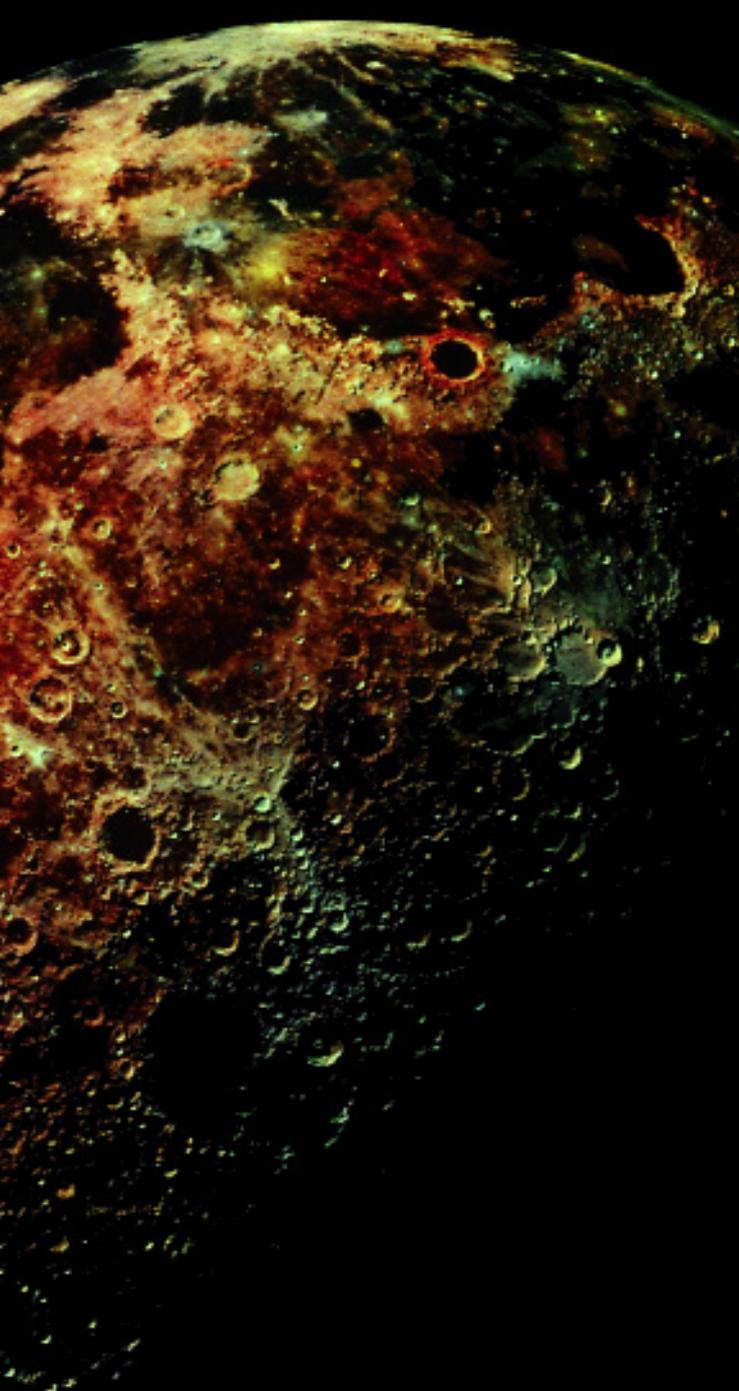


LEAVING
MY
WORLD
BEHIND

By Carol Harper



DATELINE: July 20, 1969



I can't imagine what the astronauts of Apollo 11 felt as they sat strapped into their seats in a rocket, plunging through the layers of Earth's atmosphere, into space. I wonder what they were thinking 40 years ago—not knowing what they would encounter along the way, if their mission would be a success or failure, if they'd live through it or die. Anything could have been running through their minds.

But, this might have been running through my own: *Wow, I hope all this stuff works, because there goes my air and my gravity...man, that is a whole lot of heat back there...hey, I wonder what this button does? Things sure look different from here...man, have I made a mistake? What if I goof up and something happens? What if someone else goofs up? What if I get hurt, what if I die? I don't want to die! What if I never see my friends and family again?*

My Religious Rocket

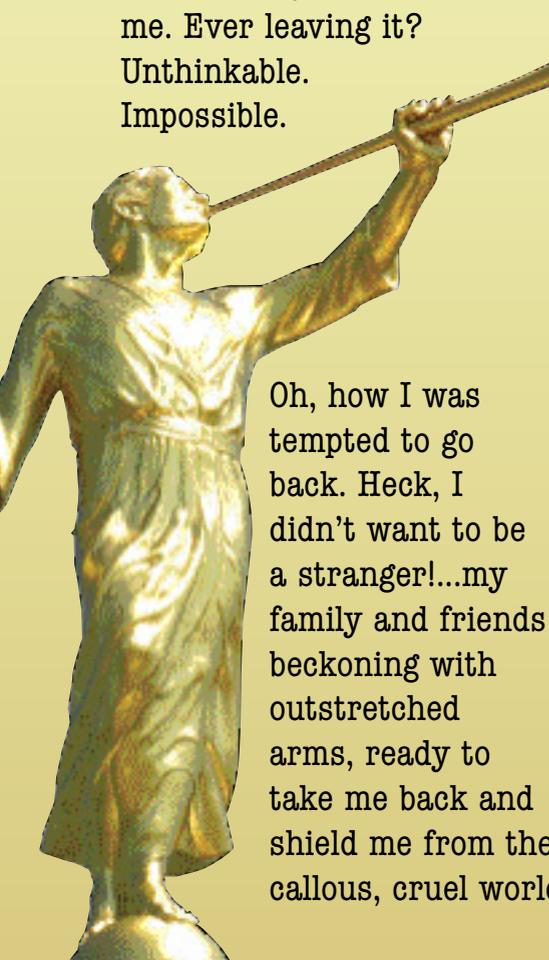
As my little think cloud pops, I look back at the timeline of my life and realize that



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...I look back at the timeline of my life and realize that there actually was a moment where I was also strapped into a rocket and plunged into the unknown.

It was my world, my very atmosphere; it meant everything to me. Ever leaving it? Unthinkable. Impossible.



Oh, how I was tempted to go back. Heck, I didn't want to be a stranger!...my family and friends beckoning with outstretched arms, ready to take me back and shield me from the cold, callous, cruel world "out there."

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I was raised as a Mormon, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was my world, my very atmosphere; it meant everything to me. Ever leaving it? Unthinkable. Impossible. Never, in the almost thirty years that I was an active, full-fledged member of the LDS church did I ever dream there would come a day when I would not be Mormon.

I had a strong testimony of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, believing without a doubt the "restored" gospel of Jesus Christ.

I followed the Word of Wisdom (health code), faithfully attended all church meetings, obeyed and conformed to the Church's standards, commandments and requirements. I attended the temple as often as I could, paid my tithes and dedicated my musical time and talents to the "building up of the kingdom." The LDS church was my life.

Yet one day in early 1996, I found myself becoming an explorer journeying into the realms of the unknown (or should I say, near-forbidden territory) by taking on the challenge of: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9, KJV). When one takes the chance to step outside the bubble they were raised in, and ventures outside the world of their own understanding, it can be quite a shock—but also a very exciting journey.

Of course, there were those who discredited my sincerity and questioned my objectives. I was told I was sinning, that I was being "led astray." Come back, I was implored—come back to the safety of the Church, the world you know; the

life you love. What you're doing is immoral and wrong. You may as well voyage to the Moon...life outside of the LDS Church is impossible....

"When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan—it is God's plan. When they point the way, there is no other which is safe. When they give directions, it should mark the end of controversy. God works in no other way. To think otherwise, without immediate repentance, may cost one his faith, may destroy his testimony, and leave him a stranger to the kingdom of God." —*Deseret News*, p. 5, May 26, 1945. Also in the *Improvement Era*, June 1945 (Mormon publication).

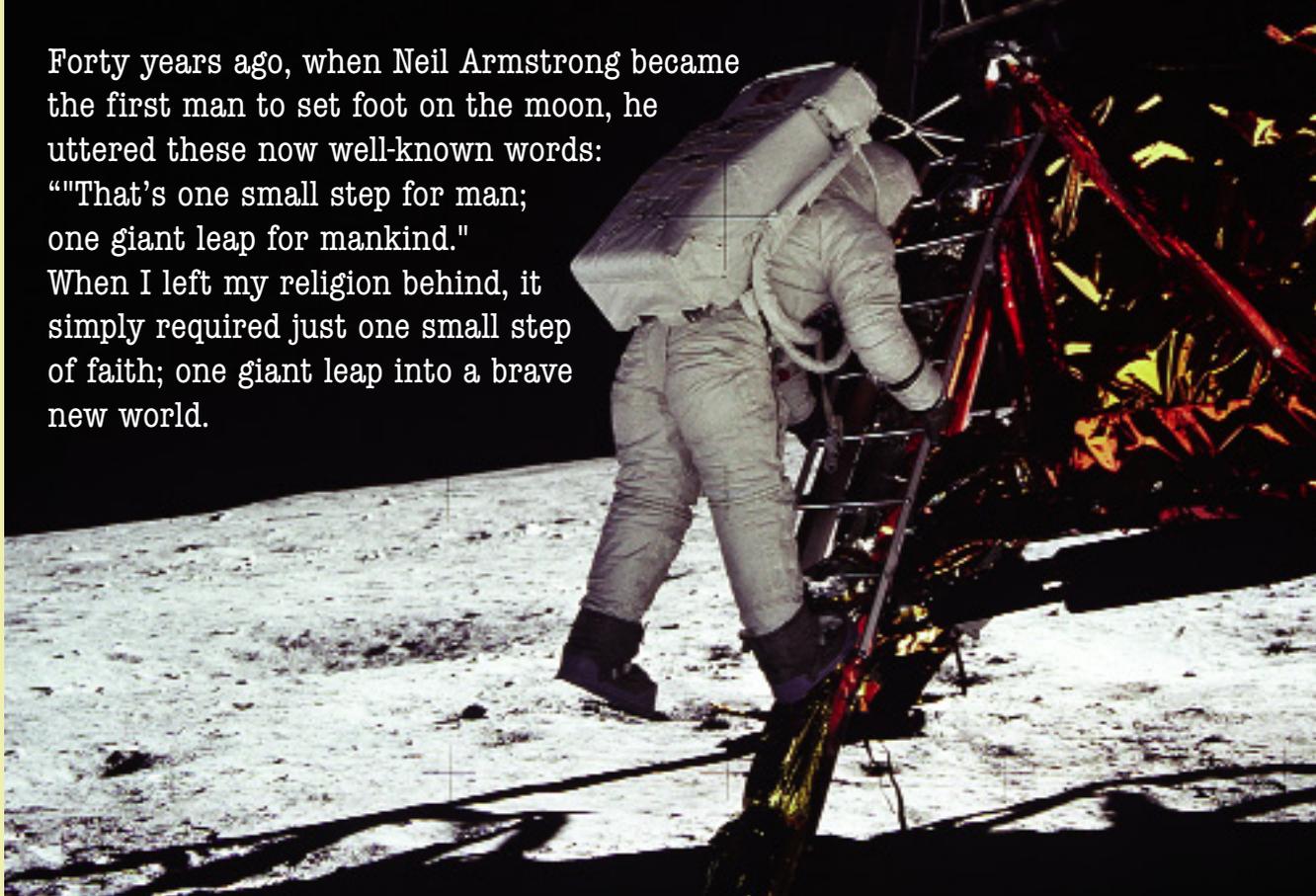
Leaving My Comfortable Planet Religion

Oh, how I was tempted to go back. Heck, I sure didn't want to be a stranger! My heart yearned for the familiar warmth, comfort and safety of the Mormon church—and my family and friends beckoning with outstretched arms, ready to take me back and shield me from the cold, callous, cruel world "out there." I wanted someone to define everything for me again, package it up with a pretty bow so I didn't have to think outside the box. But just as I could never go back—any more than a baby could be stuffed back into the womb that bore it—I did also realize that it was possible to live and breathe outside of Planet Religion.

Forty years ago, when Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon, he uttered these now well-known words: "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind." When I left my religion behind, it simply required just one small step of faith; one giant leap into a brave new world.

And I thought: Wow, I sure hope there's life out there because there goes life as I knew it.... I sure am getting a lot of heat for this. Hey, I wonder what this tastes like? Hmm, this looks interesting...things sure look different from here...man, have I made a mistake? What if something happens, what if I get struck by lightning for

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leaving? What if my friends and family leave me, reject me? I guess it's too late now.

A Giant Leap of Faith

Doing the seemingly impossible takes a great amount of courage. Even the consequences of the most carefully calculated risks cannot be known, for there are too many fac-

tors out of our control and scope of reasoning, out of our hands completely. It was so terribly painful—emotionally, mentally and spiritually—for me to leave my lifelong religion. I had no idea what would happen to me, what the future held for me. True leaps of faith usually happen when we're standing on the edge, realizing

mended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Hebrews 11:1-3).

I have found great comfort knowing that an infinite, inconceivable God is in control of all, ever mindful of his creations and galaxies within an everlasting universe. And at about 11:00 pm on July 20, 1969, when Neil Armstrong touched down on the moon's Sea of Tranquility, I can't help but think how appropriate. The results of a hope-driven faith—not knowing, yet believing (John 20:29)—is what brings peace and tranquility into our lives.

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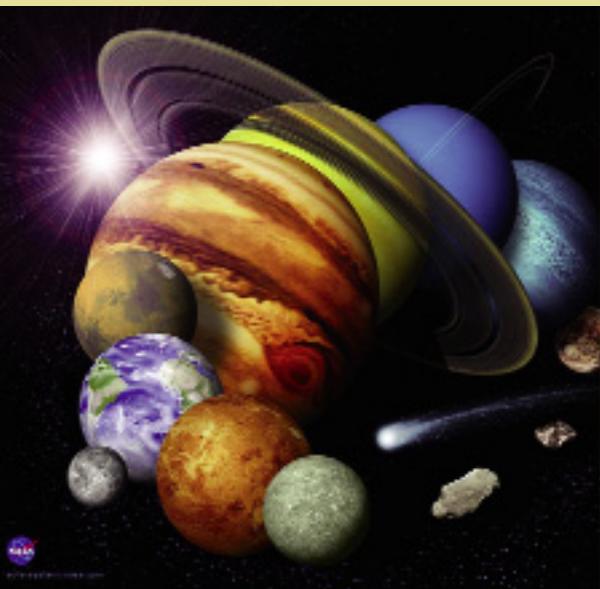
that we have nothing to lose but life as we know it, yet hoping that somewhere

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out there is a safety net, a parachute, a new home, a new life—a Savior.

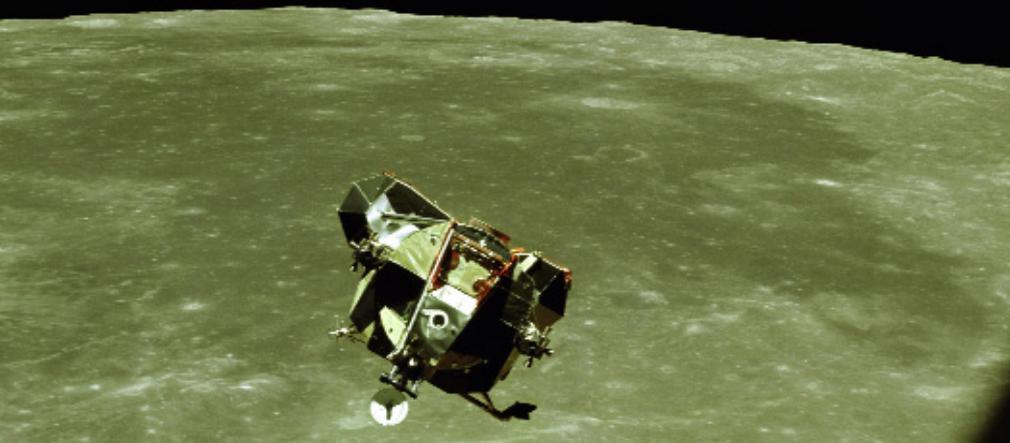
"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were com-

After plunging into uncertainty, after the fire, after the fear and doubt, nothing but a moment of truth remains. A truth that amazingly sets us free: *"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and*



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I had no idea what would happen to me, what the future held for me. True leaps of faith usually happen when we're standing on the edge, realizing that we have nothing to lose but life as we know it, yet hoping that somewhere out there is a safety net, a parachute, a new home, a new life—a Savior.



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the truth will set you free.” (John 8: 31-32).

A sick woman touched Jesus' robe (Mark 5:25-34). Some men lowered a man with palsy through the roof of a house (Luke 5: 17-26). A Roman centurion only needed Jesus' word to heal his servant (Luke 7:1-10). A man born blind didn't even know who healed his blindness (John 9). A leper beseeched Jesus to make him clean (Matthew 8:1-4). Peter stepped out on the turbulent sea, (Matthew 14: 28-29), thousands were fed with a few loaves and fishes.

None of these miracles required an existence within or observance of religious parameters, a pedigree or evidence of a righteous, perfect life, or even the smallest degree of scriptural exegesis.

No, all that was and ever would be required is one faith and one belief—one. A belief and faith, undefined by man-made religion, that Jesus Christ, could do what he said he'd do:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world;

but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16-17, KJV).

Never Alone, Because of His Grace

Do you ever feel alone—lost in space? I love the fact that God actually did the impossible, the unexpected, the unbelievable. How cool is that? That an incomprehensible, infinite God of the universe, in control of all time and our own personal timelines, packaged his own self and came down in the flesh to hang out with us for a little bit, to break bread with us, teach us, laugh and cry with us, understand and relate with our joys and sorrows, and ultimately die because of his great love for us.

How on Earth, space or time do you package something like that? How do you package that kind of magnanimous love? In a religion, church or denomination? In



Carol's book *Through the Eye of a Needle* tells the story of how she left the cultic, organized religion of Mormonism (available at www.carolharper.com).

“Men might as well project a voyage to the Moon as attempt to employ steam navigation against the stormy North Atlantic Ocean.” —Dr. Dionysus Lardner, Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy, University College, London (1793-1859)

“Heavier-than-air flying machines are impossible.”—Lord Kelvin (1824-1907), ca. 1895, British mathematician and physicist

“Space travel is utter bilge”.—Dr. Richard van der Reit Wooley, Astronomer Royal, space advisor to the British government, 1956

a self-proclaimed prophet or guru? In a mere concept or ideology? You don't. You *can't*. No one can. My friends, it is called *grace*. It is an incredible gift from an all powerful God that no one can come close to competing with. And in that gift is found a Sea of Tranquility, giving us a joy far and beyond anything Planet Religion can offer.

I know there are those who will always be wondering, skeptical of my new life in Jesus Christ. They'll wonder how I could “do that”—just turn my back on everything I used to believe. And all I can say is that I stepped out into a brave new world with pure and complete faith, and found my Lord and my God (John 20:24-29), a very real God who knows me better than I know myself.

And why do I believe this? Because I can. “We walk by faith, not by sight...” (2 Corinthians 5:7). □

Carol Harper writes from Antioch, Tennessee.

ONLINE INTERVIEW AT PTM.ORG

www.ptm.org/Harper

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- 1) Leaving religion for Christ-centered faith.
- 2) Is Mormonism Christian?

