singapore: church magazines and books.

**MALAWI**
Pastor N. S. Tsoke, Nanyangu SDA Church, c/o NRPD, P.O. Box 9, Bwanje, Malawi: literature for evangelism and outreach.

**MYANMAR**
Librarian, Myanmar Union Adventist Seminary, Mosokwin Road, M yaungmya 10211, Yangon, Myanmar: church magazines, Ministry, Sabbath school Picture Rolls, Spirit of Prophecy and church books.

Langh Sawm Mang, Secretary, Upper Myanmar Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, “Brightlands,” Cherry Road, Pyinoolwin 5061, Myanmar: church magazines, Church Manual.

**NAMIBIA**
Neville Neveling, P.O. Box 11610, Windhoek, Namibia: church books and magazines.

**PHILIPPINES**
Joy Awa Bandade, SDA Church, Mahayeg, Zamboanga del Sur 7028, Philippines: hymnals, magazines, children’s songs, and classroom materials.

Matilde N. Benito, Kapatagan Valley SDA Elementary School, 9214 Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte, Philippines: religious pictures, cards, magazines, children’s songs, and classroom materials.

Mrs. Emerald P. Marsala, Western Mindanao Conference, P.O. Box 2389, Ozamis City 7200, Philippines: kindergarten materials, Picture Rolls, children’s papers, cards, and visual aids.

**TRINIDAD, WEST INDIES**
Cecil Parris, Ramdass Street, Sangre Grande, Trinidad, West Indies: church magazines, tracts, and books.


Arlene S. Garcia, Western Mindanao Conference, P.O. Box 2389, Ozamis City 7200, Philippines: children’s materials, cards, Picture Rolls, songbooks, tapes.
One strong point is Abbott's superbly ironic wit. Her offbeat observations make her one of the best humorists among current Adventist authors. Occasionally she uses a flashback within a flashback, which can cause confusion, but her brisk pace makes up for the wandering structure.

This book is nearly as complicated as real life, with more questions than answers. Don't look to Abbott for a pick-me-up sermon on how to overcome doubt. What you will find is a searching voice and the picture of a church family that is quirky, sometimes legalistic, often embarrassing, but always there.

Journal of a Not-So-Perfect Daughter is part of the new Sycamore Tree imprint from Pacific Press. These books are intended for seekers, both inside and outside the church. Even if you're not a baby boomer or have never considered leaving the church, Abbott's story may help you understand the people near you.

Things We Don't Talk About: Help for the Private Struggles of Ordinary Adventists


My teenage son saw me reading this book and asked, "Why are you reading that? Since when have you been an ordinary anything?"

What is an ordinary Adventist? A broad range of people and beliefs make ordinary Adventism a large umbrella! Skip MacCarty peels away the external stuff to uncover basic spiritual and emotional struggles common to most Adventists. He describes the problem and includes a how-to portion—how to cope, improve, or remove it.

Having the issues defined clearly and realizing I was not the only Adventist with such feelings I found extremely helpful. Some of the material left me feeling as if MacCarty knew my innermost thoughts.

The titles in the first part of the book ("Looking to Him") held my attention. They dealt with issues such as assurance of salvation, a bland devotional life, and unanswered prayers. Who hasn't struggled with these? I learned about Heman the Ezrahite (Ps. 88). He wrote this psalm when his prayers weren't being answered, yet "he still sought the Lord every morning and night. Perhaps the greatest unsung hero of the Bible, he never gave up."

In the second part of the book the author describes the encouraging practice of "looking at one another." He includes such subjects as "how to go to church with someone you don't agree with" and "good Adventists don't have problems at home, do they?"

"Looking Within," in the third part of the book, talks about the distress that comes from looking at ourselves. How can we know God's will? How can we prepare for the final crisis, and how do we cope with our fear of it? How do we get up and keep fighting after defeats in our private spiritual battles? Is there spiritual CPR for those of us who seem to be doing things right yet feel as though our spirits are dying? The author offers help, affirmation, and hope.

"Looking Out at the World" includes "Bottom Line Religion" and "Witnless Bloopers." Besides bloopers the author offers seven successful ways to witness.

In the final chapter we are "looking through His eyes." A s His child, we have His eyes to see others in a different way.

MacCarty writes in an easy reading style with warmth and humor—a volume definitely worth reading.
The Stories in the Scars

BY PATTI HANSEN TOMPKINS

In 1987 a little girl fell down an abandoned well in Midland, Texas. More than 10 years later the girl (known as Baby Jessica) has no memory of the drama that captured the world’s attention. She has only heard stories of the frantic rescue operation and the great rejoicing when she finally emerged in the arms of her rescuer.

But Jessica still carries scars from her 58-hour ordeal.

“I’m proud of them,” she said in an interview given on the tenth anniversary of her amazing rescue. “I have them because I survived.”

My son, who was born 15 weeks premature, carries a seven-inch scar across his abdomen and several smaller scars around his clavicle. His scars tell a story of surgeries and other invasive procedures performed when he weighed less than two pounds and was fighting for his life. He has these scars because he survived.

I have a hazy, haphazard scar on my lower back from the day I was knocked down by a car and scraped against an asphalt driveway when I was 5 years old. A small neat surgical scar on my right ankle reminds me of the day a semi forced my car into the concrete center divider of a busy southern California freeway. Each of these scars is a badge of authenticity that tells a story of survival.

The older we get, the more scars we are likely to accumulate from accidents and disease. But less visible are the scars on our hearts from disappointments and hurts. Scars from neglect, abuse, shame, and indiffERENCE linger in our souls. It is hardly possible to get through life without them.

Whether our scars are physical or emotional, we needn’t be ashamed of how life and its hurts have worn us. We are like the little bunny in the classic children’s story The Velveteen Rabbit, who talks with his nursery friend, the Skin Horse, about becoming Real.

“It takes a long time,” said the Skin Horse. “That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby.”

In our journey to becoming Real (the authentic human beings God intends us to be), we meet various edges and corners and turns. We bump against them and bruise or bleed. Sometimes we break physically or emotionally. Sometimes a turn leads us into a brush with death. But when we survive, we go on, reshaped from our experiences.

We all have scars of one kind or another. They tell our stories—of being knocked down by a car or by cruel words, of broken ankles or broken hearts. Perhaps our falls have been accidents; perhaps we’ve stumbled over our own stupidity. But we’ve all felt pain, feared the unknown, asked why, and wondered about the future.

When I look at my scars, I remember the stories that have shaped my life. Take a long, lingering look at your own scars. Listen to what their stories teach you. Ponder the reason you exist. Think of all you have in common with God’s other children and with our Saviour. And give thanks for having safely negotiated the unique edges of your life.

The ultimate irony is that in the end (which is really the beginning) we will be perfect. Our scars will vanish, yet our Saviour’s will remain, because “he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; . . . by his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, NIV).

We who believe in this crucified and resurrected Saviour have reason to give thanks for His scars. We do not doubt the authenticity of the marks in His hands and His side. Those scars are evidence of the measure of humanity He shared with us the absolute proof that the power of life can triumph over the possibility of death. He succumbed, but He overcame. And He’s got the scars to prove it.


Patti Hansen Tompkins writes from Altamonte Springs, Florida.