

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Story by Wilda Kruczinski

Kathy Gilbert: From Flower Child at Woodstock to Jesus Freak

The day after Kathy Gilbert graduated from high school in 1969, she moved to a hippie commune in Virginia. While her parents in Baltimore worried about her safety, she bounced all around the country from San Francisco to Washington, D.C. In August, she camped at Woodstock for a week with the rock group, Grateful Dead. Kathy recalls, "It was a week of brown rice, mud, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. I was looking to answer the big questions of life: 'Who am I? Why am I here?'"

In Washington, D.C., she got tear-gassed in a march at the State Department. In San Francisco, she joined another commune where some creepy fellows visited from a group called "The Family" (a.k.a. the Charles Manson cult).

By the spring of 1970, she was disgusted with the hippie lifestyle and the emptiness she felt. "I was free, independent, fearless—and utterly alone. But not for long."

Kathy headed north. Hitchhiking up Rattlesnake Road in Oregon on a warm June afternoon, she met two hippie-looking fellows in an old Buick. The driver, John Higgins, invited her to eat dinner at a nearby ranch named Shiloh (Hebrew for "peace")—a Christian ranch.

"There I was, a very lost hippie girl amongst the most loving, peaceful, real, hippie-looking people I had ever met. I was told the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. I argued, and I disagreed, but I stayed and spent that night in the girl's dorm where a young woman named Debbi Bryson shared the love of Jesus with me."

The next day, Kathy fled to the coast. She got drunk but couldn't drown out the words she had heard at Shiloh. In Florence, OR, she camped on a deserted beach. "As it grew dark, I began to pray, 'Jesus, I know You must be real. Those people back on 'The Land' are real. And they say it's You. Would You please accept me? I don't have anything to offer, but I give myself to You.' I was overwhelmed with His love. It was as



Kathy Gilbert, then and now

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if Jesus gathered me in His arms and held me close. It was then that I was able to pour out to Him all my sinfulness, longings, and needs. I was awed to realize that, all along, it was Jesus who had all the answers. I was longing for Him!"

She returned to Shiloh for the next few years and worked the land with other believers. Kathy said, "I discovered the joy of having an intimate relationship with God."

Her salvation radically impacted her parents, who were staunchly devoted to a traditional religion that did not emphasize the Word of God or a personal relationship with Christ. Her father, Ed Gross, remembered, "When she left, she was ... untouchable, hating her parents and hating the world. When she came back, we saw she was not the same person. She looked like an angel. There was a radiance—like the Holy Spirit coming through her eyes, her face." While Kathy was at Shiloh, she had called and written her parents to tell them about her salvation. "We couldn't relate to it; we didn't understand," Ed said. "But when she came back, we saw with our

own eyes what she had been talking about. She prayed about everything."

Eileen Gross added, "When she left, her eyes were dead; when she came back, they were alive."

Ed and Eileen were touched by the change in Kathy, but they clung to their religion. When Kathy returned to Shiloh, she asked the other believers to pray for her parents. Nearly a year later, her parents saw a Gospel program on TV. "We knelt in the living room, and God gave us new hearts on Valentine's Day 1972," Ed said with a chuckle. "It was the intercessory prayer of those 300 kids; God was working in us."

Kathy had met Stephen Gilbert at Shiloh, and the two were married in the fall of 1972. Soon after, they moved to California and began attending CC Costa Mesa. Serving at the church, Stephen started Maranatha Printing, and Kathy worked at the switchboard and then for the radio, book, and teaching-tape ministry of Pastor Chuck Smith.

"Kay Smith became my spiritual mother," Kathy recounted. "She introduced all of us to Elisabeth Elliot, whose teaching has had a powerful influence on my life." Stephen now teaches at Orange Coast College, and Kathy is the administrator for CC Publishing at CC Costa Mesa. The Gilberts have two grown children: Judah and Hosanna.

Ed and Eileen now serve the Lord full-time with Institute for Creation Research. "In 1995, the Lord led us to sell all our possessions in Maryland and serve Him." In 2006, Ed and Eileen, both in their 70s, traveled to more than 30 Calvary Chapels to share scientific evidence for creation. They plan to head out again this summer.

That early emptiness has been gone for years now. Kathy said her passion is "to fall more in love with Jesus and that others would come to know and love Him too."

