

LINDA MERINO TESTIMONY

I remember being in second grade waiting for the school bus with my older brother when he said, “Boy, aren’t you embarrassed that the kids see where we live?” When I asked him why, he pointed to the palm reading sign on our front lawn. That was the first time I felt different from everyone else. You see, I am a Gypsy and I come from a long line of fortune tellers.

I was about twelve when my mother came to me and said, “Linda, go sit with this lady and read her palm.” I said, “But Mom, I don’t have the power yet that you and Grandma have.” She laughed and said, “Oh, just talk to her and “god” will do the rest.” I had no clue that what I was doing was evil, but I know now that was the moment Satan took over my life. Gypsies don’t believe that the “power” is from Satan because they don’t know Jesus as their savior and friend. They only think of “god” as a way to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck to the family.

One day when I was in my mid-20’s, I heard about Jesus through a young girl my brother was dating. This girl had to be sent from God since dating, and especially a non-Gypsy, is very much against our culture. She shared her faith in Jesus in such a simple, loving way. She would walk in and say, “Wow, I was having a bad day at work and I prayed for Jesus to help me, and He did.” She talked about Jesus like you would talk about a very special friend. She would pray about everything! I wanted to know more about her friend. She didn’t witness to me by reading the Bible or telling me how I had to stop reading palms, like so many other Christians did. She just loved me and shared her faith in that way.

Later when I learned what Luther says in our Small Catechism about fortune telling, I was moved to tears to think I was an abomination (a ‘bad smell’ as it was explained to me) before God! That was a turning point for me. I knew I had to stop telling fortunes, but I also realized the cost. My family would disown me and I would never see them again. When my husband and I told our families we were Christians, they kicked us out and told us we were no longer a part of them.

How would we live? When I was growing up, Gypsies were usually not educated beyond 3rd or 4th grade (today, they don’t go to school at all). Our men don’t work, they rely totally on fortune telling for income. I would bring such shame to my family. The emotional pain was unbearable.

But God is faithful; He will never give us more than we can handle. That’s when our church family in California took us into the family of Christ. We were loved and accepted even though at that time I was still a fortune teller! It took about a year for me to totally give up fortune telling, and our church family stood beside us every step of the way.

You see, God allowed our families to kick us out, but He didn’t leave us alone. He gave us Christian love through people just like you! I don’t know how we would have survived without the people at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Santa Clara, CA. I thank God for them. We don’t always know how hard it is for a non-believer or a new believer to walk into a church – but it’s scary! So please be ready to be a friend.