

## A Brief Guide to Giving a Public Testimony

- 1) Remember that your purpose is to glorify God.
- 2) Keep it short (less than 5 minutes)
- 3) Elements in a testimony of salvation
  - a) Briefly tell about your life before Christ (don't glorify sin)
  - b) Tell how you came to acknowledge your sin and need for Christ (Repentance)
  - c) Explain the gospel (Jesus Christ became a man, lived a sinless life, willingly died in your place for your sin, promises eternal life to those who believe in Him)
  - d) Tell how you personally came to Jesus
  - e) Tell what change has occurred in your life
  - f) Tell what your hope for the future is - temporal and eternal
- 5) It is helpful to write out your testimony so that you will think through what you want to say. Don't hesitate to use notes to speak.
- 6) Examples of testimonies attached to help give you ideas of how to organize and present your personal testimony which will include all the elements listed above.

# FIRST PERSON

by Zefnia Durham as told to Leslie Dunn Schulz

## The Best Bad One

**As my friends looked on, I swaggered toward the menacing gun aimed at me. I was 19, big, strong, and defiant, and I was willing to die to keep my reputation.**

I had bullied the man before, just as I had so many others. And I had been threatened before, with knives and busted bottles. But this time I pushed too far, and those few steps I walked toward him were my last on two feet. He shot one of them off.

I had been the fifth of 14 children and had always felt lost in the crowd — unless I did something wrong. By the time I was 11, I was the “best” bad one in the family — stealing, lying, and quick with my fists. I didn’t enjoy hurting people, but it was the surest way to get what I needed most: respect.

Recuperating in the hospital after the shooting, I was broken emotionally. Without a foot, I would never again compete in sports. I was certain no woman would want me. Respect had been blown away with a single blast.

But over the next two years, I was fitted with a prosthesis, got married, and moved to another city. I had to re-establish my reputation, and having only one foot meant I had to get tougher.

My wife, Hattie, and I had five children over the next five years, but I wanted nothing to do with them. *My wife can take care of them*, I thought. As far as I was concerned, as long as I brought home a paycheck, my time was my own — time I spent with girlfriends and good drinking buddies who feared me. I had all the respect I wanted.

Then Hattie received Christ.

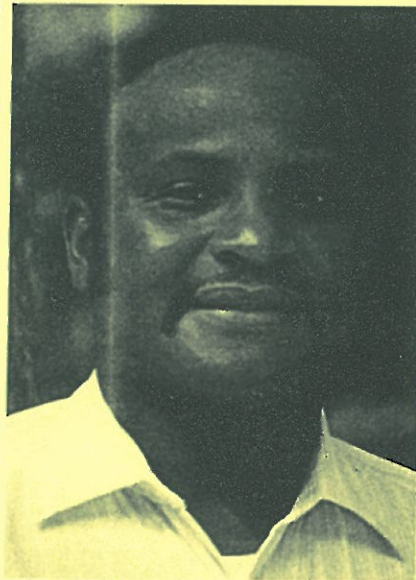
“Sure, sure, I believe you,” I scoffed. Yet she changed. She no longer begged and cried as I showered, dressed, and left her for the night.

“I’m going out,” I’d announce, “and I don’t know what time I’ll be home.”

“All right, but let me fix your clothes first,” she’d say.

Confused, I’d stare at the neatly arranged, perfectly matched outfit she selected. Didn’t she care? She was helping me out the door!

And she no longer threatened or in-



Zefnia Durham

sulted me when I staggered in early in the morning. Instead, she’d open the bed and gently cover me. When I awoke, she’d feed me breakfast. I started looking forward to coming home!

She wasn’t trying to trick me. Hattie was truly a Christian. She had something I wanted.

But change is hard. I continued laughing with my buddies, playing with women, and bullying whomever I pleased. I was dying inside and didn’t want to face it, until I pushed a man too far again. The bar was dark and his aim poor; he missed me, but he killed the woman I was with.

I finally had to face it: My life meant death, not only for me, but also for those around me. I went home and told my wife what had happened.

“You need to change, Zefnia,” she said. “Not so I’ll stay with you, but because the Lord is calling you. He can’t use you the way you are now.”

“I want to change, Hattie, but how?”

“You begin by asking the Lord to forgive you.”

“Forgive me? How can the Lord for-

give me? Some of the things I’ve done are unforgivable.”

“The Lord forgives everyone who asks forgiveness in his name.”

I wanted to believe her, but I knew my sins were worse than other people’s. So Hattie read Romans 11:32, “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all,” and Romans 5:20, “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”

I grabbed on to Hattie’s words and begged God to forgive me. I knew immediately that I had found her secret — a power far greater than mine. Despite all my sins, I knew that God loved me.

So did Hattie. Her love for me had never faltered or worn thin. As I stood before her, I thanked God for that love. I knew I would devote the rest of my life to her and the children.

Overzealous with joy and armed with the gospel, I eagerly started spreading the news among my friends.

“C’mon Zefnia, you don’t really believe all that stuff, do you?” Disbelief. “All right, Zef, you had your joke. Let’s go out and get a six-pack.” Temptation. “Get real man. You sound like a preacher.” An insult I was proud of.

I had changed, and as I walked away from each of them, I praised God that he had turned me from a destructive life to an eternal one.

Because of my increasing awareness of responsibility to my family, I started attending night school for my high school diploma, which led to a better job and was a better example to my kids.

But even more important, I have learned to love. I love God with all my heart, soul, and mind, and I love my neighbor as myself. The respect I once demanded from others is the respect I now give to them. Every day, as I slip on my prosthesis, I remember the high price of living without God. ■

*If you want to know more about a personal relationship with God, write to MOODY MONTHLY, 820 N. LaSalle Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60610.*

# FIRST PERSON

by Lou Ann Smith

## *Facing Toward Eternity*

**Finally independent, I could make my own decisions, and I exercised that freedom by fleeing the small town and unhappy home that had tormented me all my life.**

**A**s I stepped off the bus in Washington, D.C., it was my 18th birthday, and I stood face to face with my future. Clutching my old suitcase and umbrella, I gazed through the muggy June mist at all the impressive monuments and wondered if that fast-paced city, filled with hope and purpose, would share some of it with me. Maybe here I could escape the emptiness I equated with life.

I had been the ninth of 10 children in a family where No. 9 seemed one too many. It was a family with too many mouths and never enough money; one parent was an alcoholic, the other consumed with bitterness. There were frequent family brawls and sleepless nights. Sometimes my parents forced us to choose which one we loved more.

"Life isn't fair!" I once screamed at my mother. "I never asked to be born!"

"That's right," she said, "and if you had, the answer would have been no!"

Early one Sunday, quivering with hate still simmering from a bitter fight the night before, I decided to die. I walked down the dim, squeaky hall to our bathroom, opened the medicine cabinet, pulled out a bottle, and stuffed a handful of pills in my mouth. As I gulped them down, I looked at my red-eyed self in the cracked mirror.

*Wait a minute!* I thought, and I grabbed the sides of the cold porcelain sink to steady my shaking hands. *If I die, what then?*

As a little girl, I had feared that God would send my worthless life to eternal damnation. Sweating with terror, I could feel my body plunging into hell.

*If I die, what then?* I told my sister what I had done, and she called for help. The pills made me sick, but I soon recovered. Now I had to live with a paradox. Before, at least death offered some hope for respite. Now life and death were equally unbearable.

Then I escaped to Washington, my



Lou Ann Smith

new life. I found no answers there, but my active social life and full-time job kept me so busy that I could bury my fears and self-doubts deep within. I had no time to wrestle with despair.

I did, however, find time to marry and move to California. I longed for a fairy-tale romance and a happy-ever-after future. Soon I had two children and a marriage filled with arguments and fights. I started sensing the same rejection from my husband as I had from my family as a child. *Happy marriages don't exist*, I thought. Facing my future, I felt lonely and broken.

One Saturday morning, we passed a small church on our way to a department store.

"Tomorrow's Sunday," my husband said. "Maybe we should take the kids there. It would be good for them."

Sunday morning, God overwhelmed us with his beauty and love. The church sanctuary filled us with awe as we gazed at its rust-colored carpeting and rich wood; the sweetness of a spring bouquet filled the room. But the kindness of the people who greeted us reflected God himself. They were people who cared about us, and we knew it.

In his sermon, the pastor read: "The LORD your God is with you, he is

mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph. 3:17).

I had always thought I knew what the Bible said. I had gone to church as a child and believed in God. What this man was saying, however, seemed new to me. Later that morning, immediately after arriving home, I searched for our family Bible to see if my book contained the same comforting words. It did!

The words were comforting because surely God existed. And if God existed, then he loved me and would always care for me. The words I heard the following week at a Bible study shattered my brief comfort. "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder" (James 2:19). It was not enough merely to believe that God exists.

Yet I also learned that "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

"Dear Jesus," I wept. "Please forgive me, a worthless sinner, and give me eternal life."

That was 10 years ago. Since then, my husband and children have also received Christ. Instead of arguing, we are at peace; instead of fighting, we truly love each other. Like the people we first met at church, God is revealing himself through us to others.

Last week a neighbor asked me what makes me and my family so different, so loving. She said she saw a peace and optimism in us that she wanted.

As a child, I had hated life. Searching for relief, I had tried to kill myself, but found death unbearable. So I fled. I found no answers in Washington, no answers in marriage. But on my knees before my God and Savior, I found the peace that had eluded me all my life. Kneeling face to face toward my eternal future, I am finally happy. ■

*For help to find peace with God, write to MOODY MONTHLY, 820 N. LaSalle Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60610.*

# FIRST PERSON

by Doug Erlandson as told to Elizabeth Erlandson

## Philosophy Was My Religion

**Occasionally I longed for my childhood faith, but I had too many intellectual objections. I didn't want to believe in a God who was in control of everything, including me.**

**R**everend Erlandson, do you have time to talk?" The woman standing in the doorway to my church office was a member of my congregation and a student at a state university.

"I'm having a problem in one of my classes," she said. "The professor lets us use any books we want to support our theories *except* the Bible. I don't know what to do. I can't give him what he wants, but if I don't, I'll probably flunk."

As the woman continued to explain her dilemma, I thought about the teacher. I understood his position well. A few years earlier, I had been an unbelieving professor who considered the Bible unscientific.

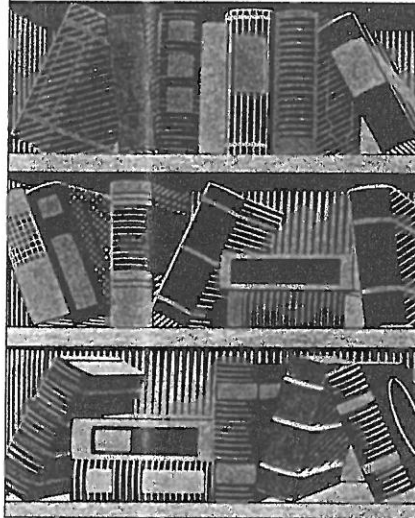
I had come to that conclusion during my junior year at a Christian college. From childhood I had heard the gospel. But in college, both the biblical and the secular viewpoints were presented, and the secular made more sense to me. So on a gray January day, after months of struggle, I stood looking out a library window, pressed my face against the icy pane, and told my soul, "I no longer believe in God."

Philosophy became my religion, ideas my god. At the age of 25, I was hired to teach philosophy at the University of Nebraska. Although I didn't believe in God, I knew there was more to reality than just the material world. I was fascinated with mysticism, even becoming a vegetarian. I began reading the Bible again, but only as a critic.

One day I realized there was a difference between what I believed and what my atheistic colleagues believed. *What was it?*

The answer came on a hot summer evening. I sat on my front porch, gazing at the stars, reasoning this way: *God isn't a part of creation. He is above it.*

Admitting God was distinct from creation was the turning point. For almost



12 years I had denied that, yet God pursued me. *He must have a special concern for me, I thought. I must be chosen.*

Then a few days later, I ran into a former student, a committed Christian with whom I had had many heated discussions about the Bible. In the past I would have been indifferent, but now I felt overjoyed to see him. I blurted out, "I want to talk to you!"

We met at a local restaurant. I didn't get a chance to say anything because Warren got right to the heart of the problem: sin. I admitted I was a sinner, but I couldn't accept that God chose me according to his sovereign will. Warren said I was asking the same question found in Romans 9:19, "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" and that Paul gives the right answer, "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?"

Suddenly it clicked! *I am a sinner. A sinner is distorted in his heart and mind. A sinner has no right to question God, yet that's what I've been doing. That's my problem.*

I left the restaurant and cried all the way home. A few days later, head bent over my desk, I breathed my first prayer since college: "Lord, I surrender."

God began renewing my mind as well as my heart. He showed me the foolishness of anti-Christian thinking and the wisdom of the Bible. For many years, I had sought after truth; now my efforts were rewarded.

For the next two years, I taught at the university, sharing my faith with my students. Even after my teaching contract was terminated, God allowed me to teach an apologetics class there as part of a campus ministry.

Today I am the pastor of a small congregation in Ohio. Throughout the past 10 years the Lord has been developing my ability to see all of life from a Christian perspective.

Many people think of philosophy as just an academic subject. Ideas, however, influence our actions. The Bible tell us that as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7, KJV). Non-Christian thinking has permeated our society. "God is dead" seemed just a slogan in the '60s, but as we approach the 1990s, people believe it.

A few years ago, I received news of the dramatic suicide of a philosophy professor who had worked with me at the university. His death underscored the result of ungodly thinking. As I reflected on his tragic end, I knew how to answer the young woman who sat in my office wondering what to say to her unbelieving professor.

"Tell him the truth," I said. "Never be afraid to speak God's Word to someone who seems more intelligent or scholarly than you. He may desperately be seeking God's Kingdom. Maybe God will use you in his life."

I now know that no one is truly wise until he "fears the Lord" (Prov. 1:7) and that my keen mind and good education are gifts from God. I pray that as he gives me opportunity, I will use these gifts to glorify him and influence the world for Christ. ■

*To learn more about how you can know God and his truth, write to us at MOODY MONTHLY, 820 N. LaSalle Drive, Chicago, Ill. 60610.*