



Randy in 1984
after leaving Bethel



Randy in 2000



Randy at 53 in May 2006

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[View from my room at Bethel \(circa 1978\) with Twin Towers at sunset](#)

Testimony of Randall Watters

(served at Watchtower headquarters from 1974 to 1980)

Having been a pioneer for two years and anxious to live at the hub of "God's organization," Bethel seemed like a wonderful place to be. From the start, I learned to run a press, printing the *New World Translation*, the *Aid* book, and many other publications. By 1977 I had been appointed a floor overseer and a Bethel elder. I was in charge of the presses that printed their Bibles, and help start an offset printing training school. Later projects involved helping to renovate the entire printing operation. Traveling regularly around New England as a speaker, I made many fine friends and enjoyed my work. I was convinced this was truly "God's organization," and was even zealous to report those who were entertaining thoughts contrary to those of the "faithful slave." I was well-known as an "organization man."

The big change in my perspective came in early 1979. On a business trip to Massachusetts with three other factory overseers, we were discussing the importance of faith for salvation and how the organization makes one's *works* the big issue (rather than true faith) through the counting of time (going door-to-door), keeping personal activity records, etc. From this time I began a study that intrigued me more and more, as I studied Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians. At Bethel, I attended a Monday night Bible study after the family "Watchtower study." We used different translations of the Bible and went through the New Testament chapter by chapter. It was becoming noticeable to those within our group that there was a significant difference between studying what the Watchtower said about the Bible and actually studying the Bible.

Word leaked out that the Governing Body had discussed the validity of the 1914 date; or, rather, the issue was brought up for discussion but was quickly dropped. Also, the matter of the importance of developing one's conscience rather than living by a code of rules had been repeatedly brought up, and it seemed that a measure of freedom would be tolerated within the organization. Articles had been published that appeared to give the Witnesses more freedom in their consciences as to matters of employment and their private lives.

Take as an example the Oct. 1, 1972 *Watchtower* article on "Your Conscience and Your Employment." It was clarified that a person who worked on a tobacco plantation could choose to remain there or quit his job; it was up to his conscience. Then not a few months would pass by, and elders would complain to the Governing Body that the flock was taking too many liberties, and rules had to be laid down. Thus, the *Kingdom Ministry* of September 1976 stated on

page 3 that a Witness most certainly "could not engage in the manufacture, sale or promotion" of cigarettes. Milton Henschel, a member of the Governing Body, once said over another matter of conscience, "If we let the brothers do this, there is no telling how far they will go." While in direct conflict with Paul's words at Romans 7:6 and Galatians 2:16-21; 3:10, the Governing Body deemed it necessary to lay down rules to "keep the brothers in line." Over and over I would hear it echoed among those in positions of responsibility at Bethel, "You just can't trust the brothers to themselves." In other words, the average JW's love for Jehovah was seemingly not able to keep him out of trouble, he needed to have rules, curfews and restrictions to govern all aspects of his life. Yet, my experience as an overseer told me otherwise. When you trust people, they feel comfortable and work all the more to get the job done. Unfortunately, this was not the pervading atmosphere at Bethel.

Up until the latter part of 1979, personal opinions could be discussed among close friends, and it was well known among the more "seasoned" Bethelites that most of the members of the Governing Body and the Writing Department had differences of opinion as to matters of doctrine. For example, Colin Quackenbush, former editor of the *Awake!* magazine, believed that all of the "144,000" (the heavenly class) must have been chosen by the end of the first century, for history testifies that there were millions of Christians even in the early years of the church, many of these having been martyred for their faith. Fred Franz, the fourth president of the organization, at times expressed beliefs that he had to qualify as his *opinion*, and not the general consensus of the other GB members. Yet, by the end of 1979, *none* would dare to admit such differences. Those who did were disfellowshipped.

During the time that the Sanchezes were disfellowshipped and Ray Franz was put on trial, I would hear through the grapevine who was going to "get the axe" next. The junior members of the Governing Body took turns at defaming the characters of these "apostates" in order to prove their loyalty to the older members of the Governing Body. A popular Bible commentary (*Barnes' Notes On the New Testament*) was banned from the libraries for a time, as some Bethelites who had used it in their studies had seen through the shallow scholarship of the JW publications and criticized them. Revealing their insecurity over their own doctrinal foundation, the Aug.15,1981 *Watchtower* (p. 28, 29) stabbed at those who wanted to study the Bible without *The Watchtower*: "They say that it is sufficient to read the Bible exclusively, either alone or in small groups at home. But, strangely, through such 'Bible reading,' they have reverted right back to the apostate doctrines that commentaries by Christendom's clergy were teaching 100 years ago."

The crux of the matter is this: The JW is not allowed to interpret the Bible, but must rely on the ever-changing interpretations of 14 men in New York, none of whom are Greek or Hebrew scholars, and have no business translating a Bible, let alone controlling the lives of millions of people.

Christianity is meant to be an experiential faith. You come to Christ as your mediator, ask forgiveness for your sins, and you receive the "new birth" (John 3:3-7). Christianity is God *working through man*, *not man working for God*. When I realized this in 1979 after a study of Romans and Galatians, it soon became obvious that "grace" is the key to a life in Christ. I wrote about this early in 1981 with the tract, [What Happened at the World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Spring of 1980?](#) which reflects my feelings about the Lord Jesus Christ and the issue of salvation in the New Testament. I was then born again and experienced the blessings of the indwelling Holy Spirit, just as promised to every believer. The greatest truth I can say that has changed my life could be summed up in John 8:34-36 (*New American Standard*):

Jesus answered them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

One of my favorite articles I have written conveys the simplicity of the Christian message of salvation, entitled, "[Rules for Christian Living](#)." Please read it if you have time and let me know if it touched you.

yours,
Randy

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