2008 Cassels Contest
First Place

Sara Schilling
Tri-City Herald
#1 Jubilee pushes boys to rise above past
School helps straighten out troubled youth
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There's a hill on the edge of Jubilee Youth Ranch & Christian Academy that is steep and difficult to climb. It overlooks the residential program's 400 acres set among the farms of Walla Walla County, and it's marked with trails beaten by hundreds of troubled boys who've run it as punishment for misbehavior over the last 10 years.

Jacob Campbell was one of them. Now a clear-eyed, accomplished 24-year-old, it's hard to imagine him ever leaving behind footprints on a hill like that. But 51/2 years ago Campbell was in jail.

Seven years before that, he was pleading with the governor of Washington to spare the life of his condemned father, who murdered two women and a little girl.

And in between, he was using alcohol and drugs.

Then the Richland boy went to Jubilee. Like most of the young men who go or are sent there — including two others who are featured in the Herald today — he found no quick fixes, just a quiet place to begin the long climb toward a more productive future.

But that is exactly what he needed.

And it's also why, although he's now a happy, popular college student, he will talk about the dark days. He will talk about his dad. He will tell how a single moment in the chapel at Jubilee became the hinge of his life.

"It did have a big impact," Campbell said last month, in between classes at Eastern Washington University in Cheney. "(Jubilee) was like the gateway, the entrance point. It was the place where everything changed."

Light years away

The lower lobby of Eastern's Pence Union Building was a blur of students rushing between classes, but Campbell sat at a table by the front doors.

He was near the end of an hourlong shift selling baked goods as a fundraiser for one of the school's student life groups.

"We're (doing this) so we can put on programs," he told a guy wearing a skull T-shirt who was eyeing the blueberry muffins.

Right then, Campbell was 150 miles and light-years from Jubilee. But it was the idea of someday going to college that brought him to the ranch 40 miles northeast of the Tri-Cities in the first place.

He was 18 years old and in the Benton County jail when some Jubilee staff came to visit. Campbell had some brushes with the law, mostly for minor mess-ups, and he'd yet to graduate high school.
The workers said he might be able to earn a college scholarship if he gave Jubilee a try. Campbell initially refused, but after a few more visits he was sold.

"I really didn't (foresee) having my life changed," he said. "I just thought I'd go, spend my second senior year out there and get a scholarship."

**New beginnings**

Jubilee isn't designed to let boys coast. It was started a decade ago by orchardists Ralph and Cheryl Broetje and sits in the middle of their thousands of acres of apples and cherries near Fishhook Park.

The state-accredited private Christian school and residential program gets its name from a religious concept found in the Bible book of Leviticus. The Jubilee year is one where slaves are freed, debts are forgiven and the guilty are pardoned.

The program's philosophy centers around that idea of new beginnings. Forty-one boys between ages 13 and 19 live at the ranch, and so do about half of the 38 full-time staff members. It's supported almost entirely by community donations.

"Somebody needs to do this, and they're doing it," said Laura Schilling, juvenile probation counselor in Walla Walla County who currently has three clients at Jubilee. "They're willing to take these boys in (so) they can be emotionally nurtured."

The ranch sometimes is thought of as a place for juvenile delinquents, and guys there tell of being heckled as "convicts" or "felons" when their sports teams play public high schools.

But none of the Jubilee students is a serious violent offender or drug addict.

"It's really sad because a lot of people have misconceptions about these boys," said Ray Fosnot, a woodshop teacher who's been at Jubilee seven years. "They live in a different kind of environment than the kids in (public) schools. That's the only difference. They're not throwaway kids."

**Facing their problems**

That's not to say the Jubilee boys don't have problems. Most Jubilee students have struggled in school or had some contact with the court system, said Executive Director Glenn Robinson, who's been there a little more than two years.

Campbell shook his head as he recalled the holes that sometimes mar the walls of the dorms, put there by boys so mad they lash out with their fists. He himself was never an angry kid, though perhaps he had reason to be.

His father, Charles Rodman Campbell, murdered two women and a little girl in a brutal 1982 revenge killing.

Jacob's mom was pregnant with him then. Jacob was in the sixth grade when his dad was hanged at the state penitentiary in Walla Walla.
The 24-year-old is straightforward when he talks about that painful time.

He knew his father only from phone calls, letters and regular prison visits. But he was the only father Campbell had.

As the execution neared, the boy met with then-Gov. Mike Lowry to ask that his dad's life be spared. When that didn't happen, he felt guilty.

"There was a (time) I thought I just wasn't convincing enough," Campbell said.

He said that may be a reason he used alcohol and drugs as a teen. He has stories of binges with friends. His mother has stories of him coming home drunk and throwing up "all over everything."

But Campbell is done with that now.

Early in his time at Jubilee, during one of the regular chapel services a guest speaker talked about how the Holy Spirit can heal the wounds in people's lives. Campbell, who had never been particularly religious, felt something deep inside.

He became a Christian. He started to climb.

Learning life lessons

There's a rhythm to life at Jubilee. The boys wake up early for roll call. They do chores, take classes, play sports and sleep in dorms at night.

When they walk to and from the cafeteria, they're in formation. Their uniform is khaki pants and blue-collared shirts.

Some of the boys don't like it. They say Jubilee is too strict or not strict enough. There isn't enough to do or too much is asked of them.

Yet for the adults who run the school and working ranch — the boys care for the ranch's livestock — it's not the program's rules and procedures that matter most.

Jubilee staff members say they're looking for inner shifts. They assign the boys to run up hills when they do things like mouth off, fight or lie, but they're hoping the teens learn a lesson as their leg muscles burn and they sweat up the trails.

"Heart-changes" is a phrase that's often uttered.

Campbell invokes it too. After his conversion experience at the ranch, he stayed on track and graduated in 2002. Then he joined a program in Spokane called Master's Commission, which offers Bible training and service experience for young people.

That cemented the changes that began at Jubilee, said his mom, Judy Dirks, 59, a Tri-Cities social worker.

"It was basically returning to what he had been," she said. "I'm really grateful for the transformation. I'm glad he came out of it."

When Campbell was done with Master's Commission, he returned to the Tri-Cities for two years and took classes at Columbia Basin College. On weekends, he worked as a dorm supervisor at Jubilee.
He's been at Eastern now since the fall. In his room are reminders of a mission trip he took to Africa — pictures, a Tanzanian wooden spear — that sit next to school books and snapshots of friends. A Bible is on the dresser. In the closet are board games and a goofy Indiana Jones-style hat he was given by his old roommate at Jubilee.

Campbell is something of a touchstone at the ranch, said Robinson, the executive director. Many of the boys there now don't know him personally, but his name still gets mentioned.

He's often included on a list with other Jubilee graduates who are thriving, such as one who's been accepted into an elite military special forces unit.

In fact, the number of boys who get back into trouble within the six months after leaving the ranch is low, Robinson said. Staff members also have started using a more in-depth tracking system to gauge other factors, like the health of graduates' interpersonal relationships.

Still, Robinson knows at its heart Jubilee deals in intangibles, and he refers to the Parable of the Sower in the Gospel of Mark. In it, a farmer scatters seed in different places. Some grows, some doesn't.

"Our call is to love (boys) in spite of the decisions they make," he said. "Any kid who's touched here, we've sown a seed."

After classes on a recent afternoon at Eastern, Campbell sat on the edge of his bed and talked about his time at the ranch. It was never easy, not as a student and not as a staff member, he said.

He also talked more about his dad. He remembers playing cards with him at the prison, each on opposite sides of a glass barrier. The only time he remembers touching his dad was after he'd been executed.

This is strange territory. The soft-spoken, gentle 24-year-old knows his father's crimes were brutal and ugly. He also knows his dad loved him. He's loaded sketches done by his father onto his laptop computer. There's one of a dove, a skull and crossbones, a dagger, a teddy bear holding a bouquet of flowers. There's a self-portrait.

Campbell has given his testimony in front of different groups several times now. For a while, it was on Jubilee's Web site, and once a new student said reading it prompted him to sign up.

As he told that story, Campbell smiled. As well as anyone he knows the reason a boy goes to Jubilee isn't as important as the choices he makes while he's there.

Finding the way

Campbell already has made a place for himself at Eastern. He's a good student and an active campus club member. People pop in and out of his dorm room and seek him out to say hello. He even planned a school-wide salsa dance.
In 1 1/2 years, Campbell likely will be done with his bachelor's degree. After that, he'll go for his master's. He's studying social work. He says the desire to help people in need comes from his mom, who's been in the field for years. It also comes from knowing what it feels like to need help and to get it.

He's in a good place now, but there was a time he wasn't.

"I could look back at my life and wish there were a lot of things that didn't happen," Campbell said. "I just hope that (with) what I've gone through, I can help other people to not go through the same thing."

Campbell likes the person he is today, he said, still sitting on his bed. It was afternoon then, and 150 miles away at Jubilee the boys had just finished with class. Some were probably hanging out in the dorms, reading or talking. Maybe some were lifting weights.

And if any had earned hills, they were lacing up their running shoes, getting ready to climb.
#2 Religious teachings in school

Educators say basic knowledge needed for some projects

Published April 29, 2007

Sharon Clement's Southridge High literature students followed along in their study guides as she talked of murder, suicide, divine right and revenge. Those important themes of Shakespeare's Hamlet weren't dreamed up in a vacuum, she said.

"Remember, literature reflects the lives of people. Real people. The way (they) viewed these topics were shaped by the religious beliefs of the day," Clement said.

Shakespeare's writings contain hundreds of religious references. So do scores of classic novels, paintings and songs. So do history books.

Although talking about religion in public schools can be treacherous territory, several Mid-Columbia history and literature teachers say doing so is part of their jobs — now more than ever.

"We approach religion to help us understand why people are the way they are," said Matt Leggett, a history and drama teacher at Hanford High in Richland. "One of our main (tasks) is to prepare people to be citizens of the world. They need to be well-informed."

Many say that includes the study of religion, which has influenced culture as much or more than any other force.

The Bible, for example, often is touted as the best-selling book of all time. Time magazine recently published a cover story saying it should be taught more in public schools.

Despite some misconceptions, lessons about religion are allowed so long as educators stick to certain guidelines.

"The important piece is that the presentation is neutral. It's never introduced or used for devotional purposes. When it is introduced, it's related to a secular student learning objective," said Shelley Redinger, executive director of teaching and learning for the Richland School District.

Plenty of teachers in the Mid-Columbia — especially of history and literature — draw connections between religion and what they teach in class. Clement, from Southridge High in Kennewick, points out parallels to the biblical story of the Exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt when she teaches John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath.

Jim Wilson's world and U.S. history classes at Hanford High are peppered with talk of religion — from the age of Michelangelo to the pilgrims to modern government — all presented within the context of historical events, he said.

"I don't think you can even teach history without (talking about) religion. It'd be like teaching it without art, literature, science. It's part of the story," he said.
A Gallup poll released in 2005 reported many teens aren't well-versed in religion.

The survey — which was commissioned by a Virginia-based group that recently published a Bible textbook for public schools — found most teens understood religious terms such as the Golden Rule and the Good Samaritan. But just one in 10 public school students could name the world’s five major religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism, said the report from the Bible Literacy Project.

Still, teachers said that doesn’t mean students aren’t interested. Many teens are grappling with questions about their place in the world and their life’s purpose, and may turn to religion for answers, Leggett said. They’re also aware of and touched by world events that have them asking questions. Just one example is the war in Iraq.

Jack Hogg, a Southridge High teacher and chairman of the Kennewick School District social studies committee, told how a student recently asked him to explain the difference between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The topic had been mentioned at home over dinner.

“(Religion) does come up a lot (at school),” said Valerie Sewart, 16, a Hanford High sophomore. “It’s the center of a lot of people’s lives, so it’s going to come up.”

How it’s talked about is critical, said Fernando Aguilar, a Walla Walla engineer and member of American Atheists, a national organization. He doesn’t like lessons about religion being taught in public schools because he worries the presentation could be skewed toward one belief set or another.

“It’s a slippery slope to start on, but there are some needs to bring up influences in history (or literature),” he said. “I don’t think it becomes the one and only, than end-all of the presentation.”

Aguilar said religion especially doesn’t belong in math or science classes.

Classes that focus solely on religion aren’t typically offered in the Tri-Cities’ public schools. And teachers said students’ already jammed-packed schedules don’t leave much room for them anyway. But instruction about religion fits naturally into some subject areas, and probably belongs there, they said.

Their job is to teach literature and history, to give insight and context. Anything else — or nothing else — should happen outside their classroom walls.

Back in the Southridge class, Clement put up a famous passage from Hamlet on the overhead projector.

A ripple of recognition passed through the room as students read, “To thine own self be true.”

What does that mean? Clement asked. What was Shakespeare — whose words perhaps were influenced by what he did or didn’t believe — trying to say?
That if you're true to yourself, you're true others too, the students said. Clement nodded. Then she moved on.
UMATILLA — Kay Perkins was the first in line to be healed. She stepped to the front of the small conference room at Desert River Inn in Umatilla and told Pastor Robert Ryder about her left shoulder. It had been hurting her lately. She was having trouble moving it up and down.

"I know the Lord loves me and wants me healed. ... I have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you," she told the pastor.

Ryder put his hands on her and began to pray.

He was in town over the weekend with his Ryder Ministries for what he called a Healing Explosion. The Milwaukie, Ore.-based Christian pastor says God uses him to save souls and heal the sick.

He points to Jesus’ commission to his disciples in the book of Mark, chapter 16:

"In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well," it reads in part.

A dozen people gathered Friday to hear Ryder's message. About half of them were from his ministry group.

"There aren't many of us here. (That) doesn't matter. God has ordained our steps. He has a touch for you. He has a miracle for you tonight," Ryder said in a booming voice.

The 60-year-old, who is tall with neat salt-and-pepper hair and glasses, has been involved in ministry more than two decades. Before that, he worked in car sales.

He's also worked at a Christian radio station in Salem.

Now he travels the country and world preaching and healing. He said he'll go to Korea in a few weeks. He came to the Umatilla area a couple of years ago.

Perkins, 68, of Umatilla, was there.

She came for help with a growth on her side, though she'd also been struggling with a sleep problem she hadn't told anyone about — except God.

When she came face-to-face with Ryder, he asked her about that problem and she was healed, she said.

Still, she got off to a slow start Friday.

Ryder asked her if she was ready and had her touch the sleeve of his jacket.

Nothing happened. He put his hands on her shoulders and told her muscles to relax in Jesus' name.
Later, he had her stretch her arms out with the palms together. He prayed for her. Her body rocked to the side and her legs looked as if they might buckle. She fell to the ground.

“If you take the word of the Bible for what it really says, then you’ll believe that healing is for today,” said Don Hurd, 63, of Irrigon, who’s known Ryder about 15 years and is starting his own church in Hermiston this summer.

“Faith is something that you can’t touch, see, feel. But in reality, if you have that faith, miracles can happen.”

Perkins, a retired accountant, said she believes. She talked passionately about her Christian faith and how it has transformed her life and made her whole.

She acknowledges there are skeptics, but she thinks God can and does heal. She believes he wants to.

“When you read the Gospels, (you see) Jesus went throughout the land and healed all,” she said. “When he came upon someone that asked for healing, he didn’t say ‘No.’ His response was always, ‘Yes.’ ”

She stood up in the hotel Friday after the free healing and prayer session was done.

She swung her right arm, her good arm, above her head. Then she did the same with her left.

It’s starting to feel better, she said.
#4 Spreading the word...door by door
Jehovah’s Witnesses hitting the road to invite everyone to their upcoming convention at the Toyota Center
Published July 6, 2007

The first house on Ruth Patterson’s route looked empty. It was 10 a.m. The porch light was on and a newspaper lay folded on the front steps.

“I’m pretty sure they’re not home,” said the 76-year-old from Richland as she prepared to leave a sheet of paper behind.

Then the door opened and a young woman appeared.

“Hi!” Patterson said, startled but smiling, “I’m not sure if you remember me ...”

She’d been to the house before in her ministry work as a Jehovah’s Witness. She and other women from her Richland congregation spent Thursday morning knocking on doors near Sacajawea Elementary School to invite people to an upcoming convention.

The series of six three-day district conventions of Jehovah’s Witnesses started last month and continues into August. The sessions are free and open to the public. The theme is “Follow the Christ!”

That’s exactly what Jehovah’s Witnesses try to do every day, said Robert Tomchuk, an elder in Patterson’s congregation.

They believe in Jehovah God, his son Jesus Christ and the infallibility of the Bible, according to information from the group. They model their faith after first century Christians, and that means doing lots of evangelism.

Patterson and Bev Tomchuk, Robert’s wife, spend hours each week going door-to-door. They share Scriptures, talk about their faith and hold Bible studies.

“It isn’t always easy, said Tomchuk, 66. Sometimes doors are shut in their faces.

“(But this) is the way Jesus did his ministry. We’re following in his footsteps. He did say, right before he went up to heaven, go make disciples, teach people,” she said. “We feel that this is the most important part of our service to God.”

So they spent Thursday morning in the heat. They left folded invitations at houses where no one was home and they smiled and talked about the convention when someone answered.

Sami Andrie, 36, and her 8-year-old son, Tate, knocked on a door around lunchtime. Andrie didn’t get to say much before it closed on her. She and her boy rejoined Patterson and Tomchuk on the sidewalk. They kept walking.
#5. What We Believe
Published Dec. 23-29, 2007

Part 1: Faith spans cultural boundaries

Ted Strong grew up believing that plants and animals have seen the Creator and deserve respect.

He was taught the proper way to hunt and take fish from the water. Today the 60-year-old from Grandview is a well-known environment consultant and advocate who has worked with world leaders including Bill Clinton and Al Gore.

As a member of the Yakama Indian Nation, the spiritual beliefs of his people have shaped his life.

Faith means different things to different people in America, but an overwhelming majority of Americans say they believe in God — or Allah, or the Creator.

Most report that they pray regularly and may say they attend church at least once a month, according to a comprehensive survey on religion released last year.

But what does that mean? Labels aside, a person's religious beliefs are as individual as his or her fingerprints.

Not all Christians agree on music, politics or church doctrine. Not all Buddhists believe in a God.

Over the next week, the Herald is featuring six men and women from different faith traditions — a Buddhist, a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, an atheist and a Jew.

They tell personal stories of finding God or feeling deeply that God doesn't exist, and in doing so they speak to universal truths.

All of them have personal ethical codes that value love, compassion, honesty and selflessness. All say their beliefs give their lives meaning.

In today's world, those commonalties aren't trivial, said Susan Douglass, an educator with the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.
“Perhaps for the first time in human history we are really side by side. There was a time when people would draw maps and people on other continents would have eyes on their stomachs,” she said. “Here we are now. We’re living as neighbors and colleagues, our kids are friends and go to the same schools.”

In the Tri-Cities, there are hundreds of Christian churches and at least one mosque, one synagogue and a Buddhist temple. The Hindu Society of Eastern Washington has a community center, and other groups rent space or meet at members’ homes.

About 35 families in the Tri-Cities practice the Sikh religion that dates back to 15th-century India, said Tarlok Singh Hundal, 63, of Richland, a leader in that community.

There also are about 50 Bahai in the Tri-Cities, said Rob Harris, 60, of Pasco, who converted to the faith after years of researching other religions. Bahai faith emphasizes spiritual unity and teaches that all religions are chapters of a larger book.

“(Bahai Faith) gives me a tremendous amount of hope ... that (the world) is destined for a much, much better future,” Harris said. “I try to be a part of making that future happen.”

Most people in the U.S. share Harris’ belief in a supreme being, although they call that being by different names, according to Baylor University’s “American Piety in the 21st Century” report.

The Waco, Texas-based university released the study in 2006.

It found that only about 11 percent of Americans aren’t affiliated with a religious tradition. One-third of Americans are evangelical Protestant, and only about 5 percent claim something other than Christianity or Judaism.

About 31 percent of people describe an authoritarian God who has a hand in people’s daily lives and global events, the study said.

Twenty-four percent see God as a distant, cosmic force, and 23 percent believe in a benevolent God who’s slow to condemn and punish, the study found.
Strong believes in a Creator. He still remembers the lessons his parents taught him about respecting the earth. He remembers stories from Yakama elders.

He likes going to the mountains and feels close to plants and animals there. His office in Grandview is filled with awards and photos that document his work to protect the environment.

"We can only look about us in awe, and we can only wonder and be mystified by the miracles that are performed each and every day for us," he said of many Native Americans. "We know that it must take a powerful God to have allowed this earth and all life forms to exist since the beginning of time."

As long as people have existed, they’ve searched for that kind of meaning, said Garrett Kenney, associate professor of religious studies at Eastern Washington University in Cheney.

Cultures throughout time have used symbols, rituals and myths to make sense of life, he said. They’ve created art and music as ways to worship and enlighten. They’ve developed ethical codes to serve as guideposts.

"We all have to share the problem of history. We have to interpret history and ask, ‘Is anything we’re doing down here meaningful?’ " Kenney said.

At the end of that, what’s left is mystery, and whether people are Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, atheist or Jew, a measure of faith.

That’s something we all share too.

**Part 2: Life, faith intersect**

Fran Eager is a practical woman. She’s not the kind to have long debates about philosophy. She likes concrete ideas that make sense and connect to real life, always has.

That’s part of what prompted her to explore Buddhism when she was in her 50s.

Eager, now 67 and a Zen Buddhist, regularly meditates, which is called sitting. She’s converted the garage of her Kennewick home into a zendo, or meditation hall. It has different kinds of benches and cushions lined up in neat rows.
There's an altar with a Buddha statue, candles and red flowers at the front. The Finch Sangha Zen Buddhist Meditation group meets there twice a week.

Eager, a retired bookkeeper, grew up Catholic. But she never liked the Christian teaching that people are born broken, as sinners. Several years ago, she started looking into other faiths.

"I just started feeling that little niggling. I wasn't sure what I was looking for. I read (about Buddhist meditation), and said, 'Aha! I can do this! I like this!'" Eager said.

She has short hair and wears glasses. She's straight-forward and seems like a good listener. She has two friendly dogs, Penny and Bess.

Eager spends much of her time helping other people. She's taking pastoral education classes through The Chaplaincy and right now is assigned to help at the hospice in Kennewick.

She also goes to Coyote Ridge Corrections Center in Connell to sit with Buddhist inmates. She started the community service work to fulfill requirements of a three-year Buddhist training program. But she's kept going in part because she believes it fits with Buddha's teachings about compassion.

Buddhists believe Buddha was an enlightened teacher. Eager understands God as absolute truth.

She formally became a Zen Buddhist in 2001 through a Jukai ceremony. She took vows and was given a dharma name, Jikei, which means Mountain River.

Eager pounded on a wooden han hanging in the entry way of her house on a recent night. The long, flat board is used in Zen monasteries to call people to meditation.

She went into the zendo and sat on her bench. She breathed deeply and became still.

When Eager finishes sitting, she feels centered. She finds that wisdom and insight about her life come in those quiet moments or even days later, she said.

For her, that concrete connection gives the practice meaning.
Eager didn’t move as cars outside made noises driving by. She didn’t stir when Bess the dog walked into the zendo and sat down.

The brown pooch likes to be with Eager when she and others from the Finch Sangha group sit. She knows not to bark. Always practical, Eager has a cushion for Bess next to her own.

**Part 3: Uncovering life’s path**

When Moses Sanchez was a little boy, someone broke into his home and stole all the Christmas gifts.

His family didn’t have much money, so there was no way for them to replace what was lost.

But on Christmas Day, a truck pulled up full of presents. A stranger had learned what happened and decided to help.

Sanchez, now 29, likes to tell the story of his good Samaritan. When he looks back on his life he can see God’s plan for him unfolding even in painful moments.

He makes sure to point that out to the youth group at the Salvation Army church in Pasco. He’s been a pastor to the teens there for six years. He wants his students to understand that God loves them. They come on Sundays and during the week partly because they like Sanchez. He’s young and funny and has so much energy that it seems to vibrate off him.

Sanchez’s wife, Grimelda, helps with the youth group too. She’s the reason he came to the Salvation Army in the first place.

They met as teens in Pasco. She was sweet and pretty and he was smitten, so he accepted her invitation to church.

Sanchez had grown up in the Catholic church. He was surprised by the Salvation Army’s boisterous worship. He wasn’t used to seeing people raise their hands in the air to pray.

But he kept going because of Grimelda. They’ve been married now for about six years, with one young son and another on the way.
Sanchez, who works in product development, shares a name with the great biblical prophet who led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt. But he says he has more in common with the New Testament story of the prodigal son.

Sanchez was strong but didn’t always stand up for others, he said. He was smart but had to leave college after a year because of too much partying.

When he was about 21, he went to California to visit friends. While he was there, he considered going in with a buddy to make money illegally.

But before that happened, he was stopped by police in a misunderstanding. By the time officers realized the mistake, the critical moment had passed and Sanchez changed his mind.

During the same trip, a friend of his died in a car accident.

Those two events prompted Sanchez to make a change.

“I came (home) to that little Mexican church and raised my hands. And that was it. It was more than emotions. It was something that was mystical. It cleansed me,” he said. “It set the path for where I am now.”

Along with his youth group work, Sanchez is trying to start a teen center in downtown Pasco. He wants to call it the Street Poets Youth Center because he dreams it’ll be a place of inspiration.

He reads the Bible often and he prays. He says he’s not a perfect Christian, but he does love God and his family. He believes there are good things he’s meant to do for the world, like starting the youth center.

When he looks back on his life, he can see the touch of God’s hand.

He thinks about that Christmas when all his family’s gifts were stolen. He was too young then to understand much but his own disappointment.

It wasn’t until years later, when he was already a leader in his Pasco church, that his mom told him about the people who showed up at the last minute with more presents for his family.

They were from the Salvation Army.

**Part 4: Protection with prayer**
Rathna Rao's house is small, but she's saved room inside to honor God.

One of her kitchen cupboards doubles as a shrine, with colorful pictures of Vishnu and Shiva, who are divine beings in the Hindu faith.

Candles and fresh flowers also decorate the shelves.

Rao, 65, stands in front of the cupboard every day and says mantras. On Fridays, she recites the 1,000 names that describe the attributes and power of the mother goddess Shakti.

Rao is tiny and has to stand on tip-toes to reach the top shelf. She wears traditional Indian saris and a bindi dot on her forehead. She has a friendly smile, and she loves watching cooking programs and the TV show House.

She was nearly killed in a car accident near her Kennewick home two years ago, and she believes the prayers she says often in her kitchen saved her life.

Rao was walking across the street by her bank when she was struck by a car, she said. Her legs were hurt badly and she was couldn't walk for several months.

The accident happened on a Friday, after she had done her daily mantras.

"I could have been dead on the road but the devotion to the goddess Shakti eased my suffering. I suffered but it still eased my suffering and brought me back to life," she said. "I wouldn't be 100 percent if I didn't devote myself to God a couple minutes a day."

The day that doctors cleared Rao to drive again after the accident, her husband, Ragi, 70, a retail worker, went temporarily blind because of a medical procedure.

Rao sees that as further evidence of God's concern for her — Ragi was healthy when she was in a wheelchair and needed help, and she regained her health in time to help him. That happened on a Friday too.

They've both since recovered.

Rao is a part-time nursing assistant and a former cooking teacher. She believes that divine beings like Vishnu and Shiva are manifestations of one God, who is the ultimate reality or truth.

She meditates and chants often. She reads Vedas, which are holy scriptures.
Rao believes in the cycle of rebirth, which means that people are reborn into new lives until they reach spiritual perfection with God. She believes in the doctrine of karma.

Rao is from southern India and met Ragi in an arranged marriage. They've been together more than 40 years and have a daughter in graduate school.

Rao came to the United States about 30 years ago. She and Ragi are involved in the Hindu Society of Eastern Washington, and Rao recently used her small kitchen to cook meals for hundreds of people for a special event.

The cupboard shrine is next to the sink, and dish soap and breakfast cereal sit nearby. Rao would like to have the shrine in another spot, but the kitchen was where she had space, she said.

She ran her fingers over the pictures and flowers as she talked about what her faith means to her.

Later, she started to chant in Sanskrit, and her voice was clear and pretty. It filled up the whole house.

**Part 5: Spreading the word**

Toure Bourama spends his days helping students make sense of numbers.

He gives lectures on algebra, statistics and calculus as a math instructor at Columbia Basin College in Pasco. He also uses his teaching skills to educate people about his Muslim faith. To him, that’s the most important lesson of all.

Bourama, 45, of Richland, was raised as a Muslim in West Africa. He went to college in France and came to the United States in the early 1990s. He has been teaching at CBC for about 10 years alongside his wife, Aissata Sidibe, a physics instructor. They have four children — a son in high school and three younger daughters.

Bourama is tall and wears glasses. He seems shy at first, until he laughs. His laugh is loud and makes you want to laugh with him.

He says his religious beliefs are the foundation of his life.

Bourama goes to the Islamic Center of the Tri-Cities on Fridays and sometimes during the week. He fasts. He gives money to charity. He praises
God, called Allah in Arabic, for being gracious and merciful, and he asks Allah to show him the right path.

He believes Allah is all-powerful and cares about what's happening in his life every day.

Bourama even unfurls a prayer rug at his office at CBC because Muslims are supposed to pray at least five times a day.

He's comfortable talking about his religious beliefs partly because he's done it so often. He was president of the Islamic Center in West Richland on Sept. 11, 2001.

Bourama won't ever forget that day, he said. He couldn't understand what was happening as planes crashed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The images he saw on TV filled him with horror.

When it later was reported that Islamic terrorists were behind the attacks, he worried about what people would think of the religion he loves.

He fielded questions from reporters here and attended multifaith community events.

He still gives presentations about Islam. He wants people to know there's a big difference between being a Muslim and being a terrorist. There's no mention of holy war in the Quran, he said.

Islam teaches about being a good person and helping others, he said. That's the message he gets when he reads scriptures and prays. That's what he tries to teach other people and his own children.

"The Islam I know is not the one I see in the media," he said. "I was born and raised as a Muslim. I believe people need to know what is Islam. If they did, they'd realize it's a religion of peace."

As he talked in his living room, a voice seemed to call out of nowhere. Bourama pointed to the laptop that was on the coffee table with some papers and a copy of the Quran. The adhan, or call to prayer, is programmed in the computer as a reminder.

"I bear witness that there is no lord except God. I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God," the voice sang in Arabic.

Bourama pulled out a blue rug and began to pray.
Part 6: A belief in the here and now

When mortar shells were exploding near Fernando Aguilar in Iraq, he didn’t pray to God for help.

He doesn’t believe God exists. And his long-held conviction didn’t change when he traveled to a war zone.

Aguilar, 55, of Walla Walla, is a civil engineer and his work has taken him to some of the most dangerous places in the world. He’s been to Iraq twice and Afghanistan once since 2003, helping to build water systems, hospitals and schools.

He’s also done relief work in Southeast Asia and volunteered in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina.

Using the skills he has to benefit others is part of the code Aguilar lives by. He has a soft voice and he chooses his words with care. He’s kind and he dotes on guests.

Aguilar and his longtime love, Yvonne Hall, share a house that’s filled with colorful murals she’s painted. One of them is of the couple dancing. Hall is wearing an orange dress and Aguilar is smiling.

She understands his beliefs about religion because she’s atheist too.

Aguilar grew up in the Pacific Northwest and served as a Catholic altar boy. He can remember being puzzled by Holy Communion.

People told him the bread and wine transformed into Christ’s body and blood. But to him, the bread still tasted like bread. The wine still was just wine.

He didn’t see how anyone could ever walk on water.

Aguilar realized he was an atheist when he was 24.

He’s not afraid to speak his mind when it comes to God. He believes people should be able to pray, read Scriptures and practice their faith. But he doesn’t think religion belongs in courts or schools.

He’s been active in the national American Atheists organization and once clashed with the Walla Walla City Council because members were starting the
meetings with prayer. The council eventually went to having a moment of silence.

Aguilar says no two atheists hold exactly the same views because atheism isn't a belief system. It's simply a way of describing someone who doesn't believe there's a God.

For Aguilar, that's the only take that makes sense. He's an engineer, and he understands what he can measure and prove.

He believes that when you die, your mind and consciousness die too. That urgency gives his life meaning.

He tries to be a good partner to Yvonne and a good father. He has a daughter in college and a son who's a teacher, and he beams when he talks about them.

He tries to help other people when he can. That's what he believes in.

"Ultimately, the way you live your life should be fruitful for those around you so you leave the world a little bit better," he said. "(People) will remember you for that."

Yvonne told a story about when Aguilar was in Iraq. He didn't pray to God when the mortar rounds were exploding around him, she said. He turned to a friend and asked if she needed help.

**Part 7: Leading as an example**

Debbie Greene feels close to God when she's with her friends at Congregation Beth Sholom.

She leads services at the Richland synagogue on Friday nights and comes to read the Torah, sing and pray Saturday mornings.

Some Jewish prayers and services require a minyan, or quorum of at least 10 adults, so every person counts in a synagogue as small as Beth Sholom. Greene is used to pitching in there.

She and her husband, Gary, moved to the Tri-Cities in the summer of 1982.

She began serving as the treasurer of the women's group that fall and was teaching religious school by January.
The synagogue has about 50 families. At least a half-dozen members are in their 90s, and there are only about 20 children age 12 and under.

Greene, who's in her 50s but didn't want to give her exact age, grew up in a much larger synagogue in Spokane, the same one her mother went to as a girl.

Greene's father was born in Germany and came to the United States with his family in about 1933. He later returned to fight with the U.S. Army in World War II.

Greene is a math teacher at Kennewick High School. She's traveled to several countries and likes that the same Hebrew prayers are said in temples from El Salvador to Israel.

She's warm and has a teacher's way of explaining things clearly. Each year at Passover, she organizes a community seder.

She sees her involvement as a way to ensure that important traditions and lessons are passed on.

"I'm concerned that if I'm not a leader, there won't be other people to step up. It's important to me to have a Jewish presence in the community. I think that Judaism has a lot to say to people," she said.

Greene and her husband have three children, a 31-year-old son and two daughters in their 20s.

Her oldest daughter, Rachel, 28, brought her a hand-painted silk tallit, or prayer shawl, from Israel. Greene wore the shawl and a pink, yellow and green head covering on a recent day when she took out the Torah that's in the temple at Beth Sholom.

The heavy book contains the sacred writings of the Five Books of Moses and is hand-written on parchment paper. It teaches that people are responsible for their actions and should choose to do the right thing, she said.

Greene believes in God and sees evidence of a creator when she looks at nature and people. She doesn't pray often at home by herself but likes to talk to God together with others at Beth Sholom.
She likes hearing her voice mixed with the voices of her friends as they sing and chant words that have guided their people for thousands of years.