

June 24, 1994

Dear Guests,

Welcome to our 10-Year Anniversary Celebration of our deliverance from the 1984 Island Pond Raid. We are honored that you chose to be with us today.

This booklet contains letters from our relatives, friends and acquaintances who have known us and observed our life over a period of many years. We thought you might like to hear from objective witnesses who are not members of our Communities, but who have spoken up about the quality of life that we enjoy within the Community. Their comments cover a wide range of concerns that some of you may have had about us, from the way we raise our children to the quality of medical care that we receive. It is our hope that reading these letters will help to remove any fears or suspicions that you or others that you know may have about us.

You are welcome to use this booklet as a resource for getting your questions answered. You may call or write any of the people who have freely given their names and addresses along with their comments in the following pages.

Again, we appreciate your participation in our celebration. We want you to enjoy your time with us, get to know us, and learn about who we really are and how we understand our purpose as a people.

Sincerely,

Your Friends from the Messianic Communities

The 250 residents of [the Community in Island Pond] live as family, with no walls or fences from the rest of the residents of Island Pond ... They educate their children at home and content themselves with following the Lord's calling. If they disagree at work they stop working until they can again work in harmony.

It is this harmony that makes the Island Pond collage industry and community totally unique. There is an ever-present sense of working, sweating, and living with one's fellows. There is harmony among the smooth farmlands, the snow-capped ridges, the bending Route 114, the evergreen pine and spruce, the white birch, the turning mill, and the hearts of these gentle people of the isolated community of Island Pond.

[From an article entitled, *Strictly Vermont Candles*, by Matthew Sartwell, published in *A Visitor's Guide to the Northeast Kingdom*, available in rest stops and welcome centers on the Interstate highways of Vermont.]

My name is Melissa Burch. I live in Bath, Maine. I am writing this letter concerning the Messianic Community in Boston. My family lives there. Granted, it was a hard thing to accept at first. I now know and believe there isn't a more wonderful place they could be. Let me tell you a little about how their lives used to be:

Before my family found the community, we weren't a family. My two twin sisters, who are now 22, were deadheads (followers of the Grateful Dead musical band) who did nothing but smoke pot and follow Jerry Garcia across the country. They were the first to find the community. Kelly, my sister, was pregnant at the time. She came after Kathy, my other sister, moved to the Boston community. After Kelly had a healthy baby boy in October of '92, my mother, Deborah, myself, my brother David, and youngest sister Joy, all went to visit Kelly and the baby. My mother, I believe, was very touched by what she saw.

After that first visit, my mother returned to the community over a period of several months. I believe she wanted to learn and understand more about the community. It wasn't something she just jumped into.

Eventually, she and my brother and youngest sister moved to Boston. Kelly married a man in the community who loves their son and loves her just as much. My family is a miracle. Never in a million years did I ever think that our family could actually be a family. I've never been at peace. Knowing that my family is safe and taken care of brings me that peace. I love the community and the people there.

If you are wondering why I'm not there, it's not because I have any doubts about the way they live, or what they believe. It's because right now in my life I couldn't go there and give 100%. It's not something you give 1/2 to. If you're there, you're there wholeheartedly.

My family has been given a second chance. The community is not a cult. There is not one person who rules over them. There isn't some person who collects your money when you enter the door. There is none of that weird stuff that you hear about. I know, I've been there off and on for 2 years. What there is is love, kindness, peace, and you are accepted for who you are. They know the truth and they take everything they know from the Bible. The Bible is the truth.

Never in my own life have I seen so much unconditional love and kindness.

If you have any questions for me, please feel free to contact me:

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Let me begin with some brief remarks about this writer. I was born some 70 years ago as the son of a Methodist minister. I grew up and became a very active layperson in the Methodist church. In the early 1960s my position as a Director of Human resources required me to move to another area. There I found it was to my family's advantage to belong to the United Church of Christ. I became, and remain, a very active layperson in that church.

My first knowledge of the Messianic Community, specifically, the Community in Island Pond, Vermont, came in the fall of 1981. My daughter and her family who lived in Cavendish, Vermont, informed us they were considering becoming a part of the Community in Island Pond. Naturally, this concerned me and I must admit I used every tactic I knew of to discourage their decision. In the spring of 1982, my daughter, her husband, and my two grandchildren moved to Island Pond and became a part of the Community. Four days later, my wife and I made our first trip to Island Pond. Although many friends and relatives came up with a list of information for me on communities such as this, or, as they called them, a cult. I was determined to find out for myself. My daughter requested that on our visits that we stay with them so that we could experience their life and the standards they had elected to live by. We have always honored this request and have to admit that it has led us to many wonderful relationships.

Our new experience in the community was an anxious one. I am not sure who was more nervous: my wife and I or the other three families in the household. So began a relationship which for the next 12 years would take me every eight weeks to visit my family in whichever community they were in.

In the fall of 1982, the household that my daughter lived in traveled to Connecticut to spend Thanksgiving with us. Perhaps it was during that visit that the anxiousness of a father began to disappear and the long-time relationship with a group of people began to form. It was during that visit I became familiar with an eight-year-old boy who later would marry my granddaughter.

Through the years I began to become more understanding of the standards they set for their life style. I had the opportunity of spending time in many different households and become friendly with so many different people. I watched as they endured the raid of 1984. I shared their great loss in the fire that destroyed their Common Sense Restaurant and meeting place, an event I believe changed the direction of the Community forever. I have watched as they have grown from basically one community to 14 communities. I have watched them develop their cottage industries to where they now have some excellent well-established industries. I have visited many of their communities. I have attended

many of their weddings, including one in October of 1992 when my granddaughter, Jennifer, married Jeff Whitten. I have spent countless hours at their tables, their celebrations, their enjoyment of recreation. I have come to know and be known by many of their children and the parents of those children. I have walked and talked to the majority who have become part of the community. I have watched them raise their children with love, care, and direction. I have witnessed my own two grandchildren grow into adulthood as loving and caring individuals, and my granddaughter to become the caring and loving mother of my first great grandchild. I must admit that both my wife and I are happy that our great grandson will grow up in the Community. We now journey to the Community in Hyannis so that we can enjoy our great grandson, granddaughter, and new grandson by marriage.

Through the years I have come to learn to return the love the people in the communities have extended to my wife and I, and we have found that as a people they are no different than any other people, except they have elected to live by what Matthew recorded in his Gospel: Don't be anxious about what you eat, drink, or wear, but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Gardner K. Johnson
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I feel that it is imperative that I step forward and speak in support of the life-style my son has chosen. It is a life-style that hurts no one, but in many ways enriches and enhances the likes of those who have chosen this way.

As a parent I want no more, no less, for my children than any other parent, that is, the best. I am confident my son has chosen the best.

Not all of us choose to live what we might call the "orthodox" way of life, and I strongly believe before you condemn a life-style merely because it is different, you should look more closely.

I promise you if you look with open eyes you will find harmony, peace, and a way of life that should truly be envied by those of us who are constantly surrounded by violence, pain, destruction, and chaos.

If you can prove to me that the life-style most of us live is most conducive to harmony and peace, then I will listen.

I, too, am afraid of the unknown, but I thank God I was able to visit my son and his community with an open heart and see that their way is quite amazing. I have never witnessed such harmony and caring as I have with these people who

spend their every moment reaching for a goal much greater than most of us could ever dream.

Some people are looking for other better ways to live their lives, and I think we should encourage those that are genuine towards this end.

Muriel Stern

My daughter and her family have been in the Community for more than 15 years and I have visited her frequently.

My six grandchildren always appear to be very happy and contented. They are well-behaved and a pleasure to be around.

I appreciate the fact that they are not being adversely affected by TV as so many children are. The teenagers do not go through the rebellion that I see in others.

From my observation, the parents give a lot of time to their children and have the patience to teach them how to work along with them. I notice that my grandchildren enjoy helping their parents.

Being a parent of six, and a grandparent of twelve children, I am particularly concerned in the welfare of children and I can sincerely say that I love visiting my grandchildren in the Community and am very pleased with the way they are growing up. Each is very much an individual, but they are all developing good moral characters as well as a joy in living. They are becoming responsible adults.

Mrs. Esther Milonas
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I have been familiar with the Community in Island Pond over a period of some 17 years, which is the length of time my son, John, has been a member. With my late wife, I visited the Community many times over the years, and several times, traveling by myself, I have been an overnight guest in one or another of the Community's residences. There has been ample opportunity for me to meet the Community's members and share meals and prayer sessions with them.

In all of that time, I have never been treated with disrespect, made to feel that I was not welcome, or criticized because of my religious beliefs. The prevailing attitude toward me has been one of fellowship, friendliness and love.

I have come to know about some of the difficult life situations that some

members have had in their past, and their progress toward integration and peace during their time with the Community. In some cases, I have known of continuing personal problems that are never ignored, but rather dealt with in terms of what I would have to call a collective outpouring of love and concern.

In a society in which personal relationships continue to splinter and go sour, I must say that in my view the members of the Community have found a way to live together in harmony, with a genuine love for one another, in an atmosphere of strong personal morals, with no drugs or alcohol, and with a unique spirit of cooperation in accomplishing the tasks they set for themselves.

My son may be typical. He had some troubled years before coming to the Community, and his personal and spiritual growth have not always been on a constant up-curve. But he has certain assets that many in our outside society seem constantly to seek but seldom find: (1) He has the companionship of a whole community of people with diverse backgrounds and talents who have accepted him as one of themselves, (2) He has the constant, unconditional love of every one of those people, (3) He has a sense of purpose that he shares with all the others, and (4) He has the assurance that his future can continue to hold all these resources as long as he wants them. I know of no institution or life-style in our society that can match those blessings.

Thomas A. Kindre
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We have been acquainted with the Community, or Church, at Island Pond and Bellows Falls and Boston and various other locations which we have either visited or been made aware of for more than nine years. Our son, Thomas and his wife, Karen, as well as their four children, are members of this community. They joined this way of life approximately nine years ago.

We have visited them at least once a year and often twice a year. Every time we have visited we have been welcomed into a very loving and caring community of people who seem quite happy in their life-style and beliefs. They eat well, have good hygiene and sufficient clothing and shelter. We believe that these people really love one another.

Their theology and cosmology is not the same as ours. In fact, it is not even close. However, there are thousands of theologies and cosmologies presently extant and we do not subscribe to them either. But we do subscribe to this community's loving life-style and we believe that they are happy.

We are especially pleased with the manner in which our four grandchildren are being cared for and educated. They will, however, have a very difficult adjustment if they should ever decide to leave this community. But, at least they will be very literate and will have experienced loving family life. So we are not worried about their future.

Hugh and Priscilla McShane
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My name is Barbara Colicchio and I have been married to my husband, Carlo, for almost 41 years. We have five grown children, ages 30 to 39 years.

Growing up in the 60s and 70s, my children were exposed to the drugs that were so available and the three oldest experimented with them, to our sorrow and grief.

Two of our oldest children, in their later teen years, found a way out of their rebellious and unhealthy lifestyle and that happened when they joined a group of young people who, like themselves, had rebelled at their lifestyle and came to a point when they decided they wanted to follow the Bible teachings and live as a family of followers of the Lord. At the time this happened, we were happy that they were giving up their life that would eventually destroy them for a life that gave them happiness and brought them peace and love amongst themselves.

By living in a community setting, they were able to help each other and work together to try to live by Bible teachings, in a group.

My children (adults now), have lived in the Community for about 15 years now. My son married a girl from Georgia who also lived in the community and they now have a beautiful little girl. My daughter married a very nice young man from Wisconsin and they have three children together. They work very hard and are very happy. They give up a lot and live very simply. They teach their own children at home. They have training from two years of age. All children are encouraged and expected to help with chores and join in family teachings and celebrations. They enjoy it and are happy doing it. I have also been there and seen and joined in the celebrations. They encourage outsiders to visit their houses and dine with them.

They have no TVs in the homes. They discipline their children with a thin rod which stings the hand or rump. I have also been a witness to this.

I have lived with them in their homes for a week at a time when I have visited them and it was always pleasant but a little too congested for me or my hus-

band. They have also spent days and weeks at our home with their children and it was pleasant ...

They try their best to be self-sufficient and pay taxes, but expect no charity from society: unemployment, TDI, Social Security, or Welfare, etc. They do have many dentists, doctors, and other professional friends who help them out and donate time when needed.

They are always ready to help someone in need, whenever possible.

If you would like to ask me anything concerning the community as I know it, I would be glad to speak to you or answer questions.

Mrs. Carlo Colicchio
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My daughter joined the Community four years ago at the age of 24. She had been very unhappy before then, drifting from one job to another and uncertain of how to live her life. Her life in the Community in these four years seems to have given her a sense of purpose and a very loving atmosphere in which she has thrived.

I have visited many of the Communities in the towns in New England and Nova Scotia where they have settled. I have always been impressed by the gentle, purposeful, caring and hard-working attitude they bring to their daily life together. The children are a special joy to be with and seem very secure and happy.

I have never encountered anything negative in their gatherings or daily treatment of each other.

Barbara P. Appel
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For a number of years, our youngest daughter and her family have been a part of the Community in Island Pond, Vermont. We've visited them from time to time, staying in their homes or renting other living quarters — staying on one visit for a whole month. In all the visits we've made to them we have never felt the love and concern of people any more strongly than we felt with the people of this community.

We saw a group of people from all walks of life, some college educated, var-

ied talents, different ages and, yes, even different races bonded together in a relationship of living, playing, and worshipping God — always praying for leadership and direction and offering a helping hand to those who were troubled or less fortunate than them.

Of course, our lives have been intertwined with the Community ever since they established their homes in Island Pond, since we had a daughter and her children living there. However, for a period of 8 years, these 5 children were awarded to their father, who had been ousted from the Community, and taken to Florida where they were soon to be placed in an orphanage, placed in foster homes, and even abused. In most of that time neither the mother or we grandparents were allowed to visit, call by phone, or write to them, due to their father's orders. The good news now, though, is that they're back with their mother and a loving stepfather and two new sisters and a new brother, living together as a happy and well-adjusted family.

There has been much media intervention with this Community, questioning proper education, child abuse, discipline, kidnapping, etc., and yet not anything has been basically proven or found factual. It appears that the very people who have received help from the Community when they were in need are the very people who are spreading rumors and innuendoes. These people in the Community are not behind bars. They're free to leave, and many have, while others have stayed, as they have chosen this way of life for them and their families.

In any group of people, be it a home, a school, a business, even a church, there must be rules and regulations, else there would be chaos, and so it is with this community.

Our question is this: Until one knows the true facts of a group of people living together in their own simple way of life, worshipping God and attempting to live their lives following the precepts of the Bible — why do people judge them wrongly? Maybe "fear of the unknown?"

Rebecca & Aldine Ebert
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I have served the dental needs of the Island Pond Community Church people for about 15 years, treating all dental problems for all ages. I've seen hundreds of individuals on thousands of office visits over these years. I've gotten to know many of the people and families quite intimately on a personal as well as professional basis.

much better than that of the general population that I see on a daily basis. They have a genuine concern for their dental health and make every effort to insure that their children take proper care of their teeth, often going beyond their means to provide preventative or orthodontic care for them.

There is also a very high level of nutritional awareness in their community. I know that they avoid the fast foods and junk foods of our society. The results of their good habits is very obvious. They present with bright smiles, full of good healthy teeth, and their skin is clear and healthy. Even their hair is always clean and healthy-looking.

To sum up, I find their commitment to family values, health, education and spiritual growth remarkable and commendable.

Dr. Paul J. Bosco, DMD
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I have treated people from the Community of Island Pond for in excess of six years. It has been my experience that they utilize the medical services, including clinic, community hospitals, and tertiary medical centers in an appropriate fashion. With the help of the various liaisons, EMTs and nurses, lay members of the Community are able to understand various diagnostic and therapeutic options. I have personally treated more than 50 Community members, both in the clinic and in the Emergency Department.

The diet of the Community members is based on high fiber/low saturated fat. They consume an abundance of fish and a paucity of red meat. Other protein sources include yogurt and vegetables. I have found that this diet is, all things considered, quite healthy. I have not seen any member of the Community who was actively using tobacco, alcohol, or illicit drugs.

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