

“Just forget all that crap about me writing some kind of sniveling back-pedaling “explanation” to the Family about how committed I am now/again to your BS, because it’s not going to happen.”

– Rick Rodriguez (Davidito) in a letter to his mother, Karen Zerby (Maria). May 29, 2000.

Introduction

This document contains two letters: One from Peter and Maria – leaders of the Family – to Rick Rodriguez, and Rick’s reply.

In the early part of 2000, Rick (aka Pete, Davidito, or David in The Family) and his long-time girlfriend Nicole left his mother (Karen Zerby, aka Maria)’s secret Family Home in Portugal, and travelled to the U.S. After living for three years or so under the watchful eye of his mother, Rick wanted to leave The Family.

He lived for a few months at the Family Care Foundation (FCF) home in Dulzura, California. During this time he met regularly with some ex-members his own age, including D____. He also had telephone contact with four older ex-members who had left from FCF 2 years earlier, who had also lived with him for over 10 years in the Family, and were good friends. Zerby had spoken to Rick disparagingly about why these four had left, and Rick was eager to hear their version of events.

In May, Rick and Nicole decided to stay in The Family, at least temporarily. They travelled to England where they lived in the “Activated” Family Home, helping Nicole’s dad, also a Family Member.

At this point Zerby’s husband, Chris Smith, aka King Peter, wrote Pete and Nicole the following letter, expressing concerns that Rick had voiced “doubts” to Family Members in the U.S. about his mother (Mom, Mama) and The Family in general. Peter goes to great lengths suggesting possible damage control, to get Rick to write a “confession” message to the Family.

In a PS, Peter refers to a note from Sharon, wife of Gary (aka Grant Cameron Montgomery, President of Family Care Foundation in Dulzura, California). These comments highlight the close connection, including financial cooperation, between the top leadership of The Family and Family Care Foundation.

To Pete and Nicole from Peter—26/05/00.

Dear Pete and Nicole,

God bless you! We love you! It sure is good to know that you're out of the States and in England, Pete. We pray all is well for you there and that you're both enjoying your reunion together. From what we've heard, that's a real busy Home, so you're undoubtedly a big blessing there. We hope you like it. From what we've heard they are super happy to have you there and that you're a big help.

Thanks for writing to Mom and me again, Pete. We appreciated receiving your second letter and are thankful for the things you shared. We're praying for you. Mom sends her love, as we all do.

Pete, we're proud of you for the stand of faith you've taken. It took a lot of guts to turn around and have that radical change of plans. To change your mind, especially after making known your intent to leave the Family, took strength, humility and determination. We're thankful you looked to the Lord and found that strength in Him.

We're also happy to know that you're in the Activated Home there in London. You and Nicole were both such blessings to our Home, and we still miss you very much. We know you have many valuable gifts, and you also have the perseverance and stick-to-itiveness to invest those gifts for the long-term, which makes them even more valuable. The years you spent in our Home proved that you take your work seriously and try to do your best to help and serve others. All of this will be a blessing to your new Home and consequently to the Family overall, because what you do there to help further the Activated program will have a huge impact on the Family's witness. There's a good GN [Good News magazine. The flagship publication of the Family] coming soon in which the Lord expands on His vision for the Activated program and how important it is for the Family's future progress and success. I think you'll like it. Thanks for being a part of that.

Besides telling you how much we appreciate you, there's another subject I want to cover in this letter. I'll just get right to the point, Pete, as I know you like to hear things straight. We've been confronted with a problem, which involves you, and we want to ask you to help us solve it. We've received unsolicited comments and questions about you, and there's a chance more will come, and we want to find the best way to handle it. It seems that some of the things you talked about with others while you were in the States has hurt their faith, or at least raised doubtful questions in their minds.

This came up in a report from Abner [aka Tom Hack, top Family leader in the U.S.]. When he was talking about the future plans of Marc and Esmey [two Family Members], he happened to say something that reflected on your time there in the States. He was talking about where Marc and Esmey would work, whom they would team up with, how they were feeling led, etc. He was communicating about this because they had previously been part of the Activated program, so their having a change of ministry affected a major operation. They were thinking of possibly teaming up with other folks from another important service Home, so the situation was rather complicated. The point was not to talk negatively about Marc and Esme. The point was to find the best place of service for them where they'd be happy and challenged, and where their gifts could be most used.

In the course of communicating all this, Abner commented that when he was talking with Esmey she brought up things along the lines of questioning Mama & me & how we handle things, what if we make mistakes & don't acknowledge them, etc. Abner felt these questions might have come up in Esmey's mind partly because of her close communication with you. This was Abner's deduction. He didn't say that Esmey actually told him this. When he was shepherding her and trying to help her spiritually, he put two and two together and assumed that some of her thoughts and questions were the result of things you and she had discussed together. Possibly you're being misrepresented here. If so, please let me know.

I don't know if you're aware that D_____ is making a trip to Thailand in the near future. Since you spent some time with him and probably mentioned to him your decision to leave the Family and perhaps some of the reasons why, chances are he'll say something about that to those he meets there. Perhaps he won't, but he could very well consider it sort of hot news. If he talks about it to others, he's going to express in his own words what you told him. He may or may not speak accurately, and he'll express the way you felt at the time when you were around him rather than how you feel now. No matter what he says, it's bound to raise questions in the minds of those he speaks to. Most likely this story will pass from person to person, email to email, and along the way become embellished and distorted. His original telling might also be somewhat embellished. The end result is that we're most likely going to start getting letters asking about it.

I don't know if you were in touch with other former members or not. If not, then what I'm about to say doesn't have any bearing. From various e-mails, notes and letters, I know that Ray [James Penn] has had some less-than-uplifting things to say about Mama and me and WS [World Services – the administrative arm of The Family], and has communicated these things to some Charter [full-time Family] members who have written their friends in other countries about it. These things have raised questions in people's minds—questions that become doubts that hurt and hinder people. Comments or complaints that cause people to doubt us or other people in WS reflect on the Word and make people doubt the Word. That's why mom and I are concerned about this type of news spreading. It's not that Mama and I are offended or have taken this personally. It's not that we're trying to protect our image or make everyone like us. But we do feel responsible before the Lord to protect the "reputation" of the Word and not allow false or exaggerated stories to undermine people's faith in it.

In any case, if you spoke with D_____ or M_____ or Ray or any other former members about your dissatisfactions or your feelings about the Family or about your mom, there's a good possibility that those things will make their way into the mainstream of the Family and into the network of former members. People may not make a big campaign about it, but over time they will probably mention it to So-and-so, who will tell So-and-so, and on and on it goes. Again, I suspect we might be hearing about it from various quarters.

I know you wouldn't want anything you might have said to be passed from person to person. That undoubtedly would not have been your intention and you probably feel it's terribly unfair and wrong if any private conversations you might have had about how you were feeling are spread around via the verbal gossip grapevine. But, it's just human nature that news travels, especially anything negative. It is unfair, and Mama and I are

sorry for you about it. However, unfair or not, it's wise to realize that it's most likely going to happen. The question is, what, if anything, should be done about it?

If someone writes us from Thailand and says that D_____ claims he spent time with David, and David said such and such about Mama and has decided to leave the Family, what should we do?—Or even if he says you were going to leave the Family, but you have since changed your mind, how would we answer them about anything else you might have said—or that he says you said--that they wonder about? We can't ignore it or pretend they didn't write. What do we say if, for example, Marc and Claire, our North American media representatives, write and say they just heard from former member So-and-so that David was going to leave the Family, or that he feels such and such about WS or about his mother?

I'm not trying to hang a big guilt thing on you. We know you wouldn't have meant to hurt people's faith through anything you may have said, but chances are there are some who were stumbled or will yet be. In fact, they might be stumbled more by the embellished stories and exaggerations than by anything you might have actually said. But how are people to know what's what when they don't know you or understand your side of the story? That's why I'm writing about it now so we can find a solution together. I'm sure you realize that if you talk about Mom and me or WS, since you've been living in our Home for years, it's going to have a very big impact on the person you're talking to. They see that as a pretty big "inside scoop". I know you understand that if you suggest that there have been mistakes made that have been covered up, or that things are not handled in our Home as they're portrayed in the Letters, it can really hurt people's faith in the Word. That's a serious thing.

I believe you know that Mama and I try to live the Letters with all our hearts. We publish the truth, without covering up or whitewashing. We do make very prayed about changes in the pubs that are necessary for matters of security or clarity. If we have made mistakes or failed in some way, we have tried to be honest with those who have been affected. We have not, to our knowledge, committed serious mistakes or sins that have affected the Family and then covered them up. (Maybe you see things differently, in which case, we would welcome your thoughts on this.)

You made it clear in your first letter to us that there were several things about the Family and your mom you were in strong disagreement with, at least you felt that way for a period of time. Thanks for being honest. We're happy you told us. We understand you were going through it at the time and probably felt pretty confused. Maybe you talked to other people about the same disagreements, which is a natural reaction. It happens a lot, as people have a tendency to sort out their thoughts when talking with their friends, or they bounce things off others to see if they make sense to someone else. You know how it is. So Mom and I realize that you might have shared some of the same things that you wrote us with others, and if so, there will be questions.

Of course, maybe we won't be getting any questions; on the other hand, we might. We expect we will eventually get some, even if it only comes through the people that D_____ talks to. So again, the question is: What do we do about it?

We thought of a few possibilities, which we'll share here. Please understand we want your counsel on the matter, as it affects you. On the other hand, we also are responsible for the Family, so, as I said earlier, I don't think we can just ignore it if someone writes in. In any case, here are some suggestions.

The Individual Approach. Write a form letter, which expresses some of what you were going through at the time and that while you did talk to different ones, you feel differently now and have made the choice to remain in the Family. This letter can be sent to anyone who writes us, or to anyone who comments that they heard this or that. Perhaps this could be a letter that you would want to write to anyone you did talk to, and we could just send copies to those who ask about it. Maybe it would help if you were to write something to these individuals and explain what happened to you while you were there in the States—the spiritual battles you went through, what you learned, how you ended up in that undecided state, what you'd advise others to do to avoid the same pitfalls, etc.

The Area Specific Approach. You could write an article for the North American newsletter sharing some of what you were going through etc., and it would go out to North America. Then if questions start coming in from Thailand, as a result of D ____'s visit, it could be published in the local newsletter there as well.

The Whole Family Approach: You could write an article for the Grapevine [internal Family newsletter] and it could go out to all.

I know the thought of having to write anything is probably a real bummer for you, but as you said, you've seldom been afraid to admit when you've been wrong, which is something I admire about you. Of course taking some action to counteract the effects of being wrong takes it a step further than admitting it, and that's where the bigger test comes. Of course, you may have some other ideas on how to handle things, and we are very open to hearing them.

I'll comment on the three options above. The Individual Approach might be somewhat easier for you initially, but it would probably drag on for a long period of time, as six or eight months from now someone in Australia or Africa might write in that they heard such and such. Also this option is more work for us, as we will have to answer people on an individual basis by sending the letter to them whenever it comes up.

The Area Specific Approach would work, but again, people send e-mail, former members post things on web sites and news travels. So even if something was printed in North America, we'll probably still get questions from other areas, and eventually it will mean the article will need to be printed in every continental newsletter, don't you think? Also, with the two above approaches it might look to people that we are trying to hush up or whitewash things.

The Whole Family Approach is probably the best because the Grapevine goes out to the CM [Charter Member – full-time members] and FM [Fellow Members – associate members] Family. As such, many former members also get it or hear about it. An article there would tell everyone, present and former members the present state of affairs. It would be an opportunity to simply explain what you went through and the conclusions you came to. Actually, I feel that this approach will make it a lot more low key than either of the others. Lots of people think about leaving the Family, lots of people go through more or less the same battles as you have, so your coming out and just explaining it would cause others to respect you more. It would also quell any rumors that might be floating around. You would have the chance to get out the truth long before the distortions have made their full round.

Pete, I'm sorry to have to write you about this, but I felt you'd want to know our thoughts about these things. I know you love your friends and want to do right by them. You don't want to hurt people. You've straightened things out in the past, even when it was hard on your pride. It's admitting when you're wrong or have made mistakes that makes you strong, and people admire you even more for it.

You like honesty and being straightforward, so I hope you'll respect this step I took in communicating these things to you. Like I said earlier, we don't know the full story, and in fact know very little, but what we do know is that news travels, people draw conclusions, facts are distorted, stories are embellished, questions are asked. You will be the topic of this, and Mama and I feel it would be wise to address it sooner than later. Please let me know your feelings on this.

Thanks, Pete. I love you. We're praying for you and Nicole and hope for the best for you there in England. Thanks for writing.

Love in our Husband,
Peter.

PS: Gary [Grant Cameron Montgomery, Family Member and President of Family Care Foundation] wrote about the funds for the car. So as it stands we have \$7,000 on account for you. Is that right? We'll just hold it hear till you tell us what to do with it.

PSS: Sharon of Gary wrote Mama a newsy little personal letter and she had a lot of good things to say about you. It's always nice to hear what people say about us "behind our backs". Here are a few excerpts of what she said:

"Pete is a great guy, really, you can see all the training that has been poured into him. He has the cutest smile. I know he doesn't really have a choice in getting out of the responsibility that he has to carry of being your son & Grandpa's [David Berg] too. I am sure he has gone through his set of trials of being so famous all his life etc. But the Lord knows he can take it.

"Pete sure has those deep spiritual eyes. You can tell there is a mega computer in that head of his clicking away all the information. Yet he is so sweet too. The women commented on his sweet simple affection to all of them. You can really see Dad [David Berg] in him. I know he has his ups & downs like everyone else but he still is special.

"The kids were all sad to see him leave. He was so good with them. GBH! I'll be keeping him in my prayers."

Following is Rick's reply to his mother and Peter.

29/05/00

Dear Mama and Peter,

God bless you! We love you too! As I wrote in my last note to you, mom, Nicole and I are happy here. Not as not only are we involved in the Activated ministries, which is very rewarding work because for now at least, it's obvious that the Word going out in the Activated mags is helping draw people closer to Jesus and love Him more, but we are also able to help Nicole's parents shoulder the enormous load they carry by doing a lot of the business trips out and home care, cooking, handyman etc.

I also felt happy that it seemed we would be able to keep in touch on a friendly level, even though there are attitudes you promote and actions you endorse that I believe are very wrong, I didn't see the need to bang you over the head with them—after all, what good would it do anyway? Well, I am still open to that kind of communication, and maybe we can talk more about that in the future. But right now you're going to have a little "reality check", which is a good thing to do from time to time for people who insist on living in their own world. I regret having to have to say these things to you, but you guys just can't seem to leave well enough alone, and it seems are in need of the "2X4 donkey" treatment whenever anyone wants to tell you something that's contrary to the way you think.

It's nice to know you're happy that I'm out of the States, but unfortunately it seems you still miss the point that the "pull of Egypt" and the influence of "The Great Whore" had nothing to do with the confusion that I felt for the for the last several years or so, even more so for the past 7 or 8 months when I decided to start thinking about the spiritual issues we're constantly bombarded with nowadays, instead of just trying to ignore them. I guess I hoped I could "outlast" you guys so to speak, until such a time when the Lord would show you that to be the kind of leaders He wants you to be you need to not just say how loving you are and how much you care about people, but show them by actions that you sincerely care about them as human beings, and not just about how "righteous" you perceive them to be.

You both seem to prattle incessantly about love and how much love you have, how loving you are, how you have been endowed with gifts of love, how you love everybody so much, how you love the Lord so much, how much you love me, but the funny thing is that's the thing you know the least about. You see, to us living in the "real" world, actions speak so much louder than words, whereas for some of you dear folks words are everything. If you say you are a certain way, then you are! If somebody else says you're that way—providing it's something you consider a positive attribute—then you are! Well, it's a nice thought, but unfortunately things don't really work that way, and what happens instead is you just surround yourself with people who tell you how wonderful you are, relatively speaking, and then you have this really nice and cozy mutual admiration society where everybody is feeling warm and fuzzy inside and just believing their own hype.

Whenever I think of the sorry state you have gotten yourselves into I'm reminded of that cartoon that Laban drew of the anthropologist and the scientist. The Anthropologist holds up a bone and says something like, "I know my bone is 10 billion years old because it was found at the same site as a tooth that my friend the scientist says is 10 billion years old." Then in the next picture the scientist says "I know my tooth is 10 billion years old because it was found at the same site as a bone that my friend the anthropologist says is 10 billion years old." Then in the last picture they're saying in unison, "...And you know, we can't both be wrong!"

You have fallen into that same trap with many of the prophecies you are disseminating. You are unable to see how you have hurt so many people's faith by putting your "winetaster's stamp" on many prophecies that are not only ludicrous, but obviously the figment of some misguided person's imagination. If the truth be known, I'm sure Grandpa, knowing what he knows now, is ashamed of you for your behavior which has been far far less exemplary than my "less than exemplary" behavior ever was.

You're poking your finger in God's eye time and time again whenever you badger and condemn His little ones. One of these days God will judge you for it and when that time comes I certainly wouldn't want to be in your shoes.

People have tried to warn you before, but your minds have been so darkened to the truth and your ears so stopped to the voices of reason you have chosen to ignore them. You're like the prophet in the vision of the Bahai Temple prophecy [a prophecy David Berg published] who just keeps on chattering even after the light has gone out. Most people can see that it's a joke and some even start laughing, but you just keep on going because you whist not that the spirit has departed.

There's so much truth in what you believe and constantly cajole others to, but there's also so much falsehood, and so many lies and pretenses. It's the worst kind of lie really, because it has a good measure of truth in it. If only you could make love and acceptance the focus of the Family instead of self-righteousness and spiritual pride, you could make it into a truly wonderful place. But love doesn't really matter to you—real love, I mean, not just the lip service kind, the “be thou warmed and fed” kind. Let me tell you, you can forget about the great measure of wonderful “protection” that you think you're going to get in the Endtime because you think you're so intimate with Jesus. I believe if we all live long enough to go through the tribulation He's really going to turn up the fires on you to burn away all that wood hay and stubble and pretense of religion and pride.

Indeed I have taken a stand of faith, but it's a stand of real faith, not the phony kind that you've tried to get me to have. I believe in God and his love not just for me but for everyone around me. When I stand before my creator and He asks me what I did with my life I want to be able to say that I did my best to love those around me, that I saw them as individual human beings, actually, spiritual beings on a physical, human journey, and I was there to be a shoulder to lean on, to give a helping hand when they needed it. There's a lot of lost and broken young people still out here in the Family who haven't left yet. They need love; they need acceptance. What they don't need is for someone like you to take them on some kind of guilt trip, making them feel worthless just because they're not “on board” with your pride trip.

You do see that's what it is, don't you? No, I guess not. You want so badly to be “right” and “close to Jesus” that you've turned into a modern brand of the scribes and Pharisees. What do you think these Pharisees were doing all day? They were serving God the “best” way they could. They were the “closest” to God of anyone. And you know what? I bet they even got the “purest” least “tainted” prophecies of anyone too. But it didn't matter to Jesus. He called them blind leaders of the blind. He said they performed their little lawful duties—made a big show about how well they kept the Charter—but omitted the weightier matters like faith and love.

Anyway, so sorry to bust your bubble, but I have not “taken a stand of faith” or had a “turn around” the way you think. I knew you wouldn't realize this because you only see what you want to see the majority of the time, but I didn't see the need to confront you with this unnecessarily. I like the verse that says “As much as lieth within you, live peaceably with all men.” Well I'm not looking for a fight with you, but if you push me, believe me, you'll have a nice one, and using the techniques learned by your sample over the years, I guarantee it won't be “fair”. Just forget all that crap about me

writing some kind of sniveling back-pedaling “explanation” to the Family about how committed I am now/again to your BS, because it’s not going to happen.

I am not a callous person, and I have a heart for you and the “predicament” that you think you’re in. But I have good news for you! It’s not nearly as bad as you think! You’re image will remain intact! Your empire will not fall apart—at least not on my account! We indeed have found our little solution together and it’s not nearly as hard as you might have thought! During my time in the States I was not interested in spreading the truth about you both and what you’ve turned into. Like I said, it was a very confusing time for me, and a very lonely one too, but I was not about to make the same mistakes you have made by trying to force people into my way of thinking just because I’m convinced it’s the truth. The reason I got in touch with M_____, and Ray and D_____ and H_____ was because they were my friends—true friendship being something you know nothing about—and also because I believed that they were not as proud or irrational as you made them out to be. Well, sure enough, my hunch was right as once again it seems you engaged in your best-loved back-stabbing and discrediting techniques to try to cover the truth.

You have nothing to fear from any of them as far as talking to others about me. They understand the need for privacy and also understand what it means to be a friend to someone, and by the time you receive this letter I will have received assurances from them that they—especially D_____, since you’re worried about him, will not talk about my time or conversations with them. Do understand though, that this won’t be done to cover your ass in any way. Rather because they realize that it would cause me unnecessary problems at this time. I will be praying for D_____’s trip to Thailand, and if the situation warrants it, I hope that he can be a help to the ones there who may be confused and searching by sharing with them the truth he’s found and giving the emotional support so lacking in the Family on your account.

I did not converse with anyone else outside the Family concerning these issues so I don’t see why Marc and Claire will write you anything about it.

As far as Esmey goes, she was going through a very rough time in her life and we were able to have some good talks together. I pray I was a support and encouragement to her, and from what she said, I believe I was. The questions or as you would say “doubts” in her mind about you or the Family were her own, and not something I needed to inspire her with. Anything I might have said that could, in your mind, sully your image, I trust she will keep to herself, and will write her shortly to confirm that.

So you see, you’re safe! There’s always tons of rumors going around about every one of us. The other day I heard that Tech [Rick’s sister] was living with Mother Eve. That was quite a revelation for me! Just because you hear something about me or something I said doesn’t mean it’s true, or doesn’t even mean that I’m remotely responsible for it! Remember, all leaders don’t drive around in BMWs, and no, Grandpa was not left to die alone in a cold little room. Just because someone says something doesn’t make it true, and I’m not going to let you stick me with the responsibility for all the weird shit that people come up with.

I’m not sorry for anything I said to you in my “second” letter, as you put it. I believe it is beyond your comprehension to grasp the following simple fact, but I will explain it anyway. I was bitter against you for many reasons, but I saw that was wrong

and have since forgiven you for those things and even apologized for those feelings and bitterness in that letter to you.

But just because I am not “bitter” does not mean that I cannot still see the wrongs that you insist on committing, and that my heart doesn’t go out to the young people that you continue hurting and turning away from the Lord. You can forgive somebody for wronging you, but that does not mean that you then have to let them continue walking all over you.

When I said I was “wrong to want to leave the Family”, I was speaking the truth. I knew you would misunderstand this, but thought it necessary to put things in language you could understand while at the same time being truthful. It was wrong because it was not what God wanted me to do at that time. I was so eager to get away from you and all your BS that I had to swallow for so long that I was blinded to where God was calling me. I don’t know exactly why He wants us here at this place and time, but Nicole and I will continue following Him where He leads. We have plans for the future, but for now are leaving them in His hands as we concentrate on the job He’s given us for now. People here know we’re not “perfect” by your standards, but they know nothing about our feelings as outlined in this letter. I have not gone around telling the truth about you both, or as you put it, “talking bad about you”, to people in our home or people in the States, and I think we’d both like to keep it that way. So here’s what’s going to happen:

1. You will not write anything at all about us to any of the members of our present Home.
2. You will not write or say or in any way give the Family at large or any individual member ANY information about us or for us or “by” us.
3. You will send us the \$7,000 when possible, within a reasonable amount of time.

Where there’s life there’s hope. I truly believe that and I will not stop praying that the Lord in His infinite love and mercy will show you the error of your ways and that He will have mercy on you even though you have offended so many of His little ones.

If you’d like to work something out where we can continue to communicate with each other about ourselves and what we’re doing, then let’s talk about it and try to work something out. But please, Peter, no more BS, and please Mom, no more “prophecy letters”. It just doesn’t cut it with me.

Take care,

Pete