

*Come and hear,
all ye that fear
God, and I will
declare what
he hath done for
my soul.*

Psalm 66:16

The FIFTH MEETING

A. Monise Hamilton

Rick Dahlberg

Lee-Roy Chacon

Viki Blanks

Denzle Harrison

Marcia H. Singleton

Joan Manzella

Jeanette S. Baldwin

Raj Attiken

Curtis Thurber



JUST SAY "NO"

By A. Monise Hamilton

IN RETROSPECT, I guess it did seem like a ridiculous idea. How could I, a nonworking, full-time student and single mother, even wish to attend the track-and-field event at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia? But then, in retrospect, it wasn't the first time I had believed in something that was deemed ridiculous. After all, I had recently moved to Berrien Springs, Michigan, to enter the seminary at Andrews University, only eight months after being baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist.

My dream-come-true, all-expense-paid trip began on Friday, July 26. That night, standing on a street corner in Atlanta, surrounded by thousands of equally excited people from all over the world, I recounted to myself the miracle that had occurred.

When the Olympic Games had begun a few days earlier, I still had no idea how—or if—God would answer my prayer. On Tuesday my sister had called to say that she was going to Atlanta with her employer for a business venture in connection with the Olympics.

"Do you think your sister would like to go with us?" he had asked her out of the blue. By Friday I was on my way.

My uncontainable excitement made it difficult to choose from the dizzying array of exciting things to do that first night. My niece and her friend, who had arrived a week earlier, suggested we go to Centennial Park. Packed with a great variety of entertainment attractions, Centennial Park was the "hot spot" of Olympic tourism. "There'll be a lot to do there on a Friday night," she said. "Wanna go?"

Friday night? Did she just say *Friday night!* In all of my excitement I had forgotten it was the Sabbath.

And that's when the battle began. *I could still go*, I reasoned. *I'd be only walking around. How is that not keeping the Sabbath holy? Plus, I may never have this opportunity again! God couldn't possibly expect me to miss out on all the fun, when I'll be here for only four days. As the lone Sabbathkeeper in my group, what am I supposed to do while they're out having fun? Certainly God will understand. After all, He's the one who blessed me with this trip.*

My mind was made up. Standing just two blocks from the park, I could hear the concert music and could see the lights from a laser-light show. I couldn't resist any longer. I was going to Centennial Park.

"So, do you wanna go?" my niece asked again.

"No," I answered.

"No?"

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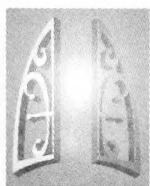
Did I just hear “no” come out of my own mouth? Shocked by my answer, I realized that in my weakness God had “set a guard over my mouth” and had spoken for me. I didn’t understand His interference. But I told my niece and her friend that Centennial Park would have to wait until Saturday night. They decided to visit an attraction on the outskirts of Atlanta. Disappointed and irritated, but now convicted to do what I knew was right, I walked back to the hotel and spent the evening alone.

A little more than four hours after my sudden change of plans, a bomb went off in Centennial Park, killing a woman who was attending a concert and injuring dozens of others. The force of the explosion was so strong that I felt and heard it three blocks away in my hotel room.

In the aftermath of the panicked chaos and terror of being evacuated from downtown Atlanta, I understood God’s interference.

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. Deuteronomy 11:26-28, NIV.

A. Monise Hamilton is assistant director of university relations at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. She is a member of the Highland Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church in Benton Harbor, Michigan.



“OKAY, LORD! HERE IT GOES”

By Rick Dahlberg

AFTER straying far from God’s church, I had stopped returning tithe regularly if at all. But now I had a new commitment to the Lord and a new job. The job paid just \$6 per hour, and with an expensive new car, rent, food, and other living expenses, it seemed that it would be only a matter of time before I would have nothing left.

But the Spirit began urging me to start tithing again.

It seemed impossible. How could I do it? Still, I knew it was the right thing, so I said, “Okay, Lord! Here it goes, into the offering plate.”

Sure enough, six months later I had nothing left to make the car payment at the end of the month. “Lord, what am I going to do?” I prayed. “I don’t have enough! You’re going to have to do something!”

That next Friday was a payday, and in my check I received an additional \$320—just enough to cover my car payment! I went to the boss to ask if he had overpaid me.

O V E R A N D O V E R A G A I N !

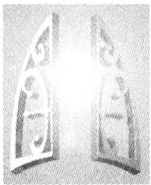
“No,” he said. “We’re very pleased with your work, so we have decided to give you a raise.”

Two years later I felt convicted to return tithe on my gross income as opposed to tithing only the net. Again, I wondered how I could do this, for I was still barely making the ends meet as it was. This would mean less spending money, or none at all. Things were really going to be tight, I thought. But in Malachi 3:10, God promised He would bless me. Again I said, “Okay, Lord! Here it goes, into the offering plate!”

Within a year I had earned nearly \$30,000. The next year, nearly \$40,000. I paid all my debts and had money to spend. Isn’t God good?

**Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.
Psalm 34:8.**

Rick Dahlberg is pastor of the Sherbrooke, South Stukely, and Waterville Seventh-day Adventist churches in Québec, Canada.



RAW VEGETABLES

By Lee-Roy Chacon

MY ALLERGIES were out of control, my body was itching all over, and I was suffering frequent asthma attacks. I was able to sleep only two or three hours a night, had no energy, had constant headaches, and was not able to concentrate. I had difficulty with bowel functions and would get sick often.

A physician put me on allergy shots for about three to four months. The shots helped with my allergies, but the itching continued, as did my sleeplessness. Another doctor tested different antibiotics on me. Nothing seemed to help. I was desperate. A psychiatrist told me that my load was too much and that I was depressed. I was willing to do whatever it took to get well.

Eventually I was referred to a doctor who practiced 300 miles away from my hometown. He ran different tests, and his final analysis was that I had become allergic to different foods. My body was now reacting to corn, dairy products, grains, soy sauce, mushrooms, peanuts, and legumes. Whenever I ate an apple or pear, I had a hard time breathing, for I was allergic to the pesticide that is used on fruit. I was allergic to cats, dogs, pollen, tumbleweeds, and dust, which was not good, since I live in Texas. The doctor said that my immune system was very weak.

“When your immune system is weak,” the doctor explained, “you get food and inhalant allergies, emotional stress, and your body is full of toxins. You’ll probably complain of fatigue, headache, depression and develop yeast or fungus infections of your skin and nails, and have rectal itching.” He said I had a condition called yeast candidiasis.

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Candidiasis is a fungus disease that can affect any system in the body, but it primarily affects the gastrointestinal, nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. Candida overgrowth is often caused by overuse of antibiotics. When yeast multiplies, it puts out toxins, which circulate through the body, weaken natural defenders, and cause sickness. Candida also manufactures a type of alcohol that can cause its sufferers to feel constantly “hung over.” When the liver is overloaded with toxins, it is not able to filter blood properly.

In August 1999 the doctor put me on a diet of raw vegetables for 90 days. I wasn’t allowed to eat packaged and processed foods, breads or other baked goods, cheeses, condiments, sauces, malt products, or mushrooms. I was not allowed to eat melons, fruit juices, or dried or canned fruits, because fruits would multiply the sugar in my blood. All I could drink was water.

That first week of raw vegetables was the hardest. I had been raised on a farm and was used to eating very well. So I went through different emotions. Mostly I was angry. I was constantly hungry and irritable at home. My body began to stink badly, because it was getting rid of all those toxins.

I began reading *Counsels on Diet and Foods*. These statements had a new meaning for me: “A failure to care for the living machinery is an insult to the Creator.” “Every careless, inattentive action, any abuse put upon the Lord’s wonderful mechanism, by disregarding His specified laws in the human habitation, is a violation of God’s law” (pages 16, 17). “Obedience to these laws must be made a matter of personal duty. We ourselves must suffer the ills of violated law. We must answer to God for habits and practices” (pages 18, 19).

I thought I had been a good steward, and perhaps I had been in other areas of my life. But now I was suffering from my bad health habits and dietary practices. I prayed a prayer similar to this: “Lord, forgive me for abusing Your holy temple. Give me the power and strength to overcome. I give my life over to You. I give my cravings and my diet to You. Help me to get well soon.”

The Lord granted my request and helped me overcome. Within ten days I was healed. My yeast candida was gone, my allergies were under control, and I was no longer depressed. I could sleep at night, and I had more energy. I felt better than I had in a long time. In the process I lost 22 pounds. At five feet, three inches tall, I could afford to lose some of my 140 pounds. Now I weigh 118 pounds.

I praise the Lord everyday because He has healed me. As a good steward of my body, I have to work in conjunction with His will to overcome long years of poor practices. I still have to be careful about what I eat. I rejoice in the Lord’s help and strength every day.

What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

Lee-Roy Chacon is executive secretary of the Texico Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Amarillo, Texas. He is a member of the Amarillo Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church.



GENEROUS WITH SOMEONE ELSE'S MONEY

By Viki Blanks

I'VE NEVER found it easy to give. I put my requisite tithe and offerings in the collection plate, but find it hard to dig deep into my pockets for anything extra.

One Sabbath, just prior to the offering, one of the deacons read the story of the widow and her mite. It moved me so much—I really heeded the Holy Spirit's nudging—that I started searching for something extra to give. Miraculously, I found a ten-dollar bill in my purse that I didn't know was there. I impulsively threw it in the offering plate and sat back, feeling generous.

The next day, my mother asked me to pick up some snacks for my son's class with the \$10 she had given me. I realized that I had used her money to make my "generous" gift.

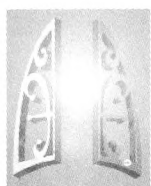
I paid for the snacks with my own money and grimly vowed never to be swayed toward impulsive generosity again. After all, I thought, God doesn't expect us to give more than we can afford.

Thankfully, this was just a fleeting bout with selfishness. As I thought about the real meaning of the story of the widow's mite, I also remembered that Jesus didn't stop giving until He bled and died.

Though I'll probably never claim giving among my spiritual gifts, I'm learning to cheerfully give from my heart when the Spirit nudges. And I'm thankful that I have a Father who teaches me His lessons with love and humor.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7.

Viki Blanks teaches grades 6-8 at Pensacola Seventh-day Adventist Junior Academy in Pensacola, Florida. She is a member of the University Parkway Seventh-day Adventist Church, in Pensacola.



CHALLENGING GOD

By Denzle Harrison

I WAS a third-year accounting major at Oakwood College and not sure what I would do when I graduated. I asked a senior chemistry-major friend what he was going to do when he finished. He was an honor student and certainly had a bright future ahead of him. I was not prepared for his answer.

"I'm going to be a student missionary," he said.

I laughed to myself. Why would he want to do something like that, especially after graduation? But neither Robert nor I had any idea the impact his response would have on my life.

For the next several months of my junior year the Holy Spirit spoke to me, directly instructing me that I would become a student missionary. I tried to ignore it, but I could not. So I posed a challenge to God:

"If You want me to become a student missionary, then You will have to meet the following requirements:

Allow me to work in accounting (all the student missionaries I knew taught Bible or English).

Send me to a Spanish-speaking country (most student missionaries went to such places as Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Guam. I was confident this would not be an option).

Allow me to graduate on time (I still needed approximately 60 credit hours, so this seemed impossible)."

I was confident that with such conditions, I would never have to go as a student missionary. I completed the necessary applications at the end of my junior year and was told that only one opening was available, on the island of Truk (now Chuuk) in Micronesia. Several months later that assignment was canceled.

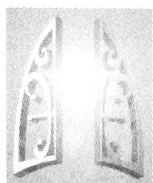
Early during my senior year I called the General Conference to tell them that I would not serve if they did not have an opening to match my requirements. As I was about to hang up the telephone, the person on the other end of the line said, "Hold on a moment. An opening is coming in on the telex machine." I listened in disbelief as she read to me an opening for a bookkeeper to work in Belize. The primary language was English, and the secondary language was Spanish.

I accepted the assignment. I graduated on schedule in June and left in August for Belize, where I served for a year.

Stewardship is more than finances. It also involves management of your time for advancing the cause of God and agreeing, even if sometimes grudgingly, to serve anywhere He calls. I thank God for accepting my challenge and changing my life forever.

For with God nothing shall be impossible. Luke 1:37.

Denzle Harrison is a senior business consultant for Administaff in Atlanta, Georgia. He is a member of the Shiloh Seventh-day Adventist Church in Smyrna, Georgia.



A READING LESSON

By Marcia H. Singleton

VICTOR wasn't an eager reader, although I had read to him and encouraged him to read. When he was in the fifth grade he was given an extensive reading program to follow, with a challenging reading list. He decided that his first book from the reading list would be *White Fang* by Jack London. By the time we found an acceptable edition of the book, he had only thirteen days to read 240 pages. We figured out how many pages he would have to read each day, excluding Friday and Sabbath.

In the beginning, it was very difficult for both of us because Victor did not read fluently and I had very little patience. When he read through the periods between sentences, I would stop him and make him read the sentences again. If he mispronounced words I would immediately correct him. Of course, it didn't help that I was a type-A choleric mother who needed her son to read very well. After a few days of frustration, my poor son, with tears trickling down his eyes, said to me, "How will I learn to pronounce new words if you always correct me before I even get a chance to try. Please let me try first."

At that moment the Holy Spirit helped me realize how I had misunderstood my role in this reading assignment. It was my responsibility, as his mother, to support and guide Victor with love, respect, and affirmation. I needed to use this valuable time to nurture Victor and not criticize him. My son is a precious gift loaned from God.

It is sometimes easier to understand my responsibilities as God's steward of money or time. But do I remember that, in the most important sense, I am also God's steward of my son? I must remind myself that my Heavenly Father is observing whether I am following His will for loving and caring for Victor, as Jesus loves and cares for me.

**Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.
Psalm 127:3.**

Marcia H. Singleton is a medical technologist at John Peter Smith County Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. She is a member of the City Temple Seventh-day Adventist Church in Dallas.



TIME WITH MY SAVIOR

By Joan Manzella

I WAITED to the last moment before deciding to go. It was yet another ministers' meeting for my pastor husband, and I was not enthusiastic about attending. I knew I needed spiritual renewal, but the prospects weren't promising. The schedule offered no programming for our children, so I would have to stay with them instead of attending the meetings for pastors. I had little hope of finding the spiritual enrichment I craved.

My spiritual life was in a drought, and nothing seemed to be helping. It wasn't the first year of the drought either. I didn't know what was going wrong. I had been a Christian for many years and a pastor's wife for more than ten. I now felt as if my prayers were not going above the ceiling. I was missing the spark that my relationship with my Savior once had.

As I fell into bed the first night, I silently prayed to the Lord to speak to my heart and show me how to fill the empty well in my life. I begged the Lord to give me a blessing from the few meetings that I would be able attend.

At one of the meetings Elder Morris Venden encouraged the practice of studying and contemplating the life of Christ, just as Ellen White encouraged us to do in *The Desire of Ages*, page 83. I committed myself to do this for one hour each morning.

Of course, I had been studying my Bible and praying during the drought. The difference was that now I was committing to an hour of meditation and contemplation of the life of Christ and prayer time every morning. I started doing this immediately because I wanted to have that dry spiritual well filled as soon as possible.

At first it seemed rather mundane and contrived to study this way every morning. I prayed that God would give me the desire to keep this commitment. Soon, driven by a new, inner encouragement, I found myself pushing forward, rising early in the morning for personal time with my Savior.

After several weeks of keeping this commitment, it became exciting! Miraculously I began to crave the early morning time with my Savior. The hour soon grew to sometimes two hours of morning worship and prayer time. Prayer time and worship had taken on a new excitement!

Looking back on the pastors' meeting from which I had expected so little, I saw that God had placed me in that time and place for a reason. It changed my life. Again I have begun seeing answered prayer, renewed spiritual vigor, and many areas of character development happening in my life.

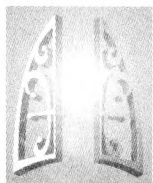
Keeping a promise to my Lord and Savior has renewed my relationship with

O V E R A N D O V E R A G A I N !

Him. I probably still would be missing it had I not attended that pastors' meeting and made a commitment to meet with Him daily.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Joan Manzella is a registered nurse and pastor's spouse in Bonnerdale, Arkansas. She is a member of the Bonnerdale Seventh-day Adventist Church.



GOD'S WATERWORKS

By Jeannette S. Baldwin

GIVE, GIVE, GIVE! The words resounded like a clanging bell in my ears as the conference stewardship director urged the congregation to make a greater commitment to support the Lord's work. I felt the Lord tugging at my heart, and we made a commitment to increase our giving.

For ten years we had struggled to make extra income from our farm for our daughter's Christian education. Each summer for those ten years the hand-dug shallow water well had gone dry, forcing us to haul water from the creek that flowed through our property. But as summer advanced, with temperatures soaring, the creek itself would dry up completely. With no running water for 1,500 laying hens, we had to lug water from my parents' well. Our very large vegetable garden from which we sold produce also suffered from lack of irrigation.

We had never borrowed money through the years when purchasing hundreds of baby chicks, farm equipment, or a new automobile. Our increased offering commitment meant that we would probably be hauling water the next summer instead of drilling a real well with borrowed money.

As time passed, we carefully budgeted funds for an automatic washer and dishwasher, certain that with the new water demands, the shallow well would surely go dry. But the well continued to supply an adequate amount of water, and the creek flowed plentifully as each week we laid the tithe and offering commitment in the plate.

Another careful round of saving netted us enough to build a long-planned dining room/family area onto our house, directly over the old and only well. A builder's failure to follow instructions resulted, three years later, in debris clogging the water system serviced by the shallow well. Believing that God would supply the necessary funds as we continued our giving commitment, we prayerfully secured a well driller as we shunned the temptation to go into debt.

The very day that the driller reached 78 feet, pumping eighteen gallons per

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minute, we received notice that my husband was one of the legatees of a distant relative's estate. As God would have it, we had the amount necessary for all the drilling expenses and a submersible pump.

To sum up God's goodness: The creek hasn't once gone dry in the 40 years since we have honored God with systematic giving. The creek flowed sufficiently to keep the irrigation pump running day and night, while other creeks in the area dried up. And the well put out an abundance of water. Our daughter never had a day of public schooling.

The water continues to flow. So do God's blessings!

The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. Proverbs 11:25.

Jeannette S. Baldwin is a homemaker in Owego, New York. She is a member of the Tioga County Seventh-day Adventist Church in Candor, New York.



TAKING CARE OF A MYSTERY

By Raj Attiken

THEIR original flight had been canceled, and they had been rebooked on another flight. The way she stored her luggage and the manner in which she plopped herself in her seat were clues that she wasn't a happy passenger. I soon learned the reason for her frustration. Her husband had been "bumped" up to first class, while she got what they had paid for: an economy-class seat. She tried to elicit a reaction from me to the perceived injustice she felt. I remained non-committal, although I was tempted to remind her that they could have been stuck in this foreign country for a while longer, had the airlines not accommodated their need.

Eventually the conversation came around to introductions. Her husband was a prominent national sports personality whose name I quickly recognized from more than 30 years ago. She seemed well connected in society and even knew the families who lived in the neighborhood where I had grown up. She filled me in on the lives of several of my childhood neighbors.

When it was my turn to tell her about myself, I introduced myself first as a pastor, then as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. I told her I was returning to the land of my birth for a visit.

She knew something about Adventists. "So, will you be going to church while you are here?" she asked, seemingly disinterested. "Will they ask you to preach?"

I responded that it was likely. She turned serious. "So what will you tell them in your preaching?"

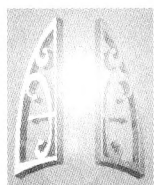
I hadn't anticipated that question. "What does one say to a people who have endured years of civil strife, loss, betrayal, separation?" I responded, without premeditation. "The only message I have is that God, in Christ Jesus, comes to us in our brokenness, in the shipwreck of our lives, in the loss of all possible peace of mind, even in the very thick of our disasters. In Christ, God has embraced the world to Himself, and the final chapter of our story has already been written." We talked for a while about what that all meant.

She seemed contemplative and didn't say much for the next hour or so—until she introduced me to her husband, who had come back to share a snack with her. Almost as if our conversation of an hour ago had not ended, she abruptly announced, "That would be a good thing to say to our people."

It was my turn to be contemplative. What else could I preach about? I was, after all, a steward of the mystery of Christ.

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2, NASB.

Raj Attiken is president of the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Mount Vernon, Ohio. He is a member of the Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mount Vernon.



EIGHT DOLLARS OF TITHE AND 80 TONS OF HAY

By Curtis Thurber

MY WIFE and I had been married eleven years when we became Christians. The idea of attending church on Saturday instead of shopping was very new to us. Returning tithe was a new experience too.

I was farming and doing custom hay-baling. The economy was very tight for farmers in our area. They needed their hay baled but had no cash, so I often took hay for my pay. I ended the baling season with 120 tons of hay and no cash.

That winter, in February, the flu hit our area. The weather was bitterly cold, with a heavy snow on. All of my family were victims of the flu bug. We were down to our last \$10.

Sabbath morning I was the only one able to attend church. As I started to leave for church, my good wife reminded me that we owed \$8 in tithe.

"I'm not going to return tithe today," I said. "The Lord knows we need medicine and food."

"We should return our tithe first," she replied. "The Lord will provide if we are faithful."

T H E F I F T H M E E T I N G

Thank God for a faithful wife!

My wife's words kept haunting me during Sabbath school and worship. When the offering was received, I returned our \$8 of tithe and \$2 for church expense. Now I was broke, but I felt a deep, trusting satisfaction.

When I arrived home, everyone was much improved. My wife had prepared a huge bowl of the best potato soup I have ever tasted in my life.

Just after sundown that night the phone rang. A man wanted to buy 120 bales of hay! After I quoted the price, he said, "That's too cheap. Bring me 120 bales, and I will pay 25 cents per bale more than you asked."

Thank God for His goodness!

Early Sunday morning I delivered and collected my money, putting the tithe aside first. I stopped by the grocery store, bought food, and came home on cloud nine!

Sunday evening a neighbor who operated a large dairy farm stopped by. He asked if I had hay for sale, because he said he had seen me go out that morning with hay. He needed hay for his dairy cows. I didn't know he needed hay. Until that morning he didn't know I had hay. He bought 80 tons, hauled it himself, and paid top price for it.

The Lord really blessed my wife's faithfulness. The family recovered from their illness very quickly with no medicine, only the Great Physician's blessings. Needless to say, our tithe has come first ever since, regardless of the circumstances.

That experience occurred 50 years ago. We have been through many highs and lows in our walk with God, but thank God, if we remain faithful, He blesses and keeps His promises.

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. Malachi 3:10.

Curtis Thurber is a retired rancher in Muskogee, Oklahoma. He is a member of the Muskogee Seventh-day Adventist Church.

*You have a stewardship testimony you need to share
and we need to read. See page 224 for details.*