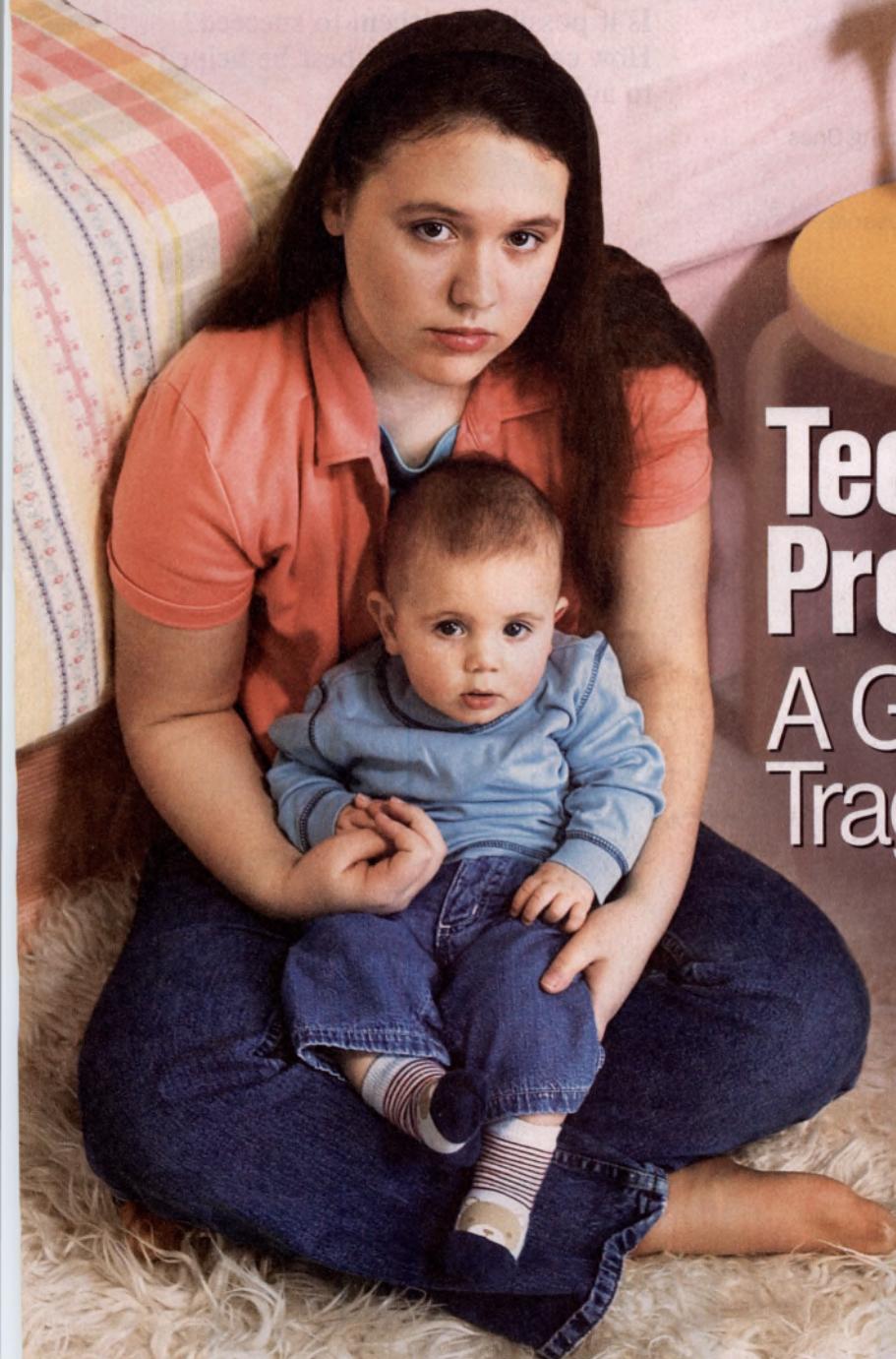


Awake!

OCTOBER 8, 2004

Teen Pregnancy A Global Tragedy



Awake!

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Glucoma is one of the chief causes of permanent blindness. Who is at risk, and how can it be avoided?



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Millions of girls face the challenge of raising infants by themselves. Is it possible for them to succeed? How can young ones best be helped to avoid this problem?



Mothers Too Soon

"My boyfriend was a cute guy. He had money, and we could go places and have fun. When I missed my period, I realized something was wrong."

"How was I to tell my mom? How could this happen to me? I was only 16 years old, and I didn't know what to do."—Nicole.

TODAY Nicole,* in her mid-30's, is a confident, energetic mother of three. Her oldest child is 20 years of age. Yes, years ago she was one among millions of unmarried pregnant teens. Like other teenage mothers, she found herself lost in a morass of formidable challenges, tough decisions, and uncertain prospects.

Nicole does not often talk about the shock, the denial, the fear, the anger, and the despair that marked her late teenage years—a time when her peers worried about their clothes and school grades. Nevertheless, Nicole's situation was not hopeless. She came from a loving family that had tried to instill high moral principles in her. Although for a while she chose to disregard those principles—and paid the consequences—later on, those same values led her to a productive and meaningful life. "Not all hope is lost" became her motto.

Unfortunately, not every teenage mother has a supportive family—or such an optimistic outlook. Many quickly find themselves trapped in a seemingly hopeless state of poverty. Some must deal with the emotional aftermath of rape and violence.

None of this bodes well for the children of teen mothers. Says the book *Teen Moms—The Pain and the Promise*, babies of teen mothers "tend to

have lower birthweight, more childhood illnesses, more infant mortality, poorer medical care, suffer more from hunger and malnourishment; they are exposed to more violence, and have more delayed development than children born to older mothers." Indeed, daughters of teen mothers are more likely to become teen moms themselves than are children born to older mothers.

How widespread is teen pregnancy? How can teenage mothers successfully face the challenges of raising their infants? Is there any way to help young ones avoid falling into such dire straits in the first place? The following articles explore these questions.



* Some names in this series have been changed.

Teen Pregnancy A Global Tragedy

TEEN pregnancy has been called an epidemic. However, the tragic proportions of this problem are best seen when the impact of a pregnancy upon one frightened teenage girl is considered. At the very least, she will experience drastic changes in her life that will deeply impact not only herself but also her family and loved ones.

Teenagers are in what the Bible calls "the bloom of youth"—a time when sexual desires are often at their peak. (1 Corinthians 7:36) Yet, it would be simplistic to consider teen pregnancy to be merely an issue of contraception. The evidence indicates that teen pregnancy involves a number of complex social and emotional issues.

Contributing Factors

Research shows that many teen mothers come from broken homes. "My whole life all I have ever wanted was a real family" is the recurrent cry of many pregnant teens. Evidently, then, dysfunctional families may set the stage for teen pregnancy. An outreach program that assists teen mothers found that they often have "volatile relationships with their mothers and no relationships with their

fathers." Anita, who became a mother at the age of 18, remembers that although her single mother worked hard to provide for her materially, Anita still felt the emotional void created by the absence of her father.

Other girls become unwed mothers as a direct result of rape. For some of them, the trauma seems to trigger emotional pain that may become manifest later in destructive conduct. Jasmine, for example, was raped at age 15. "After that," she remembers, "I became self-destructive. When I was 19, I got pregnant." Sexual abuse may also trigger feelings of worthlessness. "I never felt worthy of anything," laments Jasmine. Anita went through a similar ordeal: "Between the ages of 7 and 11, I was molested by a teenager. I hated myself. I blamed myself." She became pregnant at the age of 17.

On the other hand, some youths are the victims of their own overconfidence and curiosity. Nicole, quoted in the preceding article, admits: "I thought that I had all the answers, that I was capable of doing anything. Unfortunately, I was also capable of having a baby." Carol, who likewise became an unwed moth-

Awake!®

THIS JOURNAL IS PUBLISHED for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today's problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.

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er at an early age, experimented with sex because of curiosity. She says, "I felt there were things out there that I was missing."

Ignorance of the consequences of sexual activity also plays a role. In Britain, according to sociologists Karen Rowlingson and Stephen McKay, some young people "lack accurate knowledge about . . . what to expect in relationships and what it means to get pregnant." Some youths seemingly do not grasp the connection between sex and pregnancy. In one survey, teen mothers "often reported being shocked or surprised to find they were pregnant even if they had not been using contraception."

Nevertheless, it is the changing attitudes toward sex that have had the biggest influence on teen pregnancy. We live in times when people are "lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God." (2 Timothy 3:1-4) Australian researchers Ailsa Burns and Cath Scott say there has been "a reduction in social, religious, and economic sanctions against sex outside of marriage." Having an out-of-wedlock child may no longer carry the same stigma that it did in times past. Why, in some areas teenagers may even view having a baby as some sort of trophy or status symbol!

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**When parents break up,
the risk of teen
pregnancy increases**

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Would you welcome more information? Write Jehovah's Witnesses at the appropriate address: America, United States of: Wallkill, NY 12589. Australia: Box 280, Ingleburn, NSW 1890. Britain: The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN. Canada: Box 4100, Halton Hills (Georgetown), Ontario L7G 4Y4. Ghana: P. O. Box GP 760, Accra. Jamaica: P. O. Box 103, Old Harbour, St. Catherine. New Zealand: P.O. Box 75-142, Manurewa. Nigeria: P.M.B. 1090, Benin City 300001, Edo State. South Africa: Private Bag X2067, Krugersdorp, 1740. Zambia: Box 33459, Lusaka 10101. Zimbabwe: Private Bag WG-5001, Westgate.

Some youths seemingly do not grasp the connection between sex and pregnancy

Emotional Aftermath

The realities of teen motherhood are quite different from youthful fantasies. Upon learning that they are pregnant, girls often experience a storm of emotions. Many admit feeling shocked or stunned. "Common reactions include anger, guilt, and denial," says the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Denial can be dangerous, though, as it may prevent a girl from pursuing needed medical treatment.

"I got scared," recalls Elvenia of the moment she came face-to-face with the results of her "adventure" with sex. Many pregnant girls do not have someone to confide in or are too ashamed to talk about their situation. Not surprisingly, then, some become overwhelmed by guilt and fear. Many pregnant



teens also suffer severe depression. "I didn't particularly care about living, and I didn't care if I died," says Jasmine.*

However a young girl may react initially, she must eventually make a number of far-reaching decisions for herself and her child. How young girls can make such decisions wisely is the subject of our next article.

* For information on coping with suicidal feelings, see "Life is Worth Living," in the October 22, 2001, issue of *Awake!*

Pregnancy dramatically affects both the girl and her loved ones



Teen Pregnancy—The Grim Facts

Although the following describes the situation in the United States, it reflects some of the realities faced by pregnant teens all over the world.

- Four in 10 girls become pregnant before age 20—over 900,000 teen pregnancies annually.
- About 40 percent of teen mothers are under 18 years of age.
- Children of teen parents suffer higher rates of abuse and neglect than children of older parents.
- Only 4 out of 10 mothers under the age of 18 finish high school.
- Nearly 80 percent of fathers do not marry the teen mothers of their children.

● Only 30 percent of teen mothers who marry after their child is born remain in those marriages; teen marriages are twice as likely to fail as marriages in which the woman is at least 25 years of age.

● Children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birth weight, raising the probability of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and hyperactivity.

Taken from *Not Just Another Single Issue: Teen Pregnancy Prevention's Link to Other Critical Social Issues*, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, February 2002.

Teen Pregnancy Worldwide

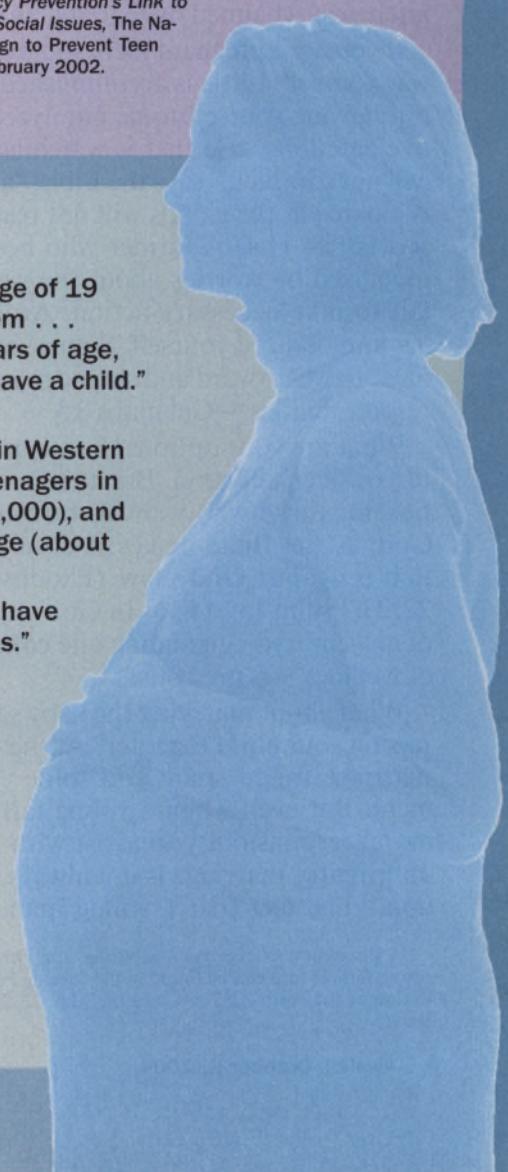
BRAZIL: Reportedly, "698,439 teenage girls under the age of 19 gave birth in 1998 using the Brazilian State Health System . . . 31,857 of these girls were children between 10 and 14 years of age, which, you will have to agree, is an absurdly young age to have a child." —*Folha de S. Paulo*, August 25, 1999.

BRITAIN: "Britain has the highest rate of teenage births in Western Europe . . . There were almost 90,000 conceptions to teenagers in England in 1997. Roughly three-fifths resulted in births (56,000), and 90 per cent of teenage births in 1997 were outside marriage (about 50,000)." —*Lone Parent Families*, 2002.

MALAYSIA: "Children born out of wedlock in the country have increased since 1998 with most mothers in their late teens." —*New Straits Times—Management Times*, April 1, 2002.

RUSSIA: "Nearly one-third of all babies born in Russia last year were born to unwed mothers, double the percentage of a decade earlier and at a level not seen since World War II, government statistics show. More than 40 percent of these babies were born to teenagers." —*The Moscow Times*, November 29, 2001.

UNITED STATES: "Despite the recently declining teen pregnancy rates, 4 in 10 teenage girls get pregnant at least once before they reach age 20." —*Whatever Happened to Childhood? The Problem of Teen Pregnancy in the United States*, 1997.



Facing the Challenges of Teen Motherhood

TEENAGE pregnancy brings with it the burden of facing adult decisions. "I feel like I'm 40 years old," says one teenage mother. "I missed out on my whole childhood." Indeed, in the wake of learning that she is pregnant, a young girl may feel absolutely overwhelmed by fear and anxiety.

If you are a pregnant teen, you may feel that way yourself. Little is accomplished, however, by allowing yourself to be paralyzed by negative emotions. "He that is watching the wind will not sow seed," says the Bible, "and he that is looking at the clouds will not reap." (Ecclesiastes 7:8; 11:4) A farmer who becomes immobilized by worries about the weather will fail to take necessary action. Avoid becoming immobilized yourself. Sooner or later you must move forward and shoulder your load of responsibilities.—Galatians 6:5.

What are your options? Some may tell you to consider abortion. But this is not an option for those who want to turn to pleasing God, as the Bible makes it clear that abortion is against God's law. (Exodus 20:13; 21:22, 23; Psalm 139:14-16) In God's eyes the life of any embryo—including one conceived out of wedlock—is precious.

What about marrying the baby's father and raising your child together? At the very least, marriage might spare you some embarrassment. But even when a young father feels a moral responsibility to assist with his child's upbringing, marriage is not always a wise option.* The fact that a young man is able to

procreate hardly means that he has the emotional and mental abilities needed to be a good husband and father. Nor does it mean that he can support a wife and child financially. Moreover, if the young man does not share your religious beliefs, entering into a marriage with him could defy the Bible's admonition to marry "only in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 7:39) Experience shows that rushing into a premature—and perhaps short-lived—marriage may only result in additional pain and suffering.

What about putting the baby up for adoption? While this is obviously better than abortion, you should consider the fact that despite the adverse circumstances, you do have the opportunity to nurture and raise your child.

Facing the Challenges

Admittedly, raising a child without a mate is not easy. However, by following Bible principles to the best of your ability and by trusting in God for strength and guidance, you can successfully face many challenges. Here are some steps you can take that will help you to cope.

● **Mend your relationship with God.** Realize that premarital sex is a sin against God—an offense against his high moral standards. (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4) Thus, a vital first step is to repent and ask God's forgiveness. (Psalm 32:5; 1 John 2:1, 2) True, you may feel unworthy of his help. However, Jehovah promises to forgive, and he assists those who repent of their wrongs. (Isaiah 55:6, 7) At Isaiah 1:18, Jehovah says: "Though the sins of you people should prove to be as scarlet [weighty, serious], they will be

* A discussion of the responsibilities and challenges young unwed fathers face can be found in the "Young People Ask . . ." section of the April 22, 2000, and the May 22, 2000, issues of *Awake!*

made white just like snow [completely cleansed].” The Bible also encourages wrongdoers to take advantage of the spiritual help offered by appointed congregation elders.—James 5:14, 15.

• **Cease engaging in premarital sex.** That will likely mean breaking off your relationship with the father of your child. To continue in that relationship outside of marriage would only expose you to pressure to continue engaging in conduct displeasing to God. Never forget that God’s laws, though strict, are there to protect us. Nicole, quoted earlier in this series, recalls: “I came to realize that God is right. He wants to benefit us.”—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

• **Tell your parents.** You may rightly fear that your parents will be angry with you. True, they will be upset and worried when they learn of your pregnancy. They may even feel that they have failed you as parents and blame themselves for your misconduct. However, if your parents are truly God-fearing, the storm of hurt and pain will likely pass in time. They are your parents, and in spite of your mistakes, they love you. Observing your repentant attitude, they will no doubt be moved to imitate the father of the prodigal son and extend loving forgiveness.—Luke 15:11-32.

• **Demonstrate gratitude.** Parents, relatives, and friends often prove to be a great source of help and support. Your parents, for example, may arrange for you to get medical care. After

**Teen mothers face many challenges
in raising their young ones**





**Rushing into a premature marriage
is not the answer**

your baby is born, they may help you to learn the basics of infant care; they may also offer their services as baby-sitters. Nicole says of her mother, "I had the baby, but she did much to help me." Friends may likewise help, perhaps discreetly providing you with baby clothing and other items that could prove useful. (Proverbs 17:17) When you are shown kindness, follow the Bible's advice and 'show yourself thankful.' (Colossians 3:15) Verbal expressions of appreciation can prevent such ones from feeling that their loving deeds have been taken for granted.

● **Learn parenting skills.** Of course, you do not want to be dependent on your family and friends forever. So start developing the skills that will help you to gain a measure of competence in caring for your child and in run-

ning a household. Learning to take care of a very needy human is challenging. There is much for you to learn about nutrition, health, and other aspects of child care. Interestingly, the Bible encourages older Christian women to urge younger women to be "workers at home." (Titus 2:5) No doubt your mother—and perhaps other older members of the Christian congregation—can give you some valuable training in this regard.

● **Handle money wisely.** The Bible says that "money is for a protection." (Ecclesiastes 7:12) The arrival of a baby will result in considerable financial demands.

You may first want to avail yourself of any public aid for which you qualify. Oftentimes, though, a girl must still depend upon her parents financially. If that is true in your case, it would be wise and considerate on your part to cut costs as much as possible. Although you would no doubt prefer to have new items for your baby, perhaps you can save money by shopping at secondhand stores or yard sales.

● **Try to get some education.** "The wise are the ones that treasure up knowledge," says Proverbs 10:14. While this is especially true of Bible knowledge, it is also true of secular education. You need to develop the necessary skills to make a living.

Admittedly, it is difficult to go to school while caring for



**Christian elders can
help erring youths to
mend their relationship
with God**

a baby. However, a lack of basic education could condemn you and your child to a life of poverty, welfare dependence, low earnings, poor housing, or malnutrition. So if it is at all possible, continue going to school. Nicole's mother insisted that she finish school, and as a result, Nicole was later able to get training to support herself as a paralegal.

Why not do some research as to what educational opportunities are available? If attending a classroom is too difficult, you might see if you are able to study at home. Study courses by correspondence, for example, might prove practical for your situation.

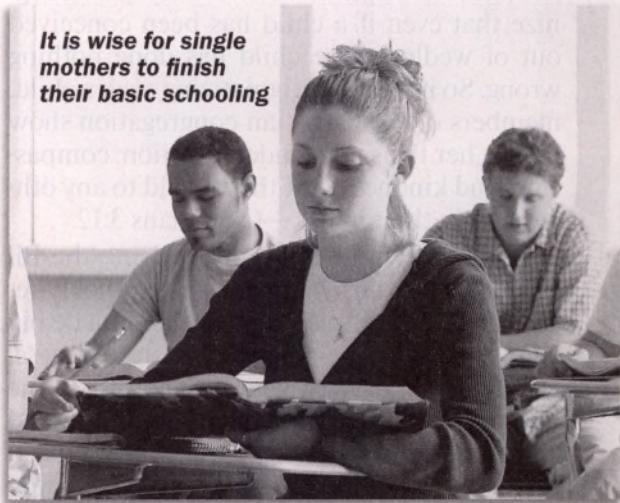
You Can Succeed

Raising a child out of wedlock is challenging for a young girl. But it is possible for you to succeed! With patience, determination, and the help of Jehovah God, you can become a loving, capable, competent parent. And children of unwed mothers can grow up to be well-adjusted adults. Why, you may experience the joy of seeing your child respond to your molding and training and become a lover of God.—Ephesians 6:4.

Nicole puts it this way: "With God's help—and against all odds—I had the joy of helping my little girl become a kind, respectful, and responsible young lady. Looking at her reminds me of all the sleepless nights but also fills me with happiness."

How, though, should adults treat teen mothers and their offspring? Is there any way to help young ones avoid the pain of teen pregnancy in the first place?

It is wise for single mothers to finish their basic schooling



Help and Protection for Young Ones

IT IS heartbreaking when a girl—still a child herself—becomes pregnant but is unmarried. Yet, teen pregnancy is widespread, and it touches everyone in some way. The tragedy of teen pregnancy is just one proof of the rightness of God's command: "Flee from fornication."—1 Corinthians 6:18.

Even so, from time to time, a young girl who has been taught God's ways chooses to

ignore or reject what she knows. She gets involved in sexual immorality and finds herself pregnant. How do true Christians react? When such a wayward youth gives evidence of repentance, her parents and other members of the Christian congregation should lovingly render help and support.

Consider again Nicole. Her parents were raising her to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

It was thus particularly distressing when she got pregnant out of wedlock. Yet, Nicole recalls, "Fellow Christians would come to my house and try to encourage me to study the Bible and stay close to Jehovah."

No, Jehovah's Witnesses do not approve of sexual misconduct. But they recognize that by applying Bible principles, wrongdoers can "be transformed." (Romans 12:2) They have unwavering faith that God forgives repentant wrongdoers. (Ephesians 1:7) They also recognize that even if a child has been conceived out of wedlock, the child has done nothing wrong. So instead of stigmatizing such a child, members of the Christian congregation show him or her the same tender affection, compassion, and kindness that they would to any other child in their midst.—Colossians 3:12.

One single mother began studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. She quickly responded to the Bible's message and made big changes in her life. She said of the Witnesses: "They all showed genuine interest in me and my children. They contributed food and clothing when necessary as well as financial aid. When I qualified to share in the field ministry with Jehovah's Witnesses, they baby-sat for me. They did all they could to help me develop real love for Jehovah."

Prevention

Still, it is far better to help young ones avoid such problems in the first place. Jehovah's Witnesses thus try to provide a warm, loving family

True Christians treat unwed mothers with kindness and consideration

environment for their children. Instead of merely relying on scare tactics—promoting fear of AIDS or even of getting pregnant—Witnesses try to instill in young ones a real love for Jehovah God and for his laws. (Psalm 119:97) They believe that children need to be given accurate information about sex. More important, they believe that from infancy children need to be taught the moral principles given in the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:15) Formal instruction is provided at local Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses. However, Witness parents are also encouraged to study the Bible with their children on a personal basis. Literature, such as the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, has been produced to help parents give their children moral guidance.*

Following the Bible's strict moral standards goes against the tide of immorality that has swept the world. But it is a way of life that could spare millions of young girls the tragedy of teen pregnancy.

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.





"Jehovah, You Found Me!"

"Are you Jehovah's Witnesses?" I asked the two men who had come to our home. "Yes," they replied. I exclaimed, "Me too!" I was only 13 years old and did not go to meetings at the Kingdom Hall. My parents were not Jehovah's Witnesses. Why, then, did I identify myself as one?

As told by **Nelly Lenz**

WE'RE it not for Jehovah's Witnesses, I might never have been born. My mother became pregnant with me while she was living in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. She was only 17 years old. Her family exerted great pressure on her to have an abortion. She consented.

Mom asked for a day off from work to have the abortion. Her boss, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, evidently found out why my mother wanted to leave work. She briefly told Mom how precious the gift of life is. (Psalm 139:13-16) On the way to the clinic, Mom pondered what her employer had said. She decided not to have the abortion. After my birth in 1964, my mother placed me in an orphanage.

My First Contact With Bible Truth

When I was about two years old, my mother and her new husband took me out of the orphanage. While living in Sainte-Marguerite-du-Lac-Masson, they began studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses and attended congregation meetings. However, we soon moved to Boisbriand, and my parents stopped studying.

A few years later, they resumed their study. I listened in to hear what was said about the Bible's hope of a paradise earth. (Luke 23:43) I came to love Jehovah very much.

One day, though, Mom told me that they had stopped studying with the Witnesses and that we would no longer go to the Kingdom Hall. At first, I was delighted. As a child of eight, I sometimes found the meetings to be rather long. That evening, though, I wanted to speak to Jehovah in prayer, and I worried that he might not listen to me.

The following Sunday afternoon, I saw our neighbors who were Jehovah's Witnesses leaving for their meeting at the Kingdom Hall. I started to cry and asked God, "Why can their children go to the meetings and I can't?" Nevertheless, the words of Psalm 33:18 would prove true: "Look! The eye of Jehovah is toward those fearing him, to those waiting for his loving-kindness."

Returning to the Kingdom Hall

After three weeks, I visited our neighbors and told the mother, Lilianne, that I wanted to attend the meetings. Lilianne explained that this was impossible, since my mother did not want anything to do with Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet, I insisted. So she took me home and asked Mom if I could go with them. To my surprise, Mom agreed. She said that the meetings would teach me good principles. Thus, I went to the meeting every Sunday.

For about three years, I got to attend congregation meetings. But when I turned 11, my parents divorced, and my mother and I moved away. Once again, I lost all contact with Jehovah's Witnesses.

An Unexpected Encounter

One day I was sitting on the front steps of our house when two Witnesses—Eddie Besson and Don Fisher—approached and asked if my parents were home. When I said they were not, the men turned to leave. But I ran after them, and we had the conversation related at the outset.

Understandably, the two men were surprised to hear me identify myself as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I explained my situation and begged them to return that evening. When I told Mom the Witnesses would be coming by, she became very upset and said that she would not let them into our home. In fact, she planned to leave before they arrived. I tearfully begged Mom to stay. Just as she was getting ready to leave, the doorbell rang, and there was Eddie Besson. Imagine my joy when Mom accepted a Bible study!

Finally, I could attend congregation meetings again! Less than a year later, however, my mother again stopped studying. This time, she forbade me to have any contact with the Witnesses and discarded all the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses that she could find. But I managed to hide a Bible, a song-book, two bound volumes of *The Watchtower*, two *Yearbooks of Jehovah's Witnesses*, and a book entitled *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*.^{*} During my last study, I asked Eddie Besson what I could do, since I loved Jehovah very much. He encouraged me to study on my own and to pray often. He assured me that Jehovah would care for me. I was only about 14 years old.

Conducting My Own "Meetings"

From then on, every Sunday I went to my room and pretended I was at the meeting. I sang the song "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize!" at the beginning and the end because it was the only Kingdom song I could remember. To this day, I cannot sing this song without weeping. I also studied a *Watchtower* article in the bound volumes I had. I concluded my "meeting" with prayer. So even though I was no longer associating

with the Witnesses, I felt that Jehovah was near me.

When I turned 17, Mom and I moved to Montreal. Those years were difficult, as our home was anything but a haven of love.

Found!

One day Mom accepted the book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* from Jehovah's Witnesses. When I came home, I saw it on the table and started to look at it. When I saw that it used God's name, Jehovah, I started to cry and silently prayed, "Jehovah, you found me!"

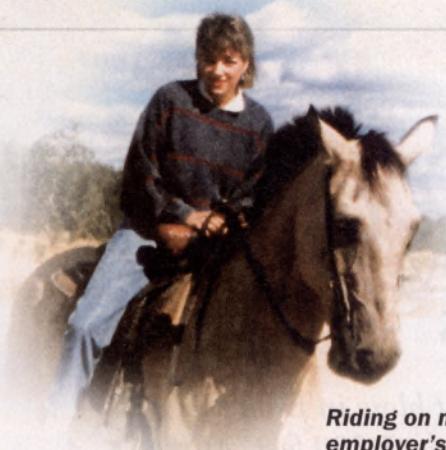
I needed to contact my Christian brothers and sisters. But how? Mom told me that a neighbor might be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. So on my way to work, I went to our neighbor's home and rang the doorbell. A man—half asleep—answered the door. How surprised he was when I said that I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses and that I wanted to get baptized! He arranged for a Christian sister named Josée Miron to study the Bible with me. But once again, Mom began to oppose my study of the Bible. She told me I would have to wait until I was 18 years old before I could become a Witness.

Family Life at a Price?

My employer noticed that my situation at home was worsening. He often invited me to spend time with him and his wife on weekends. Since I love horses, we would often go riding together. I felt that they were like parents to me.

One day my employer told me that he and his wife loved me very much and that they wanted me to come and live with them. He was offering

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



Riding on my employer's horse

me something I had always wanted—a loving family. But there was one condition—I was to stop associating with Jehovah's Witnesses. They gave me one week to think about their offer, but I didn't even need one day. I gave them my answer immediately. Jehovah had never abandoned me, and I could not abandon him.

My Service to God

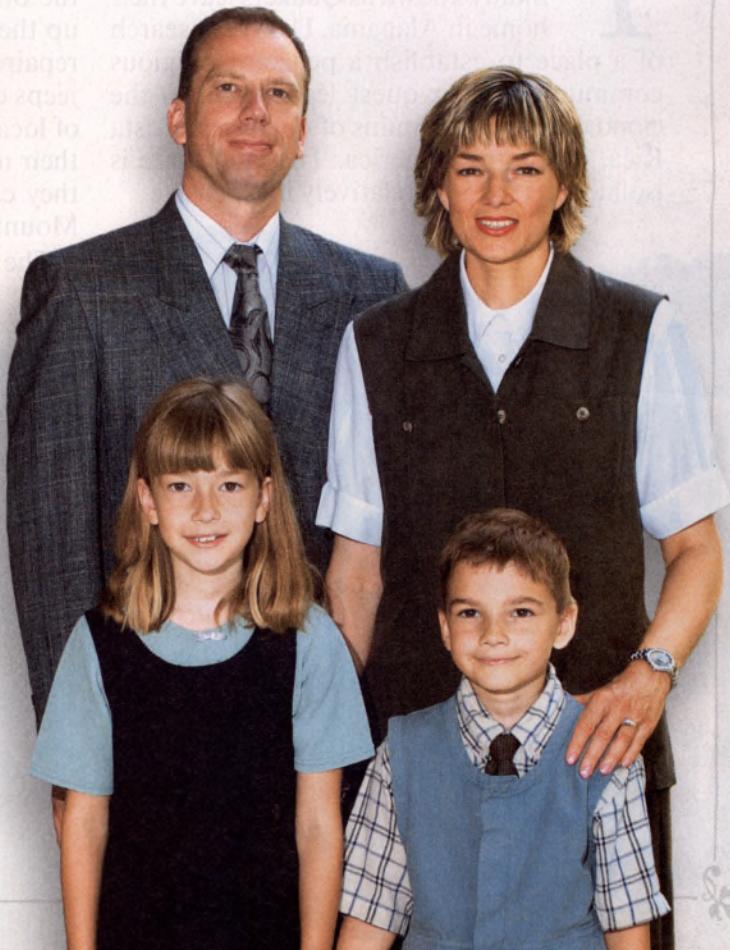
Because of the trouble I was experiencing at home, I moved in with my stepfather. He encouraged me to continue studying, and on December 17, 1983, at 19 years of age, I was baptized. I was so happy to see Eddie Besson on my baptism day. Now there was no question in his mind that I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses!

However, my stepfather's demeanor changed after I was baptized. Whenever he saw me praying, he would speak very loudly and even throw things at me! He also insisted that I further my education in a way that would interfere with my goal to become a pioneer, a full-time evangelizer. Eventually he asked me to leave home. He gave me a check for \$100 and told me that when I cashed it, I would know that Jehovah did not care for me.

I became a pioneer on September 1, 1986, and I have that check—uncashed—to this very day! Sometimes it was difficult to pioneer in a rural area without a car. But members of the local congregation were very supportive and helpful.

In time, I met a kind Christian man named Ruben Lenz. We married in 1989. Ruben presently serves as a congregation elder in Milton, Ontario, Canada, where we have lived since 2002. Our marriage has been one of the greatest blessings Jehovah has bestowed upon me. I continued in full-time service until we had our first child, Erika, in 1993. A little over three years later, we had a son named Mika. After my long years of loneliness, Jehovah God richly blessed me with a family that loves him as much as I do.

Although I was periodically separated from Jehovah's people while growing up, I never ceased resting my hope on God and holding on to the hope of everlasting life in Paradise. (John 3:36) How grateful I am that Jehovah "found" me!



Nelly Lenz with her husband, Ruben, and children, Erika and Mika

Monteverde

A NATURE PRESERVE IN THE CLOUDS

BY AWAKE! WRITER
IN COSTA RICA



The warm Caribbean trade winds that blow in from the sea encounter mountains reaching as high as 5,500 feet. As the winds ascend these heights, they cool off, and the moisture within them condenses. Thick, low-lying clouds are formed, which then bathe the mountains in rain or shroud them in mist. The result? A rare place of stunning natural beauty known as a cloud forest.

THE year is 1951. Forty-four members of the religious group commonly known as Quakers leave their home in Alabama, U.S.A., in search of a place to establish a peaceful religious community. Their quest leads them to the cloud-covered mountains of northwest Costa Rica, in Central America. The land there is isolated, fertile, and relatively inexpensive.

Developing the area into a homestead, however, is not easy. Marvin Rockwell, one of the original settlers, recalls, "The only road up the mountain was an oxcart trail, and we repaired it with picks and shovels so that our jeeps could enter." It was with the assistance of local residents that they finally established their new home in the clouds. Appropriately, they called it Monteverde, meaning "Green Mountain."

The settlers made two decisions that had far-reaching effects. They knew that they had to make their farming community self-sustaining. But what commodity could



▲ Epiphyte plants



Ferns ▶



they produce that would withstand the lengthy trip down the mountain to market? They decided that cheese fit the bill. A small cheese-making operation that began back then now produces more than 9,000 pounds of cheese a day, besides other dairy products, such as sour cream, cream cheese, and ice cream.

The settlers also decided to set aside 1,335 acres of forested mountainside above their homes. Since this watershed area served as the water source for their small hydroelectric plant, they deemed it wise to protect it. Soon, however, the rich variety of flora and fauna in the watershed area caught the attention of scientists, especially after the discovery of the golden toad. (See the box on the golden toad.) In the 1960's, a group of scientists and local residents founded the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve, a wildlife sanctuary that soon thereafter was expanded to include the watershed. Since then, the preserve has been further extended to encompass approximately 26,000 acres.

The Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve is one of the most visited attractions in Costa Rica. Annually, as many as 50,000 tourists travel the steep, winding dirt road to Monteverde. Bird-watchers and naturalists throng to see the thousands of species of birds, animals, and plants that make their home in the preserve and its surrounding areas.

Plant Life

Some 500 species of trees serve as a foundation of the preserve's ecosystems. Some trees cling tenaciously to exposed ridges, struggling against the winds that have stunted and gnarled them. Those that grow in protected areas wear a dense robe of vines, herbs, and shrubs, which cover the tree-trunk surfaces. How can these plants, called epiphytes, live without being rooted in soil? A trail guide reads: "In this very wet environment epiphytes receive plenty of water even without extensive root systems. The

Background and orchid: © Michael and Patricia Fogden

Orchid

The Disappearance of the Golden Toad



▲ RICARDO RIBERA/SYGMA

The native golden toad, actually a brilliant neon-orange, was first discovered high in the forests of Monteverde by biologist Jay Savage in the 1960's. Monteverde appears to be the only place on earth where this toad could be found. "In 1985 a swarm of about 1,000 was observed," notes Rafael Bolaños, manager of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve. "But just two years later, very few could be found." The golden toad is now believed to be extinct.

Dr. Alan Pounds, who has studied the disappearance of 20 species of frogs and toads in the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve, notes that "extreme patterns of daily precipitation . . . immediately preceded the collapse and disappearance of many amphibian populations, including the endemic golden toad."



mass of vegetation traps enough of the leaf litter being washed down from the canopy to supply nutrients."

Three hundred species of orchids add splashes of color to the primarily green palette. Much of the remaining space in the landscape is filled in by the 200 kinds of ferns that thrive here—some nearly 40 feet tall and 150 years old.

What accounts for so much biodiversity in such a small area? For one thing, the preserve's boundaries extend down toward both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. The dramatic differences in humidity and temperature at various elevations create six distinct ecological zones in which life flourishes in astounding variety.

Bird and Animal Life

Monteverde is a bird-watcher's paradise. In 1996, a bird count tallied the number of species present within a 15.5 mile circle that included parts of Monteverde. In just 24 hours, 369 different bird

species were sighted! Native birds here range from the diminutive hummingbird to the resplendent quetzal. In fact, many visitors come particularly to see the quetzal—one of the most impressively plumed birds in the Tropics. There are approximately 100 quetzal pairs nesting in Monteverde, but they can be difficult to spot because their green plumage blends in so well with the

forest verdure. However, it is hard to miss the hummingbirds that frequent the feeders placed outside local shops and restaurants. Beautifully decorated in gleaming violet, emerald, and turquoise, they zip between flowers and feeders on wings that beat too fast for us to see.

One hundred species of mammals also call Monteverde home. "It is one of the few remaining habitats of . . . five species of the cat family: jaguar, ocelot, puma, margay, and jaguarundi," says the *Costa Rica Handbook*. Still, the reclusive big cats keep their distance from humans. "A puma is sighted about every six months," Rafael Bolaños, manager of the preserve, told *Awake!* "A jaguar is seen only about every three years." An encounter with one of the 120 species of amphibians and reptiles is much more likely.

What does the future hold for Monteverde? Efforts are being made to expand the protected area. In fact, the recent addition of the Santa Elena Forest Reserve and the Children's Eternal Rain Forest more than doubled the conservation area. (See the box below.) It is hoped that these measures will help to ensure that there will always be abundant life in the clouds.

© Anthony Mercieca/SuperStock

Children's Eternal Rain Forest

In a small primary school in rural Sweden, a class of nine-year-olds asked what they could do to save the rain forest. With the help of their teacher, they raised money that in 1988 was used to purchase 15 acres of threatened rain forest. Thus was born the Children's Eternal Rain Forest. Word of the project spread, and children in 44 countries joined the effort. Children have raised enough money to expand the protected area to include thousands of acres bordering three sides of the Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve.

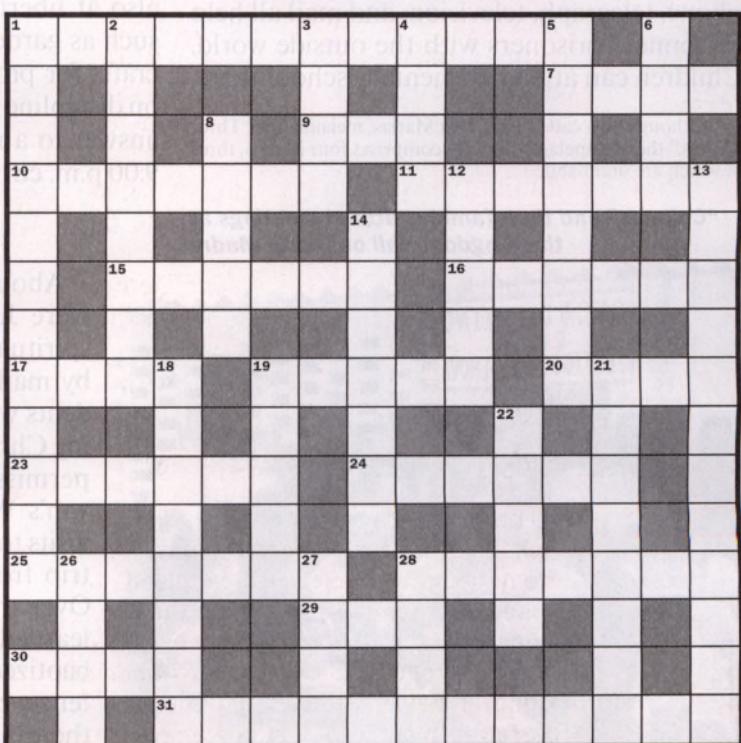
Red-eyed tree frog



Crossword Puzzle

Clues Across

1. To impress on us that we should "not return to the things behind," Jesus Christ urges that we remember this person [4 words] (Luke 17:31, 32)
 7. In Jesus' illustration of the sower, the seed that fell upon rocky soil withered for lack of this (Mark 4:6)
 9. What the resurrected Jesus was instructed to do at Jehovah's right hand until Jesus' enemies were placed as a stool for [his] feet (Acts 2:34, 35)
 10. Job's companion Bildad is the only one of these named in the Scriptures (Job 8:1)
 11. A king from this town joined the confederation of northern Canaanites that Joshua defeated at the waters of Merom (Joshua 11:1)
 15. God gave this name to Jacob when he was about 97 years of age (Genesis 32:28)
 16. Because Saul and his men were all in this state, David was able to take the spear and the water jug that were next to Saul's head (1 Samuel 26:12)
 17. In fulfillment of Jehovah's word, these animals devoured wicked Jezebel (2 Kings 9:36)
 19. Allow (1 Timothy 5:19)
 20. Free from harm or risk (Genesis 37:14)
 23. This Benjaminite was the son of Shaharaim by his wife Hushim (1 Chronicles 8:1, 8, 11, 12)
 24. Set aside for the service of God (Exodus 19:23)
 25. The first stopping point mentioned in the Israelites' march toward the Red Sea (Exodus 12:37)
 28. Your own person (James 1:27)
 29. Intention (1 Thessalonians 4:11)
 30. Related to but larger than a rabbit (Leviticus 11:6)
 31. The time period revealed to Daniel showing when the Messiah would appear and then be cut off [2 words] (Daniel 9:24-27)
- earth for a witness to all the nations" [3 words] (Matthew 24:14)
2. Remaining firm under suffering without yielding (James 1:12)
 3. The state of being comfortable (Luke 12:19)
 4. Those of anger are listed among "the works of the flesh" that keep one from inheriting God's Kingdom (Galatians 5:19-21)
 5. Crushes and destroys (Micah 5:8)
 6. A Judean city that Rehoboam strengthened (2 Chronicles 11:5, 7)
 8. A term evidently used to refer to a snake that was poisonous (Numbers 21:8)
 12. While men must judge by outward appearance, Jehovah can examine this (1 Samuel 16:7)
 13. Before he was chosen to be a prophet, Amos engaged in this
 14. seasonal occupation [3 words] (Amos 7:14)
 15. Spiritual defect (Ephesians 5:27)
 18. Makes painstaking investigation (Proverbs 15:14)
 19. Assign as a share (Ezekiel 45:1)
 21. It was in this chamber that Paul gave his defense before King Agrippa (Acts 25:23)
 22. A Moabite whose two sons, powerful heroes themselves, were killed by David's warrior Benaiah (2 Samuel 23:20)
 26. The sons of this distant descendant of King Saul were all outstanding archers (1 Chronicles 8:40)
 27. When Jesus said that his disciples must have this feeling toward members of their family, he meant that his disciples should love them to a lesser degree (Luke 14:26)
 28. To fail to perform (Luke 11:42)



Clues Down

1. What Jesus said would "be preached in all the inhabited

Imprisoned, YET Free!

By Awake!
writer in
Mexico



SIXTY miles off the central western coast of Mexico lie the Islas Marias.* One of these Pacific islands, María Madre, has served as a Mexican federal penal colony since 1905. At one time, banishment there was a dreaded punishment, but now prisoners with a record of good conduct may actually ask to go there!

For one thing, some prisoners are allowed to have their family live with them. Instead of living in cells with bars, convicts live in small houses. The settlements have many of the services you would find in any small town. Telephone, telegraph, television, and mail all help to connect prisoners with the outside world. Children can attend elementary school there,

* Although also called Islas Tres Marias, meaning the "Three Marias," the archipelago officially comprises four islands, three of which are uninhabited.

"Colonos" and their families attend meetings at the Kingdom Hall on María Madre

SALON DEL REINO
DE LOS
TESTIGOS DE JEHÓAH



although they must return to the mainland for high school. And while access to the islands is strictly controlled, once a week a naval ship arrives bringing supplies and visitors.

What about rehabilitation? The prisoners—who call themselves *colonos*, or settlers—are required to work at a job for a few hours a day. Not only does this help them later to adjust to life in the outside world but it helps pay for their keep. The *colonos* are also at liberty to pursue personal activities, such as gardening and manufacturing handicrafts for profit. This is not to say that prison discipline is entirely lacking. Inmates must answer to a morning roll call and observe a 9:00 p.m. curfew.

Spiritual Freedom Comes to the Marias

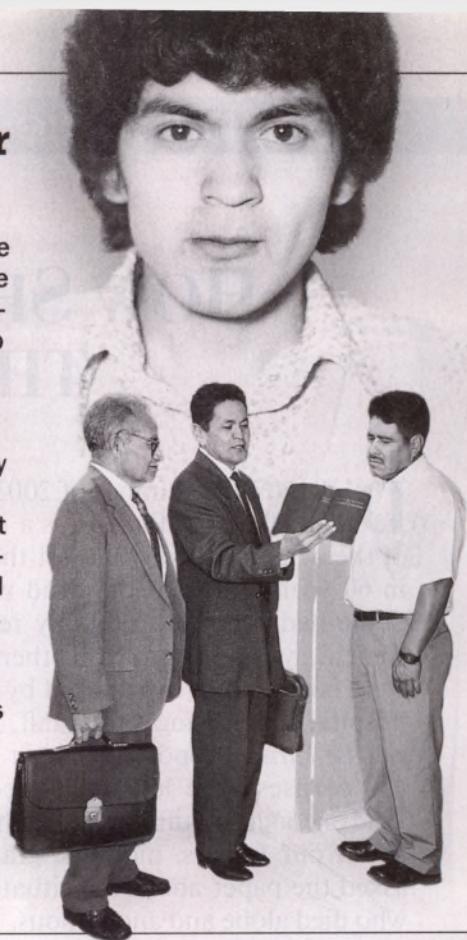
About 1985 a *colono*, whose family were Jehovah's Witnesses, requested spiritual help. A Bible study was begun by mail. In time, a group of Bible students was formed, and they began holding Christian meetings. Upon obtaining permission from the government, Jehovah's Witnesses began making regular visits to the island—a 13-hour overnight trip from Mazatlán, on the mainland. Over the years some 40 prisoners have learned the truth of God's Word, been baptized, and after fulfilling their sentence, been released. As of this writing, there are 6 baptized Witnesses still on

From Drug Addict to Christian Elder

Guillermo was imprisoned for both selling and using drugs. After being sent to the Islas Marias, he continued to be addicted to drugs. But he noticed that some inmates who had long sentences for things like drug trafficking were well-groomed, had a happy outlook, and were model prisoners. When he found out that they were studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, he accepted an invitation to their meetings. Later a formal Bible study was started with him.

Guillermo made big changes in his life and was released shortly thereafter. He immediately looked for Jehovah's Witnesses in order to continue his study. Today he

serves as an elder in the Christian congregation, and 17 members of his family are now Jehovah's Witnesses. He comments: "It is a great privilege to know Jehovah and to have left all those vices behind. Many of my former friends are dead because of drugs. Drugs had affected my brain, making it difficult for me to retain information. But the method of study the Witnesses used helped my mind to improve a lot. The doctors were amazed because they thought I would never recover. What the Bible's truth has done for me and for my family is incredible. We had never shown love to one another, but now we are united."



the island, and an average of 25 people attend Christian meetings.

Jehovah's Witnesses are admired by the authorities for their efforts, and prisoners who become Witnesses are respected by all. Recently the assistant director of the penitentiary commented to a visiting Witness: "How good it is that you have a common interest with us in seeing to the physical and moral welfare of the inmates, that you are concerned about them! You have our full support." He offered to repair the building where the brothers are allowed to meet.

One baptized Witness—an inmate for ten years—said: "When the brothers who visit us ask if I want to leave, I tell them that I want to continue serving here; I consider it my assigned territory, as there is a great need. Of course, I would like to be able to go to assem-

bles and enjoy Christian fellowship." He is due to be released next year for good conduct.

The penal system in the Islas Marias has reportedly had a measure of success in rehabilitating prisoners. However, the Kingdom message has brought true spiritual freedom and rehabilitation, a 'release to captives' and a 'wide opening of the eyes to prisoners.' —Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1.

In Our Next Issue

- A Child's Early Years
—What Should Parents Do?
- Taught From Childhood to Love God
- Beauty Hidden in the Dark

HOW SHOULD WE TREAT THE ELDERLY?

DURING the summer of 2003, thousands died all across Europe as a result of one of the worst heat waves to hit the Continent in 60 years. Most of the dead were elderly. Some had been left alone by relatives who went away on vacation. Still others reportedly were neglected or overlooked by overworked hospital and nursing home staff. The newspaper *Le Parisien* reported that in Paris alone, 450 corpses were left unclaimed. "In what kind of conditions are we living that we forget about our fathers, mothers, grandparents?" asked the paper about the situation of those who died alone and anonymous.

In a world where the over-65 population is growing by an unprecedented 795,000 people every month, caring for the needs of the elderly has become one of today's greatest concerns. "Global aging is occurring at a rate never seen before and we will need to pay close attention to how countries respond to the challenges and opportunities of growing older," said Nancy Gordon, associate director of demographic programs for the U.S. Census Bureau.

Our Creator also has an interest in the elderly. In fact, his Word, the Bible, gives us direction on how they are to be treated.

Respect for the Elderly

God's Law, given to Moses, promoted respect for the elderly. The Law stated: "Before gray hair you should rise up, and you must show consideration for the person of an old

man." (Leviticus 19:32) Obedient worshipers of God were expected to "rise up" before the elderly (1) as a sign of respect for an older person and (2) as evidence of the worshipers' reverential fear of God. The aged were thus to occupy a position of honor and were to be looked upon as valuable assets.—Proverbs 16:31; 23:22.

Although Christians today are not under the Mosaic Law, its principles reveal the thoughts and priorities of Jehovah, leaving no doubt that he holds the elderly in high regard. These principles were understood by members of the first-century Christian congregation. Early evidence of that is reported in the Bible book of Acts. Among the Christians in Jerusalem at that time were some needy widows. No doubt a number of them were elderly. The apostles appointed seven "certified men" to make sure that these women received daily food supplies in an orderly way, considering such special care to be "necessary business" of the congregation.—Acts 6:1-7.

The apostle Paul applied the principle of 'rising up before gray hair' to the Christian congregation. He told the younger Christian overseer Timothy: "Do not severely criticize an older man. To the contrary, entreat him as a father, . . . older women as mothers." (1 Timothy 5:1, 2) While young Timothy had a measure of authority over elderly Christians, he was told not to disparage an older man. Rather, he was to entreat him respectfully as a

father. And he was to show similar honor to older women in the congregation. In effect, the apostle Paul was admonishing Timothy—and by extension all members of the Christian congregation—to ‘rise up before gray hair.’

Of course, godly people need no legislation to treat older ones with dignity and respect. Consider the Bible example of Joseph, who spared no expense in bringing his elderly father to Egypt, saving the 130-year-old Jacob from a widespread famine. On catching sight of his father for the first time in more than two decades, Joseph “at once fell upon his neck and gave way to tears upon his neck again and again.” (Genesis 46:29) Long before treating the elderly with compassion and deep respect became the law among the Israelites, Joseph reflected God’s view by doing so.

During his ministry Jesus himself showed concern for elderly ones. He strongly condemned religious leaders who felt justified in neglecting their aged parents on account of their religious traditions. (Matthew 15:3-9) Jesus also lovingly cared for his own mother. While suffering excruciating pain on the torture stake, he made sure that his aging mother would be cared for by his beloved apostle John.—John 19:26, 27.

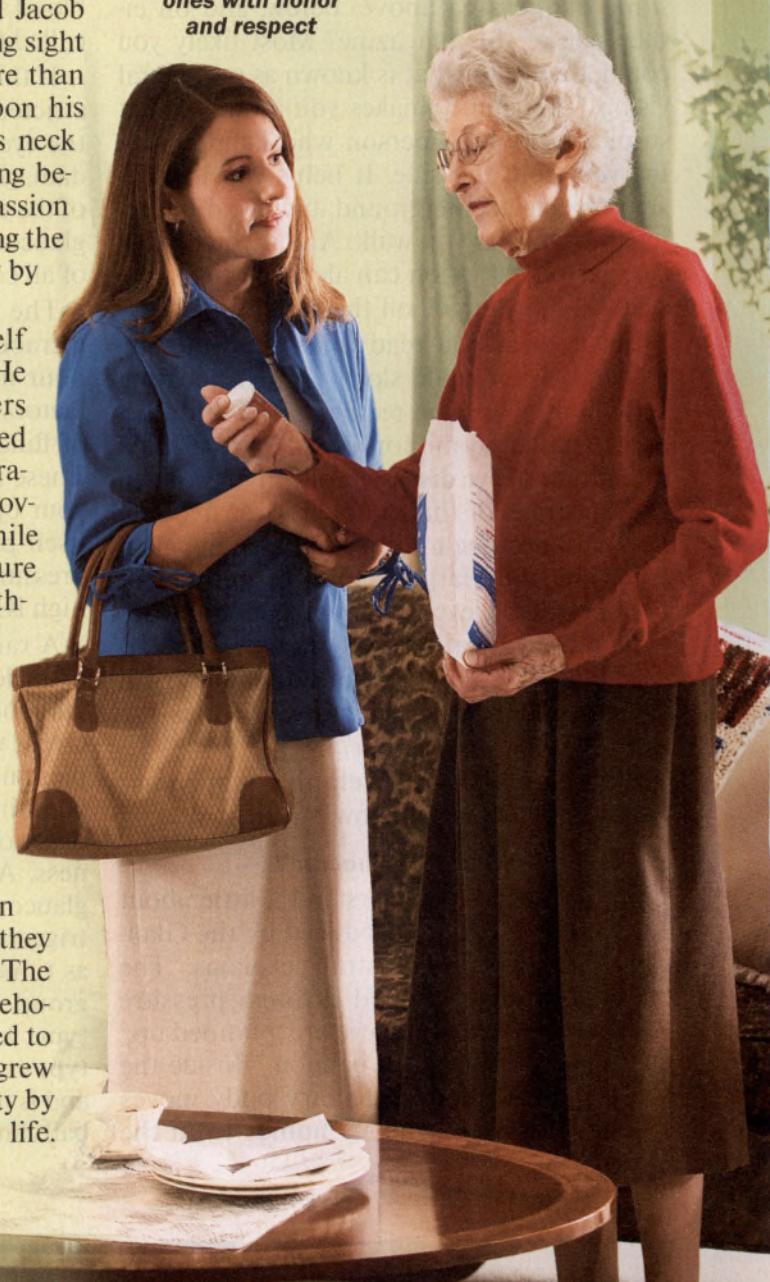
God Does Not Abandon His Loyal Ones

The psalmist prayed: “Do not throw me away in the time of old age; just when my power is failing, do not leave me.” (Psalm 71:9) God does not ‘throw away’ his faithful servants even when they themselves may feel that they have outlived their time of usefulness. The psalmist did not feel abandoned by Jehovah; rather, he recognized his own need to rely on his Maker even more as he grew older. Jehovah responds to such loyalty by providing support throughout one’s life.

(Psalm 18:25) Often such support comes by means of fellow Christians.

In view of the above, it is clear that all those who want to honor God must also honor the elderly. Older ones are indeed precious in the eyes of our Creator. As creatures made in his image, may we always manifest a godly view of “gray-headedness.”—Psalm 71:18.

**Christians treat older
ones with honor
and respect**





GLAUCOMA THE THIEF OF SIGHT

FOR a moment, keep your eyes focused on the last word in this sentence. Without moving your eyes, could you see some of the area above, below, and on either side of this magazine? Most likely you could, thanks to what is known as peripheral vision. This ability makes you aware of that suspicious-looking person who is approaching you from the side. It helps you to sidestep objects on the ground and avoid bumping into walls as you walk. And if you drive a car, peripheral vision can alert you that a pedestrian has stepped off the curb.

But even as you read this page, your peripheral vision could slowly be disappearing—without your even realizing it. Worldwide, an estimated 66 million people are affected by a group of eye diseases collectively known as glaucoma. Of that number, over five million have become totally blind, making glaucoma the third-largest cause of permanent blindness. "Yet even in developed countries with public educational programmes that target glaucoma, half of the individuals with glaucoma remain undiagnosed," states the medical journal *The Lancet*.

Who is at risk of developing glaucoma? How is it detected, and how is it treated?

What Is Glaucoma?

First we need to understand a little about our eyes. A brochure produced by the Glaucoma Foundation of Australia explains: "The eye's rigidity is obtained through pressure—the soft tissues of the eye are 'pumped up,' just like a car tyre or a balloon." Inside the eye, a pump called the ciliary body moves a fluid known as aqueous humor from the

blood vessels into the eye. "The aqueous circulates deep inside the eye, nourishing the living structures of the eye and returns to the blood stream through a strainerlike structure called the trabecular meshwork."

If this meshwork becomes blocked or constricted for any reason, the pressure inside the eye will increase and eventually begin to damage the delicate nerve fibers at the back of the eye. This condition is called open-angle glaucoma and accounts for about 90 percent of all cases.

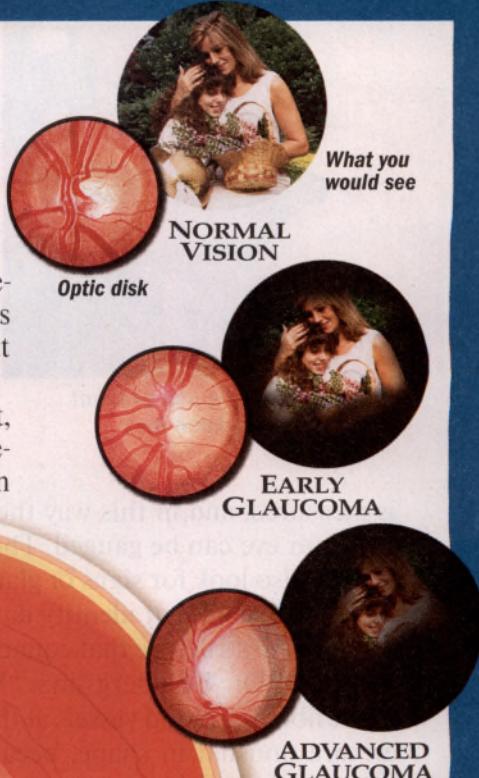
The pressure inside your eye, known as intraocular pressure (IOP), can vary from hour to hour and is affected by a variety of factors including your heartbeat, the amount of fluids you drink, and your body position. These natural variations cause no damage to your eye. High pressure in the eye is not by itself proof of glaucoma, since "normal" eye pressure varies from person to person. Still, high IOP is one of the indicators of glaucoma.

A rare form of this disease is called acute, or angle-closure, glaucoma. Unlike open-angle glaucoma, this type involves a sudden increase of pressure in the eye. It causes severe pain in the eye, along with blurred vision and vomiting. If not treated within hours of the onset of symptoms, it will often cause blindness. Another category is called secondary glaucoma. As the name implies, this type is triggered by such other conditions in the eye as tumors, cataracts, or eye injuries. A small group of people are afflicted by the fourth type, known as congenital glaucoma. This type is present at birth or shortly thereafter and is indicated if the infant has enlarged eyeballs and an increased sensitivity to light.

How It "Steals" Vision

Glaucoma could steal up to 90 percent of your vision in one eye without your being aware of it. How is that possible? All of us have a naturally occurring blind spot at the back of each eye. This spot on the retina, where your nerve fibers join together to form the optic nerve, is devoid of light-sensing cells. You are unaware of this blind spot, however, because your brain has the ability to "paint in" the missing bits of the picture. Ironically, it is the brain's ability to do this that makes glaucoma so insidious.

Dr. Ivan Goldberg, a leading Australian ophthalmologist, told *Awake!*: "Glaucoma is called the sneak thief of sight because it doesn't give you any symptoms. The most common kind of glaucoma is slow and steady and, without any warning, causes damage to the nerve structure that connects the eye to the brain. Whether your eyes water or they don't, whether they are dry or not, whether they see clearly to read and write

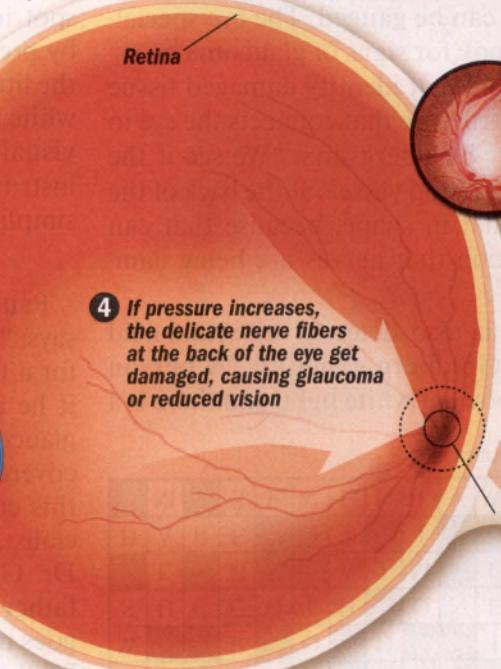


OPEN-ANGLE GLAUCOMA

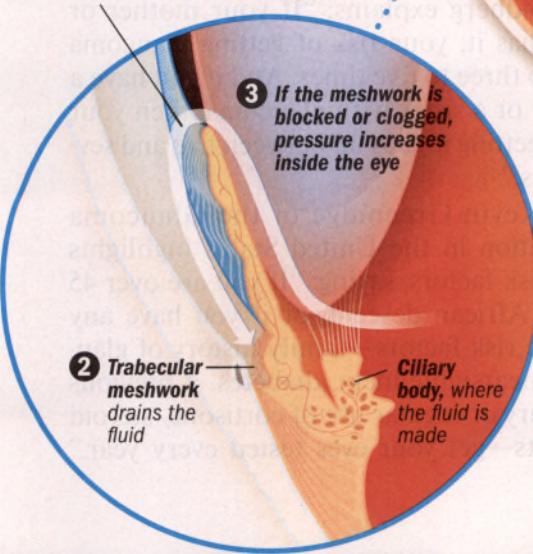
1 **Aqueous humor** is a clear fluid that nourishes the lens, the iris, and the inside of the cornea. It is not the same as tears, which bathe the outside of the eye



4 If pressure increases, the delicate nerve fibers at the back of the eye get damaged, causing glaucoma or reduced vision



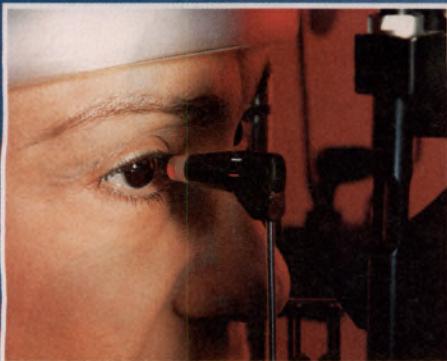
3 If the meshwork is blocked or clogged, pressure increases inside the eye



or they don't have anything to do with glaucoma. You can have perfectly comfortable eyes and have very bad glaucoma."

Detecting the Thief

Unfortunately, there is no single comprehensive test for glaucoma. Using a device known as a tonometer, an eye specialist may start by checking the fluid pressure in your eyes. The instrument is used gently to flatten the cornea, or front part of your eye. The amount of force required to perform this task



Regular testing can prevent serious vision loss

Your risk of developing glaucoma increases if

- You are of African descent
- Someone in your family has glaucoma
- You have diabetes
- You are nearsighted
- You are a regular, long-term user of cortisone/steroid
—used in some medical creams and asthma sprays
- You have a previous eye injury
- You are over 45 years of age

is measured, and in this way the pressure inside your eye can be gauged. The eye specialist may also look for signs of glaucoma by using instruments that identify damaged tissue in the nerve structure that connects the eye to the brain. Dr. Goldberg says: "We see if the nerve fibers or blood vessels at the back of the eye are unusual in shape, because that can be an indication that nerves are being damaged."

Glaucoma is also detected by visual-field testing. Dr. Goldberg explains: "A person looks into a bowl of white light, and there is a

brighter white light that is shone at a little spot inside that bowl. The person responds by pressing a button when he or she can see the little white light." Failure to recognize the white light when it is at the outer edge of your visual field could indicate glaucoma. New instruments are being developed that might simplify this rather tedious procedure.

Who Is at Risk?

Paul is a healthy man in his early 40's. He says: "I went to the optometrist to be tested for a new pair of glasses, and during the visit he asked me if I had a family history of glaucoma. I did some investigating and discovered that both an aunt and an uncle had this condition. I was referred to an eye specialist, who confirmed that I had glaucoma." Dr. Goldberg explains: "If your mother or father has it, your risk of getting glaucoma goes up three to five times. And if you have a brother or a sister with glaucoma, then your risk of getting it goes up between five and seven times."

Dr. Kevin Greenidge of the Glaucoma Foundation in the United States highlights other risk factors, saying: "If you are over 45 and of African descent, or if you have any of these risk factors—family history of glaucoma, nearsightedness, diabetes, a previous eye injury or regular use of cortisone/steroid products—get your eyes tested every year."

Crossword Solutions

T	H	E	W	I	F	E	O	F	L	O	T	S
H	N	A	I	I	R	O	O	T				
S	H	U	H	I	T	E	S	H	I	M	R	O
I	D	F	S	I	T	A	C					
G	R	E	B	E	P							
O	I	S	R	A	E	L	A	S	L	E	E	P
O	N	Y	E	R	E							
D	O	G	S	A	D	M	I	T	S	A	F	E
N	E	L	I	I	A	U	R					
E	L	P	A	A	L	S	A	C	R	E	D	O
W	R	O	H	H	I	I	I	I	F			
S	U	C	C	O	T	H	O	N	E	S	E	L
L	H	A	I	M	L	N	N	I	I			
H	A	R	E	T	I	C	G					
M	S	E	V	E	N	T	Y	W	E	K	S	

Even if you have no risk factors and are under 45, the foundation recommends that you still have your eyes checked for glaucoma every four years. If you are over 45, you should have this checkup every two years.

Treat It and Beat It

The treatment for Paul's glaucoma includes the use of special eye drops once a day. Paul says: "The drops I use inhibit the production of the aqueous fluid in the eyeball." Paul also underwent a treatment in which a laser beam was used to "drill" about ten tiny holes in the front of his eyes near where the natural drain holes occur. He says: "When I had my first eye treated with the laser, I was quite tense and nervous, and this magnified the discomfort that I felt. However, when my second eye was treated a few days later, I

knew what to expect. I was far more relaxed, and the doctor had virtually finished the operation before I realized it." Treatment has helped stabilize the pressure in Paul's eyes.

Paul's outlook is thus positive. He says: "My retinas have only been slightly damaged, and thankfully, I still have my full peripheral vision. If I remember to use my eye drops each day, it is likely to stay that way."

Is the "sneak thief of sight" stealing your vision? If you have never had your eyes checked for glaucoma—and especially if you are in one of the risk groups—it would be wise to ask your doctor for a glaucoma examination. As Dr. Goldberg says, "much of the damage from glaucoma can be prevented by timely and appropriate treatment." Yes, you can thwart this thief of sight!

BY AWAKE! WRITER IN BELGIUM

"We Do Not Want to Celebrate Halloween!"



That was the decision of a school class in Tienen, Belgium. How did the students come to that decision? In Belgium, celebrating Halloween is rather new. October 31, 2002, was actually the first time that the holiday was to be celebrated in this school. So before that day arrived, the teacher assigned all the children a project having to do with Halloween. "The uglier and more grotesque, the better!" she added.

One of the children in the class was 10-year-old Matthias. He remembered reading about the hidden dangers of such popular celebrations as Halloween in the October 8, 2001, issue of Awake! He realized that Halloween involves things that are not pleasing to God. So for his project, Matthias wrote a report based on the articles. After carefully reading the information, Matthias' teacher concluded that

Halloween is not as innocent as is commonly thought. She then asked Matthias to give a presentation to the class on the subject.

When Matthias began his presentation, some of the other pupils did not seem to be listening. But as he continued, all of them became thoroughly engrossed in his explanation. When he finished, the teacher asked the class if they still wanted to celebrate Halloween. Unanimously, the class responded: "No!" One pupil exclaimed: "It's gruesome!" Another said: "I did not realize that Halloween shows so little respect for the people who have died."

For Matthias, who had previously been rather timid, this experience was strong encouragement to stick to his Bible-based convictions despite pressure. He also earned greater respect as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, both from his teacher and from his classmates.

Watching the World

Sleep—How Much Is Enough?

"Adults who get 7 hours of sleep on weeknights are less likely to die over a 10-year period than those who spend more time in bed," reports *USA Today*. Researchers in Japan followed over 104,000 adults for about ten years, considering their sleep patterns, general and mental health, and life-style. The scientists found that "less sleep, even as little as four hours a night, didn't significantly increase deaths for men and only lowered survival for women if they averaged less than four hours." These findings are backed by two other major published studies and numerous smaller studies. However, sleep specialists also found that "those sleeping four to 5 1/2 hours did poorly on tests that measure memory, clear thinking and the ability to pay attention." Psychiatrist and sleep researcher Daniel Kripke says: "People should get as many hours [of] sleep as they need to feel rested."

Many Youths Face Grim Future

"Nearly half of all people are under the age of 25—the largest youth generation in history," states the *UN State of the World Population* report for 2003. What are the pros-

Sizzling Sunbathers

Most sunbathers do not apply enough sunscreen to reach the sun protection factor (SPF) listed on the product's package, reports the *Medical Journal of Australia*. According to Dr. Stephen Taylor, "most people, for cosmetic and economic reasons, only apply enough sunscreen to achieve an SPF of about a third or even a quarter of the level." So, how much sunscreen is enough? Dr. Jeffrey Schneider, writing in the *Archives of Dermatology*, recommends the "teaspoon rule." An average-size adult should apply more than half a teaspoon of sunscreen to each of the following body areas: head and neck, right arm, and left arm. In addition, the front torso, back torso, right leg, and left leg should each receive more than a teaspoon. "Using the proper amount of sunscreen," says Schneider, "provides greater sun protection than using a lesser amount . . . of a sunscreen labeled at a higher SPF."

pects for these young people? According to *The Independent* of London, "Dr Thoraya Obaid, head of the UN Population Fund, said the biggest young generation in history faces unprecedented dangers from Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases, early marriage and pregnancy, broken homes, drug use, violence and sex slavery." For example, half of all new HIV cases involve those aged 15 to 24. It is estimated that among adolescents, one new infection occurs every 14 seconds. Death during pregnancy and childbirth is twice as likely for teenagers as it is for adults. And as many as



four million youths are believed to be caught up in sex trafficking every year.

More Mothers at 40

The average age at which Italian mothers give birth to their first child is increasing. In 1980 the birthrate among 20-year-old Italian women was 74.3 per thousand of the population, whereas in 2000 the figure had plummeted to 20.7. During the same period, the birthrate among 40-year-olds rose from 12.2 per thousand to 16.1. The statistics, provided by the Italian National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) and published by *Corriere della Sera*, highlight

the tendency to wait longer before having the first child. According to ISTAT, "people wait for job security and to settle down in life, but they also wait to safeguard their own independence. Whatever the case, a child is seen as a tie and a hindrance."

Confession on the Decline

"Today, private confession on a regular basis is down to less than 25 percent," says Catholic University sociologist William D'Antonio. "The major reason, experts say, is a changed sense of what constitutes a sin," reports the international edition of *The Miami Herald*. Monsignor Thomas Kane, 76-year-old pastor of St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Rockville, Maryland, adds: "A kind of moral relativism has taken over.... Nothing is really wrong. If I have a good reason to do it, it's not a sin." Moreover, there is a "widespread rejection among Catholics of the church's teachings on birth control, homosexuality and divorce," the paper states. Therefore, "Catholics are increasingly inclined to look to their own consciences in deciding whether they have sinned."

Looming Water Crisis

"Over the next 20 years, the average supply of water world-wide per person is expected to drop by a third," says UNESCO's Director General Koichiro Matsuura.

The world's water resources are expected to decline, not simply because of the steadily rising world population, pollution, and environmental factors. The crisis is imminent because the "political commitment to reverse these trends has been lacking," says UNESCOPRESS. A report entitled *Water for People, Water for Life*, produced by 23 United Nations partners, says: "Inertia at leadership level, and a world population not fully aware of the scale of the problem means we fail to take the needed timely corrective actions." Says Mr. Matsuura: "No region will be spared from the impact of this crisis."

Caution Against Prenatal Ultrasound

A growing number of expectant mothers in the United States are having "keep-sake videos" made of their unborn children by using

high-resolution ultrasound technology, reports *FDA Consumer* magazine. Ultrasound imaging (sonograms) involves bouncing high-frequency sound waves off internal structures to produce images on a computer. These images are then captured and reproduced as keepsake videos or portraits. Companies providing prenatal images have been popping up all over the country in shopping centers and strip malls. However, unlike personnel who perform ultrasound procedures in a doctor's office, machine operators who provide prenatal portraits may be untrained and unlicensed. Thus, exposure times may be longer or at higher energy levels than those experienced during medical procedures. According to *FDA Consumer*, "it's risky business taking pictures of unborn babies when there's no medical need to do so."

Champion Jumper

"The insect world has a new high jump champion," reports *The Times* of London. The tiny froghopper can jump higher than two feet. That would be the equivalent of a human leaping over a skyscraper more than 600 feet high! Using high-speed photogra-

phy, Professor Malcolm Burrows of Cambridge University, England, observed that the muscles in the bug's hind legs act like a catapult, releasing explosive energy at takeoff. Burrows estimates that when the froghopper jumps, it endures more than 400 times the earth's gravitational force, "which is 130 times that experienced by a Space Shuttle crew at launch," says the paper.



From Our Readers

Note: The series "Understanding Mood Disorders," which appeared in our issue of January 8, 2004, drew an unusually large reader response. The following letters are just a sampling of the many we received.

I have read many articles in your magazines that have touched me, but none as much as this series. As I read of our brothers and sisters who suffer with these disorders, my heart went out to them. If I have ever said anything insensitive to such ones, I hope that they can forgive me. Please continue publishing articles like these. They help all of us to be more loving and understanding.

S. W., United States

I felt that my life was over when I was diagnosed as having bipolar disorder. I cried so much, but I also prayed to Jehovah with supplications. This week I received the answer to my prayers—the *Awake!* on mood disorders. It was as if Jehovah were wrapping me in a warm blanket on a winter day. Because of these articles, I have the courage to move forward.

R. T., Canada

Our 12-year-old son was diagnosed with bipolar disorder three years ago. Often he has felt that no one understands his problems and that Jehovah does not care for him. When we showed him these articles, he immediately read them. He had tears in his eyes as he said: "Mom, they *do* understand. And Jehovah understands me." His physician was pleased to accept the magazine, and I had an enjoyable Bible discussion with him.

L. P., United States

I asked Jehovah with all my heart that information on bipolar disorder be published. Today, two months later, I have the January 8, 2004, issue of *Awake!* in my hands. Thanks to your practical suggestions, I have been able to increase my service to Jehovah.

M. S., Mexico

I used the information in this series for a project in college. The department head of the special needs program asked for a copy of it to use in teaching staff members about bipolar disorder. Keep up the excellent work. Many are benefiting.

K. R., United States

You well highlighted the importance of not confusing the illness with the person. These articles help those of us who are congregation elders to understand the circumstances of the brothers battling these ailments and to work with them.

R. P., Italy

My sister suffers from major depression. When I read these articles, I cried because I realized that I have spoken with such ignorance concerning her plight. Now I know that I must not give up on my sister but patiently seek to understand her.

D. P., United States

I identified with everything I read in this series. I was moved to tears and felt somewhat relieved of my guilt feelings. I gave a copy of the magazine to my doctor, who has always encouraged me to stay faithful to my beliefs.

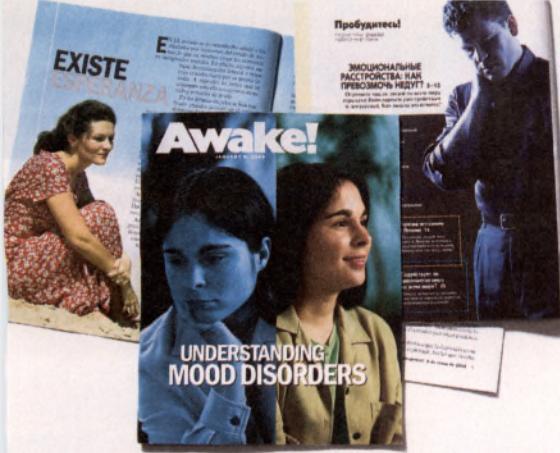
A. L., France

I am 13 years old. So many times I have wanted to die. The *Awake!* has really helped me to hold on. Now I know that Jehovah really does care and that he listens to us!

M. S., United States

I always considered depression to be selfish, something that a person just needs to snap out of. After reading these articles, however, I realized that by not being considerate of others' feelings, I was actually the one being selfish.

R. N., United States



Thank you for this well-written series. It provides a wonderful foundation for treatment. I am currently a PhD student in counseling, and I will use the article with my clients.

P. Y., United States

For more than ten years, I have been fighting depression. These articles mentioned the benefit of keeping a diary, and I would like to try that. A Christian friend records the meetings for me on the days that I can't go, and this is a real help.

M. S., Japan

I have been living with these symptoms for ten years. I've read the articles many times and studied them carefully together with my husband. They helped us to talk about my moods and to pay better attention to each other.

I. H., Hungary

I have been criticized by my own family to the point of my wanting to commit suicide. But this series gives me hope, knowing that Jehovah understands me. Now I've been going back to Christian meetings and participating in the ministry.

M. B., United States

I am comforted by the fact that I am not alone in my sufferings.

There were practical thoughts in the series, and I will try to apply them to the extent possible. Please continue to print such articles, which can help many.

V. L., Russia

I am a 68-year-old elder who has had clinical depression for about ten years. The "shepherds" are sheep too, and some of us can also get seriously depressed. Reading how others are coping with mood disorders touched me deeply.

B. A., United States

The material in this series moved me to get medical treatment. It has also helped my wife to cope better with my depression. I never fail to be impressed with how timely and accurate your articles are.

C. B., Germany

Three months before reading this series, I was diagnosed with depression. My first reactions to the news were exactly as you described in the series—shock and a reluctance to tell anyone. Thanks to your series, I feel understood and I do not feel alone anymore.

A. G., Austria

Ever since I was little, my father has been afflicted with bipolar disorder. When he was in the manic phase, the family really suffered. Even though I knew he was sick, I hated him. But when I read this series, I understood for the first time what my father was going through. I couldn't stop crying as I read it. The next time I travel home, I want to try to talk to him. I will try to accept him from my heart.

S. S., Japan

My friend's daughter has mental problems, and I told her that if she simply studied more and prayed more she would feel better. The information on page 10 of this series showed me that I was wrong. Prayer and study help, but they do not cure medical problems. Thank you for keeping me up-to-date.

B. D., United States

Many times I have cried when someone told me that if we are Christians, we don't get depressed. But this series has helped me, and it comforted me to know that I am not alone with this problem.

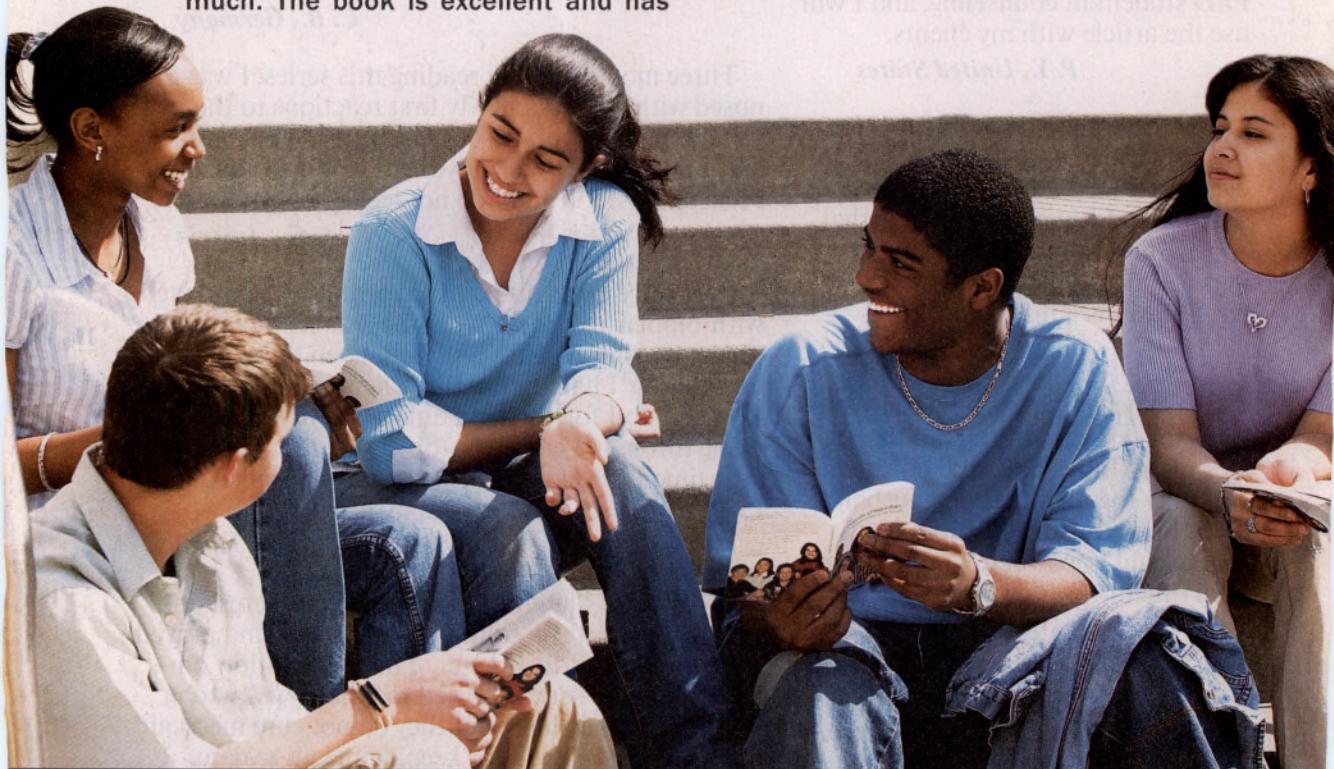
P. B., England

JUST WHAT YOUTHS NEED

For years readers, young and old alike, have been saying that the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work* provides just what youths need to know. A girl in her mid-teens from Sinaloa, Mexico, requested ten copies of the book for some friends. She said that although she is not one of Jehovah's Witnesses, she really liked the book, explaining, "I have great respect for you."

She noted: "I have many friends who have a lot of questions about their life today. I have shown them the book, and they liked it very much. The book is excellent and has

everything that a youth would want to know." She asked if the books could be delivered before the summer vacation break.



Questions
Young People Ask
Answers That Work



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