

ANNE BERMAN

as told by Anne, herself, to a group of women at a luncheon as the featured speaker that day

I was born into a somewhat Reformed Jewish family. But early on I rebelled at the Orthodox influence of a very stern matriarchal grandmother. So, my first experience in a Christian church happened when I was a little girl. It must have been some 80 or 90 years ago!

I recall very vividly the impact of the difference between that Episcopal Church and the synagogue I knew; the white walls, the red velvet draperies, the beautiful chandeliers, the great gold crucifix, the choir in white and gold robes. I was certain they were angels, and when the organ played and the choir sang "Rock of Ages" I was started on a spiritual quest that lasted for many years.

I was not allowed to go back again with my Gentile friend to that beautiful church, but finally I was an adult, working and independent and on my own, so I was able to go to whatever church I saw.

I went from the little brown church in a valley outside of Bethlehem, N.H. (I never did know what denomination it was), to the mother church of Christian Science in Boston, to St. Patrick's Cathedral and Norman Vincent Peale's church in New York. The great cathedrals and tiny village churches in Mexico, the Buddhist Temple in Honolulu and every church of every denomination as I traveled through the United States, Mexico, and Canada, were places I went to services.

I no longer ever went to a synagogue or temple and felt only a token obligation to observe Jewish holidays or rituals with my family. I knew I was missing something in my life in spite of good jobs, good health, complete independence and freedom.

Then came marriage and I was perfectly happy, and my sense of needing and wanting some intangible something, that I couldn't define, faded and came to an end. We had very little time for religious or spiritual needs in our life and it was only at weddings, funerals, and bar mitzvahs that we had a moment of time for God.

And so the years passed. I was very, very happy in my marriage. My husband and I had good jobs, a beautiful apartment, many friends, and an active social life. We traveled and partied, went to football, baseball and basketball games, boxing matches, the theatre, wine and dined in all the fashionable restaurants and I felt that, secure in our love for each other, my husband and I had the best life could offer.

Then my husband was transferred to Norton Air Base and we moved to San Bernardino. I was completely unimpressed with everything San Bernardino had to offer and I didn't try to find friends, or activities, but just moped around all week waiting to get away for the week-ends to Los Angeles or Las Vegas or Palm Springs or anywhere out of town.

And then it all came to a screeching halt when my husband collapsed at his desk one day and was forced to take a medical retirement. Then life in the fast lane was over and the nightmares began.

Because it seemed like the sensible thing to do at the time, I went back to work and was fortunate enough to find a really good job that I liked with a wonderful boss and the first critical stage of my husband's illness passed. He was up and about and he was taking care of himself.

We stayed on in San Bernardino because the doctors thought the climate here would be better for him than L.A. or San Diego. We settled down to a quiet uneventful sort of life.

I didn't recognize God's will in it, or begin to wonder why that old feeling of searching for something which I couldn't even name, began to nag at me again. Then I was pointed in the direction to Ruth and Mike Perl, and although my inbred skepticism kept me just out of their reach spiritually, I was intrigued by everything their ministry stood for and kept coming back for more.

I attended Ruth's Bible Study class and the Christian Women's Dinner affairs where I heard many eloquent speakers describe their spiritual searches. I think of one woman at a salad luncheon in

Marge Litteral's home who said, "This was the worst week of my life until I asked God for help and He directed me to reading John where I found comfort in every chapter and verse I read." I actually was envious of that lady because she had what I not only needed and wanted, but wouldn't reach out for.

My husband's battle with ill health went on as he bore courageously and without complaint, the pain and suffering he experienced, while I stood by and watched and grew angrier and angrier with God for letting this happen.

It went on and on while I refused to accept the doctor's verdict, that he could not and would not get better. And he didn't. In October 1981, his agonizing suffering was over, but mine continued.

Then, a few weeks later, my talented, beautiful sister suffered a stroke and died. A short while after, I learned my brother had terminal bone cancer. Then my car was stolen, my apartment was ransacked, and the attorney, supposedly a good friend of my husband's, who handled my affairs, cheated me out of a large sum of money. He did it so neatly that I would have had to go to court to recover the loss.

By that time, I was certain I was just a born loser and decided to forget it. So I started running back to old vacation spots, to places we had visited so happily in years past, always looking for something – not sure what – but I kept searching. And, not finding it, I was completely miserable.

Then it was New Year's Eve, Dec. 31, 1982, and I was alone in my sister's home as I refused to go to a party with the others to celebrate. I was depressed, overwhelmed with grief and too defeated to even cry. So I decided I wanted no more of this life and decided to just bring it to an end.

So, I came back to San Bernardino and started to make careful plans so no one would suspect what I was going to do. I brought my will up to date, disposed of lots of household goods, and even had my apartment thoroughly cleaned. I was outwardly calm and cheerful enough so no one noticed any difference in me. I even took a trial run up to the mountains because I knew just where I was going to drive over the edge. I wasn't going to leave any notes or evidence that would indicate anything other than an unfortunate accident.

My target date was February 1, and I have no idea why. So I decided to go to the salad luncheon on January 21, 1983, here at Tuitti's. Marge gave me a ride and that's when I met Liz Deware. It was one of the nicest luncheons ever; wonderful food, beautiful fellowship, and Liz entertained us delightfully.

As I sat there, I thought I was sure I'd never see any of these lovely ladies again. Then when it was time to leave I went over to say thank you and good-bye to Tuitti. She put her arms around me, hugged me and said, "love you" and her warmth cracked and melted the ice encasing my heart, because those were the last words my husband spoke to me and I had not heard them since his death, and I was extremely touched.

I got into Marge's car with Liz and I don't even remember how the conversation started, but in the ten minutes it took for Marge to drive the short distance to where I lived, Liz convinced me to stop arguing with God and make my decision.

So, with Liz's arm around my shoulders, I repeated after her the words asking Jesus Christ to come into my life, and I accepted Him as my Lord and Savior. Marge hugged me and called me "sister" and I started to cry and didn't stop for three days, in which I stayed in my apartment. I didn't answer the telephone or door or pick up my mail. Finally, I noticed my bitter tears of grief were now tears of peace.

I started to read the Bible and in Psalm 118:17, I read, "I shall not die but shall live and recount the deeds of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me sorely but He has not given me over to death."

I began to recognize the missing element in my life and I finally realized that God endures, through Jesus Christ, in every tragedy and circumstance.

In the two years and nine months since that momentous day, I have had three heart attacks further family tragedies, the disappointment of going to the hospital instead of on a long planned Caribbean Cruise, the frustration and confusion of not knowing where to live, and have been able to accept my limited physical activity. But now, as I turn to my Lord Jesus in pain or loneliness, I find the spiritual solace and faith I had been seeking for so long.

So now, I think it was like baking a cake: Ruth and Marge so patiently measuring the ingredients, exposing me more and more to what it was like to enjoy life as a good Christian woman, and then Tuitti mixing it well, Liz pouring it all in the pan to bake; and the frosting on the cake is sweeter every day.

So to you Tuitti, Liz, Marge and Ruth, I am grateful for your love and caring, that brought me to where I stand with Jesus Christ in my life today.

Anne Berman went home to heaven to be with her Messiah and Savior, Y'shua Jesus in August, 1987. Having fallen asleep in her favorite chair in her apartment, she just simply awoke in His presence forevermore. A popular song on Christian radio at the time stated, "(imagine) what it is like taking a step and finding it heaven, breathing new air and finding it celestial...and knowing you're home! Welcome home, Anne! We'll see you again one day, too!"