

My Testimony: Faith is an Ocean

Susan Bouachri

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Inaccurate Automatic Translation



We're going to talk with Susan about the relationships that shaped her spiritual journey, leading her to the Unification movement and eventually to a career in Human Resources

Hosts: What was your life trajectory when you met the Unification Church? Where were you? What were your plans? What was going on in your life?

Susan: It's a very different lifestyle than any of the young people I work with currently are pursuing, that's for sure. I grew up in Hawaii. My dad was a military man who retired. He was working in Pearl Harbor - that was his last station. He ended up retiring there when I was in about seventh grade. So from that point on, we continued to live there, and it was a very interesting place to grow up. We didn't live in Honolulu or a main city; we kind of lived in the countryside. In my school, it was okay to go to school barefoot. There was a real mixture of people there - in fact, I'd say the white population, or what's called haole in Hawaii, was definitely a minority. That was an interesting and formative experience for me. But I don't think I had such high aspirations.

Susan: After graduating from high school, I moved to the smaller, less developed island of Kauai. I think I was called there by the beautiful nature. I was looking for something, and I was exploring it wherever I could. Right after high school I'd moved to Waikiki and lived in the big city and tried that for a while, then followed a friend to Kauai. I became involved in a couple of different spiritual communities while I lived there, but it just felt like it wasn't quite enough - like there was something more waiting for me. And I was so curious about the mainland, because it had been a long time since I had been there. So I just wanted to travel. That's what I ended up doing - travelling to the mainland with a list of spiritual communities I wanted to check out, to find my space and find where I wanted to be. I will say, quite honestly, the Moonies weren't on my list.

Susan: I was travelling from Los Angeles by bus up to, I think it was Mount Rainier, or Mount Shasta - someplace like that. There was a rainbow tribe of people who lived in teepees that I was going to visit. The bus stopped in San Francisco, and I was so excited because I was actually born in San Francisco. My dad was in the Navy, so he and my mom, after they first got married, lived in San Francisco. I was born there, and then we moved about three months later. I had never been back. So I was quite excited about this chance to return. I only had a brief stop - maybe a couple of hours between buses - so I decided to hit Fisherman's Wharf.

Susan: I left the bus station with my backpack and my traveling cap. Whenever I traveled, I wore this hat - a baseball cap with lightning bolts coming out of it.

Hosts: I love that you had a literal traveling cap.

Susan: I'd actually made a trip to the mainland the previous summer and gotten it at Faneuil Hall in Boston. Something about it really sparked me; I was inspired by it. So I bought this cap. I was walking towards Fisherman's Wharf when this really nice guy came up to me and said, "I love your hat." Of course, he had all my attention, because I love my hat. Anybody else who loved my hat had to be a cool person to talk to. But the thing was, he was with a woman - a couple. And he didn't look like the kind of person who would have been inspired by my hat. This is 1980. I'm a bit of a hippie, though I was kind of a hippie after hippies happened. He didn't look like the kind of person I would usually speak to - he was very clean cut. But I was happy to talk about my hat. He asked where I got it, and we struck up a conversation, which was fine with me. I was out to meet people.

Susan: I didn't shy away from telling people what I was doing - that I was looking for a community, that I wanted to do my part to make the world a better place. At the time, I was practicing a vegetarian lifestyle. I probably had some type of yoga practice, though it wasn't so disciplined. And I was a very happy person, so I had answers. I knew I had answers, and I didn't mind sharing them with people. So we talked a little bit, and they asked what I was doing. I said, "I'm traveling around the country. I'm looking for brothers and sisters. I've got a lot to share. I'm on my way to Oregon." They said, "Hey, we're part of a community." I thought, okay, that's interesting. We talked a little longer, and they invited me up to their house to check out what they were doing - actually invited me for lunch. It was funny, because I was fasting. But I thought, okay, I'll go anyway. It's always fun to meet new people.

Susan: I decided to get a different bus, and I went up to what turned out to be the church center on Bush Street in San Francisco. There was something called the Creative Community Project in the Oakland church, where they did community service. They gleaned food from local farms and contributed it to the community. They gathered clothing. They were very well-organized, but yet very friendly and wanting to share ideas. I was all about that, so I just felt like I fit right in.

Hosts: When did you become aware of this concept of True Parents? And what was your journey from meeting this community that you felt you fit into, to this concept of True Parents - of the Second Coming, of this couple that was here to save the world? Can you walk us through that? For our listeners who aren't familiar with the term, True Parents is an affectionate term for the Reverend Sun Myung Moon and his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

Susan: I feel like I was, in some ways, so set up to join this movement. I was totally set up. I really trusted where I was led. I've always been a faithful person. I've always believed that God loves me, and God loves all of us, and God wants the best for us. These wonderful people invited me up to the land - "go up to the land," they called it. The thing that really struck me was a lecture called The Cause of Crimes. Because as much as I believed that God loved me, and as much as I believed we were all brothers and sisters, it was so hard to make that work in this world. As much as I tried to have loving relationships with others - especially a loving relationship with a special one - it could never seem to work. I couldn't quite figure it out.

Susan: This lecture called The Cause of Crimes was actually kind of an introduction to the Fall - an explanation of the Fall. Fireworks went off in my head. This is it. There is this original problem that we have to solve. And I am the kind of person who takes responsibility for things. I'm not sure if it's actually a healthy thing - as I've gotten older, I've had to kind of talk myself through not taking responsibility for so many things. But through the Divine Principle, it gave a path: how we could actually acknowledge something that isn't right, take responsibility for it, and turn it around - at least in my own life, which then could have an impact on the world. Somehow through that, I felt so empowered that even in my difficulty or suffering, it could have a redeeming value. Beyond me, it could actually have a redeeming value for the sake of this world.

Susan: I got so quickly caught up in that vision, and felt so quickly empowered with that understanding, that I'm not even sure how much the idea of True Parents really hit me right away. I remember fairly quickly - even within a few weeks of joining the movement - feeling loved to the point that I could start to forgive my parents, and things that hadn't been perfect in our own lives. Because of this image or understanding of True Parents, of this ideal of parents, it allowed me to forgive the shortcomings of my own parents. That was a very liberating experience. I had that, like, three weeks in. So again, I was really set up for all this stuff.

Hosts: You were prepared.

Susan: I was, very much so.

Hosts: I'm curious - was there a defining moment for you? It was exciting and fun in the beginning to get involved with these people you resonated with. But was there a moment where you felt like the rubber hit the road?

Susan: I think that moment really came about three years after I had joined, when I was working in rural Alaska in a pretty challenging mission. When I met the movement, I was totally prepared to find a spiritual community - that was what I was looking for. And here I met this group of people who just seemed to check off all the boxes on my list. They were good people. They walked the talk. They were committed. Even during times of being challenged, they stuck with it. And we had a lot of fun. We had adventures. We set high goals and we went for them. For a young person finding that community, there's nothing more. So I really jumped into it, and yeah, things went well. It was very easy. In fact, I couldn't understand when I saw others struggle - "is this what I want to do?" - I couldn't understand it, because it had been such an easy decision for me.

Susan: Fast forward a few years, and I do have experience of a life of faith under my belt. I've had some challenges and dealt with them. But somehow this new mission - it's funny, it was a business setting, not a religious setting. I was working for a church business as a fish buyer in rural Alaska, and the setting was just very tough. We had bought a company that had gone out of business the previous year, owing people a lot of money. In this type of fishery, people have invested in a plot of land where they've got a little cabin and a designated fishing spot for set netting. The fish buyers go up and down the beach. In a sense, you're kind of witnessing for your company - "we're a great company to sell your fish to, we're going to take good care of you, we're going to pay you a fair price."

Susan: Immediately we were met with hostility. A, because we're the Moonies, and everybody knows it - "oh, the Moonies are going to come in, pay us a lot of money, then take over all the other businesses, and then drop the price and we're going to be left working for nothing." There's that fear. And secondly, the fact that we had come in - even though we had nothing to do with the previous company other than buying their property - that company had left a bitter taste. People had been left with money owed to them. So it kind of had this double whammy. My adventure side loves the challenge, though. Here we are: we've got to go out and tell people how different we're going to be, and we've got to win their hearts. We offered incredible service. It went so far beyond good business, because these were my people. We did what we could to deliver their groceries, to arrange for their boat engines from down in Washington State to be shipped up. We got to know their families. We got invited into their homes.

Susan: But that first year, the atmosphere was very, very difficult. Most of the people who came up to fish in that area were men - they came on their own or with their fishing partner. Their wives and families were at home. The history of fishing is lonely, hard work - and dangerous. It can be a really tough lifestyle. So a lot of the men who would bring their fish and sell it were drinking a lot. It was just a very tough atmosphere. There were no TVs, no telephones. They were away from their families. In our little camp, which was very basic that first year, we had generators - we had electricity. They'd come hang out at our place because they only had oil lamps in their cabins. We had a TV, so we could play videos. There was myself and about seven or eight Japanese women who ran the kitchen and set up a store. So we were kind of like the company. They would come and hang out and chat us up. But it just was really hard, because you were in the position to constantly be giving and serving, and there wasn't so much return on that.

Susan: Another challenge was that the guys who were leading our company had some real disunity among them. There wasn't a lot of support. The goals weren't really clear. A lot of the promises I was making to the fishermen, I wasn't sure that we could fulfill, which put a lot of pressure and stress on me. Halfway through that first year, it just felt like things were really falling apart. It pushed me to the brink. Because when your faith is tied up with your work, it's not just about the job. I feel for those of us who, even now - I actually am doing a job that is connected with the movement - it can make things doubly difficult. A simple struggle with the way my work is done seems to have manifest implications. Is that affecting my faith? Is the current waning or waxing of my faith affecting the way that I do my job? It gets really complicated sometimes.

Hosts: I feel that so much. I talk about this exact point with my therapist a lot, actually - that my job, my faith, my identity intersect. So the intensity of the struggle feels almost tenfold, because it's not just work I can leave at home later. It's, am I practicing what I believe? Are other people practicing what I believe? So easy to get judgmental also, right? Do you understand the faith? Very challenging.

Susan: In some ways, sometimes you kind of have to separate yourself - go forward in the work realm or the faith realm, and realize that for right now, I'm going to keep the two separate. You don't want to live your life that way, but it is what it is.

Susan: At one point I reached the point in that work where I just didn't want to leave my cabin. I just couldn't deal with it anymore. You're basically stuck there. There's no road out. You can't hitchhike away - you fly in or out, and it's pretty hard to hitchhike on an airplane. Finally I - what did I do? Did I send a letter? Did I make a radio call to a dear friend that I worked with back in Kodiak? He was actually the leader of our Ocean Church group there. I just told him, "I need out. I need to get out." And as much as he gave me a hard time at different points, God bless him - somehow he just heard. He just knew. So he

arranged a spot for me on a plane, and I went back to Kodiak.

Susan: As much as I struggled and felt like I didn't stay true to what I wanted to do - I felt like I failed - that job only lasted from about May to September. So I had a whole winter to think back about it. I don't want to go into more detail, but the things I went through really were at the deepest core of my being. I had to dig through the ashes to resurrect my faith. But finally, when I came back to it, I thought, no, this is what I believe. What was so liberating was the chance to go back the next summer - even against some people's advice. "Don't do that. Why do you want to put yourself in a situation where you had such a hard time?" But I knew I had to go back. I needed a redo.

Susan: There was one particular person I'd had a hard time with. If there's a person who gets the better of you, you do anything to avoid that relationship - you go around it, you avoid it. I didn't go rushing back into seeing that person. But when the inevitable meeting came about - because I had been able to make the decision that my life of faith was the most important thing to me, and I wanted to live this way I'd committed myself to - I could have a whole new spirit and new energy to deal with this person. They had pulled me into some things I really shouldn't have been doing. I had made some bad choices, and that person knew it. They knew I wasn't living up to what I wanted to be. So I was very clear: "Last summer, I did some things I'm not happy about. I just want to let you know - that's not me." It was so funny, because there was this anger and hatred from that person toward me. But I got freedom. And that person didn't. I got freedom. The victory I got was so substantial.

Susan: I have to encourage anybody - a spiritual life is not in fashion today. Everything in the world seems to be against somebody committing themselves to a religious life or to spiritual ideals. But to find a victory there has given me so much strength and encouragement as life has gone on, because I just know I can deal with whatever comes up.

Hosts: It's so interesting - you brought up this point that every person who met Father Moon felt personally connected with him. Knowing a little bit about your time with Father Moon, it was very special and unique being out on the ocean with him while he was fishing.

Susan: It's interesting, because in Ocean Church, the members who worked with Ocean Church, we weren't always the tip-top members. We weren't always the most scholarly, or the most successful in business endeavors, or even in church endeavors. In a way, I guess we were kind of the crusty ones who would stick out this pretty challenging, tough work we were doing. But it was such a blessing, because we were able to spend so much time with True Parents - with Father Moon, as we affectionately referred to Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the founder of our movement.

Susan: I remember one time in particular when True Parents came to Kodiak, my mission was to be the captain of the camera boat. We had a cameraman whose job was to videotape everything for future reference. Mr. Che, who was the leader of our work in Kodiak, would be on my boat too. It was great, and it was stressful, because as a camera boat we wanted to be as up close and personal as we could get to the boat that Father and Mother were on. But we couldn't disturb their fishing. We didn't want to make wakes, didn't want the engine making a lot of noise. So it was a little bit stressful, but we always had the prime view of whatever action was going on on Father's boat.

Susan: At one point it was kind of a lazy day, not a whole lot happening, but all the boats were anchored up - within view of each other. Father's boat was about 20 or 30 yards away. We were anchored up nearby so that if anything happened, if he started catching fish, the cameraman had a clear shot. As I'm standing there, it's very quiet, peaceful out on the water in Alaska. Close to shore, there's still the beautiful backdrop of the mountains and the trees. I just thought about the fact that here I am, so close to this man and woman that I so highly revere, whose life has inspired me and moved me. So I got this crazy idea: if I really believe that he is the Messiah, if I really believe he is this historic man, I want to do what he does. So every time Father cast his rod, I cast my rod. As he reeled in, I reeled in. He'd cast again, and I'd cast again. I followed everything he was doing. It sounds so silly, but it was so edifying. Even now, as I say this, it makes me feel so close to him.

Susan: At the time we never could imagine that time with our True Parents was a finite thing. Never imagined it. Never thought about the time ahead when he's not going to be with us anymore. Now, as I'm reflecting back on that, I'm so grateful I did it, as silly as it was. If you think about it - what does a child do with a parent they love? They copy what daddy does. They want to walk behind daddy in his footsteps, or they want to wear an apron like mom does and cook the same thing she's cooking, follow the same recipe. So maybe what I was doing wasn't so silly. Maybe that was a natural response.

Hosts: That's a really great memory.

Susan: That experience of spending so much time with Father Moon as he was fishing was really edifying, and really solidified my faith, because I had this chance to see this man in an unstructured, casual setting where I saw him living the ideals he preached. For example, there was a whole staff of

women in the kitchen whose mission and heart it was to create the most incredibly delicious, tasty waffles and food for Father and Mother Moon to enjoy. They would work all night without sleep to cook tasty rice and tasty this and that, and pack it all neatly and beautifully in these little boxes in a nice cooler to send out on the boat during the day for the whole crew to eat on Father Moon's boat - but especially a box prepared for him.

Susan: At the end of the day, when we'd come back late into the evening after a long day of fishing, Father Moon and his guests would leave and go on to the next thing. The other boat captains and I - it would be our time to clean up the boats, clean up the gear, stow everything away, gas up, do whatever we needed to prepare for the next day's fishing, because we'd have an early start. One of the things to do was to clean up the boat that Father Moon used. Inevitably we'd clean up the lunch box, searching for what goodies we might enjoy for our dinner. And you know what we would find? Many times his food was untouched. He was fasting during the day. Many times just a little bit of that food was taken. That always would blow my mind. Even though this was prepared specially for him, and he was certainly worthy of it - he's the leader who put this whole thing together, he could certainly enjoy time out on the boat and have a nice lunch - he didn't. His focus was on the fishing that everybody else was out there doing.

Susan: Another example: we kind of always had this rule, no sleeping on the boat. Not easy when you haven't slept very much and you're not out there all day catching fish. Some days, maybe, but inevitably during a tide change there's going to be a slow period where the fish just aren't moving, or the bait you got that day just isn't working. But no matter how slow it gets, or how hot it might get sitting out there - these boats we were on, the Good Go boats, they were totally open, there was no escape from the weather. Maybe it was a rainy day and you're standing out there all day in the constant rain. But we could look right over to Father Moon's boat, and he wasn't sleeping. He wasn't hiding in the cabin. He wasn't under an umbrella. He was sitting right there, just like the rest of us, casting his line, checking his lines, just like the rest of us.

Hosts: Can you talk a little bit about your family life - how having kids has evolved your spiritual life and personal journey?

Susan: The idea of a family was always something wonderful, but it was something in the far distant future. I didn't really have a vision of what it might be like. I grew up in a military family - we moved every two to three years. We never lived with extended family. I'd visit my grandparents, but we never lived close to them. I never really knew my cousins well. It was just my mom, my dad, my sister and me, and things weren't always so great either. I moved away from home very early - I moved away when I was 17. So I didn't really have a vision of a close family that stays together all the time. I took off here, my sister took off there. That's one thing I'm really grateful for in our ideals - this idea that everybody deserves and can have a family, and even a True Family.

Susan: I was Blessed to a wonderful man, Jamal Bouachri, and we have three children. I became a mom at an older age - I was 35 when my first son was born. As challenging as that was, the fact that I didn't become a mother till later in life, for me I think it was okay, because my mind was full of other things I wanted to do. By the time I became a mother, I really wanted to be a mother. I just thought, it's such a gift. By that point in my life, I wasn't sure I could be a mom - as we get older, there are extra challenges. Thank God, with modern medicine maybe it's not quite as much as 30 years ago, but it was a question mark whether that would happen for me. I'm so grateful to be able to say I was able to have three children. My youngest was born when I was 41.

Susan: Each one is so different. Thankfully, my husband is a stable one. He'd stay home 24/7 if he could. He roots our family, because I'm still ready to jump here and there and go off to the wilderness of Alaska or whatever - but he kind of roots us. We've lived and grown, and I tell you, even as my kids have gotten older, I feel like I keep growing even more, because learning to be the parent to adult children has not been easy for me. How to care without just telling them what to do. How to not only care, but recognize that they're adults who have to make their own decisions. The ultimate journey we're on is one of love. That is the journey that all the faith leaders through history have shown us - including our True Parents. You love people where they're at. So that's working my way forward on that.

Hosts: That's fantastic. Thank you for sharing about being - I mean, they call it a late-in-life mother, but actually it's not that late. That's really inspiring. I just want to ask one last question. In a lot of your stories, you've touched on this kind of adoration and admiration for Father Moon that I think a lot of people struggle to understand. It feels a little bit like, I guess you could say it's almost like worshipping a celebrity. For you, in your experience, what is it that you feel inspires that level of admiration from people? Because a lot of people just don't see it, but you've been so up close in the movement, seeing him as a person, how he interacts with people. What was it that you've observed that would inspire that kind of feeling in others?

Susan: I think we all long - we want to surround ourselves with good people. We all want to meet that person, we want to know people of integrity. With the understanding I had of Father Moon and the

challenges he met in his life - the fact that this man could come from this tiny little village in North Korea and within his lifetime establish a movement that exists around the world is just so mind-blowing. To understand his life and how he met these challenges and didn't appear to change. I appreciated his bold declarations - that not only was it his life he was dedicating, but even he and his wife's marriage. That's pretty audacious, to speak on behalf of this woman. But somehow he found this partner - God presented this partner who was just as audacious and ready to go along this path. And then to make this audacious and bold claim that it's not just me and my wife, but our family - we're going to create this True Family. I can't think of anybody else in history who's ever done this.

Susan: Now we know that those things are still getting worked out, because I might be able to speak on somebody else's behalf, but actually making that work is a whole other ballgame. But I also know the story is not over yet. It started with a story - at first, as I learned about Reverend Moon and his life story. But as I had the chance to meet the man and his wife and have experience with them, and have that experience align with the word, it's something I respect, and I continue to respect. I don't think things are perfect. I'm not naive. In my own life, I've made mistakes, and I've been forgiven, and I know that is part of life. It's funny saying that right now - I'm not saying that Reverend Moon made mistakes or needed to be forgiven. I don't know. I'm sure those things happen, but that's between him and God. He kept going on his path, and that's the amazing thing.

Susan: In joining together as a community or a family, we can inspire each other and encourage each other. If I've got somebody above me, I can keep going. And for somebody below me, younger than me, hopefully I can be an example for them. The scary thing for me is to find myself now where I'm becoming the elder. All those people I leaned on and held on to and looked up to are passing on. It's inevitable - we're all going to die. I find myself now in this really scary position of becoming the elder, and that's really terrifying, because I know me and I know who I am. My faith has waxed and waned. But somehow within that, to find that space - because I know I'm forgiven, and because I know that others before me went this way and didn't stop and didn't give up - it's created a path for me too, and hopefully all of us are widening the path.

Susan: With Father Moon - he walked a very narrow path. Together with his wife joining him, it became a little bit wider. Then the elders joining together made it a little bit wider. That's something I'm really determined to do - to help make that path wider, that it isn't such a precarious path. It's not such a life-or-death path; it's a path that we can more easily traverse. Faith is always growing. I feel that's the example our True Parents set for us: no matter what got in the way or what roadblocks came up, they never stopped moving forward with their original plan or original ideal. I feel so blessed to have met somebody like that in my life. People go their whole lives without meeting someone who has given it off like that. Those people don't come around every day - those are historic figures. I met somebody like that who mentored me and loved me and guided me, who chose my spouse for me. That has been my greatest inspiration - just to keep going. God is a way-maker. If we keep going, the way will become open. Sooner or later we will figure out our way through. That's the encouragement I would like to give everybody.

Hosts: Well, I can say, for me, you have been an amazing elder support system. I deeply appreciate the times that I could come to you and share candidly. I think that is what a life of faith is really about - knowing other people have been through those struggles and you're not facing them alone. So I would certainly like to thank you for persevering, and for walking the path that you have always felt God has guided you on. I think that's what resonates true for me too - this is about finding the path God is leading me on. So thank you.

Hosts: Yeah, thanks so much, Susan, for coming on and taking the time.

Susan: I'm grateful to you for listening. We have to edify each other, right? Claim our victories, become stronger ourselves. The things that in one moment are our biggest failures ultimately become our greatest victories. It's so funny how it works that way. It's in a life of faith that happens. I don't have all the letters after my name like somebody such as Dr. Ward does, but in God we can all be equal too - we can all have something of value to offer.