

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

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Personal Statement: Growing Up as One of Jehovah's Witnesses

Submitted for the Inquiry into the Recruitment Methods and Impacts of Cults and Organized Fringe Groups

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This is my story of being raised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I am sharing this account to offer a personal perspective on the tactics used by the Watchtower organization to grow and maintain its membership, particularly through the control and indoctrination of children born into the faith. While Jehovah's Witnesses are widely recognized for their door-to-door preaching, their growth primarily stems from internal family-based indoctrination rather than public conversion. Though images of adult baptisms may be presented to the public, the vast majority of baptisms involve children raised in Jehovah's Witness families.

This may seem commendable to some, but I want to share how damaging this approach was to me and to many others raised in this environment.

Early Life and Daily Structure

My story begins in a rural American community in 1960. I was raised by devout Jehovah's Witness parents. My father served as a congregation servant, presiding overseer (elder) of our local congregation, which meant that he was often absent from typical nurturing family interactions due to his deep commitment to congregation duties.

Our family's life revolved entirely around the Jehovah's Witness culture. This non-negotiable weekly schedule was the standard you were judged by. If a family did not follow a similar schedule, you were labeled as spiritually weak.

1. **Tuesday evening** – Congregation Bible Study (1 hour)
2. **Wednesday evening** – Family Bible Study with my two sisters (1 hour)
3. **Thursday evening** – Congregation meeting at the Kingdom Hall (2 hours)
4. **Friday evening** – Bible study with individuals met through the ministry (2+ hours), with required family attendance
5. **Saturday morning** – Door-to-door ministry with the entire family (3 hours)
6. **Saturday afternoon** – Cleaning the Kingdom Hall (1 hour)
7. **Sunday morning** – Public talk and Watchtower study at the Kingdom Hall (2 hours)
8. **Sunday afternoon** – Additional door-to-door ministry (2 hours)
9. **Throughout the week** – Personal study sessions in preparation for all meetings

Attendance at annual circuit and district conventions, which were often held in large outdoor venues during the peak of summer heat were mandatory to maintain good spiritual standing. These 3 annual events lasted anywhere from 3 to 8 days, generally beginning at 9:00 a.m. and lasting until 9:00 p.m. with parents struggling to keep their children quiet for hours while sitting in the sun. During these exhaustive periods, I, along with many other children were periodically taken to the bathroom for correction which meant coming back to our seats in tears.

These conventions frequently emphasized how close the "end of the system" was and how much more we should be doing for "Jehovah" and his Watchtower organization. The repeated messaging instilled a strong fear of displeasing God, and a fear of never doing quite enough to further Kingdom interests which created a life of chronic anxiety. Thinking back, I can never remember one talk or discussion that encouraged individual growth or autonomy outside the confines of Watchtower—particularly in secular education and career decisions that could result in a more comfortable life. All these discussions revolved around how these decisions benefit the greater good of the Watchtower organization.

Education and Future Outlook

Throughout my youth, I was taught from Watchtower publications that I did not need to worry about graduating, getting married, or having children because the end of the world as we knew it was imminent. There was no emphasis on financial literacy or long-term planning. College education was actively discouraged by Watchtower going as far as threatening the removal of my father from his positions of responsibility in the congregation if he allowed me or my siblings to attend college or university.

The Watchtower regularly stressed that "the end" was just around the corner. I distinctly remember a public talk by Brother [REDACTED] where he quoted Watchtower publications and emphasized the point that 1975 was a pivotal point in human history with the "end" occurring around this time. His words filled me with fear—so much that I was baptized shortly thereafter at the age of 15 without fully understanding the repercussions for myself and my family if I deviated from the faith and was disfellowshipped.

As part of a well-respected Jehovah's Witness family, we were granted many "privileges." However, this did not come without Watchtower directives which spelled out negative consequences for lack of adherence. Social pressure was fierce within the JW culture, with members instructed to let the elders know if anyone inside the congregation was not living up to Watchtower standards. I was not allowed to participate in after-school sports, despite frequent invitations from school coaches. I was not permitted to attend school dances, participate in after

school clubs or extracurricular activities as this would put me in harms way because of “bad associations with worldly people.” These restrictions dictated by Watchtower were isolating and humiliating.

Looking back, I believe that the methods promoted by the Watchtower to raise children in “the truth” served as an intentional system of indoctrination:

- **Indoctrination began at infancy** and continued through adolescence, reinforced by strict religious instruction and information control.
 - **Personal identity** was shaped around religious conformity, not individual growth or autonomy—particularly in education and career decisions.
 - **Disciplinary tactics and fear-based teachings** (such as disfellowshipping, shunning and Armageddon imagery) discouraged independent thought and ensured lifelong loyalty.
 - Discipline began young, with my father taking seriously the Watchtower’s literal interpretation of Proverbs 13:24 and 22:15 that speaks of using a rod to rid a boy of his foolishness. Especially in my formative years, my father beat me regularly with his belt for violating rules and Biblical principles.
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Adult Life, Service, and Shifting Perspective

I married my wife at age 19, and she was 18. We've now been married for 46 years and are grateful to have raised two children and welcomed four grandchildren into our lives. From early on, we chose to allow our children to participate in school events and pursue higher education. Both of our children were baptized as teenagers and later disfellowshipped—my son twice, and my daughter once. We struggled with the organization’s harsh stance on shunning and chose to maintain relationships with our children, in contrast with the prescribed course of action. Since this decision would have called into question my status in the congregation, we kept the relationship with our children secret.

Over the decades, I served in numerous organizational roles:

- Ministerial Servant
- Elder
- Auxiliary and Regular Pioneer
- Member of the **Hospital Liaison Committee (HLC)**
- Construction overseer for Kingdom Halls and disaster relief efforts (in locations around the world)
 - Many of the Kingdom Halls that I worked on have since been sold and the proceeds going into the Watchtower general fund. Almost all Watchtower construction projects are accomplished by using volunteer labor which makes the profitability of selling these buildings very desirable.

All these positions were unpaid and self-funded, including travel and expenses. There is no monetary compensation for volunteers; instead, “privileges” like public speaking assignments at other congregations or conventions were used as benchmarks of success.

I was frequently invited to speak at Circuit Assemblies, Regional Conventions, and medical seminars at hospitals, where I represented the Jehovah’s Witness stance on refusing blood transfusions. During my time on the HLC, I was involved in dozens of cases—often urgent or life-threatening—where members struggled with this doctrinal requirement.

Departure and Reflection

As the years passed, I began to question many of the teachings and policies issued by the Governing Body. Inconsistencies and doctrinal changes stirred serious doubts.

The 2015 Australian Royal Commission Case Study 29 concerning child sexual abuse within the Jehovah’s Witness organization was extremely disturbing especially after seeing Watchtower attorneys and [REDACTED], a member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Governing Body giving misleading and false statements which shattered my faith and confidence in the organization I was raised in.

I have attached supporting documents and references with this biography that may assist your inquiry in identifying high-control or cult-like group behaviors.

This submission is made with sincere hope that it provides insight into how an organization such as the Watchtower Society uses:

1. child indoctrination
2. emotional control using social pressure and constant self-scrutiny
3. restricted information by discouraging higher learning or engaging in research outside of Watchtower publications
4. fear-based doctrine to influence not only recruitment—but lifelong retention.

Thank you for your attention to this testimony.

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