

loss to life

A Jewish Woman's Journey to Messiah



BY SUSAN PERLMAN

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A Purple Pomegranate Book
Purple Pomegranate Productions

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By Susan Perlman

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We piled onto a special bus destined for a big march in Washington D.C.; a group of friends and strangers united by one purpose. We were protesters, heading for the Pentagon, our nation's military headquarters. While this was serious business, the mood on board was light and festive. People chatted and joked. Now and then someone would burst into song and others would join in.

When we reached the halfway point between New York City and Washington, D.C., the bus pulled into a highway rest stop/restaurant. Everyone made a beeline for the restrooms, and as is often the case, the line for the women's room was much longer than the line for the men's. Suddenly, I had a brainstorm: "Why not liberate the men's room?" I expressed my idea to the women waiting next to me. Their enthusiasm helped me muster the courage to lead an onslaught on the men's room. We "stormed" the door and successfully "liberated" the men's room, making it coed—much to the astonishment of the restaurant's proprietors, not to mention the bewildered men who were inside!

That small act of courage and creativity bolstered my confidence as I stepped back on the bus. People continued to chat, sing and laugh right up to the time the familiar monuments of our nation's capital came into view. Then the tension, the uneasiness began to set in. There was always the possibility of violence during such demonstrations and I, for one, did not want to be maced or to get my head bashed in.

Ironically, like the police we expected to face, we had our own uniform of sorts: faded denim jeans, T-shirts, and sandals—though the more experienced protesters wore closed-toed shoes. I began to cringe as I saw some people donning homemade riot regalia that seemed almost to invite attack: motorcycle helmets, construction hard hats. Their assorted gear seemed out of place in a march for peace! Did they know something that I didn't?

Our little contingent converged with thousands of others in an open area where a platform had been erected. A long program of speakers and folk singers took their turns with the microphone, but what I remember most is the march that followed. We began with the chant, "All we are saying, is give peace a chance," which we repeated over and over. Then the slogans became more strident, more clipped, "Ho, Ho, Ho, Chi Minh, N.L.F. is gonna win!" I remember crossing over the area marked "No trespassing." In the distance, we could see the Pentagon, the symbol of our nation's military might. We could hear the tactical police with their bullhorns, warning marchers that they would be arrested if they continued in that direction.

At that moment, part of me wished that I was not on the line of march. But I had no chance of retreat as the crowd pushed forward. I felt the burning sensation of tear gas in my eyes. I saw the police attacking marchers and I saw some marchers attacking the police. It was ugly. Then everyone started running. There was no longer a line of march, just hundreds, no, thousands of people scattering in all directions. Shouts of, "Off the pigs! Off the pigs!" were met with clubs and counter slogans like "Draft dodging commies!" I was not a shouter, but I was sure a runner, only I wasn't exactly sure what direction I was going with all the shoving and hitting and pummeling.

I finally found a bench. I sat down, dazed.

It wasn't until later that I had time to reflect on the day's events. We'd gone to Washington for a noble and just cause. We saw ourselves as the voice of sanity in an insane world. We were protesting what we believed to be an unjust war in Vietnam. I knew that it was beyond my ability to truly comprehend the human carnage going on over there, even though I watched the news clips on TV and listened to the death toll broadcast every night. I remember thinking how sick the world must be if words like "a just and honorable peace" were considered more important than life itself. Was it "honorable" for people to be napalmed to death? I felt I had to raise my voice to protest this evil. So there I was, part of a peace demonstration that had turned into a hostile, bloody mess.

I survived the march on the Pentagon, but I was never the same. I rode back on the bus later that same day. It wasn't as full. Some had stayed on, perhaps not by choice, I thought. There was light chatter in the bus, even some laughter. I found myself resenting the mood as I remained silent. I felt so helpless, unable (at least for the moment) to do anything that would really make a difference.

All too often "might" triumphed over "right," and a few people in high places made decisions that affected the rest of us—decisions in which we had no voice or choice. This was particularly frustrating to me as a person who values choice. This is a fact, family and friends tell me, that I made apparent at a very early age.

A case in point happened in kindergarten. As a toddler, I spent a lot of time with an elderly uncle from Eastern Europe. He was a favorite uncle of mine and quite naturally, I picked up his accent so that when I started school, I would say words like "vat" instead of "what" and

“vye” instead of “why” The teacher was somewhat puzzled at my accent, given that I was born in Brooklyn, New York. And once I realized how different I sounded from the other kids, I worked hard to rid myself of that European accent. By first grade, I had replaced it with my accent of choice—Brooklynese.

In fact, if I could have chosen where to be born, I would have! Though I was in no position to make that choice, I feel that my parents made the right choice for me—Beth El Hospital in Brooklyn. The hospital was later renamed “Brookdale”—probably for someone who donated a large sum of money—but I still like to think of it as Beth El, which means “House of God.”

I didn’t choose the neighborhood in Brooklyn where I grew up, but I assumed that everyone else who lived there was Jewish like me. After all, our schools were closed on the Jewish holidays. All our teachers had names like Mrs. Katz and Mrs. Epstein. Our merchants were also Jewish, like Mr. Sol Warren, the pharmacist and Mr. Pincus, the grocer. We didn’t know from O’Rourkes or Smiths in our neighborhood. We never saw Christmas decorations or Easter bunnies or other “Christian” symbols unless we wandered out of the neighborhood to places like Manhattan where the big Christmas tree was erected at Rockefeller Center each December.

I was aware that non-Jews existed. I even had a Gentile friend who didn’t live in the neighborhood, but who attended my school. Her name was Priscilla Sanchez. One day, she approached me at the school playground with the accusation, “I learned this week that you killed Jesus!” She was very upset and so was I. I protested, but after all, her instruction came from an adult, a religious teacher, and I was just a kid. People our age naturally trusted adults to be

smarter and wiser—especially those in authority, like rabbis and priests and ministers. I could do nothing to convince Priscilla of my innocence.

From then on, we'd acknowledge each other with a glance now and then, but we never played together again. That made me sad, but I also remember thinking what a crazy religion Christians must have if they taught lies about little Jewish girls killing "their god."

I knew that being Jewish was a good thing. I was particularly proud of my heritage when, at age eight, I was chosen to play the part of Queen Esther in the local Purim pageant put on by the Young Women's Hebrew Association. As I recited my lines from the stage of the YM-YWHA, I was Queen Esther, the fairest maiden in all of Shushan. My flowing white robe with specks of glued-on glitter and my crown, though only made of cardboard and dime store gems, truly made me feel like this historic heroine of my people. My family and friends smiled proudly from the very front row. The play became a wonderful, magical experience and a trace of that glow still warms me whenever I recall it.

Yet my connection as a Jew with the God of the Jews was somewhat fuzzy. I didn't think much about God, other than the fact that he existed. Then when I was twelve, my father died of a heart attack. It was very sudden and unexpected and our family was in shock. Most children don't have to come to grips with the weighty issues of life and death, but I did—and so did my two younger sisters. I thought very intensely about the fact that life was very transitory. I wondered about what happens to us when we die.

The funeral was a bit of a blur to me. But afterwards, as is customary in the Orthodox Jewish tradition of mourning, our family spent a week *sitting shiva* (*shiva* means seven). We were not allowed to leave the apartment at any time



*Susan in
Central Park at
4 months*

Susan age 1



Susan age 3



Susan's father, 1943



*With her sisters
Sheila (left) and
Pauline (middle),
1980*



Self portrait



*Susan and her mom at
Santa Cruz, 1975*



*Northern Ireland, 1977.
Susan washes the feet of
a Catholic seeker.*

during that week. There were many other restrictions such as not looking at one's own image (mirrors are therefore covered in the home) and refraining from all work or business. Mourners are not supposed to bathe, wash their clothes, cut their hair or even study the Bible—if they were so inclined.

I remember during that week of mourning, we sat on wooden crates in the living room. Many relatives and friends came to visit us, bringing food and recalling their fondest memories of my dad. I hardly knew the rabbi who made the obligatory visit to my house. At the funeral, he'd spoken of my father's virtues, but his words were empty to me—mostly gathered from the questions he asked our family just prior to the service.

I didn't blame the rabbi for not knowing my father. My dad only went to *shul* (synagogue) for the High Holiday services and for special events. He sat way in the back so the rabbi never had the occasion to know him. But I did have a pressing question to ask the rabbi. So when he came to visit as we sat *shiva*, I boldly asked, "Rabbi, is my daddy in heaven?" He paused, not expecting the question, but his smile seemed reassuring. "Susan, your father's memory will live on in the life you lead. You can be his legacy." It was a nice thought, but it didn't satisfy me. "Rabbi," I went on, ". . . you didn't answer my question. Is my daddy in heaven now?" He was a little more serious at this point and looked straight into my eyes and said, "I wish I could give you a definite answer, Susan, but I can't. We don't know for sure what is beyond the grave. We can only hope. And remember, your father was a good man."

The rabbi's second attempt at an answer troubled me even more. I couldn't articulate why it concerned me then. In retrospect, I think I was dismayed by his uncertainty about

something as fundamental to religion—his area of expertise, after all—as an afterlife. “How *come* we ‘can’t know for sure?’” I thought.

One thing I did know at the time was that I was bewildered. How could a great, all-powerful God allow this to happen? Didn’t he know that my father was a good man? He was only thirty-four years old—couldn’t God see that my mother, my two sisters and I needed my dad? I was angry with God, yet paradoxically, I questioned whether or not he was even real. Maybe he only existed in my imagination and in the traditions of our religion. I had to admit that even the rabbi seemed a little uncertain about anything supernatural.

Regardless of whether or not God existed, my positive feelings about my Jewishness remained strong. I reasoned that if I was going to believe in God at all or be a religious person, I would certainly not be anything other than Jewish. In comparison to my concept of Christianity, I felt ours was the more practical, responsible religion. I viewed Christianity according to what I had seen in movies: a killer walks into a confession booth to spill his guts to the priest, he lists all his crimes, then simply tells how he wants to make a new start. The priest says, “My son, you are forgiven,” makes him say a few prayers, and that’s that. How convenient! Way too easy. Nope, it just didn’t seem right to me.

On the other hand, I felt Judaism taught people to take responsibility for their own actions. It seemed lame to cry to God when I did something wrong. Likewise, I reasoned it was false humility to give God credit when I did something right. I felt satisfied that I had come to a balanced understanding of such things. I really worked hard at doing things “right,” at least, according to my own perception of “rightness.”

I was an above-average student and rapidly advanced through junior and senior high. During that time I was in a sorority, on the cheering squad, assistant coach for the boy's swim team, wrote for the yearbook and was captain of the student patrol. I graduated from high school in a January term and had a one-week "break" before entering college less than a month after my sixteenth birthday.

I had enrolled in Hunter College in Manhattan for a four-year nursing program. Unlike the liberal arts students, I was able to live in a dormitory. My mother was concerned about my leaving home at such a young age, for even though Manhattan was not that far from Brooklyn, it was really a whole new world, and I would be out on my own. To me it was a great opportunity, a real adventure.

I turned out to be one of two Jews in the entire nursing program; everyone else seemed to be Irish Catholic. It was a strange sensation to be in the minority. Yet Gail, the other Jewish student, was right next door to me in the dorm, and we took comfort in having each other nearby. We talked often, but it wasn't the same as being in Brooklyn. Life in the nursing dorm was a far cry from the Brooklyn neighborhood where I grew up. And that was particularly evident at Christmastime. The lobby of the building where we lived was almost all glass windows, and the students traditionally decorated them with holiday scenes using a white frost-like spray paint. While almost everyone was busy designing their holly wreaths, jingle bells and jolly old Santas, I was given a window all my own and felt a responsibility to Jewish people everywhere as I defiantly drew a Hanukkah menorah. Just to be sure people understood that this was a Jewish window pane, I included a rather large Star of David as well. My "Jewish corner" was there lest anyone think that there were only Irish Catholics in our dorm.

I didn't last too long in the nursing program, but it didn't have anything to do with my being Jewish. I quickly discovered that I had more aptitude and interest in my liberal arts classes than in the courses nursing required, as demonstrated by my poor science grades. Not only that, but I was quite squeamish around blood and I could not seem to be objective in my response to people's pain. I was strongly affected by suffering, as nurses should be, but I could not distance myself as nurses must. I remember coming back to my room from a day in the hospital feeling deeply depressed. "Why so much pain and suffering?" I agonized. Then I would cry myself to sleep. This happened frequently. Sadly, when I left the nursing program, I also had to leave the dorm. I had enjoyed the taste of independence and could not see myself moving back to my mother's apartment in Brooklyn.

It didn't take long to find roommates, and together we rented an apartment above "Poor Philip's Head Shop" on St. Mark's Place in Greenwich Village. The location was exotic in some ways, but after a few weeks, I started taking on the same exotic appearance as my surroundings. My friends and family thought I looked weird and, to be honest, I did. I moved out of Greenwich Village and into an upper west side apartment with three other girls. We actually lived on the thirteenth floor of a very nice high-rise—but as is the custom in many such buildings, they had labeled it the fourteenth floor. It was an unusually large four-bedroom apartment that even included a "maid's room." The former tenants sold us their huge, carved oak dining room table and chairs as well as some other impressive pieces. The apartment had a real fireplace and was so spacious that it was perfect for lots of entertaining. And that we did. We were living well.

I continued with my studies, shifting my major to Communications. My roommates were all older than I, and fully employed. I did some waitressing to help pay the bills, but was still undecided about what I would do for a career. I saw myself as a cause-motivated, action-oriented independent woman. I continued to participate in marches like the one in Washington, D.C., and I never gave up my efforts to “make a difference.” I was an active member of our neighborhood block association and worked toward building a sense of community. I helped raise funds for a dog run along Riverside Park (though I never owned a dog), and took part in a neighborhood recycling center for glass and aluminum. I even helped with hiring a security guard to discourage junkies and dope dealers from hanging out on our street.

I also became active in guerrilla theater (street drama) as a creative means of making social statements. One role I played was that of “Mother Nature” being choked to death by toxic waste! Another time, I was a box of cereal going stale on the shelf at a local supermarket known for charging unreasonably high prices. Then I played the role of the “city official” determined to evict squatters in an abandoned building near Columbia University.

These parts were a far cry from Queen Esther, or Florence Nightingale for that matter, but in my way, I tried to be a modern day heroine defending what I felt was basic to human survival. I kept up much of this activity after college, and got a good job writing advertising copy for J.C. Penney as well. I thought to myself, “I will do this advertising job for a while until I can write something important.” I was productive and pleased that my life had purpose and great potential.

In all this, I was not looking for God—but apparently God was looking for me.

As I was walking in mid-town Manhattan on my lunch hour, I couldn't help but notice a man who was conspicuous because of his extremely blond, long hair. He was wearing a sticker on his shirt; one that I had been seeing affixed to people's shirts for days. Being a naturally inquisitive person, and also finding this young man somewhat attractive, I wanted to know what the sticker said. My curiosity was mixed with caution—I was a street smart New Yorker—so I didn't want to ask him about it directly. If he was some sort of fanatic, I did not want to get entangled in a discussion that was not of my choosing.

I decided the best solution would be to find a pretense for getting close enough to read the sticker myself. All this happened within seconds, so I stopped him with the first thing that came to mind: "Excuse me, I was wondering, would you mind telling me . . . is your hair really that color, or do you dye it?" He smiled, and assured me that his hair was not dyed. Meanwhile, I was able to read the words printed on the sticker: "Smile. God loves you."

Such a statement would not have caught my interest, except I had recently read a cover article in *Time* magazine about the California "Jesus People." This guy certainly didn't look like a New Yorker; with his extremely blond hair and what I considered somewhat of a "Beach Boys" look. Instead, he seemed to fit in with the people whose photos I'd seen in the *Time* piece. Who knew, maybe the "Jesus People" were having a convention in New York that week. I could picture the sign at Madison Square Garden: "Welcome, 'Jesus People.'" At any rate, I was curious to know if I was talking to "one of them." So I mentioned the article and asked, "Are you one of the 'Jesus People'?"

He told me that he was a "Jesus person," and he then invited me into a nearby coffee shop. It was there that he

told me in more detail what believing in Jesus meant to him. This was actually the first time I had ever heard what is called “the gospel.” He told me that Jesus was the Messiah, that he came to die for the sins of humanity, that he conquered death—and that by accepting his sacrifice I could have my sins forgiven and live for eternity with my Creator.

Well, I let Larry know I was Jewish and that Jews don’t believe in Jesus. I figured there might be an awkward moment, maybe even a mumbled apology, and then we would talk about something else. But Larry continued to talk as if Jesus was still relevant to the discussion. Then he invited me to a church in New Jersey. I explained to him that I had been to the “biggest, most impressive” church Christians had to offer, and I wasn’t impressed. He looked puzzled and I explained that I had traveled to Europe and while in Rome I’d visited the Vatican. He smiled and told me that he wasn’t inviting me to view an edifice but to experience a service—actually a concert—in the church. It wasn’t until later that I discovered that Larry Norman was a fairly well-known Christian folk-rock singer and that he would be playing guitar and singing at that church.

I went to Larry’s concert and was impressed by some of what I saw and heard. The people were young and seemed to have an idealism that was, in some ways, like my own. Of course, they weren’t Jewish, so I was certain that what they believed was not for me—still, I respected them.

As for Larry, he and I became friends. I found him kind, creative and contemporary in his outlook, even though he had certain standards of morality that one didn’t often come across in the big city. My friendship with Larry, my curiosity and my avid interest in reading were enough to convince me to look into the Bible. That was a life-changing experience.

Now to me, “the Bible” meant “the Jewish Bible.” I owned

a Bible published by the Hebrew Publishing Society (in English) and I knew it was the right Bible for me to use. I began in Genesis.

Once I opened up the Scriptures, it didn't take long to discover the fact that God is holy. That might sound obvious, but I had never really contemplated God's holiness. I could also see that the Bible was not an ordinary book, and the God of Abraham and Sarah was no ordinary god. I had not been interested in God before because, quite simply, I had a fuzzy idea of who he was.

However, what the Bible revealed about God made me hungry to know more. There was something so wonderful and right about God that I could not help being attracted to Him. However, the discovery of God's holiness had led me to another revelation—I was unholy. My own spiritual need became evident for the first time.

It had never occurred to me that I had "spiritual needs" because I didn't know what that meant. If I would have heard the phrase, I might have thought it meant a lack of meaningful activities, a lack of meaningful relationships or some other social or psychological deficiency. I was not lacking in those areas. Yet I was faced with the fact that a holy and just God created me and had certain expectations of how I should behave and relate to him. I realized that I barely knew God and I felt inadequate to initiate any move to draw closer to him.

Some of what Larry had said to me in that coffee shop began to make sense. God was worthy of my devotion, yet I was not capable of winning his approval. All the good and right things I could do seemed inadequate to bridge the divide between this awesome God and myself. All this added up to spiritual need.

I continued to read the Bible and to discuss these things

with the new acquaintances I'd met through Larry. My awareness of this spiritual need and my findings from the Bible caused me to view the things they said in a different light; I was no longer merely hearing about someone else's religion. They were talking about things that were of deep interest to me; things that I was seeing in my own Jewish Bible.

I couldn't help but wonder at this point if Jesus might be who they claimed he was—my Messiah. After all, I could see that I was incapable of getting any closer to God on my own. Could Jesus be the bridge, the way into God's presence? I knew from the Scripture passages I'd already read that Jesus seemed to fit the description. The prophet Micah said he would be born in Bethlehem. I knew that was Jesus' birthplace. Moses pointed to a prophet greater than himself. Could that be Jesus? King David described the manner of Jesus' death long before crucifixion was used. And Isaiah 53—which talked about an innocent person who would suffer and die for the sins of others—really clinched it. I had to know.

Within days, I went back to the church where Larry had sung. I had just been promoted from junior copywriter to full copywriter at the company where I was employed. I had the love of my family and friends, a nice place to live and a promising future. I should have been very happy that night. But as I sat in the church service, all I could think of was the fact that I was in the midst of holy things, and I felt unholy. I knew I didn't belong—not because I was Jewish or because anyone had passed judgment on me. I knew I didn't belong because these people had a relationship with God, and I didn't. I knew that Jesus just might be the promised Messiah and I was frightened.

I left the church building and sat out on the front lawn, hoping it would calm my fears. It was a summer night and the

air was warm. I knew I had a choice to make as I sat cross-legged and looked up at the stars (something you can't do in the city). There's something about looking at a slice of creation that makes conversation with the Creator very appropriate and natural. I told God that I too, wanted to have a relationship with him. I found myself tearfully confessing to him right then and there that I believed Jesus was the Messiah. I accepted the fact that he had taken the punishment for my sin, just as the prophet Isaiah had written, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned each one to his own way and the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all." (53:6) I told God that I wanted the forgiveness he offered through Jesus, and that I wanted to live for him. He heard my plea and that night he changed my life forever. He gave me the assurance that his promises in the Bible are true and lasting and not based on wishful thinking. Unlike the rabbi who eight years earlier had told me that, "we can only hope" that there is something beyond this present life, I now had a strong basis for my hope. It was rooted in my Messiah.

As far as I knew, I was the only Jewish believer in Jesus on the face of the earth. Now I had to find a place where I could worship with other people who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. I dismissed what I saw as "establishment churchianity." Instead, I gravitated toward an African-American church. While it wasn't culturally Jewish, at least it was culturally ethnic, and that made me feel more comfortable. In the beginning, I attributed a number of things to Christianity which were simply a part of that particular church's culture. All the women wore hats, so I assumed that just as Jewish men wear yarmulkas in synagogues, Christian women wear hats in church!

I didn't expect my family to be overjoyed with my decision, but the priority of God in my life overshadowed whatever fears

of rejection I may have had. Still, I wasn't quite prepared for my mother's reaction. "Susan," she said, "it would have been better if you had come to tell me you were on drugs or pregnant." Other family members expressed the gamut of responses—shame, embarrassment, anger, pity and disappointment.

I was completely taken aback by the way my non-Jewish roommates responded. Neither of them had ever used the name of Jesus as anything other than a swear word, until I decided to believe in him. Then they tried to "shake me loose" of what they saw as "archaic superstition." Church and Christianity had been present to some extent in their upbringings, though mostly as a cultural experience. Each felt shocked and disappointed that I, as a Jew, would "regress" to a religion they felt they had outgrown. My Jewish roommate showed no sympathy either. She was sad that I had "gotten religion."

Meanwhile, the reality of God became more and more sharply focused in my life. After work, I would go to midtown Manhattan, passing out gospel pamphlets I had purchased and tell whoever would listen about how Jesus had changed my life and how he could do the same for them. I suppose to some, I had become a "fanatic." Years later, I remember someone saying to me, "I wish I believed enough in something to be considered such a "fanatic."

Three months after I had made my decision to believe in Jesus, something tremendous happened. I was talking to a Christian couple, and they casually mentioned something about the other Jewish believers they knew. "Others?!" I said. "You mean there are actually other Jewish people who believe the way I do?"

I couldn't wait to meet these other Jewish believers in Jesus and I was not disappointed; it was like "coming home."

It helped to know people who understood some of the hardships of being Jewish and believing in Jesus. I began to understand distinctions between Gentile culture and Christian theology. I was able to set aside certain things which had felt a bit strange and alien to me without setting aside my belief in Y'shua (Jesus). I didn't have to begin each prayer with phrases like, "Our dear gracious heavenly Father, we come unto thee in prayer . . ."

As I met more and more Jewish believers, my understanding of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah also deepened. I studied the promises God made to our people, and I began to see how being Jewish gave me even more reason to trust Jesus. I also came to appreciate that negative reactions from Jewish friends and family were not about the specific beliefs I held. They were based on the emotional supposition that it was generally wrong for Jews to believe in Jesus because he is viewed as the god of the Gentiles—those who have hated and persecuted us.

I wanted to use my "cause-oriented" zeal as well as my experience in writing and drama to help dispel these misunderstandings. My first idea was to travel in a converted school bus with a few other Jewish believers I had met and proclaim our message across the country. We often discussed such plans, but among the four of us, I think I was the only one who really expected anything to come of it.

Then the opportunity came to move to Northern California to be part of a community of Jews who believed in Jesus and I took the plunge—becoming one of the founders of the Jews for Jesus organization. I used my political drama experience to write original street theater and helped found The New Jerusalem Players, which was the dramatic "arm" of Jews for Jesus. I had opportunities to use my writing skills as well, putting together position papers and press releases that

*Performing with The
New Jerusalem
Players, 1973. L to R:
Lyn Bond, Susan, and
Tuyya Zaretsky.*



*Evangelistic street theater in
midtown Manhattan during
Jews for Jesus' summer
witnessing campaign, 1975*



*Susan shares her faith with
30,000 young people in
Dresden, Germany*

Giving a "Christ in the Passover" presentation (below)



Handing out broadsides for the San Francisco "Bay to Breakers" race

Reviewing ISSUES with Art Director Paige Saunders (on right) and summer intern Andrea



Susan painting faces at the Jews for Jesus Ingathering 1999

Susan has edited ISSUES since 1976



helped make known the message that Jews can believe in Jesus on a national, even international scale.

I had always wanted to make a difference for the better, to do something meaningful with my life. Moishe Rosen, the actual founder of the modern day Jews for Jesus movement, once told me that I needed to measure how I used my life from a spiritual vantage point. He suggested I put my greatest efforts into “doing those things that would make a difference a hundred years from now.” That was good advice.

There are so many worthwhile endeavors in which we can invest our lives, causes that can bring comfort and relief, improvement and a better quality of life to others. But most of these things can only help for a time. They can only address the symptoms, not the source, of life’s problems. They don’t provide eternal solutions. They don’t provide answers for the person with terminal cancer or for the person who is the object of racism and bigotry. They don’t bring an end to hunger or war or violence. People need a hope and a future that offers justice and mercy and healing beyond this life, and that is only possible through a personal relationship with Y’shua the Messiah.

Those truths came home to me in a very personal way when, at age 34, I received a breast cancer diagnosis. The oncologist explained that while she didn’t want to be discouraging, I needed to know that the tumor was an aggressive one. “So how long do I have?” I asked. She said we can’t know such things, and that she had no guarantees to offer—but an aggressive treatment was my best shot at survival. Survival in cancer terms usually means five years. The aggressive treatment she was talking about meant surgery and chemotherapy. And I might add, lots of prayer.

I’d had all kinds of plans. I had envisioned lots of years ahead. Suddenly, I had to take stock of what might be an

overwhelming obstacle to my earthly future. One of the hardest things I had to do at that point was tell my family. Whereas I was not looking to shorten my stay on this earth, I honestly believed that my existence would not end here. I had a future and a hope beyond this world. But I knew my family didn't share that hope. Like the rabbi at my father's *shiva*, they were uncertain and unsettled about life beyond the grave. It was no surprise that they took the news very hard. They felt helpless. While I tried to assure them that I would be okay, no matter what the outcome, they took little solace. Yet I believe that my faith made the difference and I hope that they could see that.

I won't say that the next couple of years were easy. The emotional pain of losing a breast was very real, and the physical discomfort of putting poisonous chemicals into my body had its effect. And there was anxiety over every blood test or X-ray until the negative results came through. Yet I can't think of another time in my life when my relationship with God deepened as much. I can honestly say I experienced the joy of having Y'shua as my personal physician, therapist and friend. His presence can enable us to really transcend our physical circumstances. It did for me. One of Y'shua's followers quoted him as saying, "In this world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The world's religions can't make that claim. But the gift of salvation, of a forever future with God, is available to Jews and non-Jews alike through Y'shua (Jesus). If you are seeking a personal relationship with God, it really is possible. I'd love to introduce you to Y'shua. There's a prayer included in this booklet that you can pray or if you're interested in discussing this further, please send in the perforated card at the end of the booklet or e-mail me at sueperلمان@aol.com.

Susan Perlman is one of the founders of Jews for Jesus. She is editor of ISSUES: A Messianic Jewish Perspective and has written extensively on the subject of why Jesus is the promised Messiah. Her articles can be found through accessing the Jews for Jesus website's e-library (www.jewsforjesus.org).

If you would like to read other stories of Jews who are for Jesus, check out the Jews for Jesus web site (www.jewsforjesus.org) or write to request a catalog.

Jews for Jesus International Headquarters
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Look for titles such as:

Booklets:

Drawn to Jesus by David Rothstein

Disowned by Steve Cohen

But I'm Jewish! by Richard Harvey

Who Ever Heard of a Jewish Missionary? by Bob Mendelsohn

From Yeshiva to Y'shua by Lev Leigh

Nothing to Fear by Karol Joseph

Books:

Testimonies of Jews Who Believe in Jesus, Ruth Rosen, Editor

Jewish Doctors Meet the Great Physician, Ruth Rosen, Editor

Between Two Fathers by Charles Barg

Whether you consider yourself Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, religious or not, if you are looking for a personal relationship with God, please consider the following:

- 1. God is concerned with every aspect of your life.**
“Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands . . .” (Isaiah 49:15,16a).
- 2. You can't truly experience God's love because of sin.**
“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).
- 3. God provided Y'shua (Jesus) to be your sinner-bearer and Savior.**
“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).
- 4. You can receive forgiveness of sins and a personal relationship with God by asking Y'shua to reign in your heart.**
“. . . if you confess with your mouth the Lord Y'shua and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9,10).

If you believe these verses and want to follow Y'shua, there is a prayer on the inside cover that will help you begin a new life.

“God of Abraham, I know that I have sinned against you and I want to turn from my sins. I believe you provided Y’shua as a once and for all atonement for me. With this prayer, I place my trust in Y’shua as my Savior and my Lord. I thank you for cleansing me of sin, and for giving me peace with you and eternal life through the Messiah’s death and resurrection. Please help me be faithful in learning to trust and love you more each day. Amen.”

(Please print)

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

- I have read the texts from the Bible and have prayed the prayer to claim the abundant and eternal life that the Messiah Y’shua can give me. I sign my name as a commitment to make him my Savior and Lord.

Signed (if submitting online, omit or type)

Date

- I really don’t understand or believe these texts yet. Please contact me, as I am seriously willing to consider and seek what God has for me.

- I am already a believer in Y’shua and want to know more about Jews for Jesus.

- I am Jewish I am Gentile

Mail to: Jews for Jesus
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***Loss to Life* is
the story of Susan
Perlman, a Jewish
believer in Jesus
from Brooklyn,
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