



JAMES LEFORE

Readers Write
SELLING OUT

I WENT TO A CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST college in Tennessee mostly because it was cheap. There I was taught it was wrong for any Christian to drink. My parents weren't against drinking; Dad often had a beer with supper on hot summer evenings. Though I'd never tasted alcohol, I wondered why my instructors felt it should be banned. Could something God had created be essentially evil? Hadn't Jesus's first miracle been changing water into wine?

So I decided to write an essay for English on whether or not good Christians should drink. I would wait until after I'd done my research before making up my mind as to alcohol's morality or immorality.

Our professor said we would need to present a thesis statement before we began. When it was my turn to read my thesis before the class, I said I would "study the stance Christians should take toward alcohol." The professor assumed this meant I would write an essay on why Christians should *not* drink.

I didn't correct him.

Although I found more scriptural evidence supporting the consumption of alcohol than opposing it, I focused on the verses that could, if interpreted a certain way, make drinking alcohol seem a sin.

I got an A.

*Sarah Keller
Saint-Jean-Chrysostome, Quebec
Canada*

I SIT IN ADMINISTRATIVE SEGREGATION — also called "the hole" — in California's Pelican Bay State Prison and think about what led to my incarceration. I was raised in a not-so-loving home in a gang-and-drug-infested neighborhood. I joined a gang at the age of twelve, because I thought it would give me the love I didn't receive at home. I was a dedicated gang member and felt no guilt or remorse for my violent actions. I placed my homeboys above everything else. When they needed me, I was there for them. But when I needed them, they were gone. I committed a homicide and was given a life sentence.

In early 2003 I arrived here at Pelican Bay, where the gang's "elders" are and where gang unity is at its height — or so

I'd been told. In reality I witnessed nothing but favoritism and abuse of authority: homeboys having other homeboys knifed just because they didn't like them.

After eighteen years in the game I'm tired of the gang politics and back stabbing. This year, for the first time in my life, I decided to distance myself from my gang ties. In the gang's eyes I sold out. Those same homies I fought alongside now want to kill me. But that just tells me they were never my true friends. I'm finally free. I don't have to follow their rules anymore or do anything I disagree with. Guess what? Selling out feels good.

*Salvador Rodriguez
Crescent City, California*

I STOOD IN THE STORE AISLE AND waited for another customer to choose his groceries and move on. I wanted no witnesses to what I was planning to do. As soon as the man left the aisle, I quickly grabbed a box of instant mashed potato

es — a store brand, the cheapest kind — and threw it into my cart.

No big deal, right? Lots of people use instant mashed potatoes. But not me. Never in my life.

I have sold out bit by bit over the years. As a new young mom, I made homemade baby food with a grinder. I always made spaghetti sauce from scratch and never opened a jar of Ragu. I made my own yogurt and even squeezed fresh limes for margaritas.

I stopped making yogurt more than a decade ago. And even though I add meat and veggies, my spaghetti sauce now comes from a jar. I drink my margaritas at Mexican restaurants, which, I am sure, use a mix.

But I love real mashed potatoes. Crossing the instant-potato line is a major milestone in my selling-out process. What's next? Minute Rice?

*Jessie Lehman
Chicago, Illinois
(end of excerpt)*

READERS WRITE asks readers to address subjects on which they're the only authorities. Topics are intentionally broad in order to give room for expression. Writing style isn't as important as thoughtfulness and sincerity.

Because of space limitations, we're unable to print all the submissions we receive. We edit pieces, often quite heavily, but contributors have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication. (If you don't want to be contacted regarding the editing of your work, please let us know.)

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Send your typed, double-spaced submissions to Readers Write, The Sun, 107 North Roberson Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516. Please include your e-mail address and phone number. If you cannot type, please print clearly. We're sorry, but we can't respond to or return your work, so don't send your only copy unless you don't want it back. Because we must wait until the last minute to make our final selections, we are unable to answer questions regarding the status of submissions. If your work is going to appear, you'll hear from us prior to publication.

UPCOMING TOPICS	DEADLINE	PUBLICATION DATE
Taking Chances	December 1	June 2010
Pretending	January 1	July 2010
The Last Word	February 1	August 2010
Beauty	March 1	September 2010
Slowing Down	April 1	October 2010
Teenagers	May 1	November 2010