

Richard E. Kelly's Biography

(Author of: *Growing Up In Mama's Club*, ISBN: 0-9795094-2-1, on 3-7-08)

Richard E. Kelly was born October 19, 1943, in Salt Lake City, Utah. He lived with his grandparents for the first five months of his life, before his mama and her new husband decided to raise him in Southern California.

In November 1947 an ominous knock on the door of his family's new home in west Los Angeles set in motion a chain of events that changed four-year-old Dickie's life dramatically. By March 1948 his mama and stepfather had become baptized, fervent believers that the end of the world would occur before Dickie reached the age of twenty.

In order to ensure his survival at Armageddon, Dickie had to attend five meetings a week at the local Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses (the "Club") and he traveled to three Club conventions a year. He also knocked on doors to "place" (sell) *The Watchtower, Awake!*, and other Club literature. He passed out handbills and religious tracts to passersby on busy street corners, gave speeches at Halls and assemblies, and accompanied his mama while she conducted Bible studies in the homes of potential converts.

Although Dickie was a natural athlete, he wasn't allowed to participate in Little League or high school sports. His mama believed that his education should prepare him to survive Armageddon, so college was also out of the question. As far as Mama was concerned, Dickie only needed the basic schooling required by law. He didn't need to be prepared for a full, successful adult life in this marked-for-destruction old world.

In 1958, in response to a special calling from the Club "to serve where the need was great," his family moved to a small town in eastern Nebraska. There, in a school system far inferior to the one in Los Angeles, Dickie completed his high school education.

After he graduated, Dick spent a year as a "pioneer," going door-to-door witnessing for 100 hours a month. In 1962 he volunteered to live and work at Bethel, the Club's headquarters, in Brooklyn, New York. After two years, he turned in his resignation from Bethel and ended his association with the Club.

Dick married his sweetheart of five years, Helen Geerling, on April 11, 1964. They lived in New York City for a year and then moved to western Michigan in 1965, where they raised a son and daughter.

Dick has an accounting degree and worked for thirty-three years at a Grand Rapids manufacturer, Clipper Belt Lacer Company. His career there included roles as the company's treasurer for ten years and president for seventeen years. He retired from Clipper in 1997.

In 1998 Dick's youngest sister, Mary Lyn, was brutally stabbed to death by an abusive third husband. Dick's mama was given power of attorney for Mary Lyn's remains, and since Mary Lyn had left the Club three years before, no memorial service was held. As far as Mama and other Club members were concerned, because she wasn't one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mary Lyn was dead and forgotten.

Dick brooded for several months before deciding to write his story about growing up in Mama's Club and dedicate it to honor Mary Lyn's life. He believes that for many children, particularly girls, growing up under Club rules and regulations doesn't prepare them for their adult lives in the real world, a world that the Club teaches its members "is evil and under the influence of the Devil and soon to be destroyed."

In 1999, after writing the first draft of his experiences while growing up as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, he was told he was too angry and needed to learn to write at a more professional level. Driven to create a worthwhile memorial to his sister, he took writing classes at the University of Arizona and Pima College in Tucson, Arizona. Dedicated to this task, he started writing every day, participated in writing retreats, and joined writing groups. In 2005 he met and hired an editor, Sherry Sterling, who shared his passion for getting his story in print. The result of that association is his book, *Growing Up In Mama's Club*.

Today Richard and Helen Kelly live in active retirement in western Michigan and southern Arizona and are the proud grandparents of six vivacious granddaughters.

Mr. Kelly is currently working on a sequel, *Ghosts from Mama's Club*. This book will cover events that occurred during the forty years after he disassociated himself from the Club.

Mr. Kelly feels it's important to tell the rest of his story after he left Bethel. He wants parents to understand how damaging it can be for children, now and into their adult lives, when they are forced to adhere to strict religious dogma they are not emotionally or intellectually mature enough to comprehend. He strongly believes that a parent's responsibility is to instill values and ethics when raising their children, not to force a particular ideology or lifestyle on them.