

With a Mighty Hand
Will Van Moorleghem

One – Christmas in a Cave

A flashing ribbon of sunlight streaked across the Hawaiian sea. It shimmered across the turquoise waves, ending at my bare feet. I stooped between the black rocks, motionlessly gazing across the water. Soon I would have to climb back up to my cave, before the creatures of the night infested the beach. It was Christmas Day, a very unusual Christmas day for me. I hadn't eaten in four days, or talked to another person in ten. In three more days my fast would be complete, bringing me another step closer to the spiritual state I sought so seriously.

Back in Omaha, the folks had probably returned home from Midnight Mass and were gathered around the table with its traditional load of Christmas cookies and hot cocoa. A dull ache of loneliness settled over me for a moment, then vanished as I felt a martyr-like sense of accomplishment. There was nothing like Christmas in our family. It was the highlight of the year, the most sacred of family traditions. None of us would ever have thought about missing it. No one but me. Not even Christmas would keep me from what I thought to be my spiritual destiny.

Clad in only canvas shorts, I picked my way up the steep basalt cliff to the ten foot wide cave which had been my home for the past month. My calloused feet were used to the sharp rocks. At age 20 I weighed in at a pathetic 124 lbs. My shaggy blond hair brushed my shoulders and my knotty beard reached down to the middle of my tanned chest. From a distance, I resembled a janitor's mop, inverted to dry in the hot wind.

From the cave's mouth I could see far across the reddening ocean, tropical branches arched across the cave's mouth, hiding me from the view of any ship that might pass, and as usual, no ships passed.

The island of Hawaii, the "Big Island," is a huge volcanic rock, built layer upon layer by volcanic eruptions. The beaches of rocky rubble below were nothing but the crumbs of a great mass of hardened lava. The steep cliffs of Kealakekua Bay were created when a gigantic mass of lava suddenly cooled as it contacted the sea. The cliffs dropped over 100 feet straight down to the seashore. Waves wash their bases, sloshing over the ever growing heaps of broken basalt that collected there. Above, the crescent shaped rock wall was dotted with small, shallow caves. In these blowholes the ancient Hawaiians buried their dead. Few things grew in the rockier places of the island where the lava was young. Island settlers had brought locust seeds, the wispy locust trees had the ability to grow in the small crevices of rock. They hold on tenaciously, casting their tiny seeds yearly. Now they were everywhere, slowly helping to turn the rock to soil. A crop of these sturdy locusts stood like soldiers at the sides of my cave.

The porous walls of my cave soaked up the sound of the surf below. I settled on the palm branches that covered the floor, and crossed my legs to meditate. Beside me were my only possessions: a bowl, a spoon, a sleeping bag, one set of clothes, a banjo and a clarinet, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Bible.

Meditate. That's what the real holy men did. This would be my meat and drink. Meditate and fast. Meditate and walk the black rocks like a ghost. Meditate until the holy state of mind was realized. Nirvana, the white light, the state of oneness and self-realization; heaven, Hindu style.

In the distance, firecrackers sounded in Christmas celebration, but the sound dissolved into the larger sounds of waves and wind. In my imagination these all blended together into one great “Om,” the sound of all the universe, the essence of all sound, and all being, according to the Eastern Mystics.

I had come to Hawaii to meditate, to become one with nature, to “live off the land” and wait in spiritual calmness, until the “New Age” (the Age of Aquarius) came. Darkness had come. Relieved that another day of my fast was now over with, I stretched in the mouth of my cave and crawled into my sleeping bag. In two crazy years my life had changed radically, and often. In four months, I would be twenty one. I wondered if I would ever see my twenty first birthday.

Two – Death in the Cards

Two years earlier, still a senior in high school, I had attempted to “break through to the other side,” to contact the spirit world for information about my future. I visited a friend named Isabella, Tink for short, who was adept at divination through Tarot cards, Astrology, and I Ching sticks (ancient Chinese fortune telling sticks).

We sat cross-legged, staring down at the ragged Oriental rug. Tink slid the Tarot cards slowly out of her hand, laying them on the floor in the prescribed manner. Suddenly her eyes grew wide with surprise and bewilderment, then shifted nervously from side to side to avoid mine. The hangman, the card that was feared by all who used this ancient form of fortune telling, had appeared twice and upside down. Tink sat in uneasy silence, perhaps wondering how to tell me what she saw. The bleak wind whipping through the colorless buildings rattled the apartment window glass. Finally Tink gave out the truth. The cards had spoken. I would be arrested, and before long I would die.

My mind flashed back to a day two years earlier when I had been consulting a Ouija board. Many times I had correctly “read” the occultist messages displayed as the token slid over the letters and numbers of the board. During football season I had won several bets based on the predictions of the board. I had grown to be more than simply amused with the mysterious communications that came through the board. I had developed a tentative trust in it, and in my own abilities to interpret the meaning of its movements. That day it told me I would die before I was twenty-one.

Tink had now opened my astrological “chart,” a detailed inquiry into what the stars and planets could reveal about my life. The stars too bode ill for me. I would soon suffer imprisonment. I was then to suffer through several years of vagrancy and instability changing religious and philosophical beliefs every few months. Friends would come and go as if in a revolving door, then I would face a sudden end. The cards had now confirmed what the stars had revealed. I seemed to be under some kind of “curse.” I felt like it.

Three - Hippified

It was the time of Woodstock and Vietnam War protests, and young people taking to the highways in droves. My crumbling relationship with my parents and teachers at my Catholic high school in Omaha had increased my sense of loyalty to the radical “Hippie movement” that was sweeping across our country.

I had become fascinated with the wide range of phenomena usually now described under the heading of New Age. Not only psychedelic drugs, but certain types of Eastern Meditation, astral

projection, reincarnation, astrology, and other ancient systems of thought and fortune-telling became my new religion.

Although the modern New Age movement can be traced back to the 19th century, or even ancient Hinduism, it was the “Flower Children,” the Hippies of the late 60’s and early 70’s that effectively introduced our society to this diverse range of beliefs. The incredibly popular Beatles and other rock bands hid subliminal messages about drug use in their songs. People began using drugs, not for mere pleasure, but to “expand their mind.” Tales were told about a new world, an alternate world that existed beyond the five physical senses. The New Age Movement is, in essence, an attempt to tap into this unseen, powerful realm. To enter into this world, they say, is to contact one’s real self, which is God. Many were “turned on” to drugs in order to “tune in” to this new world, and dropped out of the mainstream of society.

Many left home to hitchhike, to live an alternate lifestyle, to search. A sizable chunk of a generation had gone to find spiritual truth (although most of us didn’t even know that we were searching at all), off on a vague search for deeper value and meaning in life. We embarked with little regard for the mores or the gods of our parents.

Four – Falling Out

High school had caught me ill-equipped to understand a Catholicism that didn’t seem to understand itself. Many Catholics grew increasingly unsure of their church as they struggled to adopt the policies of Vatican II, the council designed to eliminate irrelevant practices in the church. In trying to modernize the church without losing the traditions that were truly meaningful, many Catholics lost track of what was truly meaningful. I slowly lost all belief in religion and in God.

While a junior in high school, I did a very sophomoric thing that would help launch me on my New Age trip. While assisting the nuns in cleaning the living quarters of the Principal, who was a Catholic Priest, I was left alone for a few minutes to vacuum his office. Behind his personal desk I discovered a collection of Playboy magazines. Taking one down, I flipped it open to the centerfold, and propped it up on the shelf, the three-page photo of a nude woman draped down in front of his leather-bound books. I frantically motioned to my friends to look, delighted with what I considered to be the best gag I ever had the good fortune to fall into. The nuns, when they saw it, blushed, and lowered their heads like pecking chickens and hurried us to another room. Horror registered on my friends’ faces. The speed with which they squirmed out of the room left me with their unmistakable message: “You’re on your own with this one, man!”

Not a word was ever spoken to me about that incident, but from that time on the Principal launched a campaign of silent intimidation that would alienate me from the church, the school, and help to alienate me from all authorities in my life.

I had been a member of the National Honor Society, a Student Council Officer, and had carried a high grade point average. I had also been a football team captain. Shortly after the Playboy episode, I dropped a pass in the end zone near the end of a close game, then missed a field goal in the closing second to ensure our loss. A couple days after the game, I was still feeling depressed. I had cost us the game. In a deserted hallway the Principal came up to me and said, “Van Moorlegem, you blew that game for us,” then turned and walked away. These were his first words to me since I had unveiled his cache of magazines.

Not long afterward I was called into the head coach's office. Two coaches sat with arms crossed in the corners of the cluttered room. No greeting. Just a disgusted grunt. The coach lowered his balding head a little and peered at me as a judge about to sentence a criminal. "Van Moorlegem," he slowly began, "you're different... ODD. You just don't fit in around here." I didn't have the slightest idea what he was talking about, neither did I associate what was about to happen with my foolish act in the Principal's quarters. "You've got an attitude problem," he continued. "You're a bad influence on the team. You can suit up if you want, but you're not going to play. I'm going to keep you on the bench."

(I'm a reject, I thought). "Then I quit," I said.

"Fine, you can check your equipment in with Joe Sullivan."

They seemed relieved at my resignation. (At least the stupid kid didn't cry on us.) The job they had been given had been accomplished. Perhaps there were other reasons for their decision, but if that were the case it was a mystery to me. To be sure, there were many ways I failed to be a good student and a good sportsman, but the ax had fallen without fairness or explanation. My response was anger and rebellion.

The rest of my memory of high school was framed by the same feeling. The teachers were the guards, the Principal was the warden. He would pause to glare at me unflinchingly, then silently pass. My grades fell. The football rosters were posted without my name. I drifted away from my friends who remained in the sports programs. I became disliked by most teachers, an unmotivated, moody, reclusive student. I was capable, but not cooperative.

Within, I battled for some kind of control over my own life. The chances of being drafted and sent to Vietnam to die also loomed over me like a dark cloud. The government to whom I had pledged allegiance since I was a small child had now taken on the specter of a vulture, watching to snare its prey of young men (probably me), sending them off to the rice paddies to be riddled with machine gun fire. And all this only because some Senator owed a favor to a businessmen with economic interest in Nam, I thought.

As my confusion grew, so did my guilt. I felt I couldn't tell Dad and Mom about the magazines, or the way I was kicked off the team. After all, they didn't even want me to register as a conscientious objector to the draft. They thought it would taint my record. I felt they were afraid to stand up for what was right. They wouldn't understand, I believed. They just thought I was a troublemaker, apart from the rest of the "straight" people.

I quit going to church. I would borrow my dad's car and go to see a girlfriend. God didn't seem to respond to this insult. It just proved to me that there was no God. The big Catholic God with the fierce wrath and the watchful eye was just a big bluff.

I found acceptance in the company of the "heads," the small group of Hippie students who shared my distrust of authority. These were friends with a common focus. They held animosity for adults of the "establishment" who sought to reach their goals at the expense of our freedom. These new friends scorned the values of our society: affluence, status, a safe and unchallenging lifestyle of self-gratification. They also introduced me to some drugs.

Five – Free to Be Locked Up

A steely beam of morning light posted itself on the jail floor. I threw off my wool blanket, and rubbed my hand across the beginnings of my first beard. I was filled with a sense of freedom, for now within these four walls, I was finally on my own. I could plot my own course, and nobody could stop me.

My last day of high school I was arrested while smoking pot around a campfire on the Platte River with my newfound friends. The sheriff at Plattsmouth wasn't "cool." He didn't realize that getting high was a valid tool for exploring the spiritual dimensions of the mind. I was sentenced to seven days in jail for being caught with two joints. They thought I was the ring leader because I was the only one of us to beat a jail room stool against the wall and scream the night we were arrested. The others had enough good sense to shut up, so I was the only one of the five of us to go to jail.

From my jail window I could look down upon the tree-lined streets of rural Plattsmouth. The steady toll of church bells on the hour divided my stay into even chunks of time, increments of thought dedicated to my escape from my present world. My two older brothers had gone on to college after high school. So could I, but what was the use? What they valued, what my parents valued, meant nothing to me. They chain themselves to an occupation for the duration of their years, and all they have to show for it is a little status, a little pleasure, and an assortment of toys that they will only leave behind when they die. And they die so soon. Their labor and sacrifice is not even remembered, and in the end their pain probably outweighs their pleasure. Let them boast of their wealth. Let them revel in their shallow pleasures. Let them die in pursuit of the prize they will never find in those cowardly idols of security and safety. Not me. I will be all there is to be and experience all there is to experience. Give me the path less traveled, the path more beautiful, more dangerous, more heavily laden with laughter and with tears. While in jail I read "On the Road" by Jack Kerouac. Like the author, I decided that I would take the unbridled path of adventure and uncertainty.

I decided I would simply head west. Whatever I encountered, that would be all of my life as I encountered it. I had nothing to lose. No risk, no reward. The existential nomad I would be. I would go "on the road."

There is something about a drab jail cell that makes one's imagination go wild. Before me I could see seas of grass blow in the warm summer winds, whipping freely my long hippie hair. A rain-swept mountain, with me sheltered cozily away, my log cabin perched on her alpine slopes. Somewhere the waves of a warm sea lapped gently on nighttime beaches, waiting for me, to soothe me to sleep. Somewhere were "my" people, a people dedicated to a higher purpose than accumulation of wealth and security, a people who lived one for one another. The morning sun was simple and filled with a clean sort of hope for those people. There I was, with a good looking chick at my side, hitchhiking down the long highways, with the thrill of the unexpected awaiting us around the next bend in the road. Life was a mystery of excitement just waiting to be unraveled.

God? Who knows, and who cares? I had too much living to do to worry about that. If he was real, he could notify me of his existence, I thought. The Catholic God seemed to be no more real than the gaudy stained glass images that decorated the stuffy church.

The day my folks picked me up from the jail one of those forceful Nebraska thunderstorms forced us to pull off of the highway beneath a bridge. Dad sat staring at the driving rain, knowing a harder rain of broken heartedness would soon be falling. Amidst deafening peals of thunder my mother tried in vain to turn me aside from the wildness she saw burning in my eyes.

"You're going to shave and work for your dad's business this summer," she half asked, half insisted.

"Nope."

"What are you going to do?" she challenged.

"I'm leaving."

"Where are you going?"

“I dunno, Colorado, I guess.”

She queried me and demanded of me some reason, some respect. But my sail was already aloft. In bitter silence we parted, she to her worry, me to my dreams of the road.

The same day I was gone. I could hear them argue as I threw a few clothes in an old suitcase. That old suitcase, like so many pieces of home, would soon be scattered and lost along some blowing highway. Gustly days lied ahead, for as the proverb says, “he that troubles his own house will inherit the wind.” (Proverbs 11:29)

Six – Dream Canyon

In Dream Canyon the children of affluence sought after meaning, yet some were just looking for a good time. Boulder, CO was a hotbed of drug traffic, Eastern religions, hippie communes, and anti-government sentiments. Dream Canyon, several miles northwest of Boulder, gathered the wildest of them along the banks of her rushing crystal river. Hastily made dwellings had sprung up all over the canyon. The crashing sound of the waters ever echoed off of the stone walls. Pines clambered for position in the crags. You felt you could touch the clouds once you had climbed up to the peaks towering above. After a day in Dream Canyon, your hands smelled of pine sap, your eyes felt soothed by the beauty of the sun and blue sky and deep green forest.

Each night people would gather around the campfires. Music would be played as wine flowed through the crowd with the pinewood smoke, marijuana cigarettes and talk of a New World Order. The gatherings had a medieval appearance, with the flames illuminating the shaggy bearded men and the women with their braided hair and colored bandanas.

Here the mores of the new society were promoted. Some urged revolution. The “establishment” had gone too far, they reasoned. Materialism had become their God, and we were considered no more than human machines to be operated for their profit. The military-industrial complex was compared to “Molech,” the ancient idol whose hollow belly was a furnace. Molech promised prosperity to those who would offer their children as a sacrifice at his fiery altar. The leaders of our society offered us as sacrifices to the modern day gods of money and power. Vietnam was the perfect example. It was a war for economic purposes only, for which we were sent to die.

The environment was ruined at the hands of big business. “Nitler,” as President Nixon was called, was their cowardly pawn. He wanted control of our lives, and would go to any length to gain it. Months earlier police had fired upon and killed several students at Kent State University who were rioting in protest to government policies. This was seen almost as a declaration of war against the hippie subculture and demonstrated the hostile differences between the two generations of Americans.

Such talk enflamed my already bitter view towards authority. In my world view the police and government were an evil empire motivated by greed, while the flower children were the harbingers of peace and righteousness. Many people of the older generation held the view that since many material blessings had been laden upon our generation, we should be grateful. And we should have been. But many of us felt that we were expected to blindly accept their values merely because they had produced economic success. This was viewed as nothing short of bribery. We had a certain amount of contempt for those of our generation who had “sold out to the establishment.” These we viewed as people without the backbone to think for themselves and develop their own values because they were too enamored with the financial trappings of the older generation. Therefore, the more radically one dressed and behaved, the more independent and courageous one was. We looked like dirty hippies

because we refused to be bought. We would shun the shallowness and unspiritual mindset of those who thought they could buy our minds with their money. The inequalities of the capitalistic machine would be overcome by the new generation.

“My people,” the hippies, were considered freaks by the normal (or “straight”) people. We privately adopted the name “freaks” for ourselves. Our freakishness was evidence of our superior world view, and our more highly evolved consciousness. We imagined ourselves to be the secretly enlightened ones who would usher in a new age of peace and love. Sometimes called the Age of Aquarius, this new age would be one of universal equality, harmony, and fairness. We believed that the present system would soon fall either through revolution or ecological disaster, making way for the new system. The source of our enlightenment was not merely a different political view. It was spiritual. It was the awakening of the God that slept within us.

So numerous were the inhabitants of Dream Canyon, and so volatile was their temperament, that the area police wisely avoided confrontation with us. Left to ourselves, we developed into a tiny nation within a nation, a subcultural puzzle where no law was the law. Drugs were laid out in full view for sale or trade. Camps popped up everywhere. Trees were cut down for hastily made log huts. Shallow holes were dug for latrines, placed without forethought (many, however, experienced unexpected afterthoughts about these as they discovered their improper location once stumbling back to their tents at night). Many people considered it unimportant to wear any clothes. These were sunny days that we thought would never end.

Seven - New Family

Except for Bob, all of my friends who first came to Colorado with me had returned. Bob had grown up in a household where a preoccupied father and a frenzied mother left him pretty much to himself. I always had loved to be with Bob, because he could stay out as late as he wanted. There were times while in school that I would go to bed, only to sneak back out of the house in the middle of the night to meet Bob along some set of railway tracks or back street. One steamy summer night I tiptoed through the house in my underwear to the French doors. Just outside I had hidden clothes under a bush. We stole whiskey. We stole a car and cruised much of the night. Back at home, I undressed by the bush, and crept back up to the French doors. I was shocked to realize that the doors had been locked! Maybe the front door was open. I circled the house, still in my underwear. As my hand reached out to try to front door, my mother’s horror-stricken face suddenly appeared behind the screen door. She had pink curlers in her hair. Her sleepless eyes stared out of sunken pockets.

“What are you doing out there?” she tensely whispered.

“I..I..I... nothing.”

“Where were you?” she asked piercingly, glancing down at my underwear.

“I..I..I... I don’t feel good,” I sheepishly replied.

Feigning insanity was the coward’s way out, and I later regretted this cruel hoax. But my mother’s fears would soon be reality. Bob and I became best of friends, for his undisciplined schedule and my lust for independence were a perfect match.

Now in Dream Canyon we felt truly free, partners in a crusade against conformity. We teamed up with seven other hippies to form a “family,” whose aim was to purchase and found a wilderness community. The euphoric vision of Dream Canyon would be transplanted to a permanent location somewhere in the Rocky Mountains. We envisioned a self-sufficient communal estate that embodied

the philosophy and spirit of the new age. Growing our own “health” food, gathering herbs for medicine, being in harmony with nature and one another, we would live together in a community that could survive the impending collapse of our government and our ecology. We would then be positioned to fulfill our destiny as New Age leaders. Out of confusion, reason would emerge. Wars would end unto the end of the earth, and we would live happily ever after.

We sealed our alliance by participating in an ancient Mojave Indian ritual, eating the buttons of the peyote cactus. Peyote buttons contain mescaline, a powerful hallucinogen similar to LSD. Many people who take mescaline report experiences of seeing beings from the spirit world, the same ancient spirits seen and worshipped by the “holy” Hindu Indian mystics of old. We hoped that we would be considered worthy to be visited by these higher beings. We sat solemnly in a circle, ritualistically passing cups of peyote tea. Clouds and mist moved in, so we all lumbered off to be in our own tents. I felt drowsy, and laid down.

All around me I began to sense the presence of the ancient spirits, dressed in animal skins with painted faces and dyed feathers, solemn black eyes, dark as death. I closed my eyes and saw them dancing to the rhythm of some long-forgotten chant. They came closer to me, with dangling bells jingling, red eyes staring out from behind striped masks. Their lips did not move, but the chant grew louder. I felt threatened by their ominous silence, and their unceasing chant. I believed they could read my mind, so I mentally implored their favor and asked them what I must do to appease them. No answer came, just a sense of uncertainty, as if I was being put on some sort of spiritual probation, and would soon need to prove my worthiness in order to be accepted. I didn’t want to risk angering them, but I was nearly overcome with the ghoulishness of the whole affair. I finally opened my eyes and slipped out of my tent to go be with the others. They felt the peyote was impotent, and had experienced nothing. But I still felt the spirits around me. Finally, they left.

The next day was sunny, and we met to strategize. Our plan was to build teepees as temporary dwellings, then to sell enough drugs to buy land and build the facilities for our wilderness community. Then we would get out of the drug business.

We had already cut teepee poles from lodge pole pines that grew in Dream Canyon. They were hidden in the woods, drying.

Eight – Drug Runs

The ’56 Chevy (now communal property) was sent out with “family” member across the Midwest to sell the cheap Colorado LSD after quadrupling the price. Denny, who was from New York, filled his aluminum backpack frame with LSD and set out to hitchhike east. He was our first ambassador, sent away with all the praise and fanfare of a head of state. He never returned to let us help him spend the money. A different member of the group was arrested en route, while Rico and Shelly left for El Paso, TX to try to buy some Mexican marijuana for resale in the booming Boulder drug market. After two months we had no money and a splintered group that numbered four. We packed the Chevy and headed to Omaha.

On a mad excursion under a full August moon we slid down weedy hills near the Missouri River to pick wild hemp, or marijuana. “Nebraska Pot” was considered worthless in the drug market, but if dried properly and squished into bricks, it could pass for good “Mexican Weed.” We climbed back up the steep hills with garbage bags of pot hung over our backs. We crammed them into the back of the car, and I started the engine. Suddenly, around the curve in the dirt road, I saw the most dreaded sight

a drug trafficker can see: a police car! I floored the gas pedal in panic, leaving clouds of dust behind us that shone pale in the moonlight. I had already been jailed for possession of marijuana once in Nebraska, and the second offense would be considered a felony. I sped down the roads and soon came to an area of old homes. I went winding in and out of the alleys and then emerged onto a main street. I looked over my shoulder all the way to Kansas where we dried to weeds in an abandoned barn. From that time on paranoia would never leave me alone. I was always afraid, no matter where I was. I decided that I would never deal drugs again, but the fear persisted.

On our way back to Colorado, we stopped at a laundromat. There a woman came up to me as if she recognized me.

“Do I know you?” she asked.

I thought she was a cop (a “pig” as we called them).

She looked deep into my eyes, and before I could answer said “Do you know Jesus?”

I stared in bewilderment. At least she’s not a cop, just a weirdo, I thought. Still paranoid, I gave no answer.

Looking at me more intensely she said “You don’t know him, but you will.”

I thought she was really weird after that, and avoided her eyes as I walked away.

After squeezing the marijuana bricks into a suitcase, we put Bob on a plane for Gainesville, FL. Fortunately for us, the students at Florida State thought our pot was good, and Bob returned a week later with \$1000. After this, I was left at camp during the last few drug selling runs that were made. I was too paranoid.

As the summer began to close, so did the euphoria of Dream Canyon. Squabbles broke out between groups. Some thefts occurred, and people argued about where the latrines had been placed. The wine was gone, only empty bottles remained, and nobody wanted to pick up the trash. Certain demented “acid-heads” began to imagine themselves to be community leaders, (one calling himself King Boba) barking out illogical commands to their unwilling subjects.

During one of the largest campfire gatherings to take place that year, the word went around that “Crazy Horse,” a great guitar player and mystic, would be present. He played his guitar and sang with a spooky, howling kind of voice that, if not pleasant, was certainly mesmerizing. He sat near the huge fire cross-legged, with dried spray-paint under his nose. (He inhaled it to get high). His long blond hair shook as he hollered under the full moon. His singing then abruptly stopped, and he sat motionless. A hush of expectation came over the crowd, and goosebumps ran up my spine. He then began to speak in a voice totally unlike his own. He began to talk about reincarnation, even telling several onlookers facts about their supposed past lives. After some time, his trance broke, and he went back to howling.

Could this have been messages from that invisible world that so many rock bands sing about? I wondered. I knew that there was more to reality than visible matter. He seemed to speak with authority, and he also seemed disinterested in any attention or reward for himself. Later to be known as “channeling,” this phenomena would become the center of much interest years later, many believing it to be supernatural communication to high spirit beings.

With the first wisps of cool autumn air came a measure of anxiety. It was the realization that ideology does not in itself bring change. It was the realization that we were living in an imaginary society, one that had in no way overcome the difficulties of cohabitating people, but that had merely imagined the problems were solved while we sat in a drug-induced stupor. It was the realization that it was going to get cold. The summer was gone. Half crazed hippies burned out by drugs attempted to assert themselves as leaders of the doomed society whispering gossip about their half-crazed

opponents. None of them had any followers by the time October came. The Sheriff had begun to move in now that the crowds were thinning. We had to find a safer place to set up our teepees before winter.

A long two weeks of sewing heavy canvas into teepees followed. Marijuana causes a loss in concentration, and it was very difficult to sew for hours at a time. Finally we had two teepees, one for Tahn and Marie and one for Bob and me. But Bob wanted to go to El Paso to revive our partnership with Rico and Shelly. They were about to attempt a crossing into Mexico to buy some Mexican marijuana. My constant paranoia seemed to attract police, and the county Sheriff knew my face. He had told me to leave, threatening me with arrest. It seemed like a good time to get out of Boulder for a while.

Nine – El Paso

Hitchhiking had become a way of life for many people during the late sixties and early seventies. Hundreds of young people took to the highways as a form of adventure, and as a form of religion. Like a roll of the dice, a hitchhiker plays a game of chance. Not so much the chance of getting clubbed over the head or shot, but more the chance of meeting someone unusual who might add to your enlightenment. In traveling many thousands of miles “by thumb” I was never once threatened with bodily harm or expected to do anything against my will. I did meet a lot of very nice, very generous people. But hitchhiking as a religion stems from the belief that nothing is pure chance. Those who ascribe to Hindu, or New Age belief generally believe that opportunities will inevitably arise to meet people who will help you reach your spiritual destination, people who are a step or two ahead of you on the spiritual evolutionary scale. And at least once in your life, if you’ve come far enough along in your spiritual quest for “godhood,” you will meet your “guru,” someone well on the way to perfection who has been assigned the task of instructing you in advanced levels of spirituality. So hitchhiking for many was like a game of roulette, where each ride that you were granted was viewed as a stepping stone, an opportunity to grow. For me, however, hitchhiking began merely as a mode of transportation. When you’re broke and need to get somewhere, you stick out your thumb.

The highway from Boulder to El Paso is strewn with broken pieces of glass and pop-tops from the thousands of beer cans that have been opened along the way. They glitter like sparkling snow, but with only a third the brilliance because of the fummy slime that settles down over them after the cars whoosh by. That “whoosh” is a familiar sound to the hitchhiker. It means another rejection. Another foreboding glance that says: “No way, you pervert, you think I’m dumb enough to pick you up and get stabbed in the ribs and ripped off?” It means another not-so-good Samaritan who suddenly needs to look down at the floorboard with an uncomfortable sense of guilt as he passes, avoiding eye contact with the needy hitchhiker. It means another businessman who is glad he wore his sunglasses so he can more easily pretend he didn’t see you, or another family driving by so slowly, looking at you as if you were a bear in a drive-in zoo. But none of this matters to the seasoned hitchhiker. He can wait. A ride will come. If he were in a hurry, he would not have been hitchhiking in the first place. And many rides came over the months of road life. People would share their food, share their money, share their lives. No one ever whipped out a gun or a knife or tried to steal anything from me. Most were just searching too.

According to Hinduism and the New Age Movement, a person must live through numerous lifetimes in order to pay for the mistakes made in prior lives. By being reincarnated again and again, everyone eventually achieves a god-like state of being called Nirvana, or enlightenment, or self-

realization. Any misfortune that occurs to a person in a present lifetime is really only the result of past sins, according to this thinking. “Karma” is the name of the Hindu belief similar to the Biblical teaching “you reap what you sow.”

We arrived on another sunny El Paso day. El Paso lays claim to over 350 sunny days each year. We were welcomed to Rico and Shelly’s home near the outskirts of town, or at least Bob was. Rico and Shelly had left most of their possessions in Colorado with me when they went on a trip back to Texas. Absorbed by the chaos and communal property, their things were now scattered somewhere amidst the fragments of the Dream Canyon population. Still resentful at my sloppy stewardship, the pressure was on for me to “split.” Food was placed before me at their table, but no good will came with it. It was served with a complaint about departure. When I would walk into a room, everyone would suddenly stop conversing and glare at me. Only Bob stuck with me, but now not so willingly as before.

We hitched back up to Netherland, CO where we made a desperate attempt to set up our teepee. The cold wind was blowing through the rocky slopes and flurries of snow stuck to our eyelids as we tried to hammer stakes into the frozen ground. It grew dark, the wind howled and the temperature dropped. The plastic ground cloth became brittle with cold and crackled every time we moved. The area that we had selected for our site had seemed level, but we woke up piled against the side walls after tossing and turning all night. We were down to less than twenty dollars and a bag of oatmeal. After a week, we knew we weren’t going to make it. We shipped the teepee canvas to my parents in Omaha, and left our teepee poles scattered on the mountain.

Ten – Nocturnal Days

Back in Omaha, I borrowed one hundred dollars from my dad, which paid for one month’s rent in the most dilapidated area of town, and enough pinto beans to last for the same amount of time. Even though I wasn’t using or selling drugs, I was constantly paranoid and insecure. I decided that I would try a nocturnal schedule. I slept all day and walked aimlessly along dark railroad tracks most nights. I had purchased an army trench coat from a Goodwill store, and like an olive drab ghost could be seen drifting across the frigid tracks huddled against the cold. Communication with Bob had died down to near silence, as we both searched desperately for some kind of hope, some way to resurrect our smashed dreams.

I spent Christmas day at my parents’ house. Even though my dad had given me money for rent, I still felt strong resentment toward his generation, and him in particular. Frustration and anger do not always vent themselves reasonably for someone who feels confused. This Christmas was to be darker than all of the nights walking the tracks alone, for all of my inner conflict exploded out of my mouth. I sat and screamed obscenities at my dad for a half hour while my mother hurried the children into the basement recreation room so that they wouldn’t hear. While the lights twinkled happily on the Christmas tree surrounded with gifts, I spewed out cursing fit only for the demons of hell. We later ate and opened gifts in uncomfortable silence. I couldn’t wait to leave, and I wouldn’t wait to get out of Omaha again.

Eleven – On a Carousel

The blizzard of the year struck a few days later. Twenty inches of snow blanketed the dingy streets with white. Bob had rekindled an old friendship with a girl named Mary. As a protest to her

parents, she had decided to run away with Bob only a few months before her high school graduation. She had money and she had a friend named Gina who also wanted to escape her parents and her school. The four of us set off on a Greyhound bus in the middle of the night, headed for New Orleans. We had no plans and no reason to go to New Orleans. We just wanted out of Omaha and out of our four confused worlds. The bus cruised sleepily through the night until we reached St. Joseph, MO. There we were awoken as three State Troopers boarded the bus. Gina was 15 years old, and her parents were out to have her back. We all were taken off of the bus into a tiny bus station. As Gina was taken into police custody, our bus roared off into the night with our bags, our money, and our tickets. Gina was gone, and there we were alone with a young bus depot employee in an otherwise deserted station. He stood shaking in fear before three angry hippies. He issued us three tickets to Kansas City, where later that morning the district manager told us to get lost. He was unwilling to help us get to our destination, but said he would have our luggage sent to El Paso if we wanted.

We were left to face the deep snow and cold, nothing but the clothes on our back. With a resourcefulness born of desperation, we made new plans. Bob and Mary would hitchhike to El Paso to Rico and Shelly's, while I would return to Omaha to "rescue" Gina from her parents. Half dazed from a sleepless night, I headed back to Omaha. Late that night I finally arrived, sleeping on the floor of Tink's apartment. Tink attempted to predict my fortune with an ancient form of divination, the I Ching. Again and again she cast three coins down on the floor in front of her. Either she couldn't figure out what it meant, or she was afraid to tell me. Finally, a note of panic in her voice, she asked:

"Will, what are you DOING?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You're screwing up your life. You don't know what you're doing or where you're going."

"I came to get Gina."

"Bob and Mary sent you up here just to get rid of you."

That was enough. Bob and I had been through thick and thin. We shared the dream of our utopian society. He stuck with me even when Rico and Shelly rejected me. He was all I had left, and now for some reason she was trying to drive a wedge between us, I thought. I would hear no more.

When I called Gina, she didn't want to go anymore. I was relieved. Mary had asked me a favor before I left Kansas City. She wanted me to pick up a bag of her personal belongings in Omaha and bring them down to Texas. "There's a sleeping bag and some personal things in my bag," she warned. "Whatever you do, DON'T LOOK into the bag. Don't worry, there's nothing you can get arrested for, but just don't look, OK?" Stupidly, I agreed.

The next morning I stood near the snow covered highway in South Omaha, carrying Mary's white cloth bag, with my thumb out. Gusts of wind scattered the powdery snow and blurred my view. A young fearless teenager stopped to pick up the hippie.

With a knowing nod of his head he said in a hip tone of voice, "How far ya headed, man?"

"El Paso."

"What part of Nebraska is that in?"

"It's in Texas."

His jaw just dropped.

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In Oklahoma it grew dark. The temperature dropped to near zero. I could see yellowish lights go on in the distant, uninviting farmhouses as I walked on the desolate highway. Hardly a car passed. None stopped. My sleeping bag was real cheap. My body was shivering. I had no place to go. With no

one to talk to or even know my predicament, I felt more alone than I had ever felt before. Maybe Tink was right. Maybe Bob was trying to ditch me. No matter. I'll probably be frozen to death before another day dawns.

I wondered if God saw, or if there even was a God. If there was, would he let me die? I said a cautious prayer. Cautious, because I felt so foolish talking to somebody who probably wasn't even there. As the last light filtered out of the clear cold sky, a car pulled over.

Twelve – Munday Munday

A serviceman in green uniform and a skinhead haircut opened the car door and invited me in. Here I would experience one of the many acts of generosity shown to me throughout thousands of hitchhiked miles. He put me up in a nice hotel, bought me dinner, and gave me a ride almost to the Texas border. I was so overwhelmed by this stranger's kindness that when he offered to buy me breakfast, I felt too guilty to order any more than a donut. Seeing that I was poorly nourished, he said nothing, but he gave me handfuls of vitamin and food supplement pills. As he drove away, my pockets rattled with pills of every shape, color and size.

Then I hit the Texas border. Not too many people stopped to pick up hitchhikers here. Many times I had heard of the difficulties "long-hairs" had encountered with the redneck southern cops. I once met two hippes who were shaved bald. They told the story about how they were arrested for hitchhiking in the south, shaved, and kept in jail for weeks for no reason. Others told me how their long-haired friends had been sentenced to years in Texas prisons on barely a shred of evidence that they were drug dealers.

It took me all day to hitch to Munday County, and I actually walked most of the way. (I always walked while hitchhiking). I felt like cop bait out there in the grey dusk, with my long army trench coat, bushy beard, long hair stuffed into a stocking cap, and a mysterious white cloth bag flung over my shoulder. Suddenly two sheriff cars came speeding down the highway and abruptly pulled over, one on either side of me. Four patrolmen lumbered out of their cushioned seats. The sheriff, with his bloated belly lapping over his black belt, said:

"Let me see some I.D., boy."

I reached into my back pocket to retrieve my wallet. I had just opened it to fish out some I.D. when he snatched it out of my hand. He and the others crowded around while the sheriff started to take every note and card out of my wallet, riddling me with impossible questions about every name or address he dug up.

"Who's Tink?"

"A friend."

"Whose name is this written on this scrap of paper here?"

"Just a friend."

"You buy your dope from these friends?"

"No. Have I done anything against the law, officer?" I protested.

"I AM THE LAW, boy, and I'll do as I damn well please. Get into the car."

I nervously took a pill out of my pocket and slipped it into my mouth. When they saw this, they went wild! Two cops each grabbed one of my arms from behind. One grabbed my hair from behind, and the other grabbed my beard and began to pull.

"Spit it out! Spit it out!" the sheriff screamed.

I swallow hard.

Their hands were all over me searching every pocket, every seam. They were rewarded with handfuls of brightly colored pills. Astonished, one of them pinched a Carter's desiccated liver pill between his fingers and held it up an inch from my face.

"Yew smoke these, boy?" he taunted. "What is this stuff?"

"A desiccated liver pill." I replied smugly.

"Don't get smart with me, boy. Whatcha got in that white bag?"

"I don't know," I answered truthfully.

"You don't know?" he asked incredulously. "Get in the car. Yer goin ta jail."

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At the jail they took me into an office area with tile floors and a few cluttered old desks scattered around.

"What's in that bag?" They asked again. Again I replied that I didn't know. They looked at one another wondering who would take the chance to open it.

Finally they all leaned forward as one of them poured the contents into the middle of the room. There, to the amazement of all five of us, was a sleeping bag, a sealed envelope, and a large pile of tampons. They proceeded to unravel every one of them to search them for drugs. Finding nothing, they unraveled all of my cigarettes. They closed the venetian blinds, and told me to take off my clothes for a strip search. They were apparently not sure if I was a man.

I had been in the same pair of socks for nearly a week, and had been sleeping in my boots to keep my feet warm most nights. When I took off my boots, a mighty strong odor engulfed the room.

"Whew! Soooooee!" they started hollering as they waved their cowboy hats out in front of them like fans. Three cops spread out to the perimeter walls of the office laughing and making hog calls. "Don't you hippies ever take a bath?" One cackled as the others roared.

They opened the windows and doors. Then they turned more serious and returned to business. Having found no contraband on my person, and being satisfied that I was indeed male, they walked me to a small cell.

The smell of mildew hit me as I walked in. Attached to a crumbling block wall was a combination toilet/drinking fountain. Water dribbled out of the top, and fell into the bowl below with a hollow echo. Two bunks hugged the walls, and between them, the only source of a dirty wash of light, was a glass block.

A half hour later a deputy came and said in a weasel like voice:

"Say, boy, we've found those drugs you had hidden in your bag. We're sending them to the 'lab' for positive identification. The results will be back by morning, at which time you will appear before the judge."

Dumbstruck with horror, I said nothing.

"We'll be bringin' you a little dinner in a bit," he said and winked sarcastically.

The dinner never came.

I paced the floor sick with worry. I knew that if they wanted me to go to jail they would have me there. I yearned for a cigarette to calm my nerves, but they wouldn't let me have them in my cell. I began to crawl on the floor in hopes of finding a cigarette someone else had dropped. As I felt along the floor under a bunk, my hand hit a small piece of paper. I held it up in front of the glass block that was now dim with the grey sunset. There on the cover of a small booklet was a picture of Jesus, with his arms outstretched towards me. Under him were the scripture's words.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11: 28-30)

That was the first time I can remember a Bible verse having any real meaning for me. In my hopelessness and fear I caught a glimmer of hope. Just maybe there is someone who cares. Maybe there is a God, I thought. All that night I prayed to Jesus, begging him to do something.

Morning came before sleep. Steel keys rattled against the cell bars.

“Time to see the judge!” a deputy shouted.

I trembled as we approached the courtroom. The deputy had me sit on a wooden bench in front of the vacant judge’s stand. A door opened.

“Stand up before the judge, boy,” the deputy ordered.

I walked a tall middle aged woman with horn-rimmed glasses that came to a sharp point at the upper corners, her gray-tinged hair towered high above her sour face in the shape of a beehive.

“Yew may be seated!” she snapped.

She shuffled through papers in front of her, not looking up. (As if they didn’t make me sweat it out enough, already!) After a long pause which I could hear nothing but my own heart beating, she looked up sternly. Pointing her long painted finger right at my nose, she barked:

“Son, ma advice to yew is: the next town yew come to yew get yerself a haircut and a shower, find a job, and if yew ever so much as set foot in Munday County again you’ll wish damn well you hadn’t. Now I’m gonna fine yew one dollah fo hitchhiking.” With that she slammed her wooden gavel down dramatically on the lectern and in a near shout said: “Court’s dismissed!”

Half dazed, I staggered to the door as quickly as I could, afraid that someone might change their mind. Back out on the sunny highway, I looked up and whispered: “Thank you, Jesus.”

Thirteen – To Mexico

Not much had changed in El Paso in the three months since we had left. Most of my brief stay at Rico and Shelly’s was taken up staying away from them as much as I could. We made plans to go spend the rest of the winter in Big Bend National Park on the Texas/Mexico border. Bob and Mary traveled together, I travelled alone.

People have often been known to mention how dull and boring it is driving across the Chihuahua Desert. If it is dull to drive across this Texas sagebrush land, then it is maddening to hitchhike. Near Van Horn I spent three days in the same spot on the highway, close enough to a gas station to get fresh water. Every vehicle seemed as if it were a pickup with guns in a window rack. Hours of still dry air would be punctuated by the strong smell of exhaust as vehicles whooshed by at speeds often in the excess of 100 miles per hour. After a week, I finally arrived at Big Bend Park. Bob and Mary had been there several days.

Big Bend is the nation’s least visited, most secluded National Park. We camped near Santa Elena Canyon, where barren cliffs rise up above the lush flood plain of the Rio Grande River. We were many miles from any U.S. store, but only a few miles away from the Mexican Village of Santa Elena. While hiking near the river, we met a young Mexican man named Cisto riding his desert pony. Cisto invited us to his hacienda, so we waded across the river where his father and mother and five brothers and sisters

all shared an adobe home. They did not speak a word of English, and we were equally helpless in Spanish. Nevertheless, their hospitality knew no language barrier. We were treated to flavorful Mexican coffee sweetened with rich, raw sugar.

Motioning that we needed supplies, Cisto and his father saddled up their four burros. Dipping and weaving down a winding desert trail, we came to Santa Elena. The general store was small and shaded. A single set of wooden shelves held the full range of groceries available: sugar, coffee, flour, cornmeal, beans, cigarettes. Behind the counter stood a large motherly looking Mexican lady with a hint of grey in her hair. Pointing to the supplies we wished to buy, we waited for her to serve us. Instead, she started up a volley of Mexican swear words that needed no interpretation. Scowling and shouting, she was telling us to get lost. It was a long, long hitchhike back to the U.S. store, one that would likely take us two days to complete. We sat down under a desert Yucca Tree in the middle of the dirt main street. Cisto was nowhere to be found.

From behind us we heard the voice of an American.

“Do you folks need some help?”

A thin middle aged man walked toward us surrounded with small Mexican children who giggled and ran around like a pack of puppies. He was a Christian missionary worker from a church in Texas.

“We need some supplies, but they won’t sell them to us,” Bob explained.

“I’ll take care of it,” he replied.

We walked right back into the store, where the lady who had just insulted us happily ran from shelf to shelf assembling our batch of supplies at our friend’s request.

Walking out with arms full of needed supplies, we said “thanks, mister.”

“Say, have you ever heard how Jesus Christ died for our sins?” he asked matter-of-factly. “It says in the Bible ‘For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever should believe on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.’”

“I believe each one of us is God,” Bob replied a little indignantly. “And it doesn’t matter what religion you are. Whether you believe in Buddha, Mohammed, or Christ, it’s all the same. All roads lead to the same destination.”

“Well, I’ll agree that religion is not all that important,” the missionary went on, “but as it says in the book of Romans: ‘There is only one name under heaven by which we are saved, the name Jesus Christ.’”

As they stood talking in disagreement, I realized that Bob had been thinking about this, or at least had heard someone talk about it. But I had no idea what to believe about God. I knew Jesus had seemed to help me get out of jail, but maybe I would have gotten out anyway.

After we took our mules back to Cisto’s, we waded back across the Rio Grande to camp.

It was a few mornings later that I awoke to a surprise. As I opened my eyes, Bob and Mary stood over me with their backpacks loaded. Bob had a wad of clothes in his hand. He let the clothes fall to the ground near me as he said:

“We’re leaving. You can have these clothes if you want them.”

Mary said nothing. Without another word they were gone, and I was alone.

Fourteen – Of Death and Hell

For two lonely days I sat by the river thinking, wondering what went wrong, what to do, where to go. I packed out without answers to any of these questions. But now more important questions

began to fill my mind. Why am I here? Is there really a God? It was time for me to ask another important question too.

Nostalgically remembering and yearning for the time when I had climbed Colorado Mountains with my Dream Canyon "family," I decided to climb up a Chisos Mountain peak. Maybe a panoramic view would restore my vision, I thought. I hiked up the rugged trail past Boquilla Falls, and kept climbing until the trail disappeared. As the slope steepened, sheets of loose rubble would sometimes begin to flow like marbles where I stepped. But I carefully picked my way up to the top of the precipice. There I sat, lost in thoughts as aimless as the desert winds that swirled around those barren peaks.

Finally, I decided to head down. But as I began to descend, I quickly learned that going downhill in the rubble was not as easy as going up. After only a few steps, the rubble began to slide under me gaining momentum as I clambered to climb back up. Faster and faster I slid in panic. I could now see over the edge of sheer drop of several hundred feet, and I was still sliding. My only hope was to freeze. Only two feet from the edge I stopped. Every few seconds another piece of rock would topple over the edge. The drop was too far to hear them crash against the canyon floor. I laid there motionless for a long time, until fear turned to contemplation.

That was the first time in my life I thought seriously about death. In those frozen moments I realized that I really might die. I wondered what it would feel like. I had been knocked out before. It would probably feel no different to fall and hit the rocks below. But what then? Was there life after death? Heaven? Hell? And what of my life? Was that all there was to it? Such are the questions that sprung to life as I looked at death on that Chisos Mountain ledge. I thought about making a "deal with God; something like "if you save me from this I'll get a haircut and a job and even go to church," but then I wasn't even sure that there was any such thing as God. Noticing a solid rib of rock that ran across the slope, I crawled an inch at a time until I reached it. I somehow managed to get down, but the questions remained.

Wandering in those wastes felt pointless. I had enough of the lonely desert and was ready to head back to Colorado. Hitching through Taos I was picked up by a lovely girl who was also very kind. She pulled into a Mexican restaurant and offered to buy me a meal. I feasted on real tacos made with chunks of moist chicken, flaky sopapillas with honey and flavorful green chili. I thought she was personally interested in me, as I was rapidly becoming interested in her. But the reason for her kindness was deeper than that. After I had eaten, she gently began to speak about God. She asked me if I "knew the Lord."

"Do you know Jesus loves you?" she asked.

But at the moment I was only interested in her affection. Feeling a little rejected, I became defensive and told her "I believe each one of us is God. And it doesn't matter what religion you are. Whether you believe in Buddha, Mohammed, or Christ, it's all the same. All roads lead to the same destination."

She could tell by my attitude it was no use. She directed me to a local field near a cemetery where she said I could safely sleep that night.

That night I shivered with cold. My cheap sleeping bag was no match for the January nights in those mountains. As I dozed into a restless half-sleep, I experienced a horrifying vision. I was sinking down into a lake of fire. Flames and searing pain were all around me. The pain of fear and loneliness and hopelessness overwhelmed me. No one could help me. I was lost. Forever. Through the flames I could dimly see the weeping faces of my mother and others who loved me. The flames bathed their

faced in an eerie glow. My mother's piercing, tormented eyes met mine as I sank down into deeper fire. I screamed out half awake and half asleep "Jesus, save me!"

I was now wide awake. I felt warm and comfortable, in perfect peace. I had never experienced such a peace before. I knew it was supernatural. I knew it was from Jesus. I fell back asleep and enjoyed the best night's sleep I had had in weeks.

When morning came, the feeling of peace was still with me. But as the day wore on, my peace eroded. I don't think I yet had the capacity to contain this wonderful spirit. I certainly didn't have the knowledge to keep it. Still God seemed more myth than reality. Maybe my "vision" was just due to the Mexican food I ate before I went to sleep, I thought.

I arrived back in Boulder on a day after a heavy snowfall. The temperature was below zero. I slept in a bathtub at the University of Colorado, the only warm place I could find. When the cold spell ended I went up to Summerville, where my old friends Tahn and Marie had set up their teepee months earlier. I arrived to see Marie packing. Tahn had an open warrant for his arrest in Missouri and had been found out. He was being sent back to face charges of selling marijuana. Marie was glad to see me, and asked if I would stay and take care of their teepee. I said yes.

Fifteen – One Snowy Evening

Not too many things I have known compare to the beauty of living in a teepee in the winter at 8,000 feet. The only sound is often the gusty wind swooshing through the pines. You can hear clumps of snow fall from trees and hit the powdery ground right through the canvas teepee walls. When a thaw comes, you can lay on your bed and be surrounded with a symphony of water droplets softly tapping on the forest floor.

By day the snow is a sparkling display of glory. By night, the teepee glows like a Japanese lantern. An open fire within radiates color and warmth. Flakes of snow fall through the open top, turn to rain drops and evaporate before they hit the teepee floor. Look up and see the stars frozen onto the dome of the night. Cherish the firewood as it burns, for it took much of the day to haul and cut it.

It was on one of those silent, winter nights that I first heard God's voice. It is said he speaks in a still, small voice; and so it was. Twelve inches of fresh snow had just fallen throughout the windless day. I could hear the flakes land. It stuck to the walls of the teepee, making it look two feet fatter and soft as a marshmallow. The sky had cleared, and a full moon reflected off of the world of white so that all appeared to glow with pure blue light. I wandered out to see and to fetch firewood. I stood motionless near the woodpile, just absorbing the silence, inhaling the night. I knew then that He was. He was, and no one would ever again persuade me otherwise. I didn't know who God was, but I knew that He was.

Sixteen – Delirious

The months with poor nutrition and cold restless nights on the road had weakened me. I had little money and no prospects for obtaining any more. One day when a grey, wet fog covered everything, I found myself shaking with convulsive chills. It was as if something had sucked out all of my energy. I was as limp as wet grass. Every muscle felt sore, and I couldn't seem to think straight. I stumbled into the teepee and built a fire. Spasmodic shivers knotted my stomach, and I hoped the fire would restore my strength. I warmed up a little and as the fire dwindled, I crawled under my quilts where I was to be imprisoned for three days and four nights.

The sound of rain and hail passed in and out of my consciousness. As the cold grey weather continued, I lost track of morning and afternoon. Everything was a dizzy blur. I began to talk to myself and hallucinate. Bizarre dreams tormented me. There was no one there to hear about my psycho dreams or to tell me everything was going to be alright, but I talked to them anyway. I would be sweating one hour and freezing the next. It never occurred to me to seek help from man or God.

The third day I was weaker and more confused than ever. Then an amazing thing happened. At the door of my teepee was a young black haired woman I had never seen before. Dressed in a long dress and a heavy cape embroidered with flowers, she peeked in at me and asked if I was alright. I slowly sat up and told her I had been sick.

Listening to me describe how I had been feeling she said: "Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever... Mean shit. You get it from ticks. A lot of people around here been getting it, but not as bad as you."

I sat speechless.

"How long have you been like this?"

"I don't know."

She rummaged around the place a little and said, "Don't you have any food?"

"Just what's there."

"There's nothing but a bag of wheat berries. No milk or fruit or vegetables. You got any money?"

I pointed to a coffee can. She dug out my last thirty five dollars.

"You mean you've got all this money and you're sitting here starving to death? No wonder you're sick! I'll be back."

Some time later (I don't know how long, I was delirious) she came back with a bag of food. She had hitchhiked to Boulder and back with it.

Once again I had been the recipient of undeserved kindness, and in a most uncanny way. Jan (that was her name) stayed with me in the teepee for three days, cooking me food and nursing me back to health. I became better and she was gone. I never saw her again.

Seventeen – Summerville Summer

With spring in the Rockies came an influx of travelers. The Boulder area attracted young people from all over the country, laden with beads, long hair, beards, long dresses, painted Volkswagon vans, husky dogs, and books on Eastern Mysticism and radical health food diets. Oddly enough, since I had spent most of the winter in the area, I became the "local" to them. I became known as "Teepee Bill," the freak who smelled like pine smoke. My teepee, layered with the grimy soot of a long winter, stood out among the hastily made lean-tos and cheap tents that dotted the surrounding hills like a castle in a land of farm huts. While others slept in thin sleeping bags that became soaked in the heavy spring rains, I nestled securely beneath thick quilts and fur blankets that had been acquired over the cold months. I survived by selling artifacts that I carved out of deer antlers in a gift shop in Boulder. Once a week I would hitchhike to Boulder, collect the ten dollars or so from my "sales," get supplies, and hitchhike back. I had become a vegetarian, and lived on rice, whole wheat berries, beans, raisins, oatmeal and raw vegetables.

One day I was riding back from Boulder in the back of a pickup truck. The truck hit a huge rut in the road and I was thrown from the back out onto the gravel road. For the next couple of months I

walked around with a cast on my arm. Although I had been thinking about going on the road again, my broken arm kept me in Summerville. It gave me added stability.

By learning to gather wild herbs and obtaining a goat for daily fresh milk I was able to have enough food for continued existence in the mountains. Trips to town became more rare. The fragrant mountain air and responsibility-free living left me feeling like a modern day pioneer. I didn't care if I ever went back to "civilization."

My teepee was set up on an old deserted mining claim that had long since reverted back to forest. Deep mine shafts had been pecked into the rocks in numerous places. One shaft extended straight back deep into a mountain, and then in the blackness abruptly dropped straight down about sixty feet. The bottom of that shaft collected pure cold spring water, my water supply. Over another deep shaft I built my outhouse, which most visitors declined to use. On clear nights I could see the millions of lights of Denver far off in the distance. They twinkled like the hot embers of a retiring fire.

The days often consisted of long walks or going to visit the many transients that were camped for the summer around the area. While in the winter I only had one person living within three miles, in the summer there were dozens who came and went with regularity. Short term relationships with girls were entered into easily. Finding almost anything else one wanted or needed was easy too. I could have stocked a Goodwill store with the things that people left behind.

Eighteen – My Family Comes to Visit

I sometimes felt a little like a tourist attraction, especially as the name "Teepee Bill" began to stick. Many of the people who camped around treated me like a novelty, someone who deserved special favors. After all, they would go back to their college dorms or their parents' house after the summer, but I was here to stay, part of the rugged mountain scenery. Maybe they thought I needed a handout after enduring a winter in a teepee, or maybe they just wanted a way to leave a part of themselves with this beautiful land. So they shared all they had with me, and I shared my wild herb tea and independent spirit with them.

During that long summer my parents drove from Omaha to see me. Relieved that I was no longer hitchhiking or involved with people who used drugs, they were also amazed that anyone could live any length of time in a teepee made of poles and canvas. Like living in a past generation, there were none of the modern conveniences that we are so used to. Life's primary goal was a matter of mere physical survival. The sun was my clock, and the moon my calendar. I was usually unaware of what hour of the day or day of the month it was. My parents, two little sisters and six year old brother all sat cross-legged around the teepee floor, staring up through the smoke flaps at the blue sky.

My mother, still a bit amazed that I had spent much of a winter in a home with a full-time hole in the top of it, finally asked:

"What are you going to do?"

"Just live," came my non-answer.

She sat in bewildered silence.

"What do you do all day?" my ten year old sister Sue asked.

"Oh, I cut wood, milk the goat, gather wild herbs, or just think."

She sat silently with a look on her face that said "is that all?" but was too polite to come out and say it. But her silence demanded a reply.

“You know,” I began, “there’s a lot you do just in your head when you live on a mountaintop.” I stalled, fishing through my shallow thoughts trying to explain what exactly it was that I did in my head during all of that time wandering around the hills. “Mostly I just get close to God.” I drew out the word “God” as I said it to make it sound more spiritual. She seemed impressed. “Did you know there’s a grave not far from here?” I asked as I got up. “It’s just a little ways down the mountain.”

After hiking a few minutes down the steep south slope we came upon an inconspicuous slab of rock that stuck up from the earth between fir trees. Only about a foot high, it had a bronze plate affixed to the front. On the plate was this poem:

Where all the world is hushed but God
Whose pulse beats on through bough and sod.
I find in nature’s solitude
Regeneration: All is good.
-Author unknown

Below was the name of a girl who died as a teenager, and for some mysterious reason was buried on that remote mountain. I had never even thought about the poem until then, but now I claimed it was my own, as a justification for hiding out in the wilderness with no goal or plan or real job. I hoped it would serve as my shield, hiding the painful truth that I didn’t really know why I was living the way I was. I didn’t know what I believed or even why I needed to believe anything. I just knew there was a God. Maybe he was some unknowable force “whose pulse beats on through bough and sod.” Maybe nobody really knew, but poets just made up poems about God describing his characteristics, like you describe the shapes of animals and things that you can see in the clouds with your imagination. “Wow” my sister said for lack of any other comment.

We trudged silently back up the mountain, and after exchanging gifts, (my dad presenting me with a snowmobile suit) they returned to their hotel room back in Boulder.

The rest of that summer, as Ashrams and spiritual-based communes continued to multiply throughout the Boulder area, I became increasingly interested in finding God. The gospel of the New Age began to be spread far and wide. Political revolution was out. Spiritual evolution was in. You are God and I am God. We are all God, as everything is God. God is nature. God is light. God is energy. According to the New Age doctrine, God was a cosmic it, an intelligent but impersonal force that drove all things and balanced all things according to natural and spiritual laws.

Instead of strings of beads and leather breeches, the hippies began to appear on the streets with Saffron robes, shaved heads and pouches of health food strapped to their cloth belts. The carnival atmosphere in the mountain faded with the autumn leaves, and as cold winds began to sweep down from the north, I was again finding myself a loner.

Nineteen – South for the Winter

Back in Omaha for a visit that fall, my parents helped me buy a red 1952 Ford pickup truck for two hundred dollars that I dubbed “Jane.” I rebuilt the engine in my dad’s garage. My dad and brothers helped build a small camper onto the back of it (I watched, they built.) That old Ford would never run right, but would become my home. I loaded up my teepee, goat, and tools, and headed south to Arkansas, where Bob was living on the farm of a friend. In Arkansas I set up my teepee in the woods

near the small town of Elkins. Having a truck added a complication to my life: I needed more money. The road to town to get supplies was a rocky winding country road that passed right through the White River at a wide ford. When the water rose above floorboard level, we didn't go to town, but had to stay on our side of the river. The jostling two hour trip blew lots of tires and ate lots of gas. Even at twenty three cents a gallon, my meager funds were soon depleted. I had hoped to restore my relationship with Bob, but it was going nowhere. There were no jobs in Elkins. I cut my long hair, sold my goat for fifteen dollars, and left Elkins for New Orleans.

By the time I reached Little Rock I was nearly broke. I got a job painting steel machinery in a steel mill. An old man named Elmer, who was a far-gone drunk, let me park my camper in his driveway in exchange for rides to work. I arrived in New Orleans two weeks later with five dollars and seventy-five cents left. Alone, paranoid, and intimidated by this strange city I warily gawked my way down Bourbon street my first night in town. I certainly couldn't have been mistaken for anything but a gullible tourist. There in the warm autumn night hawkers stood in the doorways of the strip joints ranting the same come-on-in chatter to each passerby.

"No cover charge! Come on in, sonny, and see the sight of yer life. No cover charge!" A man in a brown derby hollered at me.

This one's free, I thought. Just right for somebody as broke as I am. "Well," I thought crumbling to the temptation, "I came here to see the sights," and like a fool sent to the correction of the stocks I entered.

I sat down at the bar, my hand occasionally feeling to make sure my wallet was still there, and waited for the show. A sour faced waitress sauntered over and pointed to a sign on the wall behind me.

"Minimum order, one drink!" she said as she looked out the door.

The sign said as much.

"I'll have a small beer."

Since I hated beer I hoped they had a very small, very cheap beer.

She slapped a small watery looking glass of beer on the counter in my face and snapped:

"There's only one size. That'll be fo' seventy-five!"

"Whoa!" I cried, "I don't even have six bucks to my name."

I backed off the stool holding up flattened hands so as not to touch the glass.

"Hey I haven't touched it, and the show hasn't started. I'm sorry, but I just can't afford..."

I didn't finish my sentence when the waitress shouted out as if it were often rehearsed: "Hey Johnny! I gotta guy here won't pay for his bee-ah!"

The freedom of the exit was almost mine, when "Johnny," as wide as a jumbo garbage barrel, suddenly appeared in the doorway, blocking my escape.

"Won't pay for your beer, huh? He growled in a deep voice as he peered down at me.

Three hundred pounds of Cajun meanness rammed a finger between my eyes and snarled:

"Then you're going straight to jail!"

I returned obediently to my seat and coughed up the majority of my finances.

For three months I worked in New Orleans at a steam cleaning company. I lived in my camper in a vacant field across the street from where I worked. I was unable to make a single friend. It rained more often than not. I felt like I was going to lose my mind. I wanted to earn enough to fix my truck, which wouldn't start unless I rolled it down a hill or connected two 12 volt batteries to the starter. The two batteries repeatedly ruined other parts, and no one seemed able to fix it, no matter how much I spent on repairs.

Finally, I bought three batteries and headed for Omaha. Another Christmas passed. After spending a month working at a concrete block plant, I headed for Colorado again, jump-starting my truck all the way. I arrived in early spring, and set up my teepee once again on the deserted mining claim. The light snows melted soon after falling. New growth began to appear on the tips of the tall pine trees. A long lonely winter had passed.

Twenty – Meditation and Music

Over two years had passed since I first left Omaha. I enlarged my teepee and moved to a higher, more isolated mountain with a southwestern view. The living was easy.

Down below, Boulder became a national center for New Age activities. Many young people who had been using LSD and other drugs began to drift away from drug use. Many claimed to have found something better.

The popularity of hallucinogenic drugs among American youth in the 1960's was for many due to the fact that drugs were fun or exciting. But these drugs were not introduced by people who made lots of money selling them, neither were they promoted by people who merely wanted to feel good. The fact is, LSD often made a person feel miserable. But they were taken anyway, because for many, drugs appealed to a deep longing for spiritual meaning.

LSD (or acid, as it was usually called) was described with such words as "mind expanding" or "eye opening." Coming under the influence of LSD was called "taking a trip" because it was compared to a journey into a wonderful new world. It was a spiritual trip, in which a real, but normally invisible realm could be entered into. Objects could be seen emanating rays of energy. People often radiated with "auras" of different colored light. Truly, people who took LSD experienced many things that were beyond normal reality. Most LSD users imagined themselves to hold a superior level of knowledge, an inner "knowing" that could not easily be verbalized.

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Jack was a man of about twenty five, but his many LSD trips had given him the look of an ancient sage. His eyes were deep bowls of sorrowful, almost martyr-like knowing. The day he showed up at my teepee I offered him tea. He sat cross-legged on the floor and looked at me as if he could see straight through me. The very few years of age that he had on me seemed like ages. Sensing my inferiority he nodded as he said:

"Far out tea."

"It's wild strawberry leaf. I picked it over on Wood Mountain," I replied, trying to make conversation.

"Far out," he said flatly, as if he were about to get to the point of his visit. "Did you ever hear sunshine?"

I let him go on.

"There is a land not far from the sights of sound, a world where only the worthy are allowed," he said half quoting a popular rock song lyrics. "A land of light and knowing is within. Have you ever seen?"

"I think so," I said. We both knew I hadn't.

"God is within each of us. I know. I have seen him"

"What was it like?" I asked, now interested.

"It was like the purest, whitest light. The ancient mystics wrote about it in the ancient writings of Egypt. Buddha saw the same thing, and called it Nirvana. It's an experience." (Jimi Hendrix's song "Are You Experienced?" began going through my head.) "It's like all that there is becomes one. Every sound becomes one sound, the essence of all sound. Every sight becomes the white light and it's all one with all sound and all time and all thoughts and all that there is. It's like the Beatles wrote in that song: 'I am you and you are me and we are one and we are all together.'" (Now that song began going through my head.)

"You see," he said with a spacey guru-like gesture of his boney hand, "All the universe is not many things, but one. It is only illusion that there seems to be so many different things. All of the love and hate, good and evil, past and present and future is all really one. But only certain people ever glimpse that truth in experience. To most of us it seems as if every person is a separate being, and that many different forces are working against each other. But in reality everything flows together like the swirls of a river go every which way, but always continue flowing downstream. One energy is in us all, and is all. That energy has been called many things, like God, or if you're Hindu it's called Brahmin, or Chinese mystics call it Chi. It is the force that is in everything, and is everything."

"So how did you see the white light?" I asked.

"On an acid trip."

"Do you have to stay on acid to keep seeing the white light?"

"No, I've taken over 300 'trips,' but I don't do dope anymore. Seeing the white light on acid was an enlightening experience. It taught me what life was all about. But it's like stealing something you didn't rightfully earn."

"I drank Peyote tea once and had a very bad experience. I saw some mighty spooky creatures when I closed my eyes."

"That's because you were trying to approach the light without earning it."

"How do you earn it?" I asked.

"Mostly by meditating on the third eye. Did you ever see someone with a red dot painted in the middle of their forehead? Well that's to signify the third eye, one of the body's energy centers. When you meditate you concentrate on the third eye. When you master that, you become one with Brahmin, the universal energy force, and sometimes see the white light."

"I've never heard of any of this stuff before."

"That's because it is only revealed to those who are advanced in their karmic cycle."

"Karma, that means you reap what you sew."

"Right, the unchangeable law of Karma guarantees that everyone will be repaid in this life or a future life for every good and every bad thing they have done."

"I thought you said good and evil are one?" Now I was getting confused.

"They are one," he said in a knowing tone of voice, as if he were about to reveal a major hidden truth to me. "Evil's job is to purify us through the karmic cycle until we reach Nirvana. If you do evil, it causes you to suffer. By suffering as karmic payment for your evil deeds, you are eventually perfected and become one with God. So evil is a tool of good, and is one with the whole process."

"Oh, I see," wondering if my lie would have to be paid for in my karmic cycle. It was probably pretty serious to lie to a person so highly advanced as Jack, I thought. I wondered if he could read my mind.

"So you have to work out your Karma through successive lifetimes until you are perfected. People who have a lot of bad things happen to them are paying for things done in their past lives."

Somebody who gets murdered probably murdered someone else in a past life. Somebody who is born crippled or mentally handicapped actually deserves it.” He had nearly finished. “The fact that you are alone up here living a simple life and not eating meat shows that you have become highly advanced at a young age in this lifetime. You must have worked out a lot of your Karma in past lives.” His comment carried with it the implication that he too was highly advanced, in fact just slightly more advanced than me. “Now if you keep living a simple life, and clean up your act, you might become perfect this time around,” he declared emphatically.

“Clean up my act?” I said.

“Yes purify your diet and fast to purify your body. Don’t kill anything, not even animals. After all, it says even in the Bible not to kill. And most importantly, meditate to become one with Brahmin.”

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Down in Boulder, the Green Mountain Granary expanded, as a growing number of people sought health foods. An even larger number of people began to associate certain diets with spiritual advancement.

While some believed that it was simply healthier to avoid meat, others believed that we should abstain from meat because it indirectly contributed to world hunger. It was said that many pounds of grain were needed in order to produce one pound of meat. We should therefore eat grain, instead of wasting grain to fatten animals for human consumption.

Still others looked at food as something that can enhance or degrade a person’s spiritual evolution. “Carnivores,” people who ate meat, were considered to be on a lower spiritual level. This was for several reasons. First, the meat-eater’s appetite was responsible for the murder of innocent animals. Secondly, people who ate meat obviously didn’t see that “all is one.” If they did, they wouldn’t kill another living creature. (Although nobody seemed concerned about killing plants, also living creatures.) Thirdly, it was believed that impurities in meat, especially chemicals used to “fatten up” farm animals, polluted the human body. A polluted body was believed to hinder spiritual progress by clouding your mind during meditation. Pure body, pure spirit was the way to spiritual perfection.

Jack had been a vegetarian several years. I became one because I couldn’t afford meat and couldn’t keep fresh meat living in the mountains. This put him on a higher level than me in this area too.

We later sat down by a river while Jack played a guitar. When he was finished playing, he said: “You see that rock wall across the river?”

I looked up at a sheer wall of rock that had been thrust up seventy five feet by some ancient movement of the earth’s crust. Jagged lines of rock zig-zagged across the face of it, making a scrambled mess of patterns.

“Yeah,” I responded.

“I just played it.”

I looked at him amazed, but not surprised.

“By meditating while I played, I absorbed the energy pattern of those rocks, and was able to play the energy back out through my guitar. For a few minutes I was really one with the mountain.”

I believed it. Later I would trade a radio for an old banjo. Playing it soon became my major pastime. That, and of course meditating.

Jack went off to live at the Divine Life Mission, where he and other devotees of the sixteen year old Guru Maharaji fasted, meditated, shaved their heads, and gave all of their worldly goods to the Maharaji. There he advanced to higher stages, working out his Karma. He claimed to experience incredible, overwhelming surges of ethereal energy that was imparted to him from the Guru. Maharaji

would touch his devotees lightly in the center of their foreheads, and they would collapse as if they fainted. When they came to, they claimed to have seen a wonderful, warming light within. I should try it, they urged. But I declined. It was too spooky. If God was in everything, why did I have to worship some sixteen year old kid and shave my head to experience God?

Twenty One – Two for the Road (Debbie Tuller)

Again the summer came, and again the mountains were awash with travelers, including one “Marny,” a pregnant dog. Marny was part German Shepherd but mostly many other kinds of dogs. Her owner became my friend and lover just long enough for Marny to have thirteen scrappy, rolling-all-over-one-another puppies. Thirteen puppies and one man in a teepee equals one mess, but one mess of fun.

Now trips to town also included a 50 pound bag of dogfood that I strapped to the outside of my framed backpack. I would often raid the dumpsters behind Boulder’s grocery stores to fill a double garbage bag full of bones. It was quite a task carrying all of that the final two miles up to the teepee, but the puppies frenziedly helped me carry them the last few hundred yards, one bone at a time. They always seemed to be waiting for me to return. I’m not sure if they loved me any more than the bones, but there never seemed to be enough of either to go around.

After several weeks it became quite apparent that I couldn’t handle them all. So I pleaded, urged, and begged people to take them, which they did. All but four. Two of them died of distemper. They began to snarl and fight constantly. They would cough and whine until my heart would break, but I was just plain out of money, and no one would take them. Before I could take them to the humane society, they ran off half-crazy and died. I found one in the bottom of a mine shaft, and the other I never found.

Two I kept, naming them Lola and Lolamai. With them I would go back “on the road.”

Twenty Two – The Trip to Canada

I don’t think a person ever becomes fully accustomed to being alone, but I had come to accept it as my “fate.” Solitude and simplicity, as Jack had said, were two important tenets of advanced spirituality. The holy men of Tibet reportedly lived alone high up in the Himalaya Mountains, loners like me. They possessed nothing but a cape and a bowl. The cape was both bed and clothing. They bathed using the bowl, and ate out of it as well. They often fasted and put their bodies through rigid disciplines, such as sleeping on rocks or sitting cross-legged in meditation for days on end. Some of these holy men acquired special powers. They could see the spirit world in their meditation. Some could hold their breath for hours. Others could float on air, or levitate. They were believed to achieve these feats because the discipline and long hours of meditation brought them into “oneness” with the “universal energy,” the “life force,” the impersonal cosmic God of the Hindu.

I was bothered by an inner emptiness, a restlessness gnawing in my soul. Teepee living had ease and beauty. The lazy days of summer lie ahead. But I just couldn’t stand to hang around. My spiritual destiny, I believed, was to become a holy man. Perhaps I would achieve perfect oneness with “God,” and would escape the karmic cycle of death and rebirth this time around. It would take radical dedication and aesthetic discipline, but I would do it, I thought. The carnival atmosphere of those hills was just not the place to do it.

I loaded up my backpack with the essentials: lean-to tent, sleeping bag, one set of clothes, canteen, ten pounds of dogfood... and I set out. I decided I would travel a route with as many mountains as possible to the west coast. Then I would follow the seacoast up to Canada, and travel across Canada and back to Colorado, passing through the Grand Teton Range on the way back.

Instead of facing winter storms on the road with a worn coat and paper-thin sleeping bag, I was now embarking with good equipment. A warm bag, layered clothing, quality hiking boots, light weight cook gear, and a nylon back pack weighed out at less than 50 pounds without dogfood.

The pups scampered around at my feet and playfully nipped at each other's ears as I hiked vigorously up the road, back to oncoming cars. About every hour I would hear a vehicle approach and hold my left thumb out. Most of the day had passed without a ride, but it didn't matter. The mountain sun shone with crystal clarity. Only the darkest corners of the woods still held any snow. A horse leisurely grazed on the fresh green growth in a meadow beside me. Lila and Lola darted under the barbed wire fence barking and lunging like little cannons. The horse lowered his head and pounded a heavy hoof into the ground in front of the pups. They stood there yipping and yapping as if they were really thinking about taking on four hundred pounds of snorting horse. I had trained them to come when I whistled a short melody. Even on the busiest highways, they were always able to hear. I whistled my tune, and they came joyfully bounding toward me. I rubbed the sides of their heads with my palms affectionately. Lila rolled over onto her back and invited me to scratch her tummy. I sat on a boulder and pulled out a few handfuls of dog food for them. As they gobbled it up, a van painted with flowers, peace signs, and other hippie graffiti pulled over.

"Where ya headed, man?" the long haired driver asked as I wedged my pack into a space in back.

"Oregon," I said with a pause. "Then Canada and the Grand Tetons."

"Far out," he replied. "You got people up there, or you just trippin'?"

"Just trippin'."

He whisked a lit match up to a small pipe he had removed from his pocket. The sweet smell of marijuana smoke filled the van. This act was intended to gesture his trust and acceptance of me.

"Wanna hit?"

"Sure."

"Have you been to see the guru?" he asked, as if everybody in those parts had.

"No, but I have a friend in the Divine Light Mission. He takes it pretty seriously. He claims to have died and been reborn. He describes it as an 'ego death' that has led to a psychic rebirth. He was at a meeting with Guru Maharaji himself, when this guru asked anyone if they would like to 'see the light.' My friend swears that when the guru touched his forehead, he smelled a heavenly smell sweeter than anything he had ever smelled, he heard heavenly music coming from another realm, and then saw a warm white light that gave him a deep feeling of peace and security. Ever since then, he has been totally devoted to the guru. I don't really understand it."

"My name's Don," the driver said as he held out a hand.

"Will," I responded with a handshake.

"Would you like some fruit?"

I was eager to eat. It had been a long time since breakfast. As I munched on apples and peaches, he leaned forward in his seat. With sincere eyes opened wide he looked directly at me.

"The guru is Christ."

"You mean Jesus Christ re-incarnated?" I asked incredulously.

“Kind of. Jesus’s generation wasn’t the only one to have a Christ born during their time. In fact, there is a Christ born in every generation. Buddha was one, Mohammed was one, people who have realized full Christ consciousness. They have progressed to the ultimate state of spiritual evolution. You see, Will, all of us are at different levels of spiritual development. The reason most people grow long hair and choose not to live as typical “straight” people is that they have spiritually outgrown the ‘ol U.S.A. Many of us don’t even realize it, but we’ve reached upper levels of spiritual growth. The whole hippie movement is happening because a lot of highly developed souls have been reincarnated in our time. We have a mission, which is to bring enlightenment to our planet, which will save us from nuclear destruction, and bring in the Age of Aquarius. The guru is an Ascended Master that has chosen to return to this realm to guide us to the new age.”

“I’m not sure I get it. What’s an Ascended Master?”

“Another Christ, an Avatar, someone who has evolved to the highest level, like you and I will someday. An Ascended Master is so highly advanced that he is no longer required to return to this earth. He has worked out his Karma and has completed his cycles of reincarnation. But he CHOOSES to come back to help us attain self-realization.”

“But the guru is only sixteen. How could he be perfect?”

“He worked it out in past lives.”

“Then what is the white light that people see when the guru touches them?”

“It is powerful concentration of Prana, the universal energy. When he touches you, he imparts part of his spirit to you. Because he is perfectly attuned to the reality of the universe, it hits you like a bolt of lightning. It’s really far out. It happened to me, and it made me higher than any drugs ever did. It’s the same thing that happened when Jesus healed people, or even raised them from the dead.”

“Can the guru raise dead people?” I asked knowing I wouldn’t believe it if he said yes.

“That’s not part of the plan.”

“What plan?”

“There is a plan developed by all of the Avatars to usher in the Age of Aquarius. To raise the dead would only invite skepticism and unwanted attention, even though the guru could do it. But according to the plan large numbers of highly advanced souls will be awakened in our time. Because of their influence, millions of people will realize our oneness with all humanity and in fact with all life, everywhere, and with the planet as a whole. The destiny of mankind, after its long preparatory period of darkness and war is to at last become one. The peace symbol painted on my van is a sign of things to come. There will be peace and one-world government. Man will transcend all national, linguistic, cultural, racial, and religious barriers that have caused wars and all of the problems. Because all religions will be one, all of the wisdom found in all the world’s religions will be unleashed. Hinduism and Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, Taoism and Shintoism, Christianity in all of its forms, native religions, ancient religions, and even witchcraft will unite. They all have the same core truth anyway. Soon everyone will realize it.”

“Wowww,” I said with a trailing voice. Things are always more impressive after you smoke a joint. The van, now thick with smoke, coasted to a stop.

“Highway 72,” Don said as we sat and stared at the sign in front of us.

“Hey, this is where I head north. Thanks for the ride. That’s heavy stuff you were talking about,” I said, opening the door.

Lila and Lolamai had fallen asleep in back. A gust of cool air swept through the van, purging the cloud of smoke. They wiggled and stood, groggily shaking themselves awake. The pure mountain air

could have revived a dead man. I heaved my pack up onto my back, and trudged northward on the shoulder of the road, my two pups following. I was soon trekking at an energetic pace.

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Another ride and I was at Ward. Then Peaceful Valley, Raymond, Allenspark, and Estes Park. The locals are often prone to remind you that the weather changes quickly in the mountains. "Always take a coat," they'll say, or "Don't like the weather? Just wait a few minutes, it'll change."

True to the saying, the sunny lazy day was quickly blown away by a wet mass of clouds. Sunset brought grey billows of fog rolling across the slopes. The pines and bare Aspens dripped with cold, condensed fog. As darkness blanketed the forest, I set up my lean-to downwind from a large vertical slab of rock.

That night the pups crawled into my bag and tossed it restlessly as the steady drizzle turned to rain. Frigid water accumulated in the depression where I slept, gradually soaking me through. The rain turned to sleet, then softened to snow. At the first light, I pulled my sopping self out of the bag, shook two inches of snow off of the tent, and scrounged up a pile of wood. The pups whined and squeezed themselves against my wet legs as I squatted down, blowing to stir up the first flames. After an hour, we were all comfortably snuggled in front of a roaring blaze. I sipped tea while my bag dried, the pups dozing in my lap.

Back on the road, Granby, Craig, and Maybell passed. By late afternoon we had reached Jensen, Utah. The Green River, warm and wide, flowed through Dinosaur National Monument. We hiked up river into the desolate brushland. The sprawling juniper bushes that grew along the banks of the river formed tunnel-like shelters beneath them, carpeted with soft fragrant needles. Finding a tunnel large enough for us all, we crawled under the canopy of foliage and slept. Exhausted after the former night of shivering in a pool of cold rain, we took comfort in the dry warmth of our cave-like lodge.

The following day rides carried us into the Wasach Mountains near Salt Lake City. I found a gas station along the way that sold dog food, and replenished my supply. We hiked up into the hills overlooking the populous area below. Wild flowers, the yellow Cinquefoil, Mountain Lily, and wild Aster blanketed the slopes. We nestled down amidst the fragrant flowers, and watched the sun set over the Great Salt Lake.

The miles became interspersed with long waits and short rides. Hippies, students, ranchers, blue collar workers, and even a few businessmen stopped to take a chance, sharing a ride and a brief conversation. A cross section of bolder Americans could be experienced at close range. They would often share food and beverages with me. I would share stories. Most wanted to know all about Lila and Lolamai.

In Idaho we slept in a grassy irrigation ditch, and in the sparsely treed Challis National Forest. In western Oregon, tired of the days on the road, we hiked back up into the desert hills with a canteen full of water and a batch of fresh food. On a remote plateau dotted with sagebrush, we set up a camp for a rest of a few days. There was little to slow down the wind. It holed through the parched crevices of rock, and eerily swooped through the brittle sagebrush. The wind would then pause, and I could hear the sand still shifting in its aftermath. To my imagination, it sounded like desert rattlesnakes in the night. My open lean-to tent afforded little protection, and the pups were restless. I decided to continue west the next morning.

The pups seemed happy to get out of the desert, but I could tell they were growing weary of life on the road. Instead of their usual playfulness, a lethargic mood had slowly set in. They would often lie

by the side of the road with their little heads resting sadly on their paws. They mostly slept during rides. I felt it was not fair to such lively pups to subject them to a life so unnatural for them.

In Oregon I left Lila with a rancher where she would have a good home and plenty of room to run. As the pickup pulled away, Lolamai whined and began to chase the truck down the highway. I whistled the tune that meant for her to come, and she stopped, still whining and looking down the road where Lila had gone. It seemed as if she knew she would never see her sister again.

That night we camped in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. I felt small and insignificant nesting at the base of a gigantic Douglas fir tree with its eight foot diameter. Sad-eyed Lolamai laid mournfully across the foot of my bag, her normally wagging tail motionless. As much as I loved her, I wished the rancher could have taken them both.

In eastern Oregon we encountered rain. I had expected it to be like Colorado, where even after a downpour you can find some dry wood in the nooks and crannies of the rocks for a fire. At least I could break off some dead branches and crack them open to find dry wood, I thought. I was wrong. As I crouched near the ground trying to blow some flames into action, the rain fell harder. I could only generate a few soggy puffs of smoke. The ground was like a sponge saturated to the max. The greyness of a wet night was slowly permeating the fog. I plodded down to the town of Lowell, my boots squeaking and sloshing as I went. Lola followed faithfully, stopping to shiver and sneeze every so often.

We must have been a pitiful pair of creatures, because the first people we met in Lowell asked us if we needed any help. We stood there drenched, next to a boathouse on Fall Creek Lake. Two men in yacht-club shirts had just shut the boathouse after working on their yacht inside. They welcomed us to stay inside, provided I promised not to make a fire, and to lock up when I left. They told me to “lay low” so that no one would find out that they let me in. Then they handed me a little booklet and left.

Never did a bare concrete floor feel so good. It was dry. It was fairly warm. I slept securely with the knowledge that no cold rain would be soaking my bag tonight. I laid down as the last light faded, and read the booklet they had given me, all about the love of Jesus. It was called “ONE WAY.”

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The Christians I had met were usually nice enough people, and I respected their solid dedication to their “cause,” but they seemed maddeningly narrow-minded. I wondered how they could constantly insist that there was only one way to God.

The next day two Christians stopped to give me a ride. For what seemed like the thousandth time I explained where I was from and that I was traveling up the west coast and across Canada. I had seen a “Jesus” sticker on their dashboard, and knew it would only be a matter of time before they engaged me in a conversation about their God.

Inevitable, the question came. The driver was about to test the waters, and I wasn’t about to make it too easy for him.

“Say, have you ever heard what Jesus did for us on the cross?” he began, jumping in with both feet.

“Sure, I believe in Jesus,” I said, but I knew I didn’t believe in Him the way my hosts did. He was too smart to be tricked.

“Well, praise the Lord. When did you accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?”

He had me there.

“Jesus is just one of many highly advanced people who, throughout history, have reached near perfection. There are others too.”

“Like who?”

“Buddha, Mohammed.”

“Buddha and Mohammed both lie in their graves to this day, but the tomb of Jesus is empty. Only Jesus Christ overcame death. There are no others at all like Him. He is God’s only begotten son. He rose from the dead not because He evolved into a god, but because he is and always was God by nature. And He’s coming again soon to judge all men.”

This guy knew right where I was coming from.

“You sound like some pre-recorded religious creed that people mindlessly recite in church,” I said in self-defense. I figured I could always get another ride if I angered him, in fact, I might prefer it, but he wasn’t shaken in the least by my assault. He persisted with a single mind.

“You know, Jesus died for you. It says in the Bible, ‘For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’”

“Your truth is your truth and my truth is my truth.”

“If what you say is correct, and truth is relative, then how can we be sure of anything?” he challenged.

“You Christians seem so assured of your eternal life, but all you have is the words in an old black book to go by.”

“No, we have the Spirit of the living God who has come to live in our hearts. This is how we know the truth, by the witness of the Spirit that now lives in us.”

“God lives in all men,” I said indignantly.

“The Bible teaches us that only those who repent and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior are the children of God, all others are lost.”

“That sure is narrow minded,” I taunted.

“Until you can accept the possibility that there may only be one way to God, you are the narrow minded one.”

He was about to get an earful from me, when without warning a car in the oncoming lane swerved, then began to slide across the wet pavement directly toward the front of our speeding car. I froze with fear, waiting for the inevitable collision.

“Jesus, help us!” the driver cried out.

Whatever happened next happened so fast that I couldn’t see it, but the next thing I knew we were safely beyond the skidding car, somehow brought under control.

“Thank you, Jesus!” the Christians gasped in unison.

I began to hope that no more Christians would pick me up.

They pulled over at a grocery store, and generously encouraged me to restock my food supply at their expense. I picked out a few food items, and gratefully stuffed them into my pack.

In Eugene, I stayed at a friend’s house for four days. I devoured book after book from his extensive library of Eastern Religious publications. I completed my first 3 day fast. I began several new forms of yoga and meditation. I learned about the “chakras” or energy centers that supposedly exist in the human body, and began to attempt to regulate the flow of “cosmic energy” through them.

Traveling the coastal highway, my days became regimented, and my focus sharpened to ever more rigid spiritual disciplines. Each day I would awake at dawn and sit in “lotus” position for an hour or more, meditating and doing yogic breathing exercises. I would sometimes hum the syllable “Om” for long periods of time. This sound symbolizes the essence of universal energy, called Brahman, the Hindu god. By humming or chanting this or other words or phrases called mantras, one supposedly empties the mind, attains inner peace, and ultimately becomes “one” with God and the universe.

Over the grand Columbia River and up through the long beaches of Washington State I steadily moved. Every afternoon I would leave the highway and walk into the most isolated spot I could find to camp. I was often overwhelmed with the beauty of the places I discovered, and spent hours sitting, thinking, and dreaming. Sometimes I pitched my tent nestled amidst huge masses of drift wood on the beach, other times at the base of tall evergreen trees on cliffs overlooking the sea. When it was windy and cold, I would camp inland underneath the thick tangles of rhododendrons, or in some small island of grass in the midst of the brush.

When darkness would fall, I always yearned to be near someone, to share fellowship with a friend or love with a woman dear to me. I yearned to know God, or to have whatever it was that would still the ache of loneliness, the churning uncertainty within. Perhaps it was the daily fog and damp or the sense of homelessness I carried, or maybe it was just being alone so much that encased me in a cocoon of depression. Lola dragged her tail most of the time when she wasn't curled up sadly dozing away her time. Like a wild but intermittent breeze slashing through barren winter trees, I continued drifting north. The stillness of the nights were interrupted only by Lola's worsening cough. The aching of my soul seemed to subside only when I pushed onward. While some might eat or drink, or lose themselves in TV or a hundred other diversions to stave off their depression, I moved, and when I wasn't moving I was lost in deep, dreary thought.

I don't think anyone ever really gets used to being alone, but some learn to endure it. Eventually I climbed out of depression to subsist on a layer of fragile courage.

Through Queets, Forks, and Beaver I hiked. Leaving the Olympic Peninsula at Port Angeles, I bought a ticket for a ferry ride to Victoria, British Columbia. On the ferry, a girl with frizzy long hair was traveling alone. Her name was Margaret, and she was going home to Victoria. She loved Lolamai, and I could see by the high-speed motion of Lola's tail that the feeling was mutual. Margaret bent down to pet Lola, and you could tell they would be friends for life. God must really love animals. At least He cared for Lola, because shortly after meeting Margaret I was informed that I couldn't bring Lola into Canada. Loads of restrictions were in effect that translated into many dollars' worth of shots and fees. I only had thirty two dollars, but I also had a person who was thrilled to take Lola and give her the love and care she needed.

The banks of Victoria were entirely clothed with flowers in bloom. Victoria's narrow streets and neat gardens resemble those of England. The elegant Empress Hotel and stately Parliamentary buildings overlook the deep harbor. The climate is milder than any other Canadian city, and the pace is more subdued than the large cities of the United States.

Although it made me feel more alone to leave her, I was glad that such a beautiful city would be Lola's new home.

Twenty Three - Canada

British Columbia is larger than California, Oregon, and Washington combined. Parallel ranges of mountains extend the length of the province, forcing the highways to curve and dip to accommodate the massive peaks. It is a formidable task to hitchhike, especially when dog lovers no longer stop to give rides. I spent many hours on the roadside.

Near Hope, BC I climbed a mountain to camp. I thought I had experienced hungry mosquitoes before, but I hadn't compared to the droning divebombers that ambushed me that windless night. Feeling like a pincushion, I broke camp as soon as there was enough light to climb down.

By the time I reached Rogers the western forests had long since given way to desert-shrubs. As the foliage thinned out, so did the rides. Out of sheer boredom, I left the highway to wander through a railway yard. I met a Russian immigrant there who worked for the railroad. He must have seen others riding the trains, draft-dodgers who also had backpacks and beards. He told me stories about his old way of life under communist rule, always trying to impress upon me the superiority of our free system.

I didn't go to Canada to dodge the draft, but I did have a lot of anti-American sentiments with regard to the Vietnam War and the draft.

I continued down the tracks where I stumbled upon an old man, thin and bearded, dressed in tattered clothes. He was sleeping under a water tank. He awoke, startled to see a stranger in his territory. His Yugoslavik accent was so thick I could hardly understand a single sentence he spoke. As I shared my food with him he offered to help me hop a freight train up to Jasper. He was waiting for the afternoon freight train. He explained the procedure of timing your run and grabbing the steel ladder of a passing rail car at just the right moment and at the right place near the tracks. The train never came to a stop there but slowed down momentarily to grab a mail bag.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a large knife. With a twisted grin he sliced off a piece of my cheese, quickly glancing up at me to see my eyes fixed on the knife.

The roaring clatter of the train came within earshot. We scrambled to the edge of the track, hiding behind the water tank so as not to be seen by the engineer. The train braked to a near stop, and as it lurched forward to resume full speed again we were aboard.

Like a surfer catching a wave I felt the power of the train propelling me forward. The clean mountain air rushed into my face as I finished climbing up onto a flat car loaded with Datsun autos. We had hoped to find a Datsun open to ride in, but they were all locked. We each found a place to huddle against the steel end-walls of the railcar, and settled in for the long ride.

The train climbed higher and higher into the snow-capped Canadian Rockies. We shot through the cold mist of waterfalls that smashed down the cliffs near the tracks. The roar of water would fill my ears for a moment, and then be absorbed by the deafening clatter of steel banging steel. Miles of straight track tunneled through forests and then unexpectedly curved, opening up panoramic views of the mountains as they extended to the distant horizon, peak after peak, hump upon hump. Distant valleys were shrouded in mist. A full moon rose, reflecting sparkles of silvery light off of wet pine needles as we rattled past. Patches of snow glowed in the light.

The euphoric beginning of the ride had eroded into a fatiguing and freezing endurance test. I first put on my long underwear, then my sweatshirt, coat, and finally my sleeping bag. I still shivered.

On the other side of the railcar, the hobo shivered too. He had nothing. But my feelings were far from feeling guilty, or even generous. He would occasionally glance up from a frigid daze eyeing my warm clothing enviously. I thought I saw him fingering his knife in his pocket as his eyes narrowed to tiny slits. As the moon rose higher, jittering shadows flickered everywhere. I moved to the far side of the car, out of his sight. If he came at me, I would stand a better chance of seeing him in time to fight him off, I thought.

My thoughts turned to my mom and dad. They would never know what became of me if I were murdered up here. I began to think about God, the God who had seemed to free me from a Texas jail and save me from a fatal car crash. How futile all of my yoga and meditation seemed now. Those things could never save a person's life. I also thought about the Tarot cards and the Ouija board that foretold me early death. My head was swimming with fear and conflicting thoughts.

"Oh God, help!" I whispered aloud.

Just then I heard the brakes of the train whine and hiss. For about thirty seconds, the train slowed as I raced to crawl out of my sleeping bag and stuff it into my pack. Then it jolted, followed by a forward lurch. It was picking up speed again. I was on the ladder. I jumped into darkness, and hit (to my great relief) a soft bed of pine needles. I rolled forward as the sleeping bag popped out of my pack and caught in a bush. I laid still on the warm forest floor as the sound of the train faded into the distance, on to the cold plains of Alberta with the shivering hobo still on board.

The stillness of the dark forest was a radical contrast to the noisy train. My ears still rang with the sound of wheel and rail. "Ahhh!" I thought, "solid ground." My relief vanished with one quick thought: BEARS!

I didn't have any idea where I was, or if I could find my way out come morning. I had read that grizzly bears lived in those parts. I decided to walk the tracks for no more than one hour that night, and then camp if need be. I knew I would eventually have to reach a road. Besides, I could live at least five weeks with the food I had, and by fasting. I didn't have to endure nearly that long, for within ten minutes I saw a service station right through the trees. I staggered over, my legs flimsy like noodles from the hours of vibrating on the train.

The station attendant, surprised to see someone walk in out of the night, asked in a friendly voice laced with apprehensions:

"Hi! Where ya headed?"

"Uh, Jasper," I replied, still not knowing where I was.

Bewildered, he exclaimed: "This IS Jasper!"

The next week I spent backpacking through the wilderness in Jasper National Park, where some of the most beautiful scenery in the world can be seen. Snowcapped peaks are mirrored in crystal mountain lakes. The rugged structures of rock are knit together by networks of cold streams flowing with water clean enough to drink.

I had decided my escape from the knife-wielding hobo was probably due to the fact that I had worked off enough of my "bad Karma" to qualify for a reprieve from the death I may have otherwise deserved. I would need to keep it up to reach the next level of spiritual advancement, and ultimately blissful oneness with Brahman. I delved deeper into yoga, meditation, and the study of Eastern Religious writings.

On my way back into the United States I was picked up by a carload of Blackfoot Indians from the local Reservation. They were out having a grand old time, drinking straight, warm whisky from small flasks. I was piled into the back seat with three wild eyed men who seemed amused at my appearance.

The one sitting closest to me, in a gesture of acceptance, handed me a bottle. I almost puked when I smelled it.

"Hey, you hippie, drink to my father!" he demanded.

"Uh, no thanks, I don't drink."

Fury registered in his eyes as he again screamed: "YOU DRINK! To my FATHER!"

I drank.

The driver was doing over a hundred miles per hour. The car seemed to leave the pavement as we flew over a rise in the road. I felt like my stomach had just been left behind. The border attendant waved us through into Montana, where I stumbled out of their car, glad to be alive and almost sober.

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Through Glacier, Yellowstone, and Grand Teton National Parks I hiked, camping, continuing my spiritual disciplines, ever imagining that I was getting closer and closer to God. In truth, I was getting

further from God as a spiritual pride began to envelop me. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. This was a truth not yet revealed to me. I imagined myself to be “higher” than everyone I met. I correctly surmised that most people don’t meditate at all, and are therefore grossly deficient in spiritual enlightenment.

It is true that I was becoming more consistently calm and emotionally cool. My thinking was becoming more clear and organized. My body was progressively more “in shape” due to health food, fasting, and miles of walking with a backpack. I even had a new inner peace that I had not known before. Surely I was becoming one with God, I thought (and I deserve it too, I also thought.)

For the first time in my life I had a sense of destiny, a direction. The Bible says that there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of that way is death. I was on that way.

At Fort Collins, CO I was again picked up by a Christian. After the usual questions and small talk, he asked:

“Are you a searcher?”

“Yeah, I guess you could say that.”

“Have you ever checked into Jesus Christ?” he asked.

Remembering my conversation with Oregonian Christians I answered more as a defense than a sincere belief: “I believe Jesus is the way for some, and I am open to the possibility that He is perhaps the only way to God, but right now I believe there are many paths to God.”

That was one of the shortest conversations with a Christian that I ever had, for he simply told me a Bible verse.

“In Jeremiah 29:13 God said: ‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’”

Unlike Tarot Cards, Astrology, or other “fortune telling” devices, this is a prediction that is forever true for every man, for it comes straight from the mouth of God Himself.

After many weeks, I was finally back at my teepee on Hoosier Hill.

Twenty Four – A Sign from the Sky

The summer madness was back in full swing on Hoosier Hill. Hippies came and went by the dozens. This year the “STP family” was around. STP was a powerful drug that caused hallucinations, chills, sweats, horror and euphoric highs. The STP Family was a group of hippies that had elevated use of drugs, especially STP, to the status of a religion. They were loud, unruly, unpredictable, and unpopular. They roamed around in bands looking for handouts of food, money, cigarettes, and drugs.

I had believed that a communal-type society where everyone shared the resources and the responsibilities (i.e. communism) was superior to our “capitalist regime.” In my worldview the primary enemies were greedy businessmen who exploited the environment and the common man. People like the STP Family made me wonder who the real enemy was. My attempts at community living had failed, and the political revolution that the hippie movement had championed was losing steam. The movement that had seemed so unified around the campfires of Dream Canyon now appeared to be splintered and disjointed.

I came to the conclusion, like many others, that individual spiritual evolution was the real key to world change. “If you want to change the world, change yourself” was a saying that became popular.

I moved my teepee several miles farther up into the mountains. Here in greater isolation I advanced in eastern disciplines, and I added something of my own to my daily routine too. At first self-

consciously (even though no one could hear), and later more comfortably, I ended each yoga session with a short prayer: "Oh God of love and goodness, who created all things, show me the truth, show me the way, and I will obey."

I felt a little foolish praying out loud. After all, I didn't really think there was a God who could hear me, but I figured that the Christian viewpoint at least deserved a chance. I was determined to be open minded, although I still couldn't buy into the concept of an all-powerful God who existed outside of a universe He had created.

Meanwhile, I had become friends with Lou, who also lived in a teepee on the other side of the mountain. He was a drug-fried Vietnam Vet with long red hair and a beard. Lou had big plans. He had planted marijuana plants scattered throughout the hills, his "cash crop." Every day during the dry summer he hoisted buckets full of water from a deep mine shaft on the mountain. Then he would load up forty pounds of water on a backpack, and go around to water his plants. I began to help him hoist up the water some days. I had decided months earlier not to get involved in any drug business, but Lou was my friend, and they weren't my plants, I reasoned.

Lou had a prized plant, dubbed "Big Red," after the "Panama Red" type of marijuana seed it had been sewn from. Big Red had reached a height of over eight feet, and grew from two thick stems that forked near the ground. That summer there was a brief period of meteor showers as the earth passed through asteroid fields in space. I stayed up late one night watching the shooting stars etch orange lines across the sky.

The next morning after I finished my routine and said my prayer we went around to water the plants. Of course Big Red always got watered first. As we approached, we noticed half of the plant was lying on the ground. Next to the broken plant was a small meteorite, about the size of a dime! We knelt in front of the plant in disbelief.

"God did this!" I said.

Lou thought I was joking.

"Right, God wants us to get high today, let's smoke it."

Not wanting to appear superstitious, I went along as Lou plucked off the leaves for drying. But I knew it was no coincidence. Maybe God was trying to communicate with me, I thought.

Twenty Five – Witchcraft and Reincarnation

A newcomer had moved into the mountain. White and round faced, with a coal black beard, he resembled Ulysses S. Grant. He dressed in flowing gowns made of pastel silk and sheer. From a cave-like mine shaft where he lived, he exercised black arts. On a makeshift shelf were numerous books full of spells and occultist information. A rack made of old mine timber held various jars and vials of substances too strange to identify. His name was Ben, and he had come to prepare himself for deeper entry into the mystical secrets of witchcraft.

Ben had a minor problem, however. He had no money and no food. I did, and so we developed a friendship. I shared food with him, and he shared mystical secrets with me.

One day we were sitting just outside of my teepee enjoying some raisins. Ben seemed to be dozing off. He suddenly sat up straight and motioned for me to be still.

"I'm receiving a signal," he said. "Yes... yes..." he said as if hearing some kind of inaudible instructions. "I have received from the masters a revelation about your last life."

I was intrigued, anxiously awaiting his next words.

“In your past life, you were a sailor on a Spanish ship. Your hands were cut off for stealing, and you were later thrown overboard for mutiny, perishing at sea. You have done well, however, in this present life. You have worked out much Karma. You are to continue diligently on your present path. You will probably require still another rebirth before you reach “home,” but you might possibly attain the heights here and now.”

I was seized with a strange sensation, a *déjà vu*, feeling as if all this had happened to me once before. The things he said about my past life sent tingles of excitement up my spine. It was as if I could vaguely remember that past life, the sailing and the death at sea. Best of all, I received encouragement from the spiritual realm. I was on the right path, well ahead of most other people, and on my way “home.”

We went on talking for several hours after that. He told me of the impressive magic spells he had done, like changing an airplane full of people into a flock of geese, and sightings of spirits of men who had gone on to the ethereal realm. It was one of these spirits who had reached nirvana that had just spoken through him to me. He was special and I was too. As fellow saints we stood head-and-shoulders about the underdeveloped masses of humanity that lived below.

As the days passed, Ben developed a sense of indebtedness to me, eating my visible food while returning only invisible gifts of spiritual fantasy. I was hungry for the real thing, and so I began to pressure him to let me see some of his books on witchcraft. Finally, against the rules of his order, he allowed me to see the most basic book. He made me promise that I would not try any of the “formulas,” a promise I had no intention of keeping.

I found a page that described a magical way to be transported, body and soul, anywhere one desired. The book warned that it should not be attempted until one had fasted at least a week or two, advice I disregarded. I decided I would go to Hawaii, and so on a warm clear night, I followed the instructions, going up to the top of the mountain. From there I began to recite the prescribed incantation, and call upon the spiritual beings whose names were given in the book. They were supposed to escort first my soul, then immediately afterward my body, to Hawaii.

I chanted and chanted, but nothing happened. I walked around and then tried again, calling upon the names in the book. Nothing. I went back down to my teepee and lit some candles as usual. Although it was a windless night, and the teepee was quite windproof, the candle flames began to fluctuate wildly. A soft hissing noise filled the air, and I could clearly sense the presence of an invisible entity. I had never known a moment’s fear in the teepee, but now I felt an evil darkness all around me. I needed some kind of weapon to defend myself, but I had no idea how to find one.

On my shelf stood many religious books. One by one I scanned through them, speedily searching for something to dispel the evil. I scanned through the famous works of Eastern Religion: the Bhagavad Gita, the Patañjali, the Tao, I Ching, and others. None of them held anything to help. The Eastern teachers say that there is no such thing as an evil spirit. There are destructive forces, but they only work to advance spiritual evolution. Just as termites gnaw away (a destructive force) at a tree to ultimately convert the wood back into life, evil is merely a tool of good. I also had an old pocket-sized New Testament on the shelf, which I never read. I didn’t even remember how it had gotten there. As a last resort, I opened it up at random. It came right to Luke 4:36, a place in the gospels where Jesus was casting out a devil:

“And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! For with authority and power he commendeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.”

Now trembling, I tried to speak in an authoritarian voice, as if scaring off a barking dog, saying: “YAH! Get out of here! Shoo! Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ!”

If calling the name of some spiritual being brought this upon me, maybe calling out another incantation with a more powerful person’s name would chase the dark one away, I reasoned. But I didn’t know any incantations, so I just yelled out Jesus’s name.

A wave of spiritual warmth and safety instantly flowed over me and through the teepee. The candle flames grew still. I felt the same inner peace I had experienced when I called out to Jesus after my vision of hell in Taos. It was a deeper, more substantial peace than the forced calm that I was able to achieve through meditation. (Of course, I thought I just needed more meditation practice in order to reach this deeper peace.)

The next morning I went and threw the witchcraft book into Ben’s cave. I carefully avoided him after that, up until he moved on a few weeks later.

Twenty Six – Hawaii

The summer was winding down, Lou sold his marijuana, and I sold my old pickup truck for two hundred dollars. We had decided to go to Hawaii. I wanted to spend the winter where it was warm and I could live off the land. The big island of Hawaii was just the place. Lou wanted to grow a winter crop of marijuana.

We made good time hitchhiking and in four days reached the Los Angeles Airport. “Student” tickets were available to Hawaii, one way, for eighty three dollars apiece. We landed in Hilo with thirteen dollars left. Lou wanted to scout out places to grow marijuana. I wanted to start things out with a three day fast on a remote beach. Lou, who was usually agreeable, agreed to fast with me, and we camped on the black sand beach at Kamoamo.

During three days of fasting, we drank rain water that collected daily in depressions in the rocks. On the fourth day, we packed up and started to walk north toward Hilo. Thick clouds moved in bringing an early dark. We spread out our sleeping bags under the cover of a roadside rest stop. An hour later, we were disturbed by the blinding light of a policeman’s flashlight shining in our eyes. He said we would not be able to spend the night, so we again packed up and started to walk.

One of the torrential rains that often pummel the east shore of Hawaii then hit. The coconut palms swayed while their branches looked as if their hair was standing on end. Every place was soaked. We were cold, wet, and hungry.

A car pulled over and a window was rolled down. A deep voice called out, as a bearded face appeared at the window.

“You need a place to stay tonight?”

“Yeah!” we screamed excitedly.

We crawled into the car and were promptly escorted to a large house in Hilo inhabited by more than a dozen Christian men and women. They gathered around to welcome us as we entered, taking our packs and offering us food. It had been a long, long time since I had tasted such delicious home-cooked food.

We stayed there for three days, feasting daily on gobs of granola, milk, fresh fruit, home-made bread, avocados, and grand meals that were made even better by the fact that I had been subsisting on backpack food for two years. When no one was around, we raided their drawers and cupboards, stuffing our faces with all we could find.

The Bible speaks of those “whose god is their belly.” I thought I would adopt their God for the sake of my belly. But it was wrong to follow Jesus for the loaves and fishes then, and it’s wrong now. My thoughts, however, followed along these lines: Now I know that all religions lead to the same place, so technically, their God is my God. And if I just say “Praise the Lord” like them, I can fit in among them and enjoy all of the scrumptious food that seems to be the focus of their fellowship.

Meanwhile, I kept myself occupied convincing some of the newer Christians there that all religions are one, even as all people are one, etc. Jesus was a way, not the only way to God, I preached.

So my conspiracy and conversation went, until one morning as we sat at breakfast an interesting conversation occurred. One of the “sisters” at the house sat at the table with a bewildered look on her face.

“What’s on your mind?” Bill asked her.

“Oh, it’s just this dream I had that I can’t seem to get out of my mind. It probably doesn’t mean anything,” she said.

“Tell us about it,” Bill said.

“Well, in my dream there was a false brother, a wolf, here at the house. He was speaking heresies. He was saying that Jesus was not the way, the truth, and the life, but there were many ways to heaven. But he pretended to be a Christian just to gain a place to stay and free food.”

My fork full of bread pudding froze on its way to my mouth. Her dream had described my innermost thought perfectly!

“Humph,” Bill sighed. “And what are your plans, Will?”

“Oh, I’m leaving today.” (I had just decided.) “Lou and I are going to see the other side of the island.”

Lou, always agreeable, nodded.

We left soon thereafter, promising them we would read the large Bible and pocket sized New Testament they had given us. I was glad to be away from them. The discomfort of pretending to be one of them was starting to get to me.

Back on the highway, we walked until, several miles outside of Hilo, the sky darkened as huge black clouds raced in from across the sea.

“Let’s get under that bridge up there!” I cried out to Lou.

We plopped our packs down on the bare earth under the bridge just as a three day downpour began. In front of us a jungle-covered hill sloped steeply downward. Through open spots in the vegetation far below we could see a frothing river winding its way toward the beach.

There we spent three boring days and four nights fighting the bumps beneath our bags and the tendency to roll down the hill all night. On the third day I was even bored enough to read the Bible. I came to the place where Jesus said:

“He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37)

That night, amidst much tossing and turning on the bumpy dirt incline, I saw Jesus in a dream. He was holding out his hands to me, with small tears standing in his eyes. He said “come to me, and I will in no wise cast you out.”

I awoke in blackness. It was still except for the sound of the river rushing by below. The dream had seemed so personal, so filled with emotion, even filled with the very presence of Jesus. A warm feeling lingered as I dozed back off to sleep.

The following morning, I wrote a very brief letter to my parents. It said:

Dear Dad and Mom,

Having a wonderful time seeing the sights in Hawaii. I think I am coming to Jesus.

I miss you all.

Love, Will

Moments of illumination can occur in the life of one seeking the truth, and I had experienced one. But glimpses into the spiritual realm can become just as quickly eclipsed with old thoughts of untruth. My considerable store of eastern concepts, kept readily accessible in my conscious mind, would not let the truth shine for long. I decided to mail the letter to my parents anyway, (I had already used a stamp) even though I didn't really believe it anymore. Two hours had clouded my mind again. How could I have believed that stuff? I scolded myself. I've been under that bridge for too long! I guess after three days at a Christian house and three days under a bridge with nothing but a Bible, anybody might have a few weird dreams. I've had enough of this Jesus stuff. From now on I steer clear of those "Jesus-freaks." If not, I just might get "brainwashed" like they are.

The rain finally broke, and we crawled out of our dirty home to hitchhike again. We walked until we came to a spot where fields of cucumbers stretched out in every direction. Hours passed without a ride.

Finally, a car pulled over. Jesus stickers were all over the bumpers. Gospel tracts and booklets were scattered around the interior. The driver sat there smiling at us, waving us in. It was another one of those Christians!

So all the way around the island, Eric (for that was his name) talked about Jesus. Of course I argued. But three nights sleeping on bumpy dirt under the bridge impaired my ability to pay attention, and soon I was dozing. There, in my half-asleep state, I experienced another dream.

In my dream, hundreds of tiny "stickmen" were waging a battle against a single defender, also a tiny "stickman." Before a black background, the men, who each glowed with bright colors like neon tube lights, advanced on the lone warrior. Swords were flailed about vigorously, spears flew throughout the air as wave after wave of attackers charged. But then the tide of battle swung in favor of the solo fighter. He began to thrust and slash with his sword, driving back the hordes of enemy fighters. They began to stumble over one another in their haste to retreat, and ended in a tangled heap of defeat.

We hit a bump in the road that jarred me awake. I knew just what the dream had meant. I didn't know how I knew, but I knew.

The lone, victorious fighter was the Word of God. The hundreds of defeated soldiers were all of the many New Age type beliefs that I had read about or concocted, and that had ruled my mind and my life. Although I had accepted only a small part of the Bible, the Word of God, it was mighty, and would prevail over all of the other false beliefs, no matter how numerous or strong. But I was not yet willing to let go of all of these beliefs.

Eric let us out near Captain Cook, a small village on the west side of the island. I just wanted to get away from the Jesus Freaks. We waved Eric goodbye, and walked into a health food store. There, to our dismay, was a stack of Christian Gospel tracts. The smiling cashier hardly let us get through the door before she enthusiastically asked us:

"Hi! Do you know the Lord?"

“Yeah, yeah, sure. How much are your dried apricots?”

Twenty Seven – Lost and Found

We “escaped” from there and after walking a few miles discovered an overgrown jeep trail that wound off into the jungle. As darkness began to set in we noticed a deserted water tank out in the middle of what was once a coffee plantation. Rusty bands of steel bound the tank, keeping the grey timber sideboards in place. The top was covered with galvanized sheet metal, slanted to channel the infrequent rains into the tank. At the base was a spigot. Water was not in such plentiful supply on this side of the island, so such a tank was quite a find.

Nearby was a huge mango tree. Its solid branches arched upward in near perfect symmetry, a perfect tree to build a treehouse in. The jungle floor was alive with many undesirable creatures. Wild pigs roamed through the waist high grass and thick brush, looking for fallen fruit, roots, or anything else they could find. Squirrel-like mongooses mischievously attacked our packs looking for food as soon as we would leave them unattended. An occasional scorpion would crawl by. We figured we could survive a night or two on the ground while we built a treehouse with scrap lumber that laid in piles around the deserted plantation, concealed by vegetation. Tomorrow would begin the job of pulling and straightening the many nails that were embedded in the old lumber, nails we would need to build our house.

I began to swish my foot around the leaves at the base of the mango tree to clear the area of rocks for sleeping. Encountering a solid object with my foot, I kicked it out into the open. There, to my amazement, was a Bible!

I looked at Lou, and with a puzzled look said:

“Lou, I don’t think this is any coincidence.”

Lou, as always, seemed to agree.

I just didn’t know anymore. Maybe I was being superstitious, I thought.

The next day, with rocks for hammers, we hoisted lumber up into the stout branches of the mango tree, and constructed a large platform. We dubbed our new home, “The Highrise Hawaii.” From there we would see over the treetops down the side of the mountain to Kealakakua Bay. Gentle ocean breezes swayed the tops of the tree, keeping the bugs away.

The next day we went out to forage for food and returned with a horde of fresh fruit and nuts. Avocados, oranges, papayas, bananas, macadamia nuts, breadfruit, passion fruit, and guavas all grew in the area. Elevated safely above the jungle floor, we had food enough for a week.

I began to try to read the Bible that I had found, but it didn’t seem to make any sense. I felt like I was reading somebody else’s mail. The personal affirmations of love that Jesus spoke seemed to be directed at others, as if they were his children and I was just some outsider who was eavesdropping.

“Get anything out of that?” Lou asked.

“Too many thees and thous,” I replied, not knowing how to explain the fact that I wanted to, but for some reason could not connect with the Jesus of the Bible.

“Maybe it was just a coincidence, to find the Bible here, I mean.”

“Yeah, maybe. What do you want to do tomorrow?”

“I dunno, how about you?”

“Let’s follow the jeep trail down to the ocean,” I suggested.

Lou agreed.

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Jesus had been the topic of many chapters of many of the books I had read about eastern religion. All of the gurus and mystics affirmed that Jesus was indeed God, and a great teacher, and an avatar, or perfected human. All of them were eager to compare themselves to Jesus, claiming to be another version of the same divinity. All of them pointed to Jesus as being true. But when I began to read Jesus's own words, I discovered that he did not view them in the same light.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

"All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers... I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved" (John 10:8-9)

"There is one name under heaven by which we were saved, the name Jesus Christ."

He was saying that to follow him would require me to forsake all other teachers, all other ways, and all beliefs contrary to his words. I was being drawn to this princely, humble Savior, but must he be so uncompromising, so narrow-minded in his insistence on complete devotion to him alone? Surely there was more wisdom in the many great teachers and gurus who together had written volumes and volumes of books on the mysteries of life, death, and eternity. These were mystics who had spent years in fasting, meditation, and self-denial, who had journeyed to the depths of inner space searching for truth. And what had they found there? God. God was deep within all of us, they said.

But this Jesus says that we need only to come to him and receive his gift, the spirit of life. He says he is the only one who can impart this spirit, which is the spirit of God. Then and only then will God live within us.

It makes more sense to think that the man who exercises the rigorous disciplines of eastern religion would earn the right to the truth. Only by extreme asceticism could someone see behind the veil of the material world, to the spiritual world and its secrets. Even those who have claimed to receive messages from alien beings affirm that these visitors from other worlds say that man must pay for his own sin by getting recycled through countless lives. It was comforting to think that, if reincarnation were true, I would eventually make it, in fact everybody would. I could afford to be wrong if this were the case. I could also afford to commit as many sins as I wanted. After all, that only meant I would arrive in heaven a little later, and I would then have a better time along the way.

But this Jesus claims that we have only one life, and after that the day of judgement. We do not have to work our way to heaven, though, so we have a chance to get to heaven after our one life. That's because He paid our Karma, or as the Christians say, died for our sins. His good deed carries enough power to compensate for and to wash away all of our bad ones. That sounds too easy, like a cop-out.

These are complex issues, I thought, too complex to be boiled down to one book, and one man for all time. I would continue my search.

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Lou decided to plant marijuana seeds near the water tank the next day, and instead of walking down to the ocean alone I decided to go to town to get a few supplies. It took several hours to walk out of the jungle, and then I had to hitchhike a ride to the nearest grocery store, in Captain Cook. Even though I had been spending more and more time meditating, I was unable to change the fear and hostility within me. I still froze with paranoia every time I saw a police car. Then my angry, bitter feelings toward the "establishment" and President Nixon would resurface. It puzzled me why, if I was spending so much time getting to be "one" with God, these feelings should have such instant and total control over me at times.

Stocked with fresh bags of tobacco, cheese, and rice, I started back to camp late. A Volkswagen bug pulled over in response to my extended thumb, and the driver, a pretty girl, smiled as I sat down.

After the usual small talk, she turned to me and said so sweetly:

“Do you know that Jesus loves you?”

Another one! I just couldn't take it. Dozens of conflicting beliefs are battling in my confused brain, I have been meditating and eating the purest diet and performing my yoga like my life depended on it, thinking about God day and night, and now this girl, some pampered brat who never fasted a day in her life, treats me as if she knows all the answers, and has some kind of privileged access to God!

I really let her “have it.”

“You ###!@! Christians think you're so ###!@! special! You conceitedly imagine that you have to only way to God. Well you're ###!@! Wrong! There are many ways to God. I'm sick of hearing your ###!@! self-righteous boasting about the light you saw and the cleanliness of your ###!@! souls. I think you're all full of ###!@!.”

By now the car had stopped as she sat staring at me crying in terror. I slammed the door as I got out. We were near the trail to camp.

“And THANKS for the ride!”

I started down the trail still fuming. But the sun had already set, and black clouds billowed in across the sky. Thunder shook the earth and giant flashes of lightening illuminated the eerie jungle. Creatures rustled beneath the vegetation, running for cover. Droplets of water began to splatter against the upper canopy of tree branches, and then dribble down and splatter again against the bed of leaves on the ground beneath.

A crack of thunder boomed like a canon, startling a flock of small birds out of a nearby tree. They fluttered in a quick loop back into another, denser tree. In the dim light, the white feathers under their wings appeared and disappeared like a gust of blowing snow disappears into a dark wood.

An old deserted outhouse stood along the way. It was my only refuge. I ducked inside and hoped that the roof didn't leak. Insects ran across the floor, briefly exposed by the flashes of lightening. I scrunched up into a ball for warmth, and leaned into the corner, bracing myself for what was to be a long night.

As the night dragged on, first one side of my posterior would hurt and then another. Some of the insects looked like scorpions. I shifted positions constantly, but there was no comfortable way to sleep, so I didn't.

That night God began to speak to me. His voice was unlike the many voices that, in deep meditation, I had imagined to have been His. His voice was like the thunder. It carried a frightening quality, a stern, confrontational call to accountability. I felt like I was at the Judgment Day. I shook with the fear of death. I knew running would be useless, so I pleaded:

“Oh, God, tell me what you want and I'll do it, I promise!” I cried out loud.

He answered by bringing a Bible verse clearly into my mind, a verse that I had read only once in a Gospel tract.

“It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.” (Luke 17:2)

I knew he spoke of the girl who had given me a ride that day. Now I had incurred His wrath. How could it be, I thought, that this is a God so personal that he would actually go out of His way to defend his children? He cares so much about his children that he is ready to kill me for mistreating one of them.

"I'm sorry, God. I'll change. I will," I said out loud.

Another Bible verse came into my mind, but with such power and force that I knew it to be that voice of God. My trembling worsened as I heard the words:

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36)

He was giving me an ultimatum. I believed that I would soon die if I did not surrender to him.

"Tell me what to do and I'll do it," I pleaded again. "Whatever you say, I'll do it."

I thought of all of my meditation and fasting and careful discipline of diet and yoga. Did He want me to REALLY get into it, like the mystics of the East? Would he want me to be a hermit, ever reflecting on him, meditating to enter ever deeper realms of oneness with him? Would he accept anything I could do in exchange for my life?

The storm passed without Him having given me any specific instructions. With the morning came my dazed descent down the mountain to camp. As I plodded down to where the jeep trail intersected the foot trail to our treehouse, I noticed a book that had been dropped in the weeds. It was called "Steps to Christ."

In this small book, the writer simply and clearly explained what it means to accept Christ, and how to do it. Nothing that we can do can earn us heaven, it said. The only way to know God is to believe in his Son, Jesus Christ. If you confess Jesus as your Savior with your own mouth, and believe that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. I confessed to God there on that trail, that I was indeed a sinner and I knew I didn't have a chance to be accepted into heaven by my own merits. I told Him that I believed (however shakily) that He had died for me on the cross to wash away my sins. I asked Him to come and live in my heart, and to guide me always. I felt a little uncomfortable talking out loud to someone I couldn't even see, but after I prayed the Spirit of God descended upon me, and I knew He was for real.

What a sight I must have been, alone in a huge jungle, sitting on the ground crying. Waves of relief washed over me, relief that my sins were cleansed. I literally felt the weight of guilt lifted off of me. I was going to live a new life. I was going to know God.

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It was our day to walk the jeep trail down to the ocean, and Lou and I set out right away. On the way down, I shared with Lou what had happened. This time he did not agree. He had always seemed open minded to Christianity, but now he seemed to be offended. Perhaps he thought I would frown on his marijuana growing, but I didn't care or even see anything wrong with it at the time. I just wanted to know God. It seemed that this was as good a way as any. I still had not accepted that Jesus was the only way to God. To me, that would be a put-down of all of the people who were into other religions. This belief, or lack of it, would almost lead to my undoing.

The road we walked emptied out onto a rocky beach. The clear waves pounded the rocks sending spray high into the warm air. A bronze plate cemented into place declared that this was the spot where Captain Cook was killed by natives. Within eyeshot was Captain Cook's Monument, a white obelisk bolted down onto a large cube of concrete. Steel chains that had been painted white looped from post to post forming a ring around it, as if trying to hold back the tall weeds that encroached upon their space. Down the beach we discovered some old Hawaiian words etched into the rocks. We were to learn later that they meant "The Royal Bath." The Hawaiians who inhabited the place in former years had discovered a freshwater spring that entered the sea there through the rocks. At low tide a sand-

bottomed pool formed by a ring of black volcanic rocks filled with fresh water, making a bath “fit for a king.”

“Your highness, if you please,” I said, gesturing for Lou to get in. We both splashed down into the cool pool, and leaned back against the rocks to enjoy the midday sun.

We then ventured out into the salty sea, jumping off of tall rocks, enjoying our first bath in days. I crawled back out onto the rocks, and as I leaped wildly into the air I called out: “I wanna be baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost!”

I was baptizing myself. Lou shook his head as if he knew such craziness would follow my air-headed decision to follow Christ.

As we swam, we found ourselves looking down through the clear water at beautifully colored beds of coral. We were new to Hawaii, of course, and did not realize how quickly the razor sharp coral could cut us. As our feet brushed over the edges of a patch of the coral, pain shot up our legs. We made matters only worse trying to climb out of the water immediately, over the top of more coral that sliced up our feet even more. We sat down on the concrete of the Monument holding our feet, trying to get the bleeding to stop.

A trimaran that had been anchored in the bay began to slowly motor towards us.

“Ahoy!” a man’s voice called out. “Ahoy! Are you in the way of peace or do you be land-lubbin’ scoundrels?”

Not a typical Midwestern greeting, but as I was to learn well, there was little that was typical of Louis Hayden. Hayden was, or at least fancied himself to be, a real sea-faring man. But instead of a man dressed in brass buckles and thick brooches that one would expect to find behind such verbiage, he dressed entirely in pure white. From the tip of his perfectly wrapped turban, which contrasted his clean shaven suntanned face, down to his spotless cotton slippers, both flowing silken shirt and smooth pants, all were white as snow.

He had sailed his trimaran, the “ANTHEM,” from San Francisco, down along the coast of Mexico, and then to the islands, riding the strong swells and winds of the Pacific current. Here his crew of two had deserted him.

Lou lifted up his fingers in the shape of a “V,” the “peace sign.” Hayden hollered out for us to grab his rope as he neared. With his ship now tied to the monument posts, he stood on the deck with arms crossed, his white clothing dazzling in the bright sun.

“Coral cuts! You should have known better.”

We looked down with embarrassment at our bloody feet.

“And what brings you two to this place, and where are you from?”

“Nebraska,” I said.

“Iowa,” said Lou.

“We walked down the trail that comes from Captain Cook.”

He offered us some fresh Kona coffee sweetened with Kauai honey. We sat there on the concrete (Hayden never left his ship) gulping down the delicious brew. I was no coffee drinker, but that was positively the best drink of any kind I had ever tasted. That was the day I became a coffee drinker.

We conversed about Hayden’s journeys, our teepee life, our treehouse, and Lou’s new marijuana farm. After a while Hayden called our attention to many small caves that dotted the face of the huge basalt cliffs ringing the bay. He ducked back into his ship and returned carrying three human skulls.

“These are from a cave far up the cliff. The natives used to bury their dead here. The spirits of the dead have entrusted the keeping of these to me. With them I can contact the ancient gods of these islands, and invoke their mercy and protection for my ship.”

He was serious.

Back up at the treehouse that night, Lou and I for the first time could not seem to get along. I wanted to delve into deeper spiritual pursuits, but it seemed that he just wanted to lay back and watch his marijuana plants grow. The friction was too much. I decided to move into one of the caves near the bay. I was alone again.

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Reacting to a society that took God lightly, I plunged into a religious subculture that would settle for nothing short of total abdication of all self. Believing that spiritual growth was to be won through fierce asceticism, I spared no pain in my effort to become free of carnal hindrances to holiness. Through isolation and silence, through the strictest diet of only fresh fruit and nuts, through fasting and meditation and yoga exercises I incessantly attempted to hone my spiritual sharpness.

Sitting in the cave’s mouth, I breathed slowly in, my body held in a yogic pose. My eyes, blue and bleary with salt, stared across the water to the orange ball of sun, then closed. Still as stone, I quietly exhaled, attempting to become one with the god I believed to be within me.

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My younger sisters and brother still attended the Catholic schools and churches where I first learned anything of God. Like most Catholic boys, I served as an altar boy. And like most Catholic boys, I wanted to be a priest when I grew up.

A short nun taught me second grade. Robed entirely in black, all I ever saw of her were her face and hands. A permanent smile seemed glued to her face. She wore thick wire-rimmed glasses that made her eyeballs seem larger than they really were. Her huge rosary beads rattled as she patrolled the aisles of little darlings. Near her desk hung (more a deterrent than a weapon) a thick board with a hefty handle carved with the inscription: “Board of Education.” It was used only once that year, on me. You may not believe it (she certainly didn’t) but I was not the one chattering during lessons while her back was turned toward the blackboard. It wasn’t me. Honest. But like the saintly martyrs of old I bore the reproach of that heavy club. With a quivering lower lip I stated my final defense: “At least God knows the truth.” I would like to say that her error caused me to stumble into unbelief and the deep-seeded mistrust of authority that later caused me to go wild, but I don’t think so. I’m no psychologist, and the truth, if I even knew what it was, couldn’t be so simple. Later it occurred to me that God did indeed know the truth, and I was really getting it because of all of the OTHER times I was yakking my head off in class. Getting the board the way I did led me to two second grade conclusions. First, I wasn’t going to get away with anything in the long run. God knew. Secondly, that ONLY God knew. Sister didn’t. Ever since I have had very little faith in coincidence. Coincidence is God’s way of staying anonymous. Now I know that one cannot attach a deep spiritual meaning to every stubbed toe and idle word, but there is a mystery to be solved in coincidences. The works of God are sought out by those who want to know Him, and we search for His hidden involvement in the mysteriously coincidental events of our lives.

So Sister’s miss was God’s hit, and the clergy remained my heroes. In 7th grade I became a “Grand Knight” altar boy. This was the highest rank given and it entitled me to serve a Mass with the Archbishop of Omaha. But my conscience was tearing me up, for at the same time, I began to doubt the existence of God. Catholics at that time “confessed” their sins by entering a small closet-like room and whispering their sins to a priest who remained hidden behind a thick screen window. I entered the dark

confessional and knelt. Instead of the usual sins (“I teased my sisters one hundred times, I disobeyed my parents seventy-five times, etc.”) I really poured out my anguish of heart. I was the scoundrel of scoundrels, for while I served as a “Grand Knight” altar boy, I even doubted the very existence of God. I believed that I would surely go to hell if I were to die. His counsel was good. “When you find yourself doubting God,” he said, “pray this: I believe, help my unbelief.” Often the simplest things are the most profound. My wavering faith in God was restored. God Himself helped my unbelief. For in the end, God Himself is the only source of true faith. That childhood faith had long since withered and died.

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Now I was at another crossroads of faith. As I mercilessly invested my faith in the god who I believed was inherent within each person, I struggled with the possibility that maybe God was external to me. The thunderous voices of the night I spent in the outhouse, the sense of guilt being washed from me on the jungle trail, the love that the Christians seemed to have for one another, and their sweet temperament; all this pointed to the Jesus of the Bible.

I had read in a Christian magazine that the Christians there had gone on a three day fast, and then broke their fast with Coke and potato chips. This could not be right, I thought. They had little discipline, little self-denial, and seemed to frown on anyone who did not accept their narrow viewpoint about Jesus being the only way. So like a yo-yo I bobbed from the Bible to all of the other beliefs.

My meditation was becoming deeper and deeper. I would at times go into a trancelike state, where I would see and hear spirits. I could not identify them, but they were bright, fierce, and powerful. Perhaps they were the spirits of Hawaiian holy mystics, I thought. Men who had sat in these very caves meditating, perfecting their oneness with God, until they ascended above the need for any further reincarnations. Now they were beginning to communicate with me, and show themselves to me to help me attain their high level of spirituality. Had I not earned it? I was sure that none of the Christians had ever communicated with the spiritual world like this. They would probably say it was the devil.

At night I would sit in the mouth of my cave to watch the millions of stars. The air was so clear, and the nights so dark at times, that the Milky Way looked thick like a milkshake. Shooting stars occasionally darted past. I wondered if the voices I heard were really beings from outer space. Perhaps, as many speculated, more highly advanced beings who lived on other planets were trying to communicate with us poor earthlings, to help us solve our problems and evolve to their stage of development.

One thing that troubled me was my inability to quit smoking cigarettes. Even though I imagined myself to be climbing higher and higher on spiritual planes, I just could not master this addiction. Nothing I had read in the eastern books dealt with the subject. But I discovered a story in the Gospel where a leper came to Jesus, begging him to heal his leprosy.

“Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” the leper cried.

“I will, be thou clean,” Jesus replied.

Immediately the leper was cleansed.

I sat smoking a cigarette as I read the account. I said to God: “Lord, if you can heal a leper that easily, surely you can heal me of this filthy habit. Lord, if thou wilt, though canst make me clean.”

From that day on the desire to smoke left me. Just once it returned, when about 10 days later I found a fresh cigarette that some tourist had dropped near the Monument. I lit it up, and took a few puffs, then became extremely nauseous and dizzy. Those few puffs I took 10 years ago was the last time I smoked. In spite of the Lord doing this for me, I still fluctuated between two faiths.

One day, as I sat on the beach reading my Bible, Hayden came ashore in his dinghy. I talked to him from time to time, and could tell he was getting very bored. He had been anchored in the bay for some time without a crew. He was beginning to fear that the coast guard or island police were going to tell him to move on. He came up to me and noticing what I was reading, he said:

“What are you reading that for?”

“Some Christians in Hilo gave it to me,” I replied.

“You can’t see the white light in the black book. I ought to know. I went to Mexico City a couple of years ago searching for my guru. Everyone meets someone in their lifetime who is to lead them onward in their evolution. I was walking down the street in Mexico City one day, and there in the window of a coffee shop I saw a beautiful man who nearly glowed with “the light.” He sat all dressed in white, with a white turban on, drinking a cup of Mexican coffee. I knew immediately he was my guru. I went in and stood staring at him.

“State your business, man,” he said.

“Sir, I see that your aura is white, even as your clothes. I would like to know how you came to such a high level of oneness with Brahmin. I would like to be your disciple. The man was not in the least taken aback by my forwardness. We arranged to meet again the next day. But unfortunately I was arrested trying to buy some hash the next day, and ended up in a Mexican jail with nothing but a big black Bible! For six months I read that thing from front to back, and believe me, there’s nothing there.”

“Did you ever find your guru?”

“No, but I was able to make psychic contact with him, which I enjoy to this day. Unknown to me at the time, that brief meeting with him in the coffee shop was all the physical contact I needed to reach the highest plane, the white one. Of course I’m not perfect yet. I sometimes titter between white and light violet, the second highest plane of existence.”

I closed my Bible, a polite way to say that I might accept his story. It did fit in with my Hindu beliefs.

“I can see auras nearly all the time now,” he continued. “Yours is light blue-green, but with a lot of active energy in it. You should soon be entering blue, then violet, if you don’t do anything to ruin your good Karma.”

The sorcerer in Colorado told me my aura was already violet. Oh, well, I thought, that sounded too good to be true anyway. I guess I still have a ways to go after all.

He was about to get to his point. All that he had said was intended to classify me, and to see if I would accept his spiritual leadership. If a sincere seeker believes another man is really closer to God than himself, then that man can command a lot of control over the seeker. Sadly, this is the formula through which many are led astray from the truth. But his hidden agenda was about to surface.

“I need someone to crew the Anthem. I want to take her around the world. You seem like a genuine devotee to the principles of Brahmin. I would like you to move on board, where you’ll have your own quarters and food provided. But you must keep in mind that I’m the Captain. You must obey instructions and learn sailing.”

I had a secret desire to sail around the world ever since I had met a fellow traveler on Black Sand Beach. He had showed me his passport booklet, filled with dozens of stamps from exotic lands all over the world. I wasn’t sure about Hayden’s stories, but maybe he was really that much further along than I. He was about 10 years older, and had a very strict diet. He was in near perfect physical condition, and was striking in appearance. I was willing to chance it. I accepted his offer.

“One more thing,” he added. “You’ll have to return that Bible. We can’t have it aboard. We have to travel light. It’s not that big of a ship. Besides, as I have told you, you can’t see the white light in the black book.”

Here was an invitation to sail around the world, the dream of a lifetime, and all I had to do was give up a Bible. The decision seemed simple enough. After all, I wasn’t being asked to give up God. I agreed.

Twenty Eight – Aboard the Anthem

I worked daily for Hayden preparing the ship for its passage to the Philippines. I scraped the barnacles off of the bottom, and reinforced supports. I cleaned and organized and read books about sailing. Hayden kept up his stories about his spiritual experiences, and I listened. We went on training jaunts into the open sea. Dolphins often ran ahead of our ship, arching gracefully airborne, then slicing back into the blue with hardly a splash. We sailed past rocky cliffs where multiple rainbows appeared almost daily.

On one isolated shore were bellowing blowholes. Waves rolled in from the open sea forcing water into underwater caves that extended inland. The caves narrowed, and then terminated at small holes that you could straddle by spreading out your feet. Look into a hole that might look like the inside of a churning wash machine one moment, and then stand back while the water shot up dozens of feet into the air like a geyser. I would wait for the right moment, and then dive into a blowhole with mask and fins on. Swimming through the cave toward the open sea was like a carnival ride replete with swarms of colorful fish, millions of bubbles, and the loud dull pounding sound of wave against rock.

We amused ourselves at times by diving off of cliffs, swimming in remote bays, or hiking inland to forage for fruit and nuts. We would hold on to an anchor and let it pull us deep into the water until our ears couldn’t take any more, and then drift slowly back up to the surface, watching swarms of fish that would condense into tight balls of silvery flashings as they fled above us.

It was a wonderful adventure, and it was mine due to one reasonable decision, the measly price of giving up an old Bible.

But there were times aboard the Anthem that made me wonder if the Ouija Board’s predictions of my death before age 21 would come true. On a trip into the open ocean, Hayden asked me to dive beneath the boat to check a piece of equipment. Over the side I went. The equipment checked out, but a gust of wind cause the boat to move away suddenly. I resurfaced to find the boat some 40 feet away. I sensed something alive in the water near me, and began to swim at panic pace back to the ship. As I pulled myself on deck, a few dolphins passed, followed by several sharks. Within seconds a black and white killer whale also surfaced where I had just been.

We left Kealakakua Bay to “island hop” our way to Honolulu, where we needed to pick up maps and supplies before departing for the Philippines. The Hawaiian Islands are actually volcanoes that have risen from the ocean floor. Strong currents of water and air encounter the islands on their westward advance. These currents, like a river going through a narrow gorge, are channeled between the islands. “Shooting the gap,” or sailing between islands, requires a sailor to enter some of the roughest conditions anywhere, with waves up to 30 feet and winds up to 60 mph. If a person were to full overboard in the channel between islands, nothing short of a miracle could save him from sure death. If the sharks didn’t get him, he’s still lost because no one can swim faster than the current moving out to sea. Turning a sailboat around in such conditions would be impossible, especially for one man. The

waves are so high, that a lone swimmer would be impossible to even see, let alone rescue. Any rescue attempt, therefore would be doomed to fail.

Twenty Nine – At Wit’s End

That day the channel conditions were typically boisterous. We started our shot toward Lahaina on the Island of Maui. The force of wind and waves was so loud we needed to shout at close range to be heard. The wind began to drive the nose of the Anthem deep into the water. Waves swept across the deck. Water sloshed into the cabin. We urgently needed to hoist a smaller jib sail at the bow. Hayden shouted instructions for me to pull the halyard rope as soon as he yelled that he had the smaller sail attached. I stood at the mast ready to pull. Waves splashed into Hayden as he screamed for me to pull. I couldn’t hear him, but I could read his lips.

Perhaps I missed the chapter in the sailing books about winches, because I failed to realize that I should wrap the rope around the spool-like winch at the base of the mast before pulling. I jerked, but instead of the sail sliding up into place, I found myself hoisted up into the air. The tip of the mast rotated like a child rotates a roman candle on the Fourth of July. Like a tetherball in flight I whipped all the way around the mast. My whirl around the world ended abruptly as I slammed, back first, into the mast and fell, stunning, to the deck.

Hayden, who had missed the whole thing, was infuriated at my failure to hoist the sail.

“Pull the halyard, you stupid ##!%!” he screamed.

This time I heard him.

With a mighty heave I again managed to send myself on a 360 degree ride. This time I was facing downward as I orbited the tip of the mast, facing the violent water beneath me. Again I clobbered the mast. Again Hayden cursed me. Again I wondered why some people think sailing is romantic.

I finally managed to hoist the sail. Back inside the cabin I began to shake and goosebumps of fear rippled up my spine, for only then did it occur to me that I had been near death.

The bright sunny day gave way to cloudy gloom as the wind and waves mercilessly pounded the Anthem like a fragile piece of driftwood caught inescapably before a whitecap. Darkness began to fall as we were pushed past the jagged cliffs of Molokini. The small uninhabited island protruded from the waves, stark and unfoliated. The waves turned from blue to dark green, to grey, and then to black. Their sound seemed amplified by the blackness.

“Take the helm,” Hayden demanded. He disappeared.

“Steer toward that light. That’s Lahaina,” he yelled from the hold.

I held her course steady as Hayden prepared some food. I could see a dimly flickering light in the distance every time the Anthem crested a wave. The strong wind seemed to have a mind of its own. It wanted to push the boat sideways, tipping it over into the sea, making us food for the sharks. I began to imagine my waterlogged body, limp and lifeless, drifting out to the open sea, sloshing about like so much seafoam. My quest to be free at all costs had ended in the ultimate bondage, the bondage to death. Did Hayden even know what he was doing? He was a crackpot. He thought some skulls he had hidden in the galley would convince the island gods to protect us.

I fought the wheel as insecurity gnawed at my guts; that insecurity known well by all who have sailed the seas in small craft. I wanted to escape, to be free of the risk and the terror of the sea. Everything was in motion. There was no stability. Like being on a horrifying roller coaster ride with no

certain end, the joy of adventure now wearied me with fear. But the situation could not be escaped. The only hope, the only indication that this trip would ever end was that distant light that never seemed to get any closer.

A huge wave smashed against the ship, lifting it up and then dashing it down into a deep valley between watery walls. The Anthem began to spin as I wrestled the helm. I overcompensated the turn of the wheel, causing the ship to radically spin back the opposite direction. We met another wave head on. With a dynamite boom saltwater crashed onto the deck. Ropes and tackle rattled. Lou ran up from the hold screaming.

“What are you trying to do, kill us?”

He tore the helm from my panicky grip.

Now panic began to fill his voice.

“I don’t know if I can bring her around,” he grunted as he leaned his full force into the helm. Another liquid wall swallowed us, and for a moment we peered out of the cabin windows at a black swirling chasm of watery death.

I began to pray. At my wit’s end, I called out to every god I could think of. The god who was supposedly in me, the island gods that Hayden believed in, the ancient gods of wind, water, fire, and earth. I tried to calm myself and meditate. Perhaps if I can become “at one” with the universal god at this time, I thought, we will be guided into a harmonious course through this danger. Another wave hit. Hayden cursed. I tried to contact Shiva and Vishnu, Hindu gods.

“Don’t just stand there!” Hayden shrieked. “Get a bucket to bail! Get ready to throw things overboard!”

I slid down the ladder into the galley. Pots and pans had been thrown all over the counters and floor by the force of the waves. Their clanging and banging was barely audible. The ship lurched, and a coffee pot came flying out of the cupboard, landing with a smash on the floor. I gripped the walls as cookware rolled around in an inch of water under my feet. I flipped the bilge pump on, and located a bucket. I began to look for heavy items to throw overboard.

As I grabbed our spare anchor, I glanced into my cabin. I remembered the big black Bible that Hayden made me return before coming aboard. It was too much weight, he had said. Now it seemed as if God has forsaken us, whoever God is, if he is.

“Forget the anchor! Get the jib down!” Hayden commanded.

I scrambled out onto the deck. I embraced the mast as another wave whooshed over me. With water dripping from my soaked hair I finally called out to the God of the Bible. He was the one I didn’t want to try unless I had to. I had rejected him and his Bible, and I felt humbled in turning back to him. He probably had given up on my anyway, I thought. But I was desperate.

“Jesus, save us!” I cried out loud.

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Lahaina Harbor provided welcome relief. I crawled into my cabin and slept like a baby sleeps in his mother’s arms. The gentle waves rippled against the side of the Anthem. I could hear the sound of laughter as partying tourists strolled on the docks.

Hayden had been reveling in his sailing skill. He said that we were fortunate that he had experience bringing sailing ships out of close calls. He went into great detail describing all of the maneuvers he had used to remedy our floundering out there in the frightening sea.

“Will, you must NEVER let her turn sideways,” he scolded. “You’re so quiet, are you still shaking?”

“Hayden, I think we had spiritual help out there.”

“Yes, the gods protected us and gave me skill.”

I said nothing. From that time on I wondered if I should be on board the Anthem at all, but to give up a trip sailing around the world was a lot to consider.

Thirty – The Hand of God

A few days later we set sail for Oahu. There in Honolulu we would obtain the necessary maps and charts for our trip around the world. We would have to leave in time to arrive in the Philippines before the hurricane season. The trip across the South Pacific would be long and tedious. We would be gliding for over a month on the long drawn-out waves, catching the constant winds of the current.

If all went well, boredom would be our only struggle. But for many, not all did go well. We met one sailor who sailed from California to Hawaii alone. He had veered off course and ended up in the Doldrums. These are stagnant, windless areas stuck between the paths of regular ocean winds. A thick layer of seaweed covers much of the surface of the water. Smaller sailing craft lack sufficient fuel capacity to allow them to motor out of these traps. Our friend had to catch rain water for drinking. His food supply had been reduced to nothing but raw rice, which he could not cook due to lack of fuel, and the few fish he was able to catch (which he also ate raw). There was nothing for him to do but wait for a breeze, a delay that took over two months.

Another sailor told us how he awoke one morning during a Pacific crossing to find that his friend, and the owner of the sailboat, was gone. He had fallen overboard overnight sometime, and there was no way they could sail back, tacking against the wind, to find him again.

We were told many stories of modern day pirates who attack smaller ships in foreign waters, murdering and plundering. For this cause we had firearms on board.

Shooting another channel on the way to Oahu was something I faced with a degree of apprehension. We set out before dawn. As the sky lightened, we saw sharks and a killer whale with young. Dolphins swam playfully alongside us. Hour after hour passed without incident. This time we had the right sails, the right tack, and winds that were not so furious. The long day melted into a moonless night. A light cloud cover hid the stars, then began to settle over the water as a light mist. The beeping of the depth finder seemed to lull us toward sleep.

“Here, take the helm,” Hayden drowsily instructed.

“I’m going to catch a little sleep. Steer by the compass and wake me up when you can see the lights of Honolulu.”

With that he disappeared into the hold. The hours floated by until at last I could see the lights of Honolulu.

“Hayden, wake up! We’re coming into Honolulu!” I shouted.

Hayden had always been the lightest of sleepers. He would wake up out of a dead sleep if even a flap of sail was luffing in the wind, and rise to tie it down. But now I couldn’t wake him.

I nervously glanced at the depth gauge. Plenty of depth. We were still several miles from Honolulu, but as the lights grew ever closer, I sensed something was wrong.

I tried shouting again. No reply.

I had been warned of the coral reefs around some islands. These massive reefs were sharp and hard. Impacting one at our present speed could puncture the bow. I looked at the depth gauge once more. Plenty of depth. But I was nagged by that same sense of danger. Something was wrong.

“Wake up, Hayden!”

Finally Hayden awoke. He climbed drowsily up the ladder and took the helm.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” he scowled.

“I tried! I tried!”

Our conversation was cut short as I saw Hayden’s eyes bug out with shock.

“OH MY GOD!” he gasped.

A few yards in front of our speeding ship was a massive wall of wood, lit only by a dim green light.

Hayden jerked hard on the wheel, but it was too late. The Anthem crashed to an abrupt halt. Pieces of white painted wood flying into the air. We banged our heads against the cabin window.

I ran out onto the deck and lowered the sails. While Hayden babbled with panic into the radio I fetched a hammer and nails to nail a sail over the gaping hole in the ship.

I knelt down on the deck and I looked up into the black sky as I softly whispered:

“God, now I KNOW you don’t want me on this ship.”

We never knew what it was that we hit that night. Perhaps it was a barge in tow, or maybe a large wooden ship at anchor far out in the bay. But one thing I do know, it was the hand of God.

Our crippled craft was able to be motored slowly into Ala Wai Harbor. I leaned forward over the bow, hanging on the ropes as we put-putted onto the glasslike water. The lights of Honolulu reflecting in the water were blinding after so many hours out in the black night. The whole city pulsed with light. The streets throbbed with activity, a stark contrast to the serene cliffs where I had been living.

We tied up the ailing Anthem to a concrete bulwark near the Ala Moana Hotel. A dark young man met Hayden there, dressed in shorts, sandals, and a Hawaiian print shirt. He threw flower garlands over Hayden’s neck, and kissed him on the lips. I stood watching in disbelief while they walked off in each other’s arms to spend the night together. It suddenly became very clear why God did not want me to sail around the world with Hayden.

I was awakened the following morning by the sharp pounding of a policeman’s flashlight on the ship’s door. He bellowed:

“You’re gonna have to get this boat out of here!”

I decided to stall until Hayden came back. After two more officers arrived, I decided not to wait any longer. As I backed the Anthem away from the bulwark I heard a familiar scream.

“Where in the hell do you think you’re going with my ship?”

Thirty One – On the Road Again: The Fool’s Highway

Waikiki beach was swarming with tourists. I sat like an insect in their midst, motionlessly watching. My beanpole frame, shaggy hair, and dark tanned body stood out amidst the many overweight white skinned aristocrats. Hayden had called them carnivores. Now it occurred to me that what a man ate really did not matter. What was in a man’s heart did.

Jesus said: Hear and understand:

“Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man (Matthew 15:11)... for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. (Luke 6:45)

One of the tourists must have thought I looked lonely. He struck up a conversation with me, and asked if I needed a ride anywhere. I declined, then went behind some rocks to be alone. There I started to cry as I realized that I hadn't felt any love from another person for months. In my zeal to meditate my way to perfection, and in disobeying God to sail around the world, I had lost contact with true spirituality, which is love. The many scriptures in which Jesus had emphasized the importance of love began to fill my mind. How could I have gotten so off course? I had been striving to enter the kingdom of God by my own works, and all I had gotten was enough spiritual pride to look down on others as "carnivores" simply because they ate meat.

The Holy Spirit began to speak to me more clearly than ever. Jesus said:

"He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

(Matthew 10:39)

What a contrast to the eastern belief that when a man finds himself, he finds God!

I walked further away from the crowded beach, and there began to cry out to God. I begged him to take me back, to let me walk in his ways, to know him, and let his life flow through me. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I cried out:

"What must I do God? What must I do?"

I reached out my hands in a gesture of surrender to him, feeling guilty for having deserted him, for having failed him in all that I was and all that I did.

Again I prayed: "God, what must I do?"

In response, a vivid image entered my mind. The image was so intense that it seemed to not be part of my imagination, but to have an existence all of its own. There in the center of each of my outstretched palms I "saw" drops of blood. Not my own blood, it had fallen from the bleeding Savior himself onto my hands.

"Nothing but the blood of my son is acceptable, but in him you are accepted in the beloved family of God." These words came as a thought, but were more than just a thought out of my own mind. This thought, which was the voice of God, had the person of another being as its source. It was completely different than any voice that I had ever heard from within myself when meditating. It was full of peace, authority, and gentle power.

The meaning of my experience was clear. There was nothing I must do to be accepted by God. Indeed, there was nothing I could do. It had been done. I must now receive.

The Holy Spirit continued to bring scriptures into my mind that I had read in the cave, but never understood.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But to as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:10-13)

God had spoken to me, and I knew it. It was God. The self-existent God who made all, but exists independently of all he has made. It is the God who will judge each of us on the day of judgement, the God who sent his Son to die to pay for our sins, and rise from death to prove that he has the power to give eternal life to those who believe in him.

I now realized who was talking, and I became frightened. I had no control over this God, this almighty person whose will was different from my own. This was not a god that I could conjure up from within myself. He hadn't disguised himself in every piece of matter that he had created, waiting for us to play a hide-and-seek game until we discovered him there.

Experiencing the reality of God this way made me realize how far from the truth I was to think that I was a little god just waiting to blossom into a full god. From within Himself God gives man spiritual, eternal life. How crazy it seemed to think of it in reverse; that from within myself came the spirit of the true God. As long as I believed that becoming one with God was a process of my own discipline, I was blinded to the gift of God. You cannot work for a gift because it is a gift. To believe you must work for it shows that you do not understand the nature of love.

God is love, and his nature is to give because he is love. So that which I had sought so earnestly, with so much difficulty and self-denial, was mine. But it was a gift.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewal in the Holy Ghost.” (Titus 3:5)

No, God was not like me, nor like any man. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33)

“..thou thoughtest that I was altogether *such a one* as thyself: *but* I will reprove thee, and set *them* in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear *you* in pieces, and *there be* none to deliver.” (Psalm 50:21-22)

“*I am* the Lord: that *is* my name, and my glory will I not give to another...” (Isaiah 42:8)

My anguish of heart was healed there as God revealed his love to me. He had accepted me. He loved me, “and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37)

The Bible had suddenly become alive to me. It made sense. It was mine.

But still much confusion followed. I didn’t know if I should stop meditation, or if I should not meditate on the Bible. I was slow to cast off all of my eastern beliefs, and would at times feel confused about the meaning of Bible verses.

I read that Jesus said: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Did this mean that God’s spirit must be “born” within a person after they put their faith in Jesus, or did it mean that we will all be reincarnated, like the eastern religions teach? Had I read a few more verses I would have realized that the former was correct, but my mind was jumbled with all of the beliefs that I had been clinging to.

I had committed my life to Him, and even though I could not see it, He was leading me down the right road. I felt like I was staggering blindly, in danger of getting completely lost, but he had already placed my feet on the King’s highway. I was no longer at the mercy of my own limited understanding, even though I felt like it. I often felt foolish for having surrendered the direction of my life to an invisible God. Had I given up control of my life to my shame? I had never felt such confusion while meditating. It was my initiation into a new spiritual life, a life that not only includes peace, but warfare.

Thirty Two – Back to the Big Island

I flew back to the big island of Hawaii where I had left Lou under the mango tree. After several months, I found him sitting in the same spot where I had left him. His marijuana plantation was a

colossal failure. A few stunted plants grew clumped together near the mango tree. They had attained a height of only three scrawny inches.

The cuts we had received from the coral had developed into a serious infection for Lou. He had been to the local hospital several times to receive injections of antibiotics, but his ankle was still swollen. A pair of crutches laid on the ground next to him. He had begun to wonder whether he would be crippled for life. He was unable to use the treehouse.

We shared our stories, and I told him about my experience with Jesus. I felt surprised that he had vegetated like he had, and pity that the coral cuts had so seriously infected him. He sensed my pity, and reacted defensively. On the ground beside him sat a Hare Krishna magazine. He grabbed it, and in reply to my stories said:

"I'm into this."

"Have you gone to any of their meetings?" I asked, knowing it was a cover-up.

"Uh, no," he said glancing down at the magazine, "but it says here there's one today down at the beach. I might go down..." he trailed off casually.

"I'll go with you," I offered.

The Hare Krishnas believed in chanting, meditation, and vegetarianism. Right up my alley. We arrived just as they were beginning. Clad in yellow flowing robes, with heads shaved as clean as billiard balls, they encircled a photo of their leader, Swami Prabhuhabananda. It gave one a great feeling of accomplishment just to be able to rattle off such a long, rhythmic name.

We walked up to the picnic table where sat the Swami and offered a fresh avocado, placing it respectfully in front of the photo. When the familiar chant/song began, I pulled out my clarinet and began to play the tune along with the chanters. Lou sat beside me chanting as well.

After the chanting, the leader came over and bowed toward me with hands folded against his chest. I did likewise.

"How long have you been a follower of the blessed Krishna?" he asked.

He wanted to size up what level of the spirit evolutionary scale I was on. Maybe he would have some competition on his hands for leadership of the group.

"Actually, I am a follower of Lord Jesus," I replied.

Bewilderment swept over his face, and a little apprehension.

"Then why do you chant in honor of the Krishna?"

"Does not Krishna teach that all paths lead to the one God? I respect Krishna, but I have chosen to follow Jesus, for he is the only one who died to pay my debt. He is also the only one who has risen from the dead. His Holy Spirit has revealed this to me."

"Do not the followers of Jesus believe that there is no other way to heaven but through Jesus?" he asked.

"I don't know. All I know is that I am supposed to follow him. When he came to live in my heart, I knew my sins were washed away. I knew by the spirit of God that came to live in me I was the child of God. I knew I was going to go to heaven. I also feel full of joy and peace, because I know I do not have to be concerned about working my way to heaven through fasting and meditation and chanting. He has taken my Karma upon himself on the cross, so I am paid up and free. Besides, he saved me from getting killed out at sea."

Having heard enough, he thanked us for coming.

I went to sleep in a papaya grove, and Lou went back to the mango tree.

Thirty Three – Another Dream

That night as I lay beneath the papaya trees I dreamed that I was a passenger in a limousine driven by President Nixon. As I have said, President Nixon had come to represent all that I hated and feared. But in this dream, my heart overflowed with intense love and compassion for him. I rode in his car, praying for him fervently. Respect and loyalty toward him seemed to overwhelm me. I had no political allegiance toward him, and he had not yet been suspected of the Watergate problems, but in my dream he represented authority in general. The dream was about a change that God was making in my heart.

I awoke to a beautiful sunny day. My heart was still brimming over with love for President Nixon. The thought of the police had instilled paranoia within me for years, but now I reflected upon them with a new love and respect. I had literally, overnight, started to love those whom I had hated!

“Now I know I’m Born Again!” I shouted out loud. “Because God has made me love those whom I could not love!”

Now I became aware that my long hair was a symbol of my rebellion, rebellion against God and against God-ordained authority. I reached into my backpack and pulled out my scissors. Grabbing tufts of hair with one hand, snipping them off with the other, I soon stood over a pile of blond curls. Somehow it made my heart feel lighter.

Thirty Four – Always a Chance to Go Back

As I laid on the beach with a new friend named Andrew one afternoon, a familiar shape came gliding around the distant point of Kealakakua Bay. It was the Anthem. Hayden had sailed back to search for another crew member.

Although I was thrilled with my new life as a follower of Christ, I still had many times of regret. I was deeply disappointed that I would not be sailing around the world on the Anthem.

Andrew had sailed to Hawaii, and many other places as well. He had a passport booklet full of unusual and exotic entries. His tales of adventure and discovery during his extensive travels made me yearn to be back on board the Anthem, planning our trip. I shared the story of Hayden and the Anthem with Andrew, and how we had a shipwreck during my watch. I told him I didn’t think Hayden would allow me back on board again.

At this Andrew exploded with misguided encouragement.

“Oh sure he will, all right. He’ll let you come back. We all need to learn somehow. Why, you were a faithful mate to him for a long time. Don’t let a little mishap get in the way of your trip. You may never have another chance to see the world. Look, he’s anchoring only a mile out. You can swim that easy enough.”

And I did. I climbed up onto the deck and shook my wet, newly sheared head.

“Will! Auch! You chopped off your hair!” Hayden bellowed.

I had forgotten about my dream, and the wonderful changes that were happening in me.

“I’ve become a Christian,” I said flatly, knowing what his response would be.

“Oh no! I’ve told you, you can’t see the white light in the black book.”

There was nothing left to say, but we talked anyway. Finally I slid overboard and swam to shore. That was the last I saw of Hayden.

I had my chance to return, as we all have chances to return again to the things that have bound us, but the price was too high.

Thirty Five – The Little Red Peppers

I hiked back up to where Lou camped near the mango tree. As I walked down the trail toward his camp, I heard Lou moaning loudly. I crept up closer and spied between the branches at Lou, who was up on top of the water tank with his arms outstretched. I thought he must be into some new and radical meditation, so I turned and went away.

About a week later I visited Lou again and learned the story of what had happened that day. As I came into his camp I noticed that his foot was entirely healed, and he no longer needed crutches.

After he heard me tell the Krishna devotee about Jesus, Lou asked Jesus to live in his own heart.

The day I heard him moaning, he was praying, asking Jesus to heal his foot. Although he went up on top of the water tank nearly every day to sun himself, he had never until that day noticed a vine that produced little red peppers. As he told me the story, he held up a small jar of them.

That day, as he prayed, Jesus opened his eyes to the peppers, and instructed him to eat one each day. Lou did, and the peppers seemed to have corrected a vitamin deficiency resulting in a healed infection.

We rejoiced and praised the Lord together. Now of the same spirit, my old friend became my new friend. We talked about Jesus together and made plans to hitchhike around the south end of the island together.

Thirty Six – A Demon of Divination

Lou and I traveled around the island visiting volcanoes and beaches. Always we talked about God, but our talks were not always clear or harmonious.

Confusion would often enter my thinking, and I would misinterpret the Bible, mixing eastern concepts with simple Biblical statements. I again felt drawn to the Patañjali and other eastern books, and began to read them alongside the Bible. I was believing that they all said the same thing in different ways, but I could not reconcile them. Well did Jesus say: “No man putteth a new piece of cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:16-17)

I was trying to add Jesus to the other beliefs that I had, and it was tearing me apart. I didn't realize that God had a new garment for me without spots, wrinkles, patches, or tears. He was just waiting for me to throw out the old one and quit trying to use the new one for patch material. He wanted me to become a new wineskin so that I could hold the new wine without bursting.

As we walked along the highway near Hilo, a young, clean-shaven man came walking toward us with some newspapers in his hand. Without introduction, he abruptly asked:

“Have you heard of Jesus, friends?”

“We follow Jesus,” I replied.

He acted like he didn't believe us.

“When did you ask Jesus into your heart?” he queried.

“On a jungle trail last October, and again in Honolulu a month ago.”

Still not satisfied, as if something were wrong, he asked:

“Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?”

“Yes, the Holy Spirit revealed the truth of the blood of Jesus to me in Honolulu.”

Convinced of our sincerity, but still troubled by something, he invited us to his house. Only a few hundred yards away was a Christian Communal House. Our friend asked us to sit down, telling us he was going to call for the elders of the house. We were only mildly surprised when the “elders” turned out to be younger than we were. Nevertheless, they had a gravity and a transparent concern that made me trust them.

After a few questions, they placed their hands on my head, and began to pray.

“Have you been involved with the occult and eastern religions?” he asked, “or any kind of fortune telling?”

“Yes.”

“I discern that there is a demon of divination troubling you. Please do not misunderstand me. You are not possessed by a Demon, but there is still something you have in your life or on your person that is serving as a contact point between you and this demon. Paul encountered one in a girl in the Book of Acts.”

As they prayed, I felt the Spirit of God like never before. A heavy weight of confusion lifted, like fog dissipates before strong sunlight. A strong ocean breeze swept through the room at that moment, or maybe it was the Holy Spirit. The red curtains now swayed in the glorious breeze, and seemed to glow with a vividness that had been absent only moments before. Praise welled up inside of me, and I felt as free as a soaring bird. I turned over my eastern books with gladness.

Thirty Seven – One Way

I spent the next three days at their house reading the New Testament. During that time, I read all but one Gospel and the Book of Revelation. The Holy Spirit opened up my understanding. I devoured it like a starving man devours fresh food. It was rich. It was clear. It showed me that Jesus was the only way to God.

All of the eastern writers had acknowledged that Jesus was true. All agreed that we should listen to the words of Jesus. But with Jesus the feeling was not mutual. Jesus condemned the eastern mystical teachings as false, self-serving, and even demonic. He said that anyone who tried to enter another way was a thief and a robber.

Now I saw that the eastern (and New Age) teachers were just trying to “get around” Jesus by pretending to be in agreement with him. But they are in complete disagreement with the Bible, which says “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” (Timothy 2:5) and “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts: 4:12)

I saw that there is only one way. While I had accused Christians of being closed-minded because they say Jesus is the only way, I was not open to the possibility (and the truth) of there being only one way for man to become one with God.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” (John 3:36)

Jesus said: "If ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24), and: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Hebrews 9:28)

As I sat reading the Bible for those three days, I also came to understand that the Bible is no ordinary book. It is a closed book to many who err from the true pursuit of God, as I did. I was sincere, and sincerely wrong.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death." (Proverbs 14:12)

Before the Holy Spirit opened my understanding, the Bible was a muddled mess of a book for me. But afterwards, it became a powerful tool in the hands of God to form in me the mind of Christ.

"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psalms 119:18)

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It was time to change. My 21st birthday, the one the astrologer had said I would never see, was only a few weeks away. I had been searching for truth, freedom, and happiness within myself and had not found it. God showed me that the first in his kingdom were the servants. I had thought that spirituality was a process of disciplined inner growth; a process of getting "higher." But true spirituality is getting lower, humbled as a servant to God. Instead of psychic powers and bright auras, love, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit was to be sought after.

After years of being weighed down with a legalistic religion that depended on my own efforts, God showed me that He is the husbandman. He plants the seed of his divine nature in us, he waters it, nourishes it, protects it, and in the end he enjoys the fruit it produces. Our job, our discipline, is merely to obey him in love. It is relationship verses rigor. It is God that works in us both to will and to do his good pleasure. Returning to Jesus, the shepherd of our souls: this is freedom. Soon I would be returning home.

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The night I was motored into Honolulu I sat on deck looking at the windows of a hospital. That image kept coming to mind as I asked God what he now wanted me to do. It was wonderful to have Him in control, to rely upon his wise counsel. I returned to Omaha. There I began working for the County Hospital as an orderly. I had spent three years on the road; three years in the uninhibited and uninhabited regions of Colorado, Arkansas, and Hawaii, where I knew no schedule and little responsibility. Now I spent nights in the dim and sullen halls of an old hospital taking care of geriatrics patients who, for the most part, had nobody left and no way to even go to the bathroom without help.

But being in God's will was better than living in a treehouse in Hawaii. "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee." (Psalms 63:3)

My fractured relationship with my parents was healed. I later joined a Christian ministry named Shiloh that operated houses like the one in Hawaii where God opened the Bible to me. I served as a pastor there. There I met my wife, the mother of my four children.

Eighteen years have passed from the time I found a Bible in Hawaii until the writing of this book. The eastern beliefs that infiltrated our society at that time have picked up steam and have often been renamed, but the underlying fallacies remain the same.

Men have always attempted to control their approach to God. They have invented hundreds of ways to try to reach God. But God has only one plan. In his plan, he initiates, he present a covenant to any who will accept his terms. This covenant is made through his sole ambassador, his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. It is not a covenant made with a church or a pastor. It is not accomplished through a

ceremony or sacrament. It is a covenant made with God in the heart of each individual who will receive Christ on his generous, but demanding terms. “This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” (Hebrews 10:16-17)

The End

Epilogue

May 1981

Life does not come all neatly packaged in easily digestible portions, but in hours of triviality, times of drudgery, splashes of activity, and explosions of the unexpected, all of which demand the utmost flexibility of he who would live it fully. For we must deal with life the way it is, and not the way we imagine it should be. But we must set our goals for life the way it should be, and not become depressed with life the way it is. And we must dream our dreams while we can, for it is but a little while, and the dreams of youth grow sparer like the balding head of an aging man.

We must not so much fear the woeful possibilities of the future as fear the wasteful and hurried use of today, for today is all that God ever offers us to live.

Sad is the man who thinks he cannot rest until he attains some worldly goal, for God bids us to rest from our own labor and to wait on Him to fulfill our lives, today is full in Him, as is.

And may we not so much fear loss of self-esteem, as loss of God's grace. For life is not in what we possess, but rather in what possesses us. Having food and raiment, we can be content. For Jesus came to give life, and life more abundantly. So give me poverty rather than animosity and wealth, give me contentment rather than honor without peace. Greed destroys all of life's quality, until even the best of life is viewed with an avaricious discontentment.

Do not envy, for you have enough, and the course of your life is chosen to teach you God's lessons. Learn your lessons well, and seek the Lord, for they that seek the Lord will not be wanting for any truly good thing. God is enough for the man who loves him. So that having even nothing is enough to be happy with if you have God.

For life cannot be bent around your little finger to suit you as you please. We must bend around the sharp edges of life, and learn to be happy within the lopsided and incomplete pathway we know as today, knowing that every today will be out of kilter and even painful in its own way until the kingdom of God is come in full. So having this sure hope is enough to cope with this troubled sea we call life.

Synopsis

There was a time when life was just a search for me, with nothing real yet found. It was the time of Woodstock, war protests, and young people taking to the highways in droves. I was 19, and had built a teepee on an isolated tract of the Roosevelt National Forest near Summerville, Colorado. During nearly three years of teepee dwelling, I studied wilderness survival, raised goats, and thought. I made smoking pipes out of deer antlers and sold them at a head shop in Boulder. The ten dollars a week was plenty for me. Many people have told me that they dream of doing something like I did, and I'm glad I did it, but like I said, I thought a lot. I thought so much because I knew something was not right. Society was not right. That's why I left it. But I was not right either. But God was out to make me right. One night when the moon was full and a fresh 12" snowfall made the night seem like day, God began to make my spiritual night a little like day. In that still night I knew that there was a God. I just knew it, and no one would ever again be able to convince me otherwise. After that night my search was more focused: I wanted to know the God that I knew existed. The next two years led me through forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, transcendental meditation, and a half-dozen other philosophies. I left my teepee for weeks or months at a time to search. I rode boxcars across Canada. I hitchhiked all across the west and Midwest. I lived in a Canyon on the Rio Grande River and went into Mexico. A missionary there told me about Jesus. I was a vegetarian for nearly two years, believing this would raise my consciousness to enable a better comprehension of God. I sought God sincerely. God sought me sincerely. We met in a deserted coffee plantation in Hawaii in 1973. He had hidden a Bible under the leaves of a mango tree where I decided to camp one night. My heart was prepared. His truth penetrated. His blood washed me from my sins. I had found him. More accurately, he had found me.

Will Van Moorleghem

Extended Synopsis

There was a time when life was just a search for me. It was the time of Woodstock, war protests, and young people taking to the highways in droves. I was 19. Life was full, and my time was my own. I had built a teepee on an isolated tract of the Roosevelt National Forest near Summerville, Colorado. Summer and winter, I lodged among the pines at 8500 feet. Visitors were rare, and so were modern implements of living. I cut firewood for fuel. An open fire pit provided heat, cooking, and light. I gathered wild herbs and made a weekly trip to Boulder for supplies. During two years of teepee dwelling, I studied wilderness survival, raised goats, and thought. I made smoking pipes out of deer antlers and sold them at a head shop in Boulder. The ten dollars a week I made was enough for my few needs. Many people have told me that they dream of doing something like I did, and I'm glad I did it, but like I said, I thought a lot. I thought so much because I knew something was not right. Society was not right. That's why I left it. But I was not right either; that is with God. God didn't matter then, only survival, solitude, and the overwhelming beauty of the Rockies. The truth was that I was distracted from the highest purpose and meaning of life. The challenge and beauty and sheer independence of it all blinded me to the knowledge of God, who made all. One night when the moon was full and a fresh 12" snowfall made the night seem like day, God began to make my spiritual night a little like day. In that still night I knew that there was a God. I just knew it, and no one would ever again be able to convince me otherwise. After that night my search was more focused: I wanted to know the God if he could be known. I wasn't sure that a man could personally know God as some claimed, but I knew a little about him. I had learned a few things about him from nature and from listening to God as he began to make impressions deep inside of me. He was pure like that snowfall, too pure and holy to be satisfied with me the way I was. I needed some type of improvement, I thought, to reach him. I wondered how I could "get on his level" and know him. He was just. He will judge and condemn all wrong, hidden or known of men. He was wise. Not just intelligent, but deeply knowing, all-wise. He was eternal as the stars, strong as the mountains of granite. He was also merciful.

Religion has long been a robber of the spiritually concerned, and I was no exception. The attempts to reach God through man-made religious schemes have been many, and I tested quite a few. The next two years led me through forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, transcendental meditation, and a half-dozen other philosophies. I even read the Bible. But people's attitudes determine their distance from God, and my attitude was self-reliance. My religious attempts to improve myself to reach God all failed. I left my teepee for weeks or months at a time to search. I carried only a backpack. My hair and beard grew long, and my single set of clothes wore thin. Each night I camped, and prayed to the God of truth that he would "show me the way." I hitchhiked from Colorado to California, and up the west coast to Canada. I hopped freight trains across Canada, and hitchhiked back to Colorado. After a few more months in the teepee, the travels continued. In Nebraska somebody gave me some hashish. In Oklahoma, somebody gave me several handfuls of different vitamin and mineral pills. I hitchhiked through Texas, and in a small Texas town called Monday I was arrested for hitchhiking. Three state patrolmen surrounded me alongside a local highway. As they began to search through my billfold I remembered with panic the hash in my pocket. I slowly reached my hand in to unwrap it from its tin foil, and quickly jerked it up into my mouth and swallowed. The patrolmen instantly grasped my beard and hair and tried to make me cough it up. I was thrown against their patrol car and frisked. Their eyes widened with amazement as dozens of pills came out of my pockets into their hands. They rushed me off to be the sole resident of the Monday County jail for overnight testing. Now in Texas in 1971, long-haired "hippies" were often given years in prison for possession of drugs. I really didn't know if any hash was left on the tin foil that it had been wrapped in. I was left with a very worrisome night to pass in a 5' x 10' cell. The only light filtered drearily in through a single glass block in one of the concrete walls. I

crawled across the floor hoping to find a cigarette, feeling every dark corner. My hand found a small piece of paper instead. I lifted it up to read in the fading light and there was a picture of Jesus, with his hands outstretched, and the scripture verse:

“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

In my fear, these words comforted my heart. All that night my heart would be overcome with waves of anxiety. Each time fear seized me, I cried out to Jesus to save me. The hours dragged by, until dawn began to lighten up the cell. Rattling keys announced the approach of the jail attendant. The time of my judgement was at hand. I was ushered into a court room, and told to sit before the judge. She slammed a gavel down and called court to order. I feared for the worst. Had they found hash on the foil? To my amazement I was given a reprimand and a one dollar fine! As they ushered me outside I breathed a sigh of relief and whispered a “Thank You” to Jesus. As the day proceeded, however, the impression of what had occurred faded in my mind.

It was several weeks later. I was in an isolated tract of desert north of El Paso. As I walked over a sandy knoll, I spied an adobe hut below me. Suddenly a Chihuahua sounded like an alarm. An aged figure emerged from the shady interior, with his hand cupped over his eyes to shield them from the bright sun. With a white head, brown wrinkled skin from age, and a snowy beard, he appeared like a prophet of old. His name was Drew, and he lived alone in the desert. He eventually fetched a Bible from his hacienda, and began to explain that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. He lamented the moral decline in society, and spoke of the Ten Commandments that God spoke so many years ago:

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
...not make any graven images
...not take the name of the LORD in vain
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Honor (Obey) thy father and mother.
Thou shalt not kill (murder).
.....commit adultery
 ...steal
..bear false witness (lie.)
 ...covet.

I knew exactly why I didn't feel worthy to know God. The words of God in his Bible made me feel guilty for the wrongs that I had done. I was uncomfortable deep inside about it all, and continued on my way through the desert. In the days to come, I would sit near my campfire by night. The sweet fragrance of burning sagebrush perfumed the clear starlit nights, and I determined that I would somehow know God.

I was a vegetarian for nearly two years, believing this would raise my consciousness to enable a better comprehension of God. I sought God sincerely. God sought me sincerely. We met in a deserted coffee plantation in Hawaii in 1973. He had hidden a Bible under the leaves of a mango tree where I decided to camp one night. My heart was prepared. His truth penetrated. His blood washed me from my sins. I had found him. More accurately, he had found me.

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