

My Partying Problem | BY RACHEL LOGAN

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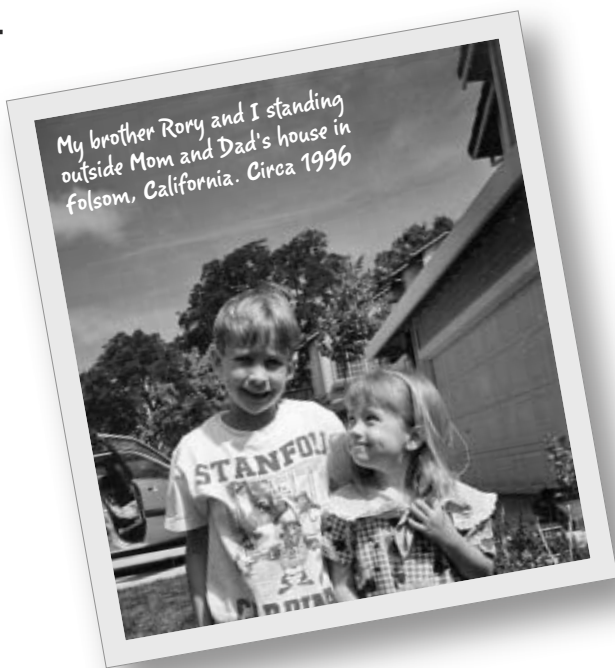
to cry.

Growing up Adventist has taught me several things for certain: Special K Loaf always tastes better reheated, summer camp is the best place in the world, and swimming on the Sabbath is expressly forbidden. When I think of my childhood as a fifth-generation Adventist, I remember rules—lots and lots of rules. Don't laugh in church. Don't clap after

only a year after my baptism, that church people were the sternest people I knew.

As I grew older and entered Adventist academy, I remember learning more about the Adventist politics that circulated through our church: women were trying to become ordained ministers. Because I had never desired to be a minister, the subject didn't interest me much, but I did think it was interesting that I learned about women's suffrage in history class and heard about women's oppression in religion class.

By the time I arrived at Walla Walla University, I was almost completely disassociated from Adventism. I couldn't wait to be graduated from university so I could shake my religion entirely and all the rules I felt it imposed on me. I didn't have visions of rebellion. I didn't want to go out and party, have premarital sex, or shack up with an atheist. But I longed for the day I could live without worrying about the judgment of Adventists. In my experience, the more religious the Adventist, the more judgmental they were. The welcome arms of the church seemed only open to those who behaved. Everybody else could stand outside until they realized the error of their ways.



that song. Don't disagree with Ellen White.

I remember hushed conversations between my parents about church members who switched to another church because of heated board meetings revolving around church carpet colors and drums during song service. I remember wondering why it mattered, and what it had to do with God. I remember thinking, at the age of ten,

The intervention

During my sophomore year of college, a man from the church approached me to conduct an intervention. He spoke to me kindly, asking how I was doing, and we made small talk for a minute or two. Then, cautiously, he shifted into the real reason for our meeting: my apparent partying problem.

He assured me that he didn't judge me, but that he had heard about my rampant party lifestyle at Walla Walla University. Drugs, alcohol—everybody was talking about it.

At first I was dumbfounded, and then I began to cry. Not from relief that somebody could help me, but from anger and confusion. Everybody had been talking about me? I felt betrayed. Who had been talking about me? And why was this man, a man I barely knew, the only one to show enough concern to actually ask me about the issue?

Shaking, I said, "But I have *never* even had sip of alcohol or done one drug!"

I couldn't believe that this conversation was even happening. Despite my struggles with Adventism, I always prided myself on my choices. Sure, I drank coffee, but I never smoked marijuana or slept around. I didn't drink alcohol or do drugs. I had no idea where any of this was coming from.

The man didn't look convinced, so he continued: "I've been approached several times, and your name is always on the list of young women who lead a partying lifestyle."

I couldn't believe it. Not only had there been rumors circling about me that held no merit of truth, but there was an entire list of sinners being analyzed.

"Who told you this?" I asked.

He wouldn't tell me, but, alarmed by my tears, he began to backtrack. "Many different people have said . . ."

I felt cornered and attacked. I kept replaying in my mind what he had said. Everybody had been talking about me, spreading rumors and assuming the worst. I wondered how long these stories had been circulating in the church and why no one had thought to ask me about it before.

"Well, I swear on the Bible that I haven't!" I had never sworn on the Bible before, and I knew that I wasn't supposed to do it so rashly, but I was caught off guard. I wanted to clear my name, but I wasn't sure how, when I hadn't even done what I had been accused of.

He looked shocked, but I could see on his face that he believed me. He even looked sorry to have brought it up at all. "Well, if you haven't been doing those things, these stories must have come from the company you keep. Your reputation is probably being marred by those you choose to spend your time with."



"So what should I do?" I asked. "Not hang out with people that drink or smoke?"

"Well, maybe," he said. "Your reputation is on the line. People are associating you with that lifestyle."

"So let them!"

I thought back on my life at Walla Walla University and tried to envision the list of girls he had been told were partiers. Maybe he had some names right, but I doubted he had gotten them all correct. Suddenly, I became furious, not just for myself, but for every person on that list—the girls who were on there correctly, and the girls who weren't.

The words began to flow off my tongue, channeling fourteen years of Adventist education and biblical studies. "I won't stop being a friend to someone just because they've decided to drink or do drugs." There was no point in denying that I knew the people he was referring

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to. "I was friends with them long before they did drugs, and I'll be friends with them when they are done. I'd rather be the person they call for a ride when they're drunk than the pastor who is called when they are dead from drunk driving and is needed by the family to offer grief support. Jesus hung out with the prostitutes and the thieves. He didn't care about His reputation."

It was a dramatic speech, not well formed or eloquent, but it epitomized my experience with the church, one of judgment and politics. I felt the hot burn of accusation from all those who had been whispering about me. I was hurt by their words and by their lack of support. If this was the church, I wanted nothing to do with it.

At the time, it seemed like the church only wanted those who were "perfect Adventists." But I was confused: if this is how I felt, a seemingly "good Adventist," I could only imagine how

who are doing their best to follow Christ's example. The problem comes when we get so caught up in trying to fix people that we forget to stop and ask them if they even want fixing, or if we are addressing the right problems. Back when I was nineteen years old and confronted about my "partying problem," the church gentleman was all fired up and ready to fix that issue. At the time, though, I wasn't struggling with substance abuse but with loneliness and a lack of direction.

Jesus performed many miracles of healing in the Bible. He healed the blind, the paralyzed, and the demon possessed. When the sick came to Jesus, He didn't sit them down in a prayer group or have them memorize the ten commands. He *healed* them. By meeting people's needs, Jesus inspired faith and love within them more than any Bible study ever could. Likewise, when people come to our church, we need to stop diagnosing their problems for them, and instead, let them tell us what their needs are. If a woman comes to church pregnant and unwed, she doesn't need to be whispered about or shunned. Maybe she needs education about healthy eating for her and her baby. Maybe she is worried about finding babysitters for when she has to go back to work. We need to stop judging people, making lists of all that they have done wrong, and instead start loving them as Christ would.

We also need to stop pushing our own personal agendas and instead start asking what our communities and churches need. It is hard to focus on spirituality when you have emotional and physical needs that are not being met. We get so caught up in tradition and legalities that we lose sight of the end goal, which is to bring people to Christ through love.

A few weeks ago, I met up with one of my childhood friends from elementary and academy days. While catching up and discussing the future, she mentioned that she planned on raising her children as Adventists. I was surprised. When I was attending Walla Walla University she had been pursuing her dreams at a public university in California. After she

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someone with real problems felt trying to live within our community.

Since then, I have a little more perspective on the church. I realize that in my heart I still believe what the Seventh-day Adventist Church stands for. I believe in the second coming of Christ. I believe in the ten commands. I believe in the state of the dead and the health message. The things I find issue on in the church have evolved from sinful human nature.

I believe that the church is full of good people

had been out of the Adventist bubble for the past four years, I was curious at her motives for coming back. Wouldn't that be difficult?

"You know, it's funny, I never thought I'd come back," she told me. "But after being at a public university, I realized all the wonderful things about Adventism that I didn't recognize before.

"Adventists have created a community. Yeah, we're nosy, and sometimes pushy, but we're a family. You and I have been friends since we were six. At university, some girls don't have friends for more than a couple years. And that's common. These girls have never been in love, or even know what love is. At the end of the day, Adventists care about each other. We take care of our own."

After we finished our meal and went our separate ways, her words stuck with me. She was absolutely right; one of the most beautiful things about Adventism is the sense of connectivity that you feel a part of. No matter where you go, if you run into an Adventist you find that have at least one friend in common. How many times had an Adventist offered me shelter when I was in a foreign city? Or fed me potluck when I was visiting a new church? How many times had my church rallied together when tragedy struck?

When Jesus walked this earth, he gathered disciples. He didn't mean for us to be alone but to have community and fellowship. During vesper at Walla Walla University I heard one speaker say: "Don't let our churches sit stagnant, steeped in tradition and rigidity. Let us constantly be evolving to meet the needs of our members and our communities. We should be able to go into any community where our churches are located, and be able to ask any stranger about the local Seventh-day Adventist church. If he or she doesn't know of us, or feel our positive impact in the community, we're not working hard enough. Every person in a thirty-mile radius should feel our presence and love."

After our conversation about partying, I never thought I would speak to that man from

the church again. Why would I? I associated him with the judgment of others who were too afraid to come forward and speak to me themselves. I didn't see him as the only person who cared enough to try to help, as I do now. Years later, I consider him a dear friend, one who has stuck by me, and those who are



important to me, in many times of hardship. In him I see Christ and the community that he represents, and it is a community that I want to be a part of. ■

Rachel Logan is a 2014 graduate of Walla Walla University, where she studied creative writing. While living on campus, she was a page editor for the campus newspaper, *The Collegian*. She now lives in Sacramento, where she is interning at *Spectrum* magazine. During her free time she loves to travel the world and learn about other cultures.



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