

**INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT METHODS AND IMPACTS OF  
CULTS AND ORGANISED FRINGE GROUPS**

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# My Story –

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## Softened Opening – Becoming One of Jehovah’s Witnesses

I wasn’t raised one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. But when I was a teenager — still living with the emotional confusion and trauma of childhood — I was drawn to the love I felt from those in the congregation. I began studying the Bible with my grandfather when I was fourteen, and at fifteen, I was baptized. What I found in the organization felt like safety. It gave structure to my chaos and belonging to my ache. At the time, that love felt like home.

## Waiting to Heal

As I settled deeper into the organization, I absorbed the teachings of Christian forgiveness — the idea that healing would come, but only in Jehovah’s time. We were encouraged to “wait on Jehovah,” to look forward to the new system where all pain would be gone. In the meantime, we were told to let go of our burdens, to move forward without dwelling on the past.

But letting go wasn’t something I had ever truly done — I had only buried what hurt. I never spoke the words of forgiveness to the one who caused so much harm. The pressure to forgive wasn’t healing. It was a quiet dismissal of the deep grief I still carried. I learned to push it aside, believing that obedience and patience would somehow resolve what I never had the chance to fully process.

The truth is, I didn’t heal. I learned how to suppress.

## The Body Remembers

Even as I tried to move forward, something inside me was never at rest. I wasn’t someone others would have called “healthy.” I always seemed to be battling one issue or another — fatigue, pain, mysterious symptoms that never fully resolved. For years, I lived in cycles of trying to function while quietly falling apart inside.

I didn’t yet understand how connected our emotions are to our bodies. But now, looking back, I can see that my body was carrying what my heart wasn’t allowed to express. The tension, the anxiety, the unspoken sorrow — it settled into my bones, my muscles, my breath. I thought I just had a weak constitution. But I was really carrying a lifetime of unacknowledged pain.

The teachings told me to “forget what lies behind,” but my body never forgot.

## A Reckoning I Never Expected

Around 2013, I got a phone call that shook me. It was my stepfather.

After nearly fifty years of silence, denial, and distance, he acknowledged what had happened. In his own way, he admitted the harm he had caused. He asked for forgiveness. And I couldn't give it. I didn't even know what forgiveness meant anymore in the context of such pain. Within the year, he took his own life.

At the same time, I was studying the Bible with other women — many of whom confided in me about experiences of sexual or physical harm. Trying to comfort them with promises of future justice, while feeling the sting of my own unresolved past, became unbearable. Their stories lived inside me too.

That's when my husband and son sat me down. An intervention of love. They gently said, "You need help. You need to talk to someone." Therapy was something I'd always been hesitant about — taught to view as worldly. But eventually, I went.

And it changed everything. The book *The Body Keeps the Score* gave me language for what I'd lived. I finally understood that trauma doesn't disappear just because we will it away — or because a doctrine tells us to leave it in the past. Our bodies hold it until we give it permission to be heard.

## Loss Without Resolution

After my stepfather's death, my mother came to live with us. Our relationship was complicated — strained by the silence of the past. But we were beginning to talk, to try. Then she needed surgery.

It wasn't expected to be life-threatening. But when complications arose, she refused a blood transfusion — a decision rooted in her faith. She died during that surgery. Her death left me without answers, without resolution. I respected her conscience, even as it broke my heart.

What I couldn't ignore was how the doctrine — the Watchtower's strict teachings on blood — had shaped that choice. It cost me my last chance to reconcile with the only person who might have filled in the blanks of my childhood.

## When Everything Shattered

As I was still trying to make sense of the layers of pain I carried — emotional, physical, spiritual — something happened that shattered whatever trust I still had in the organization I once called a safe place.

It wasn't a headline from far away. It was close to home.

██████████, a respected member of the ██████████ congregation, was arrested. Local news reported that eight women had come forward, their statements

included in a court affidavit. The Kingdom Hall's records were subpoenaed. The story rippled through the circuit like a tremor. But to me, it felt like an earthquake.

His family had been deeply involved — widely admired. Trusted. Their presence and roles had shaped gatherings, overseen activities, and reinforced the structure I had supported for most of my life.

And then — just months later — his brother, who had also been briefly named in media reports, was given a featured role at the district convention, standing before thousands.

I couldn't make sense of it.

The trust I had in the internal processes — in the idea that truth and righteousness were always upheld — collapsed. Instead of transparency, there was a disturbing familiarity: silence, promotion, protection.

I couldn't help but wonder — were the women pressured to withdraw their statements? Were they told to keep quiet for the sake of "Jehovah's name"? I knew how the organization framed these things. Speaking out publicly was often equated with disloyalty — not just to men, but to God himself.

It was devastating.

This was the organization that had once made me feel loved. That had helped me feel safe as a young girl struggling with trauma. But now, that same structure felt like a place where pain was buried instead of healed — where image mattered more than truth.

It changed me.

I didn't say anything right away. I still wasn't ready to make waves. But deep down, I knew: I could never look at things the same way again.

## **A Quiet Turning Point**

That was when my husband and I made the decision to step back — gently, without announcement or drama. We needed space. We needed to think, to breathe, to be.

So we went to Portugal.

We spent six months there — far from the routines and expectations that had shaped our lives for decades. The pace of life slowed. Nature met us with quiet reassurance. And slowly, I began to feel something I hadn't felt in years: stillness inside my own body.

I spent time grounding myself by observing the ocean waves and feeling the warm sun, watching the birds drift overhead, and people laughing as they played in the water. It was the first time in a long while that I felt fully present — not performing, not carrying a role.

Just being. I began to write poetry again, letting the stillness speak to parts of me I had forgotten.

It was during that time that I finally allowed myself to explore questions I had always pushed aside. I stopped being afraid to think for myself.

## **The Discovery That Changed Everything**

It was only after we returned to the U.S. that I dug deeper.

And that's when I discovered the Australian Royal Commission.

For most of my life, I had been warned not to read so-called “apostate” material. But this wasn't rumor or slander — it was a legal, government-led investigation with sworn testimony and verified documentation. The more I read, the more I realized how much I had never been told.

Only two former Jehovah's Witnesses testified publicly during that inquiry. But what the Commission uncovered through document discovery was staggering: the organization in Australia had kept a confidential list of 1,006 alleged perpetrators of CSA. And not one of those names had been reported to law enforcement.

It wasn't just a failure to act — it was a deliberate choice to handle everything internally, behind closed doors.

That discovery shattered any illusion I had left that this was just a few isolated missteps. This was a pattern. A system.