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Stephanie's Story

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For the first 13 years of my life, I lived with my family in a small house on a 300-acre farm in Charlotte, Vermont, while my grandparents and aunts and uncles lived in a larger farmhouse on the property. My grandfather didn’t have much formal education; it’s possible he didn’t even attend high school. He worked from a young age. However, to give his children opportunities for a better life, he encouraged my father and his siblings to pursue formal education beyond the high school level. Consequently, my father earned a two-year technical degree in agriculture and my parents and grandparents bought the dairy farm in the mid-1960s, in the pursuit of a better life.

My mother was a stay-at-home mom, however, she was absent for much of my childhood because she struggled with depression and at times kept herself separate from the rest of the family. As a result, I spent much of my early years with my paternal grandmother and aunt, and my personality was significantly shaped by those interactions.

Though some of my neighbors were farmers like my family, most were professionals who worked in Burlington, the closest city to Charlotte. While the town itself was not that culturally, racially or religiously diverse, it did possess a strict socio-economic structure and attitude concerning someone’s place in that structure and community. As a dairy farmer’s daughter who wore homemade, hand-me-down, church-rummage-sale clothes and smelled of cow manure, I quickly understood my place in New England society.
At my first teaching position in Kentucky, a colleague told me that I wasn’t of the “right” social class to be a professor. For him, it seemed inconceivable that a person of humble beginnings such as mine could have “advanced” past my family history.

When I was 8 years old I asked my grandmother about purgatory, a fundamental Catholic doctrine. Even though my grandmother was Catholic and worshipped each week, she understood that some of the teachings were not biblical. She told me that the concept of purgatory was not biblical, and by the time I was an adult I knew from my own studies that the Catholic Church did not represent true biblical teaching.

Twenty years later, I was invited to an Adventist worship service one Sabbath and realized that Adventism was what I had been searching for. My conversion was quick as I recognized the truth of Adventism. I have never regretted that choice and change. Embracing Adventism has transformed my life and me.

My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has called me to love and I strive to live to that ideal. Living a life of love may be hard at times because of our flawed human nature, but as an educator, if I do not interact positively with my colleagues and students and demonstrate care and compassion, then I am not doing my job as a teacher. Staying true to my upbringing and character, I am fair, honest and straightforward.

I have consciously resisted losing what makes me a Vermonter—my speech patterns and mannerisms, etc. I have learned how to change my speech as required by those long-ago teachers, but discovered that in the process I lost something of myself, as well. When I decide to embrace everything about myself—where I come from and who I am—then I represent the best of who I am.