

*I stepped back and looked at my progress. I was envisioning the vibrant colors that would burst off of the canvas and strike people who were attempting to just pass by. I wondered how I could make elephants relatable to my life. I chose to place a heart and a globe in two of the four hands available. I decided I would come up with a meaning later. The elephant-headed Hindu Lord Ganesh was so appealing to me. I found myself making family trees and connecting all the Hindu Gods to the Greek gods that I admire so much. I fell in love with the religious aspect of my project and fell astray from the poaching epidemic. I still felt some sort of obligation to give the actual elephants the limelight. It broke my heart to know that elephants are being poached daily to meet China's high ivory demand; but the personal connection I had to this situation was the empathy I felt for these gentle giants. It angered me to know that I would not come to any conclusion or a satisfying reason for why humans could be so cruel to another living animal. I thought I could arouse the same feeling of empathy in people if I mentioned the human traits the elephant shares with us. Their capacity to mourn and their outstanding sense of memory is heartbreaking enough to bring any man to question human morality. I stepped back once more and saw a four handed elephant headed God. How on earth could I make this personal?*

*When I was asked what my personal beliefs were, I could not give an answer. I felt the sudden urge to explain how religion appeared in my family. For the first time I was comfortable sharing my inconclusive standpoint about not only religion, but God. As of last year I was certain that I had established a core belief system for myself. When asked what belief system I was tied to, I would simply reply, "I am a devout Catholic." I was a loyal Catholic school girl who was living in a modern time of sex, drugs, and opinions. Yes, I disagreed with aspects of the Church such as the views on abortion and same sex couples but I thought that the Roman Catholic Doctrine needed to be updated.*

*Painting the Lord Ganesh has given me a wakeup call. I am conflicted within myself and not just the religious beliefs pulling me apart within my family. I don't understand much because I have not experienced a moment where I felt a holy presence. I do not know if I believe in God so how could I possibly be devoted to something that may not be real?*

## Chapter I: Introduction

My name is Isabel Natalia Gallegos. I was born in 1996. My father is Jorge Gallegos a 40- year-old Mexican-American man who migrated to America when he was only sixteen. He came to this country looking for a better life. He worked at his share of cleaners in the Bay Area which is where he came to meet my mother. My mother is Virginia Long a 34-year-old Caucasian woman who was born and raised in the Bay Area. During her senior year in high school my mother became pregnant. She did not receive her diploma. She had left her mother's house right before her eighteenth birthday and stayed with my father and his sisters. A year later, my mother and father divorced for reasons unknown to me. At that time, my father was a Pentecostal Christian; his sisters and my mother were Catholics. I am the same age that my mother was when she discovered that she was pregnant with me. It is unfathomable for me that at this age my mother was overwhelmed with decisions that would impact her life forever.

Growing up in two different households with two different central belief systems made me who I am today. I do not recall being confused about the Pentecostal and Catholic religions because they both preach from the same book and share the same morals. I have been educated

in private Catholic schools all my life and I was instructed on how to be a loyal Catholic. Both of my parents had decided to stop attending church all together. My only religious guidance was the religious courses I was taking in school. After a dreadful twelve years of Bible studies and interpretations of the same information I was very much attracted to the idea of world religions and ethical philosophies. In my ethics and social justice class I was introduced to a variety of beliefs and philosophies that I had never thought could be justified. Much to my surprise I fell in love with many components of each idea.

The past few years many people have had an impact on my beliefs. My Aunts Edith and Doris exemplified everything that I did not want to sound like when I spoke on behalf of my religion. In my eyes they sounded as if they were brainwashed into saying absolutely absurd things. They could speak for hours on end about the Pentecostal religion, and reference the Bible from memory. They persistently asked me to attend their services and would force their beliefs on me. My father on the other hand would only start talking about his beliefs when he heard someone reference the Bible incorrectly. He never pushed me to go to church with my Aunties but he would sometimes tell me it would do me good. Not until recently, did I realize that I was jealous of the relationship my aunts have with God. I became frustrated when I permitted my Aunts to pray for me and I felt nothing. Why didn't I feel anything? I was being opened-minded and I was allowing God to come to me. Do we have to search for God or does he come to us? I've been searching and have found nothing.

I began to look at my father's intense conversations about religion in a different way. I observed him speaking and saw passion and excitement run through his body. He was a teacher; a good one. He used analogies that helped people understand better and he refused to go on to the next unless he was certain you understood what he was saying. The crease in between his eyebrows was not from aggravation but from concentration. This was the same crease in between his eyebrows that I saw when he was concentrating on auto mechanics; the same crease a man forms when he solves a puzzle.

Speculation regarding my mother and fathers divorce has always been whispered amongst my family. The cousins would always say that it was the cultural difference, others say the age gap, and some say the religious beliefs. I used to find that the last assumption was difficult to believe because he married my step mother, Gabriella Cerpas, who was born and raised Catholic. She helped me feel more secure about my religious beliefs over the weekends when I was surrounded by Pentecostal Christians.

Growing up in a religious environment left no room for doubt. It was always assumed that God was real and he would forgive our sins before we go to heaven. It wasn't until my mother, sister, and I moved in with a family friend that I even considered the possibility of there being no God. Louis Sandoval was certainly not fond of religion, as he was so willing to share with us. He was a man of logic who did not believe in a higher power. He needed proof. For him, seeing is believing.

I did not fully realize that every religion has its flaws until one of my favorite teachers openly disagreed with the catholic religion. Brother Gustavo was very blunt when he felt otherwise about a teaching. To see a religious figure disagree with the religion he is studying was incredible. If a soon-to-be priest disagreed with some teachings of the Catholic Church then I was most definitely entitled to feel indifferent about specific things that I did not wish to follow as a Catholic.

## Chapter II: Catholicism and Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal religion believes that the standard Bible holds the instructions to full salvation. The Bible is the infallible word of God and is the example for Christian living. According to the Bible the only way a person can receive full salvation is through repentance and baptism. This is shown through the initial sign of speaking tongues and the belief that Jesus Christ holds all the power for the remission of sins. There is one God who has revealed himself as “our Father” in His son Jesus Christ and as the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is God manifested in flesh; God and man. The saving Gospel is the good news. The good news is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. The Gospel must be obeyed; repentance, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ and the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit is key.

In order to live like a Christian you must love God and others. You must live a holy life inwardly and outwardly. You must spread the word of the good Lord because everyone needs salvation. Salvation comes by grace of faith and sacrifice. It is believed that Jesus Christ will come again to “Catch away his church.” The time that he comes will be the end as we know it. It will be His final resurrection and the final judgment day. The righteous will inherit eternal life and the unrighteous eternal death.

The Catholic Church believes that the Bible should be translated by the Church. The Church possesses the fullness of revelation. Religious figures like the Pope and bishops have varying degrees of the spiritual authority that Jesus Christ assigned to his apostles. The Pope’s voice is infallible when regarding morals and faith. The Church’s main teachings show God’s interest in individual human beings whom can have a relationship with God through prayer. The Holy Trinity consists of one, the divinity of Jesus, the immortal soul of each individual which is accountable to death for actions; two, the resurrection of the dead and three the divine commission to the Catholic Church.

According to the Catholic Church, the Virgin Mary, Saints, and the dead in Purgatory are never forgotten. The Church conveys God’s grace directly to humanity. The sacrament of Penance is required once a year. Eucharist is required once every Easter time. Private prayer is essential. The main motive for ethical behavior should be for the love of God. It must be clear that nothing God has created is evil in itself, but evil use may be made of it. All non-Catholics are can attain salvation because they believe in God. Those who persist in what they know to be wrong and those who resist the Church when they know it to be the one true church are to be damned.

## Chapter III: Interviews

*Jorge Gallegos: Father:*

My Dad was raised in Mexico as a Catholic. He and his family were what I like to call CEO’s, Christmas and Easter Only type of Catholics. He had completed three of the seven holy sacraments: Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. When he was about eighteen he took up an invitation he had received many times to go to a Christian church. He admitted to me that his only intention of accepting this offer was to meet girls and maybe make a few friends. He was at a road block in his life and wanted to do something different. He says that in the Catholic Church no one ever taught him anything but in the Christian church he started out attending he was handed the Bible and instructed to read it. In this Pentecostal church he felt

something in his heart but he cannot explain what. His sisters called him crazy and stupid and they swore that they would never go. He would respond by telling them that one day they will know the difference. Now they tell him that he was right.

My father has never attended any of my annual Christmas shows for the past ten years because being in a Catholic Church makes him feel uncomfortable. He was absent for my eighth grade graduation and my First Holy Communion. He will not be attending my high school graduation at the Christ the Light Cathedral in Oakland. If I were to get married in a Catholic Church he told me that he was 75% sure he would not be attending. He says, "It's hard but it's better sometimes."

As my parents' relationship evolved his loyalty to the church became greater. My father put aside his religion momentarily when he decided to be with my mother. "The pastor says you have to marry a Christian. But God can change people." They went to Reno to get married. He says that they divorced because they had two different forms of thinking. They disagreed about food choices and the way it should be prepared. My mother wanted to go out and my father wanted to stay in. Also, she didn't want him going to church.

My dad had to get twelve stitches because he busted his nose open while he was carrying a cabinet down a flight of stairs at his Church. He took a day off of work to do this favor.

He did this often. He says, "Money doesn't make you happy."

He would leave the clothes my mom packed for me to wear in the bag and had me wear dresses because, in the Bible, it says that women should not wear men's clothing.

During a Friday night service there would be prayer speaking out loud, singing to the lord, announcements, and the gospel that the pastor preaches.

Speaking in tongues "makes you feel free," he says "It feels like the butterflies you feel in your stomach when you really like a person."

When my father was about twenty-four a miracle clarified that God was real for him. It was a Sunday afternoon after a service when he and about fifteen of his church brothers were going out to eat on 36<sup>th</sup> St. and International Blvd. in Oakland. A man was hit by a car and died. The ambulance was taking too much time to arrive. The brothers thought they had nothing to lose so they prayed for the man. The dead man stood up frantically and ran away.

My father accepted an invitation to attend a revival with the Assembly of God group on Clayton Street in Concord. There were about one thousand people attending the revival. At the end of the celebration, while everyone was exiting, fire men arrived on the scene claiming that a man called saying that the hall was on fire. The Assembly came to the exciting conclusion that God was with them because, "It says in the Bible that God appears like fire."

He stopped attending church because he was not abiding by Gods rules.

He does not push me to go because I have to choose on my own.

When Jorgito, my baby brother, is 15 or 16 he can decide on his own which religion to follow.

*God is always knocking on the door to your heart you just have to choose to open it.*

*I'm going to hell because I am not doing what God has told me to do.*

*Of course I want you to go to heaven, every person deserves to go to heaven.*

*It's your decision.*

*God gives you a choice.*

*Don't believe people, read the Bible and choose your own way.*

*Gabriella Cerpas: Stepmother:*

My stepmother Gabby was born and raised Catholic and still is a part of this religion. From as long as she can remember she has always enjoyed going to Mass. She has completed three of the seven sacraments: Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. Her marriage with my father is not seen as an accomplished sacrament because he is not of the same Christian denomination. Because Gabby married a man who is not Catholic she has had to give up receiving the Eucharist.

Now that my father is planning on attending church again Gabby has an unsettling feeling about how they are going to raise my baby brother. She will be taking Jorgito to Mass with her and she assumes that my father will do the same with his services. She is going to let him choose once he is able to favor one over the other as long as God is in his life.

Gabby had every intention of baptizing the baby this Christmas behind my father's back when she was going to visit her parents in Mexico. Catholics generally baptize babies to cleanse their souls and rid them of the evil. Gabby shared a fear of hers with me. In Mexico they believe that any natural body of water is surrounded by the spirits of children whose lives were taken by evil because they were not protected by the grace of God. If a baby has not been baptized you must sing from your house to the body of water at midnight for the entire way. You must sing the child's name and say that they will not take the baby. In Spanish the song would go, "Jorgito, Jorgito, Jorgito no te llevaran." There have been stories about how the spirits come and take the children away; some would cry and not stop, others would fall asleep and never wake up, and some would faint.

Unlike the Pentecostal religion, Catholics praise different saints for different things. Gabby's father would visit another state to ask this one saint for specific things; miracles. He had a lime tree farm and he would ask the saint to make the fruit the sweetest when the price was the highest. He told the saint that if he could do this for him he would return. And he did. He would sometimes ask for his wife to get better when she was sick and he would bring the saint flowers and presents.

Gabby feels that God is always knocking at your door you just have to choose if you want to open it for him. She believes that Hell is on earth. She thinks that Purgatory is a place for spirits who do not believe that they are dead—for example someone who died instantaneously and has not come to their senses. Also she thinks that Purgatory is a place for spirits who have left something behind on earth, for example a deceased mother who continues to look over her children. She feels that Purgatory is where souls wait for judgment but they are not necessarily bad or good.

*If you believe in God it doesn't matter what religion you are a part of.*

*Virginia Long: Mother*

My mom was born and raised as a Catholic. After she left her mother's household she did not feel an obligation to attend Mass but sometimes she felt the desire to go and she would. She attended a public kindergarten school and Catholic schools from first grade through part of her junior year. The remainder of her junior year and her senior year were completed in a public school. She enjoyed public school much better at that time in her life. She has completed two of the seven holy sacraments: Baptism and First Holy Communion. My mother believes in God because she grew up being told that He existed and she has an image of Him having seen Jesus on the cross and other saints and symbols.

My mother said that my father and she got divorced "because he got involved in the Pentecostal church and it was taking over his life and he would spend all his time at his church with the pastor or at home reading the Bible."

"I felt like he was leaving us out, not that I wanted to be included that, I didn't. But I felt that his attention should have been placed on us, especially you because you were a baby."

According to my mother, my dad was at the church when he should have been working. He was carrying a file cabinet that had not been emptied he lost his grip and he busted his nose when the cabinet fell on his face. They divorced shortly after this incident.

"I gave him an ultimatum, I told him: Are you going to choose this life with the church or are you going to spend it with us? You need to decide we can't keep on living like this, so it's one or the other. So he chose the church so I made him leave and he left."

"I didn't always want to go but I felt good after Mass."

She stopped going to Mass because people are in church on Sundays and when they leave they don't practice what they preach. She used her mother as an example of someone who goes to Mass every Sunday but acts like a horrible person.

My mother says that she finds God in nature. It reminds her of God all the time. She feels thankful. She thinks about all the people who are walking and driving past and not acknowledging God's beauty and it makes her sad. To her, Heaven is a place where everyone is walking around meeting the people from generations before, a place where everyone is happy.

*I believe that what's more valuable is genuinely being a good person. I have good thoughts.*

*I think there is no evil after death.*

*Doris and Edith Gallegos: Aunties:*

Both of my aunties were raised Catholic. My Aunt Edith completed four of the seven sacraments: Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and marriage. My Aunt Doris was baptized, received her first holy communion, and was also confirmed. They converted to the Pentecostal religion. When they attended Catholic Mass they never felt anything. The first time they attended a Pentecostal service and they gradually began to attend weekly. When they were invited they would say that they were Catholic and that Christians were crazy. They attended

service because their sister had gotten sick and their prayers were not being answered in the Catholic Church.

My aunts believe that Jesus Christ is the only one who should be praised, never the saints or Virgin Mary. According to them, saints don't have spirits, they are dead but Jesus Christ is alive. The cross that is so prevalent in the Catholic religion is not used in their religion, "It's as if a mother were to put a part of a car up in her house that her son died in. It would make you feel horrible."

My father would always try and get his sisters to come to church with him. At one point my grandmother was very ill and he began to cry saying: "My family, my family doesn't want to know God. I just want them to know God." Sometimes my aunts would ask him a favor and he wouldn't do it but would spend time with his brothers and sisters from church. They were angered by the fact that he was so willing to help others before his own sisters, his own blood. They would tell him that he had changed and that he wasn't the same.

"You speak tongues when you are adoring God. When you are speaking tongues you cannot understand what you are saying. You speak tongues when the Holy Spirit has come over you."

A woman asked God in the name of Christ to make her shorter. When I asked why God would use his power to help someone with their insecurities rather than help a starving family I was told that God only comes to those who ask him.

Satan has part of each person who does not go to church. There is always going to be a battle between good and evil. There is no in between. According to my Aunts Satan is using logic to take you away from God.

When I told my aunts that my father intends on attending service during New Years they said, "Amen. Hallelujah."

*The people are the church.*

*Just like you go to a place to go to work God deserves a place of his own to be worshipped.*

They have come to the conclusion that my father doesn't push me to go to church because he is not currently attending. He doesn't want to be a hypocrite.

My Aunts think that because I want to find god he will come to me but we all have a destiny and God is going to appear to me when I need him the most.

*If you find God you're going to lose friends but one day they will find God and they will understand and be with you.*

*No, we are not scared to die.*