

October 10, 1972

**Baptist Family Faces: What Should
You Do When Hippies Move Next Door?**

By Mrs. Bill Watson

ELKVILLE, Ill. (BP)--What do you do when a hippie commune, that indulges in free sex and drugs, moves in next door.

Well, that happened to our family about two years ago.

At that time, my husband Bill and our three teenage daughters were renting my uncle's house three miles east of Elkville.

Four boys and three girls, ages 19-21, moved into a run-down four-room house nearby. Most of them were from the Skokie area of Chicago.

All seven were on drugs. All were alienated from their families. All were Jewish. They had practically no money. They made leather goods, such as belts and purses, which they planned to peddle.

The house they rented had no plumbing, no electricity, no indoor bath. For heat, they used an old pot-belly wood-burning stove. They made candles for light.

They were dirty. They wore big boots, caked with mud. You can imagine how they smelled, since they would go up to two weeks without a shower.

Well, I can't exactly say these kids were welcome. Bill, especially, didn't like long-hairs. Most of the people in Elkville resented them. Angry because they had invaded our hometown, Bill and some of the neighbors even threatened to rent the house out from under them.

But to our surprise, God answered our prayers by bringing these free-loving, pot-smoking youngsters almost next door.

You see, I was in a group that had been praying for unsaved students at nearby Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. We had plans to go to Carbondale to witness to the students and had even rehearsed our "speeches."

We suddenly realized we had a responsibility to witness to the young people right next door who needed Christ.

We soon found a common denominator in all seven of the kids. Each was starved for love. One of the boys said he never remembers his mother kissing him. Not that their parents didn't love them--but the only way they know to express love was through material things.

Most of their parents were business and professional people in Chicago. They had good incomes, but their kids were dying for love. And it was love that we tried to show them, even though at first it was hard because of our prejudice toward long-hairs.

We made contact in small ways at first, such as giving them a ride to town. Sometimes we took them homemade pies.

We made it clear that we didn't approve of their drugs, or of free sex. And they promised they would not push drugs to the Elkville kids.

Not everyone in Elkville approved of our efforts. Some said it was poor influence on our own teenagers. But if we had prayed for courage to go to Carbondale to witness: how could we refuse to witness on our doorsteps?

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On a bitter cold February night last year, I noticed two of the boys looking in our window. It was snowing. I motioned them to come in.

"We've been faking it," one of them said. "We're out of money. We have no gas for our truck, and no stove wood. We're hungry."

We told them to bring their sleeping bags and move into our basement for the night. While they were coming, I made a pot of hot potato soup, and popped big bins of corn.

They were wet, cold, hungry, and muddy. They ate everything in sight. Then we sat around for a long time, just talking.

"This is the night I've got to say something about Jesus," I thought. And I did. Within a few weeks, two of them accepted Jesus Christ. Eventually, six of the seven became Christians.

The change was radical. They cleaned up, not only spiritually and morally, but also physically. They dropped the use of drugs, and cut their hair. They took showers regularly at our house.

After they became convinced that free sex was wrong, the girls moved into our basement.

Since then, the group has scattered. Some have married. Others have gotten jobs. And our family looks back on last year as the greatest year of our lives. We can hardly believe what happened.

One of them joined a Church of God, and two the Pentecostal Church. Another belongs to a Catholic-related body.

None of them chose to become Baptists, although they liked our pastor at First Baptist Church, Elkhville, James Kerley, and our members. I think it was the love and spirited music of the Pentecostal groups that attracted them.

It was not easy for us. I'm a meticulous housekeeper. Our family takes off their shoes when they come in the kitchen door; but these kids came tracking in with muddy boots, fleas and lice.

But it was worth it. I have received some of the most heartwarming letters from these young people and their parents.

Some of the parents have had difficulty accepting their sons' becoming Christians. But unanimously, they appreciate the love we gave them and the change that has come about in their lives.

One father wrote his son: "I'm glad these people at Elkhville could show you love. Sorry I wouldn't show it while you were growing up. Although I don't favor you being a Christian, I respect you for your belief and appreciate what has happened."

We have met some of the parents. One of them told me, "It's not for me--but ain't it wonderful what's happened to these kids? My world is making money. That's all I've ever known."

On Father's Day, Bill, affectionately called a "red-neck" by some of the kids, got this note: "Through this winter, you brought me through my adolescence (hippie day). And thank you for bringing me down to earth. My own father couldn't have done, or didn't do better."

Another wrote: "I hope you know how much you all mean to me, for all the TLC (tender loving care) you have given us. Before I left, I drove by your house, but the lights were out, so I didn't stop. I wanted you to see and touch and drive my motorcycle, because I wanted to share my happiness with you...I don't have a job yet. Please pray for me."

And a mother wrote me, "I don't know how to thank you and Bill for everything you did for our son. No words can really express how we feel. I didn't think there were people as good and kind as you in this mixed-up world."

Mission Board Invests
In Office Property

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has shifted investment funds in the amount of \$785,000 to purchase property valued at \$1,875,000 adjacent to their office building here.

Executive Secretary Arthur B. Rutledge said the remaining property in the Spring Plaza complex became available at the same time an expressway expansion is taking most of the board's parking space.

Included in the purchase is a 50,000 square-foot, five story office building with across-the-street property for parking, and a drive-in bank building leased by an Atlanta bank.

Rutledge said the purchase provides for needed parking; the future expansion for the agency's offices, if this should ever be needed; and shifts investment reserves for a better earning rate.

A settlement for the highway expansion is expected to pay for the new parking space, and money from the board's memorial funds will finance most of the remaining portion of the cash payment. The memorial fund was established in 1943 and consists of bequests to the board. The earnings from this fund apply annually to the work of the agency.

"We will receive a better return on our investments from these funds we hold in trust, and we will not use Cooperative Program or Annie Armstrong Easter Offering funds in this purchase," Rutledge said.

The loan on the property will be self amortizing from rental returns.

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