**The Outsiders: Teen Caught Between Freedom and Faith**

*Amish Adolescents 'Run Around' Before Committing to Church or Leaving Community*

By SAMANTHA WENDER and KATIE ESCHERICH

Adolescence is typically a time of experimentation and testing boundaries, but if you're an Amish teenager, you're faced with a confounding choice between family or isolation, tradition or the modern world, faith or uncertainty. For the past year, ABC News has had unprecedented access into the lives of a group of Amish adolescents at a crossroads, as they come of age and decide their future.

ABC News' Jay Schadler profiles four teenagers in central Ohio during the Amish rite of passage known as rumspringa that usually begins at age 16. This period of discovery, loosely translated in the Amish's Pennsylvania Dutch language as "running around," gives Amish teens the chance to explore the usually forbidden modern world before deciding whether they will forever commit themselves to the Amish way of life.

That way of life means living according to a strict set of religious rules, with no electricity, no cars, no music and no education beyond the 8th grade. The Amish wear traditional clothes and stay away from the outside, which they call the "English" world.

The Amish believe that only adults can make informed decisions about their own salvation. Baptized once as children and then as adults, the decision to join the church means they consciously take on the responsibility of following the "ordnung" -- unwritten rules -- that have sustained the culture for several centuries.

The challenge is that if the outside temptations prove more powerful than the world they have always known, the teens will spend the rest of their lives severed from their families. It's a high stakes choice between the enticement of freedom or returning to the faith and comfort of family and community life.

"If you don't grow up in the Amish then you don't know what it's like," said 18- year-old Danny.

ABC News was there as Danny ran away from his Amish family by jumping from the second floor of his father's farm house late one night. He negotiated his way through a series of first encounters with the modern world, including remote controls, text messaging and drunken nights, to find that he had escaped one set of rules for another he didn't understand. Danny's internal conflicts about the decision to be or not to be Amish landed him first in trouble, and then in jail.

"They think I'm lost," Danny said. "If I were to die, they think I can't go to heaven. I mean, I might not go to heaven, but not every Amish is going to heaven."

During the day, 17-year-old Lena cleans houses, and at night she texts and talks secretly on her cell phone by candlelight.

"You have a big decision if you want to stay with the Amish or if you want to leave," said Lena, the youngest of 11 children. "I'm confused in my life."

Although Lena dresses in Amish clothes, underneath her simple dress and white bonnet she wears a T-shirt and blue jeans.

Lena still lives at home with her mother, who very much wants her to embrace the Amish lifestyle, but on weekends she parties with her boyfriend and other Amish teens going through Rumspringa.

"Well, my dream right now is to leave the Amish and do what I want to," she told Schadler. "I want to do a lot of stuff, and just go out and have freedom for a while, complete freedom."

Lena's act of rebellion is that she plans on getting her GED -- a full high school diploma. The Amish traditionally only go to school through eighth grade. They believe that life experience trumps formal education and that young people should apprentice to learn the basic skills needed to make a living.

An hour buggy ride down the road from Lena, 18-year-old Nelson drives a souped up buggy, complete with a stereo system, subwoofers and an iPod charger.

He laughingly calls himself a "hi-tech Amish," but even so, Nelson says he is not much different then the generations before him. "It seems like every generation takes it a little further and a little further. My grandpa told me when he was my age, they had a little radio, but it was a real old type and they still had to crank it to get music out of it."

19-year-old Harley knows that life outside the Amish community isn't for everyone. He left the Amish with just the clothes on his back and $21 in his pocket.

"Some people can take it, and some of them can't," he said. "For me, it's like, my best choice I ever made."

Harley tries to maintain a relationship with his family but said his parents don't want him to visit very often, as they are afraid he'll be a bad influence on his 11 younger siblings.

"My one little brother, he was about a year old when I left," Harley recalled. "Every time I'd come home and I'd walk in the door, he'd run up yelling my name, 'You going to stay at home this time?' And I tell him, 'no.'"

"When I first left the Amish, I missed my family like very bad," he said, and he still drives by his family's home sometimes. "I try and stay away so to respect mom and dad," he said. "They're, they're disappointed in me."

According to studies done by Thomas J. Meyers, a sociology professor at Goshen

College in Indiana, more than 80 percent of Amish youth eventually join the church.

All the teenagers ABC News followed will have to decide for themselves if those family bonds are enough to keep them in the community. "Basically the reason I'm staying is my family right now, at home. I know I'd miss them and they’d miss me," Nelson said. "I just like the lifestyle, it's a simple life. Work hard, play hard, it's just fun."

1) How do you feel about the choice these Amish teens have to make? Do you feel that this choice restricts or expands their freedom?

2) If you had to make the choice that these teens face, what would you do? Explain your choice.

3) Write a claim that you could support using evidence from this article.

4) Underline three pieces of evidence from the article to support your claim.