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English 4 | Period 3

Research Paper | Final Copy

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Research papers have always seemed pointless and I have always disliked them very much. This time, however, I am actually excited because I am writing about something very real to me. Even without the assignment of this research paper, I can see myself doing research like this just for my own personal interest. For my research paper, I have decided to write about a worldwide cult group called the Exclusive Brethren. This is a group which I used to be a part of.

My family and I recently left the Exclusive Brethren, and it is a reoccurring topic that is always on my mind. Many other people, worldwide, have also left over the years. Right now there is a rampage of young adults leaving on their own. They are entering the real world, knowing only life inside the cult, and this is a huge challenge for most. I have decided to research about the history of the Exclusive Brethren but most importantly, the effects on the young adults around the world who have left, or are trying to leave. Deciding to leave is one of the biggest, yet best decision in most of these people's lives. I feel like I can connect so well to this topic because I also left as a young adult. My experience is not half as bad as most, since I did not leave alone. My parents, three siblings, and I left together.

My main question while researching for this paper is discovering the effects and traumatic experiences that have happened in these young people's lives. Most of my research is coming from personal correspondence with these young adults around the world. There is a connection between all of these kids, even though most have only just met online. I have met some interesting people whose stories will be mentioned in this paper. Five young adults from New Zealand, Australia, England, and the United States will share their stories and talk about how the Exclusive Brethren impacted their lives, for better or for worse.

I like talking about my experience leaving because it's sort of like therapy for me. There are others this way also, while some are more reserved. Some people become emotional, some people choose to move on and not talk about it, but many people like me don't mind talking about leaving the Brethren. These are the people who have agreed to be a part of my paper. I have found articles online about teens that have left. I have also directly been given a signed copy of a book from David Tchappat called Breakout. This 239 page autobiography tells his story when David left as a teenager.

This paper is going to be good for me to write, it is going to help me understand that other situations are so much worse, and it will keep myself reminded that I am not the only one who has gone through this. I am looking forward to compiling all these stories together and finding out the ultimate concern for these young adults.

The Exclusive Brethren is a world-wide cult that affects people every day. Its history of leaders is interesting, as no voting is allowed in the Brethren. The Exclusive Brethren, commonly called the EB for short, was first started by a man named John Nelson Darby. At the beginning, this religious group was not a cult, but over the years, it has gradually changed. It started small, but now there are tens of thousands of people who can trace their roots back to the EB. "There are many Christians known as 'Brethren' who trace the origins of their movement to John Nelson Darby who lived just over 200 years ago in Dublin" (Tchappat 231). It's not just the EB who can trace their roots back; there have been many splits from the EB along the years and they too, can trace their religious background back to Darby.

After Darby died in 1882, Frederick E. Raven took Darby's place as the EB's leader. He did his part in leading the Brethren and died in August 1903. While Raven was ill, a man named James Taylor often visited and spent time with him. After Raven died, James Taylor became the leader in 1903. After 50 years in power, he died in 1953. At Taylor's funeral, his son, James Taylor Jr. was appointed as the new leader. (Tchappat 231 - 234).

The EB took a turn for the worse during JT Jr's leadership. In the summer of 1970, an incident commonly known as Aberdeen took place. George Mair from the UK, who left the Brethren in 1960, described Aberdeen to me in a nutshell. "It was suppressed by the Brethren for many years. [it still is being suppressed] JT Jr. was found in bed with a naked woman. (Encouraged by her husband who had gate-crashed the family home where JT Jr. was staying). My own sister, now deceased, who was an official guest in the house that weekend, told me she disliked JT Jr because he was always drunk and fondled women as he passed them at church meetings. There was a big split amongst the Brethren and in Scotland in particular" (Mair). The split resulted in many different categories of Brethren who all claim that they are the "real" Brethren. Some groups carry on today in a regular. Christian fashion, while some groups meet as if it is still 1970: Pre-Aberdeen.

JT Jr. died 3 months after the Aberdeen Incident. There was a power struggle for a new leader during this time. A man from North Dakota named Jim Symington, claimed that JT Jr. had appointed him as the leader in his last days. During Symington's leadership, he banned computers, mobile phones, fax machines, and more. He also banned university and education after 10th Grade was discouraged. In 1987, Symington died at the age of seventy-four. (Tchappat 235 - 236).

After Symington's death, leadership randomly pointed itself at John Hales. This was strange since Hales had been thrown out of and brought back into the Brethren three different times during the 60's and 70's for going against what was 'right'. In 1987, a special meeting took place that basically wiped out Hales' history and corrected everything that had 'wrongly' happened in the past. This meeting also officially appointed John Hales as the new leader. Hales was an accountant and was seriously interested in business and finance. "Borrowing and lending between Brethren became more common which resulted in strong commercial ties between individuals (and thereby to the church)" (Tchappat 236). It was during John Hales' leadership when the first Brethren Private School was built in Sydney, Australia in 1990. Now, every Brethren location worldwide has their own Private School. Hales died when he was 79, in 2002. (Tchappat 236).

Bruce D. Hales, who was John Hales' son, now had the leadership of the worldwide group. Bruce Hales is currently the leader of the EB. He resides in Sydney, Australia where his house is safely guarded from the paparazzi and news people. He also flies around the world in a private jet. The Brethren completely believe that Hales has a direct link with God; without Bruce Hales, it is impossible to get into Heaven. One young man from England, who is still Brethren, told me, "But I have to say that there would be nothing wrong with BDH being put on the same level as Jesus! There is only one real way through life: that is to follow GOD and his Elect Vessel! BDH is taking us to Christ; he has got to be nearly as important. He knows what is going to happen next, he has constant communion with the Lord!" (Anonymous). This is the mindset of most young kids in the Brethren. They are stuck in believing that Hales has the same power as God. Opposed to this, another young member stated "They tell us in church you cannot have a link with God unless it's through our leader BDH... I cannot bring myself to believe that, but it seems everyone around me does" (Anonymous). The adults are teaching the young people that you need BDH to get through to God, and it makes me upset to know that people are going through their lives believing this. People are taught not to think as a result of a line Bruce Hales said: "We'll do the thinking, and you'll do the doing" (Hales). Whatever Hales says is right, and nobody doubts it. The people who do doubt it are people like me, and the ones who will be mentioned later in this paper. So for now, Bruce Hales is the leader of the world-wide cult. Only God knows when his time will be over, while others inside the group could argue that Hales himself knows when his time is done since he "knows what is going to happen next."

Over years and years of leadership changing hands, different rules have also come about. Most, if not all, of the rules are extremely unreasonable. Nobody inside the EB is allowed to foster or adopt children. Christian and Missionary work to help people on the outside is also forbidden. It is wrong to help or encourage people outside of the Brethren. They're also not allowed to donate organs or blood. All of these rules seem extremely strange since it's usually the Christian population who live to help out others who are less fortunate than themselves. There are also many more rules. Marriages can only take place on a Tuesday, and they mustn't be fancy at all. Receptions aren't an option, and honeymoons aren't allowed. Men cannot wear a wedding band; and the only jewelry women can wear is a wedding band. Women can never wear pants or shorts; a modest skirt must

always be worn in public. Headscarves must also be worn at all times by females in the EB. No members are allowed to dye their hair or wear any sort of make-up. Women must not cut or style their hair, although trimming is permitted. Men cannot have facial hair or sideburns; their hair must be cut short. Men are also expected to have a side part in their hair. This is supposed to be a sign of 'separation' from the outside world. Nobody is allowed piercings or tattoos of any kind.

The EB are also discouraged to use electronic devices as they are the work of the devil. "Brethren are not permitted to own or operate a television, radio, stereo, fax machine, computer, mobile telephone, DVD, or video recorder, and all other related computer games" (Tchappat 28). Recently though, Hales has slowly been introducing computers and cell phones if they are purchased through a Brethren Business. The prices are at least double the actual price if the product was to be purchased at a regular store. On top of its ridiculous price is a rental price of about \$30.00 per month per product. Even though this is really expensive, most Brethren refuse to question it since it came directly from Hales. One Brethren mother of six happily stated, "If Bruce Hales wants \$5, give him \$10!" (Anonymous). Brethren want to make Bruce Hales as happy as possible, so they'll do whatever it takes. Even though this is a small example, it shows what they're willing to do for him. Of course, nobody ever questions where the money goes. Those who do think about it, easily assume that the money goes towards the use of his Private Jet. However, that is NOT confirmed.

Another way to control the group is by forcing the Brethren children to go to the private schools set on by the church. The Private schools are deeply encouraged and again, nobody questions why. Parents fork over thousands of dollars per child for them to attend the school. These schools are not even high in quality and hardly have anything to offer. One young Australian who attended the Brethren School from 8th grade until the end of 12th and graduated last year, complained, "There were very few subjects available to choose from and there was a lack of rooms and teachers" (Anonymous). This is a horrible situation for students who want to excel at school; it's impossible! Also, Sex Education is not allowed. Although some have gone to Public School, it's almost unheard of for the student to actually graduate without being harassed from the Brethren to switch into the Private School System. Those who choose to take the Public School route are not well-liked within the

EB. Everyone acts as though they are committing a horrible sin against Bruce Hales, and in a way, they are.

Another strange thing they do is follow and worship the written word of BDH. Every church meeting with BDH is recorded and sent to a Printing Press in England where these transcripts are made into booklets called white books. These booklets are mandatory to buy and also very expensive. Every EB over twelve must subscribe to them. They must be read since they are the “current word” and must be followed. The Bible is not as important anymore as these printed books which are called Ministry by the EB.

While about 43,000 people are following these rules and doing what’s right, there is a good handful of people who are seeing the truth. Many of these people are young. This is a confusing time since all their lives, they have been told that thinking a certain way is wrong. It’s hard to listen to that when one knows that their heart is right. I have been very fortunate to talk to five young adults across the world. They have all left or are in the process of leaving. Each one has their own story, and even though they are all different, each story is similarly connected in some way.

The first story is about a 19 year old from Perth, Australia. He is in the long process of leaving. He was almost eighteen when he realized that he was not a kid anymore. He knew the time had come to make his own decisions. “I began to analyze things rather than accept things. I looked at things from my own point of view rather than take them for granted”. He began to think for himself, and this is a huge call for trouble within the EB. When someone does start to think, they run into conflicting viewpoints; this is what happened to him. He explained, “Things they were saying in church seemed empty, they talked more about BDH than Christ”. Unlike his parents and two siblings, he said, “I am not gullible enough to believe that the EB are the only hope for my salvation”. He respects Christianity and loves God, and he knows that Hales does not need to get between him and God to make everything magically possible. He has never mentioned leaving to his parents because they would treat him like he’s evil and tell him he doubts what’s right. Living with a family that sticks strong to what’s right isn’t easy and he has sideburns, which is against the rules. He recalled, “On the way home from

church, my parents threatened to cut them off in my sleep". Even though he gets in trouble for simple things, he's putting up with it for now. He hasn't left yet because of the love he has for his family. "I love my family and it's going to be so hard to leave them. I want to spend more time with them before I'm shut off from them". He's just at the very beginning of this life changing journey and is confident that he'll leave the EB in less than a year. It's certainly not going to be easy and he knows it. He says, "It's going to be hard to stand my ground and prove my confidence in what I'm doing to a huge group of delusional people". Whenever his time comes, he will have support from those who have already left while family and friends inside the cult try their hardest to hold him back. Whatever happens, he has a positive attitude towards the situation: "I'm nineteen years old. I have potential and I'm certain I can be a successful person. This challenge is one I have to do alone; it's the biggest challenge I could ever undertake". He knows the road ahead is going to be a long hard struggle, and he's prepared to fight for his freedom. It's taking the first step in leaving that will be the hardest and cause him much emotion.

The next story is about a 21 year old guy from Invercargill, New Zealand. He did not leave on his own free will, but was kicked out by his priests. "I continually expected to get kicked out from about the age of 18, but I did not want to be until I was nearly 20". The day finally came: "They shut me up four days before I turned 20". Shutting up simply means that you are temporarily not part of the Brethren anymore. This happens very rarely. The reason they shut him up was because he is gay. His priests knew he was gay for a while, but in August 2007, when he was 18, they told his parents. The Brethren put him on medicine to cut off his sexual urges. He and his priests made a deal that no information would get out to his parents, but when Hales became aware of it, he made the priests tell his parents. A few months later, he was actually withdrawn from. This means that you are no longer Brethren. It is wrong for an ex-EB and EB to sleep under the same roof or eat together, so he was kicked out from everything he knew: his home. He recalls a time during dinner when his family treated him with disrespect. "I got my meal and just went and sat at the table, but every single one of them got up and left". Who in their right mind would treat their own son like this? Nobody! But these were rules set on by JT Jr and they certainly were not going to break them. He has only been in his house once since he became shut up to quickly use the bathroom, and hasn't even crossed the threshold

since he got withdrawn from. His little siblings have been told horrible lies from parents and priests. His little sister was told that he did not love her because he was gay. Once, she even told him before he left, "If you leave the Brethren, I'll never see you again, because I'll go to heaven and you'll go to Hell". He claims that he has no regrets, although losing his family certainly is not easy.

The next story is about a young woman who grew up going to church every day in Auckland City, New Zealand. When she was 19, she just knew that things in the EB were not adding up right. "I was 19. I spent several years confused and questioning deeply about their practices and beliefs". When she was just about 20, she knew that all the lies she was being told would end up with a lost soul. Once she decided that leaving would happen one day, she told her family. She spent about six months packing up her stuff. During this duration, dozens of people tried their hardest to talk her out of it. "I would be lying on my bed crying or shocked like a zombie with my heart being torn out as my family was saying things like, you have a demon or you are mental". Her own mother even took her to the Top Psychiatrist of Auckland to see if she could get a report stating that her daughter was mentally unstable. After 6 months of packing up her things and enduring a lot of emotional and physiological abuse from members of the cult, she said goodbye to her parents and five siblings. She said that losing her family is the only terrible thing about leaving, and the pain is like death. Except, they aren't dead; they keep sending her abusive letters. She also wishes that she had taken more photographs when she was with them. Even though it's been hard, she knows she made the right move for her future and one day, her children's future. Since leaving, she has experienced the ultimate feeling of freedom. She no longer is told what to do, where to live, and what to wear. She is no longer being controlled, and after 19 years of living that way, it's the best feeling in the world!

From Indianapolis, Indiana comes the next story. He is currently 19 and has certainly been on an interesting journey. He was in 6th grade when he remembers he was different from the others. He recalls, "At that point I didn't even know that there was such a thing as a "gay person." I just knew that I didn't like girls as much as I was supposed to, so I just kept quiet about it all". When he was in 10th grade, he finally decided to stop fighting and to just accept it, so in 11th grade, he came out. In the midst of this all, he had switched in and out of the public and private school systems. He

attended the local High School for freshman and sophomore year. He was forced by the EB to go to the Private School for his junior year; it was then when he realized that the place he was in was not for him. "I knew I wanted to leave during 11th grade in 2007. I attended the Private Church School and I knew I couldn't be a part of the group". He transferred to the public school again, where he learned that his credits from the private school were unaccredited. He had to redo 11th grade. Even though he graduated a year behind the rest of his friends, nothing stopped him. His biggest dream was to go to University, and EB are not allowed to. In August 2009, he left his parents, 5 sisters, and 1 brother to go dorm on campus. Even though the university was not that far away, he said, "I left because I couldn't see myself going to college while being in the Brethren". He had left home. Everyone was devastated, and at the end of 2009, he was withdrawn from by his own father, and his priest. On holidays, he would spend the time in the basement of his parent's house since he was not allowed to sleep in his own bedroom. He had his meals brought to him and was treated like an outsider of the family. When asked why he still chooses to go home, he said "I still go home because it is my home and I still have a right to be there". He's right. It's natural for a teenager to need and want their family, and when one is deprived of it, they want it even more. Once the 2009-2010 school year was over at his university, there was only one thing he could do. He wanted to go back home. May 2010, he packed up his things and headed back to his parents house. When he left, he did not know what he was getting into; all he knew was that he had to give up his laptop, phone, and friends. His parents told him that they didn't want them home, but what they really were doing was a mean joke. He was a victim of reversed psychology. Since his parents told him they did not want him there, that made him want to go home even more. He told me, "But I can't not go home. I need to. It's so hard for these kids who try and do what they believe is right, when their family is so close, but yet so far. He is certain that he'll be back in college come fall time and that being at home is just a summertime thing. It's clear that he's not ready to make the complete break from the EB, and that's okay. It takes time.

The next story is about a 21 years old EB, who lives in Coventry, England with his three brothers and parents. As a young rebelling EB, he decided to make a Facebook which is strongly against what is right. In September 2009, he met a girl on Facebook who had left the EB a few months before. It started with a simple message that said, "Heyy there!!! How old are you by the way? But okay sorry are

you an ex-EB then?”. Even though it was an awkward message, he and this girl struck up conversation and began writing to each other every night. Soon enough, he started talking to the girl from America about his situation, “I’m 20 and I feel I’m wasting my life! I’ve tried stopping going to church meetings and have stopped for weeks but they always seem to drag me back!”. The two spent dozens of hours each week writing messages back and forth, learning about each other and complaining about the Brethren. This girl tried to be as encouraging and helpful to him as possible. By the time late November came around, the two had an online romance going on. The distance between them did not help at all, but they both stayed positive. He told her, “It’s so annoying how everything is so perfect apart from the fact that we live so far away!! It can get depressing but what we must remember is that one day there will be no distance at all!”. Even though the two had never met, they both knew it just seemed right. They had so much in common and they knew it, “We have so many similarities and are so perfect for each other; it’s obvious why we are together like this!!” From September 2009 through February 2010, the couple talked nonstop. Unfortunately, on February 15, he got caught with his hidden iPhone and laptop. His family found out about his online American girlfriend and contact with her stopped abruptly. He couldn’t even tell her what had happened! Not really knowing what happened, his girlfriend got scared and worried. She wrote emails to his religious friends asking if he was okay, wrote a letter to his parents, stopped eating, lost weight, became depressed, and cried herself to sleep. After the five best months of her life, it had all plummeted in an instant, and she still did not know why. Pete was gone and there was nothing she could do about it. Even though it’s now been 3 months since she’s heard from him, she knows that they’ll meet in the future. She knows that what they had was perfect and that something that strong can’t possibly be permanently ruined by the EB. She knows that, because that girl is me. My life has dramatically changed since I met and lost him. Some people are able to get away from the EB like the two from New Zealand. Some can push themselves hard enough to avoid unnecessary problems like the young man from Perth. But others get their dreams crushed. That’s what happened to him and I as a result of the power of the Brethren. Situations like ours make the EB very happy. I have gotten over it for now and try to stay positive because I believe the future holds something special for us.

In closing, I have learned why young kids leave, what holds them back, and their deepest regrets and concerns. One thing that many ex-EB's refer to are the "Three F's". These consist of Fear, Family, and Finances. These three components are usually what will drag a person back into the EB if they are not strong enough in their personal convictions. As a young adult, family is very important. Even if they treat you like you're not a part of them anymore, they're still your own flesh and blood and there's really nothing that can change that. So many people refuse to say that the EB is a cult, but when families are being torn apart over a religion, it is no longer a religion, but a controlling cult. It kills young adults to know that they were the cause of the family breaking apart, just because they decided to go off and find freedom away from the cult. Lots of kids take the blame for it, but it's not their fault at all. It's the way the EB has come about and the rules that the people follow. It's so hard. It's normal to have doubts, and all people do. One amazing thing about Facebook is the Ex-EB community. Everyone is so helpful and encouraging to each other. The few mentioned here are not the only ones; there are tons of young adults who are struggling with losing their family. It is a natural feeling to want to be with them, and kids will go back on everything they did, just to be with them again. I learned from previous knowledge and talking to all these people, that family is the biggest and most important factor.

My original question before researching was discovering the effects and traumatic experiences that have happened in these young people's lives. I feel like I fulfilled my purpose. Talking to these 5 young adults has been fun for me. I enjoyed doing this research paper. I realize that this didn't exactly fit the mold of the typical research paper, but I feel like I made it work for what I wanted to achieve.

I want to thank everybody who agreed to be a part of my paper. It means a lot, and I love you all very much. To everyone who still wants to leave, maybe this will encourage you, maybe not, but in some way, I hope these stories affect people. I encourage everyone who has left and is out living a normal life right now, to stay strong, and talk about it to friends and other people. That will help you in ways you'll never realize. I look forward to meeting the young man from Invercargill this Christmas, as he comes to Chicago to spend time with my family. I look forward to the moment I hear back from the guy from Coventry again. I look forward to the day when my friend from Perth breaks the news to me

that he's made the cut. Life is too short to be stuck under rules, and I congratulate everyone who has left, or has tried to leave and has been suppressed. To my family, my cousins, grandparents, and more. I miss you all so much. I miss everything we shared, everything we did together, and all the memories. I want to be with you all soon, and right now, I know that's impossible. I'm so thankful for the pictures I have from happy memories. To those who just simply know they will never be able to leave but want to, enjoy your life as much as you can. And to those who think the Exclusive Brethren is the right place to be. I pray that one day your eyes will be opened to the truth. I want you to be able to understand that the 40,000 people inside aren't the only ones going to Heaven, and who love God. I hope you realize one day that Bruce Hales is really just a man like the rest of us. And most importantly, I hope the day comes for you when you want to, and are able to break free. I look forward to what lies ahead.

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All five people from these stories have successfully removed themselves from the Exclusive Brethren and are leading a wonderful life for themselves.