

When you're a recovering agnostic and fledgling conservative – a Neo Fuddy Duddy, as my husband lovingly puts it (NeoFud for short) – it's not easy to find a support group. In many ways, you're still very much like your liberal, secularist friends. (I try not to stereotype, but in my experience, those traits do tend to go together.) But in some pretty crucial ways, you're completely different, and they understandably think you've lost your mind. Oh, there are plenty of conservative Christians who are happy to welcome you into the fold, and that's great, but you don't fit in with them so well, either. Most of them – or maybe it just seems this way – have been conservatives and Christians forever, and are comfortable in that identity. They don't know where you've come from, what you've come through to get where they've always been, nor do they care how they (or you) are perceived by your liberal, secularist friends, whose opinions you still very much value.



It's a quandary, and it can be a little lonely. This big, important thing is happening to you – especially the spiritual part, which informs the political part but so transcends it – and it feels truer and righter than anything ever has. You want to share it with someone – anyone! – but you remember how it felt to be the recipient of such unsolicited “sharing,” so you try and refrain. Besides, you don't even have the language to explain what's happening to you. You just keep telling people to “read C.S. Lewis... read C.S. Lewis....”

Or you try writing about it in your column. And when you do, what happens is, slowly but surely, people start coming out of the woodwork. They email you, leave you voice mails, send handwritten notes. Sometimes, they even approach you in public and tell you, in whispered tones, that they are like you. They, too, are going through “the change.” They get it.

Still, these folks are scarce, and you don't know them that well, and it might be a little weird to invite them all over for drinks and conversation. You find solace online – in the blogosphere, there are plenty of brilliant believers in modern conservatism, just another name for classical liberalism – but you long for faces to go with the names of your favorite cyber-minds. You look to the entertainment media, and there's practically no one there representing you. You long for a role model! If you were a gay teenager or a man trapped in a woman's body or a conflicted mob boss, all you'd have to do is turn on the TV to see yourself reflected, with understanding and approbation, in the cultural zeitgeist, many-fold. But a well-educated, arts-loving, free-thinking white woman who's chosen to embrace traditional Judeo-Christian values, not because she's too ill-informed and disengaged to know better, but because, after shopping around for decades, she believes they're the best deal out there? Show me a character like that on TV!

Or better yet, just show me Star Parker.

You probably haven't heard of Star Parker, and if you have, it's likely because she co-hosted *The View* last week. It was the first time I'd ever seen her, myself, but I've been a fan for a while. Star Parker is the executive director of a think tank called CURE (the Coalition for Urban Renewal and Education), a cable news commentator, and the author of two books – *Pimps, Whores, and Welfare Brats*, and *Uncle Tom's Plantation*. She also happens to be a syndicated columnist, which is how I came to know and love her.

Before she started down this path of accomplishment, Star Parker was a petty criminal and crackhead living in Los Angeles, whose reckless lifestyle landed her in jail and led her to an abortion clinic four times. (“I was just using it as birth control,” she told the ladies on *The View*.) When she became pregnant for the fifth time, Parker says, “something went off in my head. I

wondered, could it really be right to keep killing my offspring?" Suddenly, the answer seemed obvious. She decided to keep the child. Thus began her life as a welfare mother, which was not as great a struggle as the term might imply. While on government aid, Parker was able to lounge in her own Jacuzzi and party regularly at Venice Beach, bringing in extra income with under-the-table jobs. To paraphrase her words, she was milking the system for all it was worth and having a pretty good time while at it.

Then something radical happened. While interviewing her for one of those "extra income" jobs, the boss told Parker in very plain terms that there would be no under-the-table action in his establishment and that her lifestyle was, I quote, "totally unacceptable."

Group gasp here.

"Unacceptable to whom?" Parker asked, not just offended, but literally flabbergasted that this man would dare pass judgment on her. Didn't judgment go out in the sixties? What was going on here?

"To God," was his astonishing answer.

As Parker told this story on *The View*, her cohosts were visibly uncomfortable. This was crazy talk. Oh, not the four abortions part... not the drugs and robbery, not the welfare fraud, no. The God part. Joy Behar tried to steer the conversation back to familiar talk-show territory, resorting to the tried-and-true (and trite) with a challenge in her voice: "So, you don't believe in a Woman's Right to Choose?"

Star Parker, a tall, graceful black woman with cascading cornrows, an angelic face, and a wicked sense of humor – nobody's idea of The Church Lady – very calmly and kindly responded that she did not, in fact, support the right of a woman to abort her child, that she deeply regretted her own abortions, and that she believes we do women a disservice by making abortion so easy and seemingly inconsequential.

The co-hosts were thrown. This was not some politician – some balding, middle-aged white guy in Washington – trying to take away a woman's control of her own body. This was a beautiful, thoughtful mother who had "killed" four of her own children and lived to regret it. A different animal altogether. Clearly, her pro-life stance was still the wrong stance, but she did have street cred. How to attack her? Even Joy was stumped.

Parker went on to discuss how Christianity had completely changed her life. (Long story short: the judgmental boss-man hired Star, treated her like family, and took her to church, where she found Christ, along with the meaning, purpose, and sense of self-worth she'd been missing all her life. She almost immediately removed herself from the welfare rolls, went to college, and took responsibility for her own destiny.)

Parker made other shocking statements never before heard on *The View*. She criticized the welfare system, saying she believes it has enslaved a large segment of the black population. She touted long-forgotten, archaic virtues like abstinence (not just for teenagers, but unmarried adults as well!) and rickety, out-dated concepts like lifelong marriage, which she scandalously referred to as the province of a man and a woman. (She had the gall to suggest that Angelina should marry Brad. Some washed-up nonsense about commitment, and two-parent families being better for kids ...) She even went so far as to assert that the Christian life is about more than just loving everybody and refraining from judgment... that there are rules – rules that help us live better lives – and that many of them are hard, few of them are hip, and some don't even come naturally.

And you thought Rosie O'Donnell was controversial!

The befuddled co-hosts just weren't sure how to handle this woman. Her story was obviously

inspiring, and Parker, herself, so undeniably likable. She even had that super-cool hairdo. But... there was the whole pro-life, Christian Conservative thing. Ew. So distasteful. So Tammy Faye. So un-View. What to do?

Well, there was little they could do. The elegant, sweet-natured Ms. Parker – despite her talk of right and wrong, sin and virtue, “biblical truth” vs. “secular culture” – was simply captivating. With her radiant intelligence and self-effacing humor, she made Elizabeth Hasselbeck, the show’s token Righty, look like a light-weight, chirpy equivocator. She made Joy Behar look like a raging, sound-bite-regurgitating harpy (admittedly not hard to do); and even managed to ruffle Barbara Walters, usually so Sphinx-like in her feigned objectivity. At one point, Barbara – or maybe it was Joy, who’s always looking for a rumble – dangled that scourge of intellectuals, sophisticates, and fashionable folk everywhere, The C Word (no, not Cancer, silly!), and Parker astonished her by proudly embracing it, saying “Yes, I’m extremely Conservative!” Almost like she didn’t know it was a bad word.

What was this woman doing on The View? Didn’t she want to discuss her latest trip to rehab? Her Inner Diva? The Stripper Workout? Aromatherapy? What was with all this talk of morality? All these embarrassing references to the Bible? Hadn’t she read The Secret? Couldn’t she discuss that?

The fact that Star Parker was easily the most attractive, articulate, and politically informed person at the table was impossible to ignore. And her manners! Even guest star Michael Moore couldn’t get a rise out of her. Whenever he or one of the co-hosts interrupted her answer to one of their questions, she simply shut her mouth, refusing to engage in the me-me-me shout-fest. The secret twinkle in her eye let you know she had something to say, that it would certainly be worth hearing, but that civility was more important to her than winning an argument that, in her mind, has long been settled. Let the squawkers squawk and the nay-sayers say nay. Star Parker just sat there smiling – the very picture of the peace that passeth understanding.

I’m no Star Parker. Not even close. But there’s nothing like a good role model to inspire us to reach for the... stars. (Sorry. Couldn’t resist.) In the meantime, I’m still working on forging that support group. Any takers should feel free to email me at lowcntrywkly.com

I know you’re out there.