

Couple finds faith, and financial ruin



**Jean
Torkelson**

How
Coloradans
Worship

Steady-eyed, soft-spoken and resolute, Kristen Maaherra and Eric Schaveland are the kind of people you'd want at your tailgate party, or on your life raft if the ship goes down.

So isn't it a little alarming to hear they also believe in seraphic transports, life transplantation and thought controllers?

No — not once you've sampled their hospitality in their purple shack tucked in Lefthand Canyon, 20-some miles north of Boulder.

You soon feel comfortable here, petting the two family goats, getting slobbered on by Tasha, the St. Bernard, and occasionally repairing

to the outhouse, where the reading material consists of stacks of *The New Yorker*.

When you look around their neat but decidedly ramshackle office/living space — the walls painted in brave, vivid hues of orange, blue and green — you ache for them:

After years of searching, they found the religion of their hearts, but their most tangible reward so far has been financial ruin, and a date today with a judge in Denver District Court.

"It's cost us everything," says Maaherra, 53. Like her husband, 41, she looks a fit mate for a Viking ship. Both are brainy — she has advanced degrees, he's creatively employed as a mason.

All this husband/wife team of 10 years want to do is tell others about the *Urantia Papers*, the foundation of their religion. Its sign — the symbolic equivalent of the crucifix — is three concentric circles, something like a bull's eye.

Instead, it's they who have become the target, sued by their own faith's Chicago trustees for copyright infringement and unfair competition. The trustees argue the symbols are their property.

Kristen and Eric say everybody should be able to partake of the *Papers*, a 2,037-page, caboose-sized tome that mysteriously appeared — materialized, they believe — in the 1930s in Chicago, "with perfect margins," as Maaherra marvels.

The religion appeals to artists and eggheads: Jerry Garcia reportedly died with the *Urantia Papers* in his sock drawer (and quite a sock drawer it must have been).

Urantians believe their doorstep of a bible was written by "superhuman personalities" who detailed the next stage in human evolution: that Jesus — yes, that Jesus — came to Earth with his wife to form planet Earth, called Urantia.

All this was a revelation to Maaherra and Schaveland, each raised as an atheist. Indeed, Schaveland's dad, a cryptologist with the Strategic Air Command, "believed organized religion was a con game to deceive people."

But the call of the indwelling spirit of God would not be denied. At a Boulder Urantia conference 10 years ago, Maaherra, a widow with four kids, met Schaveland, and soon their life work became clear: Create an even more massive, 4,636-page index that would allow believers easier access to the doctrines of their faith.

"That was such a neat dream," she says.

But now, until the court case is resolved, their dreams take simpler courses — like gazing at the stars from their greenhouse-bedroom.

One constellation they see is Sagittarius, beyond which Urantians believe is the Paradise Isle, the ultimate destination of each human being.

For now, that will have to do.

Religion writer Jean Torkelson visits churches, synagogues, temples and mosques throughout the metro area to write about them each Monday.

URANTIA BELIEVERS

Sunday worship at: Seventh-day Adventist Church, 9696 Paschel Drive, Louisville

Information: (303) 530-5216

Members: 350 in Denver-Boulder area

Service: 11 a.m., often followed by brunch

Friday: Evening study groups

Scope: Number of believers unknown; 350,000 *Urantia Papers* have been distributed worldwide