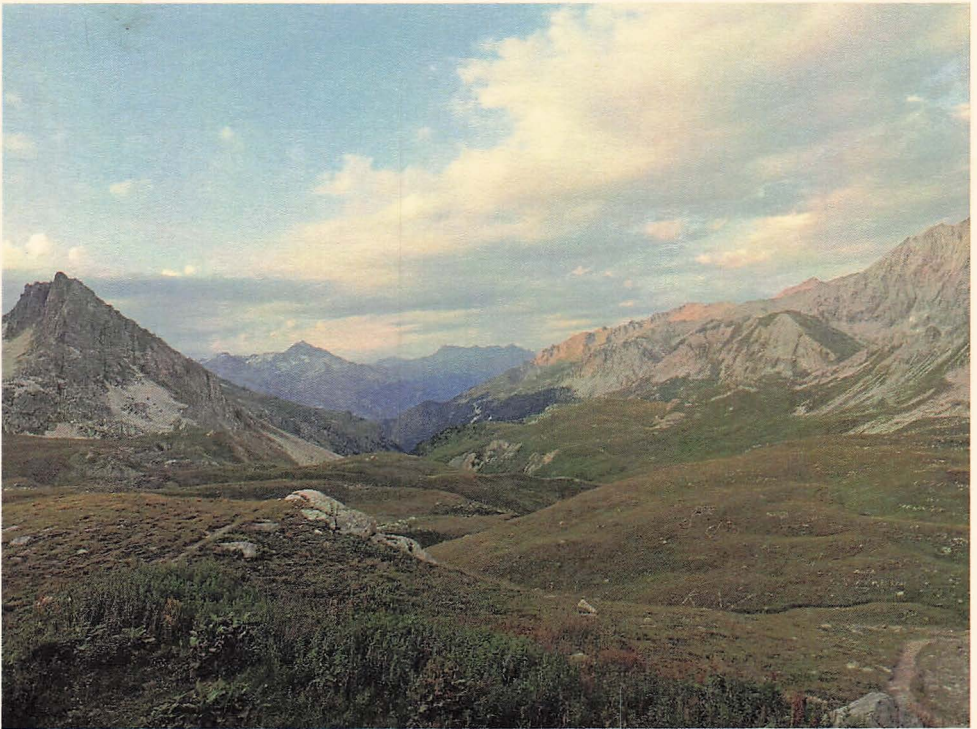


Florence Nosley

GOD? AND SO WHAT?



Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous

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*Coincidence is God's way
of remaining anonymous*

ISBN: 9791098174216

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Foreword

This short document is the result of a very long gestation period. For a long time, I simply jotted down a few significant moments, without knowing what to do with them, but simply as to keep them in my memory. It was in the spring of 2025 that I felt the desire to share my spiritual journey.

In that journey, I felt something like an invisible Hand gently prompting me to welcome the experiences I am given to live.

With this document, I also wanted to give back to Initiatives of Change, and to the people I met there, a little of what I discovered within this movement and which transformed my life.

Florence Nosley

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A Formative Experience

I was nine years old. I lived in Lebanon and at school I heard people talk about a terrible war in Algeria. No further details were given.

A few months later, in June 1962, my father told us that he had been appointed to Algiers, where we would all go and live. "But isn't that the country where there's a war? – Yes, but the war is over." A friend who had lived there told me: "You're lucky, it's a very beautiful country."

We spent six months in France before leaving for Algeria, and I discovered primary school in France. One day, a girl in my class said that her father had died: "He was killed in Algeria." Another girl, finding out that I was going there, said to me, "I wouldn't want to go to Algeria." Two teachers looked at me with serious expressions when they mentioned that country... and that's how I gradually realised that the war in Algeria was a war between Algeria and France!

And then a deep anxiety began to take hold of me, a real fear: people would hate me at school I would be attacked... but these emotions were too deep for me to express and, in any case, I had no words to describe them.

The family arrived in Algiers in the spring of 1963. We left Maison Blanche airport, driving along a road lined with palm trees. "We're in Africa," someone said. That did nothing to ease the anxiety gnawing at me.

A few days later, I discovered the "Ecole des Pins" in El Biar. I was on my guard. The teacher was French and there were five French pupils out of about thirty pupils. The teacher sat me next to a little Algerian girl, Mounira, whom I hardly dared to

look at. I told myself that in class, it was okay, I was safe, the teacher was there, but in the playground...

The dreaded moment arrived. To my amazement, Mounira invited me to come and play with her and her friends before any of the French children had come over to me.

It is impossible to describe the inner liberation and joy I felt. I have never run so fast in my life. When I returned to the classroom I found the words to say to myself: "This war was a war between adults, not between children. I will be able to live in this country. Phew!"

Stepping into the Unknown

When I was thirteen I was deeply shocked by attitudes I met among some Christians. From then on I began to have doubts about the validity of the religious instruction I was receiving and about the Church's impact on everyday life and world problems.

Nevertheless, I was confirmed two years later in the Protestant Church – it seemed to me there was nothing to lose. But shortly after, I dropped everything once and for all: as far as I could see religion had nothing to do with everyday life.

The ideas of Moral Re-Armament¹ interested me because they were related to life. I was especially interested by the idea of listening and obeying what one most deeply feels to be right. Hearing what had happened in families, schools, places of work, when someone had decided to listen to this “inner voice” prompted me to try the experiment for myself. One thought that came to mind was to apologise to someone. But the first time I saw that person again, I “backed away” internally, and at the same time another thought came to mind: “If you don't do it now, you'll never do it.” I took the plunge.

I began to discover a completely new perspective on life. When one finds the answer to a personal problem, however small, one cannot help thinking, “If that can happen to me, why not to others?” And if one can find the answer to a personal problem, why not to bigger problems in society?

Although most of those who work with Moral Re-Armament¹ have a faith in God, my commitment was on a purely human basis – for me to live the way I expected others to live. But I learned to trust this “inner voice” more and more and increasingly it became the foundation of all my decisions.

At the end of 1976, I had just joined a group of young people to work full-time with Moral Re-Armament¹ wherever we might be invited. We were beginners in every sense of the word. As regards our finances, there had been several gifts and each of us had contributed as much as he or she could. I had decided to put some of the money people had given me into the common kitty as well as the proceeds from selling my moped, and to keep the rest.

When one of our group decided to give all his savings I realised that I had never seriously considered giving everything. Did that then mean, I wondered, that I did not really believe in what we felt called to do together? I was not necessarily meant to make the same decision as him, but I suddenly saw that my commitment as part of the group was not 100% and that, financially speaking, I needed to rethink everything and be ready for anything. Unless my motives were quite clear on this score I had no place in the group.

This unexpected difficulty demanded an urgent solution. The pressure of time put me in a state of panic. Then, as had become my habit, I took time to reflect quietly and look clearly at all my motives. I could see no answer. Then I had the most unexpected thought, something like: “You have no idea how to solve this. Perhaps you could pray about it.” This was a shock – God, prayer and religion had long since gone out of my life!

After taking half a day to recover and, since no other practical thought came, I finally decided to give the idea a try “just to see”, though I felt pretty silly. I waited for a moment when I was sure not to be interrupted or discovered by anyone and I expressed something or other in my own way, with all the conviction I could muster, to a God I did not know. That evening I had a rough idea of what I should be ready to give and next morning it was clear. Coincidence? Or would it have happened

anyway? At any rate from that moment I began to wonder about the possibility of God's existence.

This experiment had sufficiently interested me to make me try it again from time to time. Of course, I had never mentioned it to anyone – except to a friend a long way off. I felt unable to expose this side of myself to anyone (especially as I had a reputation for being anti-religion), and I also wanted to find out everything by myself, in my own time, without being influenced by anyone else. “I’d talk about it later perhaps,” I thought. Was I right or wrong? It is different for each person.

In March 1977 we went to South Africa. There I became aware of an inner block which prevented me from being really open to the country and to the work we were going to do there. I realised that there was a struggle going on between this power I had begun to discover and my reason which could not understand. I still hesitate to say “God”. It is a step which brings so many changes to one's life that one considers it many times before taking the plunge.

After a few days I finally decided that, as I did not know which way to turn, the only thing to do was to carry on making listening and obedience to my “inner voice” the basis of my life. If I found God in the process, fine. If I did not find Him, that was also fine; provided I had the humility to accept it if I did discover Him. Once I had taken this decision my inner block dissolved.

During the summer of 1977 our group returned to Europe, to a Moral Re-Armament conference in Caux, Switzerland. During the preparations before a performance of “Time to Choose” – a show we had created – I thought, “If God exists, obviously I should give Him my whole life, because He would know far better than me what to do with it and, moreover, what is best for me. I cannot explain it, but I feel more and more open to

the idea that God exists. Would I be ready to risk giving my life to the little I have discovered of this God? I said to myself, "All right."

I was very vaguely aware of something changing deep down in me. I do not know quite what happened then but that evening I felt something different in the quality of my performance in the show.

Next day I thought, "To give one's life to God is all very well but it will not make it any easier." This became clear that same day; but I also discovered that I had a new attitude towards difficulties, a more positive way of facing them.

At the end of the summer conference in Caux the thought came clearly to me that I should return to southern Africa for the coming months, and to Rhodesia² that October. It was so clear that I was quick to obey the thought. It meant finding about 5,000 francs and dealing with all the administrative formalities in less than a month. The financial side alarmed me but I said to myself, "If it is God who has asked me to go, He will give me the means to get there. I obviously shall not find the 5,000 francs on my own in such a short time. I need the help of other people but that help will only come if I do all I can myself." Secretarial work which I did at home brought in a small proportion of the total sum. The rest came from friends, relations and also from people I knew less well but who had a concern for southern Africa. The last francs came two days before my departure!

On this occasion I discovered that praying was not "sheltering behind God", nor fleeing from the difficulties of life and not, as I had thought, a sign of weakness. Quite the contrary, it was drawing the necessary energy to do what one felt called to do. I now see two sides to prayer: expressing oneself in every way – it is a positive way of thinking about people and things –

and listening to what God has to say, being available for the ideas He may send. This brings me back to what I had already been doing in my daily times of reflection. Through these times, without realising it, I more or less lived as though God did exist, at the moments when I was ready for anything.

In Rhodesia², at one point, all sorts of questions about the future and doubts suddenly came up. I wanted to give everything up. For instance, I suddenly could not accept working without a salary any longer – it seemed like sponging off other people. I felt this very deeply. Just then I had a letter from Paris telling me that a retired person had sent me a very generous cheque. “Really”, I said to myself, “for that to happen just now after all I have been thinking...” It did not answer the question of living without salary but, the fact that someone who hardly knew me should spontaneously send me something, without my even being there to remind him of my existence, at least made me feel I was still in the right place, whatever I might do later on. My morale went up and it helped me face up to the other questions.

This experience deepened my new faith and also my commitment in the work of Moral Re-Armament¹. I am learning more and more to have faith about the future even if I do not necessarily understand the present.

All this is gradually bringing me to a new perspective on life. Might not the essential point be to allow myself to be entirely led by God, to be His instrument – poor, yet totally available – whatever the results might be, for my personal future, or that of the country where I am? If God exists, He must have a plan for the world and for each individual, and I want to trust Him for that.

Not long after that I read in a newspaper article that “if you have caught sight of a road you must make it known to others”. In this spirit I decided to write down what I had

discovered – something I did not want nor had ever sought to do. It is like a narrow path along which I have begun to walk – without knowing where it will take me. But it has opened up such a fascinating horizon for me that I have no intention of going off it. I do not yet feel able to fully evaluate it, but I have the sense I have probably discovered the most important thing for my life.

Some more recent changes have been made to this text published in New World News, Vol 27, No 3, 2 December 1978.

¹ renamed Initiatives of Change in 2001

² renamed Zimbabwe in 1980

Handle with Care

A few years later, while on holiday, I discovered and read Charles W. Colson's book *Born Again* in one sitting.

I felt that my fledgling faith was taking root somewhere deep inside me and I had a strong intuition that one day I would become a Christian. This intuition came so naturally that I accepted it without questioning it or arguing with my current beliefs. I kept it to myself without sharing it with anyone.

When I returned from holiday, I told myself that after such a thought, I would not be betraying myself by going to church on a Sunday. So that is what I did.

And there, to my surprise, I realised that there was a progression in worship, a journey that my critical and cynical mind had always prevented me from seeing.

I discovered that we arrive with our joys and sorrows, that we pray to “lay everything down” and make ourselves available to receive the word of God, and that then each of us tries to understand and retain what we can.

And the final blessing reminded me of Jesus' words to his disciples after his resurrection, at the end of Matthew's Gospel: “Go and make disciples of all nations... and behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” In short it is a “kick-off” for each of us.

This first experience made me want to repeat it. I had the same impression as the previous Sunday. And everything seemed so simple and natural...

On the third Sunday, I wanted to check out the service shown on TV. That's when someone who, despite my discretion, had noticed something, mentioned the pastor of a third church and told me, among other things, that he was very popular with young people... So I gave up on my plan for the day and followed his suggestion... but it was a bad move: I was royally bored and didn't even watch the service on television the following Sunday.

And so I completely lost what I had begun to discover. I also didn't understand how someone, even unintentionally, could have “swept away” this discovery, and how I hadn't been able to protect it. Looking back, I realized it was as if I had discovered something small and fragile that I didn't know yet how to hold onto, and that a jostle had made me drop it. But, like looking for a needle in a haystack, it was impossible to re-find, so I eventually gave up.

However, I retained an openness and respect for the Christian religion (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox? My intuition did not specify which of these).

And that did not prevent me from continuing my spiritual journey with a stronger awareness than before that, while it is important to be open to the ideas of others, it is even more important to follow one's own intuitions, even if they are still in their infancy.

Marriage

Having an intuition about something does not always mean you can move forward immediately. We are not robots; we are full of various hesitations before accepting and mentally readjusting ourselves. It can take time to adapt to an unexpected situation.

An example: the question of marriage. At 29, I finally managed to entrust this matter entirely to God: “I don't know how to choose, I am uncertain; I'll let You choose, I'll accept Your choice.” It was about time: a few days later, I received a letter from the man who would become my husband. It was totally unexpected. “He's joking” (but you don't joke about something like that). I had associated him with someone else... Then little things that had happened in the previous months came to mind, along with thoughts that had crossed my mind and to which I had paid no attention. In fact, when you're not ready, you don't see anything. And yet I had even thought that he would make “a nice husband...”

During a conversation with a friend, she asked me what my very first reaction to his letter had been. To my great surprise, I felt an enthusiastic “yes” emerge from my uncertainty. I was so surprised that I couldn't tell her, so I kept it to myself.

But it still took me several months to take the plunge. It was beyond the spiritual resources I felt I had within me; a bit like asking a small child who is taking his first steps to start running. But at the same time, if you want to build a lasting relationship, it's important not to be afraid of the time it can sometimes take.

A New Direction

In 1986, we began to sense that our lives were about to take a new turn. It would soon be time to try for children.

And, for me, that would mean the end of my role as a volunteer in Moral Re-Armament, to which I had been devoting myself full-time for more than twelve years. Experience had shown me that this often itinerant and irregular lifestyle did not allow me to recover my energy quickly enough, and it seemed incompatible with family life (even though many couples around us had managed to make it work).

But this would by no means be the end of the lifelong commitment I had found there. There was something new to be invented.

At the end of the summer, I got pregnant with our first child and I felt compelled to look for a temporary secretarial job. Being pregnant, I didn't expect to find anything better and I simply hoped to find something despite being upfront about my situation, which might put some agencies off.

So I submitted several resumés and waited for responses... which didn't come. Until one evening, about two months later, when the phone rang.

"Hello, Mrs. Nosley, this is the agency... on the phone. Are you feeling well?"

"Yes." (I was shaking on the phone.)

"One of our employees has just told us that she has found a permanent job and therefore cannot start her six-week assignment tomorrow morning and we have no one else but you to replace her. Are you feeling well? You're not going to give up, are you?"

"No, this is the best stage of my pregnancy." (It was true.)

And the person described the job to me: in a publishing house in central Paris (easy to get to from my home), six hours a day starting at 11 a.m. (great for a pregnant woman!). She described the equipment to me. I would have three days with the current employee to learn the ropes before she would leave for a long vacation.

I hanged up, feeling a little shaken. I hoped to rise to the challenge with the basic computer skills I had just learned at the Caux Centre... I already knew that, if I succeeded, I would get the number of hours needed to qualify for the general social security system and leave the missionary insurance that had been ours for the past few years and was not the best for a family.

After this temporary job, which went well, I had another one lasting a week and two lasting three days. This gave me, give or take a few hours, what I needed to obtain a small maternity leave allowance...

It was a brief journey into the world of work, limited in time, but it represented a new leap of faith, showing me that what I had discovered in my life as a full-time volunteer could be replicated in very concrete areas of everyday life. It was only the beginning.

For his part, my husband Jean-Louis felt that the time had come to take up a professional activity. He started at a language school where he taught English, his second mother tongue, as part of adult vocational training, while preparing to become a freelance interpreter, a profession he discovered at the Caux Centre and during several assignments abroad.

Children

When we first started living together, we didn't know if we would have children. We shared a commitment that demanded all our time and energy.

After one year of marriage, we felt that we would try to have children one day, but it wasn't the right time yet. We were waiting for the "green light" and even the "green arrow."

After three years, Jean-Louis was the first to feel that the time was coming. After a trip from which I returned ill, in a state of physical and mental exhaustion, the thought came to me: "Children, it will be soon." My immediate reaction was: "God, if it is You speaking to me, You can see that right now I'm only good for having a miscarriage." Remembering the words of the thought, I realized that it was "soon" and not now. And "children" indicated that there would be at least two...

Given my state of health, I saw a doctor who helped me recover and advised me to wait until July to try for our first child—it was February at the time. We got the "green light" a little earlier than that, but I ended up getting pregnant in July...

A second child was born three years later. We had our "at least two" children, but also a vague feeling that it wasn't over yet.

A year later, we felt that we could be ready to welcome a third child, whether it came or not. And that third child was born.

When our third child was born, I remember thinking, "Great, I managed to have all my children before turning 40." And then the thought crossed my mind: "There could very well be one more." One more, not two. But one more... that meant

that, given the postpartum bleeding, I could have a child at the earliest around 41.5 or 42 years old. That seemed absurd to me. I thought that time would tell...

Nevertheless, I left the maternity ward with my third child in my arms and a fourth one in my head.

The third child was growing up. Her clothes, which had become too small, were put aside as they were outgrown. Could I give them away now? Or should I just lend them out? No inner answer came, and perhaps for good reason.

The postpartum came to an end. And immediately, the shared intuition to try for a fourth child returned, and insistently so. And then I felt a little panic: I was almost 41, and the idea of finding myself pregnant at that age made me feel ashamed, regardless of whether other mothers had been in the same situation before me.

How would we manage financially? With four children, I found it difficult to imagine going back to work, and we would need to change our car...

At the same time, we increasingly felt that if we stayed with three children, our life would slowly settle into a rut, and that four children was the right path for us, even if it would turn many things upside down.

One day, walking down the street, I said to my “inner self”: “It’s true that I still feel in great shape, but I can see some signs that I’m about to start ‘going downhill’.” And my “inner self” replied immediately: “Yes, but your spirit will grow younger.”

Time passed and this premonition persisted. So I “asked God for a sign” and did something I never do: I picked up a Bible, opened it at random, and put my finger on a page. Looking down, I read, “...and he made his people very fruitful.” I was shaken for several minutes, then, “to be sure”, I looked for one or two more signs in the Bible and came across words out of context, such as genealogy or something else. But I had asked for a sign, nothing more. I ended up “saying” to God, “Okay, we’ll have this child. But given our age, it has to happen quickly.”

Two months later, I was pregnant. Then I “negotiated” with God again. I said to him, “We followed your leading, but now you must always provide us with the bare minimum.”

The pregnancy went well for the baby, but it was very tiring for me and even difficult at the beginning (I even said that everything would be so much easier if I weren’t pregnant) and at the end. In fact, during the last few days, I felt closer to death than to life. The strength of my initial intuition was a very solid anchor that helped me get through it. I was lucky to be able to experience this fourth birth as a resurrection!

Finances

I had “negotiated with God”: “Okay, we’ll have this fourth child, but you have to make sure we always have the bare minimum we need to live on.”

Our fourth child was 17 months old when we suffered a financial setback: Jean-Louis hadn't had any work for several weeks and our car had broken down. We realised that the repair bill would practically empty our current account and that our savings wouldn't get us very far.

As if one problem wasn't enough, two more expenses fell on us. I was paying more and more attention to Jean-Louis's and my food intake, which we cut in half. I looked at our half-empty washing powder container and wondered if we would be able to replace it. With one washing a day, it's running out fast. Would we be able to stay clean? I looked at our eldest son's shoes, which were given to us (like most of the children's clothes, in fact, or bought at a clothing exchange). They were a little misshapen, perhaps not so well suited to his feet. But they were warm. So I watched him walk in them, and he would keep them; it was not feasible to get others at the moment.

We decided to discuss the situation with a friend who didn't know anyone in our family, and asked her to pray that Jean-Louis would find work again. She told us that if necessary she could lend us money interest-free and asked me if I would be willing to work. I said yes, without really imagining how that would be possible given my daily routine. That same evening, she was going to meet with a religious community and told us she would tell them about our situation. That evening, I felt positive vibes coming our way.

The next day, for the first time in weeks, Jean-Louis was called to interpret at court, a lowpaid job, but one that allowed him to come home in the evening with some money in his pocket. The same thing happened the day after, and a few more times until a more important assignment finally came along. We told our friend about it, marvelling at such a quick “answer” to prayer. For us it was a real coincidence, but not really for her, much to our surprise.

At the same time, a week after his arrival, the young “au pair” who was supposed to live with us for nine months told us that for various reasons he wanted to find another family. We let him go, relieved that we no longer had to feed a 20-year-old boy (!) and got back the deposit we had paid to the placement agency. As a result, Jean-Louis and I were able to start eating a little more. It was about time, as my mother had said to Jean-Louis, “You have hollow cheeks”; fortunately, it didn't go any further than that.

Around the same time, a friend told us that she knew someone at an organic market who made ready meals and who was upset when she had leftovers at the end of the market because they were difficult to resell. She had asked our friend if she knew of any families who could benefit from them...and our friend had thought of us. So, for several weeks in a row, we were able to pick up her unsold food, which we greatly appreciated. It was paradoxical to be in financial difficulty and to benefit from food of a high quality that we had never bought before. A few weeks later, the saleswoman told us that she had found a family in great difficulty and wanted them to benefit from her dishes. We thanked her profusely, telling her that we ourselves had been in great difficulty. A few weeks later, she called our friend back to say that the other family didn't appreciate her food so much and so we were able to benefit from it for a while longer.

What's more, our local supermarket, which had changed owners, organised a raffle in which we took part and we won first prize: 1,000 francs in vouchers! A few days later, there was a second raffle, and we won second prize. But the rules said you could only win once, so in all honesty, we didn't get the 500 francs, but a small consolation prize.

So we started to breathe a little more easily.

It was two months later when one day I felt as if someone was gently pushing me forward by the shoulders and whispering the idea of going back to work. With four young children, I had more or less given up on the idea of having a job. So I was a little surprised and found it hard to imagine where I would find the time and energy for it. But it was just a thought, so it wasn't for the immediate future.

I could have returned to my job as a secretary, but I needed computer training because the profession had changed a lot, and I couldn't afford to pay for training as well as put our youngest child in day care. I considered providing home help to elderly people in my town, but I never got a call.

I also thought about teaching and went to the nearest teacher training college to get some information. As I leafed through the fascinating documentation, I thought to myself with every page that I would have neither the skills nor the strength to do the training first and then the job. But as I closed the documents a thought struck me: "If you don't try, you'll miss out on something." I had no guarantee of success but at least I would discover something new. We had just managed to save enough money to pay for the registration fee for the CNED¹ correspondence course to prepare for the competitive exam. I worked every evening from February to May, without having enough time to do everything. But I was lucky enough to either

find the right answers or manage to compensate by skirting around what I didn't know. I succeeded mainly thanks to English, which I had only really studied the day before and which I never used again afterwards.

“God will provide”, we sometimes hear. In this situation, it wasn't financial resources that were provided to me first, but the energy to throw myself into preparing for the competitive exam, then into a demanding and far from easy profession. Of course, a salary came later. But before preparing for the exam, I found it difficult to cope with three late nights in a row. I realised, without understanding how, that I had been able to surpass myself. During my year of training at the IUFM (1) and my first year of teaching, I managed to go to bed every night between midnight and one in the morning. Incomprehensibly, I was given incredible energy, despite my physical limitations, which are still there.

When I registered for the competitive exam, the friend we had told about our situation called me to ask if I would be willing to do a few hours of cleaning for an elderly person. I agreed. We had just enough money to put our youngest in day care during my working hours. On the day I received my first pay cheque, our eldest child's shoes fell apart, and I was able to buy him a new pair without any problem...!

These are a few very memorable experiences from a particular period. There were others before, there have been others since, and there probably will be more!

¹ National Centre for Distance Education

Almighty God?

God, if we believe in Him, is not a magician. He does not protect us from life's unpredictability (illness, family problems, professional problems, etc.). We are often full of resistance, ideas of which we cannot let go, which can interfere with our ability to discern the right direction to take at different stages of our lives. But while He cannot spare us the vagaries of our human condition, He can, if we are open to it, accompany us through the most difficult moments.

For example, our eldest child's illness (S), which appeared atypical, unknown, inexplicable, unnamed, and immediately life-threatening. It was like crossing through the night, but when our eyes adjusted to the darkness, after a while we could see points of light that allowed us to take one step, then another.

In addition to the support of our family, there were other, more unexpected sources of support:

Many parents of pupils offered to take the three other children into their homes after school and at weekends, so that we could spend enough time at the hospital. We received more offers than we could possibly accept. Every Sunday evening, we would make a "schedule" for the week to see where we would "place" the children. But after a few weeks, this routine began to take its toll on them. And that's when we received a phone call.

An "au pair", (L.), who had helped us the previous year, was in England at the time. We received a call from her one day in October, asking how we were doing. We just had time to tell her that S. was ill and in hospital before the line went dead. She called back a few days later: her phone card had expired and she had had to wait a while before she could buy a new one. She told us that her first call had been prompted by a concern she felt

when she thought about our family. She then offered to come and help us for free for four to five weeks and was prepared to take a break from her job to do so. We finally accepted, as it would give a more stable life to the brother and sisters, who spent a lot of time moving from one family to another at the end of the day after school and at weekends. L. stayed for five weeks.

After we had adjusted to life in hospital,

- A radiologist who saw S regularly told us one day that he was praying for S, that we had to believe, that nothing was impossible for God. Things turned out differently, but his warm and unexpected words were very comforting.

- During a brief exchange with one of the doctors, when discussing whether or not to do another X-ray, he said that he still needed to think about it, as each examination was so expensive. "The reanimation ward has 20% of the hospital's patients, but takes up 80% of the budget, and we have the highest failure rate. It's a department where you become very humble." These words came from a doctor whom I saw as a very bright young man who had quickly seen and understood everything, who had a certain influence over other members of the department, and who seemed to me to be anything but humble. I greatly appreciated his few words, which showed him to me in a completely different light, a real ray of light.

- The care and respect shown by the staff towards the patient's body until the very end.

The hospital is certainly a difficult place to live, but it is not always sad.

Another young girl, M., also came to give us some help. She arrived three weeks after S.'s death and stayed for three

months. Like L., her presence helped the whole family to recover a little.

We received many phone calls and emails. Whether we responded or not, they meant a lot to us.

Jean-Louis lost several weeks of work. I was working part-time at the time and was on sick leave for S., but at least I was getting paid. However, my salary would not have been enough for us. We were surprised to discover that two different groups of people had organised two fundraising collections. Given their generosity, we donated one of the collections to the hospital's research laboratory and gratefully kept the other one for the family's needs.

Turbulence

Committing oneself to a movement that promotes high ideals does not protect one from pitfalls into which many people involved in Initiatives of Change have fallen headlong; for example, intruding into other people's lives, thinking that one knows what someone else should do, and even going so far as to believe that one knows God's will for someone.

I experienced such an intrusion into my personal life. I was a student and was staying for a few weeks in an Initiatives of Change house where some people did not understand why I did not believe in God. I must have had a particular “moral” problem, I didn't understand because I didn't want to understand... I felt “chased” and in the end, to get some peace, I ended up saying that I didn't believe in God because I didn't want to believe in Him. I remember one person's smile of satisfaction.

But for my part, I felt so devastated inside because I couldn't simply be myself and, because I wasn't able to protect my true self, I considered leaving Initiatives of Change.

Then, after thinking about it a little more, I realised that I had joined this movement not because of the extraordinary stories I had heard, but because of the little things that had transformed my life. And that it wasn't hurtful words or behaviours that should decide for me. Sometimes, in situations that have become untenable, it is better to leave in the interests of all parties but I was far from that point. So I stayed and did not repeat the mistake I made at the age of 13, when I rejected faith because of Christians who had disappointed me and then “threw the baby out with the bathwater”.

It so happens that my first experience of prayer, a few years later (described in *Stepping into the unknown*), took place in the very place where I had felt spiritually “violated”. I didn't

realise it at the time, but it brought me complete healing. All that remains of that moment is an intellectual memory of the events...

Having become a full-time volunteer, I was living in the house dedicated to Initiatives of Change in France. One day, I received an invitation to spend a few weeks in a foreign country with a small team. Everyone in the house thought it would be a very good idea for me to go, that it would be meaningful... Although I felt very honoured by this invitation, I felt that at that very moment I needed to be in France for a specific person. I had a lot of trouble making myself understood: in a somewhat heated meeting, someone asked me, "Is it God's will or your own will?" I saw these same people again at dinner that evening and at breakfast the next day, with more comments like, "Do we have the right to refuse such an invitation?" It was exhausting.

A few days later, the person in charge of organising the trip came to talk to me again: "We have to book the tickets now..." Feeling under pressure internally, I still managed to say, trembling a little, "But I'm not going..." In the end, I didn't go... and while the group was away, I was able to be present at an important moment for the person I had been thinking about, which I had no idea about beforehand.

A few years later, I was part of a psychodrama group because of a difficult start to my teaching career. One day, I found myself recounting this story, which the psychotherapist summarised as follows: "There was an intuition that led to opposition without a break."

We also had a very difficult relationship with another couple. Nothing we did was right. We felt as if we were being harassed. It was very hard for us. After several months, they suggested we meet up with some other people for a chat. We went along, feeling rather apprehensive. The man suggested we start by shaking hands. Jean-Louis accepted, and so did I, but

only because I didn't dare refuse and at the same time I thought to myself: I'm worthless, I'm going to get screwed over again...

His first words seemed to prove me right, because he started by criticising Jean-Louis for something! Then his tone changed and I sensed a sincerity that surprised me in a good way when he mentioned his attitude. Afterwards, I thought to myself that if I had refused to shake his hand at the beginning, I would have done it at the end. I felt that it would be possible to start afresh on a new footing and I decided to trust him. We then moved forward at our own pace, and for some time now I can say that this story is a thing of the past.

Still on a Journey...

Initiatives of Change (formerly known as Moral Re-Armament) was the unwitting instrument of my discovery of faith.

Discovering faith is like moving from plane geometry to spatial geometry. Like plane geometry, my life had two dimensions: the dimension of time (yesterday, today, tomorrow) and the material dimension (everything I can perceive with my senses). Discovering faith made me discover height or depth – the spiritual dimension.

My perspective on life changed, in particular the notions of success and failure: what looks like failure is not necessarily so, and what looks like success is not always so. And my understanding of respect for life has evolved.

At the age of 24, I discovered faith. A few months later, the thought had occurred to me: "If God really existed, I would obviously give Him my whole life, because He would know much better than I how to use it, and in my best interests too. Without being able to explain it, I feel increasingly open to the idea that God exists. Would I be willing to take the risk of giving my life to the little I have discovered about this God?" I had said to myself, "All right." (1)

It was the first "gift" of my life to this God, which concerned what I understood at the time about my life, essentially what I was supposed to do and where. Little by little, I discovered other aspects of my life that I could also entrust to Him: who to live with and how; what to do with success, failure, trials and tribulations... what I could be.

For example, at one point, I was faced with a difficult situation that dragged on with no end in sight. This led me to a

moment of despair and suicidal vertigo. Fortunately, these thoughts lasted only a few moments during one afternoon. However, something kept me going at that moment. I had a very interesting conversation with a friend that was to continue at the end of the day. I clung to that perspective, telling myself that I could ask her to pray with me, without necessarily giving her all the details of what I was going through.

She said a few words. When it was my turn, I simply said, “Help me get out of this once and for all.” The next day, I discovered a new strength within myself that amazed me and helped me to successfully get through this difficult period which lasted a few more months. My suicidal vertigo disappeared and never returned. One day, however, I lost my footing. I really felt like I was sinking, but I also had the almost physical sensation of a Hand holding me, like for someone learning to swim, until my feet touched the ground again.

Much more recently, I realised that I sometimes overreacted to certain events and couldn't understand where this came from. I then realised that I was carrying within me the history of my family, my life in the womb, my early childhood, of which I have no conscious memory, as well as the history of my country. This led me to want to entrust to God a new aspect of my life with very uncertain contours, my subconscious life.

I believe that if you have sincerely, even if incompletely, “given” your life to God, He will not abandon you. And even if it is difficult to imagine, it leads me to sense what I would wish for on the day of my death: that I make a final and total gift to God of what little life I have left, whether I am conscious or not.¹

¹ *Stepping into the unknown*

One day, I was taking part in a writing workshop in Caux. We were asked to express ourselves from the perspective of an object that represented us, that could inspire us. And the “object” that inspired me that day was...

The Little Train to Caux

I am the little train to Caux. Every day, I make the round trip between Montreux and Rochers de Naye. The journey is tough, the mountain is steep. I climb and descend slowly along my railway track. But I am rewarded by the beauty of the lake and mountains that appear once I emerge from the trees. The effort is worth it and I wouldn't swap my journey for any other.

I have been transporting all kinds of people for decades. First there was the world's high society during the Belle Époque, then the refugees of the Second World War. And after the war, it was as if the world came to me when I transported people from five continents up to Mountain House¹.

Summer and winter, there are always lots of tourists with their rucksacks or skis. And I continue to fascinate children with my colours and my whistle.

I'm just a little mountain train, but I'm really needed here. I'll never go as far as a highspeed train but I know that, in my own way, I've helped many people go far in their lives and that's enough to make me happy every day.

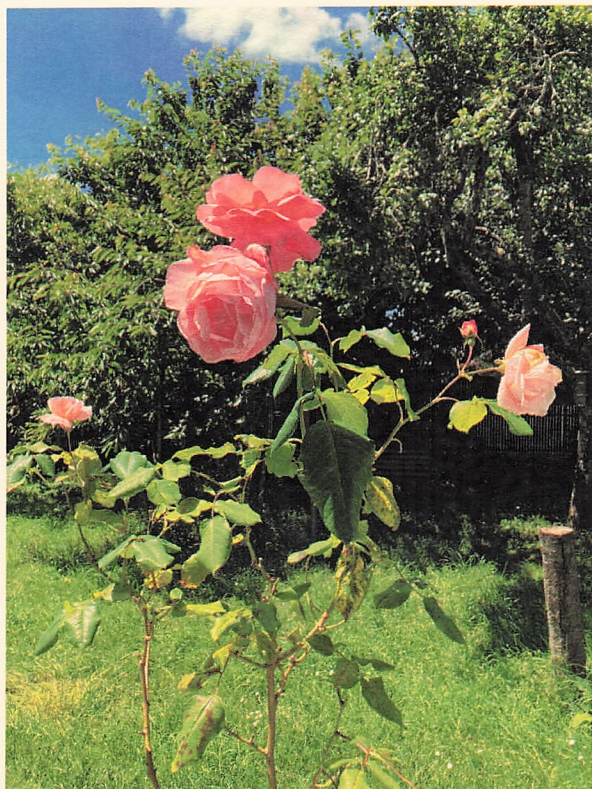
¹Name given for many years to the Moral Re-Armament/Initiatives of Change centre located in the village of Caux, above Montreux.

Special thanks go to my friend Lyria Normington and my husband Jean-Louis Nosley for their precious work of proofreading and corrections.

Printed by Monastère Sainte Claire – Nantes
June 2026

Florence Nosley worked for several years as a volunteer with Moral Re-Armament/Initiatives of Change, before becoming a primary school teacher. She retired in 2018.

In this text, she describes her discovery of a faith she had never sought. She recounts a few key moments that led her to this discovery and then to the perception of a guiding thread in life..



ISBN : 979-10-981742-1-6

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