

Student Name

Instructor Name

ENG 312

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### Finding Faith

I'm a Mormon. I grew up near Salt Lake City, the Mormon capital of the world. My entire family is Mormon, on both my mother and father's side. I'm even attending a school owned by the Mormon Church, Brigham Young University. Being a member of the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints is not only a major part of my heritage but has become an integral part of my identity. My aunt is my only family member who no longer identifies herself as Mormon. She left the Church and found faith elsewhere, which had the potential to alienate her from the rest of the family, but her strong commitment to independence and open-mindedness shaped her strong personal beliefs and motivations.

My aunt grew up in a very religious Mormon family in Orem, Utah. When I asked her to recount the story of her decision to leave the Church, she said it all started when she was a teenager. She remembers going to a youth conference where there was an object lesson demonstrating how many women would need to work outside the home due to death, financial issues, and divorce. She told me, "I thought it was so smart, yet the Church seemed to perpetuate the importance of being a wife and mother, and not that there is anything wrong with that, but reality just suggested that that wasn't the reality." After that experience she made the commitment to get her education and become completely self-reliant so she would be prepared for the future. She says she remembers thinking, "I've got to be prepared. I can't rely on my family, the government, or a man; I need to rely on myself." That sense of self-sufficiency led

her to many great opportunities throughout her life and also was the spark that led her to reevaluate her personal faith.

During her time at BYU, my aunt took advantage of any and every opportunity she came across to get the most out of her educational experience. She took an internship in Washington, D.C. and fell in love with the city. The nearest LDS church was a two-hour subway ride away, and so she started to spend her Sunday afternoons sightseeing. She told me, “I realized I was learning so much more and having more experiences not going to church than when I was going to church.” Her experience in D.C. made her more conscious of her personal commitment to her faith and she started to pay more attention to her motivations. The next summer she moved to Maryland and met people she thought were much more open-minded than members of the Church in Utah. Her experiences with the people influenced her feelings towards the Church, but she realized that if she was going to make that significant decision, she needed to base it on something deeper than people. She told me “it’s not a good reason to leave a religion because of the way someone has treated you. You have to decide what you believe and that has to be the reason you either stay or go.” My aunt decided she no longer wanted to rely on the beliefs of her family, and so she started investigating her own faith. “I came to the point where I had to make the decision for myself, and I just didn’t believe in Joseph Smith. I just didn’t believe any of it. I came to realize that it doesn’t matter if my mom has a testimony, or if my dad has a testimony, I don’t. I had to believe for myself.” That sense of self-determination that began in her youth led her to a crossroads where she realized she had to rely completely on her own faith to determine her personal decisions.

Soon after this experience she officially stopped attending the LDS Church. Her family asked her questions but overall was very understanding and loving, and that support was the

reason my aunt cites for how she has been able to maintain a good relationship with her family and a positive view of religion. She is grateful to her family for never pressuring her to come back to church. She told me, "I'm not anti-Mormon; I'm not anti-religion. I respect all religions and think religion is a great thing." She said she truly credits her family for their support and is so grateful for them, but sometimes there is some misunderstanding. One of her sisters seemed very surprised to hear that my aunt does believe in God, just not the LDS Church. "It's interesting to me that there is kind of this myopic view within some circles that if you don't believe in Mormonism, you don't believe in God." She said she loves God and gets down on her knees to pray every night and has a strong faith in a higher power.

My aunt now lives in California with her two dogs and works full-time. She is the most positive, sassy, and dynamic person I know, and she always follows the beat of her own drum. Because of her commitment to be nonjudgmental, she has the gift of loving and embracing people as they are. She fully supports herself and is wildly individualistic. She told me that she strongly believes that God loves her and wants to live a life that is pleasing to Him. Sometimes she does wonder if her decision to leave the Church led to her divorce and other difficult things in her life, but she really loves the place she is in now personally. My aunt chose to follow her own path because of her core values and is now a successful businesswoman, a non-judgmental friend, and a wonderfully spunky person.

When people ask her about the Mormon Church, she always responds positively. Once someone said to her, "I left the Mormon Church because the people were hypocritical," and she thought to herself, "Hello, people are hypocritical, regardless of the religion." In her opinion it is weak to base your personal beliefs and morals on how people treat you. Her strong personal values of independence and open-mindedness have shaped my aunt's whole outlook on life. Her

advice to anyone who feels the way she did is to not take anything personally, forgive and find out for yourself what you believe and why, fundamentally, you believe it.

My aunt is very supportive of my firm testimony of the gospel and the rest of her family's decision to stay in the Church. During our conversation she told me that she was impressed that I have found my own belief, even though it differs from her own. She values my decision to believe because she knows I came to that conclusion for myself. I think we both realized that we have much more in common than it might appear and both love God and want to live fulfilling lives. She respects the good that religion promotes in the world and is happy to see morality and responsibility being taught. Her personal experiences with wanting independence and viewing the world very openly led her to make the decision to leave a religion and find faith her own way. I respect her immensely for investigating truth and resolving to live her own life, based on her own conviction.

Work Cited

Interviewee Last Name, First Name. Telephone Interview. 8 Jan. 2015.