

(This is an update of a bit I did about 6 years ago. It was written originally as an explanation of why people are atheists for a friend who was trying to explain to his mother.)

I'm an atheist. I know that can be hard to understand sometimes. But I'll give you my background and perhaps it will shed some light. It is true that some atheists have had bad experiences with churches. I was one of them, but my atheism grew from that after much contemplation and research.

I'm 47 years old and female; married, cats, and have a good life indeed. I grew up in a very rural area in western Pennsylvania, on a small dairy/beef farm. I was within walking distance of most of my relatives on my father's side, two aunts, and two uncles and their families.

We all went to the local Presbyterian church (there was a Baptist one within a mile of the farmstead but oh we couldn't go there...sigh). It's a lovely country church. My grandma was always with the other "ladies" in the one pew. My parents ran the youth group a couple years, and I was in choir, Sunday School and I even taught Bible School. There were quite a few others my age in the church so it was nice.

One year, another local church burnt down. My congregation invited them to join us in our church. I believe they were Methodists but we were close enough that there should have been no problems. But there was, of course. I was in my early teens and watched the whole thing. One of the ladies from my congregation said that God had spoke to her in her vegetable garden and said that the church should be abandoned and a new one built. The church split over this. People were so nasty to each other. It being that the show "Dukes of Hazard" was on at the time, some people called the preacher "Boss Hogg" (he supported the new church idea and unfortunately resembled the character physically). Those opposed to him were the "Dukes" and my parents, owning the main self-employed mechanic shop for the area became "Cooter" who couldn't choose a side. Even to a girl, this was ridiculous. I couldn't understand how God could let this happen. It didn't help that my friends' parents were on opposite sides of things. Of course, all sides were sure that they were "good" Christians, and God sure didn't seem inclined to show one or the other side that they were wrong.

I prayed to God to let me understand. There was no response and things got worse. The new church was built and those from the new church stole (what you call when someone takes something without permission) the antique communion set and an antique ceiling lamp from the old church. They also took the regular communion set. This went on for several years and I was more and more confused.

I finally ended up reading the entire Bible, looking for some answers and because my father didn't think I could (I read fast and thoroughly). I read it and found that it was full of contradictions and acts I found horrible but that were evidently okay to God. I couldn't understand how God who was also Jesus, and who I sang "Jesus loves the little children" to, could be like this. Sending people to hell for no more than not knowing about him? What of all the children? What about all the animals and people killed during the flood and the attack upon Sodom and Gomorrah? Why were people being damned for the sins of two people when those sins weren't their own? I recommend everyone to read their holy book and really see what they profess to believe. I've found that most Christians haven't a clue what's in their bible, and what they believe is only a reflection of them, as bad or as good as that might be.

I used to pray every night. I prayed to ask God to protect everything I cared about and even things I didn't care about. Since I read that God was such a contradiction, I stopped praying. And nothing changed. Things weren't any better or worse, and I didn't feel like I failed if something did go "wrong". I no longer felt that I had to supplicate God for every little thing. I started reading more about other religions and even tried some others, still searching for something. I came to the realization that all religions are false because their deities do nothing. Each religion makes the same claims of "truth" as the next and none have the evidence to back their claims up. I realized that any good that occurred in the world was because of people, not some supernatural force.

So, now I'm an atheist. I am still happily in love with the man I married 22 years ago (and lived with for 2 years before that). I contribute to charities that I find worthy. I take responsibility for my actions, not blaming some imaginary friend. My parents are still the good people they have always been, nominally Christians though they do not often go to church because people *still*, almost 30 years later, are being stupid about things. I do not fear some deity in the sky and do not need a carrot or stick to "make" me act good. I just am and I'm happy about that.

I've been lucky that coming out was no real problem for me. I worked with people who didn't care. I also came out to the community in my letters to the editor, and I only got good phone calls from those who supported my views, including theists when it came to the separation of church and state. I again work in a place where no one cares and I have fellow atheists around me. We don't agree on everything but we all agree that playing "my invisible friend is better than yours" is ridiculous.