

An Affinity for Windows
A Memoir by Charlene Lamy Edge

Author's note: This is a memoir: a work of memory, imagination, and some journalism in that it tells of actual people and places, many recognizable to anyone familiar with The Way International™ or Rollins College. Events in some cases have been combined or contracted to tell this story. Names of people other than Way leaders and the Rollins College professor have been changed.

Spring 1992, Orlando Hall, Hamilton Holt School
Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida

About a dozen of us registered for Introduction to Philosophy this spring. Twice a week we gather around the oak table in our Orlando Hall classroom with Dr. Cook sitting up front. In fact, every classroom in this building has one of these giant oval tables and about twenty chairs to match. I always try to get a chair facing the windows and wear jeans so I can sit cross-legged in the wide seat. On the table, golden in the afternoon sun, I spread out my books and papers and just breathe. I can breathe in this room.

Two ceiling fans cool the room, a duet of reassuring motion. Occasionally, their whirl is all we hear in the dip and lull of discussions. When I look out the windows that run the length of the room, I see a water oak, its giant leafy arms shading the yard near the Carnegie Hall building across from us. When I can't think of anything to say, I listen to the fans hum and stare at the tree, letting its serenity fill me.

The week's reading assignment is *The Republic* by Plato. My impression is that *The Republic* is supposed to describe how society works best if everyone does the job for which he or she is best suited and doesn't complain about it. Our professor is leading a discussion about how a group called the Guardians was trained to be the army of the Republic. The philosopher king assigned this job to them, just as he did everyone else's. The trouble is that one of Socrates' students, Adeimantus, says that the Guardians aren't happy about it.

"So," Dr. Cook says, "Adeimantus asks Socrates how he would respond to the objection that this arrangement isn't making the Guardians a very happy group. For example, they could not own private property, live with a wife and child, or possess gold or silver. They lived communally with essentially no private life at all. Adeimantus insists, 'These people seem like nothing so much as a garrison of mercenaries posted in the city and perpetually mounting guard.'" Dr. Cook reminds us of Socrates' statement: "...Our aim in founding the commonwealth was not to make any one class especially happy, but to secure the greatest possible happiness for the community as a whole."

Wham! I'd heard that before. Not only heard it, but I'd lived it and ended up forsaking it. I had sold my soul to a cause that tries to make something like *The Republic* possible today. That's how I came to be sitting in Orlando Hall – as an escapee. The evening program here at Rollins gives me a second chance at college and maybe my life. About twenty years earlier, right out of high school, I had been in another college classroom at East Carolina University, but I only lasted one term.

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One Friday night I had gone to an interdenominational fellowship on campus. There I met Ted, a believer from The Way International. He was on campus that night for one purpose: to sign up people for The Way's class, *Power for Abundant Living*. I was at the fellowship in hopes of meeting other "born again" Christians – I got "born again" while in high school. But at the meeting when I heard the minister teach that miracles didn't happen anymore, that only apostles had performed them long ago, I wasn't so sure I'd found what I wanted. I believed miracles could still happen, so during the cookies and coffee break, I went up to the minister and told him that. I didn't notice Ted right away, but nearby he was listening to my conversation. Soon he interrupted, and since he agreed with me, I didn't mind. As the minister argued with us, saying he was an authority because he had trained at the best school around, Ted looked right at him.

"Well, perhaps my teacher just knows more than yours," Ted said.

"Well, perhaps you're right, but I've been a minister for a long time." The guy actually sneered. Now I was dying to find out whom Ted's teacher was. The minister had walked away, so I asked Ted about his teacher, about miracles, about healing. He called the Bible the Word of God. He was absolutely sure of himself, and in such a calm way, without shouting or even trying to convince me.

"This is amazing," I said. "Where did you learn all this?"

"In a class called *Power for Abundant Living*," he said. "In the gospel of John, Jesus Christ said he came so we could have life and have it more abundantly. I took this class and it gave me the keys to getting that abundant life. If you want, I'll bring you to a fellowship and you can hear more of the Word there."

When I told a few friends back home and my family about the fellowships and the class, some of them called The Way a cult, but that didn't matter to me. To them the word "cult" conjured up weird images of animal sacrifices. But this group, I insisted, had none of that. And I was far too curious to be scared off. I admitted that The Way had a charismatic leader and devoted followers, a set doctrine and intense recruitment methods, but the believers at ECU explained that one person's cult is often just another person's church on the corner of Fifth and Main.

After meeting Ted, I went to fellowships for about a month in the local Way leaders' house near campus. I heard the story of how God told Dr. Wierwille, the founder of The Way, that He would teach Dr. Wierwille the Word of God like it had not been known since the first century church, if he'd teach it to others. I was thrilled to be one of his students, to be a part of a cause doing God's will in this world. One night after fellowship, Ted turned to me.

"So, are you ready to sign up now?" he asked.

"Sure am," I said. I gave him my money and signed a class registration card.

I remember feeling overwhelmed at college, trying to find a path for myself. Although planning to study English literature and art, I went to college more interested in spiritual matters than anything else. One major reason for this, I suspect, was my mother's death. She had been sick

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with cancer for several years, in and out of the hospital, and not home much near the end. Finally on a rainy November afternoon, my father drove me to the hospital, led me to her room, and sat me down next to her bed. I stared at the long gray walls and white sheets. I watched her pale face, her closed eyes. I strained to hear her say something, mutter anything. But within minutes, she took her last breath.

After a nurse pulled a sheet up over Mom's face, my father steered me out the door and hurried me down the hall to a small waiting room. There, the doctor, with his white coat and sad face, leaned forward in a chair next to me. "I'm sorry," he said. "Your mother is gone from us, but she no longer suffers." But I'm only 16, I thought. I still need her. The doctor was not Catholic. My family, however, was very Catholic and gave me their version – that God took her to be with Him in heaven, that it was her time to go. At the time, I wondered, how can God, who loves me, need her more than *I* do? If that's true, I don't need a god like this!

After her funeral, I went back to high school angry and silent. Angry with the awful god who killed her. Resentful of anyone who pitied me. Mad at my father who couldn't make her stay alive. Then, during my senior year, a high school girlfriend invited me to a Young Life fellowship where we read *Good News for Modern Man*. "You can understand this translation," she said, "It's the New Testament in plain English." I felt pretty ignorant of the Scriptures, having memorized catechism questions and answers in Catholic school, but my friend's excitement was contagious. In Young Life, the more I learned about being a "Christian" the more I felt that my Catholic upbringing had failed me. The nuns had never mentioned anything about being "born again." They also said my Protestant friends were going to hell because they were born Protestants, but I was bound for heaven because my parents were Catholic – if I didn't die in the state of mortal sin first. So when I arrived at ECU, my questions and rebellion had grown into a ripe vulnerability to The Way's claim of "true" answers.

When I enrolled in the *Power for Abundant Living class*, I truly believed God had led me to it. It seemed clear to me. Step one: When I was a girl in Catholic school, I yearned to become a nun in order to serve Him. On the other hand, I wanted to marry and have a family, so I gave up on that. The Way provided me with an avenue for serving God in the ministry.

Step two: I believed I'd found the true answer about my mother's death. The Way's teachings explained that the accuracy of the Word declared that the devil was the author of death. So the devil, not God, took my mother. I didn't have to blame God after all.

Step three: I received comfort that my friends weren't going to hell because they were Protestant. The least they had to do was believe that Christ rose from the dead and they were saved. The Bible, not a church said so. (At the time, I ignored some of The Way believer's insinuations about my family and friends not being as "spiritual" as I was, because they had not taken The Way's class.)

So I dropped out of East Carolina University, intent on dedicating my life to this ministry. I had found the truth and no one, not any friends, not my father, not my sister, not my aunts or uncles, nor any cult awareness group, could talk me out of it.

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“Charlene doesn’t like the sound of that,” I hear Dr. Cook say. I meet his gaze and shift in my chair, my reverie broken. Looking down, I shake my head and hope he’ll leave me alone. But he stares at me, puzzled. He recalls Socrates’ example of coloring a statue “...it is not the beauty of one part but the overall beauty of the statue that counts.”

But why isn’t that one part important? I think. Oh man, here we go again. I’m stuck in a groove, like the grains on this table that go in one direction only. The discussion around me turns into a distant jumble of voices, like pattering rain. I tune out, fixated on the idea that one group of people, albeit small, isn’t important enough to matter. The Guardians. Unhappy. And nobody cares. I was like that just a few years ago. After 17 years in The Way, I woke up from the dream and realized I had to get out. Dr. Cook raises his eyebrows while he waits for me to speak. To me, the statue analogy is misapplied.

“No,” I say, “The whole is made up of parts, and if one part is not happy, then the whole is not happy.” I had spent all those years in The Way, only to leave like a disillusioned invalid leaving Lourdes still sick and wondering why. Sick of hearing “the truth.” Sick at the thought of wasted years. The Way community, the Republic, could no longer accommodate me. And now in philosophy class I hear that The Guardians’ unhappiness wouldn’t count either. Their unhappiness would not be important when evaluating the overall happiness of the state. This was a rerun of my life.

In November 1970, I visited The Way headquarters for a women’s weekend conference. The place was actually the old Wierwille farm nestled in the rural Ohio hills with one building as the teaching center – a multi-purpose facility. We attended Bible teachings upstairs, and we ate our meals downstairs in a communal dining room for staff and Way Corps residents. The Way Corps consisted of about ten young men and women from California, Indiana, Kansas, and Ohio. They lived in trailers for two years, studied, and worked directly with Dr. Wierwille. That weekend I witnessed their strong belief in what he taught and their dedication to the ministry. That weekend they inspired me to apply for The Way Corps program, too.

The duties of spiritual watchfulness at headquarters and commitment to the ministry were similar to the Guardian’s protection of the State. Wierwille based the Corps program on the Green Beret and Peace Corps training – only without weapons or national endorsement. Unquestioned obedience and discipline were understood requirements, combined with idealistic hopes of “spreading God’s Word over the world.”

Since my sole desire was to become my best for God, this seemed like the place to do it. Wierwille snagged a lot of us in the prime of our youth and convinced us that God called us to The Way Corps to learn how to be leaders for his ministry. Up at 5:00 a.m., we had a tight schedule of exercise, communal meals, and jobs in various departments at the headquarters. Then we struggled to stay awake during teachings at night. After two years of this, in 1973 we graduated and I married a fellow Corps grad. Dr. Wierwille immediately assigned us to lead fellowships in Los Angeles, California.

During the next ten years, my husband and I lived in California and then later in Florida. We knocked on all kinds of bolted doors to tell all kinds of people about the ministry. We ran fellowships for men, women, and children, recruited believers for The Way Corps, and conducted PFAL classes. Sometimes the ministry paid us as salaried employees, but for the most

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part we supported ourselves and tithed the fifteen percent that Dr. Wierwille said was the least believers could do. Our daughter had been born in 1975, and sometimes I wondered how we could make it financially.

By 1984, we needed a change. We'd had some tough times in our marriage, including a year of separation early on, and even though we tried to overcome our differences and focus our attention on simply running a home fellowship in Florida for awhile, our local Way leader suggested we go back to Headquarters and work. "I can see that your marriage has weakened and you need a spiritual boost," he said. I thought he was right. Where was the abundant life Jesus Christ promised us, after all?

In August of that year, 1984, we moved back to The Way headquarters in Ohio where the staff had increased to about five hundred people. Near the nearby town of New Knoxville, we rented a house and enrolled our daughter in public school. Right away we were assigned full-time jobs. I was assigned to help complete our Concordance to the Peshitta Version of the New Testament, a version in the Syriac language. Dr. Wierwille believed Aramaic (a broader term than Syriac) was the language of Jesus, and we should study it for clues to the original meaning of the Bible.

When I joined the Research Department, Rev. Walter Cummins, the director, alluded to the fact that because I was a senior Way Corps grad, I would lend some spiritual maturity to the project. I felt elated and believed God had chosen me to do this work. Only three other people were working on it: Bernita, Gertrude, and Alan. Bernita had taught the three of us some Syriac when we were in the Way Corps, and then Alan continued studying it at the University of Chicago. Gertrude welcomed me warmly as she talked with me in the hall my first day.

"You have such commitment to the ministry, Charlene," she said. Her brown eyes widened. "That's just what we need on the team. You not only have great love for God's Word, but experience as a leader all these years and a commitment to Doctor as the man of God. I'm so glad you're here!" She hugged me, and I felt as if I'd come home.

A couple of months later, at our weekly meeting, we all gathered around the big square table – Gertrude, Alan, Bernita, and the other research team members – about ten of us. I hated that this second-story room had no windows. Its back door opened onto a staircase that led down into a giant warehouse. The walls were lined with bookshelves stuffed with books on biblical archeology, history, Eastern customs; Greek texts; assorted papers; and stacks of bound computer printouts of what we had completed so far on the Syriac concordance.

Some of our Bibles and research books stacked by our elbows on the dull brown table included New Testament Interlinears, books of biblical research studies written by Dr. Wierwille, and several versions of the Greek and Syriac New Testaments. We were expected to formulate a "literal translation according to usage" of a section of scripture. Then Walter, designated by Dr. Wierwille, taught it to the in-resident Way Corps members, a group that had grown to more than six hundred.

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The morning's coffee had turned into the afternoon's coffee, so someone made a fresh pot. It simmered on its little stand in the corner and gradually the aroma permeated the room. Walter came in from his office preceded by his cherry pipe tobacco smoke. He usually brought more than one pipe to those meetings. Over time, we'd deduced that the length of the meeting was in direct proportion to the number of pipes he carried in. That day was a three-pipe day, so I figured we'd go to about 6:00 p.m. He greeted us, and we settled down to work.

One of the guys read aloud from Dr. Wierwille's teachings on Timothy. It covered the same section of scripture that we were working on. Another person pointed out an alternate reading from a Greek text. And not just alternate, but really different. No one said anything. I stared at the King James Version in front of me. Which version was right, then? We all knew Dr. Wierwille taught that the Bible in its original form was the Word of God and had no contradictions in it, that it was perfect because God is perfect and He is the author who inspired all the writers.

It was our job to apply the keys to research that Doctor taught us and support what he already taught. But here we were at this small private meeting, grappling with highly troubling questions like, "Dr. Wierwille said the Greek phrase in I Timothy 1:18, 'war a good warfare,' should really be 'work a good work,' but in fact, the Greek text does not support the meaning for 'work.' The Greek word is for 'war' not 'work.' Which is accurate, the Greek or Dr. Wierwille?" Just as I had at previous meetings, I tried to ignore this thought like a bothersome ringing phone – but that day I felt compelled to lift the receiver. Gertrude sat next to me. She sighed. As we all remained silent, confronted with this unspoken doubt, she sensed my tension and whispered to me. "I love Dr. Wierwille, but sometimes his Greek isn't very good." I froze in my chair. I looked at no one. The basis for why I was there was threatened – I was there mainly because I believed Dr. Wierwille taught the accuracy of the Word. Now that was in question. My heart pounded louder and louder. How could this be happening after all these years? Must I acknowledge that Dr. Wierwille didn't know Greek well enough to give an "accurate" meaning of the scriptures as he claimed he did? I couldn't deny that I heard Gertrude. I couldn't un-hear her words. Or any other words we'd spoken at these meetings. In the corner of my mind I thought, "This one verse is nothing...the fact is he based nearly everything he taught on what he said was the Greek text. Now what do I do?"

The room grew stifling. I couldn't open a window because there were no stupid windows. I've got to get fresh air right now, I thought. But I couldn't just run out. I closed my eyes. I blinked and looked around the room. The table turned into a waving brown sea with books floating on it. I fumbled to grab the edge of the table and counted the shelves in the overflowing bookcase. Try to focus, I thought. But I only saw myself – like those shelves – all stuffed with papers, with books, with Dr. Wierwille truth. I was a puppet whose strings were tangled in the shadowy complications of research.

Everyone in the room sat quietly, and I thought hard. How can true research be conducted, deeper meanings discovered, if we had to constantly ensure we weren't contradicting Dr. Wierwille? What were we supposed to do? I wanted to scream at Gertrude, "What the hell do you mean? He's the man of God!" I had run around the country promoting the class and teaching fellowships for years. I'd been too busy to make time for thorough study and reflection. And even if I had, I'd been too young, ill-equipped, and idealistic to realize what was going on.

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The whole Way lifestyle had weakened my marriage and family and depleted our resources. I'd given so much. Dear God, what had I done? Had I made a mistake that lasted all these years?

Each day at work, it grew more and more evident that we were just propping up Wierwille's theology. We were expected to act like rubber stamps for his teachings. On top of that, we had to straighten out the mess when Wierwille's research turned on him. For instance, later that year I found out that in one class he taught that life begins when a baby takes its first breath, but in another teaching he said it was at the moment of conception. The teachings were done years apart. One day a letter from a woman came to the research department asking which of those teachings was, "The truth." She'd had an abortion because she had believed the teaching about the fetus not being a living soul until it took its first breath. After the abortion, however, she heard the other teaching. Naturally she was horrified, confused about what to believe, and totally distraught. She wrote a straightforward letter to Wierwille, who passed it on to the Research Department to figure out and answer. When I heard about this, I couldn't turn away from the seriousness of the situation. It made me sick.

I was well aware that when research team members in previous years had confronted Dr. Wierwille with his errors or with different interpretations and presented their findings, he not only kicked them out of the Research Department, but also out of the ministry. He publicly proclaimed them "tricked by the adversary," and in some cases, "possessed," and he told the rest of us in the Corps not to talk to them. I was now ashamed to admit it, but I had been one of hundreds who had swallowed his party line. That I had failed to question what really happened disgusted me. That I'd been too chicken to find out for myself made me sick. Now here I was in the same boat. Those people had been publicly accused of turning their backs on God and the ministry that taught them "God's Word." I knew the same thing could happen to me.

For the rest of that meeting, I stared at the bookcase and down at my papers, deaf to what was going on. Gertrude's remark triggered a flood of questions. They ran through my mind for months: "Well, if Dr. Wierwille was wrong about the accurate meaning of this passage, what about the rest of what he taught? Which parts are true, which ones not? How can I know? There's no time to check out every single teaching. How would I check? What about his sources? How well can I depend on them? What do I believe now if I don't believe him?" Around and around they whirled like a spinning wheel gone berserk.

I started sleeping fewer hours and went for long walks down nearby country roads. I threw up on a regular basis, couldn't concentrate, and got depressed. That Christmas I baked tons of Christmas cookies with my daughter, tried to stop thinking, but secretly read books about the history of the Bible and the problems translating it. I soon realized that one mistake in translation could make the difference between the kind of Jesus who walked on water and one who walked alongside it. Maybe that mistake was made already. The day I realized that, I rode my bike three miles in the freezing cold.

The Rollins classroom is getting hot, my hands are sweaty, and the fans don't seem to be twirling fast enough. I look down and study the grooves on the wooden table, their fine tracks blurring through my tears. I shake my head in the stabbing regret over spending all those years on a lost cause. The isolation I felt during that time of breaking away suddenly closes in on me now. Dr. Cook paces down the aisle behind my chair, his hand on his chin, turns around, and strides back up the aisle. I absolutely want to run from this room. There seems no way out of this boxed

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conversation. Surely, I'll break down crying if I have to say any more.

In the spring of 1985, Dr. Wierwille died. People wept for weeks in the hallways at work. His death turned the tide of the ministry and affected all of us in research. The local newspaper, as I remember, published the cause of death as ocular cancer and liver cancer, but The Way's public relations department, striving for damage control over Wierwille's alcoholism, told us that was a lie – he'd had a stroke. I went for more walks.

Since 1982, Rev. Craig Martindale, who was in The Way Corps with me, had been the new president, but soon after Wierwille's death, other leaders started undermining him, struggling for power in the ministry. Craig promoted teachings that we couldn't back up in the research department, so he didn't consult us. I couldn't talk about research problems with anyone in the ministry because I knew what they would say – that I was turning my back on The Word and on God Himself.

I gradually fell silent at home. My husband downplayed my doubts, ignored them, or dismissed them altogether. Not inclined to investigating research issues himself, he just wanted to be a part of the ministry. For him it was “the best thing going even if it's not perfect.” Part of me wanted to believe that, but I knew deep down that I'd lost the ability to do it – I'd broken my denial. “We should try and support our new leaders, especially now. They'll work everything out,” he'd say. But I knew it was too late. You'd have to start from scratch. The only one I discovered I could talk with was Alan.

The Australian student across the table raises his hand. Dr. Cook calls on him and as he starts speaking, he looks at Dr. Cook, who in turn directs him to speak to me.

“Think of it this way,” he says. His accent brings a pleasant change to the moment. “Sometimes in a day, things happen that aren't particularly good or happy, but overall by the end of the day you can say you had a happy day.”

I spontaneously shake my head again. And immediately regret it. “I understand what you mean, but we're talking about people here. To me that analogy doesn't apply.” How can it? *The Republic* reminds me of the cult and my unhappiness in it. Through the windows I watch the tree sway in the afternoon breeze. The Australian guy looks expectantly at me, so I smile at him across the table. He smiles back, perplexed yet kindly, and glances at the teacher. My heart pounds through my entire body, but as I breathe, a strange calm, an unhurried sense, comes to me while I wait for what to do next. It's the same feeling I get when I watch a movie or read a book – just waiting and watching for the next thing to happen. Outside, I see a face squinting in a darkened window, a tall man leaning down and combing his hair. He's using his reflection as a mirror. Looks like my old friend, Alan.

One afternoon in March 1986, Alan headed back to our research room after a meeting with Walter who was still director of research. He walked past the window in the hall, the one that didn't open to the outside but rather looked into another workroom, inviting no outer light, much like The Way's ideology. It was this window that Alan often used as a mirror when he combed

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his hair before meetings. I looked up from my desk next to his, while other team members continued working at their desks around the room. His jaw was set hard; he didn't blink. He sat down in his chair like a lone crane on a tall post, leaned back, and stared midway across the room.

“What happened?” I whispered.

He redirected his stare at me, pushed his glasses up on his nose. I frowned. Then he shrugged as if he'd just given up on a difficult question. After working with this person for almost two years, I knew this response meant something was terribly wrong, so I got up and led him past the coffeepot, out the back door, and onto the metal stairs of the warehouse. From our world of books, we'd entered a concrete and metal cavern. Rows and rows of storage bins and field equipment were lined up like silent witnesses. A distant clang echoed through the place. It was our shoes on the stairs. At the bottom, we stopped.

“What did he say?” I said. “Tell me.”

He winced and took a long breath. “I think I just got fired.”

I grabbed onto the cold railing and nearly doubled over. He recited what Walter repeated to him of what our new leader, Craig, had decreed: that when August arrived there would no longer be a job for Alan in research. Why? He was too “academic.” We just stood staring at each other. August was five months away. We had suspected for a long time that Craig and the others, who were in a raging power play since Wierwille died, were trying to salvage Wierwille's teachings and get rid of any influences that might undermine the stability of the ministry. They publicly said they needed to get back to the basics. It was now clear that the basics did not include research.

At this point we were near the end of the second stage of the project: our Interlinear to the Syriac New Testament. The first stage, the Concordance, had been sort of a flop. The previous summer we had finished it, but by this time it was stacked in The Way Bookstore with its blue cover and gold letters, a satisfying accomplishment for us, but the leaders weren't promoting it much because it was too different from the Greek. We were drained from the increasing confusion at headquarters amidst leadership's power struggles, but finishing the Interlinear was our goal. The work was tedious and time consuming. We often worked on weekends.

As usual, our source materials often pointed to different meanings from what Wierwille had taught over the years as truth. For instance, the passage in Matthew chapter 27, verse 46 in which Jesus, when hanging on the cross said, “My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?” posed a problem. Wierwille claimed the Syriac reading was, “My God, My God, for this purpose was I spared.” But there was no such interpretation possible. The Syriac word was clearly the one for our English word “forsake” or “leave.” We realized that this project was only going to cause trouble for The Way believers. Because they would see for themselves a different meaning than what Wierwille taught, we brought this to Walter's attention. He looked at us over the top of his glasses and said it will still add to our research development. Whatever that meant.

So, with the doubts about the value of Wierwille's work continually plaguing me and the problems with the Syriac project looming, I often found myself in conversations with Alan, who,

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as it turned out, privately thought about many of the same questions I did. Only his questioning had started years before this during his Way Corps training and accelerated when he attended the University of Chicago.

Gradually, he helped me understand that the premises of fundamentalism, such as biblical inerrancy which Wierwille started from, were undermined by the very research Wierwille encouraged us to pursue. “Let’s face it, we can’t make literal facts out of metaphorical biblical language or perform linguistic gymnastics every time we don’t like a passage of scripture,” Alan pointed out. We could only surmise that Wierwille’s reasoning for having this department at all went something like this: he thought we’d be so loyal to him that we wouldn’t take issue with his work, only find ways to validate it. I began to understand that fundamentalism held The Way hostage in its research efforts. But expecting The Way to change was like expecting an oak tree to grow tulips – it’s impossible. Its nature can’t permit it.

The Australian student’s forehead crinkles as he glances at our teacher then back at me. I feel a slow resignation crawl through my body, so I sit back and try to think of something to say. As I look out the window again, I figure there is no way I can even try and tell my story to illustrate what I mean. It would be inappropriate to even bring it up...it’s a long story and far too personal for this classroom discussion. I’d probably sound like a whiner anyway. And I really don’t feel like sharing it with all these strangers. All I know is that the value of unhappy dissenting voices has no place in communities like The Republic – or The Way.

So we lived with Alan’s impending fate and continued working on the project. We didn’t finish it by August. When August came, Alan discreetly left with his family. Late one afternoon, I watched them climb into a little plane and take off out of the little Neal Armstrong Airport in New Knoxville. Dripping in the heat, I sat on the bumper of my red Chevy wagon surrounded by cornfields, freshly mowed grass, and the confused mess of my life. I kept waving at the plane even as it disappeared behind the clouds.

I hear the fans whir in the classroom and someone coughs. I yearn to sit with Alan right now and talk about this. I can see him in his chair and hear his calm voice. He’s probably the only person in the world who can fathom how frustrated I feel right now, how annoyed I am with *The Republic*, how desperately I want to get through this moment. I feel like a misfit in this classroom with all these people who seem to be fine with the book. They must think I’m nuts. But who cares? I just need to stay calm and rational. But how can I explain my weird reaction to *The Republic*? Do I have to? Isn’t there a simple way to end this conversation?

One day just before Alan left, I resigned from the Research Team. Walter said he knew I had been through a lot and wished I would stay, but he understood. Another day Craig visited the Research room and led me out the back door. While we stood on the landing of those warehouse stairs, he questioned me about the motives behind my resignation. I was tight-lipped and just said I needed a change. The relief of getting out of that department was worth enduring his little fifteen-minute interrogation, and I was extremely glad those days that no one – especially Craig – could read my mind. I’d left already, if only in my mind. My husband, however, wanted to stay

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at headquarters, so we remained for another year.

To survive, I withdrew from life at The Way as inconspicuously as I could and enrolled in college courses at a nearby branch of Ohio State. Beginning with freshman composition, the sorting process started, and I read and read and read. Starved intellectually, I devoured every teaching and sought out my teachers and fellow students for many an after-class discussion. The Way's propaganda and confusion slowly ebbed away. I kept a journal. Gradually my mind calmed down and focused so I could question thoughtfully and slowly.

Years later, when I entered The Hamilton Holt School at Rollins College, I relearned something I had neglected for so many years in The Way – the art of critical thinking, the skill that Dr. Cook was so effectively modeling in the classroom. Dr. Cook sits down. The class waits, some students fidget, some stare out the window with me. I prop my elbow on the table and lean my head in my hand.

“Well,” I say, “I guess it all depends. How does Plato define happiness?”

“Good question!” Dr. Cook shouts. He smacks his hand down on the table. “That’s exactly what we’re going to find out in the rest of the book.” A huge grin spreads across his face and the tension in the room blows right away. I nod, my classmates murmur to each other, and Dr. Cook gives out next week’s assignment.

2015 Update

This memoir, in the genre of nonfiction, was first published in *Shifting Gears: Small Startling Moments In and Out of the Classroom*. Red Pepper Press. Winter Park, Florida. 2004. Edits have been made to this copy.

Charlene – After I resigned from the Way’s Research Team in the summer of 1986, I preferred to leave The Way then, but due to the three-year work commitment that my husband and I made when we joined the staff in 1984, I went to work in the Child Care Department. But after discovering what was, in my opinion, gross negligence in the safety of the children, I resigned and got severely reprimanded for being critical. After that, my assigned jobs included washing cars and sewing draperies, which I did part-time while attending college at the branch campus of Ohio State University in Lima, Ohio.

In August 1987, my family and I left Headquarters, moved back to Florida, and broke our association with The Way. In 1991 my marriage disintegrated into divorce. In 1994 I graduated *summa cum laude* from Rollins College with a degree in English and afterwards worked as a technical writer for many years. In 2002 I married Dr. Hoyt L. Edge, now a professor emeritus of Philosophy at Rollins College. My poetry has been published and heard on public radio.

As of March 2015, I am making final revisions to a memoir about my years in The Way.

Alan – In August 1986, he and his family left Ohio and he resumed his teaching career.

Gertrude – In August 1985, after completing her work assignment on the Concordance, she left

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headquarters.

Bernita Jess (her real name) – Sadly, she passed away in 2012. Her involvement with The Way began in the 1960s. She maintained a small library of Aramaic manuscripts and taught The Way Corps some Syriac. She was a student of George Lamsa who had convinced Dr. Wierwille that the original New Testament was written in Aramaic. During my second year of Way Corps training (1972-1973) Dr. Wierwille assigned me to work with Bernita. Later, in 1976-1977, I worked with her again at The Way headquarters. Our connection prompted my assignment to the Research Department in 1984.

The Interlinear for the Peshitta New Testament – This became like another person to some of us. This work is connected by a numbering system to the Concordance, which we published in 1985. Since Alan was not permitted to finish the interlinear translation before or after he left, it was completed by another Way Corps grad. Some of Alan's translation was changed in some instances.

Rev. Walter Cummins – Walter left The Way a few years after I did. To my knowledge he continues to teach and publish Fundamentalist Biblical studies which he began learning at the age of 16 directly from Dr. Wierwille. He was related to Dr. Wierwille by way of his mother's marriage to Dr. Wierwille's brother, Harry. More information about Walter Cummins is on the Internet.

Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille – Wierwille, who died in 1985, according to many testimonies is shown to have been guilty of extreme abuse of power, in particular sexual abuse of women. One such first-person account is written by Kristen Skedgell in her memoir, *Losing The Way*, Bay Tree Publishing, 2008. <http://www.losingtheway.com>

It also has been shown that much of Wierwille's research is plagiarized. The most prominent example is, *Receiving the Holy Spirit Today*, which he copied in large portions from J.E. Stiles publication, *The Gift of the Holy Spirit*. He also used other men's Bible teachings in the PFAL class and other publications without crediting his sources. More information about Wierwille is on the Internet.

Rev. L. Craig Martindale – In 1986, Craig's presidency of The Way was threatened by a Way Corps graduate from the early 80s named Rev. Chris Geer (his real name), who had been Dr. Wierwille's driver and personal bodyguard. After 1982, Geer conducted Way Corps training in Gartmore, Scotland. In March 1986, during a Way Corps meeting at Way headquarters in Ohio, Geer read a document he wrote, titled, *The Passing of a Patriarch*. I was at that meeting. He claimed it was Dr. Wierwille's last testament about failures by the ministry's board of trustees, including Craig, and other leaders including Wierwille's own son. Geer's document caused The Way to lose many members. Some started offshoot groups and formed non-profit organizations, recycling Wierwille's teachings.

In 2000, Craig Martindale's presidency of The Way ended when he faced his second law suit for alleged sexual harassment. More information about Craig is on the Internet.

GreaseSpot Café - An Internet site where former followers post discussions about their Way experiences. My story, *An Affinity for Windows*, is posted there, as well as my article, *Nostalgia*
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for *TWI Research Raises Questions*. <http://www.greasespotcafe.com/main2/editorial/editorial-items/nostalgia.html>

The Passing of the Patriarch, and other news material about The Way ministry, is posted there: <http://www.greasespotcafe.com/main2/waydale/waydale-miscellaneous/passing-of-the-patriarch.html>.

Other sources of Way history include:

1. *The Cult That Snapped – A Journey into The Way International*, by Karl Kahler, 1999. Karl's journalistic personal story and events in The Way during 1980 – 1987. www.ex-way.com
2. *The Way: Living In Love* by Elena S. Whiteside. American Christian Press. 1972. In my view this is propaganda written to promote The Way. It includes first-hand accounts of Victor Paul Wierwille, Walter J. Cummins, and others including me, Charlene (pages 142-149). I regret being used to promote The Way.
3. Information compiled by John Juedes, a Protestant minister, at: http://www.precastconcrete.org/~messiah7/tw_reviews.htm
4. List of major splinter groups run by former Way members: http://www.precastconcrete.org/~messiah7/tw_splintergroups.htm

The Way International™ – Currently maintains its non-profit status and continues operating under its third president, Rosalie Rivenbark. Names of classes and programs have been changed in recent years but their content is still based on Wierwille's interpretations, plagiarized sources such as E. W. Bullinger, J. E. Stiles, and B. G. Leonard, and his fundamentalist approach to the Bible. www.theway.com