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--Ricky Rodriguez, in an email letter to his mother explaining why he and his fiancée were leaving The Family. January 16, 2001.

Introduction

In January 2001, Ricky (aka Pete, David, Davidito, in the Family) and his fiancée Elixcia (aka Nicole) decided to leave The Family. In this email letter, dated January 16 2001, Ricky explains to his mother, Katherine R. Smith (aka Karen Zerby, Maria, Mama in The Family) and her husband Chris Smith (aka Peter, Steve Kelly), both leaders of The Family, why he and Nicole are leaving.

Dear Mom and Peter,

Thank you for your continued correspondence with Nicole and I. It's good to hear that you both are still doing ok.

There is something that I need to discuss with you. Nicole and I have decided that we can no longer be part of the CM [fulltime Charter Member] Family. We cannot continue to condone or be party to what we feel is an abusive, manipulative organization that teaches false doctrine. You have deceived people and led them away from the truth in almost every way imaginable, and worst of all, when they are no longer useful to you, they are discarded. You have devoured God's sheep, ruining people's lives by propagating false doctrines and advocating harmful practices in the name of God, and as far as I can see, show no regret or remorse. I could talk for hours about it all, but what's the use? You'll never change.

I came to many of these conclusions about a year ago, as you know. Even though we knew the Family was headed further in the wrong direction, our desire to serve the Lord helped to keep us CM members, and we felt it was not His time for us to leave. But now we cannot stand it any longer and are strongly convinced that it is God's highest will that we leave the Family. For years you have told Family members to leave if they are not in agreement with you and Family doctrines and new wine [new Family doctrines]. We are in that category. We desire to rebuild our lives around the true simple Christian principles that Jesus taught and lived.

Now that we want to leave the CM Family, we are faced with the Herculean task of starting a new life in the real world after being cultists all our lives. The main problem that

we face is one of finances. To put it kindly, I had an inadequate education (I was only allowed to get to seventh grade). I have no diplomas, degrees, or even a GED. I have no real world job experience or marketable job skills (LWG [Life With Grandpa, a Family series of children's publications] handyman techniques don't really cut it). I don't even have any job references from previous employers to assure them that I'm a dependable person.

These are not just imaginary obstacles, but very real problems that I faced in California when I tried to get a job, and now face again. I came to Seattle a little over a week ago to get a job on the fishing ships that leave around this time to fish off the coast of Alaska for a few months. The work is gruelling, consisting usually of 18-hour shifts, and the conditions are rough and cold. The starting pay is not that great, but for someone like me with so little education and few life skills, I figure it's the best shot that Nicole and I have right now.

I've been staying in a youth hostel and haven't landed the job yet, as I got some misinformation from someone who told me how I should apply. But I'm still hopeful as the company informed me that it would conduct an interview in a couple weeks for the next ship leaving.

One SGA [Second Generation Adult adults who were born and raised in The Family] fishing-trip veteran described the work as "brainless". I thought that was funny because it seems that is the most sought after spiritual attribute in the Family nowadays, especially WS [World Services the administrative arm of The Family, supervised directly by Maria and Peter].

I want very much to study and get training so I can begin a meaningful career instead of being consigned to green-door-style [hellish] manual labour, and I want Nicole to be able to do the same. In fact, if we had to make a choice as to who would study and end up with a fulfilling job or career, without hesitation I would want her to be the one to do it because I love her so much and know how important it is for one's future and fulfilment in life.

It's a tough life out here in the "System" even for the ones who are used to it and have the necessary tools to survive. I could list many times in the past where I specifically asked to continue my education or become well trained in a specific field of study that could now be used to my benefit, and would make this need for financial help unnecessary. Each time my request was denied because of some foolish reason.

You have purposely sabotaged my future at every turn, and have denied me these very important life skills and knowledge. Now, at the very least, you owe it to me to help support us until we're able get the necessary skills and education, and get on our feet financially.

Any amount of money I could ask you for would never begin to rectify the harm you have caused me directly, and indirectly caused Nicole; but I am asking for what we feel is the reasonable amount that we need to work our way out of the situation you have put us in.

I know that you are extremely concerned about people finding out about the donations you have given Nicole and I in the past. Nicole and I have kept that information confidential, except for the few people who found out about the money for the car because of that misunderstanding with Grant [Grant Cameron Montgomery, Family Member and President of Family Care Foundation in Dulzura, California]. Any future financial help

would of course be kept confidential as well.

In all the Homes we have visited, we have also not shared the knowledge I have of the many wrongs and abuses I witnessed and suffered while growing up. I have not "bad-mouthed" you to people, and rarely shared personal beliefs contrary to what you put out in the GNs [Good News Magazine. Flagship publication of The Family, disseminating core doctrinal teachings of Maria and Peter]. I have not told people where you recently lived. I have not told of the illegalities I witnessed. I have not given out people's legal names. I have not gotten involved with the anti-cult movement, or any legal action against the Family in general or specific Family members. I have not written articles about my life and experiences in the Family and WS like other people have. I have not tried to make the talk-show circuit or sell my story to the newspapers.

Generally, I've kept my mouth shut and, largely because of no information to the contrary, have been seen to still be on board with where you are taking the Family.

The point is that even though I have deep bitterness and anger about how I was cared for and treated, and firm convictions about why the Family is not something I want to be a part of, I haven't tried to turn the Family or anybody else against you and that does not have to change. I see no reason why we can't work this out in a civil manner, but don't jerk me around, because this is for real.

I know that you have money available, so don't tell me that you don't. Just look at it as a good investment. I have thought about it, and I would like to have U.S. \$36,000 to enable Nicole and I to make the transition out of the cult. You can be assured that this money will not be used for "riotous" living. We're not talking about needing money for drugs, alcohol or sports cars. I will continue to look for employment, but we need this money to support ourselves until we're able to get what you should have given us the opportunity to get years ago: A decent education and practical job skills.

I have no agenda for writing you with this request other than the need to survive and provide an acceptable life for Nicole and our future kids. I hate even asking you for this, but what else can I do? I've lived all my life in isolation with no chance to get to know people or my relatives or gain supporters or friends. I have no choice. There is no body to help us get set up. This agreement will be just between you and me and Nicole and we will never ask you for financial help again.

I hope and pray you can understand why I have to have financial help even if you can't understand why I see things the way I do. Please let us know as soon as possible as we have a lot of details to sort out. We very much appreciate the financial help you have given us in the past and by faith we're thankful that you're willing to help us in this way.

Take care,

Pete