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A Heart of Flesh

BY BEN SHELLEY

For the majority of my life, I lived in a tiny town in the rural mountains of Tennessee. It was there where both my sister and I were raised and learned the ways of life. It was commonplace. I knew everyone who attended the local Seventh-day Adventist church very well, and we were like family. It was home to me, and it would be so for nearly 11 years.

As I had grown up, I had become hard-hearted to a certain extent. Since I had received a certain level of rejection from some of the school children, I had become very defensive and skeptical. I never truly became a hateful person, but definitely a product of my environment. This became a major downfall of mine, and it was a significant obstacle for making any future relationships or improving current ones. Change was needed, and I knew it. *But how was I to change?*

One day, I received news from my parents that our family would be moving to a small town in Michigan. Truthfully, I was quite excited. Of course, I was sad to leave all of my friends and family in Tennessee, but it was time for change; time to explore a new world. So, my family and I “pulled up roots” and relocated to Berrien Springs, Michigan. Since I previously had been exposed to the community fairly early on in life, I had developed a love for the entire area and knew it well.

Immediately after my move, I started striking up relationships with people in the community, slowly making myself known throughout my new hometown. I also asked God to help me find acceptance with others and to become a more



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Christlike person myself. He answered my prayer. I flourished! My peers, for the first time, showed me kindness, love and even genuine respect. It *was* a dream come true. Slowly, ever so slowly, my heart of stone began to crack and crumble. I no longer was as defensive or unkind as I once had been.

Once my heart changed, I found it was so much easier to maintain good relationships with others. True, there were still times when a friend would hurt my feelings or frustrate me in some way, but I had learned how to forgive more readily and easily. I had

found the light at the end of the tunnel. I was home.

It is obvious that God had a plan for my life, and I cannot thank Him enough for what He has done for me. He brought me into a new place, a new world. With good memories of my friendships in Tennessee, God led me to a place of belonging. And, most importantly, He gave me a new heart — a heart of flesh.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26 NIV).

Ben Shelley, 16, is a junior at Andrews Academy. He is a member of the Pioneer Memorial Church in Berrien Springs, Michigan.