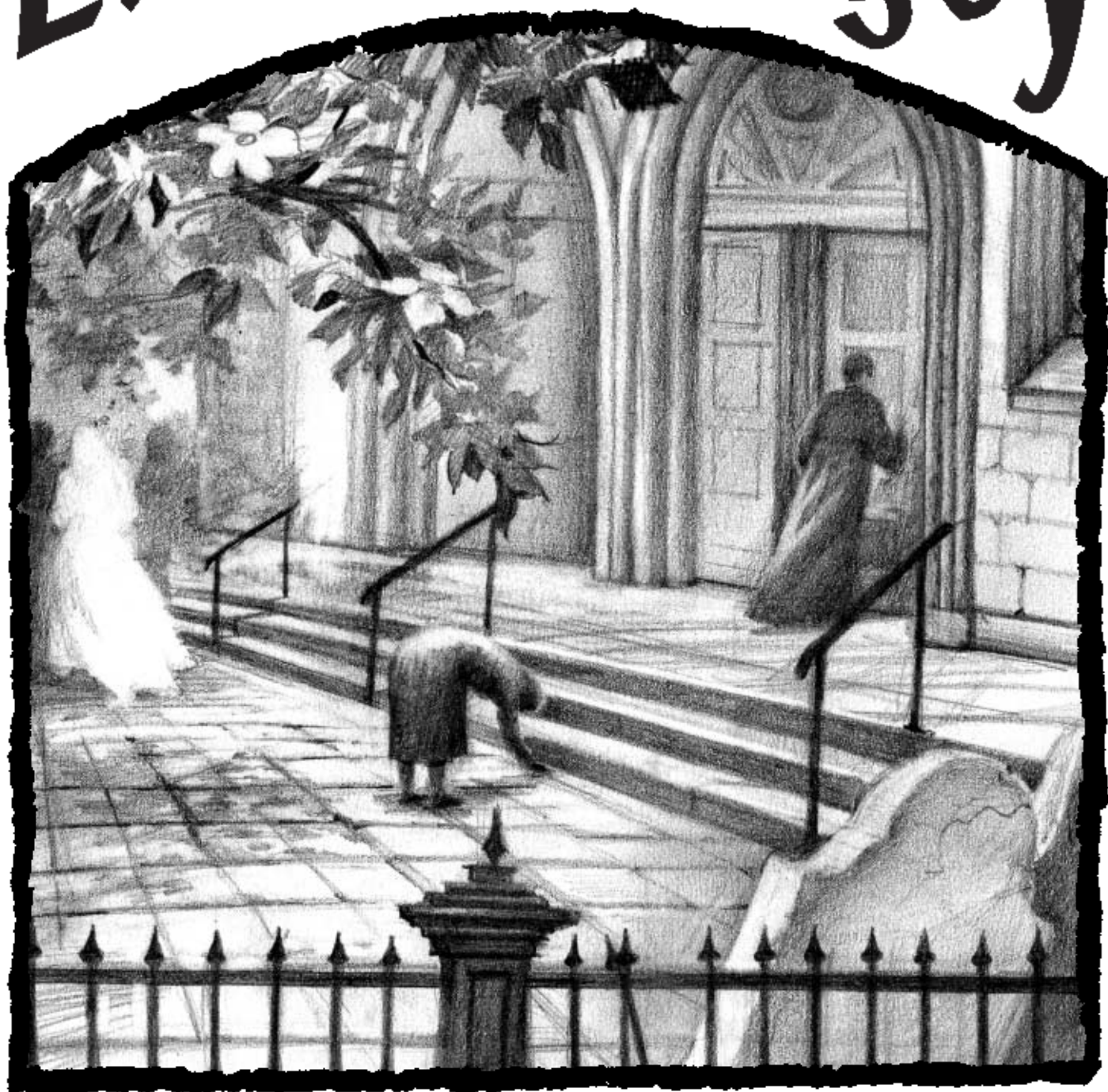


Eleanor Rigby

FREE



and all the
LONELY PEOPLE

*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all come from?*

Today, as I was walking along the way, I saw her again. Yes, there she is ... I saw her yesterday, too. And perhaps, almost certainly, I will see her tomorrow. She's always somewhere. She haunts me. I turn the corner ... there she is ... Eleanor.

As I reach for my box of Cheerios in the air-conditioned supermarket, I hear them singing about her on the Muzak ... Eleanor ... Eleanor Rigby. I do not escape her.

Sometimes she fools me with disguises, and at first I do not realize it is really her. She dresses like the teller at my bank; she talks politely and smiles. And then I catch that familiar look in her eyes and I realize ... it's her ... it's Eleanor.

Or sometimes at a party, everyone seems so happy ... she's the center of the crowd, talking loudly and laughing, but then she turns her back for a moment and I catch a glimpse of that look on her face and I realize again ... it's Eleanor ... she's wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door ... she's trying to be someone else again. Sometimes she may even fool me completely and I never realize that I am talking with her. She has many faces...

Perhaps you've noticed her, too. Perhaps you have caught a glimpse of her pale, sad face peering at you from behind her curtains as you passed her home. Perhaps you know her. Does she haunt you, too? Maybe your own name is "Eleanor Rigby" but you're too ashamed to admit it. Many of us were, too.

The really important thing is this – we have a message for Eleanor. If you see her, can you please tell her this: there is a home for her, if she wants to find it...

Our doors are always open. Our addresses and phone numbers are on the inside back cover.

Who is Eleanor Rigby?



*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all belong?*

standing in her place, and Buddy would have been just as cordial. The dog is the end of the line.

Loneliness is the Ten Year Old Girl

*"Buddy" came up wagging
his tail. Deep down
she knew he'd wag for
anyone. She could have
been Hitler standing
there, and "Buddy"
would have been as
cordial.*

Loneliness is when you're a high school student, pacing through the halls, carrying books you don't need – at least you don't need them for your classes. Finally, you've developed something to do that looks busy and involved, cleverly disguised as one of the students. Just keep looking straight ahead, past the whispers and comments. You just know they're about you. But you don't care about them. You can't care.

Loneliness is being a divorcee, peering, crying through the wire fence surrounding a kindergarten playground. Inside, your five-year-old son plays in the sand, unaware of your presence. You had been denied custody. Visiting day isn't until Sunday. What good is a Sunday visit in his little world? He's hurt and bitter towards you, and you're to blame. There he is, 100 feet away, and you've lost him. You pull your coat up closer around you and turn to go, fingering the iron grillwork as you slowly disappear. Loneliness is separation and alienation. It comes from being self-centered. I grew up self-centered, and I brought upon myself all the loneliness I am writing about. But there is someone who paid for my self-centered past. His name is Yahshua, a friend to even those who don't know how to be a friend. He is making a friend out of me. *e*

Donna

*Yahshua is the Hebrew name of the Son of God. The footnote to Matthew 1:21 in the NIV New Testament reads: *Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua.* In Hebrew, as in old English, there is no "J" sound, so the name is more accurately rendered *Yahshua*.

Loneliness is the ten-year-old girl, pasting herself against the outside wall of a concrete school building at recess, hoping the bell would ring so she can go inside where her desk awaits her. In the classroom it wouldn't be so obvious that she's alone as it is when she's outside on the crowded playground.

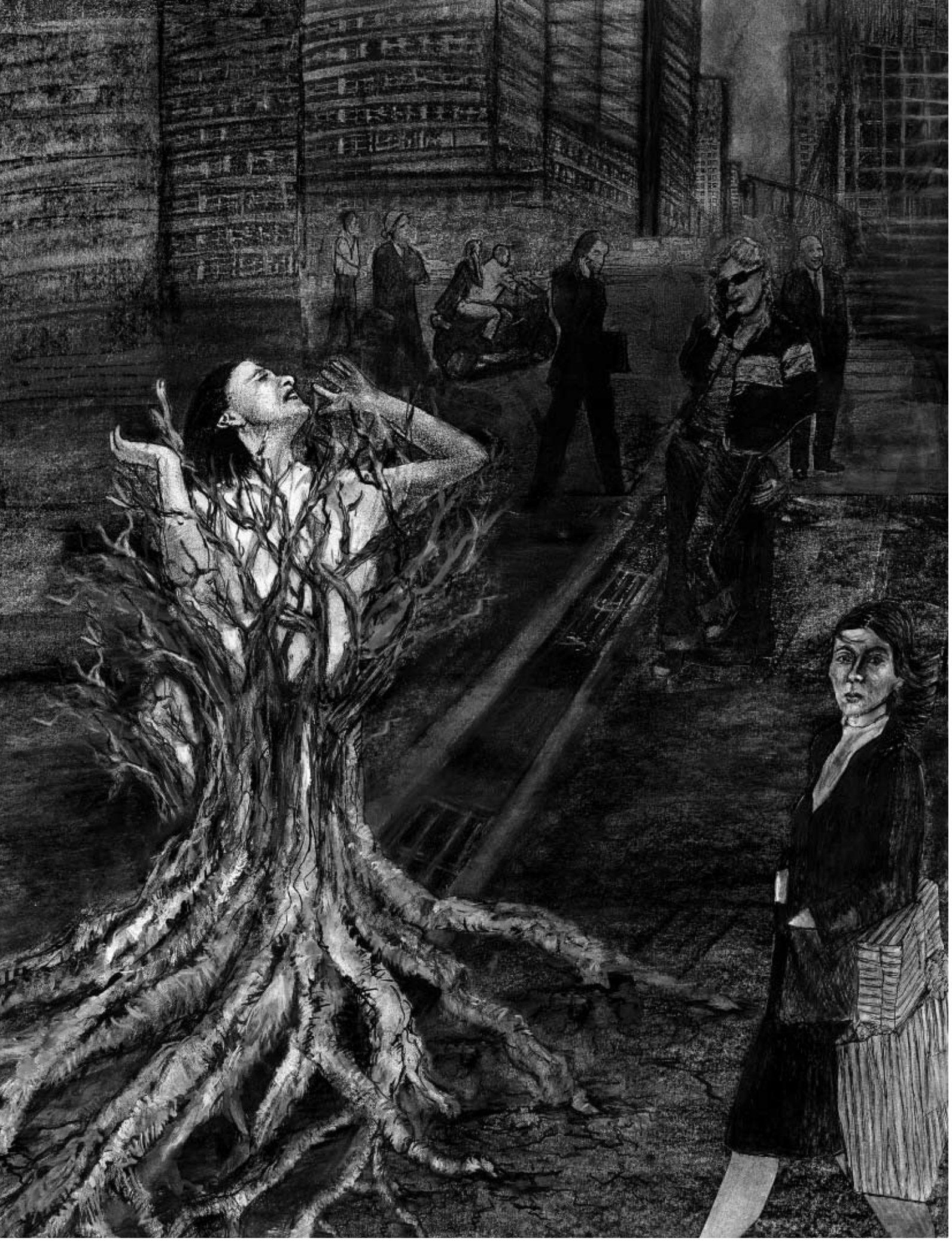
The bell rings — relief for a while. From her desk she watches the clock, hoping for the lunch bell to save her from an even more obvious exposure as a failure in math.

Lunch comes — relief for a while. She arrives at the cafeteria with a book to read, making her isolated position at the table more graceful –

less conspicuous. She reads the same page for half an hour.

After school, avoiding main streets, she talks to herself, but it only sounds like she's talking to herself. Actually her mind is in another place, another time. In her fantasy, she can become the brilliant conversationalist most asked for at any party. She's now a movie star, twirling around in a sparkly dress. Whee! — she stops, looks around, jolted into reality. She hopes no one is looking.

Home, safe at last, she can't wait to talk to her friend, the only one who seems to understand. The family beagle "Buddy" awaits, tail wagging. Deep down she knows that he'd wag for anyone. It could have been Hitler



*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all belong?*

Roots of Loneliness

*If a tree is known by its fruit and it is fed by its root,
then what feeds loneliness?*

It was once common for Americans to spend their entire life within twenty miles of where they were born. Everyone knew everyone else in the small towns that most Americans lived in. Kind people spoke to one another, and the unkind gossiped. It was a no-frills life without a great deal of intellectual stimulation. Life was based on the hard work it took to survive, and maybe, if things went your way, you could get ahead. Those who shirked their work were considered lazy, not unfortunate. The actions you took and the consequences you suffered were your own fault, not society's. Friendships were deep and the help people gave one another was very real.

On the other hand, if you broke the moral codes that ruled society, you suffered rejection. Sexual immorality, lying, using other people, all had bitter consequences. You were no longer respectable; instead, you were an outcast unless somehow you could make it right. So everyone had some visible, obvious restraint coming from

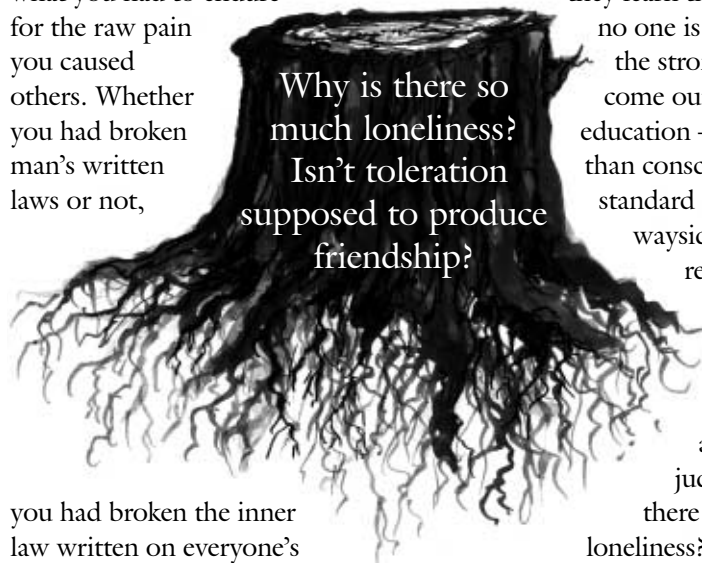
society. Hurtful and unacceptable behavior was frowned upon. In fact, people would avoid your eyes or refuse to give you the time of day. It was almost as if you had died. It was what you had to endure for the raw pain you caused others. Whether you had broken man's written laws or not,

you had broken the inner law written on everyone's conscience. That law is old and true. It does not change like man's laws do.

Many things have changed since the American Frontier disappeared. People are vastly more mobile and

basic relationships aren't what they used to be. They bare their souls on the Internet, but can hardly talk to each other face to face. Many go to school for a quarter of their life. There they learn that nothing is solid, no one is sincere, and only the strong survive. They come out calling it "higher" education — higher even than conscience. Every standard has fallen by the wayside. But is that really true?

If those old standards are gone and people now accept one another without judging, then why is there so much loneliness? Isn't toleration supposed to produce friendship? No one faces rejection for premarital sex, adultery, greed and lying anymore, do they? In the past, the isolation of one person stood out. Today, in this "free" society, it's rare to see anybody



Why is there so much loneliness?
Isn't toleration supposed to produce friendship?

*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all come from?*

shunned for his immoral or even bizarre behavior. We are indeed free, unhindered by the disapproval of a healthy conscience. But it's really only a façade, a fake front for an entire society of isolated individuals.

This loneliness is a powerful testimony that the old standards of right and wrong really have not changed. As obsolete as it may seem, people still react to the pain of being used and they still feel shame about using others. Our actions have consequences, and however much we're told that the guilt we feel is unreal, it is very real. It is the consequence of sin. Yes, old-fashioned sin. Loneliness comes from guilt, and guilt comes from sin, and it all results in death. In this life, people can experience death. You can look all around you and see that many are feeling its weight. Death is not a state of nothingness, but the actual separation of spirit and body.

When someone dies, his body is cast in the grave, but his spirit waits alone in utter darkness; he is inescapably alone, with only the excuses and condemnations of his conscience to keep him company. Death, then, is a lot like the streets of our cities. Only on them people's spirits are trapped, not in death, but in the quiet despair of alienation. Unable to escape over the self-made walls of mistrust and fear, many have lost hope of actually

reaching out to another human being and finding a true friend.

Instead each new person is a threat, or an object of lust, or



someone to scorn, or someone to envy, or all of the above. Even friends — you know about friends. They are the groups of people walking down the streets laughing and talking together. They have been everywhere and if you look into their eyes, you can tell they've gotten nowhere. The pain of broken relationships clouds everyone's memories. The time spent with friends is etched on a background of loneliness. Nothing seems to do away with the grim

secrets most people so obviously carry — "I'm not loved, there's no one I can trust, and there's no one I can love."

Every lie, every cheat, every act of unmarried sex, adultery and homosexuality actually make you unable to trust others. At the same time, others can no longer trust you. Sin is a double-edged sword, severing the ties between you and others and ruining your inner worth and dignity. It is a fatal process, the very reason why people die. It is why everyone on this earth has ever died, except for one man. His name is Yahshua. He is the only one who didn't die for His own sins. He never knew loneliness until He tasted death for our sake, taking on the full measure of the agony of death so that we wouldn't have to.

Many people say they know Him, but their lonely, separate lives betray them. Those who truly know Him are no longer lonely. In fact, He makes a home for the lonely and gives them true friends. He would like to invite you in and restore your full dignity, the inner worth that you have in His eyes. You can come to an end of guilt, and then come to an end of your loneliness. In the new life He has made, every wrong, perverted, and hurtful way can be removed from you. He will do this for all who cry out to Him. Everyone else has to go it alone, which is the very essence of loneliness. And loneliness is the very taste of death. ☩

*Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice in a church
where a wedding has been; lives in a dream*

Marriage Is Not the Cure

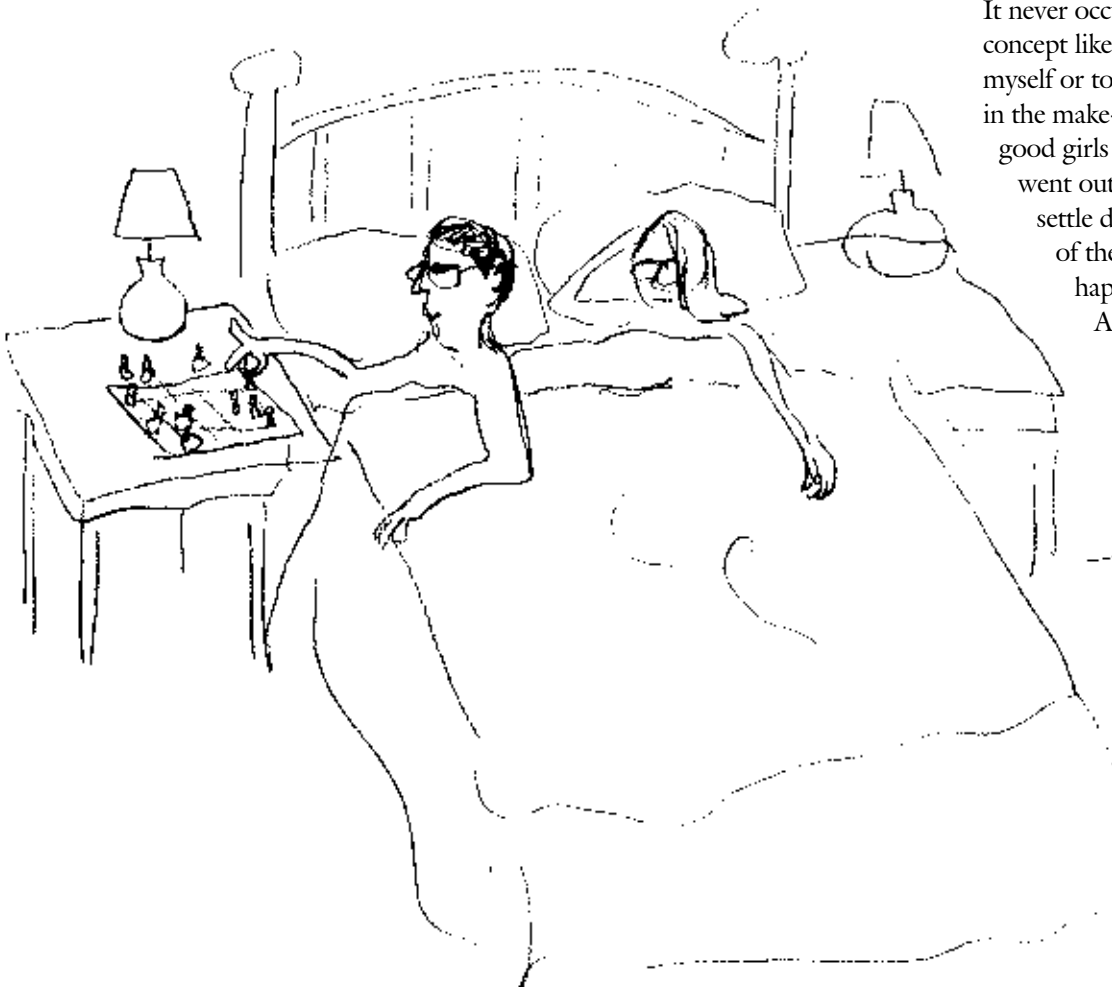
The sexual revolution had been sweeping across America for some time. It even reached the small town where I lived. To be honest, few of us valued our innocence, and our virginity was no badge of honor.

It was actually a source of embarrassment. So most of my friends treated it like any embarrassing thing — they got rid of it as soon as possible.

The revolution seemed to be passing me by, however. In part because of my shyness, I was continually amazed at how my friends convinced girls to have sex with them. It never occurred to me to apply a concept like a double standard to myself or to my friends. We still lived in the make-believe world where the good girls didn't, but the ones we went out with did. Someday we'd settle down and marry one of the good girls and live happily ever after.

As I said, it was a make-believe world.

There was something besides my shyness that held me back. Try as I might, I couldn't hide the fact that I knew it was wrong. If I was to take my part in the sexual revolution — and so far I felt very left out and deprived — I was going to have to deal with this "right or wrong" thing. There had to be some way to take away my personal responsibility.



*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all come from?*

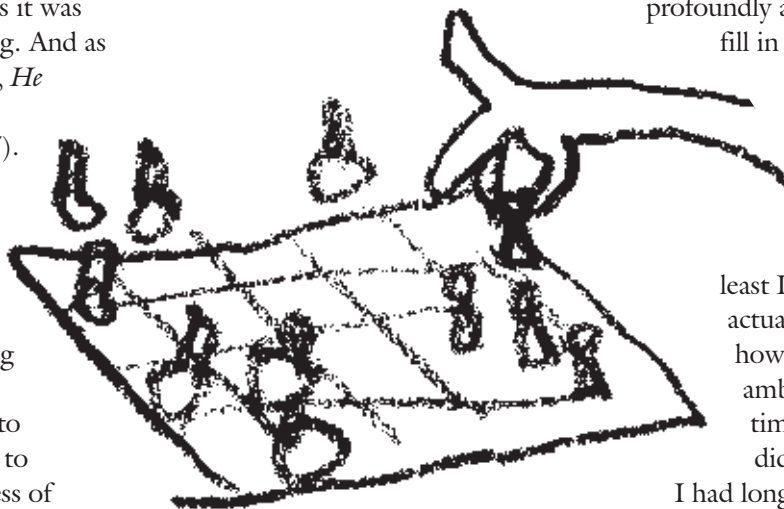
Maybe there was a liberated woman who would sweep away all my inhibitions. My conscience could then shift the blame onto her and off of me. It was a pretty tall order, but as it was my only hope, I kept looking. And as an old and wise saying goes, *He who searches after evil, it will come to him* (Proverbs 11:27).

I didn't quite find her. I told the one I did meet that I loved her. I wanted to mean it, and she wanted to believe it. As I had no intention of marrying her, I was nothing but a hypocrite. I was too young to have ever applied that word to myself, however. The dullness of alcohol allowed us to slip by our screaming consciences, or so we tried to tell ourselves. The charade of marriage we played — without its commitment — soon came to an end.

Our friendship had no power to survive our "passionate" romance. Since it was painful to be around each other, we chose not to. We ended up lonelier than when we started, cut off from yet one more human being. And not surprisingly, from one another's family and friends as well. People have this gut-level response about their friends being used that is hard to get past. I didn't learn my lesson however. What was different was that my conscience bothered me a lot less. I had faced the issue squarely and I knew I didn't want to change. Anyone can silence his conscience.

In spite of my attempts to keep the word love out of future relationships, some significant part of me became attached to each woman I knew. That was obvious each time I suffered through the

pain of breaking up. Wasn't free love supposed to be without cost? How come it hurt so much to break up?



It always took me by surprise, the fiery pain of another failed relationship. Like a burn that takes a long time to stop hurting, my life would be a haze until the scar tissue had formed on my heart. Then I'd be ready to try again. As scars lack feeling, it was easy to forget the permanent damage they cover over.

Finally, I met the woman of my dreams. I fit hers pretty well, too. We

married, had children, and I'd thought we would live happily ever after. We'd followed similar paths in life and we'd both come out profoundly affected. I'm sure you can

fill in the details. Selfishness comes in many forms, but the worst is when you don't even know you're being that way. This was a woman I did love, at

least I thought I did. The actual practice of love, however, interfered with my ambitions and demanded the time and energy I already didn't have enough of.

I had long since learned to put relationships second and myself first. However glittery it once looked, the sexual revolution did nothing but legitimize selfishness. Being excessively or exclusively concerned with yourself pushes others away. So right where I sought refuge from loneliness, it had followed me. Or rather, I had brought it with me. The walls around me weren't destroyed by my marriage certificate. It was just a piece of paper. It had no power to change my heart.

That was what desperately needed changing. Selfishness had captured the core of my being because, really, it was easier that way. The costs of friendship, of commitment, and of love, were all too high. And if people were willing to meet my needs without a corresponding return on my part, all the better. I was living for myself — wasn't everybody? Isn't self number one today? The sight of my weeping wife pleading for help and compassion under the load of the house, the children, the diapers, and — if she would have said it — my lack of affection

What must I do to be saved from this hell of loneliness? I am lonely — I need a woman. I am lonely — I need a man. But when a man has a woman or a woman has a man just for the sake of a physical relationship, loneliness persists. Even if a man and woman join together in a marriage, if God is not in it, loneliness persists.

*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all belong?*

almost made me see how selfish I was toward her. “What was going on here?” I wondered to myself. I never saw Mom treating Dad that way. I put up a strong front and let her know those were her responsibilities. Three times we came to this standoff until she stopped asking for my help. My world intact and my hard heart untouched, I never thought of what bitterness my callous answers may have buried in her soul. Selfish people usually don’t think of such things. They are too selfish.

Time passed and we settled down into a normal existence. There were times I sensed that things weren’t right, but I could see well enough to know that everyone else was in the same boat we were in. Even at church on Sunday, where everyone was so nice, it wasn’t hard to catch the strained looks and the brief, whispered arguments. What went on at home in their lives I couldn’t tell. But I could guess. The way they avoided my eyes matched the way I avoided theirs.

Several years later, we met some people who weren’t so easy to dismiss. As we got to know them, I came to an unsettling realization: they had something I didn’t. When they looked me in the eyes there wasn’t challenge or suspicion or calculation. All those things I knew well. There was compassion, and that made me uncomfortable. Me, need compassion? Me?

It took me a long time to admit the obvious. They were right. I was

a hurt, fearful, lonely man. I had done many things that I was ashamed of. The memories of them were vivid

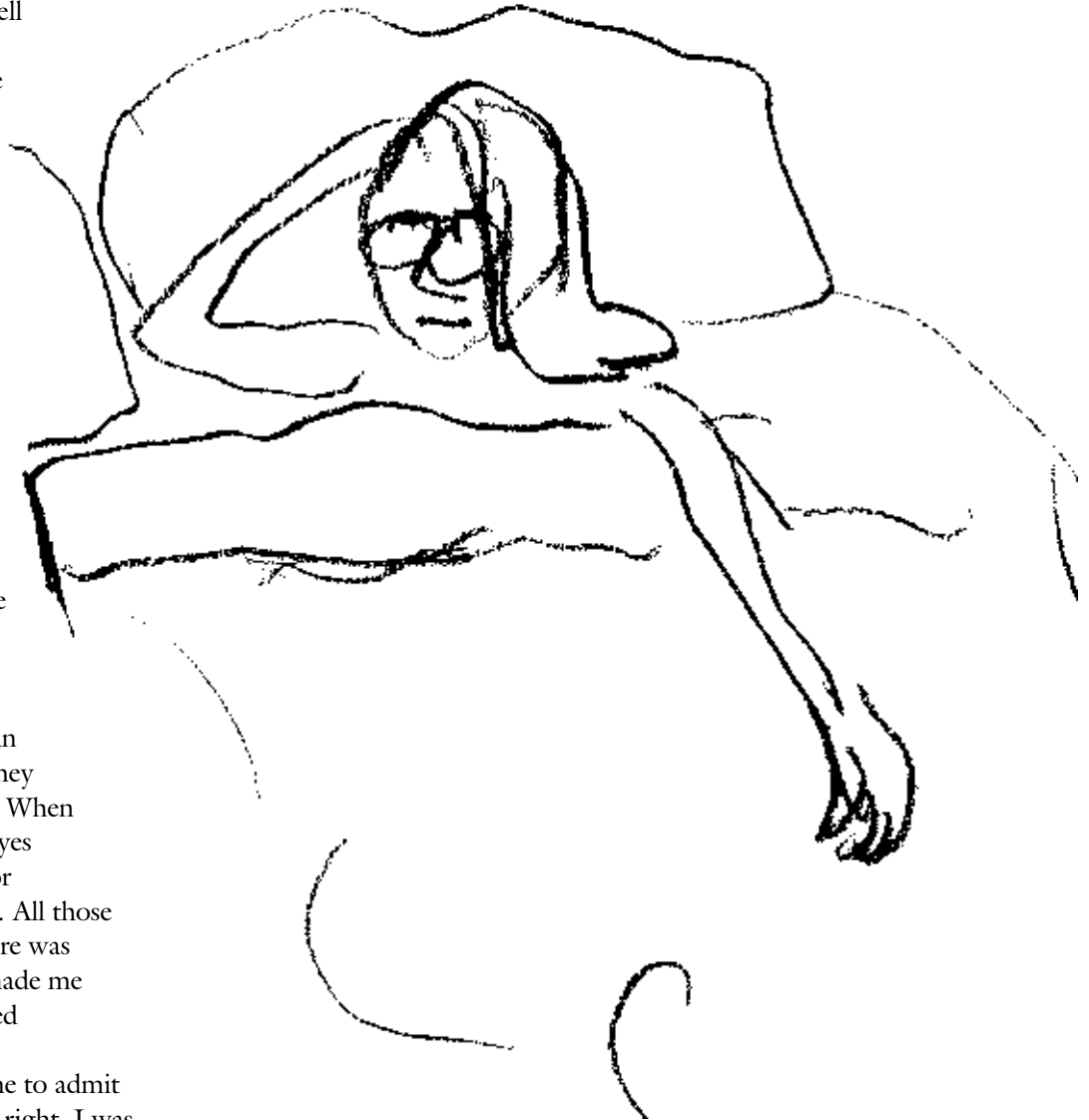
So I surrendered to the Savior — not the one I heard about in church, but the one who dwells in His

*If love is supposed to be without cost,
why does it hurt so much to break up?*

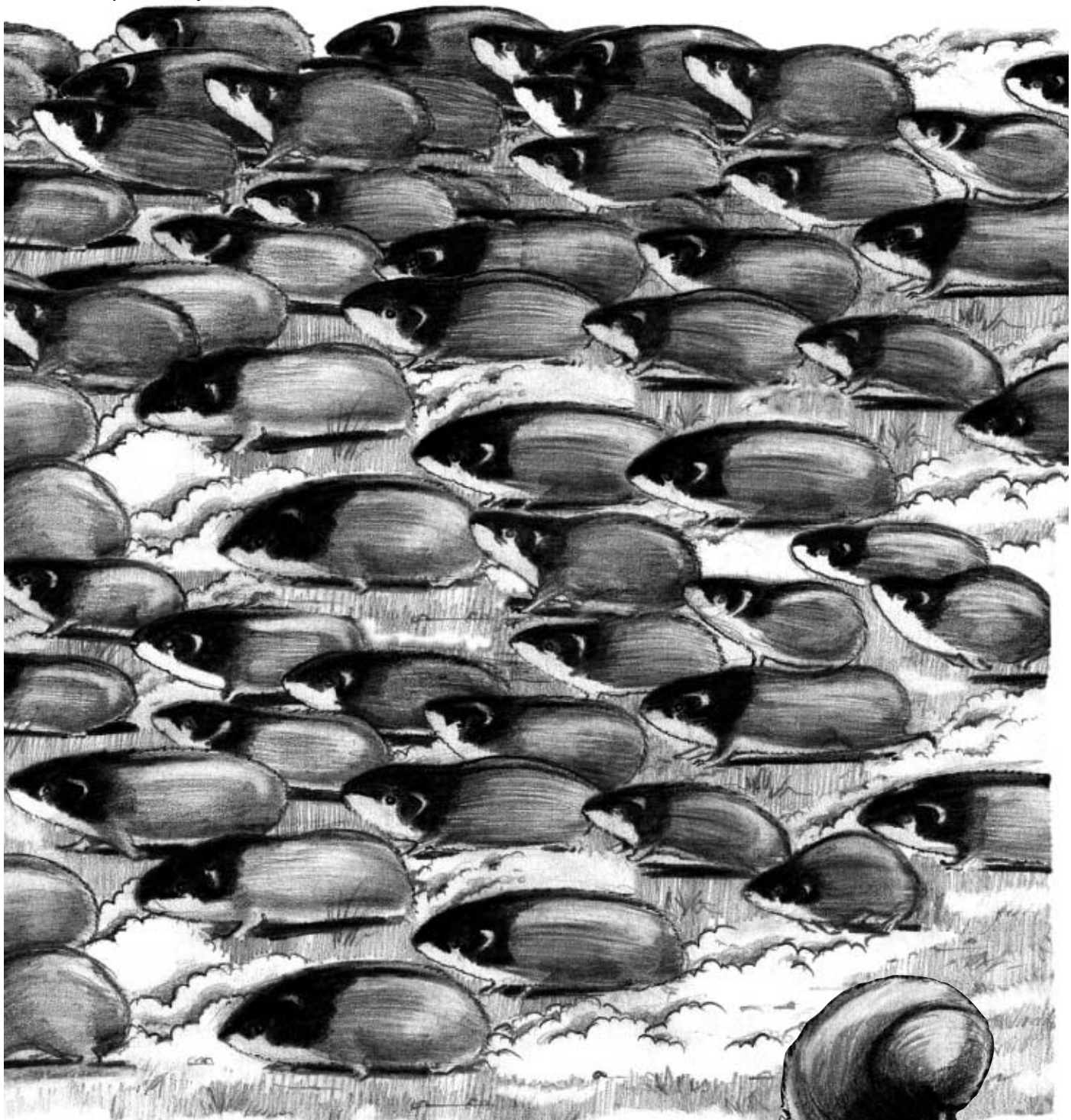
and stinging. Yet here I was, being offered that for which men ache — a second chance, a clean slate. I couldn’t deny what I saw in their lives nor what I saw in mine.

people. I was actually forgiven. It is the most wonderful thing that can ever happen to anyone. It sets you free to love. That is the cure to loneliness. ☺

Kevin



*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all come from?*



LEMMINGS

*Being left out is a terrible feeling.
But there is a sense of security in going with the crowd,
at least for a while.*



Yahshua

It is twilight, the time between the lights. The edge of the sky fades into violet, and above it hangs a veil of deep blue. Behind both waits a heaven of black fast approaching, and the second set of lights: the small, dim stars of evening.

In a tomb, a man's body is left to rot. Three nights drag by. Three mornings come and then three long days. Now it is twilight again and his spirit returns to his body. Death flees away like a frightened crow.

Suddenly his eyes flutter open. His nostrils fill with air. His first sharp breath rushes into his chest like a flood of fire. It's charged with the

sweetness of twilight, the cool of the evening, the delicious fragrance of plants growing in a garden. Like a sword, it cuts the strangling noose of lifelessness. Soon every cell in his body is surging with new life. A smile fills his lips and well-being springs up from his guts, up the entire length of his chest and escapes his parted lips like the beginning of a triumphant cry.

He sits up, bolts up, throws off the blood-stained linen. The newborn power of life fills his every movement. It wells up like a fountain as his feet swing down from the rock and touch earth. He is on his feet, standing, walking, springing into the twilight.

Did you see his eyes when they first opened, after his eyelids had flung off the air of the tomb? His first glance pierced upwards through the graying light and the sullen rock around him. It broke out into the violet and blue of the twilight until his sight captured the trembling, unseen universe beyond. He saw triumph. He saw death's cold limbs shake like twigs in a gale. He saw the fleeing serpent pinned head-down beneath a staff. And the stamp of a heel crushing its head. Little wonder he smiled. Or leaped. Or danced. Or shouted. Or praised his God. Or went to meet those he loved. Wouldn't you? ☞

*Waits by the window, wearing a face that she keeps
in a jar by the door; Who is it for?*



IT WAS OLD NOW, AND ITS SHRIVELED INSIDE PINCHED AND SCRATCHED HIS STINGING FACE. BUT AS HE GLANCED IN THE FULL-LENGTH MIRROR, HE COULD SEE ITS OUTSIDE STILL PEACEFULLY SMILING. EVER SINCE HE PUT IT ON, IT HAD BEEN SMILING EXACTLY THAT WAY.

When he had arrived at the party and someone had handed him the mask, he had politely declined, saying he didn't care for it. But someone in a huge grinning mask said that if he didn't put it on people might not think he was enjoying the party. And if they thought him unhappy they might even ask him to leave.

At first the mask seemed tolerable. It felt good, looked real, and made him feel like one of the crowd. Once behind it, it didn't matter whether he liked the party or anyone at the party. Nobody would know.

But as the party progressed, he noticed all the masks beginning to look more and more alike: smiling, happy, self-satisfied. He glanced in the mirror. Even his own mask was beginning to look that way.

Suddenly he was afraid. What if his mask should slip down in an unguarded moment? What if everyone should discover that behind the mask he wasn't really having fun at all?

He stared at his peaceful, smiling reflection in the mirror. It was nauseating. Behind him some masks were whispering among themselves. A masked voice was saying they should try harder to spread more masks around.

But something inside gnawed at him. Perhaps they wouldn't dismiss him after all. Perhaps, if he took it off, he could start a trend. Perhaps others would follow and they could

all just be themselves again.

He had worn his mask too long already, and it was getting old. Its drying, shrinking inside chafed and pinched his face. Suddenly it lost all meaning. It hadn't changed the real him at all. It was a sham, a façade, a mockery. He would tear it off and throw it away!

He reached for it, no longer caring what anyone else thought or said or did. He despised it. He wanted his face to be his — not some grinning mask. His fingers searched for the string, for the edge — but the string was gone, and he couldn't find where the mask left off and his skin began.

Looking in the mirror, he clutched frantically at the shriveled mold and pulled until his whole face stung and burned in pain. A scream escaped his smiling lips. The mask had grown onto his face. ☞



DEBTOR'S PRISON

You can tell you've arrived
by the menacing presence of loneliness.

By this time you've already gone too far beyond
the boundaries of your conscience to find your way back.

Too many people have been hurt by your self-centered pursuit of pleasure.

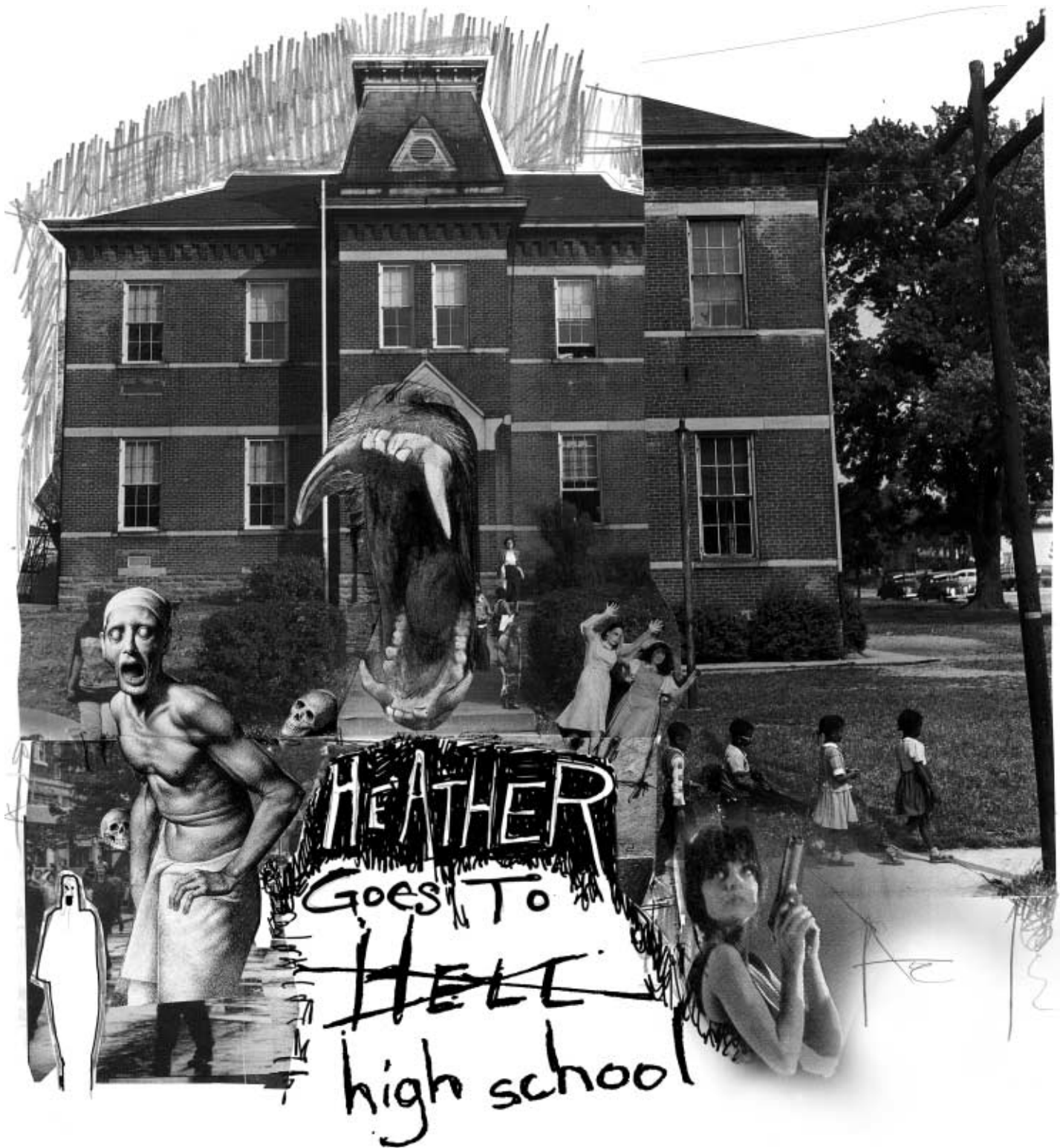
Every selfish act, every bit of cowardice that kept you from standing up and doing
what you knew was right, and every careless, hurtful word has damaged your ability to trust
and be trusted by those around you. The loneliness that results from this is like a debtor's prison.

At one time in history, debtors were thrown into prison when they couldn't pay their debts.

There was no way out unless they paid up, and there was no way to pay up since they were
in prison. They were left to rot in jail unless someone ransomed them. It's the same way with sin
and loneliness. There's no way out unless you pay the full price, and the full price is beyond
your ability to pay. The full price is death. So you live trapped in a life that brings you to death.

There is no other price that can make right all the things you have done wrong. Nothing else
can release you from the selfishness that causes you to keep on doing the things that push people
away from the core of your being. Ultimately you must acknowledge there is no way out
of the debtor's prison of loneliness.

Unless someone, somewhere, has the key. 🔑



LONELINESS HAS GOT TO BE ONE OF THE WORST THINGS A PERSON CAN EXPERIENCE. It aches and gnaws at your innermost being, not being loved or having anyone to love. I've come to this place many times in my life, and have done many things to try to fill the void.

You could say I had a typical

American childhood. I lived with my parents, and my grandparents and relatives lived close by. But when I was ten, my parents divorced. Mom, wanting her own life, moved out. My parents decided that it would be best for my younger sister and brother and me to live with my dad. He had a steady job and seemed more stable than mom.

It was like a nightmare. I'd wake up at night expecting that it had all been a bad dream and imagining that my parents were back together. Lots of other kids had parents who were divorced, but I couldn't believe it had happened to my parents, too. I closed up. I felt so empty inside. I had no one to talk to. I wanted and needed my mother, like

*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all belong?*

every young girl does. I needed her to help me through the turmoil of growing up, to help me understand what life was really about. There were so many changes that were happening to me. But she wasn't there, so basically, I had to go it alone. I started drifting further from everyone at home. They all said that I was so quiet and never looked happy.

Then when I was twelve, my dad got drunk and broke down, telling me he wasn't my real father. I already felt like I was the black sheep of my family and this only confirmed it. I began to see all the real differences between my sister and me; my grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and other relatives I'd known all of my life were not even related to me at all. My arguments with my sister often ended with her yelling at me to go back where I came from, that I didn't belong with them. I felt so very empty, and alone. I felt like it was me against the whole world. The only one I truly belonged to was a mother who didn't want me. Somewhere I had a father I'd never met.

My time came when I had to go to high school. I really dreaded lunchtime, when hundreds of kids sat laughing and talking at the tables while I watched and said nothing. It made it clear how alone I really was. The whole scene made me sick. When the bell rang, I could see myself in some shoe factory, like it was time to go back to the assembly line.

Then, in the eleventh grade my opportunity for change came. My cousin transferred to my school. He made friends instantly and with people I'd only admired from a distance — the cool, progressive clique. Amazingly, I was welcomed by them. I actually felt happy. I was hanging out with the coolest people in school. I had a new identity, a new look, new friends. I felt accepted.

Not that my loneliness was cured. It just didn't hurt as much ... but it was still there. Things were pretty good

when I was with my friends, but in class I was the same isolated, insecure person I had always been. I would count the minutes for the bell to ring so I could meet up with them again.

With this new scene came alcohol, drugs, and sex. It seems as if this was all we lived for. Our whole life was centered around the weekend. I hated being sober because I hated the reality of my life. I was lonely and miserable, and wanted love and affection so badly.



Being wasted helped me “open up,” be friendly and not so intimidated by people. Sometimes I would even sleep with someone I didn't know very well or never met before. So many times I gave myself to someone in the hope of finding love, care, or just having a good friend.

I never found what I was looking for. I was used so many times, and then began to use others as objects of gratification. Really, I just wanted to be loved. But not only did no one love me, I didn't know how to love back.

Because I had violated my conscience so many times in such serious ways, I wasn't able to have deep relationships. I was shallow and insecure. I was so afraid to open up, to let people see how I really was. I didn't want to keep going from person to person, but something about being held by

another human being gave me something I couldn't find anywhere else — a sense of security, a feeling that I was loved. When the moment was over, though, so was the “love,” and loneliness was twisting my heart again.

So many times I gave my entire being to someone, and the next day we had nothing more than a passing “Hi” for each other, or worse, we never even saw each other again. Where was hope for a real relationship?

I knew I was absolutely wrong in what I was doing. My conscience screamed at me in drunken emotional depressions where I would grieve and agonize over everything I'd done, feeling so lonely, so desperate, so dirty.

Meanwhile, all my friends were telling me everything was okay. “Don't get so upset ... it isn't so bad.” They knew that if they told me the truth it would be true for them, too.

How I longed to not do these things anymore! I just wanted to be with people who loved me for me. But how could anyone love me for who I was, after all the things I'd done? Who was me, anyway? And where are friends who will tell you the truth about yourself and still keep on loving you?

This was not an easy story for me to write. But at least it's been made easier by how it ends. As the years went by, I made an amazing discovery: I found some people who are devoting themselves to become the kind of friends I always wanted. I learned from them that there is a way to become clean, and start life all over again on the good foundation of love. It's the kind of love I always wanted but couldn't find. Now I'm with those people and we're learning how to be friends from the most accomplished friend of all time. His name is Yahshua. He's the author of friendship. He is taking someone as wounded as I was and teaching me how to be a friend like him.

Now I'm no longer lonely.

I'm loved. *Heather*



DYING

in the Church

MANY ARE DYING IN THE CHURCHES OF CHRISTIANITY TODAY. PERHAPS YOU ARE ONE OF THEM. I WAS.

I sat in a pew, Sunday after Sunday, year after year, listening to sermons. I would try to focus my mind on what I was hearing, sometimes with delight, sometimes with an overwhelming tiredness, almost always with a desire to surrender my life to God, but not knowing how to

do it. I would get up from my pew, stirred by the words I heard and the final hymn I tried to sing with all my heart. Sometimes I'd make my way to the front to "re-dedicate my life to Christ," but usually I'd make my way to the rear to shake hands with the pastor and to greet as many people as I could before plunging headlong into another busy week. My resolve to be a different person that week would begin to erode as soon as I stepped out the door of the church. The reality of my life would come crashing down upon me and I would

switch into survival mode, coping as well as I could to hold my marriage together, provide a comfortable living for myself and my family, and maintain my sanity in the process. Who would know that the condition of my private life was such a contradiction to the lofty ideal I embraced each Sunday?

No one would know. I was considered a model Christian in every church I was ever in. My family was considered the model Christian family. I taught Sunday school, led worship, preached in the pulpit, was

Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name; Nobody came.

faithful to tithe, etc. No one knew that I was dying inside. I had everyone fooled except myself, my wife, and the counselors we quietly paid to help us come to terms with our brokenness.

Do you realize that there are millions of people just like me in

Our growing family and our ever-increasing standard of living gave us enough distractions to continue on in quiet desperation.

churches everywhere who convince one another, and even themselves, that they have a “satisfying walk with the Lord”? Yet in fact, in the darkness of their own lives, hidden from their “brothers and sisters,” they harbor all manner of lustful and debased thoughts, gratify their selfish and worldly desires, and take refuge in their careers while neglecting their wives and children. Just like I was, they are dying in their churches. Unable to trust their pastors or Christian friends with the intimate details of their lives, they resort to professional counselors to help them cope with the contradictions in their lives and the resulting havoc in their personal relationships.

It was a long time before I would give in to my wife’s pleading and agree to see a counselor. That was for weak people. From time to time, we would hear about Christian acquaintances of ours who were going through divorces. I would shake my head and wonder how they could consider something so contrary to Scripture. Why didn’t their pastors help them? Why couldn’t the counselors they went to set them aright? Then, my own wife’s quiet desperation began to find a voice and my self-righteous stand began to weaken. If I would not go with her to counseling, would I pay for her to go alone? Shame and insecurity and anger flooded over me.

Why couldn’t she just talk with her friends, or other women in the

church, or even the pastor? She had a couple of friends whom she trusted enough to share her deep struggles with, but they were not in any better place themselves. They urged her to seek professional counseling, just as they were in the habit of doing. As for other women in the church, there

was no foundation of trust there — we hardly knew them. And as for the pastor and his wife, they were our friends and our peers. We didn’t see them as having wisdom or experience beyond our own.

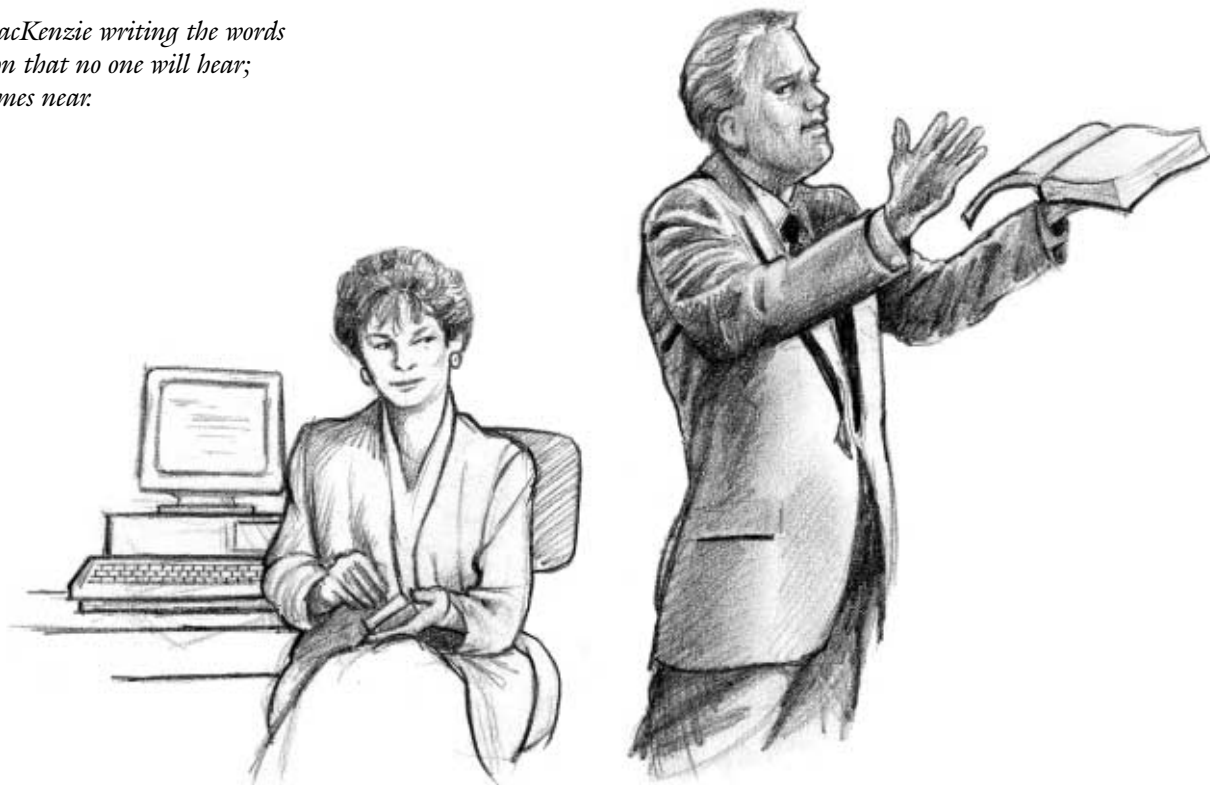
We gutted out the next ten years on some combination of Christian counselors and Christian self-help books. Our hopes were raised and dashed so many times we became numb to our

own pain. Our growing family and our ever-increasing standard of living gave us enough distractions to continue on in quiet desperation.

The first counselor my wife saw was a Christian woman who had her office in downtown Boston in a building owned by one of the larger conservative Evangelical churches. For her time she charged three times my wife’s salary as a Registered Nurse. On her second visit, my wife happened to step into the elevator with her counselor, who coldly ignored her until they arrived at her office. There my wife asked her, “Did you even recognize me in the elevator?” She shrugged off the question and redirected the focus to my wife’s problems. Somehow my wife did not have confidence to continue her therapy with this “sister in Christ.”



*Father MacKenzie writing the words
to a sermon that no one will hear;
No one comes near.*



In the years that followed, we became aware that more and more of our friends were seeing counselors. One dear friend of ours went to seek help for his failing marriage from a man who left the pastoral ministry in his conservative Evangelical church to strike out on his own as a professional counselor. The “care” he received for his hard-earned dollars left him hopeless, his marriage ending in divorce. Shortly after he quit going to this counselor, he learned that the counselor himself was divorcing his wife and had “come out of the closet,” admitting his homosexuality.

Many other Christian friends of ours have had similarly devastating experiences, going to counseling year after year with no relief from their condition. They have become virtually addicted to the counseling itself, so starved are they for deep, honest, and personal relationships. For lack of caring shepherds and trusted friends, they pay self-appointed counselors to hear their confessions and forgive them of their guilt.

These “professionals” sort their “clients” into well-defined categories:

adult children of alcoholics, co-dependent and addictive personalities, victims of sexual abuse and incest, etc. Each receives reasons for his maladies, goes off to the nearest Christian bookstore for the latest book on his condition, joins a “support group” with other broken people who share the same malady, and tries to cope. Another Christian friend of ours learned that she belongs to the Adult Children Of Alcoholics category. She has been faithfully going to her ACOA Support Group for more than six years now, learning more about her problem and meeting more people with problems like hers. She loves it. She loves it to death. She is dying in it.

Shortly after we first met the Twelve Tribes, my wife described the life that we had seen to a Christian counselor she had come to know. She described the simple common life, the good authority, the respectful, obedient, happy children, the similarity to the early church described in the Bible in Acts, chapters 2 and 4. With a resigned look in her eyes, this counselor told my wife that if the church was really being the church, she would be out of a job. My wife

replied that surely there would always be a need for counselors. But this woman insisted that no, if the church were real, there would be no need for her profession. She admitted to being a parasite, living off the pain and suffering of her “brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Like Father MacKenzie, the so-called priests and pastors of Christianity live separate lives, disconnected from the daily lives of the Christians who they try in vain to direct with their weekly sermons. Truly, no one comes near. And like Eleanor Rigby, the Christians in today’s churches learn to put on a mask to hide their inner torment. They cling to memories of stimulating experiences in their churches — weddings, musical events, and presentations of visiting missionaries — in a desperate effort to convince themselves that it is not all a sham. They hold on to the hope that at least some are making it — the Sunday School teachers, the “deacons” or “elders,” the music directors, the pastors — so maybe someday they also will get their lives together. They live in a dream.

But the Christian stars are not

Father MacKenzie wiping the dirt from his hands as he walked from the grave; No one was saved.

making it either. Ten years ago, I attended a “Pastor’s Breakfast” in preparation for a Billy Graham Crusade in Boston. Among the men at my table was the pastor of a large suburban Evangelical church. He was a well-known radio preacher and the author of several popular Christian books on “making it” as a Christian in your marriage, family, and social life. His charisma was immediately evident at our table, and we all felt privileged to be with him. He was the very picture of Christian success. A few months later, his picture was in the papers across America. He had resigned his position, confessing his adulterous relationship with his church secretary. Sadly, this is far from unusual in Christianity today.

The reality is that no one is “making it” in Christianity. All are slipping away into death, clergy and laity alike. Whether or not they have fallen into gross immorality, they are abiding in death because they are not vitally connected to one another. They are divided from one another in countless ways: physically, emotionally, economically, theologically, politically, and so on. They cling desperately to their own independent lives because they do not believe the words of our Master: *Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it* (Luke 9:24). Because they do not lose their own lives, they don’t receive Messiah’s life, which is able to save them. They are not vitally connected to Him; therefore, they dwell in death, cut off from the only source of life.

When we met the Community, we saw the reality of life in Messiah that fifteen years in Christianity had taught us was impossible. We saw ordinary people living together in unity, laying down their lives for each other every day, working together, eating together, teaching their

children, teaching each other, and being healed. They had all given up their independent lives — careers, homes, possessions, opinions, etc. — for the sake of Messiah, and received His life in return. The shepherds among them lived the same life as the rest — open, accountable, and trustworthy. They didn’t become shepherds because they had earned a degree in some institution. They were recognized as shepherds because they had demonstrated their character, their faithfulness, their stability, their wisdom and their love by years of laying down their lives for their brothers and sisters. No one was going to “professional counselors” because their needs were being met in their own households by people who truly loved them.

I was dying in the church — in Christianity — and I knew it. Despite my pride and my unwillingness to give up my Christian “salvation,” I came to see that my intellectualized faith was an empty husk. When divorced from an open and simple life together with others who were living that same life, I could see that my salvation was really no salvation at all. I heard the words of Yahshua from the lips of someone who had obeyed them: *No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions* (Luke 14:33). I came to see that there was a death I had to give myself to, a total surrender of my life

and possessions, in order to gain eternal life in Messiah (Philippians 3:8). As it was, death was overtaking me in my relationships and in the turmoil of my own soul. Finally, I saw that I was faced with a choice: death by decay behind my mask of pretense, leading to eternal death, or death by the voluntary act of my will, leading to eternal life.

I am so thankful that the God of heaven stopped me on my journey to death and led me to where I could see a demonstration of His life. (Eleanor Rigby never got that chance.) Here I live with people with whom I can share the deepest things in my heart. I can trust them because we have entered into a covenant together, a blood covenant, sealed by the blood of our Master Yahshua. We were able to reach His blood because we actually gave up our lives in the waters of baptism. *Now we no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf* (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). He is making us into His royal priesthood. Rather than wiping the dirt from our hands as we bury one another with neglect and selfishness, we are being saved as we learn to love one another as Messiah loved us.

David

Loneliness is sin. Sin is something that you know you should not feel or experience or do, but you are caught in its trap anyway. Sin always separates you from others. Death is the culmination of all the other separations we have brought upon ourselves. We cannot expect in death other than what we choose in life. That’s why the Bible says that the wages of sin is death.



WHAT DEATH IS LIKE

You are finally alone with your conscience. You are forced to face your sin, with nowhere to hide and nothing to distract your mind from the awareness of your own guilt. Every evil deed, every base thought, every selfish motive comes out of hiding to torture you. Like a worm burrowing into

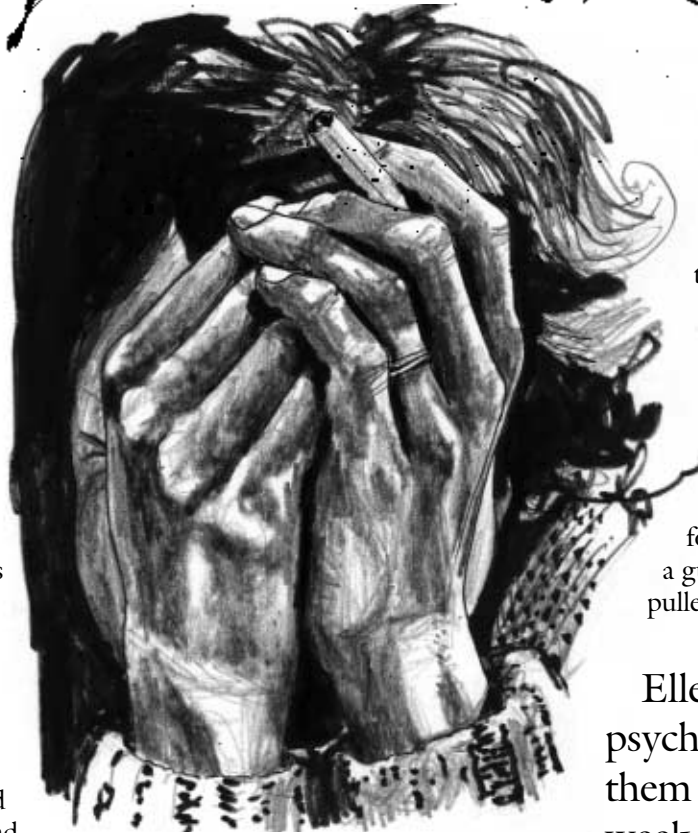
the recesses of your memory, eating away at your every excuse, so is the path of your thoughts as your conscience fully awakens. The unquenchable fire of your self-inquisition leaves you either weeping in remorse or gnashing your teeth as you resist the truth about yourself. Will it ever end?

*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all belong?*

Are there any answers?

“Daddy was driving home a few hours ago ... he died in a car wreck” My sister’s words had awakened me out of a deep sleep. They pierced into a place in my heart I never knew existed. I remember going outside and looking up at all the stars. I was so afraid. Where is he now? How can it be that I will never see him again? Guilt began to mount up in my heart. It was too late to tell him how sorry I was for all the ways I had hurt him over and over. If only I had one more chance to hug him and tell him how much I loved him. How could I live with myself for the rest of my life?

Why don’t I just kill myself and get it over with? We’re all going to die anyway!” She slammed her bandaged arm down on the table, jarring me out of my own hopeless thoughts. “No! No!” I said, “You can’t do that. I don’t know why or how, but you can’t do that.” She looked at me, her pretty blue eyes full of tears. I knew she had no reason to listen. She saw no reason for her young life. She was hopeless. Worthless. At least in her own eyes.



And I didn’t have any answers.

Two weeks later, I lay in my bed staring at my burning candle. Julie was dead. She collapsed right in the street. Darvon and alcohol. She wasn’t even twenty years old. I couldn’t deal with my thoughts.

People loved being around my friend Tom. He was kind and friendly. He and his girlfriend were together all the time. Hippies.

Enjoying life the best way they knew how. Well, a drunk driver ran into her car and she died instantly of a broken

neck. I still remember him telling me how he went to the morgue to identify her body. There was just a faint line around her neck. That’s all. He came to my house again and again, but I had no answers. I could only suffer with him and wonder why. He cried for weeks. Then he put a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

Ellen and John were psychologists. I paid them twenty dollars a week to come and talk to me and sort out my life.

They kept trying to figure out why I was so unhappy. There had to be a way to get me off Valium. Wasn’t I ever going to forget about that abortion I had? Somehow they were determined to get me out of the house, get a job - just be happy! Why had I turned my house willingly into a prison? Why was I so afraid of people? Of going anywhere?

Without warning, John went in his back yard early one morning and shot himself in the belly with a shotgun. Everyone was stunned, but they accepted it. Wasn’t it an act of courage? After all, he didn’t have any answers. Maybe there weren’t any answers.

*Ah, look at all the lonely people;
Where do they all come from?*

Each day it seemed death had a tighter grip on my life. Things were more and more out of control. My husband was drowning in his memories of the Vietnam War. When he drank, he would explode. I was afraid and so alone. My children were being raised on television and day-care centers. We were on and off welfare. There was no faithfulness in our marriage. In desperation, my husband and I tried going to a church. We even got happy for a little while. My brother had told me about the Jesus Movement and that He was my answer. I had believed him ... for a while. Finally, my fellowship suggested that I go into the hospital. I had gone without sleep for months and weighed only ninety pounds. It was my pastor who drove me to the “retreat.” Almost immediately, they gave me Thorazine and a room in a locked ward. I was all alone except for my terror. Even in the hospital I tried to find Jesus. Maybe there was a believer who could help me, bring me healing. Sometimes I would beg my psychiatrist to give me shock treatments. I wanted to forget the children I had borne. I didn’t want to remember anything — I just wanted to disappear into nothingness and not exist. Several months later, they sent me home with a daily dose of

The sidewalk, college campus, cafeteria, or the subway is jammed with lots of people; but all are lonely. The party can be “jumping” with lonely people. No, it’s not the number of people in one place, doing the same thing together that dispels loneliness. Loneliness is a reaction to life.

Thorazine and anti-depressants. I was facing a life-long struggle with depression. I could be kept near normal as long as I was on drugs.

With as much determination as I could muster up, I went home and did everything I could to push through my madness. That’s when I met them — “the walkers” — pairs of men and women hitch-hiking through my town. They had all been sent out from a small town in Vermont where they lived together in a community. I was struck by their interest in me. As worthless as my life had become, they wanted to hear all about me. They were friendly and warm. I invited them home for supper. I gave them a place to sleep. They weren’t shocked by the condition of my life. Their interest in me gave me the freedom to unload all that was torturing me.

They told me they were Yahshua’s* disciples, living a common life together, raising their children to follow their God. I was starving for what freely flowed from them, and

I desired to come to know them more. When I visited their homes, I saw something I never knew existed — a people living their whole lives for one another, married couples devoted to the raising of their children, men loving their wives and women trusting their husbands. I saw a security I thought impossible, surely something beyond mere human effort. I saw more than I could have ever hoped for, a way out of my lonely prison. I saw that I could be forgiven. All I had to do was believe in the one they spoke of, Yahshua. I never knew what I was looking for, but now I did. He was my answer. His forgiveness reached deep into my soul and to this day continues to bring miraculous healing to me. I have nothing better to do than follow him the rest of my life. I am so thankful to be alive and to have answers for you.

Susan

*Yahshua is the Hebrew name of the Son of God. The footnote to Matthew 1:21 in the New International Version of the New Testament reads: *Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua*. In Hebrew, as in old English, there is no “j” sound, so the name is more accurately rendered *Yahshua*.

WHO WE ARE



WE USED TO BE DESPERATELY LONELY, EVEN THOUGH MOST OF US HAD A LOT OF FRIENDS. Some of us were successful in what we did, and some of us were failures beyond hope. We came from everywhere and we have done everything, trying to make sense out of our lives. But no matter what we did, we were left feeling dirty inside. We were scarred deeply from the effects of mistrust and hurtful relationships. We strove for acceptance, money, and whatever else could give us comfort. Some of us had dreams of a better life, but most of us had given up the struggle, settling instead for compromise and consent to "the way things are." We were lost, scattered, without direction, doing our own thing.

THEN WE HEARD A VOICE THAT SPOKE TO US RIGHT WHERE WE WERE, exposing the emptiness of our lives. This voice matched up fully to the longing of our hearts. Somehow a lifetime of being unable to trust was shattered by this voice of hope. It came from a people who had their dirty consciences washed clean. They had a clean slate and

an absolutely new life. This new life they eagerly offered to all who wanted it.

NOW WE HAVE A LIFE TOGETHER. We no longer have to be separated by race, education, appearance, position, status, or where we came from. Instead our days are filled with seeking first the needs of our brothers and sisters. In so doing, we find our own needs are met. This new life has given us the power to care.

WE HATE THE DEATH, WAR, STRIFE, HATRED, STARVATION, MURDER, INJUSTICE, GREED, AND SELFISHNESS that is leading the whole world to destruction. We want to see all of this come to an end. We want many more people to hear the voice of hope we've heard, to come and see the life.

WE LIVE IN COMMUNITY, SEEKING TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER SO MUCH that we would be of one heart and mind. We hold all things as common property, taking our meals together and devoting ourselves to the One who saved us from death and misery. His name is Yahshua. We invite you to come and see that this life is reality.

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Ah, look at all the lonely people. Where do they all belong?