

True Tales from the Kingdom Hall – the Armageddon Project

As told by

**Larry S Gray
Michael J Hart**

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Dedications

I dedicate this writing to all those who had to suffer through my attitudes, mood swings, and downright nastiness over the years. Some of these people stuck by me while others ran because they had no idea what I was living through, and I had no idea how to tell them. Above all, I dedicate this to Sean and Lyndsay. Without them to guide me towards the wonders that are the true world, I firmly believe I would not be here. Thank you, and I love you more than you'll ever imagine.

– Michael J Hart, September 8, 2009

I dedicate these writings to my family who've been here through it all. To Maryann, my wife of twenty-four years, who saved me from myself after I saved myself from them: thank you for still being here through all my frequent bursts of insanity. To my daughters Lauren and Amy, grandson Little John and granddaughter Kennedy: thank you for growing up normal, it means *the world* to me. To my father; who left this life in 1983, who resisted to the bitter end, and who by his very existence allowed me to realize that there was indeed another way, that there was something else out there: thank you for giving me those occasional glimpses of the real world when I was little. And to my sister Cynthia, who lived and died without ever knowing the difference.

– Larry S Gray, September 11, 2009

Author's Note

Former Jehovah's Witnesses have written many books on this subject. Some such books are very good, some are not so great, and some just outright stink. But however good or poor the writing, the stories revolve around the same thing - people who were held slave to an organization that messed them up in some way or another. Statistics show that more than one million persons have left the Jehovah's Witnesses over the last ten years. Yes, some of them died, some of them were thrown out, and some of them merely faded away. But a great many left for other reasons, and a chosen few felt the need to tell their stories to the public, and fewer still had the guts to actually follow through and bring their tales to the forefront. Every account I've read is a heartfelt rendering of what these people endured as Jehovah's Witnesses, like a cross between a confession and a scream for help. Critics of these stories have stated repeatedly that most of them are overstuffed with feelings of bitterness, hatred and resentment, and that those feelings only serve to cloud their objectivity and dilute the potency of the very message they are attempting to get across. That may be so, but again, what we're talking about here is *truth*. The true feelings expressed are what make those stories *non-fiction*. These people are telling their tales, pouring out their hearts and souls onto the printed page, articulating their gut feelings. What good what would it do them, or the reading public for that matter, if they were to tone down the rhetoric and gloss over the bad stuff? That would be tantamount to a mentally unstable individual visiting his psychiatrist and starting out with, "Ok, Doc, I don't want to sound angry today, so we'll just talk about the happy stuff. Everything's A-OK!" It just doesn't serve the purpose. This is not to say the book you are now holding in

your hands is filled with bitterness, anger, hatred and resentment. It is not. We strive to be objective in this memoir, and we tell the truth. During this long journey, events took place that made us mad, that caused us hurt. When we relate those certain events, we tell it from the heart, and if a little irritation tends to slip through, so be it. This is the real thing; we were there, and we tell it like it is. Like the umpire - we call 'em as we see 'em. That is the true meaning of *non-fiction*...

PROLOGUE

In the Beginning

Herein lay the only evidence of a baseball game in the Bible; Genesis 1:1 “In the big inning...”

And that, my friends, is about as humorous as this tale is going to get. We are not going to spend a great deal of time and space relating and debating Jehovah's Witness dogma and doctrine, as there are quite a few well-written books of that nature already available to the public. This work is neither a pro-Jehovah's Witness promotion nor an anti-Jehovah's Witness diatribe; the opinions derived from reading this material will be strictly up to the reader. From the perspective of the authors, however, the tale that shall be told is a long and sad one - interesting, entertaining, provocative, scathing, nearly unbelievable and very disturbing. I have a family member who also was a teenage Jehovah's Witness and he also will be telling his tales in this project; there is reason to believe that he's emerged in a bit worse shape than I have. I will explain these reasons later, but herein, just a few things that encompass being born, raised, and then living life as a teenage Jehovah's Witness. Therefore, this story is more of a personal nature, a memoir, a documentary of sorts, from the perspective of two persons who spent their entire childhoods as Jehovah's Witnesses and knew nothing else. We will, however, devote the first and second chapters to a history of the Jehovah's Witness organization and an overview of their doctrine and teachings so that readers who are totally unfamiliar with the Watchtower Society and the Jehovah's Witnesses will not end up completely confused by the references and the jargon. We'll briefly touch on such Witness doctrine as the prohibition of celebrating holidays and birthdays, their prohibition of blood transfusions and other medical procedures, their stand on rape, their insistence on members' complete isolationism from anyone who is not a member, and their demand for strict and unimpeded adherence to the Watchtower Society's rules and regulations. We'll touch on Armageddon, the 144,000, Bible prophecy, the *New World Translation* of the Bible, the elders and the Governing Body. We will also supply a glossary of terms and phrases used strictly by members so that you, the reader, will have some earthly idea of what we're talking about.

Those of you who are former Jehovah's Witnesses will recognize the content for what it is; the material of the first chapter will stir memories of what you learned and how you dealt with it, and you'll be reacquainted with terminology likely long forgotten. You may

then join us for the long strange trip through childhood and teendom as Jehovah's Witnesses and, perhaps even more disturbing, the aftermath of the time spent therein.

The Forbidden Fruit

I use the term *Forbidden Fruit* to represent anything you desire that is willfully held back from you. We're not talking about an apple, a snake and a naked woman under a tree, but does anyone know that the term *Adam's apple* refers to the legend that when Adam took the so-called forbidden fruit offered by his wife Eve and ate it; it got stuck in his throat? Yes, that is why humankind today has what is referred to in unscientific medical circles as an Adam's apple. Anyway, growing up as a Jehovah's Witness, most things that everyday normal kids take for granted are completely forbidden. If one has a mind of one's own, and even a little bit of a rebel spirit, this forbidden fruit is going to become an obsessive desire. You are going to want to do things, and have things, and be things, like everyone else around you. Here are some of the things that, when I was in the process of evolving into my real world, I felt I had to have:

Rock and roll music, fictional books and magazines other than the *Watchtower* and *Awake!*, worldly friends, birthdays, holidays, sports, concerts, parties, worldly girlfriends, just all of the things I missed out on in my childhood. Everything that was forbidden I had to sample. In my case I almost went too far. Since 1976 I've been doing all manner of exploring and learning, and not all of it has been pleasant. I was not an "A" student in the school of life, mainly because I was teaching myself and not all the leaders I followed were worthy. Since 1976 I've become an avid rock music fan, an avid fiction reader, found a great interest in things strange and unusual (sci-fi, horror, ghosts, occult, supernatural), developed an interest in politics (went so far as to run for Stockton, New Jersey town council in 1999 and garner 47 votes), developed a taste for booze, went on and off drugs, grew my hair, botched a great many relationships with the opposite sex, went to but did not finish college, worked at numerous jobs, got swindled more than once, got talked into things more than once, missed out on countless opportunities for fear of failure (and probably missed a whole lot more for fear of success), declared bankruptcy, built a home, lost a home, wrecked three cars, had two operations, wrote a book, got married and started a great family. I've been an office boy, a salesman, a manager, a limousine driver, a bartender, a waiter, and a professional. I've hired people and I've fired people. I myself have been fired more than once. I've been to a shrink more than once, and I've made an ass of myself too many times to count. I've made a great many wrong decisions. I've caused the people I love untold grief because of my occasional bursts of pure stupidity, but they've stood by me and for that I will be eternally grateful. All that notwithstanding, I think I turned out all right. I'm almost normal, and that's OK, because I believe total normalcy to be extremely boring. I'm still plugging along, and not a day goes by when I don't learn something new or see something I didn't know about. When I think back on the period between 1976 and 1984, I shudder, because that was when I was at my most self-destructive, and I didn't even know it. I was too busy having the time of my life. I survived those years, for some reason, and here I am.

1976 thru 1984 is going to encompass a major part of my story, and 1979 through the bulk of the eighties for my cousin and co-author of this work. Although the main focus is on growing up in the Witness world and experiencing childhood and teendom as one of them, I believe the aftermath is of equal, if not greater, importance. Therefore, much will be devoted to the years following our escape as well.

The forbidden fruit is everywhere. What I've learned, however, is that most of it is simply not forbidden.

Let us Assemble...

In addition to the requisite five meetings per week that Jehovah's Witnesses must attend, also held are assemblies and conventions. An *assembly* is held twice a year and is a *circuit* event, usually held at Jehovah's Witness Assembly Halls around the nation. In the early days, these twice-yearly events were held in places like high school auditoriums or local arenas; in our case the Trenton War Memorial was once such place, before the new Assembly Hall was built in Buckingham, Pennsylvania. A *convention* is held once a year and is a *district* event, a much larger gathering. These events are held at large venues such as racetracks, fairground grandstands and stadiums in large cities. In our time, we attended these district conventions in such noble places as Philadelphia's Vet Stadium, Delaware Park Racetrack, the Allentown Fairgrounds, and Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City. The most colossal of these events in my memory was a seven-day marathon in July of 1969 at Yankee Stadium and, yes, every seat was filled. Circuit assemblies were held in the spring and fall and consisted of a long weekend of teaching, preaching and fellowship. There was a Friday night program, a Saturday afternoon and evening program and a Sunday morning and afternoon program. Immersions (baptisms) were held on Saturday; assembly halls had their own pools, but if an assembly was held at a public building, immersion candidates were bussed to a local swim club or beach for the immersion ceremony. We attended numerous assemblies in places like high schools in Plainfield, New Brunswick, Lakewood and Camden, and the ever-popular Trenton War Memorial, before the Buckingham Assembly Hall opened in 1971. I actually looked forward to these assemblies because for me they were more of a social event than a learning experience. By the time I was seventeen and had my own car, the twice-yearly event at Buckingham was like a reunion; a time to dress up and act cool, troll for girls, hang out with guys from other congregations, take pictures and act like I was somebody special. As things progressed and my Witness days dwindled, I still went to the assemblies to hang out and act cool, but things were going sour and the thrill was gone. The last one I attended was in the spring of 1976, just short of my turning nineteen, and it was so uneventful there's not much to say about it. District conventions were held in mid-summer. These were large-scale events ranging from four to seven days. Again, immersions took place on Saturday, with busloads of people going to some local place with water to be baptized. Attendance was mandatory at these events and Witnesses were required to take time off from work to be available for all sessions. Usually held in larger cities, travel was necessary, at the individual's own personal expense. From the earliest I can remember of these conventions up until 1967, they were held at the Trenton

Fairgrounds in the grandstand, which was local with minimal travel required. I can recall commuting to the Philadelphia convention of 1973 (the assembly at which I got *immersed*) because it was a mere hour trip, but for the Jersey City events of 1970 through 1972 we had to stay overnight, like some holy righteous mini-vacation. The same for the Allentown, Pennsylvania and Wilmington, Delaware events of 1975 through 1977. 1969 was the big one at Yankee Stadium, and we stayed at a hotel in Yonkers for an entire week - my mother, little sister and I, and my cousin and co-writer of this story and his folks. My folks at times liked to combine convention with vacation, the result of which was our 1968 trip to Burlington, Vermont, our 1974 trip to Knoxville, Tennessee and our 1975 trip to Taunton, Massachusetts and Cape Cod. In 1979 through 1982, we went to the summer convention in New Haven, Connecticut. Although I had been finished as a Witness by 1976, these trips were again like little family vacations. My mother and sister would attend the convention ceremonies at the Civic Center while my dad and I would do such things as explore the town, go to the track, hang out by the hotel pool, drink in a local bar, or just relax and watch TV. Bear in mind that my dad was not a Witness, never had been and had no intentions of becoming one, so that made it slightly easier on me. There was some small degree of normalcy in that we could almost pull off an actual family vacation by combining it with a convention. That covers all the years except 1978, and the reason for that is I honestly can't remember where, if or when I went to a convention. I would have to assume I did not, because I was way removed from the Witnesses by then, living in my own private world of wonder. If it had been a convention/vacation combination, I imagine I'd recall it, and if it weren't, I never would have gone anyway. I was way gone by then, in more ways than one...

Arrested Development

As one suffers such indignities as a little kid, just imagine how much worse it becomes, as one grows older. This is where it usually gets tricky, and those of you with minds of your own will begin to realize that something is just not right. You want to please your parents, whom you believe are doing this to you because they mean well and want only the best for you (and in most cases, as in ours, this is true), but you are sick of being the outcast, the class freak. You want to be cool, you want to fit in, you want to be liked and, the saddest thing is, you don't even know how. You are torn between and your very sanity is at stake, and the groundwork is being laid, right there, for some very rough days in the not-to-distant future. Some of you will turn eighteen and flee the grasp of this organization, to the utter dismay of your folks. Although that is the absolute best solution, it is one wrought with peril and danger and you better be up for the challenge, because now, after you've basically missed your entire childhood and formative years, you have some major work cut out for you. You now have to teach yourself how to exist and function in the real world and at the same time the temptation is great to run amok and catch up on everything you've missed. It's hard, it's dangerous, and it could possibly take a lifetime. This is the path I chose, as well as my cousin and collaborator in this project. We opted out, and more than thirty years later, the journey is by no means over.

Why bother, you may ask. Because I've seen the alternative. Kids who were born and raised and didn't exercise their free will and continued into adulthood in this organization. We have, in our rather large family, individuals who chose *this* path instead...

I leap forward here, to the year 2009. I am fifty-two years old. I am sound of mind and I believe I've put this all behind me, though it's all still lurking around in the back of my brain. I live a fairly normal life, even though I'm still running about ten years behind. Yes, I had to catch up as I taught myself how to function in life. These few things will give an idea of what I mean when I say I was running way behind:

I did not finish high school when I should have. Having sense enough to rectify that, I got my high school diploma at twenty-two.

I was also twenty-two when I played on my first real sports teams; intramural baseball and bowling at the company I worked for. To this day I still stink at both, but I love to play.

I started college at twenty-six. I did well but did not finish, as by this time I needed to work fulltime. I still do.

I did not have a complete sexual encounter until three months shy of twenty-one.

I was twenty-seven before I could handle a relationship without botching it completely.

I got my own apartment at twenty-seven, and got married two weeks shy of twenty-eight.

My daughters were born when I was twenty-eight and thirty-four, respectively. I was forty-eight when my grandson came along.

I got interested in politics at twenty-six, and first voted at twenty-eight, in 1985 for New Jersey governor. I first voted for president at thirty-one, in 1988. I haven't missed an election since.

The first Christmas tree was erected in my own house when I was twenty-eight.

The first time I went out for Halloween, actually trick-or-treating with kids, I was thirty-four.

I was still renting group vacation houses at the Jersey Shore and drinking like a college kid at thirty-eight.

The list goes on....

On the flip side, I drank my first beer at fifteen, first puked up booze at sixteen, snuck out to my first rock concert (Nazareth and Deep Purple) at seventeen, and smoked my first joint at eighteen. Even then I was on my way out; my rebel flag was beginning to unfurl.

It may also be interesting to note that the bulk of my close friends, people I actually hang out with, are about ten to fifteen years younger than I am.

We are telling these stories in hopes of helping anyone out there who may be dealing with these problems now, or who may have dealt with them in the past and are still trying to get past it all. We offer closure. We also have an ulterior motive. Putting these experiences to paper and telling all this to the public (getting it out of our systems, essentially) is like a great enema. A vast purging, a good vomit. We've put it all together, and now we are going to let it all out!

Now that you have our book in your hands, sit back and get ready. Leave the light on. We invite you all along for the ride!!

TRUE TALES FROM THE KINGDOM HALL
The Armageddon Project

Chapter One – A Brief History of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Watchtower Organization

The Jehovah’s Witness movement began and was established in 1879 under the direct guidance of Charles Taze Russell of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Mr. Russell, born in 1852, organized his own religion at a very young age. As a young man who was extremely interested in all things scriptural, he had major difficulty in accepting the doctrine of eternal hellfire, and as his studies progressed he came to deny not only eternal punishment, but also the concept of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. At age eighteen he organized a Bible class in Pittsburgh and within several years he sought to popularize his peculiar ideas on religious doctrine. In 1876 he co-published with Nelson Barbour a magazine called *The Herald of the Morning* and by 1884 had full control of the publication. He renamed it *The Watchtower - Announcing Jehovah’s Kingdom*, and founded Zion’s Watchtower Tract Society, which soon thereafter came to be known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, formed in 1881 and incorporated in 1884. Mr. Russell came to believe that the Bible could only be understood according to his own interpretations, which was a bit of a dangerous arrangement since he himself controlled what was printed in the *Watchtower*. Let it be known that this type of assertion is typical amongst leaders of cult religions.

This religion does precede Mr. Russell, however; they can actually trace their roots back to the Adventist movement of the early nineteenth century instituted by William Miller, a Baptist preacher who in 1816 proclaimed that Christ would return to Earth by 1843. That year passed without event, as did many more, and caused most of Mr. Miller’s following to break apart. However, some of his disgruntled and disappointed followers kept the movement alive, and several sects blossomed under the heading of *Adventism*, one of which grew into the current Seventh Day Adventist denomination.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are able to trace their roots back to the Adventists, but they are loath to admit this to outsiders; in fact, many Witnesses themselves do not even know these details. The Witnesses are accustomed to defending themselves against the charge that they are a new religious cult, and their classic response is that their own faith is the most ancient religious group, older than even the Catholic and Protestant churches. In their publication *Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, the claim is made that “Jehovah’s Witnesses have a history almost 6,000 years long, beginning while the first man, Adam, was still alive” and that Adam’s son Abel was “the first of an unbroken line of Witnesses,” and that “Jesus’ disciples were all Witnesses of Jehovah.” — *Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, pp 8-9.

Any outside observer with any semblance of Bible knowledge quickly realizes that the sect has merely appropriated to it all the characters named in the Bible as faithful witnesses of God. By this kind of conjecture, the sect is able to stretch its history back to the beginning of the human race - at least in the eyes of believers who are willing to accept such reasoning. Many outside observers dismiss this type of rhetoric and calculate that the conception of the Jehovah’s Witnesses dates back only as far as the time of Charles Taze Russell. Mr. Russell studied scripture under various Adventist clergy, meeting with a small circle of friends to discuss the Bible. Eventually this informal study

group came to view him as their leader, their pastor. One of the things that attracted Russell to the teachings of Nelson Barbour was the belief that Christ had returned invisibly in 1874; this concept was presented in *The Herald* and captured Russell's attention. It meant that this particular Adventist splinter group had not remained defeated as others had when Christ did not appear in 1874 as they had predicted. Somehow this group had managed to hold on to that date by declaring that the Lord had indeed returned at the appointed time, only invisibly. Although this idea appealed to young Mr. Russell, the reading public seemed to have a hard time swallowing the rumor of an invisible Second Coming. This resulted in Barbour's *Herald of the Morning* to lose ground financially. In 1876, Mr. Russell, who was then a prosperous haberdasher, offered to become the financial backer of the magazine in exchange for being named Assistant Editor, and he began contributing his own brand of religious articles as well as monetary donations. Hence Russell's small study group became affiliated with Barbour's.

Russell and Barbour believed and taught that Christ's invisible return of 1874 would be followed, in the spring of 1878, by the Rapture - the physical seizing by God of His believers to heaven. When this Rapture failed to occur in 1878, Barbour came up with what he called *new light* on this and other doctrines, but Russell rejected some of these new ideas. Soon after, Russell resigned from *The Herald* and started his own magazine, first published on July 1, 1879 as *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. By this point, Russell no longer wanted to consider himself an Adventist or a Millerite, even though he still considered both Miller and Barbour as instruments chosen by God to lead His people. The formation of a distinct denomination around Russell was a gradual development, as his break was not with Adventism, but with the policies and teachings of Nelson Barbour. Russell began traveling around speaking from the pulpits of Protestant churches as well as to his own followers. In 1879, he organized about thirty study groups, which he called congregations, scattered from the Ohio valley to the New England coast. Each local class came to recognize him as *Pastor Russell*, although distance along with his writing and publishing activity allowed for only an occasional personal visit. Russell's increasingly deviating teachings forced his followers to disconnect from other church groups and to create a denomination of their own. Commencing in a small branch of Adventism that went to the extreme of setting precise dates for the return of Christ and the Rapture, Russell took it even further when, in 1882, he openly rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, and began publishing writings against it.

His followers had been educated to believe that Russell himself was the *faithful and wise servant* or *faithful and discreet slave* of Matthew 24:45, also known as the *Laodicean Messenger*, God's seventh and final spokesman to the Christian church. He named his group of disciples the International Bible Students Association (the term *Jehovah's Witnesses* was not introduced until long after Russell's death). Charles Taze Russell lived long enough to see the failure of the dates he had predicted for the Rapture and died on October 31, 1916, over two years after the world was supposed to have ended, according to his calculation, in the early autumn of 1914. His disciples, however, viewed the raging World War as a reason to believe that the end was still imminent. They buried him in a Ross, Pennsylvania, cemetery beneath a headstone identifying him as the Laodicean Messenger, and erected next to his grave a massive stone pyramid emblazoned with the

cross and crown symbol he was so fond of, along with the name Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. According to the directions left behind by Russell, his successor to the presidency would share power with an editorial committee and the Watchtower Corporation's board of directors, whom Russell had appointed for life. The new president, Joseph Franklin (Judge) Rutherford, soon began concentrating all the organizational authority into his own hands. Rutherford, a skilled lawyer who had served as Russell's vice-president and chief legal advisor, combined his own legal expertise with an unscrupulous approach to internal corporate politics. He exploited a loophole in their so-called lifetime appointments to unseat most of the Watchtower directors without the need for a membership vote, going so far as to have the local police summoned to the Society's Brooklyn headquarters to break up the board meeting and evict them from the property. — *Faith on the March*, A. H. Macmillan, pp 78-80. After securing the headquarters complex and the sect's corporate entities, Rutherford then turned his attention to the rest of the organization, replacing locally elected elders with his own appointees, transforming the congregations into a tightly-knit organizational machine run from his office. Some local congregations broke away, forming Russellite splinter groups, but most of the International Bible Students remained under his control. Rutherford renamed the sect *Jehovah's Witnesses* in 1931, to distinguish them from any of the groups that had broken away, and also to underscore the direction in which he was now sending his followers.

Rutherford also strove to redirect the sect's emphasis on individual character development and scriptural education to a dynamic public witnessing work, distributing the Society's literature from house to house. By 1927 this door-to-door preaching and literature distribution was an essential activity required of all members, no exceptions. This literature consisted mainly of Rutherford's relentless diatribes against the government, against prohibition and big business, and against the Roman Catholic Church. He also took to the radio; expostulating populist and anti-Catholic sentiment to draw additional converts. His vitriolic attacks, blaring from portable phonographs carried to peoples' doors and from the loudspeakers of sound cars parked across from churches ended up causing mob violence and government persecution against the Witnesses in many parts of the world. Like Russell, Rutherford also tried his skill at prophecy, predicting that Biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be resurrected to a perfect human condition in 1925 to rule as princes over the earth, and to replace the worldly governments of men. Also named in his prophecy were Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and John the Baptist; all ancient notables mentioned in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The Society actually built a compound for these prophets of old to dwell in upon their return to earthly life, a mansion just outside San Diego, which they named Beth-Sarim. — *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, 1920, pp 89-90. Of course these Biblical personalities failed to show up, and Rutherford eventually quit predicting events tied to specific dates. Later, in referring to that great prophetic blunder, he confessed, "I made an ass of myself." — *Watchtower*, October 1, 1984, p 24

Vice president Nathan Homer Knorr inherited the presidency when Rutherford died in 1942, but he left doctrinal matters largely in the hands of his newly named vice-president,

Frederick William Franz. Franz had joined the sect as a young man under Russell, and had been serving at Brooklyn headquarters since 1920. Since Knorr lacked the personal magnetism and charisma of Russell and Rutherford, he focused the followers' devotion on the organization rather than himself. An excellent administrator, Knorr shifted the sect's focus from dynamic leadership to vibrant, energetic membership. He instituted training programs to transform members into effective recruiters. Instead of lugging a portable phonograph from house to house, blasting recordings of Judge Rutherford's bitter lectures at people's front doors, the average Jehovah's Witness began receiving education on how to speak convincingly. Men, women and children were taught to give sermons at the doors on a variety of subjects. At the same time, Fred Franz worked diligently behind the scenes to restore faith in the sect's chronological calculations, a subject largely ignored since Rutherford's prophetic failure in 1925. This revised chronology established Christ's invisible return as having taken place in 1914 instead of 1874. It also established, in Society literature that began being published in the 1960's, the year 1975 as the likely time for Armageddon and the end of the current worldly system. Knorr's training programs for proselytizing, plus Franz' apocalyptic projections for 1975, combined to produce rapid growth in membership, with the annual rate of increase peaking at 13.5% in 1974. Everybody wanted to be saved, nobody wanted to die at Armageddon, and so they optimistically joined up with the Witnesses in the hope of getting in on this paradise new earth and promise of everlasting life in eternal peace under Christ. All this activity pushed meeting attendance at Kingdom Halls from around one hundred thousand when Knorr took over in 1942 to nearly five million by 1975.

During the 1970's changes took place at Watchtower headquarters concerning presidential power. It first became accepted in theory that the Christian Church, which the Watchtower Society view themselves as all-inclusive, should not be governed under a one-man rule, but rather by a body similar to the twelve apostles. The seven-member board of directors had previously been portrayed as fulfilling this role, but in 1971 an expanded Governing Body was created with a total of eleven members, including the seven directors. The goal was to show that the leadership was derived from a religious or Godlike source, rather than from worldly, human-influenced corporate law. This new Governing Body was presented as further evidence of the sect's being the one true church, when in actuality Nathan Knorr continued to rule the Jehovah's Witnesses much as Russell and Rutherford had done before him. But by 1975, Governing Body members began insisting on exercising the powers granted to them in theory that had never really been theirs in practice. Over the strenuous objections of Vice-president Frederick Franz, the Body that he had been influential in creating finally began governing, so that when Knorr died in 1977, Franz inherited an emasculated presidency. An article in *Time* magazine, reporting the selection of Fred Franz as the new president, stated: "Though few people know his name, he has acquired more-than-papal power over 2.2 million souls around the world." — *Time*, July 11, 1977, p 64. That statement might have had merit several years earlier, but at this point, it couldn't have been further from the truth. Franz also inherited an organization reeling over the failure of his own prophecy for 1975. Even at the Brooklyn headquarters, known as Bethel, small Bible study groups began questioning the 1914-based chronology that produced the 1975 deadline. Thus the rapidly growing sect actually began to lose members for the first time ever, as faithful

constituents who had expected Armageddon to occur in 1975 became disillusioned and began turning away. When membership loss grew into the hundreds of thousands, president Franz and the conformist majority on the Governing Body took drastic action. In early 1980 they initiated a major crackdown on dissidents, breaking up the independent Bible study groups at Bethel and forming judicial committees to have those viewed as stirring up the pot put on trial for disloyalty and apostasy.

By this time, this purging of the inner bowels of the Society culminated in the forced resignation and subsequent excommunication (*disfellowshipping*, in Jehovah's Witness jargon) of Raymond V. Franz, the president's nephew and fellow Governing Body member. *Time* magazine found this development worthy of a full-page article in their February 22, 1982 edition, and proclaimed this information to the world at large. Ray Franz had disgraced himself and the rest of the Governing Body by denying their (and his own) collective infallibility, and was therefore dismissed and set up for disfellowshipping. The Watchtower spies who followed him around after he left Bethel could find him guilty of nothing offensive to God, so they finally disfellowshipped him for dining with his boss, a gentlemen who recently had voluntarily left the Witnesses. A siege mentality had taken hold of the Watchtower Society, and even Witnesses who left willingly for their own personal reasons were denounced as disloyal apostates and were ordered shunned by their fellows. Former friends and even family were forbidden to offer so much as a simple greeting to them, and sadly Raymond Franz, who had spent his entire life as a faithful member of the Watchtower Society, fell victim to this new decree. Therefore, even though Fred Franz served as the Watchtower's chief theologian for fifty years, from the beginning of Knorr's reign and through his own ruling years until his death on December 22, 1992, the fact that he outlived his own failed prophecies by more than fifteen years required him to severely bring the hammer down on the membership in an attempt to keep his doctrinal and chronological framework in force for the remainder of his lifetime.

Milton G. Henschel took power after Franz's death as the Watchtower Society's fifth president on December 30, 1992 and held this office until 2000. In that year organizational changes took place, as the Governing Body was separated from the Society's board of directors. As a result, the members of the Governing Body stepped down from their functions in the Society. Henschel thus gave up his office to Donald Alden Adams, a non-member of the Governing Body. Henschel remained a member of the Governing Body until his death in 2003.

Since 1976, all the activities of the Watchtower Society and of the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide have been brought under the supervision of the Governing Body, which formed six committees to oversee the various administrative requirements of the organization's worldwide activities. Prior to that, nearly all the administrative responsibilities had been vested in the office of the president.

The membership of the Governing Body continued to include the directors of the Watchtower Society until 2000. Since that time, the Governing Body has delegated the responsibility of directors of the various corporations that are used by Jehovah's

Witnesses to members outside the board. Therefore Adams, who reigns as current Watchtower Society president, is not a member of the Governing Body.

It is interesting to note that in the 130 years that the Watchtower Society has been operating, a mere six men have succeeded each other in running the organization.

Chapter Two – Belief (Dogma)

The actual *religion* of the Jehovah's Witness teachings is essentially not all that far-fetched, with a few glaring exceptions, including the fact that they took it upon themselves to name God and rewrite the Bible. In 1961, the Watchtower Society published the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. This rendition of the Bible extensively uses the name Jehovah, an English version of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, YHWH, translated *Yahweh*. It also replaces the Greek word for *Lord* hundreds of times in the New Testament, and is now available in sixty-four languages. The *Watchtower* has been in circulation since 1879. This magazine is published twice monthly and is now available in 161 languages. It is the Witnesses' main journal and its articles are considered authoritative and firm, and to be treated by members with as much significance as the Bible itself. The articles featured deal primarily with their interpretation of various Bible topics, and organizational news and biographies of various members are also included. The *Awake!* magazine, in publication since 1946, is a general interest magazine with a wider scope than the *Watchtower*, issuing articles on science, nature and geography, mainly with a religious slant. *Awake!* is published monthly in over eighty languages.

The Witnesses are well known for their eccentric beliefs concerning such matters as blood, sex, disfellowshipping and shunning, the demons, the trinity, the afterlife, holidays and birthdays, the flag salute, politics, the world at large, use of the Internet, and more. Like most religions, they believe that theirs and theirs alone is the only true religion, the one and only pipeline to God, the solitary road to salvation. They alone are God's chosen people, and no one else matters. However, what sets them apart from most all the other denominations is their inherent conviction that the world is soon to end and the only people who will be saved are themselves, the Jehovah's Witnesses. Their hallmark is their expectation that *Armageddon*, which is the complete and total annihilation of this current worldly system and all of its false religions and corrupt governments, is on its way. The end is coming soon, and everyone but the faithful Witnesses of Jehovah will perish in its wake. We will present more on that subject later. The rules and regulations of the Watchtower Society, as set forth by the Governing Body at headquarters in Brooklyn (Bethel), are extremely rigid and severe. For those of you who *do not* know it, I will tell you, and for those of those of you who *do* know it, I will remind you - the Jehovah's Witnesses follow the directives of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. They do not, I repeat, do not; receive their marching orders from God. The Watchtower Society, under the direct tutelage of the so-called Governing Body, tells these millions of worshipers what to do, how to act, who to be, and what to believe. Consider this quote from the *Watchtower* magazine of July 1, 1973, p 402: "Only this organization functions for Jehovah's purpose and to his praise. To it alone God's Sacred Word, the Bible, is not a sealed book...How very much true Christians appreciate associating with the only organization on Earth that understands the deep things of God...Furthermore, this organization alone is supplied with gifts in men, such as evangelizers, shepherds and teachers." Does this quote indicate that only the Watchtower Society can interpret the Bible? This appears to put a stop to thinking about and interpreting the scriptures without the guidance of the organization. Also, from the 1939 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*,

p 85: “It should be expected that the Lord should have a means of communication to his people on the earth, and He has clearly shown that the magazine called the *Watchtower* is used for that purpose.” This passage claims that the Jehovah’s Witnesses are the only channel God has to correspond with humankind. Also, from the *Watchtower* of October 1, 1994, p 8: “All who want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the ‘greatly diversified wisdom of God’ can become known only through Jehovah’s channel of communication, the faithful and discreet slave.” Here, the *Watchtower* asserts that the only way to understand God and the Bible is through the Watchtower organization. From an analysis of their own material, it appears obvious that the Society discourages individual thinking amongst its members and requires them to be in submission to the teachings of the *Watchtower*. When we were young Witnesses, we were privy to all this activity, in our Bible studies with our mothers and our dealings with the elders of the congregation. In our young, uneducated, inexperienced little minds, we accepted as pure fact that the Watchtower Society wrote the Bible. We believed that the organization was the only channel to God, and that we could only access Jehovah via the organization. Our belief was that we were worshipping and obeying the dictates of the Watchtower Society, the all-powerful and all-knowing body from which sprung the concept of God and Jesus.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Jehovah’s Witnesses and their beliefs, here are some principles that they follow, in a strictly religious sense. They do not believe in the Trinity, mainly because founder Charles Taze Russell could not swallow the concept. They instead teach that Jehovah created Jesus and the Holy Spirit as he did humankind, and that Jehovah alone is the solitary God of the entire universe. They teach the trinity to be a belief in three Gods and, thereby, Satan-inspired polytheism. I remember my mother using what I thought of as the *three-headed freak* story to convince me of what she called the fallacy of the trinity. It went something like this: “Sincere, righteous people who want to learn the truth about Jehovah and serve him might find it a little hard to love a complicated, freakish three-headed God. When false religion teaches the doctrine of the trinity, they right away contradict themselves by using the Bible to say that God made man in his own image. We certainly have never seen a three-headed man, now have we?” That would make sense to a nine-year-old, right? A three-headed man. I remember the episode of *I Love Lucy* when they were in Scotland and Fred and Ethel became a two-headed dragon in Lucy’s nightmare, and that scared this little kid out of his shorts. And then my mother talks about a three-headed man to verify Witness doctrine.

The Witnesses do not believe that Jesus Christ died on a cross, but that he perished on a *torture stake*, and they in fact teach that the cross is a pagan symbol of sex worship and that all buildings and persons displaying the cross are likewise pagan. They *do* believe and teach that Satan has been the invisible ruler of this world since 1914, a year which they consider to be the end of the *Gentile Times* and the beginning of the *time of the end*. They don’t believe in observing holidays or birthdays, and consider such to be a form of idolatry. They do not allow blood transfusions, as well as the donation of blood to others. If a Witness allows himself to receive blood, even if medically necessary to save his life, it will result in his everlasting death. They do not believe in any form of an afterlife; that the soul is something you *have* and not something you *are*, thereby it ceases to exist upon death, but they do believe in a resurrection of all people after Armageddon. They do not

believe in hell, or any form of eternal punishment, but they do believe in an eternal death. However, they do believe in heaven, and that a chosen flock of 144,000 will go there to rule along with Jesus after Armageddon. I also remember my mother utilizing what I call the *hot-stove story* to debunk the concept of hell. That one went like this: "Suppose someone had a child who was a bad boy, who kept doing naughty things even after his parents had told him time and again to stop. This boy would not respond to discipline and would have to be punished. Would the parents be able to take that young boy's hand and press it upon a hot stove, even for a few seconds? Of course not! Well, we know from the Bible that 'God is love.' So how can false religion teach that loving God, who is perfect, would be able to torture bad people in a burning, fiery torment forever, when those imperfect parents couldn't do it to their child for even a few seconds?" That was rather convincing, and a damn tad scary, particularly to this young boy. Burn a kid's hand on the stove...

The Witnesses do not believe in patriotism of any sort, including the saluting of the flag or the singing of the national anthem. The reason for this is that all allegiance is to be shown to Jehovah, and only to Jehovah. They remain politically neutral, as expressed by their detachment from secular politics. When we were young, voting in elections was totally prohibited. However, as of 1999 they leave it as a matter of conscience, but their fellows and the elders will still look down upon Witnesses who do vote in worldly elections. They do not believe in higher education for their children, although that dictum has also been relaxed in recent times. Tobacco products are forbidden, under penalty of expulsion, as is the excessive use of alcohol. Illegal drugs are also forbidden, as well they should be. Any acts that are considered to have a pagan origin are prohibited, such as toasting, throwing rice at a wedding, or having wind chimes dangle from their porches. They are not allowed to use the words *luck* or *fate* or say *God bless you* when someone sneezes. They may not practice Yoga, tell ghost stories, read horoscopes, eat Lucky Charms, own a gun, learn karate, or engage in gambling of any kind. All these things are considered to have sprung from Satan, and are obstacles and stumbling blocks to lure the faithful away from Jehovah. And here is where it gets really personal: Jehovah's Witnesses may not attend a wedding or a funeral in any other Church, other than the Kingdom Hall. A funeral parlor or a banquet hall or a firehouse or even a hastily thrown up tent is fine, but a Witness may not place one shoe in a Church, even if immediate family is involved. In the view of the Watchtower Society, any Church, no matter the denomination, is regarded to be a tabernacle of false religion and to be avoided at all costs. They may not read or investigate any other religious material, and they may not read so much as a word of any negative information about the Watchtower Society. They may not exercise their own conscience on any matter if it goes against the Society's teachings, and they may not question the organizational rules and regulations on any matter, be it religious or private.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been taught from the Bible and the Watchtower organization and are convinced that what they believe is fact, that they are indeed *in the truth*. They are led by what the Watchtower *says* the Bible says. We have seen every week at the Watchtower Study following the Sunday talk that the organization teaches by asking the questions and then giving the answers. They believe that only persons who use the true

name of God, Jehovah, will have their prayers heard by God. No salvation is possible without using the name of Jehovah. They believe one hundred percent that anyone who is not one of Jehovah's Witnesses will die by God's hand at Armageddon. They also believe that they, the Witnesses who survive Armageddon, will live forever in the new paradise earth. That is what drives them on, what inspires them, what motivates them - that ultimate goal of everlasting life in Jehovah's paradise. Members of this religion are required to go from door to door, from house to house, to *preach the good news* and to *announce Jehovah's Kingdom*. This is an obligation bestowed upon all of Jehovah's Witnesses, young and old, male and female, everyone. This has been a requirement since 1927, when then-president Rutherford proclaimed it to be so. Witnesses who preach, and again, that is everyone, are called *publishers*. These publishers are required to not only preach the word, but to also keep diligent records of their time spent in the *field service*. They must fill out a monthly report stating how many hours were spent in the service, how many *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines were placed (or published), how many Kingdom books were placed and how many Bible studies were conducted. If a *publisher* goes a full month with no hours to report, he is considered to be *irregular* or *delinquent*, and is ripe for reproof. Not engaging in the preaching work for any extended period of time will not be tolerated.

Among the more strange beliefs is that of taking a prison sentence in lieu of not only military service, but also substitute or alternative military service. There was a young brother in our congregation who was jailed for two years because he refused to go to Vietnam when called for the draft. He also refused substitute military service because the Society at the time had deemed that to be unacceptable. So off to jail he went, and I remember him being held in the highest esteem amongst those in our congregation. They were so proud of this young man, who was spending two years of his life in the penitentiary because he steadfastly refused to disobey Jehovah God (aka the Watchtower Society) and fight in a worldly war, that they placed him high on a pedestal of elevated status. They spoke with the utmost reverence of "young Jerry, who did not waver in his faith even knowing that it would mean prison for him." Unfortunately for Jerry and countless other Witness men who refused to serve during the Vietnam era, the Watchtower Society has since reversed that stand. Since 1996, alternative military service has been viewed as acceptable by the Society. This was clarified in an article entitled *Should Christians be Pacifists?* from the July 1997 edition of *Awake!* magazine.

Jehovah's Witnesses are also required to report to the congregational body of elders any behavior *unbecoming a Christian* that they may observe being committed by any of their fellow Witnesses. In this case *unbecoming a Christian* literally translates to any behavior *not in line with the Society's rules and regulations*. This practice is encouraged repeatedly in their own literature: "The reporting of wrongdoing is an act of genuine concern for the wrongdoers. So then, why report what is bad? Because it works what is good. Really, to report is an act of Christian principled love shown toward God, toward the congregation, and toward the wrongdoer. As each member of the congregation upholds God's righteous standards, Jehovah will richly bless the congregation as a whole." — *Watchtower*, August 15, 1997, p 30. In our congregation, this tradition was tantamount to everyone minding everyone else's business in order to remain in the good

graces of Jehovah's organization. In simple language, they would *rat out their brother* to keep face and favor with the elders. In a lot of cases the accusations thrown about were mistaken or just plain false, thereby causing untold strife and dissention among the members, often resulting in people being punished for crimes they did not commit. This practice was very strongly encouraged among the youth of the congregation: "Young ones generally feel a sense of loyalty to friends. This can present real tests when such companions get involved in unchristian conduct. Many youths then face situations involving divided loyalties. Will you report serious wrongdoing or ignore it as if it never happened? Genuine regard for Christian associates and love of God will no doubt move you to report this in line with the principle at Leviticus 5:1. Christian youths thereby avoid becoming a party to wickedness by yielding to a false sense of loyalty." — *Kingdom Ministry*, August 1982, p 1. Consider also these words from the *Watchtower* of June 15, 1991, p 20: "Jehovah richly blesses those who loyally maintain high standards of conduct. There are other ways, though, in which your loyalty may be put to the test. For example, suppose a friend of yours has embarked upon a wayward course. Will you let misguided loyalty to that friend overshadow your loyalty to Jehovah? The loving thing to do would be to approach that friend and urge him to report the matter to his parents or the elders. Tell your friend that if he does not do so within a reasonable period of time, you will have to do so yourself. By assisting your friend in this way, you manifest not only the genuineness of your friendship but also the depth of your loyalty to Jehovah." *Disfellowshipping* occurs when a member commits an act of woe, any deed or behavior prohibited by the Society. This often occurs when someone *rats out his brother*. The Watchtower Society dictates that it itself must be obeyed without question in any matter, religious or personal. Now this is important; when I say *the organization* must be obeyed, I mean just that. Not God, not Jehovah, not Christ Jesus, but *the organization*. Witnesses are taught that the Watchtower Society is Jehovah God's spokesvessel; that anything Jehovah God wishes to communicate to His followers must be relayed through the Society. Therefore, the strictest obedience to the Society is required. In this way, Brooklyn (Bethel) runs the proletariat of the Witness population, not God or scripture. The men who rule the organization in essence play God by enforcing the certainty that they themselves are speaking for God. When one is disfellowshipped, one is completely spurned, scorned and shunned by the rest of the congregation. No active Witness is allowed so much as to speak a word to such an ousted member. My friend Steve was disfellowshipped in 1977 for smoking a cigarette, and it was expected that I refrain from seeing or speaking to him ever again. It was expected that I *shun* Steve, even though by this time I myself was *disassociated* from the organization. *Disassociation* occurs when one voluntarily leaves the Witnesses, for whatever reason. Disassociated ones are also shunned, though not in such a callous a manner as those disfellowshipped. Michael and his parents essentially disassociated themselves from the organization when they realized their membership with the Society was literally destroying their household. They were completely shunned by the family members, uncles and aunts including my mother, who were active Witnesses. For non-Witness kin, it was business as usual. It is interesting to note that Michael's folks left the Witnesses in the early 1980's, when Watchtower hierarchy was on the warpath, and at that time even those who willingly left the group were considered to be unclean in the eyes of Jehovah and were to be avoided at all costs. This would explain why my mother and the rest of the Witness side of the family

suddenly would have nothing to do with Michael's folks, my Aunt Marian and Uncle John. It was a directive issued by the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, and it seems that in this case, and most likely many others, family blood was not as thick as Watchtower ink.

Sexual practices deemed by the Society as *unnatural* are grounds for disfellowshipping. I'm not talking about everyday fornication, which translates to unmarried couples having sex with each other, and I'm not talking about adultery, which translates to married people having sex with persons other than their spouse. I'm not even talking about gay and lesbian sex. All of those sexual acts are forbidden by the Society, and are also rightly spoken against in the Bible. What I'm referring to are such sexual acts as oral and anal copulation, or any sexual conduct other than regular penis-to-vagina intercourse, *between married couples in their own bedrooms!* What, you may ask, is the Watchtower Society doing behind the closed doors of married persons' bedrooms? A good question, indeed, and *we* don't have the answer, but we are not making this up. This kind of stuff was actually discussed from the podium at congregation meetings, in front of little kids like me and even littler kids like Michael. Unbelievable? Again, we were there! The Witnesses seem to be possessed of an obsessive preoccupation with sex. Yes, fornication, adultery and homosexuality are fundamentally wrong, but the organization's fixation on the subject borders on the fanatical, especially where young children are involved. I can remember when the time for my little talk about the birds and the bees came along; it was my mother who did the honors. She wanted me to learn about sex in the proper manner, in a morally clean way, through Jehovah's (the Watchtower Society's) literature. I remember her using *Watchtower* and *Awake!* articles to reinforce the teachings that a young boy in the truth needed to properly learn about sex. There were graphic articles about intercourse (called *sex relations* by the writers), descriptive articles about the sexual organs of men and women (*private parts*), in-depth material on femininity and menstruation, an explicitly heavy-duty piece on masturbation (*self-abuse*) and all manner of ramblings against having sex relations outside of the marriage bed and the unnaturalness of men and women having sex relations with those of the same gender. I was even warned against bestiality (sex with *animals*). I was admonished to stay away from girls and not allow unnatural (unnatural??) sexual desires to fester in my head, to never touch my penis in an unnatural (there's that word again) manner, and to never think about women being naked. I was actually told to never stare at a woman's crotch in public and to never think about a woman's crotch in private. Sex was everywhere, and it was all sinful and sprung from Satan. Satan would use girls, my thoughts and my penis to make me turn away from Jehovah and give in to the desires of the flesh were I not ever so careful as I blossomed into puberty.

In our time, most of our indoctrination came from the books *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (1958) and *The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life* (1968). It appears the Witnesses are still teaching their children that sex is a bad thing that springs from Satan. In 2003, they published *Learn From the Great Teacher*, a new book directed at educating young children in the ways of Jehovah. This book is also designed for thorough indoctrination, as explained in the foreword on page 7: "You will notice that the book calls for a response on the part of children. Many well-placed questions are provided in

the printed material. When you come to these you will see a dash (-). This is a reminder to pause and encourage the child to express himself. Children like to be involved. Without the involvement, a child will quickly lose interest.” So what is it they want to teach to these young children? We know that the Witnesses have a major mania concerning sex and demons, among other issues. In this particular book, they actually combine the two in an attempt to scare kids about sex by putting the fear of the demons into them. A brief excerpt from this book, chapter 10, pages 60-61, reads: “It is important that we know what bad things the demons will try to get us to do. So think about it. What bad things did the demons do when they came to the earth? - Before the Flood, they had sex relations with women, something that was not right for angels to do. Today the demons like it when people do not obey God’s law about sex relations. Let me ask you, who only should have sex relations? - You are right, only married people. Today some young boys and girls have sex relations, but this is wrong for them. The Bible talks about the male ‘genital organ,’ or penis. (Leviticus 15:1-3) The female genital parts are called vulva. Jehovah created these parts of the body for a special purpose that should be enjoyed only by married people. It makes the demons happy when people do things that are forbidden by Jehovah. For example, the demons like it when a boy and a girl play with each other’s penis or vulva. We don’t want to make the demons happy, do we?”

From their material; again, we’re not making this up. They are actually leading young kids to associate their genitals with demons. I can remember all the stories fed to us as kids about the demons, how they were everywhere. One of the more bizarre of these was my mother’s (and as far as I recall, every other Witness I knew at the time) phobia about demons getting into our house via anything that was used, or *pre-owned*. Nothing used was allowed in the house, so we couldn’t shop at flea markets or garage sales, or buy anything pre-owned from the want ads. Oddly, this didn’t apply to automobiles, though, and I still don’t quite understand why that is (I thought about that used-car thing once again when Stephen King did *Christine*, but only briefly, because by that time I didn’t care two shits about demons or used merchandise). Anyway, we were never allowed to buy anything that wasn’t brand new, because we had no way of knowing where it came from. If the original owner had a Ouija board or a Tarot deck or even a book about astrology among his possessions, demon influence could be transferred to us if we were to bring anything they once owned into our house. One time my dad and I went to a yard sale in the neighborhood, and he bought me a little silver chest that I could use to keep my baseball cards safe. Since it was *used*, and we didn’t know anything about the person who sold it to us, my mother made me throw it away. In the garbage can *outside* of the house, of course. We had to be on the lookout; we could not allow for the possibility of that little silver chest, that gift from my dad, to be able to bring demons into the house.

While on the subject of sex, the Witnesses have a rather peculiar theory on rape, as well. One of the most heinous crimes that can be committed by man, with the possible exception of murder, is the forcing of a woman to submit to sexual penetration against her wishes. This is called rape. The Watchtower Society has changed its stance on this issue several times in the past, but I ask you this: Why should the Watchtower Society have *anything* to say on the subject of rape? It is a crime, plain and simple, punishable by the laws of the land. Unfortunately, for women who are Jehovah’s Witnesses, it is not

quite that simple. Consider these passages from Watchtower Society literature over the years: "...if she should submit to the man's passionate wishes, she would not only be consenting to fornication or adultery, but be plagued by the shame" — *Watchtower*, January 15, 1964, p. 63. "An issue of integrity to Jehovah's laws is involved here. So by no means would it be proper quietly to submit to rape, as that would be consenting to fornication" — *Watchtower*, June 1, 1968, p. 347. "...if she did not scream, she would be as good as dead anyhow. Also, if she did not scream, she would ruin her relationship with Jehovah God and the Christian congregation; that then she would be disfellowshipped or excommunicated from it" — *Awake!* March 8, 1974, p.14. What the...? Is rape to be considered fornication if the woman does not scream? According to these quotes, the answer seems to be undoubtedly **yes!** The organization has relaxed this dictum as well; in 1980 an *Awake!* article acknowledged that rape at the time was the fastest growing crime in America, and that Jehovah's Witness women who were raped and failed to scream would not be considered guilty of fornication. But this stand was reversed in 1984, then again in 1986, then again in 1993. So should a woman scream when she is being raped? In my considered opinion, that should be totally up to the victim, not the Watchtower Society. Sometimes it might be better to fight a rapist, other times not; I would imagine each situation to be different and unique and should be handled as such. When the Society was in the mode of punishing rape victims who didn't scream, did they ever take into account the possibility of the woman being a mute, or of having her mouth taped shut, or of being just plain scared silent under the threat of death? The point here is that the woman's instinct and judgment should be the deciding factor in whether or not to fight the rapist or scream for help. That decision should in no way belong to a bunch of old fossils with uncontrollable God complexes who sit in their lofty Bethel tower making up rules and regulations based on their own interpretation of the Bible. The physical rape is crime enough; there is no call for the Governing Body and the elders to be allowed to follow it up with a further psychological rape.

A divided household takes place when one of the spouses is an *unbeliever*, or *not in the truth*. This can make for some extremely unpleasant, although interesting, circumstances. It can also make for some rather dreadful experiences. In my case, my father was the *unbeliever*. My home life was the exception to the rule of most kids who are growing up as Witnesses. Whereas in most Witness families, both parents are striving to inculcate the teachings of Jehovah (the teachings of the Watchtower Society) into their children, in my house, it was directly the opposite. My mother discovered the Witnesses because my two aunts, Joanie and Marian (mother of Michael, who did have both parents pounding Witness dogma into his young head), discovered them first. My mother followed her two sisters into the organization against my father's wishes and immediately began raising me as one. I was but a baby boy and didn't know what was going on at the time. My father opposed this intrusion on our lives straight from the get-go in 1958, and continued to resist until the day he died in 1983. Throughout this time, as I was being groomed as a *perfect little Witness*, I suffered through more fights over religion than I can possibly remember. You'd think God is supposed to bring people together, but no! My folks fought about God, Jesus, the Trinity, blood, fish on Friday, Santa Claus and the Easter Rabbit, heaven and hell, me going to the Kingdom Hall, me preaching the word door-to-door like some mini-evangelist, me not attending college. They fought over stuff I never

even heard of, but it always came back to religion. Any interests that I developed along the way, and I had many, were disregarded as worldly, unworthy of Jehovah, and not in line with my spiritual upbringing. These interests were always encouraged by my father and likewise discouraged by my mother, and I was the poor slob ever caught in the middle. I went through so many pursuits and potential hobbies that I never followed through on; it just makes me want to throw up. I collected coins for a while, then stamps, then plastic horses. At one point I enjoyed taking pictures of bridges. I went through a model car phase, collected baseball cards for a while and got pretty good at jigsaw puzzles. Like Michael with the weather, I became fascinated with geography, and I took a special interest in maps. At ten, I was a whiz with a map; I could find anything, I could map out a route to anywhere, and I knew what every little symbol in the legend represented. I would find a shortcut or an alternate route to any place anybody wanted to go to, and better still, could memorize it right down to the last detail. It was like I had an organic Google Earth implanted in my young head. When we took vacations, I'd plan a route, and my dad would compare mine with those from AAA and then tell me my directions were as good as, if not better, than those of grown experts who were being paid to do the same thing. My sense of direction was impeccable and, I'm proud to say, still is to this day. It is nearly impossible for me to get lost. By twelve, I actually took to drawing maps of imagined places, creating fictional cities, highways, lakes, mountain ranges (years later, when I discovered *The Lord of the Rings*, I ashamedly considered Tolkien's *Middle Earth* maps to be somewhat primitive); and by age fourteen I was designing complete fictitious worlds on paper. But sadly I didn't stick with it; at the time I was made to believe there was no future in it. I remember an argument, another loud and nasty one that went on and on, and what sticks in my head is this: my father telling my mother how proud he was of the way I knew my way around a map. Her sneering answer, and I remember it word for word: "You think making maps is going to get him everlasting life? Making maps isn't going to get him life!" Alas, I might have been a damn good cartographer had I asserted myself sooner rather than later; had I asserted myself at all. My mother was adamant that the world was about to end, that Armageddon was on the way, and I had to be properly indoctrinated in the ways of Jehovah in order to survive into the new order, and be able to obtain that so-called everlasting life. (I remember how the terminology kept evolving over the years; when I was very young, it was the *New World*. Later it became the *New Order*, and after that it was known as the *New System*. Now it is called *The Paradise*.)

My father was not interested in becoming a Witness, but my mother continued to harp on the fact that we had to get him in, we had to convert him, we had to make him what she used to say, "open his eyes to the ways of Jehovah so that he could be saved and join us in the righteous new order." I also remember my mother telling me repeatedly, "if Dad doesn't come into the truth he will be destroyed at Armageddon." The teaching at the time was that anyone who went down at Armageddon would go straight to *Gehenna* and not be eligible for the *resurrection*. The implication I gleaned was that it would be partially (make that mostly) my fault if my father didn't make it to the new order and ended up being gone forever. It was also prudently implied that if he happened to die *before* Armageddon he would simply go to *Sheol*, later to be resurrected into the new order and given a second chance to become one with Jehovah's kingdom. What the hell

was a little boy supposed to think? Should I preach to him? Knowing he wanted no part of the Witnesses, should I secretly hope (or pray) for a car crash or a heart attack or something, so I wouldn't lose my dad forever? Like the puppet that I was becoming, I pitifully encouraged him to come to meetings at the Kingdom Hall, to read the *Watchtower*, to do something to save himself from the oncoming wrath of Jehovah. I was a little kid, and I didn't want my dad to die at Armageddon. Thankfully I grew out of that phase as I matured, but for years it was held deep in my subconscious that Jehovah would eventually take my father from me, for the simple reason that my father wanted nothing to do with the Witnesses. I know now that in my subliminal mind I despised Jehovah, and his organization, for making me feel that way. Yes, I absolutely hated that terrible so-called God that my mother was shoving down my throat. My sister was born in the summer of 1964. I was seven, and it was cool having a new baby in the house, and I loved her. She grew up like I did, being indoctrinated from infancy in the ways of the Watchtower Society, while my father watched helplessly from the sidelines. By this time his drinking had gone from bad to worse, but I know now that what he was doing was *self-medicating*, hiding in the bottle because it was so painful to see what was happening to his family. Hiding in the bottle because he was powerless to do anything about it. That is not to say that it was all bad times, yelling, and drunken brawling, because it was not. I can remember a lot of good times spent together as a family when we were young, but there was always that underlying schism, that rift caused by religion that could emerge at any moment and wreck everything that was good. One of my parents would make a comment, sometimes innocent, sometimes intended, and then all hell would break loose.

My father was a long-suffering fellow and he put up with a lot, but it was always me who was trapped in the middle, like some dog, as he and Mother battled over religion. And yes, they fought in front of the baby. When they fought, she called him a goat, a hypocrite, a jackass, a pagan, wicked and stupid. He responded with such niceties as witch, bitch, dummy and brainwashed bag. I wasn't allowed to watch cowboys and Indians or the *Three Stooges* or anything else that gave off even the slightest hint of aggressive behavior on television, but I had to listen to that crap almost every day for years on end - divided household indeed.

One position on the concept of God that rings clear in my mind, even after all these years, is the notion espoused by the Watchtower Society that Jehovah is the only true God. Again, we had this crammed and jammed and hammered into our young heads right from the start. I wondered about this as a kid, though I dared not ask the question. But it seems that every religion claims their God is the only true God, thereby begging the question - which one is right? Is it Jehovah, is it the Lord, is it Allah, is it Buddha, is it the Great Spirit, is it Sai Baba; I mean who's right in this debate? If there is a God up there for every religion down here, we have some major crowd control to deal with. That's not even logical. Someone asked me once, "If every nation can have a president or a king or a prime minister, why can't every religion have a God?" Believe it or not, that question stumped me at the time. I imagine now the simplest answer would be that every religion has a perception of who or what their God is, and they worship accordingly. Most rational-thinking people believe that God is the Creator, that God is all-powerful, and that God is in complete control. They praise and thank Him when things go well, they curse

and blame Him when things go bad, and they beg for His help and mercy in the face of impending disaster. I've heard it argued that God is a woman, that God is a spirit, that God is a concept, that God is the universe, and that God is nothing but a mental convenience in a far corner of each human brain. And who can forget the episode of *All in the Family* when Archie Bunker and Mr. Jefferson argued over God being black. Then we throw agnostics and atheists into the mix. Who is running the show for them?

Christians believe that their God is the creator of all things, but they believe also in a triune God; one God made up of three divine personalities who have individual works. They believe that He is a merciful heavenly father and sovereign sustainer of the universe who loves mankind so much that He gave His only son to die on the cross for the sins of humankind. They believe He sends His holy spirit into our hearts to create a new spirit in us and lead us through life. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe none of this, yet they consider themselves to be true Christians, and they refer to the rest of Christianity with the derogatory term Christendom. They refer to nuns as offspring of vipers and call priests the unholy sperm of Satan. And don't forget the three-headed freak story. Then they tell us that God is love, and that Jehovah loves his faithful witnesses so much that He will usher those Witnesses (and only those Witnesses) into the righteous new paradise earth. After Armageddon, of course. After this angry, jealous, ghastly, dreadful God sees fit to slay my dad and countless others in a most horrible fashion.

The ultimate children's nightmare, the Watchtower Society's illustrated study book used for indoctrinating young children into the fold, was entitled *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*. It provides the Jehovah's Witness view of the Bible from creation to Armageddon and on into the future millennium and is best known for its graphic portrayal of Armageddon on pp. 208-209. "Jehovah will destroy the bad ones who do not change – Psalm 37: 9, 10" was printed on the side of the page next to a full-color assemblage of horrifying depictions. Near the top were burning buildings crashing to the ground and airplanes plummeting from the sky. A little further down was an open chasm filling with water into which were plunging people broken and doubled over in pain, cars, animals, a complete staircase and most of the flaming wreckage from the above-mentioned buildings, along with a house on fire sinking into the muck. At the bottom of the page were people running amok but still falling; people with such looks of sheer terror on their faces as they plunged further down; one a woman in a maid's uniform and apron who ridiculously reminded me of Hazel from the old TV series (...he's even gonna kill Hazel...I actually remember thinking that during study time with Mother), another woman with her arms raised skyward, obviously pleading to a God who would not listen to spare from her this hideous calamity, a man wearing jeans and a white jacket with his back on fire, and a horrified young woman wearing a skirt holding a dead child wearing shorts in her arms. An ugly patchwork of fire and water, death and destruction, the ultimate downfall of the wicked system of things of which we were to be no part of. And all those people, they were the bad ones, they were the *wicked* ones. You may find it funny that I saw Hazel in this unholy hodgepodge, but what isn't so funny is that I saw my father there too, along with all my aunts, uncles, cousins and neighbors who would be destroyed for the mere crime of not joining up with the Jehovah's Witnesses and following the Watchtower Society's path to everlasting life. Yes, they were the bad ones,

too – the *Paradise* book, the brothers at the Kingdom Hall and my mother all told me so, and made me believe it. This unspeakable collage terrified little kids, but that’s exactly what it was meant to do – scare us out of our shorts so we would never waver in our faith and obedience to Jehovah God (the Watchtower Society). I can look at this depiction now and laugh, and blow it off because I’m grown up and know it’s a load of hokum, but for us kids it was downright terrifying. This illustration in my view is simply the bowels of hell opening up under the earth to swallow a civilization being annihilated by both a major earthquake and a raging flood, and taking the whole of it’s population down to a fiery reward. And Witness hierarchy, our parents included, told us we’d be right there in the flames of Armageddon if we didn’t follow Jehovah’s word to the letter. Oh, the fear we lived in back then...

And before we move on, a quick clarification on the concept of God. So many different religions, so many different beliefs. We know what the Christians believe, and we know how the Witnesses slant the Christian belief system. The Indians believe in the Great Spirit – they worship, they obey, they sacrifice – that’s their belief and they’re happy with it. Is it right? Is the Great Spirit the one and only true God? Any Native American will answer that question with a resounding “yes.” Ask a Muslim if Allah is the only true God and you’ll get the exact same answer, and maybe get yourself killed in the process. They are raised to believe that any person who doesn’t acknowledge Allah as the only true God is deserving of death. Anyone who didn’t know this before September 11, 2001 sure as hell knows it now. So the Christian God is a loving being who wants all mankind to thrive and flourish in peace on Earth, and the Muslim God is one who wants to expunge any and all of mankind who so much as questions his existence. This is meant to be neither a slap at Islam nor an endorsement for Christianity, but merely an example to show the glaring difference between these two religious cultures and each one’s concept of their own God. This brings us back to the Watchtower Society’s version of God, to their rendition of the Christian deity. This is a God who is going to destroy everything at Armageddon and spare only his people, the Jehovah’s Witnesses. “He will bring to ruin those who are ruining the earth,” is what Mother always proclaimed as we studied from the *Paradise* book. This is the God that little children were raised to be in fear of, under threat of destruction and death. They constantly parroted the *God is love* theme and continuously recycled John 3:16, “For Jehovah so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son...” and yet we were constantly reminded that if we didn’t do everything Jehovah required of us, all we had to look forward to was a hideous, painful and everlasting death. For me, I grew to think of Jehovah as this beastly, angry, monstrous being who would wipe me out if I so much as disobeyed one stinking rule. And when I was still little, I had a hard time getting around the fact that people I loved; relatives, other kids, neighbors and especially my dad, were also going to be wiped out by this insane God. But my mother pounded it into me relentlessly that this was to be the fate of every human being on earth who did not become one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Jehovah commanded us to preach the word, Jehovah commanded us to attend five meetings a week, Jehovah commanded us to not celebrate birthdays and holidays, Jehovah commanded us to be *different*. Jehovah demanded that his people be *no part of this world*. Jehovah was *cruel*.

It took a while for intelligence to creep in as I got a little older, and to realize that all these rules, regulations and commands were coming from the Watchtower Society; that is, the Governing Body of men who run the organization like a corporation. The Society was writing the books, writing the magazines, directing the flow of information, even translating the Bible. It was the Society that the adult Witnesses were following like a pack of sheep, not God or Jehovah. Whatever the Society claimed to be true was swallowed as gospel. And when the Society changed their view on any subject and relegated it to print, it was again swallowed as pure and legitimate gospel, as we know happened with military service and voting, with rape, and with blood transfusions.

Then there is the subject of what I call *the rod*. “Foolishness is tied up in the heart of a boy, but the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.” So saith Proverbs. “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” our mothers, our aunts, the elders, and all the Watchtower hierarchy were fond of spouting. And by God, did they ever mean it! In the Parkway Kingdom Hall, the library and/or the basement was used as the place to dispense the rod. Little kids were yanked out of their chairs and dragged bodily down the aisle and into the library or down the stairs to the dingy cellar if they so much as fidgeted in their seat or showed any signs of not listening intently to the spiritual food being fed to the multitude from the platform. Children were expected to sit ramrod straight and pay strict attention to every word and if they did not do so, it was expected of the parents to dole out corporal punishment. These parents were actually praised for performing this theocratic duty there in the Kingdom Hall and wore it like a badge of honor – “there goes righteous and upright Sister Smith taking her naughty Little Billy downstairs to whip some of the Satan out of him and to inculcate some spiritual behavior into his being.” And those parents who did not whisk their children away and strike them were looked down upon as weak, as *wishy-washy*, and were castigated for not having their family in subjection. I’ve seen kids anywhere between two and twelve dragged physically away, suddenly weeping in fear and anticipation of what was to come, wondering what they had done that was so terrible as to make Mommy want to thrash them. Then only to hear them crying in pain and anguish a few moments later as they were being clobbered for whatever ungodly conduct they had exhibited in their seat. Incredible. Parents who no doubt love their children and certainly want what’s best for them being intimidated by the Watchtower Society into beating them in public and then being congratulated by the elders for doing so. “Train up a boy in the ways of Jehovah, and even when he grows old he will not depart from it,” was another favorite of our mothers and the Watchtower teachings, as was “bad associations spoil useful habits.” The rod. Yes, the literal rod. Instruments of discipline. I used to get it from Mother with a bent-up coat hanger. I would do something that was *displeasing to Jehovah* and she would fly into a theocratic frenzy, yank a hanger out of the clothes closet, twist it over and bend it double and then whack me with it (not in the Hall, of course, but it wasn’t any more pleasant getting it in the house). I’ve also seen cousin Michael get it with a belt, a ruler and even a flyswatter. *Train up a boy*, indeed.

Along the lines of how fanatical the Watchtower Society is when it comes to their reputation, how they strive to make themselves look so superior to the outside world and how they place themselves high on a religious pedestal, consider this little tale. I took a

job when I was fifteen (my first real job aside from delivering the *Trentonian* in the wee hours before school) in a women's clothing store called the Twigg Shoppe. The job consisted mainly of keeping the place clean (yes, including the toilets), keeping the back storeroom organized and doing general all-around jobs that no one else wanted to do. And one other thing - it was my duty to dress the mannequins in the display window facing the street. Yes, naked female dummies; I had to lay them down on the floor and put dresses, skirts, tops, bras, pantyhose and shoes on them and then stand them back up in the window. This in full view of people passing by outside, and all for a measly \$1.60 per hour. Also, the damn Twigg Shoppe was just a few blocks away from Ewing High School. Oh, the shame of it all... But it was a job that put money in my pocket, necessary dollars that I would use to go roller skating with my Witness crowd on Sunday nights, out to dinner with the brothers after Friday night meetings and buy record albums that would have to be smuggled into the house and stashed under the bed. A few weeks into this employment, the woman who owned the place, Bertha Troll, accused me of stealing a box of belts. Since it was my job to put things away and make sure all excess inventory was in its rightful place, and these belts went missing on my watch, the owner automatically assumed that the skinny, nerdy, geeky gentile teenager had stolen them. When Mother found out about this, she blew her self-righteous, pious, sanctimonious stack. She yanked me back into that store and confronted Mrs. Troll like a madwoman, making a God-snob of herself, ranting and expostulating about how we were a family of Jehovah's Witnesses and Jehovah's Witnesses do not steal or lie. She carried on in a storeful of Jewish saleswomen about the disrespect and reproach they were bringing upon Jehovah's holy name by accusing one of His Witnesses of thievery and how they were all going to perish at Armageddon because of their greed and their persecution of a poor innocent Witness boy. An ugly scene, I wanted to go hide under the building. When the dust had settled, I realized that the ladies who worked at the Twigg Shoppe were forced to understand that the only reason I wouldn't steal a box of belts (or anything else) was because I was a Witness and it would bring shame and disfavor upon the Watchtower society. No matter the fact of this - what the hell was a fifteen year-old boy going to do with a box of women's belts? The point of that odd little story is that those people were made to believe that I didn't steal the belts because I was a Witness; nothing was said to let them know that I didn't steal them simply because I was raised not to steal. ("My son is one of Jehovah's Witnesses, therefore he does not steal. My son is one of Jehovah's Witnesses, therefore he does not lie about stealing.") It was like it was more important to protect Jehovah's (the Watchtower Society's) reputation that it was to protect mine. Like if I were a Catholic or an Episcopalian or a Baptist it would have been perfectly reasonable for me to steal women's belts and then lie about it. A day later the belts were found in the storeroom, right where I put them (in the wrong place, of course), and the ladies knew then that I did not steal them so they were apologetic to me. No matter, I had quit the job out of utter and complete embarrassment.

Which brings us to the reality that, as a kid, I was enormously self-conscious, ill at ease, uncomfortable and embarrassed over what I was; over *who* I was. Anytime we went out - shopping, to a restaurant, to the bank, anywhere - I was terrified of being spotted by people from school who might recognize me. I would literally hide in such a circumstance because I was so ashamed of myself. It was bad enough being ridiculed,

mocked and scorned in school, but I couldn't bear the idea of the same thing happening out in public. I cringed whenever I saw someone I knew. I began making every excuse I could dream up not to go out shopping or eating with the family, so I wouldn't be seen. But since I did enjoy going out places, I always encouraged my dad that we should go someplace in the next town or over the bridge into Pennsylvania, so the probability of being seen by someone from my school would be much lower. Roller-skating was always at the rinks in Flemington or Kendall Park, both places about twenty miles out of the area. Friday night meals with the brothers were usually at Italian restaurants in the Chambersburg section of Trenton, and it wasn't very likely I'd run into school kids there after ten on a Friday night. I refused to go anywhere in our local area of Ewing, going so far as to feign sickness just so I'd never have to run to anybody who knew me. Overreacting? Of course. But imagine going through childhood thinking and behaving like that. Imagine being so ashamed and embarrassed of yourself that you would do anything you could to avoid anyone who wasn't a member of your strange religion. Imagine how long it took me to build up self-confidence and how long it took to catch up after I left the Witnesses. Imagine lugging that heavy mental burden into adulthood, trying to make my way in the real world, trying to develop friendships and relationships, trying to earn a living. Much more is written on this subject in our *Aftermath* chapters further into this book. Imagine...

All this and more...and now onto the sensitive and delicate subject of blood and blood transfusions. The Watchtower Society has always prohibited blood transfusions, even when medically necessary and even when the refusal of such blood would result in certain death. This stems from the Watchtower Society's rendition of Leviticus 17:14, where it is written: "For the soul of every sort of flesh is in its blood...I say to the sons of Israel: 'You must not eat the blood of any sort of flesh...anyone eating it will be cut off.'" The Witnesses believe that in the literal sense. Their belief is that blood transfusions are a form of *eating* blood and in doing so; Jehovah will *cut them off*. That is why a transfusion, even when necessary to save the life, is a disfellowshipping offense. The faithful Witness of Jehovah would much rather perish in the hospital bed or at the accident scene, because then he still has a chance to live in the Paradise after the resurrection. What would be the sense in saving one's own life through a prohibited procedure only to be judged unworthy by Jehovah and be destroyed at Armageddon? Let it be known that although the Bible does say, "thou shalt not eat blood" in the book of Leviticus, it is the Watchtower Society that compares that Biblical eating of blood to a well-respected medical procedure and forbids it under threat of eternal damnation. The dictum has been relaxed slightly in recent years, however, to allow for certain blood substitutes and blood fractions, but actual blood transfusions are still strictly forbidden. The Society has officially notified it's members, through the June 15, 2004 *Watchtower*, that they may now use hemoglobin, which is red cells without the membrane, the largest of all blood components that transports oxygen through the body. That is one giant step in the right direction for those who need medical attention *now*, but what about all the people who needed medical attention *then*? Consider these statements from the *Watchtower* concerning their blood policy circa 1961: "If you have reason to believe that a certain product contains blood or a blood fraction...if the label says that certain tablets contain hemoglobin...this is from blood...a Christian knows, without asking, that he

should avoid such a preparation.” — *Watchtower*, November 1, 1961, p. 669. Also this: “Is it wrong to sustain life by administering a transfusion of blood or plasma or red cells or others of the component parts of the blood? Yes! The prohibition includes any blood at all.” — *Blood, Medicine and the Law of God*, 1961, pp. 13, 14. Now consider this, from much more recent material: “...when it comes to fractions of **any** of the primary components, each Christian, after careful and prayerful meditation, must conscientiously decide for himself.” — *Watchtower*, June 15, 2000, p. 29.

To put it in more simple terms, this is what the Witnesses allow and disallow, as of the current time: Whole blood, inclusive of red cells, white cells, plasma and platelets, is strictly forbidden. Red cell fractions, including hemoglobin-based blood substitutes are now acceptable. Note that hemoglobin constitutes 97% of the red blood cell! Also acceptable are white cell fractions such as interferons and interleukins, plasma fractions including albumin and globulins with clotting factors, and platelet fractions with a wound-healing factor. In another rather interesting development, the Watchtower Society has ruled that a new oxygen-carrying solution made from cow’s blood may now be used by Jehovah’s Witnesses, this despite the Watchtower Society’s purported Biblical ban on the storage and use of animal blood. Even so, members may not pre-deposit their own blood or even use certain human blood products like platelets that are frequently required during chemotherapy. I shudder to think how many faithful Jehovah’s Witnesses chose death over medical treatment before these rules were relaxed. Worse yet, how many faithful followers allowed their *children* to die for lack of a necessary blood transfusion? From page 2 of the May 22, 1994 edition of the *Awake!*: “In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue.” What?

Also be aware that the cover of that same magazine, the May 22, 1994 *Awake!*, displays the photos of twenty-six children, with the caption: “Youths Who Put God First.” The material in this magazine glorifies and venerates these twenty-six innocent Witness children who died supporting the Watchtower Society’s blood policy. This Watchtower policy is unfairly biased and hurtful, especially to children. Why? Because of the way the Watchtower Society has chosen to classify blood products, platelets may not be used. Platelets play an important part in the clotting process and are widely used in the treatment of cancers like leukemia. Since platelets constitute a mere 0.17% blood volume, we have to wonder why the Watchtower Society would choose to ban this particular component. The disastrous result is that Jehovah’s Witness children are sometimes forced to discontinue their chemotherapy and allow their cancer or leukemia to run its course. The sad irony is that in the next hospital room over, a Jehovah’s Witness can be having a transfusion of hemoglobin, albumin, or blood serums, any of which will likely constitute a much larger percentage of blood by volume. Theoretically, a Witness can have all of these at the same time as long as the tiny membranes from the formed elements are not transfused. However, he may not have this tiniest of all blood components that is so essential to life in specific situations. With cure rates for children with leukemia now higher than 80%, the chilling aspect of that particular *Awake!* magazine increases to an outright scandal. By their own proud admission, thousands of Jehovah’s Witness children have died to support the Watchtower Society’s unscientific

classification of blood products. Those children may have been sacrificed in the name of religious freedom, but *God* did not sanction their deaths. We ask you, was the sacrifice really necessary? Is it something that God requires Biblically, the physical sacrifice of one's own child? Or are we back to those men sitting in their cozy Bethel tower, making up illogical and unreasonable policy and imposing it upon their subjects? You decide.

Some Jehovah's Witnesses believe that a blood transfusion is a liquid tissue or organ transplant, not a meal, and hence does not violate the Biblical admonition of Leviticus 17:14 to "abstain from [eating] blood." The Watchtower Society attempts to deny these members a free choice in their medical care by means of controls and sanctions - enforced shunning by the Witnesses, both family and friends. They have been persecuted for their conscientious beliefs by their own religious organization, which presents itself as a champion of human rights. Is all this really necessary? Again, you decide.

And now, one last topic from the esteemed vault of Watchtower prohibitions, one that will bring us squarely into the twenty-first century: the Internet. We now know that the Governing Body does not allow the Witnesses access to any religious material that is not produced or sanctioned by the Society. We know that the organization wants total information control, and that it doesn't want its members to receive any outside influence regarding matters of faith and belief. Jehovah's Witnesses are strongly discouraged from spending time surfing the Internet, exploring the web. Why? The Governing Body fears that use of the Internet will exercise undue worldly influence upon the members, and encourage them to look into things concerning the organization. Encourage them to *investigate*. The Internet represents freedom of information. If you want to learn anything about anything, Google it up and have at it. When Witnesses read anything other than Watchtower-supplied propaganda, they can see for themselves the discrepancies and misinformation and constantly changing doctrine. When they surf the web, they can find plenty of external material, written *by* the Witnesses, *for* the Witnesses and *about* the Witnesses. Questions can arise, but true, loyal Witnesses must not question the Society's rendition of the word of God! The Witnesses are forbidden to think for themselves in religious matters and must blindly accept whatever the organization teaches. What a serious threat the Internet must pose to those who want to exercise control over what the members are allowed to read and examine.

Consider again some words from the Watchtower Society's own literature, these from their monthly internal circular *Our Kingdom Ministry*, November 1999. In the article *Use of the Internet - Be Alert to the Dangers*, these ideas were presented: "The Internet enables one to communicate inexpensively with millions of others throughout the world, and it opens the door to vast amounts of information. - *Awake!* Jan 8, 1998. The indiscriminate use of the Internet, however, can expose a person to great spiritual danger and moral dangers. How is this so? Many are concerned about readily available information that shows how to build weapons, including bombs. Industry complains about the amount of time workers waste using the Internet. Much has been stated in our publications about the obvious spiritual dangers encountered on the Internet. Numerous websites present violent and pornographic material that is entirely unsuitable for Christians - if you use the Internet, ask yourself: 'what do I use it for? Is there a

possibility that I could be harmed spiritually by how I am using it? Could I be contributing to the spiritual injury of others?' ... Consider, for example, some Internet sites set up by individuals who claim to be Jehovah's Witnesses. They invite you to visit their websites to read experiences posted by others who claim to be Witnesses. You are encouraged to share you thoughts and views about the Society's literature. Some give recommendations about presentations that could be used in the field ministry. These sites offer chat rooms for individuals to connect to, allowing live communication with others, similar to talking on the telephone. They often point you to other sites where you can have online association with Jehovah's Witnesses around the world. But can you tell for certain that these contacts have not been planted by apostates? Noticeably, there have been a number of individuals who have created websites ostensibly to preach the good news. Many of these sites are sponsored by indiscreet brothers. Other sites may be sponsored by apostates who wish to lure unsuspecting ones. (2 John 9-11) Commenting on whether there is a need for our brothers to create such websites, *Our Kingdom Ministry*, November 1997, page 3, stated: 'There is no need for any individual to prepare Internet pages about Jehovah's Witnesses, our activities, or our beliefs. Our official site (www.watchtower.org) presents accurate information for any who want it' ...since we are deep in the time of the end of this system of things, this is not the time to let our guard down. The Bible warns us 'Keep your senses, be watchful. Your adversary, the Devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour [someone]'. (1 Pet 5: 8) It further states: 'Put on the complete suit of armor from God that you may be able to stand firm against the machinations of the Devil'. (Eph 6 11) If misused, the Internet can be a means by which Satan overreaches those who are seduced by its power... It is imperative that we stay close to our brothers in the congregation and use the remaining time wisely, thus making ourselves available for the advancing Kingdom interests. As this system nears its finish, let us 'no longer go on walking just as the nations also walk in the unprofitableness of their minds' but let us 'go on perceiving what the will of Jehovah is.' (Eph 4: 17; Eph 5: 17)" — *Our Kingdom Ministry*, November 1999.

So there you have it. The Internet is supposedly harmful to faithful and loyal Witnesses of Jehovah because there is just too much information out there that could lead them astray and summon them away from the cocoon of the organization. Information that could lead them to think for themselves, to question the absolute authority of the Watchtower Society, to *investigate*. To sum it up, it simply appears that the greatest fear of the lofty men in the tower of Bethel is this: the informed Witness will soon become the ex-Witness. And onward we go.

Armageddon is just around the corner.

Chapter Three – Armageddon!

Throughout the years, the epitome of the Watchtower Society's teachings, the essence of their being, the very cause for their existence, has been the upcoming *battle of Armageddon*. I use the word *upcoming* loosely, because Armageddon has been on its way since Mr. Russell put this group together back in 1879. Armageddon was predicted to take place first in 1914, then 1918, then 1925, and of course the pivotal year of 1975. The coming battle of Armageddon is core to their belief, and every Jehovah's Witness on the planet continues to live in fervent anticipation of this momentous, monumental, epic occurrence. The end of the world as we know it. Or, more simply stated, the end of the world. The end of this wicked system of things. The total annihilation of mankind's worldly rule. The final destruction of Babylon the Great and the absolute ruin of false religion. As our mothers would repeat over and over again during our family Bible studies, and as the elders and other speakers in our congregation would constantly parrot from the platform: "Armageddon is just around the corner!"

The Watchtower Society's hypothesis of the end is not all that much different from other Christian religions, in the actuality that the war of Armageddon will take place and Jesus Christ will return to Earth to launch his Kingdom of a thousand years. Armageddon is essentially God performing the most massive genocide this world has ever seen, resulting in the death of billions of humans. The Witnesses do, however, teach three beliefs that are unique to the Watchtower Society. First, most Christians, along with the Jews, Muslims and followers of all other false religions will be exterminated. Also eradicated by the wrath of Jehovah will be any Jehovah's Witnesses who have been disfellowshipped or have disassociated themselves. Second, the Society proclaims that only active adult members in good standing in the Jehovah's Witness organization will be spared from destruction at Armageddon. The fate of children and mentally challenged adults will be at Jehovah's discretion. In simple terms, only the Witnesses will be saved. Third, they believe that the Rapture has already taken place, invisibly, back in 1918. No existing Christians will rise up to meet Jesus in heaven at the time of the end. All of the Society's predictions for the year in which the end of the world would occur have been wrong, but they still teach that Armageddon will take place in the near future. Yes, nearly three and a half decades after the ultimate deadline of 1975, Jehovah's Witnesses the world over are being taught that the end of the world is nigh, that Armageddon is just around the corner, that the last days are finally about to come to a close. They are still being admonished to preach the word diligently, to align themselves with Jehovah's organization, and to speak the word of God with boldness, as that is the only way they will survive Armageddon and be delivered into Paradise. In mainstream Christian belief Armageddon is the site of the final battle between God and Satan, the ultimate clash between good and evil. The English term *Armageddon* is said to represent the Hebrew *Har-Megiddo* meaning Hill of Megiddo or Mount Megiddo. This Megiddo was the location of many decisive battles in ancient times. Note here that the translation renders Armageddon to actually be a *place*, not an *event*.

The Witnesses believe that Armageddon is to be an incident of war and destruction where Satan unites the kings of the earth against Jehovah's appointed king, Christ Jesus. Unlike

most Christian factions, the Witnesses don't believe that an individual Antichrist will be involved. Instead, they expect Satan himself will control the worldly empires to wage war on God's chosen people. Revelation 16:14 reads: "expressions inspired of demons cause the kings of the entire inhabited earth to gather together for the war of the great day of God the Almighty." Thereafter, Revelation 17:12-14 says that "the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords because of his righteousness will defeat them for the glory of the Almighty God." According to the *Watchtower* article of December 1, 2005 entitled *Armageddon - a Happy Beginning*, they believe from these scriptural texts that this war is not one of worldly nations fighting one another, but all uniting as one to fight against Christ. It doesn't appear possible for all the armies of the world to gather together at the relatively small area that is Megiddo in modern-day Israel. They proclaim in this article "those slain by Jehovah will be scattered from one end of the earth to the other. Thus, Armageddon is not a human war confined to a particular location in the Middle East. It is Jehovah's war, and it is global." They feel the Bible uses Megiddo as the symbolic place of gathering of all the kings of the earth, where they will attempt to do battle against God and his forces. The action by these earthly kings is incited by expressions and signs inspired by demons. Jehovah's Witnesses believe the collective action to persecute God's chosen people on the earth (the Witnesses) is what will finally trigger this war. The New World Translation version of Ezekiel chapter 38 foretells that Gog of Magog will collect an army of many nations to attack God's people, believing them to be vulnerable and unprotected. Jehovah will respond by striking at these nations with pestilence, floods, hailstones, fire and death. The chapter ends with God declaring, "I will make myself known before the eyes of many nations, and they will have to know that I am Jehovah!"

As noted earlier, Armageddon has been expected by the Witnesses at numerous times over the past century, and not one of the marked years have been correct. The most notable was 1975, the failure of which resulted in the departure from the organization of a great many Witnesses. It appears now that the Watchtower Society may be forecasting the year 2034 to be the time of Armageddon; this time by subtle hints and not outright prophecy. They are likening this current period to the time of Noah, in that when God decided to bring about the great flood, he allowed Noah to preach for 120 years before the flood, which was the time of the end to Noah and his generation. This parallel is outlined in a *Watchtower* article of December 15, 2003, pages 14 through 19. The Society is adding 120 years to their all-important date of 1914 to come up with the hinted date of 2034. In the article *Our Watchfulness Takes on Greater Urgency*, page 15, paragraph 6, the *Watchtower* proclaims, "In Noah's day, Jehovah declared: 'My spirit shall not act toward man indefinitely in that he is also flesh. Accordingly his days shall amount to a hundred and twenty years.' (Genesis 6:3) The issuance of this divine decree in 2490 BCE marked the beginning of the end for that ungodly world. Just think what that meant for those then living! Only 120 years more and Jehovah would bring 'the deluge of waters upon the earth to bring to ruin all flesh in which the force of life is active from under the heavens.' - Genesis 6:17" Paragraph 7 continues: "Noah received the warning of the upcoming catastrophe decades in advance, and he wisely used the time to prepare for survival. 'After being given divine warning of things not yet beheld,' says the apostle Paul, '[Noah] showed godly fear and constructed an ark for the saving of his household.' (Hebrews 11:7) What about us? Some ninety years have passed since the last days of this

system of things began in 1914. We are certainly in ‘the time of the end.’ (Daniel 12:4) How should we respond to warnings we have been given? ‘He that does the will of God remains forever,’ states the Bible. (1 John 2:17) Now is therefore the time to do Jehovah’s will with a keen sense of urgency.” In paragraph 9, the article admonishes, “Jehovah has kept these warnings in front of his people by means of timely reminders through the spiritual food provided by the ‘faithful and discreet slave.’ (Matthew 24:45)...An integral part of the Kingdom message preached earth wide by Jehovah’s Witnesses is the warning that God’s Kingdom will soon remove human rulership. (Daniel 2:44) This warning is not to be taken lightly. Almighty God always keeps his word. (Isaiah 55:10) He did in Noah’s day, and he will in our day. - 2 Peter 3:3-7”

The final paragraph states, “Today, Jesus Christ is directing a tremendous spiritual building work. For the security of and survival of true worshippers, an arklike spiritual paradise exists...It is imperative that we ‘keep on the watch’ and prove ourselves ready for Jehovah’s day.” At the end of the article, two of the summary study questions ask this: “In what ways are our times similar to the days of Noah?” “How should reflecting upon the similarities between Noah’s day and our day affect our sense of urgency?” — *Watchtower*, December 15, 2003, pp14-19. So it would appear that the Watchtower Society is still holding fast to the belief that Armageddon is on it’s way, is coming soon, is just around the corner.

Back in the beginning, Brother Russell believed that he was chosen by God to be a messenger to the churches. He believed that the *time of the end* began in 1799, that the world was in a *harvest period* from 1874 to 1914 (40 years), and that the kingdoms of the world would end in 1914. He believed he and his followers would be taken to heaven at that time, but nothing happened. He upped the prediction to 1918, but he died in 1916 without seeing if his prophecy would come true or not. As we well know, it did not.

In 1920 Brother Rutherford penned the book *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, and used a series of calculations based on his interpretation of Bible chronology to place the year of Armageddon’s arrival at 1925. Again, nothing happened. Brother Knorr expounded upon Rutherford’s command to take to the streets and preach, and was the architect of the modern house-to-house witnessing technique still in use today. He was also largely responsible for the greatest growth in the organization during the period leading up to 1975. It was during his watch that the 1975 Armageddon prophecy was established and fed to the Witnesses, but it was his vice-president, Brother Franz, who was responsible for the statements and predictions regarding that date. It was Franz who heralded the date 1975 and counseled young Witness folk not to pursue careers or start families because the end was at hand. And again, nothing happened. Now it is 2009, and Armageddon has not yet come to pass. Will it happen soon? Will it happen at all? According to modern-day Jehovah’s Witnesses and the whole of the Watchtower Society, the song remains the same.

Armageddon is just around the corner.

Chapter Four – Dialogue

In reading this chapter, you will come to understand what makes our story so unique. You, the reader, be the judge. What follows is a four-month-long ongoing e-mail conversation between the two authors of this book. What started out as a friendly note of hello between two cousins who hadn't seen each other in a few years evolved into a lengthy epistle of swapped stories, childhood memories, confessions and rants. What follows is the naked truth, as memories resurfaced continuously during the period spanning September 14, 2008 through January 7, 2009. Since hastily written e-mails can appear somewhat sloppy when printed, some editing has been done to the following pages. However, that editing was limited strictly to punctuation, spelling and grammar, leaving the thoughts and feelings represented in the dialogue unchanged. That is because the way these events were recalled by the writers, and the way these happenings unfolded in their memories and came back to life, is as haunting as the experiences themselves. These stories are actual events that involve real people and places. The names of the people have been changed to protect a privacy that they may or may not deserve, but locations and place names have not. Let us proceed!

September 14, 2008

Face, ol' buddy! What's been happening? I see you've received my alternate e-mail address. Been trying to coordinate some travel plans here, but it's the same old story - when I have the time to travel, I don't have the bread. When I have the bread, I don't have the time. Hoping to make a trip up home in the next month or so, before I get busier at work. Anyway, I want to throw something out at you, something I could use your help with. A new project I'm working on, sort of like a documentary on strange events; one of the topics being religion and beliefs. I may or may not publish it, depending on how it turns out. It's along the lines (and it's just in the planning stage now, it'll probably change and evolve as it goes along) of *I Was a Teen-age Jehovah's Witness* or something thereabout. I need your input on this one because, bro, you were there too! Let me know what you think about the idea, or if you can think of anybody else who might want to add to it. As it progresses, I'll throw up a website. Anyway, let me know. Send me your thoughts and we'll talk further on the matter!

L

PS Break out the old *Captain Fantastic* album and pay attention to the words of *Tower of Babel*.

PIPES!! Good to hear from ye!! Things are about the same here, nothing really new, except your little cuz (Sean) has started high school. Where has the time gone, dude? It was hard for me to watch him walk up that street the first day, let me tell you. He's doing wonderful in baseball; we play tonight in fact. You can count me in on the Witness thing. I will hold back my anger of my lost childhood and fill you in on what I encountered, from both my point of view and Pepper's if you like. Hope you can make it up, it'll be nice to spend longer than a few minutes with you this time, and maybe a trip back to Asbury Park will do us good. Stay in touch and take care. Later.

F

Cool. Don't feel fretful about Sean - Little Amy is in eleventh grade now, complete with boyfriend, attitude and learning to drive. Great to hear he's in with our sport. Here's something cool. I work part-time in a hotel and one of the guests there last weekend was the ex-mayor or Manasquan, really nice dude, grew up in Asbury, graduated APHS in '59, knew both Uncle Pat and Uncle Ray. Small world, eh? Anyway, I'll be in touch on the Witness project, gonna start putting together an outline soon. I believe Asbury Park will play an integral part in this tale that must be told.

L

I just truly felt old for the first time that day, it bothered me. I work with a guy that hung out in Matty's Bar with Uncle Ray; he knew everything I talked about, he's about fifteen years older than me. We talked for over an hour about all the sites and sounds of Asbury Park gone by. Now you take your life in your hands if you drive down Bond St - so sad. Keep me posted, hope to see you soon.

F

Found a really interesting website put up by some ex-Witnesses, and it's so close to where we were that it's almost chilling! We'll be getting our own project off the ground very soon. Wouldn't it be cool if the very thing that so messed up things for us ends up making us rich and famous?

L

Cuz, I always wanted to sue them and never knew how, so maybe you're onto something. One of my biggest (and worst) memories is when I went after John with a huge stick when they wanted me to go to Pittsburgh for a summer assembly. I could have killed him!

F

Yes, that is the kind of stuff we need. So basically, you were so stressed and bitter from being in with the Witnesses you actually went after your own father with a stick. How old were you? What year was it? Why Pittsburgh? Did you end up going? You didn't actually take the stick to John, right? As far as suing them, I'm sure they are well insulated against such things. They're worth \$951 million at present and I'm sure they're not going to allow peons like us to grab a piece of it. They may a religion, but above all, they are a corporation. Now that I've been hunting around the web, I find that there are tons of anti- and ex-JW websites out there, mostly sites where people can post blogs to whine and bitch about their experiences. Believe me, bro, we are not alone. However, having the entrepreneurial spirit and being a decent writer, I want to take it to the next level. We're going to put a book together, because there are two tales to be told, yours and mine. We had similar, but different, experiences, and we turned out differently too, though I dare to say we are both still a little fucked up. Also, so far as I know, there are nine books of a similar nature for sale on Amazon. I haven't had time to look into any of them yet, but ours will be better. So anyway, when you have some time, start throwing some notes together. E-mail me bits and pieces or jot shit down and mail it to me, so I can start putting it all together. One thing I noticed, and it surprises me given my makeup, but if I spend too much time on this in one shot, I end up with a raging headache. Just

reading stuff on the web last night and I had to stop after less than an hour. Took me four Motrin to get right again... Talk to ya soon.

L

PS Here are a few things to jog your memory if need be -

*Zimrod, Clemente, 1975, disfellowship, blood, demons, theocratic, in the truth...*the list goes on and on. Do you realize that we *fell out of the truth*? Do you know how incredibly strange that sounds?

I'm still stressed. I honestly feel that is why I can't get anywhere in life and don't know how to be happy with I have, I just can't do it. Your cuz really has it bad...I tried therapy and that didn't help...they made me worse. I still hate Pepper and John for it, and I always will. I just recently realized they were doing what they thought was best for me, but it doesn't matter, it just hurt and pushed me into a friendless corner. I was fifteen then, so that would be circa 1978. We didn't go to Pittsburgh, none of us ended up going; that's when Pepper's eyes opened up for the first time. No, I did not hit him but I came very close. Even then, he could have knocked me on my ass at a moments notice. Thing is, I loved that man more than anything in the world and he didn't know it; he didn't know how to show it to me either, and that was the Witnesses fault. I had to be *broken*, so they sent Hinkmeier to come see me - I threw his 80-year-old ass up against the wall and told him to get out of my face. John had to grab me so I wouldn't kill the bastard. Pittsburgh was where the big summer assembly was being held. Count me in! I hear ya; I get headaches, stomach goes to hell, and I get very angry. I know I've had the chance to make my life better, but they ruined me; every step forward equaled two giant steps back. I read some of that website today - unreal. I was reading about Franz and Knorr - our era - so sick and so sad. Keep that Motrin handy, and I'll have a bottle o' rum ready for ya! Ach, Zimrod! You had to speak that name. I punched him in the face in the Kingdom Hall doorway on Parkway Ave in early 1978 - he told me to take off a sport jacket I was wearing and I said no; he grabbed my arm with the "Michael me lad" shit and I just whacked him! My jacket was no good but he could stand for the National Anthem at a Phillies game because he was afraid of being beat up by the crowd; well, he got it from me instead. I need a smoke; the ol' blood pressure just went up fifty points!

F

Wow, '78. I was long gone by then. I started to drift away late in '75, doing things like leaving for the meeting and going to the mall or a movie instead. That was when I went out with my first *worldly* girl and started working fulltime for real money in the real world (that would be McDonald's on Olden Av). I use 1976 as my official get-out year, although I do remember being at an Allentown assembly in '77. But by '78 it was all over for me, so I didn't know about your little run-ins with Zimrod or Hinkmeier. Good God, they must have thought you were the physical spawn of Satan himself! I don't think Pepper and John meant to do you wrong; like you say, they meant well, and they were brainwashed all to shit but that doesn't make us any less fucked up thirty years down the road. But these memories, painful as they are, are what we need to tell this blockbuster tale to the masses! Getting this out is going to be like therapy. Tell this story, pull no punches, leave nothing out, spare no feelings, take no prisoners! It will be a purging of the soul, mind and body. It'll be like taking a massive shit after years of constipation. It'll

be explosive! One thing I've learned, even this far along in life, and I invite you to take heed (and by no means is it easy), is this - the Jehovah's Witnesses may rule my past because the past cannot be changed, but I refuse to allow the Jehovah's Witnesses to rule my future. Tell yourself and tell the world - the Witnesses ruined your life - UNTIL NOW. I know it's not as simple as it sounds, but they've taken enough from you. No need to let them take anymore. I believe telling this story is a certain step in the right direction, so keep sending me little tidbits when you get the chance. Little pieces here and there until you're done with baseball and we have the time to jump in completely. You might even notice that five minutes a day of writing this out and sending it away will make you feel a little better as time goes on. Sort of like cleaning out the garage of all the unused, rusting and stinking junk that's been festering away for years. Like my old buddy from Asbury Park said once upon a song - "Someday we'll look back on this and it will all seem funny..."

L

PS Wait until you hear some of the crap that's still floating around in my head...Carpe cerevisi!

Your last line, "Someday we'll look back on this and it will all seem funny." I hope you're right. They actually did think I was what you call "the physical spawn of Satan himself," but more on that later. No one knows the pain that's inside of me, and no one understands it so I just keep it all bottled up. I've devoted my life to my son - he is what I have to see of what I never got out of life. You're right though, since I never had anyone to talk to about all of this, getting it out will be a help to my boggled-up mind. I have school stuff, Kingdom Hall stuff, door-to-door stuff; you name it, it's in there. Being older than me, you were able to escape sooner. I had to wait; *suffer* is a far better word, dude. When I went to San Francisco to see Ron in '77, he told me not to worry, that I didn't have to go to a meeting; he said I was safe with him. Yeah, right. Pepper found out and drove Ron nuts. He never gave in, telling her to leave me alone, but she won anyway. She found out that Fred (can't think of his last name, he had a son named Joel, a real tall guy) had family out there and sent them to where I was staying with Ron. They actually made me go to a meeting up on 37th St and I'll never forget that - Ron told me to go just once to shut Pepper up, so I went on a Sunday, stayed for the talk and left before the Watchtower study could start. I walked five blocks back home. Remember this though - your little (younger) cuz wants to be in on this project 100%! Maybe doing this will finally clear my head out.

F

That would have been Fred Maines. Great God, you couldn't get away from them even 3,000 miles away! That's ugly. Keeping it bottled up is bad though, as you well know; stomachaches, headaches, being pissed off... We'll get it all out. I can actually throw up an ex-JW MySpace site in about an hour, just to get the ball rolling. It'll be a little added incentive, and a good a place as any to store our material as it grows. We can start sharing with people now. Of course we'll save all the juicy, hideous and ugly shit (and there is plenty of that) for the book. If I have time I might start on that this afternoon. Right now I'm going to the beach; Maryann is there with Little John. We just had three days of pounding wind and sheeting rain and the waves and the tides are mighty indeed. Anyway,

send me some more tidbits when you can stomach it. Remember, you're taking a big duke and we're gonna laugh our heads off when we finally flush the filthy bowl!

L

Fred Maines. Yeah, that bastard! His son turned to drugs and all that while I just sat in anger watching the world go by. Nope, not even 3,000 miles away and under Ron's watch could I get away, they still found me. Headaches, anger, it's a normal day for me. But I hear ya; I know it's not good. I'm like the San Andreas - ready to blow! It will lurk forever dude; I can't get some of the things out of my head. I never had anything, and I have to admit, I have some things now, but I'm not happy and they are the reason. I'll get more things to you as it goes on. I may surprise you cuz; there are things about me I'm sure you never knew, and many have popped into my head even as I type. But I can't get mad today; I have a game to coach tonight. Sean is playing great right about now. He's a skinny little dude, but he puts the ball in play; hell of a bunter too. Wish you could see him in action - maybe next spring. Maybe I'll drive his butt down there to bass fish...got an extra spot in the driveway? Sunday we go to the banquet for the regular season - he gets his trophy and championship jacket then. Talk at ya later, have fun at the beach and hi to all.

F

Ach!! Absolutely. Come down anytime; that's all they do here, fish and drink. Anyway, I'm really leaving for the beach now, but check this out - I had to start, but not much there yet. I'm gonna have some fun with this as our project progresses. Talk soon.

L

I will check it ASAP. Fish, drink, & be merry!! My kind of town...

F

Make sure you check out the site I threw together over the weekend. It'll give you a feeling for what this project is going to be like. If you looked at it Friday, I put a lot more up since then. Make sure you don't miss the Arrested Development blog at the top of the page. It's a good start, but we haven't even made a dent. Send me some more fodder when you can stomach it, and if you know of anybody else who needs an enema, let him or her know what we're doing. You know, now that I'm actually trying to remember stuff long forgotten, it's amazing how much of it is floating around back there. I'm off tomorrow and I believe I'll start to decorate the house for Halloween! That's weird here; putting pumpkins on the porch when it's still ninety degrees out. Talk to you soon.

L

Hell, it's ninety here too, today and tomorrow. Indian Summer. Amazing is right, how much comes back. It's sick in a way - blocked out for all those years and now it's streaming in. Not so sure I like that but it's for a good cause. The real *TRUTH* shall be told!!

F

OK and cool. Streaming in is right, but streaming in because I'm allowing it to. Sort of like a clogged up toilet that you have to let overflow before you can flush it away properly (must be a reason why I keep referring to this in analogies of toilets and enemas and shit. I think a brief chapter on the psychology of that should be written. What do you think?) Ha, we'll be plumbers. Yes, plumbers of the mind and spirit come to the slopping and stinking toilet bowl filled to overflowing with emulsified shit and bile and leftover vomit and pus. We shall wield the plunger of truth and the snake of hope. And after the bowl is properly plumbed, the bowl shall be properly cleansed; it shall be made to sparkle with the Drano and the Comet of normalcy, and forever shall the toilet be once again a fixture that works properly. No longer shall we have to bolt that door and be ashamed of the toilet, because it will have been made new again, and it will be a toilet to be proud of, and will be used for normal purposes only! Ninety there, too, huh. Oh well, it won't be long before you're all shoveling the white stuff again. And now I'm off to the dollar store for some pumpkins with faces and some skeletons and even some... *gasp!!...ghosts*. Later.

L

GHOSTS? EEEEEEEEEEEK!! You know, I hate to say this, and I hope you don't get mad, but some of my worst memories involve both Pepper and your mother - sorry - I'll try to be nice there. I was thinking last night of all the old shows on TV. I went to see *Underdog* the other day; I haven't laughed that hard in a long time. I grew up with *Underdog* the cartoon so it was only natural I went to see it. Sean and his friend William couldn't figure out what I was laughing at some of the time, but that movie brought back memories of shows like Gene London, Sally Starr, and Dr. Shock. I was laughing thinking of them when another version of the past hit me hard - Pepper coming in and making me turn off Dr. Shock because he was a demon, then having Lester Clemente come and talk to me because I liked to watch the old "B" horror movies and how they were contaminating my mind. Then, 1975/76 came back to mind, and this involves you and your mom. I had *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, *Captain Fantastic & the Brown Dirt Cowboy*, and *Elton John's Greatest Hits*; the beginning of my first album collection. Pepper took my *Yellow Brick Road* and *Captain Fantastic* albums and with magic markers, destroyed all the artwork, crossed out all the words, and ripped out some of the pictures. I was devastated. I wasn't doing drugs or anything like that, I was the immature one. I didn't know anything; I had no idea that *All the Girls Love Alice* was about lesbians, nothing. I told her you had all the same stuff I did and she said your mom did the same to you, but when I was over your place one night, I saw all the pictures you made hanging on your wall. The Swan Song guy, *Captain Fantastic* stuff, and you had both albums intact. I went nuts on Pepper telling her your mom let you keep it all, so why couldn't I. Your mom said it was none of my business and that was the first time I told her to go fuck herself - she was a liar and a cheat in my eyes that day - I hated you for a year after that until I realized it wasn't your fault. To this day, I have the *Yellow Brick Road* album that she wiped out; I kept it as a memory of what *not* to do to my kids. I had to give everything up while everyone else could do what they wanted, like being tossed out of a school play because I couldn't stand for the Anthem while David Andersman was up there with the choir SINGING THE FUCKING THING! Or that five-faced son of a bitch Jim Zimrod telling me that I shouldn't follow you and become the one that will

“burn when Jehovah raises his hands to wipe you and all like you off the earth forever” while his son was sitting in jail for drugs and his daughter was leaping into bed with anybody who walked. Yeah, it was me that was no good, right! And people wonder why I’m the way I am today. I have not one ounce of respect for any authority figure thanks to them. See, you got me started, and now I have a headache...

F

Don't worry about being nice. My mother - a subject we'll go into in detail later, but not now - sore spot, mental pain, all that. We don't agree on much to this day, yet I've given her a roof here because after my sister died Steve wouldn't have her in his house and finally Aunt Joanie had enough of her, so it fell to me. A saga for another time; I wasn't ready to go there yet, but what the hell. Face facts, bro, our mothers quite frankly ruined us, and are responsible for quite a big chunk of our missing sanity. Don't be nice. Spew it out. Believe or not, I thought your mother was the cool one, and mine the real asshole. I had no idea you were pissed at me over my records and stuff, but here is the strange thing about that. This is going to sound really odd, but I guarantee it's true. I'm gonna sound like Sophia on the *Golden Girls* now, but here goes: My room - 1975-'76. I was past eighteen by then, but it still didn't really matter. I don't know how this happened, but for some reason I got my mother to be tolerant of Elton John. She was totally against any of my music but I was able to convince her that Elton wasn't like the others, not some rock demon, but just a young guy who liked to sing soft songs. I was able to keep my Elton albums, but I had to hide everything else. Zeppelin was an obsession of hers; she was so against them she actually spouted prayer in my room. Now if you'll recall, most of the stuff I had on the wall was stuff I had drawn. The Swan-Song guy from Zeppelin, the picture of Elton, the one of Lindsey Buckingham and the ones of Lennon and Mike Schmidt - think back, I drew all those pictures. I was allowed to hang them upon the wall because she believed that I was drawing faces from memory or imagination and it was OK for me to showcase my art on my wall. I could draw, like Aunt Mad, and she was OK with the talent that I had. If it had been the same pictures from magazines or posters or album covers, I would have come home one day and found them all ripped to shreds (wouldn't have been the first time). So you saw my Elton records, but I also had a great many more albums stashed under the bed and in the bottom drawer, and what else you saw was a rather creative way to have rock stars and sports figures on the wall and not be forbidden. And doesn't that just sound pathetic, over eighteen and hiding my albums under the mattress? Unfortunately, in '75 you were still a kid and they still had full control of you. By '75 I was old enough to know better and knew I was on the way out. I was drinking by then, and it was the beginning of a long period ('76 thru '84) of transformation. Record albums under the bed and drawings on the wall were the least of what was about to come. It's funny, almost prophetic, that you should hit this subject now. Not less than an hour ago, I wrote a brief blog on the site concerning *forbidden fruit*. When you go home and check out the site, make sure you don't miss those blogs. But see how this stuff multiplies? I'd completely forgotten about my drawing and what I had on my wall back in '75. It just keeps coming! I guess Zimrod picked on you because by then both his kids were in the toilet, I was gone, *going to burn* as he so lovingly put it - so the damn control freak had to try and dominate somebody else's kids. And I guess Clemente was a self-proclaimed expert on both movies and demons, fucking jerkoff that

he was. I don't know how much trouble you had with Clemente, but Clemente was the biggest monkey wrench in my life at the time, even more so than Zimrod. I have Clemente stories out the ass, and I have no doubt now that I'm going to remember them. Jesus Christ. Ah, that's enough for now...

L

PS I don't drink nearly as much as I used to, but I'm going to pick up Amy from school at three, drop her off home, and then head over to my favorite beachside pub and down a few...

Put one down for me. I can use a rum and coke right about now; I'm pissed for the day now! I hated you but I didn't hate you if you know what I mean, but I hated your mother to no end. I always wondered how you got away with it, but again, you're right, you were eighteen. I was still the kid who was trying to reach out and see what was out there. I'm sorry I brought up your mother; it wasn't fair of me to do so. However, even with all the pain, you did the right thing, you gave your mom a place to live out her days. I would have done the same thing if it were Pepper. Pepper always loved you even though she wouldn't let me hang out; she just didn't trust you enough. Remember I had to play ball with you on the ETS teams in secret? If she ever found out she would have gone nuts. That was right after I went after John with the tree limb; unreal. It hurts more today than it did then because of what I know; in truth, I'm forty-five but in life, I'm only twenty-five. I still have no desires that a normal person would. I admit I'm lazy, I don't care, I hate life most days and I blame them. I know I should not harbor this, but yet I do; they did mess us up - they ruined us. You mention Joanie - how about when my father was lying in the hospital taking his last breath when Jennifer (my second wife) called him to say he should come see his brother one last time, then Peggy (John's sister) called and said to get there so he could hear his brother's voice once again before he passed on. Uncle Jim says, "No. You want me to fall down before the devil and come to a Catholic hospital (St. Francis). You destroyed my brother by putting him in there and now he will pass into Gehenna instead of the house of Jehovah God! I would burn for eternity if I came to that place!" Then he had the nerve to show up at my father's gathering. Uncle Nick had to grab me and take me outside when I went after our Uncle Jim; I wanted to pound him dead. Nick knew it was coming. Nick had told him and your mother to stay away, and your mother did, but that bastard showed up anyway. I shouted out that it should have been his lazy, fucking alcoholic ass in the ground, not my father. Nick took me outside and hugged me like I was never hugged before; Scott in the meantime went up to Jim and told him to leave before something really ugly happened, he was ready to kill him if he didn't get out. This is what I lived in. Jennifer's mother Carolyn was scared to death; she said she never saw family act like that. I said he was not family and never was in my eyes. And when Ann-Marie and I split up Joanie says loud and proud to all that I deserved it because I left Jehovah to marry a Catholic girl. Yeah, it's me right? I'm the one that's wrong. I loved your drawings - they were so good - do you still have them? And Clemente? The self-proclaimed leader of the righteous world - fuck him! Zimrod too, asshole to no end. It's coming back so use what you can; there's more. I'm sick now, so down three for me instead of one. I'm going to baseball practice tonight for the kids so I will hit a few out of the park to take out the frustrations. If I punch my computer I'm blaming you! Nah, just kidding. But go ahead and add this to your blogs if

you like... I'm remembering more stuff from the early years. Although I was born into the Witnesses in 1963, the seventies were when the lifelong damage occurred. Since then, I have been married three times, once to a wonderful girl that I destroyed because I had no idea how to accept life thanks to the wonderful elders and my family of Witnesses. To this day, I cannot function right and I cannot hold friendships properly. I don't know how to act, and I have no respect for anyone in authority. Worse, no one understands me and the pain that I still have - a pain that grows more with each passing day. Imagine being in school knowing *the end* is coming and wondering why everyone is mad at you because you didn't finish your work, or you just acted like you didn't care. Think about hearing all the kids talking about how their birthday parties went and what they got for Christmas and you weren't invited, or any part of that kind of thing because you were different. You were different because Jehovah told you that you were better than them and that you would move on to the New Order and live forever in peace. Think of how it would feel if your teachers laughed at you, and even went so far as to pick on you because of this. Imagine that you are heading to a class assembly but directed to go straight to the office because you were not allowed to sit in on most things like that. Imagine that you are good in something like baseball but you aren't allowed to play because Jehovah didn't believe in organized sports or competition. Imagine having your landlord give you a present for your birthday or even for Christmas and having your parents say, "no, we cannot accept that." Once, Mr. Huff, our apartment's landlord, gave me a small boat to play with. My mom found out and took it away from me saying that Jehovah was going to be upset with me if I kept it. My tears meant nothing to her, just wasted in Jehovah's eyes. Think of how it would feel if you are finally going to a school assembly and the teacher makes you leave because you can't stand for the National Anthem, and then on your way out, you get laughed at, picked on, punched - and you turn around and see another Witness kid standing on the stage singing the National Anthem loud and proud - how would you feel? What was good for them was not good for you, and when you said something about it, you were called a liar and a racist, just trying to stir up trouble. Think of how it would be if you were the immature one - the one who didn't have to grow up because the end was coming. Think of how it would feel if you were a walking punching bag, always being called names, always being told you were nothing. Think of how it felt when you finally turned and fought back, only to be told by the elders and your parents that you were now disgraced in the eyes of Jehovah. You are to stand up and take it because Jehovah is alongside you and will help you through. Yeah, think about it. Think about how good that would make you feel. Cripe! I have much more to say, and it will come out. How they pissed in my father's face and treated him like he was a dumbass. Know what? He *was* a dumbass. Because he kept going back; going back to be treated like a third-class person, a fool, a tool in their arsenal of disgrace. How my mother's family, some of them Witnesses themselves, always used her because she had a big heart but then were never to be found when she was in trouble or needed help, and how they told her to hold on to Jehovah God when my father was sick and out of work for six months. One who lived around the corner from us would not lift a finger to come and help but cried whenever she needed something and my ignorant mother would bend over backwards for her. I told her that they didn't care about us as I grew older, but her response was I was wrong and that Jehovah knew she was good and so were they. Yeah, sure, whatever you say. It brings to mind a song written by a man that I grew to respect

more than anyone in the world. Why? Because he was like you and me. He didn't try to push his authority on anyone and he spoke in truth. He was a genius yet very few to this day knew just how good, thoughtful, and peace-loving a man he really was. Read and feel the words of *Imagine*. Let the words take you to another place where you may find, at least in your mind, what Mr. Lennon was really saying - and what he wanted most.

F

Very well written and well said. Why do I think we're going to go through a lot of aspirin in the next few months? Now I want to go back to yesterday's e-mail about John's death, and tell you a little story of my own concerning your mom. I remember being at Nick's but I don't remember any of the fighting, and I would imagine that I was probably drinking and missed the whole fuss. But I'm not surprised. What is it that makes them turn against their own family like that? Are they that afraid of - what? I remember my good friend Steve Betzow got disfellowshipped for smoking, and I, twenty years old, had to sneak and lie so I could continue to hang out with him. I had to walk down to the end of the street so my mother wouldn't see his car and realize that not only was I a liar and a sneak, but I was committing *apostasy* by associating with Steve. One night we got lazy because it was raining and cold and Steve drove right up to the house. Yep, I got busted. Had a big fight like you wouldn't believe over the stupidity of me being expected to turn my back on a friend because he'd been banished from the organization over a stupid bad habit. I also remember when your mother left the Witnesses, I remember suddenly my mother was badmouthing yours, saying she committed apostasy by turning her back on Jehovah and had become a part of the *evil slave* and was now in league with Satan. We were to have nothing to do with her. I remember saying, "woman, you must be nuts if you think after all these years I'm never going to talk to Aunt Marian again. This is family. This is even more ridiculous than Steve and his damn Marlboros. You don't have to agree with her decision, but you certainly don't have to act like she never existed!" Of course I didn't win the argument, but I still spoke to your mom. It was around then that I just stopped arguing; it wasn't worth the hassle, and my temper was getting the better of me. But a couple of years later the subject came up again, when I was putting together the list for Maryann's folks for our wedding. My mother went butt-stone whacko when she saw your folks on the list. "You can't invite Marian and John! Sinners! Turned their backs on Jehovah! No-goods!" And I said, "The fuck you say, I'm the one getting married, Mr. V. is the one paying for it, so he has the final say on who gets cut from the list, not you." She carried on for days, ranting and roaring about it, carrying on about how she wouldn't be able to go and Joanie wouldn't be able to go and how would it look if my own mother didn't show up at my wedding, and I told her she'd look like the damn fool, not me, but finally, and I am ashamed to this day of it, I gave in. Just to shut her the hell up and get her off my back, I, at twenty-seven years of age, gave in, and your folks were not invited. I felt like a weak little asshole, but I didn't have the energy to fight it. I just didn't care. But it bothered me, and I felt bad, because I knew that it was wrong, and I was pissed with myself for letting it happen. I didn't see your folks for quite a while after that, and I was actually ashamed to go see your mom. I assumed she was down on me, and rightfully so, and I didn't want to face that. But after awhile, enough was enough. I was out one Saturday afternoon, a nice fall day as I remember, cruising around with the then four-year-old Beeblet, and I decided to stop over there and talk to her and let her meet the

kid. So I did. I knocked on the door and she was glad to see me. I was relieved and happy because I thought it was going to be hard and maybe she'd shun me the way I did her, but it wasn't. She was a better person than that. The first thing I said to her was that I wanted to apologize about the wedding. She told me to forget about it, she knew it wasn't my fault and that I had been manipulated and she knew why. Told me I should have come around sooner and I was always welcome. Told me she was going with Aunt Mad to the Pearl S Buck house out in Doylestown and did little Lauren and I care to tag along. I said yes, we went along and we all had a great time. I was glad to have a family member whom I pretty much grew up with back in my life and was again kicking myself for being so weak and not going to see her much sooner. That Monday I went to my job at John Hancock and didn't get home until after dark. Maryann met me at the door with the sad news that your mother had died. All that wasted time, and for what? To this day I believe that something more than just guilt and remorse made me go see her that afternoon. Time was up, but I didn't know it. I don't think I would have been able to look in the mirror if she died before I had a chance to apologize. It's the same thing with your dad. His own brother couldn't go say goodbye because - why? I mean how fucking brainwashed are these people? I'm going to stop now; need some food, maybe a beer. Talk soon.

L

Thanks! Hey, my mom may not have trusted you with me (as you were older), but she always loved you. You were her *Main Pain*! She always asked about you and wondered how you were doing. She knew all about the wedding and understood the whole thing - you were never, ever, once at fault. I understood it all too so never have a worry. She got to spend time with you one last time and that was important to both her and you. I think she knew. She was leaving hints all over the place in the weeks leading up to her death. Even Ron who was not going over that Monday morning, stopped in just before seven. He was there when it happened and to this day, he doesn't know why he went over. I was out in Valley Forge when it happened. That fight took place at Curtis Lanes in the old Headpin Restaurant. We had a small service at Mr. Huff's cemetery and all went there; Nick paid for the whole thing. Old man Curtis gave me the place for three hours and charged Nick like \$100. That bastard actually thought we were going to let him stay. Peggy begged me not to go off but I couldn't hold it, I went nuts. That's when Nick grabbed me and took me outside; he would not let go of me and he told me to take it out on him, as Jim wasn't worth the room he took up. Do you remember when Aunt Joyce died? Your mother, Joanie, and Dot would not go to the service because they would have melted in a Catholic Church. Do you remember that Scott was a pallbearer? She loved him to no end. He was always there; he loved my mom and dad, he was there in a second if we needed him (and he's not even blood). Too bad that your mom and the others can't see things like that from us people in *THE WORLD*! I have no issues with using my name. Let the world know what I lived through, and regretfully still do.

F

Interesting, that - the old Headpin. I remember it well. How is Scott, by the way? Tell him I said yo! Yea, I do recall the death of Aunt Joyce - it was spring of '89 if I'm right. By then Aunt Dot was a Witness too. I have fond memories of Aunt Dot back when she was normal when I was young in the early seventies - she used to smoke cigs and

drink beer with my dad and I would hang out with Angie and cuss and talk about music and TV shows and normal stuff like that. It almost seems like when the Witnesses lost your parents they took Dot and Angie. It's me responsible for Angie and Jim getting together in '75, but back then Jim was cool and normal too. A year later, they got married and I went to the wedding and I remember a woman (one of the sisters in the Bradley Beach congregation) putting her hand to my crotch while I was driving a bunch of people to Vic's after the reception. This so-called lady was thirty-one and I was nineteen. That was very strange, but what was I thinking, in my then-still-twisted mind? Not a normal thought like "wow, there's an older chick going after me balls," but no, I'm thinking, "this woman is a Witness? What kind of Witness reaches for a younger guy's balls in the car? Witnesses aren't supposed to act like that." Ah, well, Angie was a lot of fun when we were kids, I used to love going to Asbury to hang out with her. Having Mother here is no big deal. She's getting up in years and she doesn't preach, but I believe now that her physical presence in this house is what turned on the spigot of this mnemonic hemorrhage. I mean, I'm remembering shit that I haven't thought about in thirty years or more. I can't write that fast! But yes, back home I could take her in small doses, and I'd stop and see her maybe a few times a month. She got real bitter when my sister died, gave Steve a load of hassle, started trouble with him, so he threw her out. She did and said some horrible things to him, got the elders involved, caused all kinds of strife. He had no choice, and I'll never hold that against him. But had she been a nice person, and a decent mother-in-law, I'm sure she would have been welcome to stay there, and I wouldn't have to deal with it. But she's here now, and I'm not happy with the arrangement, but it could be worse... All that said, now I'm going to start my day. Talk soon.

L

I too remember Dot when she was cool. As I said, things pop in and out - since you contacted me; I actually see things in my head. Like in the movies, how you watch people recall stuff; that's what's happening to me. I was on the porch the other day when I saw myself walking back to the stands at the fairgrounds after helping serve lunch. That night, I was covered in these little bite-like welts. I had Impetigo, and I got it from helping the cafeteria people. The following year, I did the same thing and got it again; there was something around there that did not agree with my skin. Pepper used to say it was because I wasn't paying enough attention to detail and Jehovah was punishing me. Did you know that they would never let me help again in the kitchen because they thought I was going to give it to all of them? Nice, huh? How about the times at Buckingham, during the speeches when most of the teenagers were outside smoking pot in the field (first place I got high by the way). But none of it was ever happening, always swept under the rug. It always made me sick when they said it wasn't happening and then gave the ones who did it praise and rejoiced in their name; yeah, right! Your mom always drove me nuts; I have much Witness and even some non-Witness stuff in my head about her, but that's not to be told as I don't feel it right to do.

F

Yeah, I remember Buckingham. It was like this big social event, where we dressed up like a bunch of pimps and trolled for Witness girls. I once remember taking Bob Heichtmann's Cadillac and going to the Pineville Tavern and missing the whole afternoon

session. Had Jimmy Powell, Steve Betzow, Jeff Zimrod, Rob Smithers and a couple of girls from Lakewood with me. We must have stunk of booze and reefer when we got back, but I don't remember ever getting caught doing that. I remember you having Impetigo (well I do now, anyway) but didn't know you were banned from volunteering because of it. Yeah, real nice.

L

Bob Heichtmann, my God. Haven't thought about that clown in decades. Now I'm thinking of all the places I was dragged off to for assemblies - DC, Wilmington, NYC, Philly, Allentown, Jersey City, and Monroe, NY. I used to work at most of them, but after the Impetigo they would never let me help again. Instead of finding out what was causing it, they banned me saying I was bringing it. Incredible. You know, we never took vacations; the mass gatherings were our vacations, or going down the shore to Dot's so Pepper could preach the *good word* in a different town. I never had a childhood. It's just so sad what they do to people.

F

Here's a history of those assemblies, from as far back as I can accurately remember - 1967 and before - Trenton Fairgrounds

1968 - Burlington, Vermont. Assembly mixed with vacation with the Van Dinizio's

1969 - Yankee Stadium, the big one

1970-72 - Roosevelt Stadium, Jersey City. I still have a picture somewhere of me standing on the roof of the stadium (looking like a dork of course) with the first of the twin towers built and the second about halfway up in the background.

1973 - Philly. Vet stadium. Got *immersed*.

1974 - Knoxville, Tennessee with the folks for vacation and assembly, then Garden State Racetrack in south Jersey.

1975 - Allentown, Pennsylvania and Taunton, Massachusetts. Assembly mixed with vacation with the Clemente's.

I also remember assemblies in Wilmington, Delaware; in '75 and '76. Also was in Allentown in '76 and '77. By '78 I was out of it but we still went to assemblies by mixing them with a family trip. '79 thru '82 was New Haven, Connecticut, but I never went to the actual assemblies, just hung out and drank with my dad. My God, no wonder he drank. And no wonder I picked up the fucking habit...

L

The ball is finally in our court. It took long enough. It's like our entire lives being spewed out before us.

F

Maybe the Witness past is putting a monkey wrench into your family life and once you've purged it of your system (the enema) your family life will improve. Just a maybe, but if you don't know how to react to stuff, maybe they're not as bad as they seem. Tough question here - does your family know all that you've been through and why? Or do they just know the basics or maybe nothing at all? Either way it looks like they're going to find out soon. My people know there's an odd past there, but they know very little of the

actual horror stories. But knowing that I was actually able to rise above all that and produce a family of normal kids makes me feel damn proud. Maryann is 100% behind this project, to the point where I should lay my fiction writing and TV watching and beach bumming aside until this is done. I agree with her. And you know what? When she reads the book, or checks out the site as it progresses, she's going to learn a lot about me she's never known, and it's been twenty-four years. There are going to be times when I'm going to want to go hide in the shed when she reads the pages we're putting together. There's a lot of stuff I've never told anybody, because it's so goddam embarrassing. But I strongly believe this project is just one more pit stop along the journey of self-improvement. That said, and I don't know your home situation, but this project may actually improve it for you. Either way, it's going to do something. A wise man once said, "Keep on doing what you've always done and you'll keep on getting what you've always gotten." Well, my brother, we are doing something different, something most people in our shoes haven't had either the balls or the brains to do. I fully believe we are going to get something out of it, something different and better. OK, I'm done preaching for a while, but again, who knows what awaits us once we get this mess off our minds and out there for all to see. Sounds like you're trying to work it out chronologically, but don't hesitate to just jot it all down as it pops up - it's easy to forget stuff. Send me more as you can, in bits and pieces or one big BM, either way is good. I've got an outline set up; I'll send it over to you in a few days for your opinion. Remember too, this doesn't have to be about just us - if you recall anything that others went through in those days that's good too. Aside from my own memories and stories, I can put together a lot about the people I was hanging out with at the time. I don't think very many of them are Witnesses still. I know Betzow isn't, Zimrod and Smithers left the truth and are both dead now, and Salmonte, and I heard recently the Powell died also; I'll have to dig deep to remember who else, but those guys did some awful stuff and had some shitty times at home, too. Billy Huster is still a Witness as far as I know, and living on the left coast of Florida. That amazes me, because his family life was I think worse than any of ours when we were kids. Anyway... Going to add a little more to the site tonight. Don't know when you saw it, but I changed the song to one that's a little more fitting - *Truth* by John Lennon. Check out the lyrics on the site. Of course we know John is singing about his total disdain for politicians and authority in general, but tell me those words don't fit this scene to a tee. Let us carry on!

L

For me, coaching ball is my out; it gives me time to spend with Sean and the game I love so much. Plus, I love being outside; fishing and baseball and time with my son are all that I have. Let me put things into light for you. I accept that people don't understand what I went through as a youngster, but what I don't accept is the fact is that they don't have time to try to understand parts of it, but have all the time in the world to say stop living in the past, get a life, stop making excuses (the *excuse* part is the one that bothers me the most) It's not an excuse. I don't blame the Witnesses every time something happens, but what I do blame them for is what my life was like - how I didn't know what the real world was like and when I finally got there, I didn't know how to react, act, or live. I still don't! I think the one thing that killed me the most was losing Jenn. I was so set in my ways; I let her walk out without even stopping to smell the roses. Sure, she

was no prize with her spending habits and run-to-mommy-about-everything attitude, but I should have worked harder. She gave me the best gift in the world, Sean. But I couldn't see past my own ignorance and dude, to this day, I still can't. However, my patience is the issue now. As I get older, I want no parts of the ignorance. I want peace, I don't want to argue any more, no desire to, no desires for anything but getting away and going to upstate New York to live out what time I have left on this rock in peace. I've been thinking and trying to break things down. Some things pop in, some are fuzzy, some are gone - the ones that are gone are the ones I want back since they are amongst the worst. I see things in my head that are not inside the Halls of The Kingdom, things like catching my old man smoking while we were fishing, and his drinking that I hate to this day, yet now I understand why he did it. The way the other so-called family treated me, your mother saying I was a bad influence on you. YOU'RE OLDER THAN ME. HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN A BAD INFLUENCE ON YOU?? But that bitch (sorry) pushed that issue always blaming me for each step you took. Yeah, me, the immature little fat boy who had no clue what the hell a joint was until he was fourteen, yeah, right! I see Dot screaming at me for reasons I don't recall. I see getting a bike from Tom Peacock and my father taking it apart and putting it back by his apartment door telling me "we don't accept gifts from non-believers." I see Santa sitting at our table in a restaurant when I was around ten, and my father telling him he that there was no such thing as Santa Claus and what a bad man he was to walk around and play this fake person and that he should leave our table now. Imagine how I felt when the eyes of the whole restaurant were on me, on us - disgraced, hurt, crushed. Anything you put on the website from Lennon will work for me; he is, and forever shall be, my idol. That man had it right!

F

Baseball, fishing and time with your son sounds like a very cool mix. Some of these poor misguided ex-Witnesses don't even have that. To go off, that's something that I've been notorious for since I escaped into the real world; I have no patience, I hate to wait for anything, and I have a propensity to give up on things prematurely. I'm sure that's why I've had so many jobs; I always wanted to jump on to something else. But realistically, I don't think most people can fully understand what it was like for you, others like us and me. It's one of those things - you had to be there. We can talk about humiliation, getting beat up, and feeling like idiots and know what it's all about, but for people who didn't experience it on our grand scale - they just don't get it. That, however, does not give anyone any reason to not care and not at least try to understand. If you decide to move on with your boy to upstate New York, more power to you. And do not hold back where your recollections concern my mother. Spew it out. I need to remember the shit I've blocked if I'm going to do this right. She is, after all, a main component of this project. To be brutally frank, she's the fucking reason for it, fifty years on. So tell it like it is, man, and don't spare anything. Be the umpire - call 'em as ya see 'em!

L

All I can say right now is thanks! Thanks for getting this out. It may take some time because I'm hurting as I recall it, as you are, but it will come out. Tell me this - I loved my mother and father, but I don't think they ever really knew that; how about you with yours? I grew to hate them both as I got older; in my twenties I blamed her for

everything. I knew that she was doing what she thought was best, but she had to know she was killing me inside. To this very day, I blame her; I still love her, miss her tremendously, but I hate her all the same. I know that sounds bad...

F

Remember, my dad wasn't in the truth so I did have some semblance of normalness, of knowing that there was something else out there. But either he was too weak or she was too strong, because it took me almost nineteen years to break out. She swore up and down until the day he died that he was just about ready to *join the flock* and *come to Jehovah* but I know better. He just stopped fighting it. He wouldn't give in though, and join, just to shut her up. But I do know one thing; I broke his heart when I dropped out of the tenth grade to *pioneer*. Looking back over the stupidest things I've done in my life, that one still ranks pretty close to the top. But, oh, I had an ulterior motive. I told my mother if I could quit school I would pioneer. I told my dad if could quit school I would get a job, and that I wasn't really going to pioneer, just wanted to keep the old lady from bitching about it. She encouraged me to quit school; he was 100% against it. He was right of course, but she won out, as usual. But my motivation was neither; I had lied to both of them. I didn't want to pioneer, but it was a good excuse to get out of school. I hated school, because I was constantly being made fun of and beaten up and humiliated. It was much worse in high school because it progressed from not saluting the flag and not eating birthday cake to being someone to be ridiculed for other things. I couldn't play sports, didn't know how to talk to girls, couldn't fight, and was a shorthaired unstylish nerd. I couldn't take it anymore, just wanted to get out. So I quit school in the fall of '73, half-heartedly pioneered for a few months, and then got a job at the IHOP on Parkway Ave. Stupidest thing I'd ever done. Now skip ahead six years, I took some classes, went back, and got my high school diploma. Yes, this dummy finally graduated high school at twenty-two, when most normal people are about to finish college. What a fucking waste. I was able to save my education but I could never get the time back. You only have one chance to enjoy your high school years, and I let them take that away from me. That's what pisses me off the most; no matter what changes I've made and am still making, I cannot get back the lost time. I can't go back to high school and do it again and hope to get it right. You're only a teenager once - but it made my father damn proud when I went home with that diploma, late though it was. My mother is a different story. She was a fucking fanatic, more so than your mom and Joanie. I never hated her, and I knew that she meant well and wanted what she thought was best for me, but c'mon. She encouraged me to quit school! My sister too. The Bunn never graduated, never went back, never got that diploma. Poor kid, she was weaker than I was, I guess. As for Mother, I don't hate her, but it's safe to say that I don't much like her, either. I don't believe I've liked her at all, since I was about sixteen, and I certainly don't like her now. That's something I'm having a hard time getting past. I also have a Jeff Zimrod story for you, too, next email. A few questions to satisfy my curiosity. When did you mom leave the Witnesses, and did her and John leave together? How old were we when my mother said you were a bad influence on me? I never knew about that until now. How old were you when you finally got out for good, and how old was Ron?

L

Ron got out long before any of us; by 1972 or so he was free completely. I got out in 1979 along with John. That was the year after I went after him with the stick for what he was doing to me. He slowly stopped going and by '79 he was done; Pepper held on about two to three years after us but little by little, she knew the jig was up. It was when Frankie was asking too many questions that Pepper started to wake up, and the day she asked the questions and was told she was no good, she left. I went with her that day to Buckingham in '82, and when she asked how this was possible and that was possible, the big-shots cursed her without using curse words, and she cried from the way they yelled at her. Needless to say, here's something else you don't know about me. I may have hated her, but she was still my mom, and you don't make my mom cry. It took five people to get me off the guy and then I was arrested, got out that night, and went right back after the bastard. He was from Connecticut; one of those traveling servants that used to come by the area. I found the bastard and went after him again, had him almost blue in my hands, told him to drop the charges and say it was just a fight between friends or I would kill him on the spot. He did, and trust me, I would have carried out the threat. Only fight I was ever proud of. Pepper left completely about two months later. Your mother and our other two Witness aunts gave her hell during that span. I was about thirteen or fourteen when your mother made those statements. I will never forget that I was the reason you were doing whatever it was you were doing. I laugh now, but back then, I was hurt, and so confused because I wanted to be like you and I couldn't. You being older had no time for the little immature cousin. I just sunk deeper and deeper into the darkness I created for myself, and I'm still there. School. Whoa, where do I start? First grade on I guess; I hated my teacher, didn't know why I was there if the *end* was coming, failed everything, yet was as smart or smarter than the entire class. To this day I am a numbers man, but I never got to prove it in life. I still enjoy the weather and know more than the hurricane center does, but where am I? I'm in ETS hating my job and myself more each day. That school life is carried over to my work life; without the punches and beatings and ridicule of course, but all the same. I was always getting laughed at and picked on, couldn't do the birthday stuff, couldn't salute the flag, and all the time I was wondering why everyone else did. By fifth grade I was asking more questions and getting pushed further away. 1980 was coming; the planets will line up and Jehovah's hand will strike, you will be stricken if you don't comply (today, every time I watch a *Star Trek* episode with the Borg, I feel like I was sent back to my Witness days). I was asking why I could not stand for the pledge and the anthem when it's saluting the country that gave me life (past wars) and freedom. I was grounded, lost TV, had the elders speaking to me; it just goes on and on. I'll get more on school and the parents as I go along, and I think I will surprise you with the things I have to say. I'm not kidding when I say I still feel like I'm in my dark place. How much longer will that last?

F

Sounds like you were quite the little hell-raiser, beating up the brothers and all that. I never knew any of that happened. Shame that's what it took to get your mother out of there. But didn't she and Madeline and Nick join some Indian group after that? I have vague memories of being at Nick's house and they were all talking about smelling flowers that weren't there and climbing mountains and stuff like that. They seemed happy as all hell, too. Guess that's what counts. So she started questioning the way the

Witnesses did things and they made her feel small. Arrogant assholes. Did John go along with the Indian thing, or did he just stay to himself after that? Yeah, school was a clusterfuck. The best time of our young lives, the most important and most impressionable, and they were completely ruined. We would have been better off getting spewn out of a test tube at nineteen. Now you might not realize this, because you're still hurting from the old days, but you have done a wonderful thing, maybe without even knowing it. You have given your son the gift of a normal childhood - having friends in school, listening to real music without having to hide it under the damn bed, playing ball with his dad. You did this despite the fact that you yourself have no shitting idea what a normal childhood was like. That is a great accomplishment; I know, I've done the same thing with my girls. And if you and Sean have a good father-son relationship, it doesn't matter how old he is, you will always be friends. My dad and I were close until he died, no small feat considering we lived in the utmost chaos; I was twenty-six. Of course Sean will grow up, move out, start a family of his own (and be able to do it right, thanks to you), but I'm sure he'll always be close to you. Lauren is twenty-two now, lives with John, has a job, goes to school, takes care of the baby, but we are still close and we get along great. Still find time to spend together, and that's important. I think my mother's whacko comments about you being a bad influence on me make a little more sense now that I know the timeframe. If you were fourteen, I was twenty, and that was when I was finally out for good. She couldn't accept that I had left Jehovah of my own free will. There had to be somebody to blame. It was my worldly friends, it was Steve who was disfellowshipped, it was Zimrod and Clemente because they pissed me off, it was the booze, it was my father, it was the elders, it was my father's family, it was the music, it was the books I was reading, it was Satan, it was my job at McDonald's, it was other Witness kids who left Jehovah and took me down with them, and probably a bunch of other baloney too. And it was you, the little cousin. She couldn't blame herself, as that would be tantamount to failure. It would have meant that she raised me wrong, and I was going to die at Armageddon, and it would have been her fault. So she blamed everybody and everything she could think of. But she would never for a second even consider the fact that I left Jehovah because *I fucking felt like it*. My choice. My decision. To her I was incapable of leaving on my own; I had to have been influenced, talked into it, brainwashed out of the truth. There was no way I would have left Jehovah on my own, because I was raised from infancy to know it was the only true religion. Sadly, she believes that to this day. I remember Ronnie McNally telling me one day that he was amazed by the "absolute hatred that your mother exhibits toward Brother Zimrod." I wasn't amazed at all. She blamed Zimrod because of all his infernal meddling in our lives. It's funny, she hated him and I didn't. I didn't care one way or the other, I just thought he was a big, blathering idiot. Clemente was the one I really couldn't stomach. One more thing before I move on to the next e-mail. It may or may not be significant, but the true fact is that once I got a little older I never really believed any of it. It just didn't make any sense. Everybody was going to die except the Witnesses, a chosen few were going to heaven, all those rules, the holiday and birthday thing, the world's gonna end in 1975 and only the Witnesses will pass on to a righteous new system, the dead will be resurrected; it just all seemed so preposterous. There was no science to it. But I was a kid, so I had to go along with it, or risk disobedience and get whacked a few times with a bent-up coat hanger. So I never swallowed the religious dogma, but I did get caught up in

the social aspect of it. As I was being ridiculed and castigated in school, I was such a little social butterfly at the assemblies and meetings. It was like a sanctuary, right up until the brothers started giving me shit because I wasn't following the rules. That's a long tale for another day, when the elders in the Parkway Hall started on me and wouldn't give up. That's when I realized it wasn't going to last. They made me an outcast in the congregation in November of 1974, and it all started because someone wrote *fuck* in the frost on my bedroom window. But I was still seventeen, and I had to live with that shit for months. Again, that's another tale to be told later. But I didn't wholly believe the religious end of it; I couldn't, it was ridiculous, and that probably made it easier for me to move on. I'm sure it's why my sister stayed behind; she believed all the bilge and crap they fed to her. So tell me, cousin, did you believe what you were being taught? I know Ron didn't, I somehow remember that from somewhere, but did you?

L

I was a fighter once I got it all figured out. I had no choice, I was tired of being picked on and used as a punching bag in school. I hated fighting, but I did it if I had to. I wasn't really a hell-raiser, only if I had to be. Frankie is the one who started it all; he was the devil in their eyes, but he got Pepper's attention once and she ran with it. They belittled her, cursed her and I went nuts. I saw red that night, and I couldn't stop beating that guy and anyone else who touched me. I felt Like Rocky for a few minutes, and it felt good. I look back on it now with both a laugh and some sorrow that it ever came to that. I told you I punched Zimrod in the face at the Parkway Hall, and that feels good right to this day. Yes, Mad, Nick, and Pepper got into the Sai Baba cult, but they were happy. Mad still is; they see it as a peaceful thing and that's good for her and was good for my mom. John didn't follow it but he had no problem with my mom doing it. Thank you for saying what you did about Sean and me. I told Jenn that with her and her family, I was going to make Sean's life far easier than mine. I wanted him to have everything I never did. He knows something is not right about me, and that I had no life. I hope he reads our book so that he can see what really went down. For now, I will give him all that I can and allow him to grow on his own. He's fifteen but he still thinks on the line of say a twelve, but that's ok, he's doing well and that's all that matters to me. Thanks again for that, almost made me well up, you bum! Do you remember every time your father got drunk, your mom grabbed you and the Bunn and ran to my mom? My mom always put you guys up in that little apartment we had. Your mom would try to take over *our* house whenever she was there, and my mom let her do it. I used to just go hide under the table. What always got me was this - your mom had no problem running to mine, and mine always took her in, but whenever mine needed the slightest thing, she was no good, all she ever does is want, always needs something - this was your mom to mine. Ask why I hate her to this day and will forever (sorry). I did believe quite a bit of it for a long time, but it slowly went away in 1977 when I was sent to San Francisco with Ron. That is when I started my fighting. It took some time, but I got out. I realized that the end was not coming by any God or angel. If it was going to happen, it was going to be by man, or it was going to be cosmic if nothing else.

F

Yea, that was it, Sai Baba. As long as they were happy, and I don't seem to recall Sai Baba wrenching families apart (though I guess our aunties will blame him along with everyone and everything else for your mother's leaving Jehovah). So it was Frankie who got her going. I barely remember him as a Witness, I just remember being told by both our mothers that he was no good anymore, joined up with the evil slave, and we were to have nothing to do with him. Was Frankie the first? Did he get his sisters started down that road to ruin? I always wondered who got them started or how they got involved in the first place. I do remember coming over your place a lot, and I remember my dad drinking and them fighting like hens about the most bizarre shit - they couldn't fight about normal stuff like money and the house, no, they had to fight over religion. Always they were yammering and caterwauling about religion, and it's why I decided very early on that religion itself was not a good thing, because it caused untold strife in my house. I remember sitting in Don Young's years later, in the spring of '84 - I was alone that night in the bar for some reason; probably had another fight with Mother dear, and somehow the subject of religion came up. I said to Billy Young that I was ok with the concept of God, but I had absolutely no use for organized religion of any kind. He asked, "Why, you have a bad experience or something?" I said yes, but then I quickly changed the subject. I didn't want to go there, even that many years after. Not to make an excuse for my dad's drinking, nobody should drink to the point of belligerency, but I don't wonder why he drank so damn much. Like John, I guess. I remember a few times when John and my dad got together and starting slugging back the Schmidt's and the Rheingold and the Fleischmann's (low budget drinking men, the two of them), having a grand old time, and then having our mothers bitch them out and raise holy hell about the evils of alcohol. About the end, - you're right, if Jehovah was such a loving, pious, and righteous deity, I think he'd find a better way to cleanse the earth than with all-out war and destruction. Have you ever read Stephen King's *The Stand*? It's one of my favorite all-time books - tells the tale of how a plague wipes out 99.9% of life on earth and the survivors take up sides, essentially the followers of good and the followers of evil. Then comes the ultimate showdown. The plague is manmade; a government-created virus gets spilled and kills everyone in its path. People everywhere just get sick, crawl away and die. At one point some survivors are talking about how it all ended and it is said: "No way was this any act of God. This was pure human fuckery." Sounds about right to me. God, if there is one, isn't going to destroy the earth to get rid of the people; that would be like burning down your house to get rid of some ants. Anyway, it doesn't matter. Think again on the 1975 concept. Something about that has always fascinated me, and there's just so much about it that needs clarifying. Until then...*this is how the world ends. Not with a bang, but with a whimper.* — T.S. Eliot

L

They were happy when they joined up with Sai Baba. I thought it was a bit stupid, but they were happy. They didn't bother anyone with it and they found something that brought them together on a different scale, so it worked. Frankie was the first to go. He was a rising star with the Witnesses but he had too many questions. They finally forced him out and he became the *Devil's Speaker*. He wrote some books and formed the Edenite Society back in the mid-seventies. Everyone disowned him and no one was allowed to talk to him, but he somehow caught my mother's attention, and he got into her

head. That is what started her trek out; it took many years, but she finally broke free. You keep saying 1975. I remember 1980, 1990, and of course hearing about 1999 later on. What are they up to now - 2010?

F

Viva la Frankie!! 1975 fascinates me. I love the way they so piously claim to have been misunderstood about 1975. I don't remember, did they attach any armageddonly significance to Y2K?

L

When the planets all aligned in 1980, scientists were saying there would be volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, and the like because of the pull on the Earth and the Witnesses jumped on that claiming that the Jehovah would be striking down the evil during that year. When it didn't happen, they lost about 35% of their following. Only the stubborn hung on claiming it was a misjudgment in timing - they meant to say 1990 - which also came and went. Then they jumped on the Y2K bandwagon and said that Jehovah would wipe out all evil by stomping on the world's technology, and since Jehovah's people didn't need technology to survive in God's Kingdom, they would prevail. They lost another 30% of the following that year as well. So, I was wondering what they had in mind now - 2010 or 2012. The world is forecast to end in 2012; I believe some prophet made that statement thousands of years ago.

F

Ok, so how many times can these bloody clowns cry wolf, and have their gullible sheep continue to listen? I did have a little concern about Y2K, though I never really thought it would be anything more than a minor inconvenience. This is what I did for Y2K, just to be safe: I bought twenty-four gallons of bottled spring water and a bunch of batteries and candles, and hit the bank. I had two thousand cash in my desk drawer just in case things went shitty for a few days. I welcomed the new millennium at my friend Dave's place in Flemington (he has since moved to North Carolina) with the wife and kids and some friends. A good time was had by all. Five months later Dave and I put together a website called ghost-hunter dot com and we launched a project. That's a story for another day because we're way ahead of ourselves here, and it has nothing to do with the Witnesses. But it was cool all around.... You are thinking of 2012. The Mayan Calendar ends in 2012 and the big date is December 21, 2012. 12/21/12. That date is being recognized the world over by psychics, astronomers, scientists, astrologers, gurus and mystics as the end of the world as we know it. Not to be confused with the *end of the world*, but simply the end of the world as *we know it*. A fundamental time for change. Some kind of major upheaval, some kind of transformation, something new and different. Who knows? Have the Witnesses made 2012 this generation's 1975? I don't know, but it wouldn't surprise me any.

L

2012. I'm ready; maybe that will be my changing time, but then again, I don't want to wait that long. I remember Ghost Hunter; that was a neat thing you guys did.

F

Trust me, this won't take until 2012! I'm gonna take a day off from this, I have to. Rummaging around in my head (the box) last night and had quite a rude *awakening*. Some shit came back that hit hard. I'll lay it out for you, but not today. I'm also going to pick up the thread on that '75-'76 timeline and finish it and send it to you tomorrow. It's going to be a long one, so bear with me, but I need to get it out. And I forgot to mention it yesterday - happy birthday, Mr. Lennon. Until tomorrow.

L

Taking a day off from this is a good thing for me too; too many headaches and depressed memories, however I'm 100% glad we are doing this. Yes, a happy day to one of my favorite people! The world is a mess without him!

F

Speaking of California, I've recently been in touch with our cousin Gloria. Seems she has some issues too. It never ends... Ah, the Law of Attraction works in mysterious ways.

L

More pop-ups - this is from sixth grade. There was a major assembly this one day, and I was in Mr. Mazzola's science class and we all went to the assembly. It was going to be a show; kids were playing instruments, doing comedy, good stuff. When we all sat down, the choir came to the stage to sing the National Anthem and the director asked all to stand, but I, of course, was not permitted to stand because of Jehovah. Mr. Mazzola grabbed me by the arm and started to lead me out of the auditorium; along the way, I was called names, punched, (all this with Mazzola holding my arm and doing nothing about it) and had things thrown at me. I turned around, and there was David Andersman and his brother (can't think of his name) along with Den Bartson standing in the choir singing the anthem. SINGING IT! I was unable to stand and had to be walked out, taking hits all along the way, and they were up on stage SINGING IT! I cried while I was sitting in the office during that whole show. The principal came out and tried to talk to me and actually said he was sorry for what I was enduring. What bothered me then was the fact that they were singing it; their fathers were *elders* and their fathers always gave my father shit because he was too weak in their eyes, and didn't go door to door enough. It didn't matter to them that he was feeding his family on the pennies he made in a sweatbox factory that later killed him. When I got home, I was still very upset and I told my mother what happened. At first, she said I was wrong, then she took it in when she finally realized I wasn't kidding and I was quite upset. She went to the fathers of these boys and was told that David, his brother, and Den were *not* on the stage, did *not* sing the anthem, and were *not* standing. She asked again and was told I was becoming a racist because I claimed lies about those fine young brothers. David's brother went so far to say that he was hurt when he saw my teacher walking me out of the auditorium. Yeah right, he was hurt. If he did see it, which to this day I highly doubt, he was laughing his ass off. I would not back off and begged my parents to contact the school to see that I was right, but they refused to. Instead, I was visited by the elders yet again so they could attempt to fix the troubled soul that I was. I *was* troubled, that is true, but it was they, and not the devil as they claimed, that troubled me. Hinkmeier, Clemente, Andersman, and Bartson

all wanted to know what was wrong with me. I kept saying there was nothing wrong with me and I had the proof, but they said that no one wanted to hear my false, racist claims against those boys. On the next to last day of school, I got in a fight with a student much larger and stronger than me. I ended up throwing a desk right into his knees knowing this would make him drop; he had knee surgery earlier in the year and I knew where to hit him (and all that time people said I was dumb and didn't listen - fooled them - I took everything in and knew what was going on around me). This kid claimed that I didn't love my country, and that I said all people who are not Jehovah's Witnesses deserved to die. *Me?* Oh sure, I would say that. I wanted to die because I was *with* the Witnesses. The teacher actually told him to shut me up; everyone laughed in the class, and he came after me. I ran after the first punch, I kept warning him that he didn't want to pursue this any further, but he hit me again so I turned and flung the desk. Guess what. I got tossed out for the last two days of school, he got off, and the teacher did no wrong. The teacher said I started it and before he had a chance to calm the other kid down, I threw the desk at him. During the meeting with the principal and my parents, I gave my side of the story but no one wanted to hear it and the principal was assured that I would be talked to by the elders again and that I would be severely punished. On the way out the door, I turned around and asked the principal a question. My question was this: "Mr. Fuller, can you please tell me if David Andersman, Den Bartson, and the other Andersman boy are in the choir?" He responded with "well, yes they are, and quite good they are, too!" I then asked if they sang the National Anthem at all events; again, he responded with a proud "yes, and they have the best voices for it as well." I asked then if Mr. Fuller would tell my parents that I was not lying, just like I'm not lying now about this fight, and that those boys were allowed to sing the anthem while I was crying in the office, banished from the show. He looked at me, and my father went to yank me out of the office. But Mr. Fuller stood up for me and he came out and told them to stop. He told them that those wonderful boys sing in that choir and are required to sing the anthem at all events or they can't be in the choir. And then he said he wanted to revisit my claim that I did not start the fight in the class and that quite possibly I was right and the teacher started it with the kid I took down. But guess what? My parents yelled back at him saying I was troubled, I was under the influence of Satan and I was going to be punished and that he, the principal, should never take my side. My own parents! Yeah, this is what I grew up with. I saw things that were wrong, and I see things to this day that are wrong. I'm still the troubled one to this day; it's like there is an invisible branding that precedes me everywhere I go and to everyone I talk to that I am troubled, I am always the one who is wrong. I needed to be fixed or Satan himself would get me. Well, I guess he got me then, but for some sad reason I relive sixth grade to this day, in what is supposed to be my life. Yes, the Jehovah's Witnesses have destroyed me; and just like those elders didn't believe I was fixable back then, I don't believe I am fixable now.

F

Holy shit. I haven't thought about those clowns in how many years? David Andersman and his brother Pat and Den Bartson. Those kids were a bunch of cowards, but they were no dummies. They didn't want to be outcast and ridiculed, so they sang the songs and ate the cake and spoke the pledge, and then went home and acted all righteous and holy and their idiot parents never knew the difference. And wouldn't believe it if they did know, as

you well found out. They went to meetings and from door to door, spouted their Friday night talks, and were fine upstanding young boys. And when you saw them doing something they were forbidden from doing, and put it out on the table, the parents and the elders had to shove it quickly under the rug. If you were in sixth grade, that puts us in what, 1976? That would have been Fisher school. They were a few grades ahead of you if my chronology is working here, so you were in sixth and they were in junior high. I know they were younger than me, but I can't remember by how much. I do recall that we had what was known as a *Christian gathering* at my house and I'm thinking it had to be early '72 because *American Pie* was all over the radio, but it was this so-called gathering that my mother wanted to have so I could mingle with all the Witness kids from Parkway. I was fourteen. She invited them all; let's see who I can remember - the Zimrod kids, the Andersman boys, my good buddy Ronnie McNally, Teddy Howell (because he was older and was supposed to be a positive influence on all of us) Barbara Vincenzo, just a whole shitpile of people. At this gathering, young David Andersman found the opportunity to spirit a five-dollar bill from a cup of cash I had on the desk in my room. I didn't see him do it, but Jeff Zimrod did, and told me. So I went into my room to check and sure enough, the five was missing from the cup. The coins and a fistful of singles were still there. I went to my mother (which in retrospect I never should have done; I should have taken his apelike ass out in the yard) and told her what happened. I got the speech about accusing our brothers of wrongdoing and how the matter would have to be handled properly. Of course that meant a trip to see the elders. I remember going to the Hall that Tuesday night and going into the library (remember that little room on the side of the hallway - the same little room where people used to hit their kids when they made noise - the same little room in which I supposedly had sex with a married sister a few years later) with my mother, Andersman, Ernie Hinkmeier, and a few others. Brother Andersman asked me what happened. I said "David took five dollars from my room the other night, and I want it back." Well that was just the end of it all. I then got trashed all to hell by those brothers, and why? Because I had the colossal balls to accuse that fine boy of stealing and on top of that I had the total attitude to actually demand my money back. They all went against me, and my mother was appalled by the way I spoke in the library, by the sheer disrespect I exhibited by telling Brother Andersman that "I want it back." I was punished for the way I acted in that room, but I did get my money back because my father got involved and Brother Andersman didn't want to have any dealings with a pissed-off unbeliever. It may have been my money, but it was his house and he didn't take too kindly to being robbed by people we'd invited over. And David did admit to stealing the money, and told his folks, and later he actually apologized to me and told me it was pretty cool that I wouldn't back down even with all the elders castigating me for making accusations. So that kid not only sang forbidden songs, he was a fucking thief, too. How is it that our folks were so blind? What were they afraid of? Tell me, were your folks any happier after they split, or was the damage so deep that it didn't matter? Back to the *gatherings*, - we had some of those over the years, right up until the incident in November of '74 (which was in retrospect the beginning of the end of my Witness period) and I'll try to remember some details. I'm drawing a blank now, but it's in there. The other day Maryann and I were talking about what I call *the box*. I liken this mnemonic flush to a big box of junk that I filled up some twenty to thirty years ago and then shoved in a far corner of the attic. That's really how long it's been since I put this

Witness stuff out of my head. I'd have flashbacks whenever I went to visit my mother and sister, but they dissipated when the visit was through. And now, I've been poking around in the attic and I've come across the box. I've opened the box and I've been pawing through this box for a few weeks now. I'm finding stuff that's better left unfound and I'm finding stuff that amazes me and I'm finding stuff that just plain cracks me up. But if I spend too much time rooting around in the box, I have to head for either the medicine chest or the bar. So I ask myself why, instead of putting that box up in the attic, why didn't I just pitch it into the furnace? I don't know the answer to that, but I do know that once this project is done, that whole box is going right out the fucking window and into the dumpster. It's time to move on. How about your box? Is it stashed away in the attic, or have you kept it a little closer? Either way, when this is done, I'll be honored to help you get rid of the goddam thing - maybe we'll have a little symbolic burning, like my buddy Richie and me did with the ties when we got fired from Wendy's.

L

They were in Fisher and I was in Antheil, and they were visiting all the Ewing schools doing this show. Mr. Fuller knew them from when he had them, and helped with the shows. So yes, those wonderful, upstanding, young boys were stealing life from everyone else and flaunting it in the meantime. I knew they were all trouble, thieves and whatnot, but everyone else saw them as the good guys. Not me! Like I said before, to this day I have the ability to see good and bad, and I knew they were bad. I remember the married sister you supposedly had sex with but I can't think of her name (Katie Douglas sound about right?), but I do remember all the shit that went on about it, all the talk, you were this and you were that. I just sat back laughing, but it all came down on me a few years later with me marrying the Catholic girl. My dad kept hitting the whiskey every night, and my mom kept driving him to it more (that's where I made my choice not to become a drinker) and I hated them both for that. They fought like cats and dogs most days. So no, nothing changed really. I do not have a box; instead it's all stuck in my head. Jenn and I got rid of almost everything to do with it when Pepper died. You know, you are the only person I ever told this to, but sometimes I wish Jenn and I were still together; I never gave her the chance she deserved. Those Witnesses wiped me out of having any long-term relationships; like I said, I drove shrinks to drink after they talked to me. Cuz, I have so much hate built up inside of me, that after you started getting this out of me, I scare myself. But on the other hand, I feel better too, that it's finally coming out to someone who knows what I feel because he feels the same way - so thanks! More is to come, I would assume.

F

You know that's a symbolic box, right? I mean, I don't have an actual box full of Jehovah Witness crapola stashed up in the attic (I don't even have an attic, or a basement for that matter) that I go rummaging through to get ideas. The box is in my mind, a very remote corner of my mind, and the ol' memory has been kicking in of late - but you knew that. I don't have any actual stuff anymore, like the books and Bibles and all that junk, but I do have tons of pictures from that era, and they really are in a box, out in the backyard shed. I guess I'll be going through them during this project; I imagine they'll trigger yet more ideas and memories. Speaking of memories, you've got a rather good one. Katie

Douglas is absolutely correct. She was about four or five years older than me, and had those two kids, David who was two and baby Adam. When she started coming to the Hall in early '75, she and I became friends. That was great because, thanks to Zimrod and Clemente back in Nov. '74, all my so-called Witness buddies had been turned against me, so I started making friends with the newcomers. This is where Don Lawson and Don Swisher come in, if you remember them, and this is when I began hanging out with our future cousin-in-law Jim Hughes who, at the time, was one of the coolest dudes I had ever met. Anyway, back to Katie. She was a nice girl and I fell in love with those two little boys. A lot of times they would act up during the meeting and so I told her that kids, even little babies who don't know any better, are frowned upon if they open their mouths while the esteemed speaker is expostulating. Just a little friendly advice, and I also told her to take them into the library if they started hollering, not to beat them of course, but to do normal mommy things like change the diapers, give them bottles, feed them, give them naps, whatever. A few times I went in with her to help out because she had two kids and bags full of kid stuff and food, and because that's what friends do. But what got the dirty-minded assholes in such an uproar was that Katie was a breast-feeder, yet so discreet that no one ever knew she was doing it. When little Adam got hungry, she would feed him the natural way. Well, these clowns put two and two together in their filthy little minds and after seeing her breastfeed and seeing her go to the library and seeing me go to the library, they just assumed there was sexual activity going on. Andersman had a big part in this smear campaign (probably to get even with me for exposing his holy thieving son), as did Clemente and the Clemente wife, who at the time was my mother's *pioneer partner*. They actually went so far as to accuse us of having sex in the library, during the meeting for God's sake, and so here we went again, the elders and the speeches about improper conduct and adultery and fornication and all that shit. My dad found about it and was furious. My mother of course took their side and, while she didn't think I was actually giving pipe in the Kingdom Hall, she did say that it was my own fault. How could I be so stupid as to go into a closed room with a married woman when the brothers were around? And of course, it was Katie's fault too, because she lured me into the closed room with bad intentions. I was forbidden to ever see or speak to her again. It hurt, because I really liked her, (and not sexually, that never even crossed our minds) and they destroyed our friendship. And it was all over the congregation, too - *there's that whore who whips out her breasts in Jehovah's house, and there's that kid who took her for his own gratification right here in Jehovah's house*. Nobody ever once had the pure common sense to realize I was simply helping a friend with her kids. That incident was the last straw; I was so pissed off that those narrow-minded sex-obsessed assholes made a mockery of our friendship with their accusations and finger pointing. The November '74 exile had lasted deep into the spring of '75. I had a girlfriend from the '74 autumn assembly named Allison Jensen - she broke up with me in early March of '75. I was working for an insurance company doing grounds maintenance and got fired the weekend after Memorial Day. I went to Cape Cod with the folks over Memorial Day weekend and blew the transmission in the family Plymouth and we had to stay two extra days to get it fixed - that's what got me fired. I didn't get another job until the last week in July, when Ron McNally got me a job at the Olden McDonald's. In between I remember having a girlfriend from the spring assembly named Gabrielle, which didn't last too long because I of course botched it up because I hadn't yet learned how to properly treat a girlfriend. The

Katie fiasco was sometime close to Allentown or maybe just after. In July we stayed a week in Cape Cod with the Clemente's, combining assembly with vacation. I wanted to throw up the whole time, but I just can't recall if that was before or after Katie. It was probably before, because I don't think I would have been able to stay in the same house with Clemente after what they did to Katie and me. Zimrod was behind the November '74 trouble, because it was Jeff who wrote fuck on my window and my mother saw it and asked me who did it and I told her. So she went and raised hell with Zimrod and he turned everything around and made it look like I was out to give Jeff a bad name in order to cover up all the ungodly things I was doing at the time (ironically, I wasn't doing any ungodly things at the time; that all came later). But it was Clemente who was the ringleader with the Katie incident and one thing I remember about him is that not only was I pissed because they ruined a friendship for me, but I was even more pissed for her. Because of me and the ridiculous organization I belonged to, that poor girl had to suffer all kinds of indignities and ridicule and wagging tongues and pointing fingers, simply because she was my friend. That is why my disdain for Clemente was always much stronger than my disdain for Zimrod. There was a trip to Vermont in September of '75 with my folks and sister, Aunt Dot, Angie, Jim and Ron McNally. In October of '75, I had achieved my first non-Witness girlfriend - her name was Syndi. It only lasted two weeks (hey man, I was still learning, and *worldly* girls were a much greater challenge) because I guess somebody filled up her head and one night she asked me if my mother knew about her. I told her no, and she asked me why not. Like a dummy, I told her exactly why I had a girlfriend I couldn't tell my mother about. Instant breakup. There was a camping trip to Stokes Forest in October too; Jeff Zimrod, Jimmy Powell, Steve Betzow and me (the boys were speaking to me again, they finally realized they didn't have to shun me just because their parents and the elders said so). We drove from the campground in my '68 Acapulco Blue V8 429 4-bbl Thunderbird into Manhattan and went to dirty bars, porn shows, guzzled booze, bought pot on the street and made total fools of ourselves. We were like kids in a candy store. I remember getting stopped by the Jersey State Police on Interstate 80 about three in the morning on the way back to the campground and to this day I can't fathom why we didn't all get locked up for the night. The self-destructive mode was just beginning to blossom and it would be a good eight years before I wised up and toned it down.

L

I thought you actually had a box with old books and stuff in it. What a jackass I am. SEE WHAT THEY DID TO ME! Katie was a sweetheart; even her non-believing husband was a good guy. I used to help her baby-sit and I remember it well when all the stuff started about you two. It hurt her...and I know it hurt you. I can still see her sitting in the seats by the window of the Parkway Kingdom Hall breastfeeding Adam. It was the first time I ever saw a woman do that. I also remember people talking bad about her doing so as well. You know what, it's the most natural thing in life to do aside from taking a shit; why would anyone down a woman for doing that? The first girlfriend I had was in 1979 - Karen Epstein. Like you, I had no idea how to treat a girl, but it lasted a while. Then came the forced relationship with Debbie Fordina. Debbie and I liked each other, but not in that way. We were always together but never shared so much as a kiss; we were like brother and sister and she actually helped me open my eyes to a lot of things. I ran into

her a few years back, her mother is still involved and she is now brainwashed to no end. She had some serious drug troubles and her mind went; she is now a drone (see *The Borg*), a washed-up, Jehovah-is-God, mindless drone. When she started speaking Jehovah to me, I put my fingers on her mouth, gave her a hug, and wished her the best; she is now gone in my eyes, mind, and heart. Then came Mary; she was first, I'll never forget her, but Pepper hated her and we broke up. Then Ann-Marie, the Catholic girl who became my first wife; again though, I had no idea how to make things work. Donna and I went out many years ago, and somehow ended up together again thirteen years ago; we're married now for coming up on twelve. As for Jenn, she is now re-married as well with two kids; that ship has sailed and I'm not on it. That was a 50/50 split in so many ways but I of course will never tell her how I really feel; she drove me nuts, but I loved her to no end and I still do. I always will have the one tie to her - Sean. Today, we get along very well, and I also get along with her mom very well and we talk about things. Her mom was the closest to any person I ever met that actually understood some of the feelings I had; she was the one who said I would re-live life again through Sean. She was right.

F

No man, that box is in my mind, a far corner in the back, and it hasn't been unlidded in many a year. But now, because the box is not made of earthly material but of loose gray matter and brainwaves (the memory banks, as the robot on *Lost in Space* used to say), it's become a shape-shifter. Last month, when I first broached the idea to you to throw together a memoir of our Jehovah's Witness days, it was a little box, like maybe the size of a shoebox, and it was duct-taped shut. As we've been rolling with this, I've noticed the box has been getting bigger. It's now about the size of a small appliance box, the tape has been ripped away, the lid is gone, and stuff is overflowing and spilling to the dusty floor and fluttering around in the stale attic breeze. I imagine it will get bigger still before we're done. Katie is a perfect example of how shit is flying out of that box of its own accord. I honestly haven't thought about her since that time and it made me realize that not all my memories from those days are bad. I ask myself, did I forget about her because what happened to us was so painful I blocked it out (that really was the last straw, I'll elaborate on that in a bit), or did I just forget because not too long thereafter I started drinking and stoning? Either way, she landed in the box, and yesterday I pulled her out. Remembering that incident has made me feel worse than anything else I've hauled out of that box so far...because in that case, they didn't just take something from me, or give me a hard time, or piss me off with their rules, but they hurt me, too, and they hurt someone I really cared about. And I ask myself now *why* I haven't thought about her in thirty-two years, and I don't much like the answer. I tossed her in the box with all the rest of the Witness crap and forgot about her, but that wasn't fair. She was twenty-two and I was eighteen going on twelve, and I'd be lying if I said I never liked her in that way (immature twelve-year-old boys have crushes, normal eighteen-year-old dudes wanna fuck, so she was safe), because I did, but it never went anywhere beyond friendship and it never could. Now I find myself missing that friendship we had, brief though it was, and I'm pissed with myself for allowing those meddling busybodies to forbid me to see her. About a month after it went down, I wrote her a letter telling her I was sorry about all the crap that took place and that I was *leaving Jehovah* because I just couldn't take anymore of it.

Them making our friendship out to be a dirty sexual affair and then destroying it was the final cut. I told her I was OK. That was that, I can't talk about this one anymore. Funny how I remembered when I left Jehovah and how, but not why. It wasn't the rules, it wasn't my mother's holy righteous assholeism driving me bugshit every day, and it wasn't the preposterousness of the teachings. All those things were a major part of it, but it was Katie that finally pushed me over the edge. If we hadn't started this project, I don't think I ever would have remembered that, or her. (Oh, shit. I just heard a crash in the attic. How much you wanna bet something else just sailed out of the box?) Here's how it went down. I told my mother I'd had enough. I was furious beyond belief about it. I was pissed off to a high ray and I was no longer going to let a bunch of holy-rolling jerk-offs tell me how to live and who to associate with. I told her I was out, done, finished, too fucking bad, I know she meant well, but it was over. Of course she begged me not to, told me it wasn't Jehovah who made all that happen, but mere men. I told her those mere men were in my face, and because of those mere men, it was over. That's when she took to hating Zimrod and Clemente. I told her I would have nothing to do with those mere men in any capacity, I never wanted to see any of them again, and I would never plant my skinny white ass on a hard metal chair of the Parkway Kingdom Hall again. I also reminded her that I was now eighteen. She said that didn't matter, as long as I lived under her roof I would continue to follow in the ways of Jehovah. I reminded her that I had a full time job and it was no longer obligatory that I remain under her roof. That's when my dad piped up and said that it was his roof too, he paid the goddam bills, and that I had a home for as long as I wanted. They fought for a while about that, of course, and I really didn't want to move out, so I shut up for awhile. Then I had an idea. I told her I'd remain a Witness, but I'd have to change congregations, because I was not about to change my mind and go back into that Parkway hellhole. I told her I'd join the Hamilton congregation, because I had some friends there. I also told her if I heard one word from any Hamilton brother about Katie, that would be it; no more argument, no debate, no second chances, no more Jehovah. If it came down to where I'd have to move out over it, then I would. She had no choice but to agree, and hated Zimrod and Clemente all the more for it. OK, there's more to this, about six months more, and I don't want to rush it through, so I'm gonna save it for tomorrow. Gotta work this afternoon.

L

PS. I just realized that of all the people who are going read this story, authentic Witnesses won't be able to. A true Witness will be forbidden to read it, won't be allowed to have it in the house, won't even be allowed to eye it up in the bookstore.

Any Witness with a sense of question will read it, and we may save a few souls in our quest.

F

You know, I just got so pissed over Katie that I wanted to take the names Zimrod, Clemente and Andersman and splash them all over the evening news, but of course we can't use their real names. I remember my father saying we should take those brothers to court and sue them for slander. Except he didn't refer to them as *brothers*. Sue them for *defamation of character* is what he actually said. He was right of course, but I didn't want to be bothered, so I let it go. If we save a few good people, that'll be great. But as

you well know, any Witness with a sense of question is already on his way out, either voluntarily or through expulsion.

L

I believe it was called - drum roll please - being DISFELLOWSHIPED! I was just thinking, I wonder if any of them are still alive. Zimrod, Clemente, Andersman; if so, they have to be close to eighty at least.

F

Yea, that's it. Disfellowshipped. These people have their own fucking vocabulary. As for the old ducks being still alive, I'm sure we can find out, but do we really want to know?

L

Nah, not really....

F

Didn't think so - to be continued!

L

I have a short story here for ya from around 1973. I have always, and still do to this day, loved the songs *Silent Night* and *Oh Holy Night*. I used to get goose bumps when I heard the song *Oh Holy Night*, and *Silent Night* would always relax me. One day I was humming *Silent Night* and my mom asked me what I was humming and I wasn't real sure of the name. I said night something or other, so she asked me to hum it again and of course I couldn't do it on cue. Later on, I was doing it again and she got full wind of it. She went nuts - "*where did you get that? Don't you know that's a blasphemist song? How dare you!*" She hit me, then she shoved a bar of Ivory in my mouth, and all along, I had no idea what was going on. Back then, fool that I was, I thought *Oh Holy Night* was a Godly song and so it was alright to sing it. Needless to say, the same thing happened and I was brought before the elders again. She even made my dad go through hell about this, saying that he didn't care what I sang and that he needed to be more on the ball with correcting my demons. When she died, I put a lyric sheet of *Oh Holy Night* next to her urn. In one way, I got some release from that, but in another, it was one final act of disrespect towards her for what she had done to me. Just thought you might like that little story. By the way, what the hell is a blasphemist?

L

They were Christmas songs. Oh man, you were about to bring Satan and all his minions into your very house by uttering such songs! Sad, that. The word is blasphemous, as in committing blasphemy by putting wicked pagan Christmas songs before Jehovah. Sort of like committing apostasy, which I was accused of time and again. So this inspires me to throw up a list of my top five favorite Christmas songs, cultivated over the years.

- 5 *Santa Claus and His Old Lady* by Cheech and Chong
- 4 *2000 Miles* by the Pretenders
- 3 *Little Drummer Boy* by Bing Crosby and David Bowie

- 2 *Christmas Rapping* by the Waitresses and...
- 1 *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* by Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band

There are many more, including Rascal Flatts' new rendition of *Jingle Bell Rock*, but I can't remember them all right now. Hell, it's eighty degrees out and the front of my house is sporting skeletons and pumpkins. Too early for Christmas...

L

I love those songs to this day. Back then, I would hear them on the radio and I loved them. I didn't think anything of it. What is apostasy? My favorites:

1. *Oh Holy Night*
2. *Silent Night*
3. *White Christmas* (Bing Crosby Only)
4. *Little Drummer Boy* with Bing and David
5. *The First Noel* (Nat King Cole)

F

You put your list up backwards... The official dictionary meaning of *apostasy* is to abandon one's religious faith, beliefs and principles. An *apostate* is one who becomes disloyal and betrays or deserts his religion and his God. *Blasphemy* is the act of disrespecting, cursing or reviling God. If I had a dollar for every time I heard the Witnesses sling those words around, we wouldn't even have to work.

L

You got that right! Do you remember Wayne Scott? He popped into my head the other day. Used to go fishing with him; he was a nice guy. He used to stand in the back during the Passover (or whatever they called it) and partake of the bread and wine when it passed by. He truly believed he was going with Ernie and Lucy to heaven to be a part of the 144,000. I don't know how long he hung on or if he still is; I do know he left town, though. He was around thirtyish back then and like I said, a real nice guy.

F

See how stuff just pops up out of nowhere? This keeps up we'll have a manuscript as thick as the Manhattan telephone book! I do remember Wayne Scott; well I do now that you brought him up. You're right; he was a nice, gentle well-mannered man. What sticks in my mind is that our mothers and the other gossip-spewers used to ridicule him for doing the bread and wine. It was called the Memorial. They said (as if they were experts) that he was too young, and how dare he presume to be one of the *Little Flock*. The timing was off, because the rule at the time was that to be one of the 144,000 you had to have been alive in 1914, and that made Wayne way too young. I also remember a fellow named Anthony Scott, a real cool guy who worked at Trenton State College, who I always thought looked a black Jim Croce. I recall one day he and Wayne got into an argument and our mothers cried about how disgraceful they were acting in Jehovah's house. And I'm still learning, as this late age. I had no idea Uncle Frankie was anymore than a former Witness who made and sold his own furniture! I Googled up the Edenite Society and there it was. Big website with more stuff that I can read in a year and a tribute page to,

and I quote “Frank J. Muccie, Jr, Founder of the Great Edenite Society of Imlaystown, NJ.” What else is there? I wonder. Also found out that I wasn't completely born into the truth. My mother got her mind erasing in 1959 and got immersed in 1960. I found my baby book in a box of old pictures and come to learn that I actually had both a birthday party and a Christmas party as a baby. Too bad I was too little to remember. There are no pictures of these events in that baby book (I can see that they were removed) but what was written in ink is still there. Also found out (although I'm sure you probably know this, I'm actually surprised I didn't figure it out myself) that *Tower of Babel* is a scathing rip at the music industry. Seems Bernie hated the big shots and record companies so much, he likened them all to a bunch of pagan hypocrites and Babylon the Great. I really thought he was singing about the Witnesses, like he knew somebody who went through it or something... Got another Zimrod story for you - you may remember it, but I think they did a damn good job of shoving this one under the rug. You would have been thirteen. What that fucker did to his own son... Spring of '76 - May, I guess, this was prom time. Jeff was a junior at Ewing High and he had a worldly girlfriend named Allison LeClair. Nice girl, we all worked at McDonald's together at the time. Well Jeff, like any normal high school kid, wanted to take his girlfriend to the prom. But how to do this when your parents don't know you even have this girlfriend? That's easy, you get your ol' buddy Larry to dream up a scheme and help you out. I had this fictional girlfriend in the Lakewood congregation, down by the shore. I created this fictional girlfriend so that on meeting days I could say I was going to the Kingdom Hall down there to visit her, then I'd go to the mall or the movies or a ballgame or something. So we created a fictional Witness girlfriend for Jeff so he could say he was taking her to her prom down in Lakewood. This was acceptable to Brother Zimrod. So we spirited Jeff over to Robert Smither's house (his folks were always out) where he got himself dressed and primed up for the prom. Since Jeff was too young to drive, I told Brother Zimrod I would be more than happy to drive young Jeff to Lakewood and save him a trip, and I would also spend some time with my own fictional girlfriend. This made Brother Zimrod very happy. We got Jeff ready, picked up Allison, and dropped them off at the banquet hall in Trenton. Robert and I then smoked a bone and I went home. Done, right? Well, no. I guess we'll never know how, but somehow Zimrod found out that Jeff was right there in Trenton at a prom with a worldly girl. He went to the place in the middle of the event and physically yanked Jeff out of there, leaving poor Allison to wallow alone in an unmitigated pool of embarrassment. He called my mother to explain these events to her and to demand my head be cut off and fed to the dogs. She looked at me with a face of utter disgust, but all she said to me was, “you lied to Brother Zimrod.” I said, “I did.”

Imagine being of the mind where you can actually consider doing that to your own kid. He could've waited until Jeff got home and then punished him or beat his ass or whatever else they do, but no. He had to go there and humiliate Jeff in front of a ballroom full of people, and how do you think Allison must have felt?

L

Yeah, it's amazing. I'm sitting there and things just pop in. I remember asking about Wayne's doing of the bread and wine and I remember what you said, how they ridiculed him for it. He was a good guy; I will always remember that about him. I don't remember Anthony Scott though. I'm surprised you didn't know of the Edenite Society; I never

looked into any of because quite frankly, I didn't care. I didn't get along well with Frankie; while still a Witness, I went after him when he came to my house and gave my mother shit. I firmly believe I am the way I am today because of all that crap. I protected a woman that was destroying me, and I knew it, but I protected her anyway. I was born into it - never had a birthday until I was nineteen and nobody could understand why I refused to come out of my room and be a part of the so-called party. I didn't care; had no feelings towards it because of how I was raised. To this day, I don't get excited by any of that, but I do take pride in standing for the flag and the anthem. I was long gone by nineteen, but the feelings of repression (is that a word?) were hanging on tight. I didn't hear about the Zimrod/prom thing, but I do not doubt that taking place. I remember my mother doing that to me when I went down to the bowling alley to play pinball, and I know you remember this, the Pinball Wizard machine with Elton on the backboard. She came in there and yanked me right out - she did stuff like that to me at school too - yelling at teachers, making me feel two inches tall; no wonder I had so much trouble in school. Damn! I had heard that *Tower Of Babel* was written as a acknowledgment for the record company. I always knew Bernie hated them. However, that song fits the Witnesses to a tee. Robert Smithers, what a joke; however, sorry that he's no longer with us. He had some ups and downs, more downs though. His mother Rosemary, I remember you called her a refrigerator with a head! I will never forget that. She was always in our business, too, and I was always the bad guy. Drugs, drink, sex - all the stuff you and the others did, and I didn't do, but I was the bad guy. I have never gotten over that and what they all did to me.

F

Yeah, it's a shame they ruined school for us, because that's the one thing we can't do anything about. We can learn something new everyday, we can put things out of our minds or put it back in if we want to, we can grow and learn and make the most of our experiences, but we can't have our school days back. We can have school, hell, I've heard of people starting college after retirement, but we can't have that time back. I probably would have been good in school, too, but it's too late for that. I imagine ol' Jeff felt like quite the horses ass, but poor Allison. What a clusterfuck that must have been. Yeah, Robert was OK in a way; he was fun at times but I think he was a whacko when he came in, and becoming a Jehovah's Witness just made him worse. The boy was not sane in any manner. Now let me clear this up, it's all part of that time continuum thing that I'm trying to work out. The drugs, drink and sex were 90% after I left. During that final year I did do some drinking and smoking with certain so-called brothers, but they were on their way out too. Guys like Robert and Jeff, Jimmy Powell and Steve Betzow, in that period of late '75 and early '76. The final countdown... By the end of '76, I had nothing to do with any of them except Steve. And contrary to popular belief, I never went to bed with Kim Zimrod, or any other of the so-called Witness girlfriends I went through. I had to teach myself how to act around girls, remember. It took awhile, but I think I did alright; but when I think back on the eight years that followed, I'm sometimes amazed that I'm still here to talk about it. I didn't block out anything from '76 to '84 like I did with the bulk of '59 to '75, but I'm sure a lot of good memories are lost completely to what I like to call reefer memory. It was just that I had to taste everything, grab hold of everything that I missed growing up; the bad stuff along with the good. I made a lot of friends and did a lot

of things and learned a lot of life in that period. My job at McDonald's, then the job at ETS, getting involved with baseball and bowling, getting too heavily involved with strong drink (the only bad habit I still have, by the way, but not nearly so much - no time), doing stronger drugs, meeting some really great people, but also getting involved with some really bad characters, too. For purposes of this project, we're going to call that time the aftermath. It's important because not only did my entire childhood go to the Witnesses, but also the next eight years were, to be brutally honest, a mind-numbing blur of self-destruction. *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy* was released April 30, 1975. A reflective collection of songs written by a wistful Bernie Taupin. I was a big Elton fan in those days, as were you, so I bought this album. As I was prone to do in my younger years, when I liked an album, I would play it to death. I mean day after day for weeks on end. I'd know every word of every song and have them all memorized. Such was the case with *Captain Fantastic*. Now when one listens to music the way I do, events coincide and songs remind one of such events. You know how that works. At the time I started spinning *Captain Fantastic* nonstop, I had no idea I was heading into the most tumultuous time period of my young Witness history and the events that would transpire would finally bring an end to my being one. There's a memory, a connotation of sorts, for each song on that album. I was hanging out a lot with cousin Angie and her boyfriend Jim; I introduced those two, if you remember that. I was spending a lot of time in Asbury then too, so any song on the album conjures up a misty memory of mid-'70s Asbury Park, as it was declining into what it become in later years. When I heard *Tower of Babel*, it hit me that the song had to be about the Witnesses. "Someone called us Babylon, those hungry hunters tracking down the hours..." I mean, c'mon - whatever he was singing about, it was all the Witnesses to me. *Tell Me When the Whistle Blows* always reminded me of Jim, because Jim worked for the railroad and I used to ride the bus from Trenton to Asbury before I got my car. I always changed the words "in Hyde Park holding hands" to "in Asbury Park holding hands." *Someone Saved My Life Tonight* was just about that whole summer, in the middle of which was my eighteenth birthday. I remember one time Angie, Jim, Ronnie McNally and Billy Huster and me were in the car going somewhere and Ronnie was singing along and sang "its 4:00 in the morning, darn it" and I said "hey man, its ok, its part of the song, you can say dammit," but he wouldn't hear of it. When I played the song again, Jim sang along louder and sang "its 4:00 in the morning, fuck it" and I thought Ronnie was going to dookie in his drawers. *Meal Ticket*. Remember how at the assemblies you couldn't use real money in the cafeterias? They actually called them meal tickets. *Better off Dead* reminded me of my then-girlfriend Gabrielle, simply because she liked that song. *Bitter Fingers* went for my declining attitude as things started coming apart during and after the Katie incident. The last two songs were for her, *We All Fall in Love Sometimes* and *Curtains*, and for some reason whenever I spun *Captain Fantastic*, even far into the future, I never really let it finish, didn't keep it on for those last two songs, or at least didn't pay full attention to them. Now I know why. I blocked out that incident so deeply that those two songs no longer had any meaning, even though the whole rest of the album still did. It was the core reason why I left the Witnesses, and I wouldn't remember it. Didn't, for thirty-three years, until last week, when you and I talked about it. It just came out, but it was always there, hidden, stashed away. Buried away in that fucking box. I dug out the tape and played it, because it needed to be done. How's this for a twist of fate - I haven't played the album in years (actually

haven't played any album in years, my needle is shot), but I knew I had the cassette somewhere, and I thought I should look for it, because I needed to hear it again. I would have gone out and bought a new CD of it but I thought I might as well look around for it first. I had no idea where it might be, but I went to where I keep some old books and tapes and stuff in some boxes, opened the first one, and it was right there on top. I mean, no shit, right there *on top* of the stuff in that box. An old homemade copy just waiting for me to pick it up and play it. The time had come... I played the tape, in its entirety, beginning to end, six times in the dark of the wee hours of Oct 9 and 10, in the car. Once again in the midday sun on the 11th. All that shit, and now it seems like it was just yesterday. If Clemente and Andersman were to somehow materialize here in Florida, I'd run them down like the dogs that they are. And I thought I was over it! Here's a weird question for you, but trust me, it's relevant. Do you ever dream about your teeth falling out, or breaking up and you spitting them out? Do you ever dream of your father? Details later... OK, I think I've beat the dead horse of that subject enough. Had to get it out of my system. You were a good son; you couldn't turn on your mother even with all the shit, because you knew deep down, she wanted what was best for you. She didn't know what she was doing, but she meant well. I guess Frankie knew what was coming down the pike. Man, this is all just so goddam weird. To be continued...

L

School, youth, the past - all things that are gone forever. Some of us can move on, some get trapped. I'm one that is trapped. I can't help but think how different it could have been. Where would I be now? How would things be? Would I be happy? I think, I would be a lot happier than I am now, that's for sure. But things happen for a reason, and many good things came out of my years from thirty on, but many continuing disasters plague me and forever will. I don't remember some of my twenties. I blocked that era out, like many of the things that happened along the way in my earlier days. I remember pain, I still have pain, and I will always have pain. But I have good, too, and there was some ultra limited good back then. You took to drugs and drink; I took to pot and trouble. I became a fighter in the punch-you-in-the-face sense. Shit, now I'm too tired to fight my own battles at home; I've lost the edge completely now. Girls! Yeah, sure. Maybe when I'm eighty I'll figure that one out. It was meant to be that you played the *Captain* again. Those songs have only one memory for me - the memory of what my mother did to me when I had that album. However, reading what you wrote is so true. I can think of a few things that go along with that album. Believe it or not, just a few years later I really discovered John Lennon. He became my hero - I needed one, and he was it. Most of me wants to believe what you said about my mother doing what she thought was best for me, but I can't go on with that notion any more. I just can't. I've been thinking since we started this, and it's awakened many sour moments in my life - how could anyone who thought she was doing what she thought was right allow her own son to suffer so much. Well, here's where I jump off that bandwagon - she didn't give a shit. She let the Witnesses guide her along like some lamb and she ruined my life for good. She went out of her way to ruin Ron's, too, didn't even go to his weddings, and I have no respect for her at all. If she thought she was doing so much good, then why didn't she look at the pain I had on my face, in my head, in my actions. Yeah, some mother. As for my teeth falling out - I have very few left, so it already happened. In time, I will have

them all taken care of. I have only five left in the bottom. Regretfully, Sean got my teeth, but unlike my mother who said I would become perfect in the new order, I take care of him in the now - he's more important than I am so it goes without saying. I honestly don't know if I dream about John or not. I think I have in the past. I remember fishing with him though, catching him smoking while we fished. It's funny now, but it was shocking back then. I try to remember only the good about him but his drinking always clouds that over for me. I guess you can tell I'm in one hell of a mood today.

F

Rocky, get back in the ring. Yeah, according to those dirty-minded slobs, I got more ass than a toilet seat - Kim, Katie, all those black sisters I was supposedly chasing around, and worldly women beyond count. Incredible. I do remember Debbie Fordina. I also remember Bob Heichtmann chasing her around when she was like fourteen, and the brothers going after him for that, and then somehow it all coming back to me - since Bob was hanging out with me at the time, I had to be the one who influenced him. I was a *stumbling block* to Bob and somehow I influenced him to chase girls half his age. Bob also had a major hott-on for Angie, and it was obvious that he knew even less of how to treat a girl than we did. When I think back on that, Bob Heichtmann was a total bleeding asshole, but I have to conclude that he was so because of his upbringing. The poor slob didn't know any better. Did any of those fools ever stop to think how totally preposterous their allegations sounded - they had me made out to be some kind of sex master who had the power to turn other brothers into perverts. They gave me way too much credit, because at the time, I was still a skinny immature kid who didn't know shit. I know you're right about our mothers; I just hate to admit to myself that they actually knew what they were doing when they were doing it and yet continued to do it. But of course, they did, and we have to live with that. They all did, I mean look what Zimrod did to his own son. I can remember how utterly nuts my mother went when she realized there were no more meetings, assemblies and service for me. She blamed everybody and everything imaginable except herself. To this day, she doesn't mentally accept that I am not a Witness of Jehovah. Ironically, I'm teaching a class the next few days on the IRS rules for doing tax returns for members of the clergy. I picked up a book at the library called "*Awakening of a Jehovah's Witness - Escape from the Watchtower Society*" by Diane Wilson, published by Prometheus Books in 2002. Seems we're not the only ones with a story to tell. This book is close to 300 pages and I'm about 1/3 through. They say truth is stranger than fiction, and I'd have to say that's right - Stephen King himself couldn't conjure up a horror story to match what this woman lived through. Ours will be even better, and more horrible, because we were just kids. If you get the chance, grab it from the library and check it out. Through the years, I mean way back to childhood, I've always had a recurring dream of losing my teeth. Having them break apart, spitting them out in the sink, having them fall out on my dinner plate, swallowing them, crapping them into the toilet bowl, but always losing them. Not a nightmare, just an annoying dream from which I'm glad to awake. Still have them, at least a once or twice a month. So I looked it up in a dream interpretation book: Losing teeth in a dream is "one's subconscious telling one that one has lost something in real life, a sense of not being able to get what one deeply wants, a mental loss of self. A painful or rotten part of one's feelings of life, of loss, of missed opportunity, of angry or regretful words." Ring any

bells?? Jesus Christ... I leave you now, so that I may go teach my fellow tax pro's how to do clergy returns. Should be fun, and I'm getting paid! To be continued...

L

PS It may hard to write a *song* with bitter fingers, but the more bitter the fingers, the easier to write this story, and the better it will be!

YO, ADRIAN!! Funny you mention the black sisters. It brought back memories of my mother saying although you were going after the Witness girls, you would have a hard time adjusting to them since you were white and they were black. She once told me that when I grew up, not to go after a black Witness since they lived differently than us, so I guess in a way, she was a bit against blacks. Bob Heichtmann; I do remember him liking Angie. I also remember him being a big jackass! And his family, my lord, they were out there. Bob made a lot of money back then if I remember correctly. Of course you would be the blame of it all. I guess all those gross Elton John songs made you into a pimp! I mean, come on, I'm sure *Sweet Painted Lady* got you rolling with the idea the first time you heard it! Anyway, have a blast with your clergy class today. IRS. Clergy. Shouldn't church and state be parted?

F

PS By the way, I only told my buddy Phil what we are doing. I gave him the website to look at on MySpace, but he doesn't know of my past so this may shock him some. I mentioned to Jenn that we were putting some things together too and she asked why. I told her that it was for people like her to better understand what I (we) dealt with, and in a way, to say I'm sorry for the past.

Bob Heichtmann was a supermarket manager who got paid well and had a nice car. A perfect example of how money can buy neither common sense nor plain old street smarts. Witness assholes with money, God, get out the Raid. Believe it or not, when *Yellow Brick Road* came out I still wasn't up on all the so-called worldly matters they were writing and singing about. *Sweet Painted Lady* I understood, and I remember telling my mother it was a tribute to Dean Martin (she liked Dean Martin). But I actually thought *All the Young Girls Love Alice* was about Alice Cooper and I thought *Jamaica Jerk-off* was really about masturbation, and I didn't know *Candle in the Wind* was for Marilyn Monroe. I figured it all out pretty quick, but imagine being that dumb at sixteen. Jesus... Do you remember the Carvel Inn in Yonkers and the assembly at Yankee Stadium? You would have been six; I was twelve, it was July of '69. I remember being overwhelmed by the enormity of it all - the size of the stadium, the teeming bustle of the big city, how powerful the Jehovah's Witnesses must really be to be able to put that many people in one place at one time. You know what I wonder about now? How much does it cost to rent Yankee Stadium for an entire week? After that, it was three years running in Jersey City. That book I'm reading is a dreadful story, but I can't put it down. Its bringing back memories of the more mundane Witness stuff, like the way they talked with their own little vocabulary, certain rules I forgot about, etc. I'm a little more than halfway through.

L

I remember the Inn in Yonkers well. And Yankee Stadium with all the food courts set up across the street, where we had to use meal tickets in place of money. I remember

hearing Brother Franz the first time there. I have pictures of Grafton Browning and me from that year. Another one I loved, but I mean that in a good way - he was a nice guy. I am totally blank right now, but maybe over the weekend, more things will pop up in the head. The stuff I have given you already has worked into terrible headaches and I can't get them out. Once I move those aside again, more will come out. I get these little pictures of things, but they are too small to grab onto. I think I must look through things to see if I come up with anything. Problem with me right now is that I see the hate more than the cause, and I have to get by that first.

F

Not a problem, take your time getting the stuff out. We don't want to make ourselves physically sick over this - we're already mentally ruined so I don't give a shit about that, but we have to maintain our physical health, of course. Grafton Browning - a very cool man, Brother Cisneros's son if I recall. Picture this - a black dude in his late thirties explaining to me the meaning of the Beatles songs when I was seventeen. He was a true fan, believe it or not, and it was he who got me to dig deeper into the lyrics and eventually spawned my reverence for John Lennon. I feel bad that I haven't remembered him until now. Take your time.

L

PS Brother Franz's nephew Raymond left the organization and eventually wrote a scathing ex-Witness book. Details later.

Grafton was a great man. My mom loved him and so did I. I cried my heart out when he died. He was a cool dude, I knew he liked the Beatles but I was too young to understand it all yet. Brother Cisneros. WOW! I forgot all about him. I never had any issues with him; he was one of the few that always helped my dad when he needed it without any complaints. I liked him. What was his wife's name? She was a trip!

F

I remember Sister Cisneros but not her first name; she was fun. Cisneros owned that barber shop down in the bowels of Trenton, around the block from Monument School, where Clemente worked as a janitor. Grafton was cool; if I remember rightly, he was disfellowshipped for *conduct unbecoming a Christian*, whatever that means, then reinstated a few years later. I spent some time with him during the exile of '74 and we used to sit around and pick apart the Beatle lyrics. He knew more about the Beatles than anybody I knew, and I bought (and shoved under the bed) a lot of Beatle albums after that. He actually knew a lot about a lot, I guess his time in the world gave him some real street smarts. A real nice guy. Remember David and Danny Salmonte? Danny left for a while and then came back and he was lauded as the so-called *prodigal son* who left Jehovah to experience the world and found it not to his liking. Then David grew up and left, but if I remember it right, he was always pretty bad. Used to see him smoking in school, and hanging out with a rough crowd. He was pretty cool, though, and I liked him because he was not completely sane. Never a dull moment when he was around... To be honest, until I read this book, I didn't even know there was a Ray Franz. The guy who was in charge when we were kids was Frederick Franz. But Ray left and wrote a book about the organization, and not a very nice one from what I hear. I'll have to check it out.

L

I knew of Ray Franz because I was around a bit later on than you. I remember hearing about him questioning the reasoning of the Society and being tossed around like a beach ball. He took a lot of shit from them, mainly because of his name. Yes, I do remember David and Danny; they were cousins of my first girlfriend Karen. And the Dorvacks were in there somewhere too. Albert turned real bad, got into heavy drugs, fights, jail, the whole nine yards. I haven't heard anything about him in twenty years. I didn't have much use for Dave and Dan. My mom used to try and push friendships on me, and those two were a waste of time to me. David was a weird kid; I didn't like him much at all. Here are some names for you, the ones that started it all with my parents - Sam and Connie Formantera. They had a son Joey, and Joey was a crook by the time he was ten; I got in so much trouble because of him. When I was eighteen, he came back from California (they moved there around '79) and I beat him up in the parking lot of Glen Roc Shopping Center. When he asked me why, I told him because he was an ass, caused me lots of trouble and that I was just repaying him for all that he gave me.

F

Yea, David was one strange duck - kinda scary if you didn't know him well. I remember Albert now that you mention him; he was this little kid who always had a smirk on his face, like he was a bird who just ate a cat. I also remember the Formantera's, and I recall our mothers speaking of Connie and Sam with something like reverence - now I know why. I remember Joey, too; didn't know you kicked his ass, though. There were three sisters; Connie, Millie and Theresa - one was a Scarpaloni with a son named Michael, who later married Jimmy Powell's sister Karen. That wedding was in May of '74, and I remember it was a blast. There was also Sam Aniraf, and Gene Krakowski who ran the Friday night ministry school, and Brother Camelton who always smelt of booze (and I remember our mothers merrily gossiping about his drinking) and Nelson, and Davidson, and the Nosreffs (I remember once hearing my mother say that the Nosreff girls looked like apes and that David and Pat Andersman made her wonder about the theory of evolution, and I cracked up). Don't forget Eva and Ray Van Dinizio and those three girls; my mother *brought them into the truth* and she was so proud when Ray was named one of the *seven lampstands* (where did they get some of these terms??). She got really pissed because I blew off the importance of it by saying, "Ray is a lampstand? What does that mean? He doesn't look like a lampstand to me." And Teddy Howell... Tell me more about Karen; I just can't seem to remember her.

L

Joey and I became friends again after our fight. I haven't seen him in about fifteen years though; we each understood the other when we got older. I remember Gene Krakowski; he used to live right down the street from me on Carlton. Millie and Theresa, oh man, names from the past. Yes, Connie and Sam were the icons - they started the entire downfall of my life and yours before we were even born. Camelton, the freaking drunk. I remember that street - Dixfield Ave. It was Andersman, Camelton, then Bartson - all apes! I for some reason don't recall the Nosreffs. Eva and Ray; yes, and their three daughters. Nice kids. So Ray was a lampstand? Got me there cuz, what the hell was a

lampstand? Remember the problems Ron had with Eva? Like you and Katie, they ruined a friendship. Ron was like you, he said he would have done her in a heartbeat but he had too much respect for Ray whom he liked. Karen was Albert's cousin; Pepper hated the fact that she and I became so close; she was a non-believer after all. We were together for a few years, she taught me how to kiss, and a few other tasty things.

F

The lampstand thing, I'm not exactly sure, but there were seven of them, and I think the term might have been synonymous with *Ministerial Servant*. Again, not 100% sure, but Ray was designated a lampstand, and it was a cause for great rejoicing. Cindy was very good friends with my sister for a long time. I remember they made me conduct a Bible study with Lisa (I was twelve and she was nine, is that the most ridiculous thing you've heard yet?) but then put a stop to it because we were (...*gasp*...) not taking it seriously enough. But if I were to lay a bet, I'd put the farm on the fact that they probably realized, with their filthy little minds, that leaving a boy and a girl alone even to study the Bible was probably asking for trouble. So they just said it would be better for this little nine-year-old to learn Witness doctrine from her parents and the Society. That's really what's being taught, you know. Witness doctrine, not the Bible. In my ever-so-humble opinion, God and the Bible were mere tools of the Watchtower Society, not the other way around. Remember, this is a group that took it upon themselves to name God, and then had the utter balls to actually rewrite the Bible and publish their own version of it as the ultimate truth! And called people who accepted their dictum and dogma *sheep*! Well, that part is true; a bunch of mindless, brainwashed sheep following their unworthy doglike leaders down the path to a complete mental train wreck. All right, enough bitching - for now, anyway. I remember the doings of Ron and Eva, but of course the gossip I heard from our mothers was the filthy and perverted version. What I don't remember is the timing, when was that? It must have been pretty early on, Ron was living upstairs and supposedly having her up there in the dark, and our mothers were pissed. What I remember hearing was, "Eva used us, she lied to Ray and told him she was going out to Briehler's for ice cream with Marian and Glorya, and then slithered away to be with Ron." They called her names that weren't very nice. Very judgmental. I remember hearing them say that "Ray called Eva a stumbling block because of her behavior" and other such tripe. Did that episode end up with a trip to the elders for them? I don't know what happened to those girls, but they were good kids the three of them, and I hope they grew up and out. I remember my mother telling me sometime around the early nineties that Ray quit his job, left Jehovah and joined the Navy. I don't know if that was truth, gossip, or just plain misinformation, and I didn't really care, but it sounded so bizarre - who in his right mind would leave a woman who looked like Eva, and join the military at that age. He was twenty-seven in 1968, so he would have been at least fifty by then. Maybe you heard a more accurate version... Yea, Dixfield Avenue, the heart of the Ewing Witness ghetto. There were other Witnesses on the next street over, Brandon Avenue, but I forget their names, Harrington I think, and Theresa Street housed the Clementes, McNallys and Greenfields. There were also the Alberses, on the street on the other side of Dixfield, and the Kunkles, on Broad Avenue, around the block. Did you go to a shrink because of the Witnesses and the mental confusion they caused you, or because you were having trouble in the real world after the Witnesses? I've only been twice, and neither time was due to

the Witnesses. The first time was because of my mother; it was about two years after we got married and she was dumping guilt on me and at odds with Maryann, trying to drive a wedge between us and generally stirring up the pisspot. I was stuck in the middle and got sick of it. The second time was because of my drinking, about five years later. I was down because no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't seem to make a decent living; there was never enough money. I had good jobs, but just never had enough bread (that actually persists to this day, but I think now I know why), so I drank too much. I went to the shrink because I felt out of control. I had no idea what he would tell me - either "quit drinking before you wreck your life and kill yourself" or "it's ok to drink as long as you don't let it take over." He told me neither, but I did cut down a great deal; I knew I had to and I really didn't need him to tell me that. Got through that OK, just like I get through everything else OK, but now that I think about it, it wasn't my mother or my drinking that sent me to the professional couch, it was my background. It was oozing out, and those two times it spilled over, though at the time I didn't see it that way. But there would have been no mother/wife issues if not for the Witnesses, and there would have been no hiding in the bottle over my financial problems if I hadn't had it pounded into my head for years that money was evil and material possessions were of Satan and success was against Jehovah and all the rest of that holy sputum. I didn't catch on to that then, but I do realize it now. I'm assuming that's a good thing.

L

Ministerial Servants. I remember that; my dad was one. Always passed up to be an elder, but they tacked that onto him to be nice. Imagine those people, deciding who is what, who gets what. I often wondered if they got paid in some way. I know that can never be proved, but can you imagine? Look at Andersman, he once told my father to leave American Standard where he was making \$200 a week (big money back in 1972) and take a part time job in the fish market and make around \$75-80 a week, and then he could pioneer with all the free time he had. My dad told him, "I can't pay the bills now..." Andersman's response was, "Jehovah will take care of your family and you will be able to feed the souls of the world the good word of Jehovah." GOOD GOD!! I went to a shrink twice; once because I had no idea what or who I was, the other to get some of the Witness shit out of my head. Neither worked. The second one did say that they destroyed me, killed me inside, and that it would take much medication and many years to fix. Needless to say, I didn't do the drugs and I'm tired of the years passing me by. I drove the second one nuts, she could not believe what one person went through. She told me to put it in a book, and I think now that's finally going to happen. The Witness doctrine is exactly what it was - a cult doctrine. They firmly believe in themselves and that's it. Look at your mother - do you think that for one moment she doesn't believe you are going to come crawling back? She probably thinks that she was sent to you to make you turn away from the devil, leave your wife, and go to the great beyond with her. Eva and Ray moved back here in late '87 or '88. Eva worked in a store up at Quaker Bridge Mall and Ray was working with the Navy from what I gathered. I believe he was in the Navy at one time in his early life. I have not seen nor heard about them in at least twenty years.

F

Now that I've been thinking so far back, I thought it a good idea to relive a few good memories too. Remember these folks - Ron Lundy, Dan Ingram, Cousin Brucie, George Michael (the Philly DJ, not the gay singer), Jim O'Brien, Jerry Blavat, Sally Starr, Soupy Sales. Top 100s on WABC...

L

Oh yeah, and Gene London, Larry Ferrari, Dr. Shock, Herb Clark, John Facenda. The list carries on...

F

Harry Harrison, Larry Kane, John Cameron Swayze, George Luther Bannister, *Lost in Space*, *The Green Hornet*, *It's About Time*, *My Favorite Martian*, *I Dream of Jeannie*, *Bewitched* - wait, those last two were forbidden. Can't get away from it...

L

LMAO!!!

F

Gene Mauch, Roberto Clemente, Thurman Munson, Johnny Bench, Carl Yazstremski, Johnny Unitas, Joe Pepitone, Mario Andretti, The Philly Phanatic.

L

I am having a hard time believing that today is seventeen years since my mother died. Seems like yesterday.

F

A sad anniversary that is, and you're right, it seems like it just happened. All this shit seems so recent now that we've been digging around in the muck. Do you remember Gloria Lynn's first husband Jimmy, Kimberley's dad? Sadly, he died recently. I remember their wedding reception at Matty's in 1970; she was in jeans and he was in the pure white suit of *Abbey Road*. I kept playing *Psychedelic Shack* on the jukebox, over and over and over. Were you there?

L

Yeah, it is a sad day for me today. I can't believe that it's been that long. Yes, I remember Jimmy; reminded me of Tommy Chong. We would not have gone to that *pagan* wedding, but I remember the pictures. Sad to hear that he's gone, I liked him.

F

Ah, that's right, it was a *pagan* wedding. We did not go to the actual wedding for just that same reason, but it was OK to do the reception afterward. In a bar, with men and women drinking liquor and smoking, rock and roll music blasting from the juke, people *toasting* for God's sake - hypocrites. Can't step foot in a church of God but a bar in the backstreets of 1970 Asbury Park was just fine. It's actually funny, that. You know, I considered going to an actual Sunday meeting at a Kingdom Hall down here as part of this research, but decided against it. I don't think it would help any, and it might just piss

me off. Maryann also said that it would be a *bad* idea to do so. I agree. I would say this story is going to be split between Trenton and Asbury about 60/40. Doesn't matter if we name the characters after flowers, those who were there are going to know it's us. Good!

L

We didn't even go to Ron's weddings, my own brother, with Suzanne or Irene. We didn't go to the receptions either, any of them. God, I remember Uncle Ray being one of my favorites - he knew what I was going through because he had already seen it happen with Ron. He always took me aside and said it would all work out some day. He always took care of me and I loved him to no end, and Matty's was my favorite place to be in Asbury Park. Then the days of going down there got bad; of being dragged to the Bradley Beach Hall. I got the chicken pox one summer down there and this, my cousin, is no lie. Your mother and Aunt Dot (who was just in place as a newly baptized member) went off in the Bradley Hall; they had already spewed enough about me being the devil's son, that when I broke out during the service, your mother screamed that I was turning. Turning into what I don't know, but I was turning. Dot began to cry, saying prayers and all, and others were grimacing as my father took me outside. My mother quickly followed, disgraced, as she put it. They took me to the hospital in Neptune, Jersey Shore Medical Center, and the doctor said I had the chicken pox. My dad screamed at my mother who kept asking the doctor if he was sure it was really chicken pox and that I was not changing; again, changing into what I don't know. I remember going back to Grandmom's house on Lake Avenue, they were packing our bags to go home and Uncle Ray was there. I don't know what he told my mother, but he was screaming at her about me - all I caught was "don't let that poor kid grow up to be like you." They did not talk again for many years because of that. That killed me; I wasn't allowed to see Uncle Ray because he was no good, and what hurt even more was that over time, I just forgot things. I kind of got used to not seeing people any more and didn't think about it. Uncle Ray had moved to New Mexico, then he died, and I never got the chance to say thanks for all he tried to do for me. I never got to say goodbye. Clemente even told me that I was stricken with that sickness for a reason - to warn my mother of the evil that Uncle Ray was and that I needed to stay far from him. Your mother and Dot went so far as to say that I needed to be *cleansed* since I brought a plague into the house of Jehovah. Like you never sneezed while in the hall, right? About a year later, we walked back in there for a Sunday meeting and people turned away from me like I was carrying some kind of disease. You just don't forget things like that. *Stricken?? I was turning?? Changing?? ALL I HAD WERE THE FUCKING CHICKEN POX!!* Every kid got them - didn't any of their kids have them?? *DIDN'T YOU??* Another thing that happened was one that almost killed me. I was six and so you may remember this. I was given a prescription from the doctor to help an ear infection; the drug was erythromycin. Over the course of two days, I lost movement in my legs, then my arms, and it started to make my breathing harder and harder. My parents took me to the ER and the docs asked what drugs I was taking. Soon, they figured out that I was highly allergic to the medication. They counteracted it and said that I would be fine in about a week or so. The arms were back in a day or two, but I still couldn't walk. I remember being at your house and your father holding me in the chair so my dad's back could catch a break. Well, your mother just threw a holy fit! She

told your father to give me back to John so that he would not catch the wrath that Jehovah had put on me and pass it on to you or the Bunn. Your dad was pissed and fought back, but to try and end the war, he gave me back to my dad and we left. Your mom bitched at my mom for weeks about that; she didn't want to hear that it was a drug reaction. It was Jehovah that was making me repent. REPENT FROM WHAT?? I was six years old!

F

The only thing I can say to those two stories is - HOLY SHIT! I mean holy fucking shit. What are these people thinking? What kind of twisted mind conjures up such utter and complete crap?? No wonder we blocked shit out! When was the Bradley Beach Hall thing? Was it after I left, because I don't remember hearing about it? That is fucking incredible. They actually thought you were turning into something, like some gargoyle or little demon, sullyng up Jehovah's house with plague - how did they come up with this crap? I honestly didn't know about this, but it does not surprise me one bit and I can just see them carrying on and ranting in the Hall. Sad. I'm trying to remember when they captured Dot and Angie. '74 or '75 I guess, because Angie and Jim got together in early '75 and got married in Sept of '76. It was a Witness wedding, so they must have been altogether swallowed up by then. I remember Uncle Ray but we didn't spend a lot of time with him, I guess because he was an unbeliever. God, their own blood brother, what a shame. He had a friend named Phil; supposedly they smoked and drank and gambled and cussed and did God knows what else together, such sinners! Ever wonder why our three uncles, Nick, Ray and Frankie, died so young? I would imagine I sneezed in the hall more than once. Hell, being sick was never an excuse to miss a meeting anyway; I know I was never allowed to stay home from the Hall because I was sick. I remember once going to a Friday night meeting with diarrhea and then being chastised for causing too much commotion by bounding up and down the stairs to use the bowl. They would have rather I shat my fucking drawers in the chair, but staying at home and shitting in my own toilet would have been unacceptable. Now talk about contaminating the house of Jehovah, I remember Billy Huster and me would strain our guts trying not to crack up during the talk when Ernie would hack and gag and gob up phlegm where he sat. He would just hack it up and not spit and we thought the guy was going to choke to his death right there in his seat. It would be quiet as all hell in the Hall except for whoever was preaching on the platform and all of a sudden - *hhhhhwwwwaaaagggggggg* - ol' Ernie harks up another one! But you had chickenpox in the Hall and our insane clown posse thought you were shapeshifting. Why the hell did they drag you to a meeting when you were sick in the first place? And then Clemente butting into family business, I mean, did he even know Uncle Ray? That was just great, he knew next to nothing about the guy, but still saw fit to call him evil. Even now, the arrogance of that man makes me want to throw up. And what kind of God have these people created for themselves; what kind of God would cause - not *allow*, but *cause* - a young kid to be *stricken* with disease inside a place of worship just to prove that his favorite uncle was an evil man? Did they ever once stop to think how preposterous they sounded? And how in holy hell did your aunts expect you to be cleansed? Did they want to give you some holy righteous hosejob with Ajax or Comet, or did they want to give you some weird spiritual and mental cleansing, or what? That is so fucking strange. Last I heard, chickenpox wasn't a *plague*. I had them when I was around eight, but I don't recall the spiritual ramifications of my own

chickenpox. Too long ago, I guess. I don't remember that other episode either - wonder if I blocked it away because it was so ugly or if I just lost that particular memory to age and the vast amount of brain cells I've destroyed over the years. But if you were six, I would have been twelve and the Bunn would've been five, so I should remember that if I was there. Again, it's no surprise, they saw Satan everywhere. And again, what kind of God would strike a little kid with an allergic drug reaction to make him repent? I say it yet again, where did they get this crap? I believe it's not too far-fetched to use the term *child abuse* here. Shame you didn't go to your own brother's weddings; that comes under the heading of those things that you just can't get back.

L

One thing you either don't recall or were never told is that from the day I was born, I was no good. There was something that went wrong during my birth (as told by Pepper in later years). I was stuck and they couldn't get me out. They were afraid that I would die from no oxygen, but I finally came out. You mother and Joan gave my mother a hard time because she was pregnant with me, telling her it could not work, that she was too old to have a baby. Yet, right after me came your sister and Joanie's kids - but it was wrong for my mother to have me. Right from the start they said I was a seed of something other than Jehovah and that I needed to be kept in close watch. As the years went on, your mother and Joan firmly believed that I was no good, and the *I was a bad influence on you* syndrome came out of that. The doc at the hospital said that in a rare case you can see the pox forming; that was my case. I was covered head to foot. This was '73 or '74 - I always got that mixed up since I had the pox one year, and measles the next (guess Jehovah was out to get me). It was a bad case; I was covered over the entire physical body. My mom was convinced it was because of Ray that I broke out where I did, right in the Kingdom Hall. She always hated that he took me under his wing. My dad used to bring me to see him every time we were in Asbury; I kinda grew up in Matty's Bar and was always happy to see Ray. But he hated what my mom was doing to me; he'd seen it with Ron and he swore he wouldn't let it happen to me too. His wife, Betty, even tried to tell my mom that I was being hurt by this; I had no friends, didn't know anything that a normal kid should know - she was a nurse remember - and she knew what she was talking about. If she saw me now, all her worries have come true. Shit, I'm forty-five and I don't even have any ideas now that should be normal! That fight that Ray and my mom had ended my last link to the normal part of the family. Their own blood you say; how could they do that to their own blood? Easy. They are brainwashed to believe that anyone not part of Jehovah is no good, must be evil, and has plans to destroy you. Even if it's family. Look at your mother, Joan, Dot. When was the last time they spoke to my mother? She died without them ever speaking to her again. Look at me, you are the only one I talk to, I want nothing to do with any of them. I don't want to bother with anyone. They turned me cold; ice cold. I live less than a few miles from most of these people, yet I don't want to see or hear from them. They were never there for me so I will never be there for them. When I got the impetigo at the conventions, I was banned from helping the following year since they thought I would infect all of the people with some plague. You remember those days. My parents would try to find other places to go for the summer conventions because they had to go where people didn't know us - or me. Yet there was your mother - always had to go where we were going, and always flapping her

gums about how evil I was and that she was scared of what I may do to you. GIVE ME A FUCKING BREAK!! I was so immature, I didn't even know what sex was until I was fourteen! After I broke free, they all had their laughs that they were right and I was finally becoming the demon they knew I was since birth. You ask, "What kind of God would let a plague happen in His church?" The God they created would. To prove them correct and to bring them closer together. By chasing the evil one away, they bonded together and beat the evil one. They prayed for my parents because they were stuck with the real live version of Linda Blair - ME!! I told you I would surprise you with things you never knew of, things about me that seem so far-fetched. Now you know why the shrinks had such a hard time with me. I told them things that can only happen in *The Omen*; they had their minds blown when they spoke to me. I am, and always will be, a walking horror story - just in real life, not in the movies. Ask me again why I'm the way I am. They must be right, I have no soul; because they took it the day I was born. As for Ron's weddings, I couldn't go anyway - too young - but to not go to your own son's wedding, that's sad. Now don't take this the wrong way, but your no-good mother never should have gone to yours. She made sure my mother stayed away from her own son's, so why the hell was she at yours? Again, what was good for the goose was never good for the two-faced gander.

F

No. I didn't know you had trouble being born; I'm sure they never bothered to tell me that. I just remember hearing rumblings, you know, overhearing stuff. Little things, like *Michael doesn't know how to act, he's got bad habits, he talks back to his mother, he throws things, he's fat, they're not bringing him up properly in the ways of Jehovah*, that kind of crap. I never knew they thought of you as some kind of evil spawn, I just thought they considered you a misbehaved, rowdy kid with a big mouth. Unbelievable that grown people can be talked into believing such pure bullshit. I never knew you hung out at Matty's, but it makes sense. John enjoyed his spirited liquids, Ray ran the bar, I'm sure John didn't want to hang around the house and listen to those hens prattling on, and those hens probably didn't want you around with them anyway. Matty's was the logical place to be. My dad used to go there too, or sometimes just walk the boards, to get away from the hens. I always stayed around to hang out with Angie; before she was a Witness she was very cool. We'd go in her room and listen to music, read magazines, and she'd talk to me about stuff Witnesses weren't supposed to talk about. I actually learned some things from her; she was like my worldly connection in the family. And she had some gorgeous friends, too. I remember my dad and me going to watch Ray play baseball; didn't he almost make it to the majors? The three of them never spoke to your mother after she turned apostate. I couldn't figure out why they wouldn't even speak to her; she wasn't disfellowshipped, she just quit. It didn't make any sense to me, but you can't argue with a fanatic. Well, you can, but you won't get anywhere. It all came up again around the time of my wedding. I strongly believe the only reason she went was because she made such an ass of herself trying to thwart it, and she didn't want to look even more foolish by not showing up at her own son's wedding. I personally didn't care whether she came or not. And she never would have gone had it been in a church, but we got married at the Fountainhead in New Hope by the mayor, Jay Snyder (also the local chiropractor). The Catholics are pretty strict, too, and I wasn't Catholic, so we couldn't get married in church

until I took a bunch of classes and became an official Catholic. I remember the priests weren't very happy about my Jehovah's Witness background. Six months later, we had a church wedding ceremony at St Johns in Lambertville. Both my girls were also baptized there. You're right, a lot of things I didn't know about you. No wonder you're still bitter...

L

The Yankees signed Ray. He was to start minor league ball when he was called to the Army or Navy, where he was injured, and it ruined his career. I've told Sean quite a bit about him - my hope is that he stays with baseball and becomes what Ray or I could not. If he doesn't, at least he grew up playing and liking the game, I can't ask for more. I was fat, rowdy, hyper, I am currently diagnosed with Adult ADHD, something they knew nothing about back then. Could you imagine if they knew the term ADHD back then...your mom and the rest of them would have had me committed to the Vroom Building at Trenton Psych! I acted out because I didn't know what else to do. The bitterness may sweeten a little by telling this entire story, but it will always remain. Thanks by the way, I believe you may be waking me up to a lot of things by triggering these memories. I'm seeing life as it is for me now a bit differently. It's almost like being in the Witnesses all over again, but this time, I'm grabbing onto things better - fighting faster and thinking clearer. I needed this.

F

All the more reason to be a Yankee fan! Yeah, getting it out is a good thing. You said your shrink told you to write it all down, looks like she was right. You'll have to send her an autographed copy of the finished product. OK, time for a pep talk. It sounds like they pounded it into your head so much that you were no good, and you started to believe it yourself. That means they win. To that I say NO FUCKING WAY! If you believe that you're no good like they said, then that's the way your life will go. You're only forty-five, you got a lot of years up ahead. I'm not much of one to give advice, being that I'm still a little whacked in the head myself, but one thing I strongly believe is that everyone, and I mean everyone, is here for a reason. Maybe not everybody is here for a *good* reason (i.e. Hitler, Stalin, Manson), but everybody has some purpose, something to accomplish before they check out. Even if it's simply producing offspring who may grow up to do something great. Hell, I know I've done nothing majorly profound but who's to say that one of my kids won't grow up to save a life or discover a cure or just help somebody who needs it. Who's to say I haven't already saved somebody and don't even know it? I can remember a few times taking away keys or giving rides to friends who drank too much...one of those times may have avoided a crash. You gave Jenn a son, and he just might grow up to be the next Derek Jeter. Or a future governor of New Jersey, or a detective who thwarts a terrorist attack. Maybe Amy will be the first woman president (hopefully not the second, I don't think much of Hillary). But we're all here for something. Those assholes stole your past; don't let them take your future. They stole my past, took my childhood, and set me on an eight-year path of stupidity that could have just as easily killed me. But that was then... Just curious, after all the shit you've been through - do you believe in God?

L

Well I still can't see myself being a Yankee fan, but think about it. Ray would have played with Mantle and Maris, would've been a part of the biggest and best Yankee teams of that era. I hear you - and I know you are 100% right. It is just so hard. I was told I was nothing pretty much from day one, and that's something that is very hard to let go of. Look at me; never happy, never content, so many jobs that I can't grow in since I can't keep my mouth shut - when I see something wrong, I spew it out! Three wives. One was a nut case trying to get away from her parents, the one that have now can be annoying as hell, and the one in the middle - who gave me my beautiful son - was a handful, but she deserved far better than she got. I still don't have any idea if I'm the one who is causing this shit or not. Maybe, after this is out, people will finally see me, in the light instead of the dark. I think of myself as a good person. I'd give my last drop of water to someone thirsty risking my own life, that's me. I relate to the outdoors for some reason, why is that? Why is it that I need to be away in the private settings of a mountain stream or lake? I can't be near people to this day for long periods of time because I seem to ruin everything, that is why I'm so close to Sean. He is all that I take pride in, not me. I know you're right, but I just seem to let go. No, I don't believe in God so to speak. I do believe in a much higher source, be it God or whatever, but a physical God, no. I do not believe in organized religion at all. I see them as passing the plate around to get richer and to pay for all the gold they have lying around. I have no use for it whatever! It is a fight in my house every Sunday when Donna takes that envelope to church - I haven't a pot to piss in and she has to give the church \$40 a week! What the hell?

F

Nothing wrong with relating to the outdoors, and you're certainly not alone there. You like mountains and streams and fresh air, why? Because it's peaceful, because you like to fish, because it's a cleaner and quieter environment than what you're used to, because it's a special place you go with your son - all reasons perfectly normal. Like me. I like the beach and the sun and the water. I like the culture. It's funny, but when I was a kid I wasn't a real beach fan. We used to go to Long Beach Island every summer for a week with Dot and Angie. Had a lot of fun; I didn't hate the beach, but I wouldn't have cared if we didn't go everyday. I started renting shore houses in the late seventies (post-Witness) with my friends and grew to love the beach. It was a place to relax, a place to look at gorgeous women, a place to let go and just be myself. Whether with a crowd or alone, the beach became a haven, a sanctuary for me. I could go to the beach and sit and think about stuff, listen to the waves, walk for miles, get a tan, read books in the sun, be a lazy spud for a few hours. To this day I enjoy the beach and the peace it represents. I have no bad memories from the beach. I'll wager you have no bad memories of the mountains either, and that's a big part of your answer. Peace, a good feeling, and no bad memories. Three very important things in our otherwise tumultuous lives. Ah, God. Lennon says: "God is a concept by which we measure our pain." That is essentially true in our case, especially yours, as God, through no fault of His own, is the cause of all your pain. It's safe to say you measure your own pain against the yardstick of the God that was shoved down your throat as a kid. In Jehovah's Witness philosophy, and I believe this is true, the way I see it is the Watchtower Society is God, not Jehovah. It is the Watchtower Society, the governing body, the elders, the Witness doctrine that must be obeyed to the letter for fear

of punishment, not God. They use Jehovah as the figurehead, the Godhead so to speak, but Witnesses are required to submit unquestioningly to the whims of the Watchtower Society. The Society is God to them and to the poor slobs that buy into it. Think about it. When everything was going down, what did you dread more, the so-called wrath of Jehovah, or another trip into the library? Those men set themselves up as God, and felt it their sworn duty to run other people's lives. Who instructed them to do so? Jehovah? Or the lofty fellows in Brooklyn? Jehovah never kicked anybody out of the Hall, men playing God did that. What do I base these ideas on? Simple. There is no Jehovah. *He does not exist!* Jehovah is a concept created by the Watchtower Society as a vehicle to make the sheep submit to their will. Now this is not to say there is no *God*; I don't profess enough intelligence to know if there is or there isn't, but there is no Jehovah in the sense that the Witnesses will have their followers believe, of that I'm sure. I don't believe in God in the sense that we were brought up to believe, that there is a big guy in the sky looking down and running everything. I also don't believe I'm a descendant of an ape who was a descendant of a fish. I believe in the higher power; some call it the universe, some call it God, some call it karma or ego. I believe in the Bible as a great history, philosophy and guidebook and think much of everything in it is true. Written by men but inspired of that higher power. I think prayer works if it's done right, but again, I don't think it's like asking someone powerful for favors. If you believe in something strongly enough, and want it badly enough, and are willing to work your butt off for it, it *will* come to you eventually. Prayer is one of several vehicles that can be used to achieve that goal. I've seen it happen more than once. As far as organized religion goes, I went on record back in '84 in Don Young's that I had no use whatever for organized religion of any denomination. I have since softened my stance on that. I've been to church, not very often, but I kept an open mind, and didn't find the services all that bad. As is my custom, I had a hard time sitting in a pew for more than a few minutes at a time, but it was alright. I respect other people's beliefs and what makes them happy. St John's in Lambertville is a much gentler, more civilized place than the low building on Parkway. And the people there actually fear and worship *God*, not the men who run the place. It's normal, and as long as the collection plate remains a voluntary thing, I have no problem with the concept of the church, be it Catholic, Baptist, Episcopalian or whatever. Enough for now...

L

Lennon was a genius. Too bad no one was listening back then. I'm still rattled about what I sent to you the other day; I actually had a nightmare last night. I saw all those faces again; I could not believe I was there. I was my age now in the dream and they didn't change...Zimrod, Clemente, Andersman; and then Morris appeared. Eva was there but no Ray, Uncle Jim and I was cussing at him. Clemente and Andersman were holding onto me and Morris was praying to Jehovah to cast the evil out of me. I woke up in a cold sweat this morning - what the hell brought that on? Maybe more memories are trying to come out; we'll see shortly I guess. Yes, your madman cousin has some horrible things stuck inside of him - and they are all shaking loose.

F

Yes, John Lennon was a true man of genius but nobody listened then, and they most likely wouldn't listen now. He was an outspoken, radical, pot-puffing nonconformist -

my kind of guy. But to the narrow-minded hypocrites in positions of power, the message was obscured by the appearance and attitude of the messenger. Shame, that. Good God, Morris. Completely forgot about him until now. Was he an elder or just a lampstand? Was ol' hacking Ernie the only white elder? I know John and Ray Van Dinizio and Krakowski and I think even Teddy were ministerial servants or lampstands, but at the moment I can't think of a single white elder from Parkway. Who else am I forgetting about? Your piece on the outdoors is well written, warm and touching. It bespeaks a true love of nature, peace, solitude and happy times. Ron was right, it could be part of a series for a magazine like *Field and Stream*. It's hard to believe a bitter former Jehovah's Witness wrote it, but he did and that's a good thing. It tells me they didn't take everything from you and, again, I'll lay bets that it's because you have only good memories of the outdoors, the mountains, the rushing streams, the flopping fish, and the little animals. They didn't follow you there, because you didn't let them. It's your place, your sanctuary. It's your therapy. And it's perfectly normal! It is a perfect example of the fact that they didn't completely ruin you and it bespeaks an inner strength that some in our position might not have been able to achieve. You're probably dreaming about it because we're spending so much time talking about it. The stuff is out of the box and strewn about the floor and you can't help slogging through it as you walk through the house. Notice the big players in your dream - all the goons we've talked about in the past few days. Don't make yourself sick over it. Write more about fishing and your happy places; not for this project but for your own enjoyment. Even though I'm a big beach bum at heart, I always enjoyed places like Bull's Island, Delaware Water Gap, the Pocono's, Vermont. One of the main things I miss about Jersey is that I lived in what is probably the last remaining nice part of the state, Hunterdon County. I especially miss it in the fall, but once the snow flies, I'm glad to be gone.

L

I think Ernie was the only one, the rest were all the racist pigs, but wait, Zimrod was promoted later on, wasn't he? And possibly Gene Krakowski, but I'm not sure. I think Morris was one later on, but a servant nonetheless. Right now I see some faces but I can't put names to them. Do you remember Paul DeBuerta? I see him quite a bit in the baseball circles. I remember his mother and Teddy Howell's mother wishing they were both dead so they could be brought back in the new order - a way of saving themselves - remember that? That dream was so real. I haven't had a dream like that in many years. I guess you're right - the box has spewed and I'm tripping over it all. As for being sick about it, too late, been sick for years so I'm getting used to it

F

Ernie, ha! A white man in a black man's world, turn the tables. And he supposedly went to heaven when he croaked back in '88. I do remember Paul DeBuerta, I went to school with him, he was a very cool dude. You see him, tell him I said hello. He's not a Witness is he? Hope not. I don't remember those women wanting to die so they could be resurrected into the new system, but it doesn't surprise me. Sounds like a shortcut, an easy way out, a *cheating* of sorts. Are Paul's folks still around? I remember his dad, he was pretty cool, I think he came to the meetings just to be respectful to his freshly brainwashed wife. Paul was instrumental in turning me on to Led Zeppelin when I was

still clinging to top-40 AM. I, too, wonder what became of the Van Dinizio girls. I hope they went on to live good and happy lives, and somehow I think they did. I hate to ask this; because I'm not sure I really want to know, and you might not know anyway, but you *were* there a few years after I took off. Do you have any idea what became of Katie? Did she stick around, or did she (I hope) move on? Guess she'd be about fifty-five by now, and Adam and David in their early thirties. That book I read, *Awakening*, was written by a woman who joined the Witnesses in her early twenties. She had one kid when she joined and had another after. She married a worldly guy and turned him into a Witness and he later became an elder. She stayed with the Witnesses for twenty-five years out of pure fear, even as her kids grew up and left the Witnesses before her. She finally quit the Hall and to this day is still in therapy. That is one of the saddest, most disturbing and intriguing books I've ever read, because I know where she was coming from. I hope to God that didn't happen to Katie.

L

The last I heard about Katie was so many years ago, I don't even know when it was; my mother was still alive. It's said that she and the family had moved because they were disgraced by what happened; she never lived that down, so I think they left the state altogether. That was a shame for you both. Yes, Teddy and Paul's mothers used to pray for themselves to be killed in an accident or have heart attacks or something so they would both reach Jehovah's side unscathed. Paul's mom said that she hoped that would happen to me so that I would finally be cleansed. My mom didn't like that. I won't see Paul until next season, he and I disagree on many baseball things but we always have a shake and a smile when we see each other, and the Witnesses are never mentioned. Now that writer's kids would know how we felt, but not her. I hope she included some of the things her kids went through. Something tells me that Katie had enough sense to get out and on with her life. Her husband was a good guy and stuck by her, so I can only hope that they moved on and became people again.

F

Where does the insanity end? They wanted to cheat and die ahead of time to guarantee a ticket to the new system, and they wanted you to croak so you'd be cleansed. That's just plain mental illness, if you ask me. I can understand your mother being pissed over such an idiotic, insensitive comment. Should have told the elders some crazy women were promoting unnatural death in the congregation. Are they still alive and breathing this satanic air, or did they finally give up the ghost and have their wish fulfilled? Hopefully you're right about Katie; I imagine you are. She grew up normal, joined the Witnesses and saw them for what they were. I would imagine she didn't stick around for a rerun - she was no dummy. May she and her family be happy, wherever they are, thirty-three years on...

L

So many things that went down in my life I took as being real, or everyday things. We didn't go out much so seeing Christmas things and other holiday stuff really didn't bother me all that much. Until I started to go to school. I was in kindergarten for only a few months, then my mother took me out because I wasn't ready to face the real world yet,

but not because I struggled. I already knew how to read and was working on a third grade level in math, my favorite thing. I was taken out because I was being pressured to join in the flag salute, anthem singing, birthday parties, and of course, holiday plays and parties. By January 1969, my mother had enough of this pagan shit and I was removed from kindergarten. I had actually made a few friends too; friends that would turn on me by the coming September. It became quickly known to all to stay away from the *witness boy*. I had my first taste of the world and was asking questions, so this had to stop. I had to be talked to, taken out of harms way, and re-prepped for school again. In September of 1969, I was on my way to first grade. I hated the teacher from day one; an old, witchly looking person who in no way should have been teaching at that level. Mrs. Skecketti was scary, mean, loud, and she stunk! Most of the kids didn't want anything to do with me. Even at that age, they knew I was different - I wasn't like them. I was quite smart, yet told at home that smart didn't mean a thing since Jehovah was going to strike all the bad away sometime very soon. It took a while, but I started to just give up, not do my work, not bother with anyone, or anything. I was labeled as a troubled student right from the beginning. *Socially Maladjusted* was the term given to me in sixth grade - more on that later. The teacher often put me down in front of the class. Poor work, can't get along with anybody, no friends because of the way I was. One day I told her that I didn't have to worry about good grades since Jehovah was going to take care of me, and the entire class laughed at me. I asked my mom why everyone would laugh at me and she said that they were all going to be wiped away by Jehovah's mighty hand one day, so don't worry about it. Soon, I was an outcast to everyone. Keep in mind, I was only six. By second grade, things got worse. Kids were now taking to degrading me with both words and punches. What I couldn't figure out was *why wasn't Jehovah protecting me?* I remember one day asking Brother Elbon why all this was happening to me. His response was close to my mom's, "Let it go, because they will all be gone one day. You should hold your head high like I do." I asked him what his problems were, and he told me he was a black man in a white man's world. From that day on, I had no respect for Jehovah's blacks since they were able to do and say what they wanted, but I was not. Now only seven, I was actually seeing things that Uncle Ray and Ron were saying to me on the side. My teacher was nice, an older woman named Mrs. Lippingcock. However, when it came to class events, and the pledge of allegiance each day, she didn't take too kindly to me not standing or saluting. She even went so far as to say she had other Witness kids who took part in all the events in the past (I later found out about them, black kids again, who could do what they wanted, such as the Andersmans and the Bartsons). Being in the position I was at that age, what could I do? I had no friends, no one would talk to me, so I acted out. I acted strange so kids would like me, think I was funny and want to hang out with me. It didn't work, and so I became angry and mouthy, this all leading to more beatdowns and more visits to the elders. Third grade was real fun; the kids were getting bigger and the punches harder. I took all I could stand one day and then the big fat, immature Witness boy struck another student. I was hauled before Hinkmeier, Clemente, and Andersman. They gave me the speeches of how no Witness should ever fight, and how I should expel the demons inside of me. I begged for help, for someone to talk to my teachers about this, but they all said I was the problem, not the school. The worst was from Clemente who said that I should not live up the names that my aunt (your mother) called me. She knew I was haunted and wanted me taken care of. They figured it was

alright after the days of counseling they offered me, so I went back to school and took the name-calling, the punches, the lies, the teachers. I was always taken home for lunch, so I wouldn't have to be involved with the lunch crowds that all loved to steal my food, throw it at me, and call me names. One day, I was home for lunch and fire trucks were going by. I didn't think anything of that until I went back to school and found that Fisher School was on fire. It seems a student, far worse in the head than I was, set a classroom ablaze. This was in the middle of the week, and my mom was actually convinced I had something to do with it. That Friday the cops came to the Kingdom Hall and I was taken along with my mom and dad into the library with Clemente, Bartson, Andersman and two police officers. The cops said they were there to ask me if I knew about or had anything to do with the fire. I said I was home for lunch when it started, so how could I? Andersman said that I was known to complain about the school and wished I wasn't there, making me look all the more suspicious. One of the cops was not buying into this and told Andersman that he knew who started the blaze. Bartson asked if the person was black because, if so, I may have set him up. If I was about five years older that day, I would have slaughtered that butthead on the spot. The cop said no, it had nothing to do with me, and that this so-called church should get itself in order. The kid that started the fire was MR (protecting his name), and for the first time in my life, I was happy to be called a faggot. MR had said, "that little faggot doesn't even know what a match is, how is he going to start a fire?" Since I was now considered a threat, I was sent to a private school for fourth and fifth grade. Seeing that Jehovah hadn't raised his hand yet, I tried to bury myself in schoolwork. I took on more and more, I saluted the flag, the teacher was young and nice and I developed a crush on her, but I still had a hard time with other kids. Things just did not work out. I had one friend back at the Hall, Albert. He was younger than me and we had fun together, but since there were so few of us Witnesses around, and even fewer that were allowed to talk to me, I still, in truth, had no friends. This was hard on me since I didn't know how to make friends. The kids didn't know me, didn't know of me, and didn't know of Jehovah. I stayed quiet for a while until this one kid kept at me. I told him one day to get away from me or risk being punched back. He dared me, so I broke his nose. I'm the bad guy. Remember I said the teacher was nice, but she had a thing going on the side with my brother. I knew this, but said nothing. She sent me to the headmaster and I get sent home; guess who picks me up? Ron. He yells at me, tells me I ruined it for him. I tried to explain and he says it was my entire fault. I always thought he was on my side. What I didn't know was that at the time he was making a Witness comeback (although a short-lived one), and my mom sent him to knock some sense into me. I was devastated to no end. I was now the same person all over again; a hated person. They found out about me being a Witness so they sent me to other rooms when they had class events. I was forced to go out in the vestibule during the flag salute. If I cried, which is something I did frequently, I was ridiculed, called names, and hit. Teachers laughing all along. Fifth grade was no better. I hit a kid in the eye one day in Columbus Park; I'd had enough. The elders were at our house and I was in the library more times that I can shake a stick at. They warned my parents that the evil was seething out of me and that more was needed to help me. They prayed around me like an exorcism; it was a living nightmare. All along, Glorya, Joan, and Dot were at me, saying I was no good. Teachers saying I had issues with people, I would never be anything, never amount to anything. I was an outcast in my own family and my school. I

had nothing, no one, not even Ron, who at this point left for good and moved to California. I remember coming home from school that June with my report card. I still have the card and I will never forget this: A in Math, A in Social Studies, A in English, A in Reading, A in Gym, A in Science with a bonus for weather forecasting and related issues. All A's, but the words written in the comments ruined it all, and after reading them, I had nothing left in me. *"He cannot be with other children. His grades are not reflective of the person he is. His grades are just luck. He is a smart person ruined by a poor attitude. He is always mouthing off about a God that will strike all down but him. We feel that he should be promoted to sixth grade but he is not welcome to return here. We worry that he will return larger and go after the other kids in the name of his God. We recommend help for him over the summer with child study teams and also recommend medications to calm him."* Sixth grade to follow but I need to go cry now...
F

All I can say is, what they did to you was criminal. Ron actually considered going back? Good God, they almost got him twice! He must have been pretty strong to break away a second time, more power to him. My friend Brenda (you remember Brenda) is fond of saying "what doesn't kill us only makes us stronger." How true. Was MR a Witness? Did your private school happen to be Ireland on Chestnut Ave? As far as your Aunt Glorya, what goes around comes around. She's getting back exactly what she put in. So much for Jehovah taking care of his flock.
L

It gets better. I'm leaving stuff out and I know it, but it will come back. You wanted a story. Quick, Call Dr. Phil. I would love to blow his mind on national TV! MR was just the school punk; he was always in trouble but not a Witness. Yes, Ireland Private. You remembered...WOW! I feel sorry for your mother actually. She never got to have what you and I have; our kids, in their own life. The fun and the joy of watching them grow. You have a good wife too; she stuck by you.
F

When you mentioned Columbus Park, I knew it had to be. That's where I went, Kindergarten thru fourth. My mother insisted I go to a private school so the large worldly public school crowds would less contaminate me. My father went along for the ride, but he wasn't real thrilled; he had to write the checks. She also wanted me to start a year late, but he wouldn't back down on that one. The Bunn started a year late, though. Aha, here's another flashback. This one's almost comical, but I know at the time I was pissed as hell. I laugh about it now, though. This deals with the requirement that if one Witness sees another Witness doing something *questionable* they are to immediately report such behavior to the elders. In other words, rat out your brother. I was sitting in the parking lot of the Shop-Rite. I don't remember who or what I was waiting for, but I was writing up some notes (even then I used to write shit down, so I could concoct weird tales afterward) and here's what happened. I'm sitting in the car with this pencil in my mouth just looking around. I see Rosemary Smithers lumbering across the parking lot with that silly grin on her face; like she just did something forbidden. Anyway, she recognizes my car and starts waving to me, grinning from ear to ear. So I think, ah, Robert's mom is

saying hello, ok, cool. I wave back and in she goes to the store. End of encounter, right? Oh, so wrong. I get home a few hours later; the elders have already been called and my mother is ready to pounce. My crime? I had a pencil in my mouth and ol' Refrigerator thought it was a cigarette. Went straight to the elders, they called my house - "Do you know that your son is smoking?" This was after I left Parkway but just before I quit Hamilton, so no way was I going into that library with those clowns, but they wanted to take it up with the Hamilton elders. I remember telling my mother, "I was sitting in my car with a pencil in my mouth. Your spies are going blind. They see sin everywhere. And what business is it of Rosemary Smithers's even I was smoking? I don't smoke, but if I want to smoke, I'm gonna smoke! Tell these jackasses to mind their own business. Oh, and by the way, I don't care if you believe me or not. Take the word of some self-righteous busybody over your own son, because I really don't care." I adamantly refused to speak to any elder, white or black, Parkway or Hamilton, about the matter. I was not about to go into any little room with three men possessed of uncontrollable God complexes and defend sitting in my car chewing on a pencil. It was ridiculous. They didn't do enough damage with Katie, with those false accusations, now they were seeing cigarettes in pencils. That was it; I was done for good in a matter of weeks. The rest is history...

L

Need a light?

F

Maybe a torch, or a Molotov cocktail.

L

That damn woman had more bones in her closet than all of us, and used to always go after me too. I got some of the same shit from her that I got from your mother, that I was no good for Robert or Lynda and shouldn't be exposed to them. Do you remember the people that used to live on Pennington Road? They had a son named Charley. It was the mother, grandmother and grandfather; no husband. They were tight with Smithers. Charley's mother used to come out and say that I was ruining her son with my Satanist ways, so I told her to go suck an egg once. She said that she will not and that I was horrible for saying such a thing, so then I told her to suck something else and she almost fainted! Gotta love it. Here's a laugh for ya. I was about seven or eight and I got in the back seat of a car and spilled Aunt Joyce's coffee on her; oh my God, Joyce whined about that for years. A few years later, when I was twelve, I got in the car with Joan and my mother in the back, Jim was driving and my dad was in front. It was a big station wagon, their three kids in there too, heading to Browns Mills for a big sermon Jim was about to spout. We stopped at a deli along the way and everyone got coffee. Joan was on me the whole way there about how I could not sit still (I used to get carsick if I rode too long and this ride was getting to me). I drank some juice and a few minutes later, I threw up all over. She was praying to Jehovah after I did that, carrying on about how I ruined the spirit of the entire day, how I was no good, and of course my mother was screaming at me. My dad told Jim to pull over so he could take care of me but Jim was saying that I needed more than taking care of, what I needed was to be beaten for doing what I did. So

in an act of pure anger and hate I grabbed Joan's hot coffee, dumped it all over her and wailed, "now you're clean, ya bag, so shut the fuck up!" Jim stopped the car then! He told my father to be a man and take care of me, and he did. He called a taxi and took me home, and they went on their merry way. I love that story!

F

Yes, a miserable gasbag who minded everybody's business but her own, always digging around, looking for dirt, like some dog. I must give credit where credit is due, however, the term "refrigerator with a head" comes from an old Jim Croce song. But it fit her like a glove... You are thinking of people called the Trask's - Harry and Dot and their daughter Pat and her kid Charley. Forgot about them too. What is it that makes these people think that when a kid gets sick he's got the devil in him? Unbelievable!

L

The Trask's, yes. And there were the people in West Trenton, up the street from Don Lawson and down the street from the Fordina's; we used to have Tuesday night Bible studies in their basement. I see the faces but can't remember the names. Now, you must remember, I was born of the spawn, so people like that believed it and had to pray to Jehovah when they were near me. They had my mother fully convinced and my father about a quarter of the way convinced - the one-quarter is that my dad wasn't a school smart person. He didn't know much since he had to quit school and work to help feed his mother and two sisters while his big brother took all the money and went to college. So my dad only thought of things like the spawn when there were things he didn't understand.

F

West Trenton, oh yeah. You're harkening up Dot and Joe Parchmont. Nice people but total hicks. They had a kid, or maybe it was a nephew or something, named Kenny. A real loser and user from what little I remember. And Don Lawson, his gay ass. Witnesses aren't supposed to be gay; I guess that's why he didn't last. He drove a VW bug and I always used to crack jokes about how he was "shifting the wrong stick." Do you remember Don Swisher? That little fucker used me and I was too dumb to know it at the time, but he got his comeuppance, ended up in jail. He passed himself off as a master mechanic so I let him work on my car instead of taking it to a garage. He would tell me what needed to be done and said he could save me money if I bought the parts and let him install them. He was more than happy to do the work free for a brother. He told me he could get a discount on auto parts at some place in Trenton which I don't remember the name of, so therefore I had to give him the cash and let him go in and buy the parts. I decided something was smelly when he wouldn't let me go into the auto parts store with him and then he told me to go buy a Chilton Motor Manual so he could follow the directions to properly install the parts. The little fucker didn't know jackshit about cars, but neither did I, so he took me for a lot of money before I wised up. Turns out he had a doctor friend who was writing him prescriptions because he was addicted to painkillers, Darvon and Percodan, and he was using my bread to fund the pills. I never knew what he was doing until one morning my dad handed me the Trenton Times and told me to read the article on page two. It was all about how one Don Swisher had been arrested and

jailed for filling unauthorized drug prescriptions. My dad was pissed; he said, "You've been hanging out with a druggie posing as a Witness, letting a stoner work on your car." After I figured out the whole scam, I never had the heart to tell my dad it was my money he was using to buy the pills. I knew it because I did a little research into the price of certain car parts and found out he was charging me vast amounts of dollars for shit that cost next to nothing. Since most of that money came from my dad, I just couldn't let on that I'd been that fucking stupid. Don't know what ever came of the asshole after that, but I imagine the big boys in the slammer cornholed his scrawny ass but good. Again, what goes around comes around. But there you have it, those fuckers out there knew that Witness kids were dumb as rocks and could be easily taken advantage of. Didn't know John had two sisters; I only remember your Aunt Rose, she was pretty nice. Your dad got a raw deal, both in life and from the Witnesses. I know he and my dad had some fun though, I remember once I went with the two of them to pick up a rug in Asbury. They drank themselves into a stupor and I was sure I was going to die along with them on 33 heading back home. But here I am, still talking about it, still here for some reason.

L

The Parchmont's, yes. Nice, but as you said - hicks! He was a trapper and I remember all the Witnesses, led by our mothers of course, giving him a hard time for it. He ate the meat, and he used the furs; the guy wasn't in it for sport. Don Swisher; I do remember the name, and I do remember him being fucked up, he hung out with Don Lawson around that time. Lawson hated you. I think it was more lust than hate, but he had to cover it up. He was a freaky one. Died many years back of AIDS, from what I've heard. Another thing came to mind, the Fordina's. Debbie and her mother, sisters and brother. Her father Ed hated the Witnesses; would stop her from going to the Hall and all that. One time, we picked them all up to go to the Parkway Hall and about halfway through the meeting, in walked the old man, looking around for his family. I remember he looked like a Quaker; anyway Zimrod and Bartson were in the back near the book-selling counter and they walked over to him. He asked where Ina was and Bartson asked him if he would like to join in the meeting. The dude flipped, saying he was going to kill anyone who didn't tell him where his wife was. Ha, big ol' Zimm ran downstairs like a baby, Bartson hid behind the book counter, and then Ed came into the seated crowd to grab his wife. My dad stood up and told him to take it easy and not to grab her like that. Ed backed down, and asked if he could take his family home; my dad said only if they want to go. Ina, to keep the peace, got up, took the kids, and went with him. Everyone gave my dad a big hassle because he let that family leave Jehovah's house with the devil himself, but no one said anything about Zimrod running away with his tail between his legs, or Bartson hiding and trembling behind the counter. But my dad, who stopped that woman from being hit or worse, had done wrong in the eyes of Jehovah. He had to sit for the meetings in the back of the Hall (remember that - if you did wrong, you had to sit in the back of the Hall?) and he had to endure counseling for doing what he did. Ina's husband told my dad later on that he appreciated what he had done. He said he might have killed Ina for being there and that he was surprised someone would stand up to him. My dad was like that; if he knew he was right, he would not back down - except to those God-playing elders. With them he became the size of a flea every time.

F

Yes, Ed. I remember I got a call one night from your mother, because Ed Fordina was sitting at the State Police barracks up on 202 outside of Flemington. Seems he was driving around guzzling beer out of the can and the cops got him and wouldn't let him back on the road. He got his one phone call, called his wife, who called your mother. She called me and I had to go fetch him and drive him back home. That's about the only thing I remember of Ed Fordina; guess I was gone by the time that little episode happened in the Hall. Good for John; he kept a bad situation from getting worse, and the elders excoriated him for it. Why is it that some men freak out when their wives want to join up with the Witnesses? We've seen a lot of that, but I can't recall ever once seeing it the other way around. My dad used to go off about it, but only when he was drinking (and contrary to what they told you, he didn't get drunk every day and threaten our lives, the most ever he did when he overdrank was bitch and cuss about how we were *wasting* our lives. Funny, even though he was drunk, he was right. But after a while he just gave up on it). Strange. I remember hearing about a time when Aunt Mad was considering looking into the Witness thing, and Uncle Bill went completely bugshit. Meek, mild, well-mannered, gentlemanly Uncle Bill went berserk and supposedly threw a fit, started busting up china and heaving chairs around, hollering at the top of his lungs and threatening to choke her if she placed one shoe in the Kingdom Hall. I wasn't there, so I don't know much of that was exaggerated, but I do recall hearing our mothers clucking and henning about the incident. Can't rightly place the period, but I was still young. Could be true, I guess, Aunt Mad never did go to the Hall. I spoke on the phone to Cousin Gloria Lynn the other day. She's a perfect example of how somebody who is not and never was a Witness can still be affected adversely by Witness doctrine. Her own mother and sister barely talk to her, mainly because of the cats. If they only knew what else she's been doing, they want to perform an exorcism! Now do you think for one minute that Dot and Angie saw the need to shun her on their own? Don't think so. But the Watchtower Society strictly forbids association with family members who do *unholy* deeds, so the sheep had to obey the master. Grown people, good God. Reminds me of last time I was in Jersey when my mother was still there at Joanie's and I decided to stay an extra day, and I wanted to sleep there overnight and leave in the morning. Joanie was glad to have me stay over, she talks to me (and so does Dot), gave me a blanket and a pillow, the TV remote, even let me put some beer in her fridge and drink a few in her house. But when I turned on the Sci-Fi channel and started to watch the *Twilight Zone*, she came down and made me change the channel. Demons, I guess I thought that was funny as hell. Just like when we were kids; used to listen to WABC (everybody else I knew listened to WFIL, but I had to be different. I thought WABC was cool, and you know why? Because your brother Ron listened to WABC, and he was cool and normal, therefore I listened to WABC instead of WFIL) and anytime *Spirit in the Sky* or *Let It Be* came on, the radio station had to be changed immediately, so as not to draw demons into the car. There were a bunch of other top-40 hits that merited an instant station change, but most of them slip my mind right now. That's funny too.

L

Do you think those idiots had any idea Paul wrote *Let It Be* for his mother? Buttheads! What a messed up dude that Ed was. I remember you picking him up in Flemington, you

were the only one around who would do it. How is cousin Gloria? I haven't seen or talked to her in over thirty years. What a shame.

F

Of course not. The words "*When I find myself in times of trouble Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be...*" were deemed by the three stooges (your mother, mine and Eva Van Dinizio) to be referring to an apparition, which is demonic. Since the apparition was of who they thought was Mary, mother of Christ, that made it a *religious apparition*. The very sound of the song was fit to summon untold legions of demons into the car or room where the radio was being played. Gloria is fine. Don't feel bad, I hadn't talked to her in about thirty years either, since Angie's wedding I think. She e-mailed me in 2004 when my sister died, and we kept in brief touch since then, and it's kinda funny (or is it?), but we've been communicating steadily for about the past six weeks. She's very deep into the paranormal; takes it very seriously.

L

HEY NOW! Say what ever you want about them, but you WILL NOT disgrace the Three Stooges by comparing them to our wonderful mothers and other JWs. GOT IT?

F

You're right, thou shalt not disgrace Larry, Moe and Curly by JW-ing them up. It's like desecrating a Philly cheesesteak with mayonnaise, or slopping ketchup on a ribeye. I will pass on your greetings and e-mail to Gloria Lynn; when we spoke the other day, she mentioned the horrible things they did to your mother. She and Pepper spoke at length of these things just before she died, don't know if you knew that. She'll probably be glad to hear from you...

L

I did know of some times that Pepper and Gloria Lynn spoke, but not of what. It'll be good to hear from her.

F

I wasn't allowed to watch the Three Stooges when I was little, because they expressed violence toward each other. Man.

L

Neither was I. Ron used to let me watch them when the folks were out; I didn't really get to know them until much later. Hell, I caught shit for watching Bugs Bunny.

F

Right, I know. Sort of like how I didn't get deep into the Beatles until around '74, with a little help from me ol' buddy Grafton.

L

I loved Grafton - he was like Uncle Ray to me. You know, I hope this book works to get the word out. I was just thinking that so many people that just thought I was an ass

will know why I was the way I was, and still am to so many points. Hope we can get on some national show someday to tell it like it was, and still is. *Yesterday* is on the radio now - that fits in a way for me - so many troubles from yesterday that still linger today.

I found the Beatles on my own, but you got me into Zeppelin and Elton John, and the rest just fell into place from there. Sean was playing *Slow Ride* and *Mississippi Queen* last night; so many memories pour out when I hear those songs - some good, some bad. In a way, it makes me feel old; yet young again that he is playing them. The boy is turning into a hell of a guitarist!

F

You see! Sean plays guitar. We tried that and we stunk at it, or at least I did. Just didn't have the patience to follow through on it. I remember us cutting through the cemetery with the guitars to take lessons at Glen Roc. That became a favorite story for me to tell in later years; of course I enhanced it a bit and said we used to *practice* in the cemetery amongst the stones and the spirits and the mists... But there you have it - Sean playing ball and playing guitar, liking good music; he's everything you would have been... Cousin GL says this project will be a raging success. From what I've learned of her and from her recently, I can only assume she's correct. Like Tug McGraw used to say - "Ya gotta believe!"

L

Sean does so much of what I wanted to do. I try not to let on too much of my past life ooze out, but he knows some. I play, but very limited. I can still play *Stairway to Heaven* and that's all that matters to me. He is following through and that makes me proud, but man does he ever have a lazy streak. I feel more each day that this will work and bring into light what we went through. The pain will never go away, but if it saves one person from that ungodly hold, we'll have done some good! May Tug rest in peace; I loved him.

F

Just keep believing that this is going to work. I know the book will get read, it'll get read if I have to rent a bus, go on tour and *give* away copies to every library and bookstore in Jersey and Florida.

L

Ok, here are some more excerpts from my school days. Sixth and seventh grade were no fun, in fact, that was the beginning of the worst part of my so-called school life. Out of the private school and back into the public school system. I had mentioned before the battles of being different. But now, the battles were growing due to my getting older. I was beginning to challenge more both at home and in the hallowed halls of Jehovah. Watching other Witness kids doing what they liked, talking whatever way they wanted to; it was becoming quite distracting to me. I had no teachers that understood me. All they kept saying was that my God was no better than their God and that I had to follow the rules like everyone else. It was pointed out to me on so many occasions that the other Witness kids had no issues with following the rules, why did I? The punches became harder, and the ridicule became constant. At this time, Kiss was very big, but I

didn't even know who they were. I tried to fit in and I tried to be like one of the crowd, but I failed horribly. When the Kiss tour hit Philadelphia, some of the more popular kids were going to see them. I went so far as to say I went to the concert so that people would think that I was like them; even though I did not go, and I was not like them one bit. My grades began to suffer around this time. The notes on my fifth grade report card had gotten to me; they destroyed me in fact. I had all A's, but I was not good enough. The incident at Fisher back in third grade was still following me. Everyone knew who started that fire but I still had to take grief for it, constant teasing, nothing good. No one cared that I wasn't even on the premises when the fire began; it was always open season on the fat Witness boy. And I was always the deer caught in the headlights. Let me say this, if any of that torment went on in the schools today, especially after the Columbine incident, all those kids would be behind bars. But back then, it was all right to pick on the lower class kids with no mercy and the teachers did nothing about it - until the lower class kid struck back, that is. My fights were almost always in the hallways. I can still see them coming at me. I rarely fought back because we had the never-strike-back rules jammed into our brains, so I was an easy target. I wrote before about a fight in seventh grade where I threw a desk at another kid coming at me. I knew where to aim, the knees. I was far smarter than I was given credit for. The teacher in the class, the bastard that he was, let the other kid attack me, even told him to do it; but neither expected me to fight back. That fight resulted in me being tossed from school and a meeting with the principal and my parents. I got some vindication in that meeting about another event - but only in my mind - my parents still came down on me like I was the devil himself. However, that story was told before. My biggest sixth grade story was the when I broke another kid's jaw. This kid always hounded me, and on this day I'd had enough. He hated the fact that I was a *Jehovah*, as he called me. He said his father had told him to take down any *Jehovahs* when he came across them. He lived near my friend Albert, and always went after him too. Albert was afraid to go outside half the time because of this kid. This day, he came up behind me, pushed my face into the lockers, and slammed my locker door on my arm. Two teachers were in the hallway at the time and all they said was, "Steve, don't do that." Nothing else. Well, it happened that my left arm was open and free and so I came up under his jaw and slammed him. He was rushed to the nurse and I was taken to the office. I was suspended, had cops there, parents there, and of course the whole thing was my entire fault. I kept trying to tell them what he did to me; that I would not just hit this kid for no reason and that the two teachers were right there, telling him to stop, but it didn't matter. My entire fault. Later on that night, Lester Clemente, Ernie Hinkmeier, and Jim Zimrod were at my house. I had to endure over two hours of their nonstop spew about how evil it was of me to have hurt that poor child. They didn't want to hear that this kid was a Witness-hater and they didn't want to hear about how Albert was so scared of this kid. I finally got my mother to agree to a meeting with Albert's parents, my parents, and the elders at the Hall that Sunday after the Watchtower study. I'll tell you now; I never spoke to Albert again after this night. He lied to them by saying that he and Steve were friends and always have been. He said he was never afraid to talk to Steve and that he even spoke of Jehovah to him. Albert's folks went on to say that I was a bad influence on Albert and that I should not be allowed to talk to him anymore, and that my parents should take better control of me and make me see the light of Jehovah. I was given scriptures to read. I had to write essays about the

fight of Jehovah to save his flock and turn these essays into the elders for approval. I was made to sit in the library and read countless Bible stories about how Jehovah's flock never fought back, but fought onward to the goals set forth by Jehovah. Needless to say, this is when I became very bitter, and this is when I started fighting back more and more. Oh, and by the way, the last time I heard of Albert was many years ago. He had fallen into drugs, crime, and was in and out of jail - but I was the one that was the bad influence. I'm sure all that is somehow my fault. Hell, after all, it's partly my fault that my cousin and fellow writer of this book is out of Jehovah's loving hand - just ask his mother! In 1977, I was sent to visit my brother in California. Of course, this is a story that was told in the past as well. My bitterness was in full bloom by this point and my brother was helping it release even more. I began to hate then - I began to hate Jehovah's organization and all they stood for. I began to hate my parents and my family members both inside and out of the Witnesses. When I came back, I wanted no part of the Kingdom Hall, but being only fourteen; I had no choice but to go. I fought tooth and nail over this every Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday. Then it happened. Inside the Hall, I was asked to take off a sport jacket I was wearing. A dressy sport jacket it was, not a team jacket or anything that was not allowed. I said no, there was no reason for me to take it off and I would not. Jim Zimrod grabbed my arm and I told him, "Get off me, NOW!" He gave me the same old "Michael my lad" crap and I clocked him. I ran out the door and up the road towards home. My mother was floored; she didn't know what to do. My father came after me and I told him he'd be next if he didn't leave me alone. I walked all the way home. Next day, I locked myself in my room because I knew what was coming. This time, there were some new faces that came to push the devil out of me - Andersman, Morris, Van Dinizio, Dorvack, Bartson, Maines (Thom, not Fred). I lit about a hundred candles in my room, turned off the lights, and sat and waited; my father finally had to break open the door so they could get to me. You had to see them all, with Bibles in their hands waving them around. Morris and Bartson actually praying as they came through the door - and there I was in the dark with all those candles burning. I laughed then, and I will laugh now. They ran. They all ran right back out the door. I was finally coming out like my wonderful aunts said I would when I was born. They got to their cars and took off, all the while screaming at my parents to get out before I contaminated them too. I was in hysterics. My mom made my dad take her out of the house, because she didn't drive so he had to take her everywhere she wanted to go. He wanted to stay and talk with me but she said, "No, John, we have to get away from him." About three hours later, my parents returned with our uncle Jim, whom you know was an elder in the Greenwood Hall, my dad's brother. He and my dad *talked* to me for a while and finally gave up late that night. My parents stayed away from the hall for about two weeks after this because they were afraid to be seen by the others due to my flirt with the devil. By now, I had the radio playing loudly every day; Aerosmith, Zeppelin, top-40, whatever was on. I was beginning to discover John Lennon at this point as well. Later, I was to find out that this whole thing was my brother's fault and that I should not be permitted to see him again. Onward to 1978, fifteen years old now. I have been back to the Hall, slightly brainwashed by the pills my parents put me on. I was out of control in school and out of control at home, and getting worse in their eyes. So-called friends and family would not talk to me. I just sat in the back of the Hall staring into space, like I was stoned on narcotics or something. I was slower than I had been since they put me on pills

to control my thoughts and anger, but it didn't work, as the upcoming summer would prove. All were ready to go to Pittsburgh for the big summer assembly at Three Rivers, and I refused to go. My mom packed my clothes, my dad loaded up the car and we all went outside, and I took off in another direction. My mother was screaming at me to come back and my dad was slowly following me and getting madder by the second. He cornered me and I picked up a very large branch, warning him not to come any closer or I would hit him. He kept coming and I drew my arms up to strike. I even flailed the branch towards him to show I was not kidding. My mom was still screaming and my dad was beginning to see I was far from kidding. I told them I would no longer do this; that I would no longer be involved with these people - they took everything I ever had and I had nothing to begin with. My father stepped close again and I lunged towards him. With this, he backed off. He told my mother to go in the house, and started to unpack the car. That started a huge fight between them, but he told her if she wanted to go, she had to find her own ride because he was not going - and he agreed with me. That day, I was done with the Witnesses about 85%, and my dad was done about 50%. Even though I would have hit him, I knew deep inside that he could have broken my fat ass in half, but I wasn't backing down this time. I'd been backing down my entire life and it was time to make a stand, and so I did. By the end of '79, I was gone completely and so was my dad. My mom hung on for a few more years, taking nothing but grief from the congregation for what I had done to the family and to Jehovah. She still believed that I was no good and that I caused my father, who'd been drinking since he was fourteen, to drink more and more. She never accepted the fact that it was as much her and the Witnesses doing this to him and causing his drinking to get worse. I quit school in tenth grade, and I never got to do what I always loved: forecast the weather. To this day, I get on my son about grades, studies, paying attention and the like. I don't want him to ever see what his father really is - a big nothing. I never walked back into a Hall again but I did walk into the Assembly Hall in Buckingham, Pennsylvania one more time. My mom was asking questions, and was violently spoken down to, called all kinds of names, ridiculed. I went nuts and wound up in jail for a night, then went back to kill the bastard that did it to her only to end up grabbing him by the throat, telling him that if I ever see him again, he would not be so lucky. With all the hate I had inside towards her, I still protected her. Later on, when she finally left in 1982, I told her that I had no respect for her and the way she ruined my life. I was and am still an angry, bitter person filled with hate. She died in 1990, and I got to know her a bit better before she died, but that rage and hate still clings on. She tried to buy back the life I never had. In 1982, she tried to give me a Christmas and I resented it. Then she tried to give me a birthday, and I refused to come out of my room. I hated her for what she was trying to do and for the damage she had already done, and it was way too late to fix it with a few superficial parties. By this time, 1983-1985, I never took hard drugs or drank. I hated drinkers due to my father and his fucked up brother, but I found pot, and I lived in pot for a long time. I couldn't hold any job, I was lazy, had poor attitudes towards everything and everybody - and sadly, I still do.

F

That is an incredibly heart-wrenching tale. With all that crap happening in your formative years, how the hell could you grow up normal? What the kids did, and what the teachers allowed to happen, and what our folks made us suffer through, was downright criminal. I

often wondered if you finished school, or dropped out like I did. I made it through tenth; turned sixteen in '73 and didn't go back to school. I took classes and got my GED in '79 at twenty-two. That was the happiest day of my dad's life; I finally got that high school diploma, albeit four years late. At least you were big enough to fight and get a little satisfaction. I was such a scrawny little stick, every time my temper finally took over and I went meshuggenah, I ended up getting my ass kicked. Except for the time I took my belt to Bobby Delaney in the Fisher school locker room; I got suspended for three days for that little deal. And then there was the time in that very same locker room when Charlie Dekle offered me a dollar to give him a blowjob and I didn't know what he was talking about. I figured it was something I didn't want to be involved in when he yanked out his penis, so I put my foot hard to it and took off. Got suspended for that one, too. Sounds like young Albert was so afraid of dissing the Witnesses he took the easy way out, dissed you instead. Coward. I love the way you lit candles and scared them off their rockers. They must have thought Satan himself was in the room, ready to slurp their very souls out through their nostrils or something. Again I say, they can't write horror stories and make movies to match this stuff. I didn't know you turned into a pothead for a while. Wasn't it around '81 or so when you started playing ball with us on the old McQuaide's Brigade, which eventually became the Chickehawks in '84? Ok, I have two brief schoolboy memories to share here, one from first and one from eighth. By eighth grade I was a complete mess when it came to school, and I didn't give a shit about the flag or the songs or anything else. I saluted and sang because I was already enough of a freak based on the fact that I didn't know how to act around my peers. The kids were all over me not because I was a Witness, but because I was a skinny little jerkoff who knew next to nothing about real life. Then my mother told me it was required for young Jehovah's Witnesses to present their Science teachers with a copy of the book *Did Man Get Here by Evolution or Creation*. I was forced to bring this book to Mr. Richman and tell him to read it. So what happens next? Not only is this kid a skinny little jerkoff who can't fight, talk to girls or play sports, but he's a Jehovah's Witness too! A double freak. It got worse after that, which led to many ass-kickings and just general all-around hurtful ridicule and chaos. I swore as soon as I hit sixteen, I'd leave school, and as soon as I hit eighteen, I'd flee the Witnesses and teach myself how to live and act like a normal human being. Ok, flashback to first grade. Ireland Private School. There was a birthday party, and I knew I wasn't supposed to take part of the festivities, but how would I tell them that? A birthday party was unfolding and I had been told that if I celebrated someone's birthday, I would be destroyed at Armageddon. However, I was more afraid of what Mother would do to me than what God would do to me (and that is a significant thing, how the kids are more afraid of their Witness parents than of Jehovah, and how the adults are more afraid of the Watchtower Society's and the elder's punishments than they are of Jehovah). Anyway, suddenly a birthday party was about to happen, and I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to tell my class and teacher that I couldn't be a part of the party without hurting their feelings and feeling like a fool. I did a little quick thinking (I was six, remember) and said that I was not hungry and could I take my party goodies home as I couldn't eat them there in school. My teacher, who was a first-class creep, knew exactly why I couldn't partake of the party food, because of course Mother had spouted off about our beliefs on the first day of school. So the teacher knew, but the kids didn't. They knew about the flag, because I had to stand there everyday like a tree trunk

with my arms dangling at my sides, but they didn't know about birthdays and holidays yet. So my teacher made a very logical observation, and said: "Sure, Lawrence, you can take your food home. But why don't you eat the ice cream, because it will melt if you don't." I didn't know how to answer this, it was so logical, so I went ahead and ate the ice cream, the whole time feeling like I was committing a major crime, and silently praying to the God who would destroy me for eating it that my mother wouldn't find out that I did eat it. Well, Jehovah didn't answer that prayer, because when my mother came to pick me up, my teacher took the greatest of pleasure in telling her that although I tried to follow the rules of our religion, I had gone ahead and eaten the forbidden ice cream. My mother's face turned to stone when she looked at me, in front of all the kids, and she said in a soft voice filled with rage these four words: "You ate ice cream." I honestly cannot remember what happened when she took me home after that, I've blocked it out and can't get it back (I've been trying for the past half-hour), it must have been that bad. But that was the incident that started the entire *outcast in the school* era that lasted for years.

L

PS Did I ever tell you that our Lambertville Halloween tradition was to plug *Phantasm* into the DVD player and let it run while we prowled the neighborhood with the kids? Something they'll always remember about their slightly twisted ol' man...

That, my cousin, is my life. I got my GED in 1985; I was happy I did that, but I still didn't fulfill my dreams. Oh trust me, I got my ass kicked quite a few times being passive, and by bigger kids, but I fought more and harder as it drew to a close. I didn't know what a blowjob was either. I was a pothead for about two to three years; the only thing that kept me going and calm - wish I had a puff or two right now, believe me! I could use some calming. I played ball with you guys in '78 and '79. My father used to sneak me up to the field to play, then come back to pick me up. Used to tell Pepper we were just going out for a coke or to bowl a game or two at a place other than Curtis. She always fell for it. Ah, *Phantasm*! Great movie, as you well know!

F

Yeah, fighting is not something I was ever any good at. But imagine not knowing what a blowjob is when you're in junior high. And finding out the way I did. I got suspended for kicking a dude in the crotch who wanted a blowjob from me. It's funny now, but I was kinda shaky over it back then.

L

Like you, I had no idea of anything worldly until I was about seventeen, so I know how you felt. Amazing that you and I followed so many of the same paths. I never knew you went to Ireland Private until now, and about the fights you had in school. I was right behind you bringing up the rear of the tradition set by our mothers, and oh man, that really stinks.

F

Just read an article in the Wall St Journal about the congressman from western Pennsylvania who has been steering a lot of political pork to his own district. Suddenly up pops a memory of an assembly and some people I can't remember the name of. They

were good friends with your folks and they were from Indiana, Pennsylvania. Who were they?

L

Betty Zelwitz. She lived in Mt. Union. We must be linked, because I've been thinking of them for the past few days. Betty was caring for her niece Sissy at the time, and I've often wondered what happened to them all. We met at the first Allentown assembly we went to in '75 and they became friends for years. I'll never forget when my mom left - Betty was heartbroken. She sent my mom a letter saying she broke her heart and destroyed their friendship. Imagine that...

F

That's it, Betty and Sissy Zelwitz. They seemed like nice people, but instead of asking your mother if she could do anything to help, she chose to cancel their friendship. Shame. Under direct influence of the Watchtower Society; like you say, wonder where they all are now. And will they buy the book?

L

Yes, they turned out to be really messed up people, so-called friends, just broke it off and told my mother she was making a big mistake. Were my mother and father ever disfellowshipped that you know of?

F

As far as I know, your folks were not disfellowshipped. What they did in Witness jargon was *disassociate themselves*. That's why I couldn't understand why they shunned her so. I know the big three thought she was badmouthing the Witnesses, so maybe that's why. The Evil Slave thing. Then when she took up with the Sai Baba religion, it was even worse. There was no talking to her then, she was *apostate*. But I believe I now know why they treated your mother so bad, if the timing is right. If she split around 1982, that was right after all the shit hit the fan with Ray Franz, and they booted him out of the Watchtower Society. Their dictum at the time was to crack down on people because if somebody that high up could go bad, then anybody could. They didn't want the organization poisoned by nonconformists. So they issued the command that not only were the disfellowshipped to be shunned, but now everybody and anybody who left the Witnesses for whatever reason were regarded as outcasts and to be treated like lepers. Seems like your mother fell into that ugly category, and her slaughtered-lamb friends and sisters had to obey the rules and act as if she didn't exist. So, if she left in 1982, there's the answer to that question. Interesting, huh?

L

If I remember correctly, her split was tied to Franz. That's where most of her questions were coming from - that issue with Franz and Frankie. Yes, it was towards the end of '82. Makes sense to me now, I never would have thought of that. Proves one thing, that blood is not thicker than water; family water that is. That is what that fight was about in the Buckingham Palace that day, when they crushed my mother's spirit and I went nuts, so now it all comes together.

F

Did Franz and Frankie know each other or have anything to do with each other?

L

With me hanging several years after you, you are able to see some of the things that I lived as well, and now, with the research you're doing, more is coming to light. Ray Franz and Uncle Frankie didn't know each other, not that I was ever aware of, but my mother was being slammed by Frankie with his views and he was constantly on her, so it just happened that the two went together somehow (Franz and Frankie's Edenite Society).

F

Yeah, I'm learning a little more every day about this ungodly bunch. Ray Franz wrote a book called *Crisis of Conscience*, about his time in the governing body and his subsequent departure. I'll try and track it down; they don't have it at the library here, but it is available on Amazon. Sounds like an interesting read...

L

I was cleaning out some crap last night and I found a book. The Truth Book. Remember that little blue book, *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*? It was my mother's. She had saved it for some reason in a box of other things. The book was quite clean (which was rare for her since she made notations in everything) except for one little passage on the inside back cover: "ALL LIES - FRANKIE WAS RIGHT!" Signed in October of 1990; the month and year she died. I was shocked to first of all find this book but even more shocked at what she wrote, and why she kept it. I was tempted to read the book again but I did one better. I placed it back in the box, took it outside, and burned it. Donna thought I was nuts but I told her to just stay back and leave me alone because it was something I had to do. It felt good to do that, like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. I know that sounds weird, but it really was quite relaxing to do. I remember when that book came out. We used to carry it with us when going door to door. It jarred some rotting memories of those days on the streets, and one that stood out was about your mother. We were going to houses along the side streets of Pennington and I was walking with your mother and The Bunn was walking with mine. At each house, I listened to your mother talk about how Jehovah was the savior and would strike down all that did not comply with his word. Now, even back then, that was a rather wealthy area and most of those people already had their own God and didn't need another. Anyway, we got to this one house and your mom nicely asked me to take charge and preach the gospel. I was ten at the time, and about as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Your mother never liked me; I knew that from the time I could walk and talk, but for some reason, she was being quite nice to me that day. I got up to the door, rang the bell, and identified myself as a minister of Jehovah. About midway through, I forgot all the words and froze up so your mom took it from there. The lady at the door was feeling sorry for me because I was so nervous. She listened to your mother spew on about Jehovah for several minutes, and then said she would be right back. When she got back to the door, the lady of the house handed me a lollypop and told me I did a good job and everything would be alright. She then told you mom that she wasn't really interested and politely

closed the door. I started to unwrap the pop and your mom smacked my hand, knocking it away, and gave me hell all the way back to the car where she told me to stay until they were done. When your mom, my mom and The Bunn got back, your mother was still ranting on that I took a gift from a worldly person and that I should not go door to door again until I realized that such behavior was wrong. My mother and yours were screaming at me all the way home about how we are out to save people and not to take gifts from them. How wrong it was what I did and how that person was surely to die at the hands of Jehovah. To this day, I don't know what I did wrong. I followed all the directions and I got scared. The woman gave me a pop and told me everything would be alright - yet it was wrong. I wish I knew what I did. Another door-to-door incident happened about a year later. While working West State St in Trenton, I fell down a set of concrete steps and tore up my arm, and my face. My mother had to flag down a police car to take me to the hospital because - again, I'm not making this up - Brother Fred Maines and Sister Glorya Gray could not stop *helping* people long enough to help my mother and me. We were at the hospital for several hours and nobody would come to pick us up. Not your mother, not Joan or Jim, not any of the brothers; so we had to stay at the hospital with no money and wait until my father was done work that night. This was their version of *helping* people - let your own suffer while you gather up the flock. I still have the scar on my arm from that fall. Want to know what made me fall? That stupid Truth book. I dropped it, then slipped on it, and I went down like a wax dummy. Now, refer back to the first paragraph and ask me why I took joy in burning that book last night. Again, no lie, no making it up, I wouldn't know how to make something like that up. Later on, about a week or so, my dad was asked by Brother Bartson to pay for the book that had I damaged. He refused to pay for it saying it was, first, an accident and, second, no one bothered to help when I was down and bleeding in the street. He was again told that Jehovah was likely punishing me because I was evil and making it known that I wanted no part of being out there preaching the good word, and the book was placed there to help me along the way to salvation. My father said good, let Jehovah pay for the book then since it was His idea to put it under my foot. Later that night, I noticed that my father was paying for that book; this was after he was brought into the library to be spoken to. I'm sure finding that book last night brought back those two horrible memories from our street walking days. I have many others too, but they mostly are about being yelled at, never having anything to drink or eat while out there, watching your mother eat a sandwich in the car while my mom and I had nothing, all typical bullshit.

F

Amazing. You know, she kept that book for one reason only, don't you? Wonder what she'd think if she knew it took you eighteen years to find it. You know, I've been so involved with writing about school times and going to assemblies and the crap that went on at the Hall and picking apart the elders and bitching about our mental state, that I've so far completely ignored the times spent out in the service. Now that I think of it, I can come up with some dandy tales of the fieldwork, too. I'll have to gag up some of those memories now, too. To be continued...

L

You think she kept it so I would find it? I never thought of that. I was just cleaning up some junk and there was this box; it was all her stuff, knick-knacks, old crap...and that damn book. I'm waiting to hear your tales of horror in the streets of Jehovah.

F

I tell ya, man, things happen for a reason. Sure she saved it for you to find - and you found it at a most opportune time, too. Like me finding that Elton tape a few weeks ago. I would imagine it was a way of her apologizing from beyond the grave for wrecking your childhood. Take it a step further and read between the lines - Frankie was right. Frankie was right and so were you, and don't think it's a coincidence that it stayed hidden (right there in your house, right?) until now. I too have tales of Pennington, the big Ewing territory, and my favorite - waving the Watchtower and Awake around between six and nine in the morning on the streets down in the bowels of Trenton to rack up time (...*those hungry hunters tracking down the hours...*). Autumn of '73, after I ditched school, not even old enough to drive, riding the fucking *bus* into Trenton that early so I could get my pioneer hours in. Stood on the corner of Broad and Montgomery, State and Broad (the old pedestrian mall), fucking *Perry Street* for God's sake, Hanover St, Willow St, all around down there. Stood on the corner with the black sisters; I must have looked like some kind of skinny pale pimp, the Doogie Howser of the Trenton street scene. Unbelievable. It was around that time that the incident with the mannequin happened; I'm sure you've heard that story. Incredible.

L

There was a lot of stuff I took with me when I went to live at Donna's and some of it I have never got around to looking into. Last night was one of those *let's toss the shit* nights and there it was. Damn, man, she's still after me. I guess you're right, she meant for me to find it, but I'm sure she didn't think it would take almost two decades. I'm not convinced that Bernie didn't have a thought or two about the Witnesses when penning that song; there are way too many fitting strings in there! Oh God, I know. Prospect St, Stuyvesant Ave, West State, East State - go there now and you're dead within a few seconds. But I guess Jehovah will protect you, right? ONWARD AND FORTH!!

F

I don't know if Jehovah protected us or not, I would imagine it was pure luck, since we're all here for a reason and I'm still here. Jehovah certainly didn't save that goddam mannequin, though. I haven't thought about that in thirty years. To this day, that has to rank as one of the strangest and most insane things I've ever done. And I was only sixteen...

L

I'm lost with the mannequin. Can you shed some light on that for me?

F

Oh holy shit! You never heard mannequin story? It was the best! If they found out we would have all been disfellowshipped. You might remember it when I start to tell it, if not, get ready, you'll be rolling around the rug laughing till you gag. Grafton used to tell

this story to his buddies; he never used our names of course. This was good; this was probably the funniest thing that ever happened while I was still a Witness. Here it is. Along about the fall of '73, my freshly baptized and newly pioneering self was doing a lot of street work deep in Trenton with the black sisters, as I said earlier. After a time, I got a little tired of hanging around with a bunch of women, walking the streets waving religious material around like some kind of freak. But a promise is a promise, and I'd promised I'd pioneer if I were to quit school, so I did, for a little while. But anyway, I wanted some company down there, so I ended up talking Jimmy and Steve (also freshly dropped out of high school so they could preach the word - remember, 1975 was looming ever closer, Armageddon was nigh) and also Billy Huster into the morning street work. It was much more fun peddling magazines with my friends, and we actually began to look forward to those mornings. Jimmy had gotten some people from his congregation interested in the morning work (a great way to rack up the hours without really doing any preaching) and before long the streets of downtown Trenton were teeming with young white Witnesses wandering around like little holy soldiers. Good God, what had I started? Anyway, it was usually Jimmy, Steve, Billy and me, and we took to walking around instead of standing on corners to pass the time more quickly. We'd dump magazines in laundromats and stores and the train station so we could count them as publications, and we'd spend an hour or more in this dumpy restaurant called the Towne House on West State eating breakfast. This went on for several weeks with nothing major happening, but, by God, we were getting restless and tired of pissing away time roaming those mean streets early in the morning. One fine day we were strolling down Hanover Street towards Willow and noticed that there had been a fire in a clothing store. There was rubbish all around the entrance to the building, and amongst this rubbish were a bunch of life-size naked mannequins. The comment was made that we should grab four of these dummies, prop them up on the corner and stick Watchtowers in their hands so we could go home. It would be cool, and somebody would be sure to think that there were four naked Jehovah's Witnesses passing out literature in our fine city. Let's do it, says one of us, as we walked past the burnt-out store. Nah, never mind, let's not and say we did. On the corner of Willow and Hanover, there is (or was, don't know if it's still there) a seven-story parking garage. Many times we would go to the top of this garage to enjoy the view of scenic Trenton and take pictures of us hacking around and making asses of ourselves (I still have them somewhere; I'm sure they'll turn up before this is done). Someone said, let's take one of those dummies up on the roof and take some pictures. Someone else said, ok then, let's do it. So we grabbed a mannequin from the pile, wrestled him (yes, it was a male mannequin) into the elevator, and took him up to the roof. One thing led to another and one of us came up with the idea that people down on the street would shit themselves if we were to fling this dummy over the side. We talked about this for a few minutes, and the concept quickly became too good to resist. We threw a quick plan together; Steve, the dummy and I remained on the roof, Jimmy and Billy retreated to street level. Steve, being taller and stronger than me, picked the dummy up by the legs and pushed him out about three-fourths of the way over the ledge. We both crouched down so that from street level, only the dummy could be seen. Since I had the bigger mouth, I started hollering: "WWWWAAAAA - AAHHM GONNA JUMPPPP - I CAN'T FUCKING TAKE IT ANYMORE - AH AMM GONNA JUUMMMPPPP." Steve then gave a quick little shove, and Mr. Dummy was on his

way down. We bolted for the elevator and headed down, thereby missing the action that then took place on the street (which is why we sent Jimmy and Billy down there, to observe and report). Walking along Hanover with a dog was a scruffy black dude. In a nearby doorway were Jimmy and Billy, boldly holding up the Watchtower and Awake, acting completely oblivious to what about to happen. When I started hollering, the black guy looked up and also started yelling, "NO MAN, DON'T DO IT. DON'T JUMP MAN, DON'T DO IT!" When the dummy began his descent, the black guy scooped up his dog and continued hollering, "OH FUCK, OH FUCK, THE DUDE JUMPED, THE DUDE JUMPED, OH NO..." When the dummy hit the sidewalk - a hard plastic hollow dummy - it shattered into about fifteen pieces. The head went one way, the arms flew off, chunks went here and there...the black guy dropped his dog and screamed, "OH SHIT, THE DUDES BROKE UP, OH SHIT, HE'S BROKE UP, HE'S GONE TO PIECES..." and he took off around the corner with the terrified dog right behind. A small crowd began to gather, and Steve and me reached the street and walked over to Jimmy and Billy. We noticed a few other Witnesses in that gathering crowd and figured it was all over for us. We'd get disfellowshipped, and probably end up in jail, too. So we decided to stay put; if we ran off, it would probably look like we had something to do with this ghastly joke. By this time, people had caught on to what happened and were pretty much cracking up. Two cops rushed up, shouting, demanding to know what in the hell was going on. The best part is the cops saw us standing there, four well-dressed white boys peddling religion at eight in the morning, and just assumed we had nothing to do with it. Actually said hi to us, because they'd seen us down there every other morning. In an act of great balls, Steve said to one of the cops: "Hey, man, looks like somebody pitched a dummy off that roof." A chosen few knew what really happened that morning and, a few months later when I was dissecting Beatle songs with Grafton, I'd told him what we'd done. I thought he was going to choke; he literally had tears running down his face. He made me tell the story a second time. His favorite part was the black guy screaming "THE DUDES BROKE, THE DUDES GONE TO PIECES..." Man, that was fun. And that's one time when going out in the service was anything but boring.

L

Holy shit!! I can't stop laughing, I never heard that! "THE DUDES BROKE!" Son of a bitch, I'm pissing myself. I can just see it! Do you remember the great flood at Parkway? I was sent to the library for acting out and I had to take a piss. I went downstairs, mad as usual, went to the toilet and decided to have some fun. In less than five minutes I plugged the old drains in the floor, clogged up the toilets, and began running water, including that hose that was down there next to the old furnace. I then calmly walked back upstairs to the library to finish my sentence. There was water everywhere; they knew I did it but never could prove it because I was, after all, in the library with a sound asleep brother who was supposed to be watching over me. Wish I could remember his name but I can hardly see his face.

F

Yea, that was a lot of fun. Grafton even went so far as to say it would've been cool if we could have found a way to fill up the mannequin with ketchup or red paint. I think I vaguely recall the toilets overspewing in that disgusting basement. What was the time

frame? There was always some kind of plumbing issue down there, always dirty water running through those trofts along the wall, always stinking like raw sewage down there. Surprised the board of health didn't make them do something about it. Maybe religious groups are exempt from that? Were you there on a Friday night around late '73 when Clemente went up on the platform with a giant four-foot long Styrofoam pencil and announced someone had done some writing on the wall in the bathroom? Said such things would not be tolerated. I did it. Nothing bad, if I remember rightly, it was simply this:

He who writes on bathroom walls

Rolls his shit in little balls

He who reads these words of wit

Eats those little balls of shit

Christ, the place was disgusting down there.

L

I'm still laughing, that was good! Around '74 and early '75, lots happened in that era.

Yes, it was disgusting down there, nobody ever cleaned it right. We used to go there to help clean the filthy place; vacuum the floors, wipe the windows, sponge out the toilets. I hated all that work. I don't recall Clemente and the pencil, however I am not surprised by it. But you? Oh, no. Why would you ever do something like that?

F

Yea, it was a big giant Styrofoam pencil, almost as big as he was. It was a prop for one of the Friday night talks, and Clemente seized upon it to make a point. Good God, they made you clean that filthy hole?

L

Oh yeah, all were assigned times to clean the dump. I guess you got out of that - you must have been too busy hurling dummies off of roofs...

F

Now that you mention it, I do remember the Hall cleanings. My mother and the Bunn used to go, but for some reason I didn't. I was there once with Zimrod (Jim *and* Jeff, father and son for God's sake) to rake leaves, and when that was done, Zimrod announced that the gutters had to be cleaned out of leaves. He told Jeff and me to get out the ladder and go up on the roof (this was way before the dummy) and I said no way, I don't go up on the roof, not here, not home, not anywhere. He said, "why not, are you afraid?" I said, "actually, yes. I'm not afraid to climb up, but I'm scared to death of coming back down. I won't do it." So of course Brother Zimrod got pissed at me, because he had to go up there with Jeff and do the work, and wouldn't let me go help anymore (how sad, that). But I wonder if they singled out certain of the lower echelon to do the cleaning and such. The proletariat. The peons. Seriously, did you ever see Clemente or Ernie or Andersman swabbing the basement or swishing out the bowl? Ever see the big guns wielding the vacuum or passing the Bissell?

L

Come to think of it, no. I don't recall any of the big guns, except for maybe Zimrod and once in a mauve moon, Clemente or Andersman, but they stayed outside directing mostly. The inside jobs were saved for the ones that were nothing in their eyes. Do you remember the get-togethers at certain houses? We used to go to Andersman's all the time - the Bartsons, Camelton, Clemente - they always had tons of black food but never made anything for the few token whites they invited, not even burgers. Everything was in Andersman's backyard; grits, whole fish (I'm a fisherman, I eat fish, but I am not eating anything that's looking back at me), greens, chicken that was either burnt to hell or butt-raw, and gallons of beer and booze. Even though it was forbidden to indulge in the whiskey of man to over-excessiveness, they were falling down drunk half the time. Ninety degrees inside the house, and the son's of the brothers breaking my toys and saying I broke theirs after *I* broke my own. I'm actually getting sick remembering these things. How I was treated, how my parents were treated - those *NOTHINGS* with the *EVIL SON* are what we were. Yet my poor sorry mother kept going back to them and doing whatever they said; I still can't believe it.

F

Yes, the iron grip they had on the minds of your parents and my mother borders on the supernatural. My father always said they were brainwashed, but I always thought they were just fanatically religious and afraid of God and death at Armageddon. Now I see how right he was; they were much more than religious fanatics, their very minds were tampered with to the point of total and complete obedience and control. I went to a few of those gatherings but not too many. That black bunch over there could definitely put away some booze, though. I'm surprised they didn't get into fistfights at these so-called get-togethers (if you remember, we were not allowed to use the word *party* because it conjured up images of worldly people overindulging in food, drink, sex and other debauchery). Don't forget how we were also forbidden from using the word *luck* or *lucky* because it meant one was depending on the forces of luck and chance, which were of course of Satan. We had to use the word *fortunate* whenever something good happened. And you're right, the big brothers stood around and supervised and directed while the women and kids scrubbed and wiped and swept and dusted and cleaned the place up. It seems they required *mandatory volunteerism* to get the work done. And the freaking sheep were just oh so willing to volunteer in the name of Jehovah. You're right, it's unbelievable.

L

You know I couldn't bring myself to use the word lucky until I was in my twenties. It was hard for me to say since it brought back memories of things I was taught against. I still have trouble with some things...it's like it's burned into my memory banks! I have so many bad memories of those gatherings; how they acted, how they talked, the things that they went out of their way to do. But heaven forbid, if I did one thing wrong like put my foot up on a chair, I was brought before the powers-that-be to be chastised. I used to walk down to Camelton's house to see his dog every time we were at Andersman's, and I would be yelled at because I said the dog was hungry or wanted to be petted. "He's in Jehovah's hands" is what I would hear. But that poor dog was hurting for friendship and someone to love him, as well as to be fed from time to time, and that creep would tell my

father to keep me away from the dog so I didn't hurt him. It's coming out now dude; the pain is vivid. I was afraid this would happen when we started; what they did to me, how they treated me, what they called me; it's all in the frontal lobe now. I'm trying to run from it but it's all coming back. I cried myself to sleep almost every night back then because I really believed I was no good. I really thought I was going to die by Jehovah's hand. I tried to be good but I couldn't, at least not in their eyes. Christ, I spilled something and it was Satan that made me do it so I could disrupt the sanctity of Jehovah's world. No friends, no life, and yes, I still carry all this. I can't even bring myself to say all of what happened but I'll try to get some of it out. I actually hate myself because of all this - I hate what I was, and I hate what I became because of them. They took a baby fresh from the womb and labeled it a demon - the son of Satan - this is what your mother, Joan, Jim, and all rest of the so-called brothers and sisters did to me...RIGHT FROM BIRTH!! Yet *I* led *you* down the path of worldly wrongs. Five and a half years younger, but *I* led *you* astray, and how do they come up with that? Easy. I was born of the seed, not of the flower. At the assembly of 1969, the big one at Yankee Stadium, Knorr himself told my mother that I had to be watched; it seems word had reached him that I would be there and they were to look for anything I may do or trouble I may start...I WAS SIX! Old man Franz touched my head and said that I could amount to many good things as long as I was held in check, and that anything that could be done, both medically and in the eyes of Jehovah, should be done and done quickly...I WAS SIX! How I should be kept away from people but remain in the sights of Jehovah's servants (elders), how I should only be allowed to speak when spoken to; this is what I went through. And your mother? She was on me from fucking birth. Joan and Jim's kids, they got to go places and do things, while I was pushed into the black hole like a redheaded stepchild. Anything I said, anything I did was from Satan. I lit those candles thinking they would leave me alone if they saw something like that, but that didn't work. My parents put me on drugs - this is what my mother thought was right? Oh, ok, I'm supposed to accept that. Oh, this is just such fun! Sorry, of course you know none of this is directed at you. It's just coming out now, so be ready. I go off any time like this, let's get it in the book because the world needs to know what they did to both of us. They need to be exposed. I'm sure there is another me and another you out there feeling this very same thing right now...

F

Unfortunately (fuck that - *unluckily*) there are kids out there going through what we did, and there are parents out there who are destroying their kids lives because they think it's the right thing to do, and they fear the Watchtower society's condemnation if they don't. And yes, that shit is burned into your memory banks, mine too. You can hide it, block it out, pretend it never happened, but it's all still there. I have a scar on my stomach from having my appendix out when I was twenty-two; it's all but forgotten, but it's still there. Same with those memories. A scar on the mind is what it is. It's a shame your folks kept going to those stupid gatherings. Did they want to fit in so bad that they had to hang out with a bunch of reverse-prejudice self-righteous blacks who kept on dissing their own son? I never knew it went so high as Knorr and Franz with you; guess they kept all that a secret from me (I can only imagine why) and I never knew they went so far and deep with the Son of Satan thing. What in holy hell was wrong with them? One thing, though, at least your folks finally got it right and saw them for what they were and left the

Witnesses. No help to you, though, as the damage was already done. You're childhood was over. How could they hang on to such a group and allow them to say you were the son of Satan? I mean, and correct me if I'm wrong, but is not saying that you were the son of Satan a bit of a slap to your mother? Did they believe the Devil raped her in the night or something, or did they think John was spewing the unholy sperm of the Devil himself? Where did they think you came from? I mean, that is absolutely insane! This actually has me pissed right now, about two things. How could they do that to a little kid, and how could your folks allow them to do that? They were essentially calling your mother Satan's whore, and *she stood for that?* And John let them *get away with it?* That's incredible. No wonder you're bitter. I hate to say this, but I've lost a great deal of respect for your folks after learning all this. And not because of what they did, they were brainwashed and hypnotized and controlled like marionettes for God's sake, but because they continued to allow it to happen. You're supposed to protect your kid, not let a bunch of assholes make a mockery of him. Looks like my mother wasn't the only whacko fanatic of the bunch; they were all crazy. But again, your folks saw the light and got out; sadly all your lives were ruined by then, but at least they got out. They had to live the rest of their days facing up to what they did to themselves and to you, and that must have hurt them. That's why she left the book for you to find, I'm sure of it. Think about it - if she came to you in 1990 and said she wanted to apologize for stealing your childhood and wrecking your life, would you have listened? Would you have wanted to sit down and have a conversation about it that late in the game? Don't think so...I know I wouldn't. If my mother decided to come to me now and say she was sorry for what she allowed the Clementes and the Zimrods and the Andersmans of the bunch to do to me when I was a kid, I wouldn't want to hear a word of it. I'd say, "I saved my own ass, no thanks to you, and almost killed myself doing it, and with all the shit you did to me in the name of God, I'm still here!" And she's still there, a lifer in the ways of Jehovah. And Jehovah really takes care of her, too, right...she has no friends; she's lonely, bitter and miserable. Yes, Jehovah takes care of all his flock (unless they need blood, that is). As Mr. King said in *The Talisman*, "God pounds all his nails." Enough for now... Tomorrow is Little John's birthday, he's three already. Here ya go - take two bucks, stop at Quick Chek and get two New Jersey Pick-4 tickets, straight and box, for 1109, tomorrow. Maybe we'll get **lucky!**

L

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO LITTLE JOHN! Alright, I'm a lot calmer today, my blood pressure is not through the roof and I don't feel like running into a corner and crying like yesterday. Here's the story: As far as the memory will allow, my mom had a horrible pregnancy with me, remember I said I almost died at birth. It was Satan's fault that this happened since he took over my unborn body. Your mother, Joan and Jim all told my mother she should never have gotten pregnant in the first place and I was going to ruin their harmony with Jehovah. So I'm guessing here that I was the next *Rosemary's Baby*. My parents weren't the demons because the seed was planted after the fact and I became true evil. The Knorr and Franz thing was a last ditch effort to make me conform - almost like *The Exorcist*. They would touch me and tell my parents to watch me and take care to never let Satan out. I truly believe to this day they all wanted me dead, and if I didn't protect myself like I did, they may have done something rash. Going to those

gatherings and trying to keep up with the Joneses was my parent's way of keeping me in the eyes and hands of Jehovah. So every time I saw something go wrong or somebody do something wrong, it all came back on me. I was no good literally from conception. I told you my parents were far worse than you ever thought; now you know. My father, God love him and may his soul finally be at peace, was a wimp before my mother. My mother, God love her too, was a violent, Jehovah-fearing bitch! No wonder my father drank the way he did - it was his only out. Would I have talked to her in 1990? I guess there's about a one in ten chance that I would have, but it would not have been pretty if I did. Those fanatics led her around like a lamb and she followed their every word, and my father tagged along to keep her quiet. Oh, he fought now and then, but not enough and I grew to hate them both of them because of that weakness. Towards the end of their lives I got closer, but not what you'd expect from a normal family. I give Pepper credit - she did try to fix things - but it was far too late for any of that. And yet again, I became the outcast; now all of the non-Witnesses in the family took the position that I was no good and didn't appreciate anything she was trying to do. Well, they were right - I didn't ask for any of it and I didn't want to be bothered. So you see, the Witness side of the family all had me pegged as the Devil himself, and then when I break free, the rest of them all peg me as a nasty brat who cared only about himself. I got it from both sides; this is why you are the only one I talk to besides Ron. He figured out where I was going with all the hate in a short time and we patched that up long ago, but he still to this day has no idea how I truly feel and what really went on in my life. I had no use for any of them - inside or out - and I hold that feeling to this day, and forever will. The last time I talked with anyone was Uncle Charlie's funeral. I have no reason or desire to talk with any of them now. So you see, it was and still is a hard life. I so wanted to be liked, to be normal, to be a part of things; I actually felt sorry for myself, but no longer. You know what I want? Peace, plain and simple, peace. I want my son to grow up to be whatever he wants and I want my daughter to realize that her mother is not the God she thinks she is and grow up to be whatever she wants. I want for myself to be in a place away from everyone, anyone I have known in my life except for a few chosen people like Sean, Lynn, you, and Ron. And if you think my home life is rosy, try again. I blame the Witnesses the most, but I would break it down like this - 51% Witnesses, 49% parents. Pretty damn close, huh? The song remains the same...

F

Yes, going to Little John's birthday party today. A normal kid having a normal birthday; how refreshing. It's all good. So they believed that Satan entered you as a fetus and took over thereby causing a difficult pregnancy and an evil child to be born. Then they had to follow you around and make sure the evil didn't spill out of you and cause problems in their relationships with Jehovah and the Society. It sounds like your folks really believed this and acted upon it. And it wasn't just the family running with this absurdity, it was also the local Witness proletariat, the congregation, the elders and the Organization all the way to the top. It sounds like something out of Edgar Allan Poe; it sounds like something Stephen King might have thought up way back in the eighties; it sounds like some B movie from the fifties. But it's not any of that, it's completely real. And it's completely insane. They all should have been taken to that sprawling complex on Sullivan Way to get a checkup from the neck up; everyone from our mothers right on up

to Knorr and Franz. To do that to a little kid, it was criminal; today it's called child abuse, and people get locked up for it. I'm assuming you want to include all this in the book. I'm also assuming they've done and maybe are still doing this to other kids. But why you? Why did you get singled out to be possessed of Satan in their eyes? Why not me? Why not David Andersman or cousin Becky or little Albert? Where do they draw such reasoning? You probably don't know the answer to that and we'll probably never know. But that was some crazy shit that went down. You're right, no wonder John drank so much. My dad did too, but I don't know if his drinking increased after Mother got Jehovah or not. If I had to lay odds, I'd say yes. I remember he used to say some crazy things when he was in his cups, stuff that didn't make any sense to me as a kid, but makes complete sense now. He used to bitch at my mother, saying that in her world nobody knew anything except the Witnesses. He used to refer to your mother and Joanie as the two wicked sisters who ruined her. One day he said to me, "your mother won't listen to anybody except those seven men up in Brooklyn." I didn't know what he meant by that, so I asked her. Her answer was a scoffing, sarcastic, "he doesn't know what he's talking about; he's drunk." But it wasn't drunken rambling after all; my research reveals that in those days the Governing Body consisted of seven men, and we know they sat in their ivory Bethel tower in Brooklyn trying to run everyone's lives. And he knew. He also used to say that she never believed anything he told her, religious or not, but if Ernie spoke the same words from the platform, then it became true fact. He was right about that too. He also said the Witnesses worshipped the organization and the men who ran it and didn't know the first thing about how to truly worship God. Right again. He said they were brainwashed, he said they were puppets... Today the Governing Body is anywhere between eleven and seventeen men, depending on some social mix I couldn't quite understand. Anyway, time for cake and presents for the little one.

L

Why not you? Why not, say, The Bunn? Why not Becky? I was born first, not in the light of you since you were already around, but I was before all the others. And all of you were perfect! There were problems with me all through the pregnancy so something had to be wrong. Connie and Sam started most of it, then they have their own little monster in Joey, a terror from the start. But he was perfect. I was nothing but demon trash! You see, although we both suffered beyond any kind of reason, I lived the horrors of believing I was of the Devil and that I was going to die. Right up to the day I went after John with the tree branch, I knew I was going to die because of it. I still have horrible dreams about that, dreams that Jehovah is coming for me. Ask Jenn, me screaming in the middle of the night, she wakes me up and I'm soaked with sweat and shaking like I just got hit by lightning. I knew why but I couldn't say, and there's another reason I feel the way I do - I could never talk about it. It was the same for me. My one true love was the weather. By twelve, I could predict it just by looking at the sky. Because of my accuracy, everyone around shunned me; it was like the Salem witches. I knew the future, so it must be of the Devil! If the guy on the TV news said it was going to rain, they all grabbed their umbrellas, but if I said it was going to rain, and it did, I was brought before the elders like some witch in 1694. I lost everything because of them. Enjoy an extra piece of cake for me and give my third cousin a great big high five! Carry on, wayward son.

F

I get it now. What I was missing was the fact that they actually had *you* believing, as a little kid, that you were of the Devil. That you were no good and were going to die because of *who* you were. They pounded that shit so far into your head that you believed it yourself. It's good that you stopped believing, but I can imagine the damage that was done. Well, trust me, Jehovah isn't coming to get you. And because you developed a skill, your accuracy with the weather (I remember that now, how you were so into it, and how you enjoyed it), they took it to be from Satan. In-fucking-credible, out-fucking-rageous! So, in your case, you were afraid of Jehovah. You had it in your head that the great Almighty God was going to strike you dead at any time, whenever he saw fit. You were a little kid, but your parents believed it too, and why? Brings us right back around to the same place, the Watchtower Society. *They* told your folks you were evil, your folks swallowed that bilge and then force-fed it to you and made you believe it too. With me, it was the other way around, when I was little. I was taught to fear Jehovah and fed all the same rhetoric and dogma and doctrine that you were, but it was shoved so far down my throat that it backfired. I had no fear of Jehovah. Instead, I was afraid of my mother and the organization. I feared what would happen to me at home if I ate the cake or said the pledge or didn't do right in the eyes of the Society. I went to meetings and out in service because it was demanded of me, under penalty of punishment by Mother and the elders. When I got old enough to figure out that it was all a bowl of crap, I knew that not only was *I* afraid of the organization, but all the adults were, too. I didn't want to get smacked around and screamed at and whacked with a coat hanger so I did what I was told. They didn't want to be taken before the elders and counseled, they didn't want to have to sit in the back of the Hall, they didn't want to be talked about and shunned, they didn't want to be disfellowshipped and have their names announced from the platform, so they did what they were told, like sheep. They were told that they would surely die if they were disobedient to Jehovah, but what that really meant was they would die if they were disobedient to the organization. Grown people! The Watchtower society, the organization, those seven men in Brooklyn, set themselves up as God's spokesvessel and every Witness believed that they were speaking for God. That Jehovah was using the organization to speak his demands to the masses. How twisted.

L

Now you see it, and I believe you are the only one that does. I firmly believed by the time I was eight that I was no good and had to do all that I could so no one would strike me down. Now, finally, after all these years, someone understands. Thanks. I've been waiting to hear that for so many years I've lost count. But no offense, you were there, and I need to hear that from some other people. After this book comes out, maybe, hopefully then, they will finally understand why I've become what I've become. So that's why you were the Golden Child in the family; you did no wrong because you were in the belief that your mom and the elders would come after you? Now I get it; oh yea, now I understand how you slipped under the radar all those years. You see, even though I tried to be good, I just couldn't - maybe there *was* another spirit inside of me - telling me to get out and that's why I acted the way I did. I mean, I was ADHD. They didn't know about that back then and so I was just a naughty hyperactive kid in the scientific

and medical circles. I'm now considered adult ADHD, and I'm proud that I can handle it (most times that is) but back then, I was told I was possessed of the Devil and had to do everything to get him out of me without harming anyone else. I actually thought I was able to hurt people. When I went after John with that stick, Pepper was in the back carrying on, crying, "oh, oh, it happened, it has finally happened, now Satan is going to get us all." I can't prove this, and I'm sure I never will be able to and don't even want to try, but I can remember a time where my mother told Joan that something would have to be done about me since I wouldn't accept Jehovah. It's very faint in my mind, but something like that was definitely said, and who knows what it meant and what they may have done. That may be the reason I was sent to San Francisco to live with Ron back in '77. I don't know, but yet, she still insisted that I go to the Hall and she sent people to get me. I guess they wanted to show off the devil-child for all to see.

F

Yeah, man, that's about it. After two months and a couple hundred pages of e-mail conversations, we've finally come to an understanding of what the other had to deal with and how we each handled it. Essentially that when I was little and into the early teenage years when I feared the wrath of my mother and did as I was told; went to meetings, sat for studies, gave talks, went from door to door (all the time feeling like a real jackass for bugging people in their homes). I guess I was about fifteen or sixteen when I started to openly rebel, and it was just as I feared. Trips to the library with the elders, screech and smack sessions with Mother, all kinds of turmoil and strife in the house, my folks fighting because I was fighting. When I dropped out of school I had no intention of following through on my promise to pioneer straight through to the delivery date of 1975 (I no more believed it was all gonna end in '75 then I believed cows could walk upright and speak Chinese) but I needed to get out of school because the ridicule was killing me. I certainly didn't feel like any kind of Golden Boy; I felt like a freak and an asshole. I knew I had to do something soon to change things, or else something was going to break. So today I was blessed with another repressed memory that managed to burp its way up, and I believe this is very significant. I can't remember the exact timing, but it had to be sometime in '74. It was definitely after I started working and stopped pioneering, and it was probably after the November '74 incident with Zimrod and the window but it was definitely before Katie. I just remembered this today. I wanted to get out so bad, but at the time still didn't have the balls to go against Mother and leave on my own, that I decided to take the easy way out. I concocted an elaborate story and tried to get myself disfellowshipped. I went to Mother and told her I had done some bad things and the time had come for me to man up and confess my sins to the elders and take my punishment. I told her that I'd started smoking pot and drinking with my friends, that I'd shoplifted and that I'd done things with girls (I actually had done none of these things yet, except guzzle some beer). She was aghast and proclaimed that we must go immediately to the elders. I said OK, but I want nothing to do with those assholes in Parkway because they were the reason I went bad. I told her to get Uncle Jim and Thom Maines over, and I would confess to Jehovah in the presence of those two men, and those two men only. It was a big step that took a lot of guts, but I was desperate, and I knew I'd feel so much better after they just plain and simply threw me out. Guess what? It didn't work. It fucking backfired, and to this day I don't know why. Jim and Thom listened to what I had to say,

then came to the conclusion that I been led astray by the demons. It could happen to anyone, and it was most likely tied to the demonized music I was listening to. My punishment was that I would not be allowed to give talks for an undetermined period of time and to alleviate the root cause, my music collection would have to be scrutinized and the offending items destroyed. I was then instructed to name all the people that I'd been smoking and drinking with, who I'd been shoplifting with, and what girls I'd been intimate with. I flat out refused. I said, "no way, I don't play that game, I don't rat out my brother, I do not give names." They insisted, saying my punishment from Jehovah would be swift and severe if I allowed these bad seeds to flourish within the organization. I again said, "hell no! Go ahead and do the math, you people know who I hang out with and if you want to start a witch hunt go right ahead, but I will not speak one name to you, end of story." That was that. My plan didn't work. I was still in. A little later on I started to hear rumors circulating that the reason I wasn't giving talks and having parts on the program anymore was that the elders strongly suspected that there was something wrong with me; something mental. Guess they were right on that... Now come on, think about it. Smoking pot, underage drinking, stealing, fucking; all disfellowshipping offenses, right? Why the hell didn't they give me what I wanted? It's like that movie *Storm of the Century* (if you haven't seen it, by all means rent it) when Andre Linoge says, "give me what I want and I'll go away." But they didn't. I can guess, and I have an idea, but I really didn't think they were that smart. Maybe they knew what I wanted and punished me by not taking action. By leaving me to stay and dangle and be talked about and looked at. Do you think they knew what they were doing? Maybe...

L

That one can go either way. Thom Maines wasn't all that smart, but Jim Hart was educated, and being your uncle he may have seen through the play and decided to go the other way. Also, Thom may not have wanted to disturb the family and pass sentence on you with your uncle sitting right there. I have so many other thoughts in the head that are getting tangled with others and I can't think fast enough to put them in their right light. I was sitting around yesterday and thought of this one guy, he was in the Greenwood then the Hamilton Hall. He looked like Jack Benny, wore glasses, I see this face in my head almost every day but with no name to it, and he was real. I know I had a run-in of some kind with him but I can't remember it - I just see his face. He was back in the Connie and Sam era. Pisses me to no end I can't put a name to this face. Yeah, my mind is a tangled web right now. One thing though, I never knew it was that hard on you. I mean, I knew it was hard, but you were the Golden Child, and The Bunn was the perfect follower, Mark and James were the most gifted, and Becky was slow but she had more sense than all of us. But you, you were the one that never had a problem unless I caused it (ask your mother); you did everything right including school and the preaching work. I was always no good and I often still feel that I am no good. No matter what is said to me, I often revert back to those days of having it drilled in my head that I was nothing. You opened my eyes to a few things I never knew about you, but there is one thing you had that I never did - a father with a spine who stuck up for you. Oh, you don't how many times I heard that your father was a no good drunkard, and I believed it for a long time, but then I started to realize that he was right. Now you have proved to me what I thought, that he was right all along. Uncle Scotty was a good dude.

F

Yea, I guess I'll never know, probably better off not knowing. I don't remember a Jack Benny-looking dude, but it may come back (not too many white guys to recall...) Yes, The Bunn was a total follower, the polar opposite of me in a lot of things. Her and Mother had a major falling out in the early nineties, right around when her and Steve got married, but she didn't take it so far as to leave the Witnesses. That thought never crossed her mind in her entire life; she was hooked like a fish, she was a sheep. I guess I'll have to expound more on the fact that my father was not a Witness, and it made for some interesting events. We lived in what was called in Witness jargon a *divided household*. That was rare in the Jehovah's Witness scheme of things and most likely contributed to the fact that I broke free without as much difficulty as you. I think it saved me a lot of mental anguish just having someone normal in the house. He was like a window to the real world. It makes me sick now to think about how Mother put him down so bad, spoke so shittily of him and his worldly ways and downgraded his family to me, and I went along with it because when I was small I didn't know any better. I believed it when I was little because I saw his drinking firsthand and heard all the fighting, but later I knew why he did both. He did stand up for me a lot, but trust me, there were a lot of wham-bam drag-down fights over how I was being raised that he didn't win. He stopped fighting after awhile, just gave in and gave up, stopped putting up a Christmas tree and all, but I remember he told her that one day I would grow up and turn away from her and all that crap she was stuffing me with. Said I was too smart to stay a Witness for too long. That's another main reason that it galled her so when I left the Witnesses; what he said so many years before turned out to be correct. But my dad was a good dude, no matter what you heard. It's sad that he died while I was still in still in my self-destructive, booze-guzzling, fast-driving, pot-smoking and pill-popping mode; he never got to see that I actually ended up OK. Never got to meet his granddaughters whom he would have loved to no end. Now here's another tale for you, and I imagine it hinges on how we had it pounded into our heads that there was no such thing as the immortal soul, no life after death, no ghosts, no spirits, nothing like that - it was all demons. In 1999 when Collin was being born, The Bunn was having a rough pregnancy and had to go to a special hospital in north Jersey that had Witness doctors and worked with blood substitutes. She came close to death having the baby and little Collin was born two months premature. After he was born and the worst was over and it was determined that both would survive, an interesting thing happened. We were visiting at the hospital, all of us, Maryann and the girls and me and on the way home Maryann said me, "I saw your father in the hospital." Now she believes in the spiritual, so of course I believed her. I said, "tell me about it." She said, "he was standing in the doorway to her room dressed like a doctor. He came in to check on his daughter and when he saw she was OK, he left. I went out in the hall, but he was gone, and there was no doctor around who looked like that. I recognized him from the pictures you have. I knew who he was and he knew who I was." I said, "wow, that's great, but how come I didn't see him?" She said, "Because you don't believe." I said, "but yes I do, you know I'm cool with ghosts and spirits and all that." She said, "No, you don't. You think you believe, and you want to believe, and you try to believe, but you don't. You can't. You had it so far engrained into your mind that there's no such thing, that you'll probably never see it." What a crying shame...

L

Holy fucking shit. I'm the same way - I believe, I want to believe, and I try to believe. Maryann is right; we will never see it unless we find a way to rid this shit that's entrenched in our brains. See, it never goes away; it just festers, sours with age, and rears its ugly face every chance it gets! I firmly believe your father was there, he was checking on his baby, to see that she was alright. I always argued with The Bunn, but it didn't mean I didn't like her. I felt sorry for her as my years out the hands of Jehovah passed. The first time I her saw in many, many years was at Uncle Charlie's funeral, she was there with your mother. I spoke no words to your mother and wouldn't even make eye contact with her. The Bunn was happy to meet Sean and Lynn. She spoke kindly to me, we laughed, thought up a few old memories - then your mother pulled her away. As we were leaving, we met again in the parking lot and I went to give her a hug and your mother said, "stay away from him and get in the car!" This was a thirty-something woman that mother of yours was talking to, and The Bunn followed her like a little lost lamb. I called out to your mother; she stopped but never turned around to make eye contact, and I yelled out that she can go fuck herself and I hope she lands right where she belongs, in Jehovah's holy hell! Lynn was so scared she cried all the way home. Sean was in shock because I told him that was your mother and sister and he doesn't talk to his aunts and cousins that way. Donna did the smart thing and kept her mouth shut all the way home - GOD THAT FELT GOOD! May the Little Bunn rest in eternal peace; she deserves that. I didn't know your mother and sister went at it. It's a shame she didn't jump ship, but I bet she didn't because you already had, and she always wanted her mom to feel good.

F

Yes, of course he was there. I believe it wholeheartedly, it makes perfect sense. Guess he knows I'm doing alright, too...that was June of 1999. Less than a year later, my good friends Dave, Richie, Johnny, Billy, Fran, Susan and I put together a website called ghost-hunter.com. We had a lot of fun with that, actually went to a few places with the equipment just like they do in the TV show now, but I never saw any ghosts. What's weird is we have some footage from the basement of the Logan Inn in New Hope (there's a big story of that place, room six being haunted and all that) and there I am wandering around in the liquor storeroom with the EVP meter and there are all these colored orbs bouncing around the room, floating around me like a school of fish. I knew something out of the ordinary was going on in that basement but I couldn't feel it. Everybody else was like, wow man, this place is full of spirits, we can feel their presence, but I couldn't. But I knew they were there. Orbs. On film! Those guys are all good friends of mine but to this day none of them, except possibly Richie, has any clue that I was a teenage Jehovah's Witness. See, once I was gone, I never talked about it. I always acted like it never was. I don't imagine The Bunn ever would have jumped ship, not even to spite her mother. She believed everything they told her, never questioned as much as a word. She was in to stay; she had nothing else. So refresh my memory on the timetable. When did Uncle Charlie pass? I'm trying to figure out why I wasn't there; I always tried to make it to weddings and funerals, as they were they only times when the entire family was in one place. I must have been working. As for The Bunn, she didn't want to turn into me. I

think she was both fascinated by and afraid of my lifestyle, and she wanted to remain safe in the cocoon of the organization. In her mind, she equated leaving Jehovah with turning to drugs, drinking in bars, associating with unsavory characters, consorting with loose women, proselytizing, embracing false religion by acknowledging holidays and birthdays, not being close to God; essentially total and complete rebellion. She watched me do so for eight years before I finally grew up, moved out and started my own family. No way man, the world and its ways were definitely not for The Little Bunn. And by the time they fought, she was almost thirty, and she knew nothing else. She would have had a much harder time making her way in the world than I did; I was nineteen and had plenty of time to learn my way around. She would have been lost, plain and simple. She was in for life.

L

Uncle Charlie died about a year and half before The Bunn. I remember getting the call from Aunt Mad about The Bunn - it hit me hard because we were so close in age. You're right; she would never have lasted out there. She was tainted for life by your mother and the overseers of Jehovah; a lost soul so to speak. I hope she and your father are together again, laughing this all off.

F

If Uncle Charley died a year and a half before The Bunn, that puts it sometime around the spring of 2003. Middle of tax season, and working Quick Chek too. No wonder I didn't have time for a funeral... I've been thinking again about the pivotal year of 1975. You were twelve and I was eighteen. Throw me some stuff from your world during that year if you're of a memory. No rush, whenever. Three great works of art blossomed forth out of 1975 - *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*, *Physical Graffiti* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. And yes, once this project is done, it's time to flush the toilet. Thy will be done. Remember *Spirit in the Sky* by Norman Greenbaum? Great song, I have it on the MySpace site. We were forbidden to listen to that song. Think about that. It's actually a nice little song, full of pleasant words about Jesus. Guess it was the "going up" line that threw it into forbidden status. Life after death and all that. Weird too; Jewish dude singing about the Christ.

L

Of course you know that song is now stuck in my head. '77 and '78 were my big years - fourteen-fifteen years old then. I agree with the big events of 1975, and I have one from 1976 for you. I wasn't allowed to watch the pagans celebrate our country's 200th birthday; the fireworks over the Statue of Liberty, you know I didn't see that until years later in a re-run? My mother was raging on about that from the start; carrying on about how the pagans would be dancing in the streets, drinking wine, having relations with women. It was so sick now that I look back on it. Oh, flush we shall!

F

Dancing in the streets, drinking wine and having relations with women? Well, now I know what the Bicentennial was *really* all about! God forbid we be a little patriotic, wave the flag, that sort of thing. Pagans, pahhh! Damn Witnesses were down on everything...

L

She must have had a hole in her head somewhere. I mean, the drinking wine and relations with women. Doesn't that sound like the Hebrews waiting for Moses to come down from Mt. Sinai? She got really bad, man, and way out there.

F

It definitely sounds more like something out of the Bible than out of the Philly Inquirer. But that's what they did, they related everything in real life to something that took place thousands of years ago in a Bible story. Yeah, way out there.

L

Any wannabe horror writers out there should check themselves into a Kingdom Hall for a year before they start writing. That way, they'll be better than Stephen King ever was. The stuff they came up with was more far-fetched than a cow milking a dog; you're right, no one can think this stuff up.

F

You're right about the writing, and anybody who doesn't know any better will swear our book is horror fiction, but we know better. So, I had this weird dream the other night, but the images were strangely comical now that I think about it. My subconscious must really be working overtime with this crap we've been filtering through our minds. Zimrod, Andersman, Clemente and Ernie, all shrunken down to the size of midgets, complete with short legs, barrel chests, stubby little arms and sausage fingers. They are standing in a little room (Parkway library?) next to each other about to give criticism to a full-grown white guy. Andersman is in a complete clown suit, Clemente is a mime all painted white and silent, Zimrod is naked with Pepsi bottles dangling from both ears and his crotch, and Ernie is a minstrel in full blackface, harking up big balls of phlegm into an ashtray. The big white guy is a symbolism of everybody that ever got castigated in that room, and he tells all four in a booming voice to drop dead. All four topple over and crash to the rug and break apart like the Hanover St dummy, and a thick yellow pus-like substance flows out of them and spreads across the ratty rug. The big white guy then floats up and disappears right through the ceiling, goin' up to the spirit in the sky... Gone insane, man, insane in the brain! Go ahead and top that!

L

You had me had pissing my pants reading that. They sound like they were all the little creatures in *Phantasm*. The modern-day horror authors have nothing up there to match what we both lived through.

F

I guess *Phantasm* partly inspired it, but think about the symbolism. Clemente a MIME! Mimes can't talk, and old Clemente could never shut his prejudiced, criticizing trap, so I turned him into a white, silent circus freak. Ernie a blackfaced minstrel. Zimrod naked. Zimrod was a manager for Pepsi and he was always minding everybody else's business, so I rendered him naked, exposed for all to see. And Andersman a clown. Well, they were

all a bunch of fucking clowns when you think about it. I made them into midgets because I love midgets and that's my way of not allowing the Witnesses to destroy the midget concept for me. *Turn 'em into midgets, fill 'em up with yellow shit, and then bust 'em up like piñatas.* I love it. Maybe I'll take it a step further... Ok, here's this. The law of attraction continues to work in mysterious ways. I got called upon to do a company interview on the local AM station this morning. So I did. Turns out I never even knew this station was on the dial, but it's an oldies station in the grand tradition of WABC. The DJ who interviewed me actually worked in NYC years ago, and knew Dan Ingram. So I'm sitting there talking about tax law on an AM radio oldies station, and come to find out I did such a fine job, the company is going to use me to record all this season's local radio commercials. Very cool; now I get to ham it up on the radio. So after we're done, I go to the car, drive away and tune in to this station, which is *WROD The Rod, 1340 on your AM dial, Daytona's only oldies station.* Every song they play is from that period - around '66 thru '72 - all the music I listened to in my Witness heyday. How about that? I mean, why today? The first song they played after my interview was - guess what? I think you know...

L

CLOWNS! So right! Don't tell me, please don't tell me. *Spirit In the Sky.* Coolness!! Can't wait to hear your voice over the digital connections.

F

Spirit in the Sky, it was! I think I'll designate *Spirit in the Sky* as the official song of *The Armageddon Project.* Yes, Clowns. The Insane Clown Posse. Did I ever mention that I utterly despise clowns? I don't much like mimes, either, but midgets are ever so cool. I have an old buddy from Dunellen who used to organize illegal midget-tossing parties. Made about a grand a night and split it with the wee folk...

L

Went Christmas shopping and got lots of goodies for the kids. Sean's tastes changed so much now that he is growing, so everything is more expensive, but it's worth it to see the smiles. I'll be doing the outside of the house on Friday. I do it every year that day and it takes me all day to do it. But, I have fun with it, and try to out-do myself every year too. I like it...

F

The fact that you take so much enjoyment in getting the place looking good for Christmas is a good thing. They haven't completely ruined it for you. Some former Witnesses don't even bother with Christmas or, if they do, they just do it for their families. Sounds like you're really into it. Me too, but it took awhile. After the big escape, I didn't really care one way or the other; but once we had our own place and the kids came, I really got into it. I'm actually, to this day, a bigger fan of Halloween than Christmas, because of my interest in things weird, but there's plenty of Christmas spirit to go around... Aha, a memory has harkened forth. It was 1980; I bought my girlfriend a stereo for Christmas. I remember bringing all the stuff over to your house to wrap so Mother dear wouldn't see me wrapping Christmas presents for my worldly girlfriend, and your mother helped me.

Don't remember if you were there or not. Well, may your pagan ass make the house look superb. Your wanting to put the tree up early is a symbol of pure rebellion in addition to your love of Christmas. It's OK. It's normal. You're doing Christmas and liking it and that's another victory over those who would have continued to ruin your life had you not fled.

L

I'm good with the decorations on the outside, but I don't really enjoy the spirit so much. I guess it's how many times it was drilled into my head that it was no good and the fact that I'm not happy in my surroundings; it all adds up. I do the lights for the kids and me but that's really it, and I buy the goodies for the kids so they can have all the fun I never knew. I have to admit it though; I am enjoying it more each year. I love to shop for gifts and I love my lights and other decorations. I never knew that you did that, but I can see my mother helping you. She was more than halfway out by 1980.

F

Yeah, it was one big box and a few small ones; went right from the old Silo on Parkway to your place and got everything all wrapped up nice. Now that I think about it, she was the only one home. It was cool of *your* mother to help, but again, I was twenty-three and hiding from *my* mother so I could wrap Christmas presents. That part is just plain sad. Someone on *Coast-to-Coast* last night put forth the theory that the people who wrote *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, Roddenberry and Lucus and the rest, were actually told what to write by people from the future. Seems time travel is discovered and made possible sometime around 2150 and some people came back to give us ideas of what it would be like a few centuries later. Makes sense to an extent, because the science in those shows isn't that far off. An interesting concept, eh? OK, off to the firm for some spouting of the corporate dictum...

L

In 1968 Kirk asked McCoy if he knew how to go back in time. The simple answer was slingshot around the sun and if you build up enough speed, you'll break the barrier and move through time. He asked again in *Star Trek III* and got the same answer. Think this over - what do they do now to get spacecraft to Mars or Jupiter? They *slingshot* them around Venus and then around Earth so they build up great speeds and cut the trips time in half or more. That concept was alive in the mind of Roddenberry and has been used in almost every launch the past two decades. Roswell exists!

F

Oh yeah. It's all out there, for those of us with open minds...

L

Another memory has surfaced. Along with the weather, I was always interested in space. I knew there had to be life out there other than Jehovah and his angels; something put us here or we formed from other planets and space dust, as Carl Sagan would love to say. I remember being told I could not watch Sagan's *Cosmos*; however, I did so every chance I got. I was amazed with it all and began comparing the visions in the Bible to those found

on TV. Well, stupid ass that I was, I asked Zimrod about it one time and all hell broke loose. "There is no other life in the universe, we are it," proclaimed he. Well, not one to accept that, I started getting books out of the library and looked further into it. Needless to say, I was stripped of my library card, notes were sent to school that I could not be involved in anything that had to do with the formation of the universe or anything like that. In seventh grade, the big project of the year was to join the debates on how the universe formed and how we came about. I had tons of thoughts on this subject but was not allowed to do it unless they added the Biblical version to the mix. The science teacher, ever happy to give me a hard time anyway because of my being a Witness, agreed and couldn't wait until I put Jehovah's version together so he could rip it apart and watch me get further ridicule because of my so-called belief. Well, I got the last laugh on all of them. I refused to do it based on the false notations of the Witness Bible and said I would sit with the Big Bang Theory debate team instead. I wasn't allowed to do it that way and was told I would fail the entire year if I didn't do it the way I was assigned. So, in my cockiness, I put together these words, and I'm sure you know them well: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth." I was done. I sat down and never said another word on the subject until now. Everything I ever had an interest in was driven by the devil inside me; knowing the weather made me a devil's prophet, having an interest in space and the universe made me a warlock or something. Do I believe in other life forms? You're damn right I do! Do I wish to see something to prove it someday? A big HELL, YEAH!! I'll even have a sign in my hand that says: "Take me with you...cause there's no intelligent life down here!"

F

I used to have a bumper sticker on my old Chevy that read *Beam Me Up Scotty, There's No Intelligent Life Down Here*. Seems that becomes truer with each passing day. You know there's a baseball game in the Bible? Oh yea - "In the big inning..." hohoho. Anyway, that was a good answer. Were you made to present your teacher with the *Evolution* book like I was? As far as other life forms out there, of course there are. It would be narrow-minded and ridiculous to assume that ignorant, greedy, self-destructive, violence-prone mankind is the only form of life in the known universe. If that's the case, then God has done a miserable job and needs to start again. I will even go so far as to espouse the possibility that the Nephilim still walk the Earth and breed. They live on in the secret societies such as the Illuminati, the Freemasons and the Skull and Bones. They control everything and install their puppets in high places all over the world. So I'm picking up that thread I never finished - the period from late '75 through to the end for me by the summer of '76. Since Sept 14 we've been all over the calendar with these mnemonic hemorrhages. Mine is simply this: birth, school, work, escape. Yours is pretty much the same. So here is the chronology of the final months of my Jehovah's Witnessism: I have to place the beginning of the end at November of 1974; I was seventeen. That was when the incident with the window took place and Zimrod decided to forbid me to associate with his son, my good buddy Jeff. He spread the word around and the parents of the kids I had been hanging out with followed his gospel. The powers-that-be branded me as a bad influence and I was not to be in the social circle anymore. That was when I started making new friends and hanging out more in Asbury Park. Enter the Dons we talked about earlier - Lawson and Swisher. That was also when I started

spending time with Grafton. Also Barbara Vincenzo; she felt sorry for me because she knew I wasn't the monster the Zimrods and the Clementes were making me out to be. Billy still hung out with me, but only when he was able to lie to his grandmother and sneak out of the house. Not long after that Katie started coming to meetings and you know how that ended up. I had a girlfriend named Allyson and she broke up with me in March of '75. I found a new girlfriend named Gabrielle from the Lakewood congregation at the spring assembly. I was also hanging out with some of her friends from down there and people from Asbury. At Parkway, they wouldn't let me have any more parts on the program because of my so-called behavior. Then the Katie mess unfolded and I finally had enough. But you know all that - summer of '75, the Allentown assembly, all that. In September of '75, there was a trip to Vermont with my folks and The Bunn, Ronnie McNally, Aunt Dot, Angie and Jim. Very interesting it was. One thing I remember was Jim carrying around the *Truth* book in his back pocket and doing the underlining thing whenever there was spare time. He was actually underlining in that book out in the woods, and my mother made a crack about him being overly pious and self-righteous; imagine that. My mother, of all people, commenting on someone else's over-holiness. Later that year, in October, the boys were allowed to hang with me again and Jeff, Jimmy, Steve and me went on a camping trip to Stokes Forest in my blue Thunderbird. There is not much to be remembered of that trip as by then we had all discovered the illegals and were well on our way out. At this time, I was working at McDonald's and was developing friendships with worldly folk, including my first non-Witness girlfriend, Syndi. That lasted two weeks as I mentioned previously. I had also defected to the Hamilton congregation, as I was disgusted with the hypocrites and parasites at Parkway. It also kept me at a pleasant distance from my mother. I still had friends at the Asbury and Lakewood congregations, and spent some time there too. But I was drifting away, having no interest anymore, even in the social events at the Buckingham Palace. You see, I was discovering the real world, and I liked it. I still hung out with Jimmy and Steve, who were drifting away in their own right, and things went along fairly smooth. A lot of times I would leave the house for the meeting, only to go to the mall or to a movie or a ballgame or something. Then late in the spring, I was seen chewing on a pencil by Rosemary Smithers, and that was the last straw. I threw in the towel, and I was a Witness no more. Summer came and I still did the assembly thing, this one at Delaware Park in Wilmington, just to socialize with the few Witness buddies I had left. I remember going to Atlantic City with this black kid named Clayton who was the son of someone my mother was studying the Bible with, and buying pot down there under the boardwalk. Remember, this was Atlantic City in 1976, before the first casino was even erected. But that was about it, and by the fall of '76 I was completely gone. Nineteen years old and freshly enrolled in the school of life. The rest is history....

L

Here is what I called a normal week. As I grew out of being a toddler, things that went on around me were what I believed to be quite normal. Aside from school, and being taken out of kindergarten since I asked too many questions, a day in my house was something like this: Starting on a Monday I'd wake up, play with some toys, and watch some television. I wasn't allowed to watch *Sesame Street* if The Count was on as he was considered otherworldly and a product of the Devil, but I got to watch Captain Kangaroo,

Sally Starr, and Mr. Rogers (who was later deemed to worldly for me to watch). My toys were limited to Tonka trucks, some Hot Wheels, and a few Matchbox cars. I had plenty of stuffed animals, and that's where I found myself in a world of imagination. My dad worked different shifts at the plant so most of the time it was just my mother and I. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were normal to any family outside of the Witnesses so that was not a problem. Tuesday nights were Bible study nights. We went to the Hall and sat in the library or else to someone's house for an hour to discuss the Bible, the *Truth* book, or other Witness publications. Wednesday and Thursday were the same as a Monday. Fridays were for going to the Hall for the weekly meeting; two hours from 7:30 to 9:30. Saturday was always the day to go door to door to preach the word of Jehovah and advise people that they were going to die a horrible death if they didn't follow us. It was like we had a sign on us that read "THE END OF THE WORLD IS COMING! JEHOVAH WILL TAKE ALL FROM THIS WORLD THAT DO NOT FOLLOW HIS WORD!" We went out during the week occasionally, but Saturday was the big day. I hardly knew the Saturday morning cartoons, and that made things bad at school later on, because I had no idea of what was really going on. Bugs Bunny was my favorite; any Warner Brothers cartoon for that matter, but I had to sneak to watch them since my mother thought they were too violent and suggestive for me. Since I was already poisoned in their eyes, I was forbidden to watch them, most other cartoons, and the Three Stooges. For a while, I actually accepted that fate. Sunday was Watchtower day at the Hall, another two hours wasted in that stuffy building. First the main talk, the *public address* it was called on those leaflets we used to pass out all over town, and then the Watchtower study. It stunk, but again, I thought it to be normal back then. At least once every few weeks, I was dragged into the library to be spoken to since they *knew* I was the son of Satan and they had to be sure I was complying with all the rules. During these important growing and learning years, I was pushed deeper into their views as the world passed me by. There were some things I got that were worldly though. My father was a big John Wayne fan, but he wasn't permitted to watch many of the movies, especially the ones about war. You know, films about the people who saved our freedom and got no credit from the Witnesses, only grief. My dad took me to see *True Grit* when it came out in 1969. Being only six, I didn't understand much of it but I enjoyed watching The Duke on the big screen. I'm sure all will remember towards the end; the wide-open field, and The Duke, one man against several bad guys, one of who called him a one-eyed fat man. I laughed, and my father laughed, but then John Wayne did the unthinkable. He cussed: "*Fill your hands, you son of a bitch.*" I howled, but my father was floored. He yanked me out of the movie and dragged me home crying and screaming. John Wayne had cussed! That was a fate worse than being shot dead in *The Cowboys*! I didn't see the end of *True Grit* until I was eighteen; along with many other movies that I was not allowed to see or had been pulled out of. My father didn't watch another John Wayne movie the rest of his life. Towards the end of 1990, I bought him a John Wayne box set, which had some of his favorites in it, including *True Grit*. At this time, my mother had already passed and my father was very ill with cancer of the brain and lung; but get this, he would not watch *True Grit*. He never saw the end of that movie; he never knew that Glen Campbell saved the day - even after all those years away from Jehovah; he still couldn't bear to watch the movie. I asked to watch it with him and he said no, that's alright, he would check it out later. This is what *normal* did to him. I did get to see other movies

that were deemed corrupt by the elders, and when they found out, they belittled my parents (and I never thought to wonder how the elders knew what movies we were going to see). At times, especially after seeing *Dog Day Afternoon*, I was blamed for this. It was I, casting some kind of spell over my parents, to take me to see these movies. *Dog Day Afternoon* was thought to be a homosexual movie and that was a big no-no to the Witnesses, but I got to see it, and to this day, I love that movie. I took a liking to the Elton John song *Ticking* because it reminded so much of that movie and believe it or not, my own life; but without the killings. *Normal* would soon destroy me; to this day in fact. School, life, girls, friends; I'm still batting close to zero there, but I'm getting better. I'm finding out what normal really might be. I say might be, since everyone else's normal is quite different from our own.

F

Jesus Christ. I remember *True Grit* as a great movie. I also recall you being a little Glen Campbell fan, and I can remember, though vaguely, your mother talking about the end of the movie and Glen Campbell being a hero and all that. Rooster Cogburn, right? Man, it's been so long. *Dog Day Afternoon* was an absolutely excellent movie. I bought the DVD for John last year because he is a major Pacino/Scarface fan and had never seen *Dog Day*. It's a true story, you know, and yes, they were gay. That was the entire motive to rob the bank, to pay for the sex-change operation. It was a movie! Now here again is the law of attraction at work in this project. I pulled out yet another old tape to play in the car at night; this one my homemade "Two Best Albums of 1974 - *Caribou* and *Abbey Road*" (yes I know *Abbey Road* came out in '69, but I didn't discover it properly until '74). You mention the song *Ticking*. Great song. I always envisioned the events in that song; the bar, the working-class neighborhood in Queens, the tension of a young boy who can't find his way in life and is ticking like a bomb...and some ten years later comes the song *I Don't Like Mondays*. I thought, wow, this is just like *Ticking*. I knew *Mondays* was based on the Lizzie Borden story but was never sure if Bernie based *Ticking* on an actual event. Do you know? Anyway, when I listened to *Caribou* last week and it finished up with *Ticking*, I thought of something different this time. Not Queens, not the Kicking Mule, not Lizzie Borden; I thought of you. I thought that if you were a lesser, weaker person, you would have been a prime candidate to go do something like that. Of course you are a better person and wouldn't take out your Witness-induced anxieties on a bar filled with innocent people. I was going to mention that about thirty e-mails ago, but got sidetracked on other shit. In a bizarre twist, there was some kind of bad event in Daytona early today; I saw the cops and ambulances and fire trucks and stretchers on Nova Rd about three in the morning. Since there was what looked like a lot of carnage and no wrecked cars anywhere around, I'm wondering if there was a bar shooting. There must be a higher level of consciousness between us as we work on this project, with the songs and the music and the TV and movies kicking around back there. On a lighter note, were you allowed to watch *The Flintstones*? I was, and still do. I don't think they ever caught on that when Fred and Barney were drinking cactus juice, it was alcohol. How sad that John, even in his final days with nothing to lose, wouldn't watch the rest of *True Grit*. He was that far mentally scarred, and that's a fucking crime. Do you think maybe he snuck off and watched it when you weren't around? More to come...

L

Ticking always fit me. I love the song, and I can relate to its meaning. I don't know if Bernie penned that for an actual event or not but you have to admit, it fit *Dog Day*, and it fits me. Wow, I can't believe you were thinking that, but then it must be true; a mental connection has seemed to surface here. Last night while cleaning the old cedar chest out, I found tons of pix of my parents. So many of them were of my mother in California (she got to go there one last time before she died) and my father after she died posing with Christmas trees and the like. Do I think he finally watched the end of *True Grit*? I would really like to hope so. Yes, I loved Glen Campbell back then and I still like some of his music. I find myself tuning into them from time to time in the ol' mind. Of course, I watched *The Flintstones*. I wasn't into them as much as the Warner and old MGM things, but I was allowed to watch them. *The 'stones* were funny; my favorite was Barney. *Solar Prestige*...

F

Creepy. If "*Ticking*" wasn't about a real event, then it's a major work of art. Something strong had to be going through Bernie's head to put together a story like that, in such detail. But I, to this day, can't fathom where they were going with *Solar Prestige*. That's gotta be one of the strangest pieces of music ever. Here's a brief memory from that '74 era. I was working at the job on the grounds maintenance crew; had that job from late summer '74 until they fired me at the end of May '75. Anyway, part of our job was to put up and decorate the Christmas trees around the building. It just so happened that a young woman named Mary Pentesta also worked for the company, in one of the offices. Young Mary was a Witness from Hamilton and I knew her well, mainly from the early morning street work in Trenton. So, I'm called upon to place balls on the tree in the lobby. I'm standing there with a big box of balls and lights and garland and all that god-forsaken pagan Christmas stuff and I see Mary walking through the lobby, right towards me. I became frightened and nervous, and I thought, "Oh shit, I can't let her see me hanging balls on a Christmas tree! She'll tell!" I actually took off, said I had to go take a piss, and dashed to the bathroom so she wouldn't see me doing my job. Is that fucking sad or what? And again, it wasn't an Armageddonly death or the wrath of Jehovah I was afraid of, it was my mother and the elders I was afraid of. The organization. The Society Its memories like those that make me want to look in the mirror and give myself the finger for being such a weakling. Anyway, these days I take great pride in hanging balls and such on the tree. To be continued...

L

So, you've been able to find out a lot of things about me that you never knew, and most of them still bother me. I don't have much enjoyment in life but what I do have, I cherish. I found things out about you too, like I never knew you were that afraid of your mother. Sounds like she was a real slavedriver for the Watchtower Society's cause. I guess they were right about me; I had fear of the mother, but more fear of the fake God coming to get me, yet I fought back as I got older. That appears to be the one difference in us - I had a mouth and used it and you took to not letting anyone see you - unless you were chewing pencils, that is. They did have me believing that I was going to die by Jehovah's mighty hand though; I was warped with that thought. Although I never think

that way, there are still things I just can't do or have a hard time doing. You say they haven't ruined me, but in a big way, they did. Now, thanks to this project, I'm fighting it more, but the fight is limited.

F

I guess when you get right down to the skin of it, all pretenses aside, no phony baloney, they ruined both of us, and countless others. But think about the poor slobs who were too weak or too far brainwashed or just plain didn't have the balls to get out. At least we were strong enough to call it quits before it was too late. Like Rocky; bruised and bleeding, but still standing! You're right about certain things that are hard to do, even at this late age. I guess the brain is like a sponge, and the some of the residue of everything it sops up throughout life will always remain. But I still like to lie to myself and say all is well, and all manner of things are well. The project shall carry on...

L

You say we have competition out there, but we lived the horror. I was considered real-life horror; let some of those out there top that. I can bet the farm none of the former Witnesses out there were ever subjected to what I was from birth. Brainwashing is correct; that is what they did to us. Even though we were both strong enough to break free - I want you to think about this for a second - we are still not free. It still lives inside of us because we were both so young when the damage was done. Sure, we have moved on, we have lives, we have kids, we have Christmas; but we still both have scars that will carry on forever. Shit, we still question ourselves sometimes when we do something. This project must be told just the way it happened, all the horror. I am counting on the fact that through all these pages, most of the horror is released finally - *flushed*, as you would say. I already feel better and I know that you do too, but it has to be flushed completely for this to work.

F

Amen to that! The flushing will take place and the sewers shall never be the same. We shall purge, and we shall flush! Here's something else that might be of interest to you. You know how I'm into the weird and abnormal; scary movies, King and Koontz and McCammon, ghosts and goblins, cemeteries, conspiracies, all that stuff. I also have a major interest in what one might call the doomsday scene. Stuff like *The Stand* by King (truly the greatest end-of-the-world story ever told) and *Swan Song* by Robert McCammon, end-of-the-world movies, disaster movies, all that good stuff. Kind of a sick fascination, to enjoy end-of-the-world fiction so much, but not surprising in any way because we had Armageddon pounded into our heads and up our asses from day one. But here's the really odd part. If such a thing were ever to happen, be it nuclear war caused by the Middle East (or by us), or a plague that wipes out 99.9% of the population like in *The Stand*, or global warming, or global freezing, or even an end brought on by God - I automatically assume, I have no doubt in my mind, and by that I mean I am absolutely **100%** certain - that I would be amongst the survivors. I know that as well as I know I'm gonna eat tonight. Not a doubt, just absolute certainty. Is that crazy or what? I would survive, no matter how the end was to happen. Is it because I wasn't afraid of Armageddon then, therefore I'm not afraid of it now? Is it because I was a Witness and

had it pounded into my head that we as God's people were going to be saved? Is it because I'm just butt-stone whacko? Another thing is I fully believe is I am going to live to be very old, whether I want to or not. I went to a palmist when I was twenty-something and was told that I have a very long lifeline. I took that as truth and have never forgotten it. I'm sure that's what saved me from an adventuresome but accidental death between '76 and '84. Interesting, eh? OK, enough of that for now. The house is decorated inside and out; it looks pretty good. I get special pleasure out of Christmasing up the place this year because of you-know-who being around. *This is how the world ends. Not with a bang, but with a whimper.* —T S Eliot

L

If you live a long life, you will have more time to help some poor Jehovah's Witness kids along the way. I hope you see your great-grandchildren. Me, I don't think I will be around that long a time. I hope to see my two kids get married and to see their children. I smoke, I have high blood pressure, I'm always stressed out, have little patience for anything; I'm a walking time bomb. I need a life! Maybe I'll write a book after this one telling all the people what not to do after they break free.

F

The Witnesses want to live forever, that's their entire goal. If I remember it right, it's not only the punishment of death if they do wrong that they cling to, but also the reward if they continue to do right, that of everlasting life in a paradise earth. Yeah, I'll get old, but don't kid yourself; I drink, have high blood pressure, no patience, stress over finances, cholesterol, and two jobs where I sit on my ass - not to say I don't try real hard to stay in shape - but at our age that stuff is pretty common. Don't worry, you're not going anywhere for a while. You're right; people also need to be educated on what not to do after the big escape; especially if they were kids who knew nothing else. A sequel could be in the works. Carry on...

L

My biggest problem is I get stressed out too easy. It pisses me off I'm like that. Plus, I'm a very unhappy person; I know I'll get it right sooner or later, but it's the in-between that bothers me. The boy was up blasting Guns & Roses last night; I actually had to tell him to lower it. It reminded me of being yelled at to lower my Zep and 'Smith. I'm thrilled he loves our music.

F

I think the stress part runs in the family, but it's probably been enhanced by the Witness years. But there's nothing like a little Axl Rose to bring your stress level down and make you mellow, right. Young Sean is definitely going in the right direction. Rock on! A quick thought - might Ron have anything he may want to add to this?

L

I haven't said anything to him about it. I know that may sound surprising to you, but I just didn't feel it necessary. He suffered too hard with it. They took his piano away from him when they joined the Society and he lost everything he had when he was about ten. He

was older than both of us and flew the coop by sixteen, which was 1963. They trapped him again for a very short period in the early seventies but he broke free again and moved to California. Really, I would rather not include him, and because of the fact that each time I blow off steam about my life he changes the subject, I left him out. Let's leave him alone.

F

Not a problem. If he's got it out of his head, no way do I want him to dig up a dead dog and breathe in the stench of it. I didn't know they took away his piano; he probably would have become an accomplished musician. Another sad case.

L

They took everything from him when they became followers. His piano was taken because he would no longer need it since the end was coming and he wouldn't need to play it anymore. But they gave it - *GAVE IT* - to another Witness, Virginia Vincenzo. What fucking nerve! Plus, our wonderful mother threw out all his comics and stuff, including the first ever issue of *Famous Monsters In Filmland*; it'd be worth tens of thousands of dollars today. I don't know if he has it out of his system or not, all I know is each time I mention something he changes the subject as quickly as possible. Maybe it bothers him to talk about it more than I know, and that's why I said you were the only one who ever took the time to listen to me about this. I was wondering when you were going to ask me about that.

F

It probably does bother him, so we'll leave him out. I'd go nuts; that would be like, if I had a personally autographed first edition King book or a signed Springsteen album with my name on it and they threw them away. What fucking gall and what absolute stupidity. And what a pitiful waste! Do you remember Renee and Joe DeBleu? They had a girl named Marcy whom my mother used to baby-sit for. She was three years younger than me and was around a lot when we were small. If I remember rightly, Renee left both Joe and Jehovah and took Marcy with her. I didn't see her again until '73 at Buckingham, and she had blossomed from a scrawny little kid to quite an attractive teenager. Then I never saw her again; I don't know why, if they moved, or she went back with her mother, or what. So here's the strange thing. The other night I dreamed about Marcy grown up as a woman. I haven't seen her since '73, don't think I've thought about her since then, and wouldn't know her if I ran into her on the street. Yet I dreamed about this woman whom I know was Marcy. Interesting, eh? Just when I think there's nothing left to remember, that we've run out of material, something else pops up, this time in a dream. Anything new on your side?

L

Of course I remember them. Very much so. Marcy lived with us for a while when things were going bad for Joe and Renee, but not for long. I often wondered what happened to her. She was a beautiful girl who treated me like her little brother. I thought of her about a month ago and actually think of her often. I hope she is one of us now. Nothing new on my side. I've been in some strange moods lately; I go from pissy to happy to sad in a

matter of a few hours. I guess things are catching up to me. It's still driving me nuts that I can't think of that one guy's name. He was one of those people that believed I would be better off dead than continuing to ruin the good name of Jehovah. It seems that each time I think of something, I keep coming back to that same time period; the 1969 to 1977 era with strong points to the '73-'77 time, yet I feel there is still something missing. I would have to say that era damaged me so much, that I can't let go of it. Sean keeps asking more questions and I keep telling him that he will have to read the book. I get angry when I think of those things so I don't want to take it out on him.

F

Ah, small world. What was the time frame there when Marcy was with you? We must have still been pretty young. We could look her up but I'm sure she's married and has a new name, maybe even moved away. The dream was set somewhere around Princeton; not the city, but the rural area to the north, maybe up around Great Rd, near Skillman or somewhere like that. You know how dreams tend to distort time and space. I hope she is well, wherever she may be. A name popped to mind, maybe not the right one, but I remember a tall, skinny, kinda sad-looking fellow with glasses named Sam Aniraf. He your guy?

L

I was around seven or eight, so it was late '70 or early '71. I hope she is well too; she was a nice person, sweet as could be. No, not Sam Aniraf - but I forgot about him until you mentioned his name. I don't have too many memories about him; I know he was around though. I drive by the Hall on Parkway almost every day because a friend of Sean's that I drive home from school lives on the corner of Pingree and Latona and I swing out of Concord to come back home. And there it is staring me right in the face. Fucking place...

F

Someday we shall remember your mystery man! Seeing that hole every day must be rough on your bowels, but therein rests the story, the goose, the magical bird whom lay the golden eggs. Clemente, Zimrod, Andersman, all of 'em. Pah! Funny how those clowns don't scare me in the least now, but back then they were so much involved in our lives that we had to actually fear them. Ah, but isn't growing up grand?

L

It bothers me to know end that I can't name him. He must have had something to do with the family and me somewhere along the line. Maybe he's blocked out for a reason and my mental capacity is not allowing him to surface. It's like that place has a life of its own, like it laughs when it see me. I know that sounds like I'm off the deep end (not yet, but leaning slowly that way), but I get a sinking feeling every time I see it.

F

OK, let's work on this. Was he an old dude? Was he white? Was he a member of the Parkway clan or did he hail from another congregation? Was he a so-called friend of your folks? Did he give talks? Was he an elder? We are going to cough up this guy's name if it

takes a year. Ya got me curious now. The old Parkway Hall, what is that building now? Is it a Baptist church? Does it house some kind of evangelical revival bunch? And it laughs when it sees you? Nothing deep-end about that, it's full of old ghosts; ghosts of past events and sad stories and bad memories. For us, it's a creepy mini-rendition of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining*. It does have a life of its own, for you and me anyway, because we have so much of our past bottled up in there. We could probably sneak in there at night and feel the spirits of Clemente and Zimrod and Andersman and old Ernie Hinkmeier, might even see them down in the bathroom or languishing in the library; old memories come to life. We might even see pictures of ourselves on the wall, from years ago, like we belong there. It may be just a pile of bricks and mortar, but what went on in that pile damn near took our sanity, and definitely lopped a bunch of productive years off our lives. A haunted cathedral for us, but just a normal old place of worship for the poor dummies that gather there now. The more I think about it, the more I'd like to find Marcy and Katie, if for no other reason than to know for myself that they got out safe and sound.

L

He was part of the Klockner gang, but I think he started out in Greenwood. White, he was an elder, I can see his face. DUDE! Even as I am typing this it just popped into my head. Sigrust. Brother Sigrust! I still don't know why he is so important to me though, but maybe now there will be a breakthrough; this guy has some meaning to me other than that he thought I should be dead or put away. He was no friend; I do know that, not to me at least. DAMN! I'll have to look at the place closer; Calvary-something-or-other I think. That damn building gives me the creeps and it still looks the same. Aside from the new sign out front, nothing has changed. I would actually like to get inside of it; maybe when you come up, we can contact the keepers of the gate and get inside. Pictures, thoughts; that place is a horror chamber! Might even hear old Ernie hock a few in the third row. I would like to know more about Marcy too. I'm hoping like you that she is free.

F

There was a Sigrust, Henry Sigrust from Hamilton, but I don't remember much about him except he reminded me a bit of Uncle Bill. Is Sigrust your guy? We can look up in township hall who owns that building and get their contact information. I would imagine by simply telling the truth we'd be let in; just tell them we're going to include its history in an upcoming bestseller. What run-down sanctified old tabernacle wouldn't crave a little free publicity? See if you can check into that; all you have to do is go to town hall and look up the deed. It's public record and doesn't cost a penny. Good idea, man! We'll definitely feel some spirits in there. I swear the radio speaks to me. It knows what I'm doing and plays relevant shit to me. Last night I was out listening to the oldies station in between commercials on Coast-to-Coast, and what song do you think they played? I'm not even going to tell you, I want you to try and guess. Just think about what we've been talking about the past few days and you'll probably get it. If not, I'll tell you. Keep in mind I only had that station on for about five minutes because I didn't want to listen to news and commercials on the other station. Five minutes, one song...

L

That's him. Henry Sigrust. He's the guy that's been haunting me for some reason. I'm sure they would let us in, especially when we say who we are and why we're there. Throwing their name in the book won't hurt either. The only song that pops into mind is *Spirit In The Sky*, so you'll have to let me know, then I can kick myself.

F

Get this. The song they played the moment I changed the station was *Walk Away Renee*. Is that weird or what? So what did Sigrust do to you?

L

Wow, that is something. I don't know why I keep seeing this dude's face; I can even hear his voice. Very strange. I know he hated being around me because of the vibes I threw off, but I don't know why he's stuck in my head.

F

Maybe it will come back. Maybe not. Maybe you're better off not knowing...

L

Maybe so. It's just so strange that I can see this guy in the Klockner Hall, in Greenwood, in Parkway, and even in Buckingham. He stands out in Klockner, though. I can see him in a suit and tie, standing near the restrooms with a book in his hand. I can even hear him talking, but not what he's saying. If there really is a true haunting, this guy is it for me. It's weird that he now stands out bigger than Clem, Flem, and Zimm; I guess your cuz is going batty. Maybe he was a good guy; I don't know, but I do know he was afraid to be near me, and he hated Ron.

F

That's odd; that he's so deep in your head and you don't know why. But now that I think back and dig deep, I remember our mothers speaking of Brother Sigrust rather often, but that's as much as I can get. Afraid to be near you and hated your brother. Sounds like a true man of God to me. Maybe he was the local pipeline to and from Brooklyn. A few more things popping into the ol' dome. Your folks must have been indoctrinated around '56 or '57, right? I've been thinking about Ron, I remember his black Chrysler. Did he have a swastika or a surfer's emblem put on it? Something is sticking in my head; I remember our mothers trying to figure out what that symbol on his car was. I was around nine or ten, and they were going on about how whatever was on his car was displeasing to Jehovah. At the time I had no idea what either a swastika or a surfer's emblem was, but I knew from their tone it was something they didn't approve of. Guess he wouldn't tell them what it was, because they were going frantic. I silently and secretly applauded him, knowing that some ten years down the road I'd be doing the same thing. I also remember him having a girlfriend named Carol who was disfellowshipped and he kept on seeing her. He took me for a ride in Nick's pickup one day, and went somewhere and left me outside. It was a house far out in the country (which in those days was probably no further than outer Hamilton Township) and I remember I messed up one of his tapes, by accident of course. He was pissed, but he was cool about it. Anyway, later on, both of our mothers were pumping me about where we went and why we gone so long. They wanted

to know if he went to see a girl, and they kept spouting the name Carol. They wanted me to rat on him, and I hope to Christ I didn't, but I just don't remember any other details. Any memories of that?

L

My folks went down in 1957; Ron was ten. I don't know about the car and its markings, I was too young for that. He had his own place in Allenhurst and he had that fantastic black light room he created, do you remember that? That was around 1969 when he married Suzanne. He was dating a girl that was disfellowshipped; I do remember that. I'm thinking back to what I said about my father. I always said he was weak and a follower, but in a way he had to be strong, just not strong enough to be like your father and stay out of the crap. My dad was a lot of things; a drunk, slow-minded in many ways, but yet, he had to be strong to put up with my mother all those years. And I was no prize to deal with either. I wonder why he just followed Connie, Sam, and my mother; what would make a man do that? He was always drunk though; at home, out at those gatherings, whenever we went to Connie and Sam's, or when Joe, Sam, and all those guys got together. It's a wonder he lived as long as he did and didn't kill himself or anybody else with his drinking. But his drinking was the key. He was never a nasty drunk; but a loud, talkative one. When the drink went in, the words came out. He would talk about how terrible the Parkway crowd was. Clemente was a liar and a prejudice beast and Zimrod was a coward who was afraid of his own ass and of course, Jehovah. Ernie was his favorite target, though; he couldn't stomach Ernie and Lucy but would never let anyone know that. He truly despised how they put themselves above all other forms of life, like the two self-righteous pompous old snobs that they were. He was always helping Ernie out at his house because my mother made him do it; he always went but then later on, in the drink of the night, he'd lash out about them. I guess the strength that he had came from the bottle. Too bad he didn't see it when he was sober and before it was too late.

F

I do remember Ron's place in Allenhurst, vaguely though. By then, he was a man of the world and I was but twelve or thirteen, so your brother was *persona non grata*. He was someone I wasn't allowed to be around; therefore I looked up to him all the more! What I'm remembering was earlier so I guess you really were too young for all that. A bit more has oozed through. It was a surfer's emblem and the girl's name was DeFranco; there was a whole tribe of them out in Hamilton and Carol was the disfellowshipped one. It's a fact that when someone drinks, the real man comes out. Booze loosens inhibitions, and you will say what is on your mind, no matter what people think. If a so-called nice guy turns into an asshole after a few shots, chances are he's an asshole in real life. John knew what was and what wasn't, and when he got a few drinks in him, he told it like it was. It was probably a cry for help. In some cases, alcohol opens up a whole new world, almost like hallucinogens. People drink up and suddenly have the courage to be who they really are. If John despised the Witnesses and the organization when he was drinking, then John despised the Witnesses and the organization all the time. He just didn't want to make waves and stir up the pisspot. And it turns out he was right, wasn't he? Clemente, Zimrod, Ernie, the rest of them...he was right about them all. Speaking of drinking, I remember

reading in one of the bios about Lennon that, no matter how much other shit he did; pot, coke, acid, he had zero tolerance for alcohol. Two beers and he'd turn into a raving fruitcake; three and they had to lock him in his room with a spewbucket. He wisely stayed away from the drink and stuck with the illegals.

L

I have to agree. I believe he did hate the Witnesses and what was going on, but didn't have the heart, will, or guts to stir the pot. It's a shame things had to come to what they did. When I went after him with that branch, he finally opened his eyes, and he told my mother I was right and he was no longer dealing with it either. When I think back, I guess I did him a favor in a way. I sat at the corner and stared at the pit on Parkway yesterday. I told Sean that was the place that helped ruin my childhood. He wanted to know why I was just staring at it and why my hands gripped the wheel harder and harder the longer I looked at it. I think I scared the poor kid. I didn't even realize I was doing it, he says it took a few minutes to get me to respond to him. It was like I was lost inside that place again. I guess there is a link in my brain that gets me every time I see it. I don't have those thoughts when I see any other Hall, just that one. I didn't hear any voices or anything like that, but I saw us, you, me, our parents, faces in the crowd all walking out of that place like a movie-style flashback. Yes, a true house of horrors. You're gonna laugh, but I drive by a Hall in Massena, New York every year. I gob out the window whenever I go by, but I don't get chills like when I pass the one on Parkway. Ready for Christmas?

F

You know, there are just so many of those damn things around. There are three within less than a half hour from here; one right here in the suburbs, one up in the slums of Daytona, and one out in the rural, redneck town of Samsula. That one cracks me up, because Samsula has quite the reputation. They still burn crosses, they have an active chapter of the KKK, and when they use the word *nigger*, they mean it. There's a biker bar there that has bikini cole slaw wrestling and co-ed creamed corn wrestling; like something out of *Deliverance*. And of course, fitting right in, the local Jehovah's Witness tabernacle. When I explore, I pass Halls. It's like, they're just there and they're all over the place, like Wendy's and Wal-Mart's. I never really paid them any heed until around three months ago when we began this project. Now I look at them, and wonder what goes on inside, and wonder if there are kids like us inside slowly losing their sanity and not even knowing it. Singing kingdom songs with phony forced smiles plastered on their little faces... Nowhere near ready for Christmas yet, gift-buying wise, but the house looks nice!

L

That's it too, the kids that are stuck inside that cult. They have no idea what is going to happen to them later on.

F

And the sad part is, when it happens, most of the poor slobs will think its normal and will roll with it. We have cousins like that. Did I tell you Amy is singing in the Christmas

pageant with her high school chorus at Disney World next week? And in the local Presbyterian Church tonight! I am so proud of such normalcy!

L

Good for her! Lynn is singing in the Christmas play at school next week, then off with the choir to sing at a nursing home the following day. Sean is in a murder mystery/dinner next week as well. Yes, it is nice to have our kids be normal, and some thrown in for us too!

F

Yes, it's all good. We have daughters who can sing, and who are actually allowed to go out and show off their talents. We are doing OK. And now there's more... I finally remembered why Grafton and I were hanging out toward the end of '74. He was called upon to do the artwork for the yearly banner that hung over the stage behind the podium at Parkway. Since I had been recently put on the outcast list by the powers-that-be, Grafton, ever the rebel, picked me to be his assistant in that project. I don't recall what was on the banner, but you know how they always used a particular scripture as a theme each year, so I guess if we researched what that scripture was for 1975, then we'd know what eventually went up on that banner. But finish it we did, and it hung in the Hall for all of '75. It outlasted me!

L

The Sigrust stuff came back to me. He was one of those elders who decided that my father was too weak to be an elder and should just remain a lamppost. My poor father was nothing in their eyes - he was weak, yet he was strong too - but over twenty years of his life was wasted. Sigrust was scared of me and I guess he saw that my father had no control over me so therefore he could not have control over the organization. I'm remembering I never had a real face-to-face conflict with this dude, but I wasn't sure of him either. It's amazing that the image of him standing in the Klockner Hall with the Bible in his hand is still etched in my head; it must have been the last time I saw him. Yet, there has to be more, since this dude still hangs in my thoughts.

F

There's probably a little more, it'll come thru. I would imagine your ugly image of him is because he dissed your dad and that pissed you off internally, even then. But I remember him much more clearly now too, though I don't think I had any dealings with him personally. Carpe diem!

L

I have some thoughts, but they are minor things, and I've been so caught up in Christmas this year, I haven't put too many of the thoughts in order. I'm sure there are tons more floating in those closed and decircuited cells of our brains and whacked-out heads. I don't know how you did it. You really impress me, I look up to you in that respect, you found the right woman and took it to the highest high. *The Show Must Go On...*

F

There is more in there, but for me, I think most of the major stuff is out and on paper. I'm sure there are still little events wallowing around in the old memory and if they come forth, great. I'll add them in. Hoping to come up for a few days mid-May and maybe a week in the summer. You're right, I did find the right woman (or rather, she found me), but don't think we're not without our own problems. We have our moments, and some of them can be pretty noisy! She hasn't thrown me out yet, and that speaks volumes as to what good character and upbringing she has. She is actually learning new stuff about me as I dig it up and write it down, and her opinion of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Watchtower Society has gone from just bad to completely down the sewer. With good reason, I would imagine! Anyway, cousin Gloria says that we, and that's *we*, as in you and me both, are success stories. She says it doesn't matter how fucked up we may be inside because of our youth, we escaped and moved on, exercised our free will against tremendous odds, went against our very family to do it, and that's what counts. Our lives are much more normal now than they were back then, and, more importantly, we are helping provide normal lives for our kids. I'm convinced now, after years of just ignoring it, that the skeletons in the darkest closets of our minds will always dwell there, but by facing them as we are now, we are in control and can keep them at bay. Sounds like something from Koontz, now that I reread that, but I think it's true. I didn't realize that two people could dig up so much shit from the past. But dig it up we did, and now we have to put it somewhere. Carpe noctem!

L

Here's an issue that's been surfacing more and more lately, and I know this is a direct effect from my past. Since I was always told I was no good and that I would amount to nothing, I feel that my life has turned out to be that way. I always find myself looking over my shoulder, questioning what I did, and wondering if I should have done things differently. I always look for approvals and never seem to get them, just like when I was a kid, making it all the more obvious that I believe somewhere in the back of my mind that I am what they said I was. I always think people are out to just piss me off, or do things on purpose to make look small, like getting in my way when I have to get something done. I am a creature of habit. I do things the same each morning, by the clock and yet, there they are, right in the way. I wonder sometimes if I am good enough to do anything. Whenever I did good things when I was a child, I was told they weren't good enough. I can recall a time at the assembly at Yankee Stadium when we met a wonderful black woman, who was fun to be around and all that. One day, she forgot her money at the hotel and had no food. I gave her my sandwich and went with just my little bag of potato chips. You know, she was so happy that I shared with her. This was 1969 so I would have been six. But it wasn't good enough. I had done a good thing, but it wasn't good enough because I kept my chips. This wonderful black woman turned her smile to my face into a complaint to my parents that I kept the chips. I was then told by my parents that I was raised better than that and had to speak to Brother Hinkmeier. I remember saying that I gave her the big sandwich and I kept just the little bag of chips so we both could eat. Too young to realize what happened until recently, I thought I did something good, and yet I didn't. I'm ready to flush now!

F

And flush we shall! I was there at Yankee Stadium, we all went up together and stayed in Yonkers, but I don't remember the actual incident with the food. But there you were, being a good kid and sharing like you were brought up to do, yet it wasn't good enough. There are no words to explain how a six-year-old can end up being castigated after giving most of his own food away to a total stranger. How big a part did Brother Elbon play in your dealings? For some reason, he's been banging around in the old memory the past few days, but I didn't have a whole lot to do with him. I remember he worked as a cook at the IHOP a few years before I did and he had a couple of butt-ugly kids. I remember our mothers talking about him once, saying something about how he looked like the kind of person who would have pinworm eggs under his fingernails, and because of him they would never eat at the IHOP. What a nice thing to say about one's brother! I guess that was their way of saying he looked dirty, which if I remember rightly, he actually did. I took it to Google and discovered that when kids have pinworms, the eggs of them usually fester under the fingernails. Other people get them when the kid with the dirty fingernails touches stuff and the other people get the eggs into their system somehow. Then these other people also develop pinworms. Icky, huh? I don't know what made me think of kids having worms, but there you have it. The shit that comes up. Anyway, off to work, talk soon. Carry on

L

I liked Elbon but I lost respect for him once he made that comment about being a black trapped in a white world. He would often try to shed some light on me, but he wasn't as direct and brutal as the rest of them. I went through many, many episodes like that. That is why I closed off so much in my later years. I never felt, and still don't, like I did enough, or can do enough. Like I can't say I if I did something good or not without thinking about it later and questioning everything. *Should I have turned left when I turned right*; you get the picture. There was an incident on the train coming back from DC where I gave up my seat for someone, and my dad did the same. We went back to the dining car to sit, but it wasn't good enough for my mother because we took a seat from someone else to sit down in there. There was no one else around as the car was almost empty, and yet she said there were people standing. It wasn't our fault they didn't go to the same car as us, but we were supposed to come out and get those people so they could have a place to sit. That generated more elder talk; the same elders that would not give up their seats or food to an old lady. I still don't get it.

F

Things happen that continue to mystify me. You may get a kick out of this; it's a bit weird. It just seems like they're everywhere now. I work with a very nice woman, very professional, mid-thirties, white, family-oriented, perfectly normal person. We got to know each other better over the past few months, and we've had more than a few interesting conversations. So last Friday I have a client at my desk and this woman is wandering around the office; getting ready for us to close. My client comments, "she's such a nice woman, but I feel so sorry for her." I of course thought that was a strange thing to say, so I asked how he knew her and why he should feel sorry for her. He replied, "I know her from the old neighborhood, from years ago. Everybody keeps wishing her Merry Christmas and she's a Jehovah's Witness. They don't celebrate Christmas." I

nearly shat my drawers. How did I work with this woman almost every day for two months and not realize that she was a Witness? I thought back to some of our conversations, and the signs were all there. She said she didn't celebrate Christmas, but I assumed she was Jewish. She was never preachy, but she did refer to the Bible a lot. She said she and her family attended services thrice a week, but she used the word *church*, so that threw me off. She knew about the Nephilim (I love to talk about the Nephilim when there is someone around to have an intelligent conversation with, because most people I talk to have no earthly idea who the Nephilim are). I figured she was some kind of southern fried holy roller, but I never thought Jehovah's Witness, because she never talked it up and never preached it, never even mentioned it. It was almost like she didn't want us to know. Very strange, how this guy at my desk tells me she's a Witness, and then it all fell together. We broke for the holiday and I haven't seen her since and won't until after the New Year. So back to the guy at the desk. I asked him if he had any experience with the Witnesses and the story that spewed from him was not unlike our own. They took his Little League trophies away, made him stop playing ball, took his guitar away, made him cut his hair; you know the deal. As soon as he hit eighteen he took to the road and hasn't looked back. Sound familiar? So a few days later, I'm working at my part time job at the hotel, and because I gave my notice, I have to train a new girl. All is good. The owner tells me that the normal overnight person is away for the holidays and he has yet another new person coming in to work the midnight shift and would I show her around the place and get her set up. I said, "sure." He added that it was easy to get this new person to work over Christmas and New Years because she was a Jehovah's Witness. I said, "wow." So the new girl that I'm training hears this and also says, "wow." Seems she has a Witness tale of her own, and she proceeds to tell it to me, about how her sister is getting involved with them and they're trying to stop her but she won't listen. Her sister is about to become a full-fledged, dyed-in-the-wool Jehovah's Witness and probably has no possible idea of what she's getting into. So I tell her my story and about our project and direct her to our MySpace former Witness website and we end up talking about this for hours. I'm choking on this because it seems like everyone I run into now has some kind of dealing with this bunch. Are you running into anything like that up there? Attracting this stuff? I guess its good - more grist for our ever-grinding mill of stories - but it's creepy finding them all over. Anyway, I thought you might get a charge out of that little tale. So, happy New Year, and let us carry on!

L

I have but one Witness that I know of in here. She is the one I told you about; talks loudly on her cell phone about Jehovah God all the while puffing on a cig. Maybe they're allowed to smoke now? Who knows. I'm thinking about school again. By tenth grade, that was it, I just gave up and left. At that point, I was already sixteen and was gone from the Witnesses. But my mind wasn't there, because if it was I would have stayed and grabbed that bull by the horns and got my degree in either weather, science, or astronomy. Carl Sagan was my idol and I would have to carry on his work. I wanted to be the one who put together *Cosmos 2*; but I had been doing so poorly, didn't care anymore, and my brain was so diseased with Watchtowerism, that I just flat out gave up. I had no get up and go, I didn't care about life, and I knew I was going to die even though I was out of their realm. I knew there was no hope for me. I saw that Ron was

nothing but a part-time writer, but he was so good a writer and he didn't know it and didn't even care, so why should I. He had gotten away and yet he still had the same troubles he had when he was in. I figured my life was going to be nothing but a burger-flipper and I accepted that. At about eighteen or so, I changed my thinking some and went out into the world looking for a job. My mother was still with the Witnesses, but slowly on the way out. I got some temp jobs here and there; Sears, Penney's, things like that. But the trend became that I never stayed with one very long. Either my big mouth got me fired, or pure laziness drove me to just give up. I'm still like that, although not nearly as bad. I don't put things into perspective properly and I don't know if I ever will. I have a total disrespect of all authority figures and that is based completely on my experiences with the elders. They never cared about me except to push their doctrine and system of belief into my brain, to drive it in, deeper and deeper. Away from that life for more than thirty years now, and I still feel it. I still hear them. I still believe I am nothing, a no-good like they said I was. Hell, three wives and still not happy. I hate fighting, arguing, and ignorance, and regretfully, that's all I ever see in people. Like that old *Twilight Zone* episode, the one where the guy who couldn't stand to be around other people discovered a way to make them all go away. "*People. Nothing but people, and people are pigs. I wish they'd all just go away...*" Suddenly he was lonely and bored, and that was worse. So he decided to populate his world with people who were all exactly like him, and that was much, much worse. But that is what I see; people like the Witnesses all the way through. Ignorant, mind-numbing stupidity, with a sense of entitlement, always right, never willing to see another side. Here's a perspective that I came upon - they are me many years ago. They have all the ignorance and self-righteousness I had years ago. They are the elders of the past, yet they are also the me of the past. They will not accept change, and the Witnesses will not accept change, and I did not accept change. But *I have* changed. Changed to a point where I don't give a shit again, yet I don't fight like I used to and I don't argue like I used to. I spend more time each day upstairs watching my Discovery and History Channel shows; I don't care what goes on outside, I don't have any feeling except pure depression about goes on outside. I am watching myself all over again, but this time, from a forty-five-year-old viewpoint. I have tried to talk, but no one hears. Just like back when I used to, just like the Witnesses, the elders, my parents. I am always wrong even when proved right, just like the elders, my parents, me from a time gone by. It's so sad that I have gone full circle; sad, because now I see what I was, what I did. But the I-don't-care part lives on. I have no idea how much longer that will last since I don't care, and I have the Witness visions pounding in my head to this very day. That's about it for now.

F

Wouldn't it be just like them to change the rules again and let people smoke! Especially now when everybody's trying to quit for health reasons, but that would mean my old buddy Steve got disfellowshipped for nothing. And good ole Rosemary would have had to have left me alone with my pencil. What a crock of shit, what a waste. Well, we have certainly gorged up and collected a lot of material since we jumped on this black train built of bones back on Sept 14.

L

I'm about to send you a space, time and creation essay I wrote. There is much more out there on that subject; it may make for some interesting reading, or it may not. Only time will tell. I really would also like to tear the New World Translation version of Revelation apart.

F

I like the idea of picking apart Revelation. In all the Witness stuff I've looked into, not many have tackled Revelation; it's just too damn complicated. Go to it.

L

I need to get hold of a New World Translation, you know, the witness Bible, then I'll read the chapter and compare it to Donna's Catholic Bible and see what I can come up with. It is a tangled web of a book, but there are things in there.

F

You also need a copy of *Then is Finished the Mystery of God*. That book came out in 1967 and supposedly explained what the Society believed the prophet John was talking about in Revelation. I imagine it would be hard to find, especially if they don't agree now with what they wrote back then. You already have a NWT. www.watchtower.org is the official Jehovah's Witness website. The entire New World Translation is there for the reading. Have at it!

L

Didn't realize that, I'll look into it. *Then is Finished the Mystery of God*. Is that theirs? I don't recall that title.

F

It is, but not to be confused with one called *The Finished Mystery*, which came out back in 1917. This one was a red book, was part of the Tuesday night study. It was one of your mother's favorites, but you were four or five when they were digging into it on Tuesday nights, so you'd probably not remember much of it.

L

I don't want anyone to confuse my age with the timing of *Cosmos*. I was an avid Sagan fan before the show began. I've been watching the show again lately; the Science Channel resurrected it. Back in 1980, he was talking about global warming and no one listened to him. Well, here it is. It took me some time to put this essay together because I had to do some research and you know I'm not much of a reader. But it meant a lot to me and still does, as my constant watching of science programs proves to this day.

Life in the New Order. All living beings existing in complete harmony. No death, no crime, just life on Earth forever and ever. No need for anything but the loving hand of Jehovah God himself. Black, white, red and yellow; lions, lambs, goats and tigers - all living together. One thing is missing though, and very important too. The planet Earth will not be here; at least a few billion years from now it won't be. The sun is growing; hence, global warming. Sure, mankind is not helping any with all the crap we spew into

the air, but you cannot escape the fact that the sun is growing. Jehovah's Witnesses would have you believe that you will live forever, in peace and harmony, for all eternity. How is such a thing possible? They will tell you flat out there will be no need for technology of any kind since you will live in peace, but how, a billion years down the road when the sun burns out, will we survive? When conditions on Earth become intolerable for anything living, how will we get to another planet to survive? With no technology, and no advance warning system in place, how will we know when it's time to leave? Or is the great Jehovah going to have all of his sheep die in one place? Is this what He destroyed all evil for? Ask any Witness what he or she thinks about this and I'm willing to bet my bottom dollar on the fact that, first of all they have no idea, and next, they will spout what they spout every day; Jehovah will protect his flock. However, I have a problem with that; and I always have. This is nature - the natural beginning and ending of all things. I can't understand how a God who loves his people would let this happen. I grew up having two very big interests, they being space and the weather. I always looked at the stars and loved to read about them. The weather was an area that I had complete interest in. However, when I would predict the weather a day or two in advance, I was deemed a warlock, a demon, the son of Satan. This was discussed earlier, however, my love of the sky was not. For years, I asked how we would live in the New Order when the earth was going to go **boom!** I was told that would never happen, that Jehovah would take care of his people like he does now. Of course, that would bring another question, it being if Jehovah was taking care of me now, why do I suffer so much at school and in life. A trip straight to the elders each time I asked that foolish question. I would say that the sun is growing and will go supernova in the far distant future. I was told the sun would do no such thing, That Jehovah wouldn't let that happen and that what the schools were teaching us was false in the eyes of Jehovah. I told them there was proof of this, that supernovas left behind their own proof, that being nebulae. Again, I was told it was all false and just a way for the world to try and suck us into its greed and want. It took me a while to figure it out, but they were saying that if I believed all this crap about supernovas, growing stars, and exploding suns, then I would leave Jehovah and join the world, and do worldly things. I would start doing things that Jehovah did not approve of like playing baseball, standing for the flag salute and national anthem, going to parties and possibly drinking (like they never did); in other words, start living my life! Years ago, I knew what other people already knew; that the sun would not be around forever. It was going to grow larger, turn to a red dwarf and slowly burn out. It will take over Mercury, then Venus, then Earth. Life might be possible on Mars for a few thousand years, but it would soon go the route of the other planets as well. Even if life on Mars were possible, how would we get there? Hell, we're still trying to figure that out now, in the real world as we know it; can you imagine how hard it would be in the New Order? Witnesses tell you there will be no need for *earthly goods* in the New Order. They tell you willingly that there will be no need for technology or anything remotely close to it. I once asked an elder (Zimrod) what he thought about space, planets, stars and his reply was cool enough, "they are God's creations." Ok, I can buy into that somewhat, but not totally. To make a long story short, I asked about life. He was shocked! How could I ask such a worldly question? How could I even think there was anyone else but us? Do the words *Ancient Catholic Church* mean anything to you? Back in the days of Galileo, there was belief that we were the only ones here. We

controlled the space, the stars, and whatever else. The Bible was full of myths and to this day, still is. Since this resulted in many lectures for me and for my parents, I didn't bring it up again; for a little while anyway. Then, after reading many of the writings in Revelation, I decided it was time to take the question of life from other worlds a few steps further. Chariots in the sky? Multi-headed creatures? Voices from above? UFO's? I have always believed in other life. How did we get here? Was Carl Sagan (*Cosmos*) correct by saying we are stardust? Are religions correct in saying we were created in the image of God through Adam and Eve? Is one of the greatest science fiction writers of our time, Ray Bradbury, correct in saying, "we are the Martians?" (*Martian Chronicles*). Today, we see that there are possibilities that life existed on Mars a long, long time ago. We haven't proved it yet, but the possibility is growing. Maybe we did come from Mars. Over a billion years ago, when the earth was becoming more livable, maybe we came here from Mars. Mars may have been going through the changes that brought about a catastrophic collapse. Is it possible? Of course it is, but highly challenging and next to impossible to prove. How about the *Cosmos* theory? We just came here on an asteroid, comet or meteor; particles from another world or something. It's been proved many times over that the earth was not a friendly place four to five billion years ago; constantly being hit by comets, asteroids, and anything else flying around out there, so why not? That's a rather intriguing theory. Or did God, some God, actually create us, in his or her image? Did Adam, soon followed by Eve, really start life? Did a God create them or were the apes already here and humans evolved from them? Did a God create the apes and set the ball rolling? Did a God create, or cause, *evolution*? Ok, another good and viable theory. Something may have created us, and I would consider that something or someone had to. But who, or better yet, what? Maybe we came from distant galaxies. Or maybe, from just around the moon, Mars. Maybe from God's hand. But in all likelihood, we cannot be the only ones in the entire universe. Breaking this down into pieces that I could understand, and then into smaller pieces that a young Jehovah's Witness could understand, I started out on my quest to find answers. I fully armed myself with the best information that a twelve-year-old living in 1975 (there's *that year* again) could possibly find. Remember, there was no Internet, no Hubble telescope, and not too many probes in the solar system as yet. Just encyclopedias and libraries full of science and reference books. I started with the visions. I asked a stupid question, "You know, they loved to drink wine back then, is it possible they were drunk when they saw these chariots in the sky?" That question got a laugh but no lecture, but no answer either. Then I asked some questions that did elicit the first of many lectures, "What if what they saw in the sky was a ship? What if the creatures they saw were aliens to them; people possibly from another world? Our galaxy? Another galaxy? Atlantis?" That opened up panic to our old buddy Brother Clemente, the elder I posed the questions to. It also led to months of private Bible study that I later described as a Witness version of an exorcism, but I was far from done. During this timeline, I was forbidden to watch the show *Cosmos*. My idol, Carl Sagan, was trying to show a viewpoint on the creation of the universe and life itself. Of course, I watched it anyway, whenever I could, and I dreamed of one day taking Sagan's thoughts, findings, and theories to the next level. And now I had some scientific backing in my next set of questions. I went to Zimrod, Clemente, and added Nelson to my panel. "What if we came from the stars? What if, the asteroids and comets that hit the earth three to four

billion years ago, gave way to life as we now know it?" Oh my God, you would think that I was Satan himself, as we know they actually did. This prompted even non-Witnesses to jump off my ship. Our aunt from Bucks County went so far as to say that I was worse than my brother and that I was dreaming of things that can't possibly be true. "Borderline sick in the head," is what she actually said. The Witnesses though, they took it a step further. They took it out on my father, who they say was weak. They made my mother go to special Bible studies to help her find a way to deal with his weakness and my warped mind. But again, I was not done. I had just read *The Martian Chronicles* and went full force into it. Once, during an open question session with the elders, I asked the ultimate. Actually, I didn't ask, I told! I said that it was possible that we on Earth came from Mars after the red planet started to decline. I said that I would buy into the possibility that a God or higher being had created us; not here, but out there. My mother actually fainted. My father asked me in his quiet subtle way to stop, but I refused. I kept going. I was asked to leave the room. Again, I refused. Then my father was *told* to take me out. I refused yet again. All along, I went after them, saying there had to be life out there; the universe is way too big for there not to be. I said that coming from Mars made the most sense and that the Big Bang theory was scientifically correct and not just a theory. Three of the big boys in the room physically took me out while my father helped my mother. Those three were Zimrod, Bartson and Krakowski. I fought all the way. Six months later, I was what they called *under control*. I was given medications to help with my personality problems. I was taken to many Bible studies and my father was reduced to nothing more than just another lowly prole in their congregation. My mother took constant abuse from her sisters; those real, flesh and blood sisters who were also Witnesses. I was no longer allowed in their houses. My cousin, the co-author of this book, never knew these things, but his mother refused to allow us to be seen together since I might influence and ultimately destroy him. Other cousins were not allowed to be anywhere near me. They had placed what I call the Jehovah's Witness restraining order on me. All along, all I really wanted was one simple answer to one simple question, "What will we do when the sun grows too big and we can no longer live on Earth?" When they would not answer me, I went further into my realm. One day however, another Witness said something to me that I would never forget. Wayne Scott said that he took what I said that night into thought. He was a deep thinking man, a college graduate before he took up with the Witnesses, and a favorite of mine. He said he watched *Cosmos* and found what Sagan said to be quite possible. He said he would ponder my thoughts from his adult perspective and get back to me, but I was never allowed to see or speak to him again. To this day, I often wonder what they said to him, because he left the area one day, never to return. Maybe, just maybe, he is a free man like me, and he found the answers he and I were looking for back then. Today my interest is still there but, just like the weather, only in the backyard. I look skyward sometimes and wonder - what is out there? More and more planets and systems are being found everyday. Technology is showing more and more how the earth formed, and how life may have come about. Since no one is really sure, only theories can be given, but they make sense. Maybe it's one of them, and maybe, just maybe, it's all of them in some way. However, any way you look at it, it's all pagan to the Watchtower Society. It's all worldly lies thought up to bring Jehovah's people down. I would love to ask someone high in the Witness hierarchy today those same questions I asked over thirty

years ago to see how they would answer me now, now that we have the technology to challenge what I questioned all those years ago. My guess would be that the answer would be the same - pagans trying to upset the balance and nature of Jehovah. I would love to ask my aunt Glorya what she thinks now that they found other worlds out there. What are her thoughts on the possibility that I may have been right back then, and still think that I am. I am no scientist, the Society made sure that *those* dreams were crushed, but I am a realist. I do believe that somewhere out there, another race put us here; created us so to speak. Life traveled from someplace out there billions of years ago. But who, or what, created *them*?

F

This is excellent, thought provoking, insightful and cannot be topped. I must say, it's time to quit yakking over cyberspace and get this material into print. Let's do it...

L

We'll get there! Keep the pace and hope for peace; enjoy it while you can.

F

And that, my friend, is the challenge of the day.

L

Chapter Five – 1975

As the Watchtower Society promoted 1975 as the time of the end, the year in which Armageddon would occur and destroy all the wicked ones who were not in the truth, a funny thing happened to me in that great year. I turned eighteen!

Repent, all ye sinners! The time of the end is come; Armageddon is nigh! Sell your house, quit your job, cash in your insurance policies, give your dog away. Prepare ye to enter the Kingdom of Jehovah! It was a prediction that did not come to fruition, obviously, as I'm sitting here in 2009 ranting about it still. For me, 1975 was a fairly good year. I turned eighteen, and I knew it was time to move on. If Armageddon had come as predicted, I would have been destroyed. But Armageddon did not come, and I'm still intact, alive and kicking, still attending the school of life. Aside from impending adulthood, 1975 gave me *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*, *Physical Graffiti* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. I was on my way.

What a long, strange trip it's been...

What was happening in our world in 1975?

As you will see in the material that follows, a vast throng of worshippers left the witnesses when Fred Franz's 1975 prophecy failed to materialize. It was purely coincidental that 1975 was the year I began my trek out. By that year I was fed up with the whole schmegeggie; disgusted, pissed off and ready to move on. I never believed that we were all going to die come the autumn of 1975 if we didn't continue to swear obeisance to Jehovah God (the Watchtower Society), and it was a mere trick of the calendar that I hit eighteen that year and my eyes began to open. Cousin Michael was twelve in 1975 and, intelligent kid that he was, started asking questions that the elders couldn't (or wouldn't) answer. Armageddon was never an issue, for me anyway, although Michael was still quite young and a bit worried that the end might really come. But it didn't. That is the crux of the situation.

The end of the world did not happen. Armageddon did not occur. We lived on, and have survived to tell you about it.

What was happening in the Witness world as 1975 approached? Did the *Watchtower* really say that Armageddon would come in 1975? There are statements on the Internet, gleaned from past Watchtower Society literature, that proclaim the Jehovah's Witnesses taught that the current system would end in 1975. However, the Society flat out denies that the Watchtower ever professed that 1975 would be the end of the world. They claim that a few individual Jehovah's Witnesses expected Armageddon would occur in 1975, but they say that the Watchtower Society never officially gave that date for any event to take place. Many Jehovah's Witnesses today deny that the 1975 false prophecy ever happened. They do this because this is what they are being told by their leaders. Anyone who was not a part of the organization at the time that this prophecy was believed would have no way of knowing how swept up into the belief of the 1975 prediction the

Jehovah's Witnesses were in those days. But we know what happened, because we experienced it first-hand. Again, we were there.

I was at the God's Sons of Liberty District Convention in the summer of 1966 at the Trenton Fairgrounds when there was a very powerful talk concerning what the Witnesses referred to as *the time of the end*. As young as I was, nine years old, I remember well that Saturday afternoon when they released their new book, *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*. There was a great deal of excitement amongst our mothers and all the rest of the Witnesses at the assembly. The issuing of this book was a thrilling climax to a stimulating speech given just prior to its release that all but announced that we were literally at the physical threshold of the New World. This talk recalled the many prophecies the Society had made in the past regarding the coming battle of Armageddon that the Witnesses believed would end world governments and usher in Jehovah's thousand-year Kingdom rule under Jesus Christ. They made a point of expressing that the reason all of the past dates had been wrong was because those dates had not been properly based upon Bible chronology. However, the speaker emphatically stated that this new book proved beyond any doubt that Armageddon was sure to come no later than the autumn of 1975; that they had been wrong in the past, but this time there was no doubt, they had gotten it right. The talk explained that the book would clearly show that the Watchtower Society's new claims were verified by Bible chronology through a five-page chart laid out in the first chapter of the book.

The chart was significant because it methodically outlined six thousand years of human history, starting with the creation of Adam in 4026 B.C.E. The chart clearly stated that the end of this six thousand year period of mankind's existence was to be completed in the fall of 1975 as the following quote from the book illustrates: "According to trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man's creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E." —*Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*, 1966, p. 29. Why was the completion of six thousand years of human history so important to Jehovah's Witnesses? To understand that, you have to realize that the Bible chronology taught by the Watchtower Society at the time was, "one day is with Jehovah as a thousand years." Jehovah's Witnesses believed that each thousand-year time period of human history paralleled God's creation week of seven days. Thus, they reasoned that each one of these creative days equaled a thousand years, to make a total of seven thousand years in length.

Since God finished the creation of mankind on the sixth day, and on the seventh day He rested, they thought Jehovah would likely wreak His vengeance upon the wicked (Armageddon) shortly before or immediately following the conclusion of His sixth thousand-year time period, in the fall of 1975. Thus, they reasoned that God's final thousand-year time period (God's seventh day of rest) would begin at that time with the destruction of the world's governments and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ. In keeping with this understanding, the book went on to explain: "How appropriate it would be for Jehovah God to make of this coming seventh period of a thousand years a Sabbath period of rest and release, a great Jubilee Sabbath for the proclaiming of liberty throughout the earth to all its inhabitants! For remember, mankind

has yet ahead of it what the last book of the Holy Bible speaks of as the reign of Jesus Christ over Earth for a thousand years, the millennial reign of Christ. Prophetically Jesus Christ said concerning himself: 'For Lord of the Sabbath is what the Son of man is.' (Matthew 12:8) It would not be by mere chance or accident for the reign of Jesus Christ, the 'Lord of the Sabbath,' to run parallel with the seventh millennium of man's existence." —*Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*, 1966, p. 30. Anyone who doubted this fact was considered to be weak or unfaithful, an apostate. Older Jehovah's Witnesses that had been members back during the years of the Watchtower Society's other Armageddon prophecies grabbed hold of this 1975 prediction in the hope that, at last, Jehovah's promises were finally about to be fulfilled. Many articles emerged from the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines that raised the anticipation of faithful Witnesses toward the 1975 prediction. Among them was this dogmatic statement found in the 1969 Watchtower article entitled, *The Approaching Peace of a Thousand Years*: "...six millenniums of mankind's life on earth would end in the mid-seventies. Thus the seventh millennium from man's creation by Jehovah God would begin within less than ten years. In order for the Lord Jesus Christ to be 'Lord even of the Sabbath day,' his thousand-year reign would have to be the seventh in a series of thousand-year periods or millenniums. Would not, then, the end of six millenniums of mankind's laborious enslavement under Satan the Devil be the fitting time for Jehovah God to usher in a Sabbath millennium for all his human creatures? Yes, indeed! And his King Jesus Christ will be Lord of that Sabbath." — *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1969, pp. 622-623.

As expectations continued to increase over the 1975 prediction, the Watchtower Society published an article entitled *Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?* While this article continued to affirm that Armageddon was just around the corner, it was a bit more cautious in its statements regarding 1975. It explained that the Watchtower Society's chronology was reasonably accurate but admittedly not infallible. They then suggested that their calculations might be in error by a matter of weeks or months, not years. From that article: "What about all this talk concerning the year 1975? Their interest has been kindled by the belief that 1975 will mark the end of six thousand years of human history since Adam's creation. Are we to assume from this study that the battle of Armageddon will be all over by the autumn of 1975, and the long looked-for thousand-year reign of Christ will begin then? Possibly, but we wait to see how closely the seventh thousand year period of man's existence coincides with the Sabbath-like thousand-year reign of Christ. If these two periods run parallel with each other as to the calendar year, it will not be a mere chance or accident but will be according to Jehovah's loving and timely purposes. Our chronology, however, which is reasonably accurate (but admittedly not infallible), at the best only points to the autumn of 1975 as the end of six thousand years of Jehovah's seventh creative 'day.' Why not? Because after his creation Adam lived some time during the 'sixth day,' which unknown amount of time would need to be subtracted from Adam's 930 years, to determine when the sixth seven-thousand year period or 'day' ended, and how long Adam lived into the 'seventh day.' And yet the end of that sixth creative 'day' could end within the same Gregorian calendar year of Adam's creation. It may involve only a difference of weeks or months, not years."—*The Watchtower*, August 15, 1968, pp 494, 499. In spite of the cautious statements made by the Watchtower Society in this article, its concluding statement that the possible error in

calculation would only amount to a difference of weeks or months, not years, again affirmed the anxious expectations of Jehovah's Witnesses. Talks from the podium at the Kingdom Hall and especially at Jehovah's Witness conventions were relentlessly passionate about the necessity to be ready for Armageddon and to keep on the watch!

As time progressed, the urgency to do even more Kingdom preaching work was continually stressed by the Watchtower organization. Jehovah's Witnesses were taught that the salvation of mankind was their responsibility, and this job was not to be taken lightly! The pressure was ever increasing to do more to prove loyalty and faithfulness. As 1975 drew near, many Jehovah's Witnesses quit their jobs (and lost their pensions) in order to dedicate more time to the door-to-door ministry. Many sold their homes and businesses, cashed in life insurance policies, rejected college education for themselves and their children, and even put off non-emergency medical or dental treatment in expectation of the end. All of these actions were highly praised by the Watchtower Society and acclaimed as good examples of how faithful Jehovah's Witnesses were supposed to be conducting themselves as the time of the end drew near. "Many schools now have student counselors who encourage one to pursue higher education after high school, to pursue a career with a future in this system of things. Do not be influenced by them. Do not let them 'brainwash' you with the Devil's propaganda to get ahead... This world has very little time left! Make pioneer service, the full-time ministry with the possibility of Bethel or missionary service, your goal." —*The Watchtower*, March 15, 1969, p. 171. "Therefore, as a young person, you will never fulfill any career that this system offers. If you are in high school and thinking about a college education, it means at least four, perhaps even six or eight more years to graduate into a specialized career. But where will this system of things be by that time? It will be well on the way toward its finish, if not actually gone!" —*Awake!*, May 22, 1969, p. 15. "Yes, the end of this system is so very near! Is that no reason to increase our activity? Reports are heard of brothers selling their homes and property and planning to finish out the rest of their days in this old system in the pioneer service. Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world's end." —*Kingdom Ministry*, May 1974, p. 3. The belief of 1975 was so entrenched into the Society's teachings; it was constantly referred to and talked about, so much so that it was a natural part of daily conversation amongst the Witnesses. I remember how countless talks from the platform would start with, "Well, Brothers, 1975 is looming ever closer!" and, "Well, Brothers! Only a few more months until 1975!" Then, as the time drew near, it became, "Well, Brothers! Just a matter of weeks until 1975!" And when 1975 actually came, the excitement in the air was so substantial as to be nearly physical! People were almost foaming at the mouth in their anticipation of moving on to Jehovah's new system. But then 1975 was almost over...

By 1976, it became obvious to everyone that yet another of the Watchtower Society's Armageddon predictions had failed to come to fulfillment. Members began to gripe, fuss and complain, and started falling away. When the Watchtower Society was forced to address this recurring issue of botched predictions yet again, what they said was stunning and shocking. The Witness proletariat was denounced and denigrated, essentially accused of it being their entire fault that Armageddon didn't happen! I remember hearing about Fred Franz bellowing to an audience of Witnesses in Ohio, saying, "You know why

Armageddon didn't come? Because you wanted it to come!" After that, in the talks and in the literature, the Watchtower Society began blaming their false prediction on the rank-and-file Jehovah's Witnesses by saying they read more into the 1975 prediction than what the Society had intended, and that this was the reason for so much disappointment. They went on to claim that those who had built their lives around the anticipated fulfillment of a specific date had not followed the counsel of Jesus: "Some who had been in service to God have planned their lives according to a mistaken view of just what was to happen on a certain date or in a certain year. They may have, for this reason, put off or neglected things that they otherwise would have cared for. But they have missed the point of the Bible's warnings concerning the end of this system of things, thinking that Bible chronology reveals the specific date. Did Jesus mean that we should adjust our financial and secular affairs so that our resources would just carry us to a certain date that we might think marks the end? This is not the kind of thinking that Jesus advised." —*The Watchtower*, July 15, 1976, p. 440. What? The Watchtower Society had previously lauded and exalted the brothers and sisters who sold their homes and businesses in order to put more time into the preaching work. The Society had proclaimed in print, "Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world's end!" —*Kingdom Ministry*, May 1974, p. 3. And then they turned it around by telling them that their disappointment was their own fault for not heeding the words of Jesus?

This revisionist history was gradually fed to the masses so that what they had pounded into their heads about 1975 was somehow turned around. The Society managed to convince the remaining Jehovah's Witnesses that the belief that Armageddon would occur in 1975 had really been their own idea in the first place - the Watchtower Society had never taught it to them. I can remember pioneers from our congregation who had been faithfully preaching the Watchtower message for years on end, only to pitch their bookbags into the garbage and say "I've had it!" then walk out of the Hall. "Falling out of the truth over serving a date," was how my mother so eloquently summed it up. But with so many Witnesses leaving and saying that they didn't believe anything the Society taught anymore, the organization had to act. They actually used the example of people leaving the flock as an excuse to show why Armageddon *hadn't* taken place. They said that the prediction had been a test of loyalty, and that Jehovah had been cleaning house to rid the organization of all those whom He knew were not truly His people, even though they had seemed righteous and upright all along. This ploy worked quite well to keep the rest of the more naïve Witnesses in line and prompted some to become even more diligent to prove their loyalty to Jehovah.

Years later, these words were printed by the Society: "But some of their time calculations and the expectations that they associated with these gave rise to serious disappointments. Following 1925, meeting attendance dropped dramatically. Again, in 1975, there was disappointment when expectations regarding the start of the Millennium failed to materialize. As a result, some withdrew from the organization. Although these tests resulted in a sifting, others remained firm. Why? 'Those who had set their confidence in Jehovah remained steadfast and continued their preaching activity.'"—*Jehovah's Witnesses - Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 1993, p. 633. As with all the of the Watchtower Society's previous unsuccessful predictions that the average Jehovah's

Witness knows nothing about, the truth of what really happened has been twisted around and Watchtower history has been rewritten. Those who are aware of the real truth and have moved on have been effectively silenced by being labeled as wicked, evil, apostates by the Watchtower authorities, and the ones who are too young to know any better are kept from the truth.

So then, what *really* happened in 1975? For the vast majority, Jehovah's Witnesses and worldly cretins alike, absolutely nothing! The year came and went and nothing more significant than normal everyday history occurred. Saigon fell and the Vietnam War was officially lost. Two bungling women took shots at President Ford and both missed. Aristotle Onassis died. Rod Serling, master of the *Twilight Zone*, died fifty years young on my eighteenth birthday. Sean Ono Lennon was born on his father's thirty-fifth birthday. Tiger Woods, Drew Barrymore and Angelina Jolie were born, and *Saturday Night Live* hit the small screen. Microsoft was founded. Jimmy Hoffa vanished. Bill married Hillary. *Jaws* scared timid beach-goers the world over out of the surf. The Pittsburgh Steelers took the Minnesota Vikings 16-6 in Super Bowl IX, and the Cincinnati Reds needed the full seven games to take down the Boston Red Sox in the World Series. The SS Edmund Fitzgerald along with twenty-nine good sailors plunged to a watery grave during a freak storm on the tumultuous waters of Lake Superior. The world's population surpassed four billion. The Cold War continued relentlessly and numerous political hopefuls boned up for the following year's upcoming presidential election. All these events and countless others took place as the great year of 1975 passed into the annals of history, but *Armageddon did not come...*

Armageddon did not happen.

Chapter Six – The Woe of Aftermath; What a Long, Strange Trip it’s Been. – (Larry’s Story)

The events of 1975 (my personal events, not those predicted by the Witnesses - as we now know, those events never came to fruition) served well to set me up for my impending plunge into *the world*.

Filled with disgust and anger and bitter resentment following the Katie incident, I threatened to walk but instead agreed to hang on with the Witnesses at a different congregation. The so-called brothers of the Parkway Hall had pushed me at least that far and, as mentioned earlier, I would have no part of them. At the end of July, I got a job at McDonalds on Olden in Trenton. Now for most, getting a job at McDonalds at age eighteen after being out of school for two years would appear to be the ultimate dead-end. For me it was the opposite - a total rebirth. I tried acting normal and actually succeeded for a time. I made new friends, friends of *the world*, and I began to learn a few things from them. By late October, I had actually managed to obtain a girlfriend. Unfortunately, that first foray into worldly romance lasted a mere two weeks. I was also at this time hanging out again with my Witness buddies who were also drifting away from Jehovah in their own right, and for their own reasons. Betzow and Powell were also eighteen and were technically under no obligation to continue to avoid me. They were also no strangers to tobacco, pot and liquor. Jeff Zimrod was still sixteen and under Brother Zimrod’s iron fist and so his movements were rather restricted, though he would sneak out to party with us anytime he could concoct a tale he could get his father to swallow (the aforementioned prom incident was still half a year in the future). I continued to attend meetings at the Hamilton Hall, though not regularly. Many a time I would dress the part and simply head to the movies or a ball game or sometimes even a bar. Remember that back in 1975, eighteen was the legal drinking age in New Jersey. I turned eighteen on June 28, 1975, at the Allentown, Pennsylvania summer convention, with my younger cousin and co-author Michael just a few doors down at the Patio Court Motel. I spent the remainder of ‘75 and the first half of ‘76 just kind of drifting along in a double existence. I hung out and drank with my old Witness pals and I did the same with my new friends that I’d made on the job. That job at McDonalds became like a social event; I was making friends, learning about the real world, actually being *accepted* by my peers and, for the first time in my life, I felt almost normal. I was no longer the class freak. I felt great! Unfortunately, because of my Witness and mother-dominated upbringing, I was also completely blind to the big picture, but it would be years before I would realize the full impact of this. A lot of the kids I worked with were still in high school, some were just neighborhood sluggards, but many were in their first or second year of college. There was also a twenty-three year old fellow who was a complete nutcase and a twenty-seven year old Vietnam vet who was totally ruined from the experience, neither one of whom would ever get much farther in life - damaged goods so to speak. I became fast friends with both of them. Like attracts like.

In the spring of ‘76 the incident with the pencil happened, and that was the last straw. I just stopped going to the meetings, and I stopped sneaking around and pretending to. I had a lot of new friends from the job, and they were not all male, to be sure. However, I

was still a stupid little kid at nineteen who didn't know jack about surviving in the real world, and did not know how to act properly, especially around girls. I flirted with the good-looking ones and poked fun at the sorry-looking ones, like some sixth-grade jerkoff who didn't even know if he had sperm yet. However, every time I did something incredibly stupid and assholeish, I learned a lesson from it. That turned out to be both good and bad, because not all the lessons I learned were valuable, and not all the leaders I followed were worthy. By the autumn of '76 I had a girlfriend named Laura, and this one lasted nearly three months. My Witness buddy Steve began dating her older sister and the four of us had a lot of good times together and, for the first time ever, I went to a Catholic church. On Christmas Eve in 1976, JoAnn and Steve and Laura and I went to the Incarnation Church for midnight mass, stoned on pot and buzzed on beer. A strange thing happened to me in that church and, for the first time, I realized that my transformation was not about to be an easy one. This will sound supremely strange to you, the reader, but trust me, it happened, and it caused me to seriously begin questioning my own sanity. That night in the church, I began to feel sick. Not sick in the I've-had-too-much-to-drink-and-am-about-to-puke sense, but in a more subtle way. I felt sweaty, then just plain hot. I felt shaky and unstable and I knew beyond any doubt that it wasn't from the pot and the beer. I don't how I knew this, but I was 100% positive that it was so. My little voice. What I felt was a crushing presence on my soul and spirit and an intense desire to get up and run like hell out of that church and down the road. I felt that I was being looked down on, that I was being judged, that I was guilty, and that I was about to be punished. To be blunt, I felt what I believed to be the steel hand of evil tightening around my throat. At that moment, I knew what I was afraid of, and felt all the more an idiot for it. I felt my sanity might be at stake. Of course, being the coward that I was, I didn't want to look foolish and stupid, and I didn't want to act drunk or high in front of Laura's perfectly normal Christian family, so I sat it out. Later I realized that what I thought was cowardice was actually an inner strength I didn't know I possessed. So I sat in the pew sweating and trembling, and when everyone was rising and sitting and rising and sitting, I felt that I might literally throw up. But I made it through mass, thanks to that inner strength that was hidden someplace inside me. My friends thought it really *was* the pot and beer that had me trembling and sweating and palefaced, and although I didn't want to be labeled a lightweight, I offered no words to dispel that notion. The alternative, the truth, was much worse to admit. Steve might have understood, but no one else in that family of nice folks would have, that's for sure. They would have been insulted, but they wouldn't have understood. They couldn't; they hadn't been there. Over the next few days, I pondered the events of Christmas Eve in the church. I knew what had happened all along, but I was loath to admit it, even to myself. I thought I was free. I hadn't seen the inside of a Kingdom Hall in six months and I was learning how to get along in the real world. Leaving the Witnesses had been the end, hadn't it? So I thought, but as it turned out, it was just the beginning. I'd never be able to talk about that night to anyone, and I never did. Until now.

What had happened? What was so terrible? What the hell was I so afraid of? Those questions, legitimate though they may be, skirted the real issue. Face it man, my little voice said to me, and ask yourself the *real* question: Why was I scared out of my shorts to be in a *church*? I knew the answer immediately, but I didn't much like it. A word my

father had used many times in the past popped unbidden into my troubled mind, and languished there: *brainwashing*. And all the crap that was pounded into my head since infancy - false religion, Babylon the Great, offspring of vipers, the Catholics are the worst, Satan the Devil - was still in there, poisoning my subconscious and affecting me physically and mentally. In the church, it all came flooding back. I was doing a bad thing! I pushed it away and tamped it down as strongly as I possibly could, but it quite nearly made me physically sick to do so. The images were all around, pointing at me like the accusatory fingers of Mother and the elders: "You have entered the tabernacle of false religion! You're in Satan's house! Call upon Jehovah to save your miserable self! Pagans!! Catholics!! Nuns and priests; pah - worshippers of the Devil; offspring of vipers! Death at Armageddon awaits you, you weak and selfish little boy!"

A rude awakening, for sure! Though I was finished with the Witnesses, it was a long time before I was able to enter a church and not feel as though I were committing some mortal sin. That incident shook me hard. I was single again by New Years Day.

By summer of 1977, I was deep into my little world and having a ball; twenty years old and still working at McDonalds, still living at home, getting high every day, drinking, flirting, all without a single thought as to the future. I had become an avid rock fan (my top-40 days were finally over) and my full-time *career* enabled me to buy albums (which, of course, still had to hidden under the bed), gas, beer, pot, concert tickets, and all that good stuff. The big Fleetwood Mac stadium tour hit JFK, and Pink Floyd brought their *Animals* tour to the Spectrum on my twentieth birthday. Queen hit the Spectrum in the fall, as did Aerosmith and Kansas. I had much-coveted tickets to the Lynyrd Skynyrd show, the one that never happened because of the plane crash. Steve and I both had Tuesdays off, and Tuesday was reserved for cruising. We'd buy beer and score a bag of smoke, then just drive the whole day long. Down the shore, deep into Pennsylvania, through the Jersey pines, all over the state. We just drove around all day drinking beer and smoking pot and stopping to stuff our guts somewhere along the way. This was a ritual, like some high holy day, through most of the year, until Steve again got serious with a girl. Let us not forget that when Steve would pick me up, I had to walk down to the corner so Mother wouldn't know whom I was associating with. By this time, Steve had been disfellowshipped for smoking (cigarettes; ironically, he never got caught smoking the illegal cannabis leaf). I was dating a lot of girls, but nothing really serious. I was able to get lots of girls to go out with me because I always had pot, I always had concert tickets, and I always had a full tank of gas. I was the king of the world! Or so I thought...

In early 1978, I became involved with a girl, and it got fairly serious. It was with this girl, Sandy, who was seventeen at the time, that I learned another hard lesson. Somewhere along the line, it had become much easier to get a girlfriend than to get rid of one. More on that later. As it turned out, she was the *first*, in the spring, three months before my twenty-first birthday. As it also turned out, she was a whacko, but she had some pretty cool friends. She also had an older brother, who I became friendly with, and he had some pretty bad friends. Stronger booze and stronger drugs. Uglier parties in uglier places; dirty bars and run-down dungeons in the bowels of Trenton. Speed freaks and cokeheads

and people who'd actually been to jail, and my perfect little world that I'd built out of my McDonalds employ was fast crumbling. Now I was getting involved with a rougher, nastier crowd. I remained friends with a chosen few of my McDonalds buddies, but the bulk of them moved on - they left for college, moved away, got real jobs. I was nearly twenty-one and was beginning to feel left out. The way I looked at it, I could do one of two things; either stay at McDonald's and hope to one day become an assistant manager, or try to find another, better-paying job. It was about this time that my cousin and co-author, at fifteen, began taking guitar lessons. I had grand hopes of becoming a rock star, even though I couldn't sing a lick, so I joined him. And we really did cut through the cemetery to get to the studio, but we never *practiced* in there. As it happened, I had neither the talent nor the patience to learn the instrument, and I gave it up. That was the first of many abandoned efforts and dreams; the pattern was evolving - my propensity for not following through on things had begun, and that terrible habit would follow me for a long time. I had no patience - I wanted everything and I wanted it NOW! Play and practice for five years? No way, I want to go on stage and open up for Zeppelin next week! Go to school for four years to learn how to *be* something? Hell, no, I want that job today! The concept of spending that much time learning how to do something, and to do it well, was totally foreign to me. It had been drilled into my head so hard and for so long that the end was soon coming, that Armageddon was nigh, so there was no need to accomplish anything. No need to become anything, no reason to become *somebody*.

I did get another job, the first of many, as a galley slave in the kitchen of a large sprawling business complex about twenty miles to the north. I got fired after six months because the chef who ran the place was an asshole, but by then, so was I. Along about this time, my girlfriend found about my Witness past and began hassling me about it. It seems a second cousin of mine on my father's side who lived in her neighborhood told her about my past, not maliciously, and not expecting her to begin harassing me about it. Sandy broke up with me in October after nine months and, like the dummy that I still was, I took her back a few months later.

Late in '78, I took another job, as an office boy, at the Princeton think-tank known as ETS. Though I went through five different positions there, I stayed with this company for close to ten years. The friends I made at ETS were an amiable bunch and, as it turned out, this too was more of a social event than a career. I also began thinking about my future, at the urging of my dad. Let's face facts, I was twenty-one, still living at home, still drinking and getting high, had no savings, and was spending every penny I made (which didn't amount to much) on fun. I was a party shark swimming in an ocean of good times. I was fiscally irresponsible and a mental midget, but I had something I never had when I was younger - I was popular. Because of all the ridicule and scorn I endured as a kid and a teenager, my messed-up mind dictated that I must be and must always remain well liked, at all costs. This was not very hard to do, since I was quite a likeable fellow - my personality had blossomed and I had become very charismatic. I was popular, I was good-looking, I was cool, and I was having the time of my life. However, because I was still subconsciously afraid of ridicule, of confrontation, of fighting and getting beat up, I made it a point to get along with and agree with anybody in my presence, both friends and friends of friends. I remember a guy once asking me at a party why I had to be so

goddam agreeable. Fool that I was, I took it as a compliment (I actually honed this trait of being well liked to near-perfection, and many years down the road, it served me well in my positions of restaurant and retail management. I was able to convince people who worked for me to do just about anything I wanted by instilling in them a fear that if they did wrong, they would get *me* in trouble with *my* bosses. I led them to believe that if they did get me in trouble, I could possibly get fired and, if that happened, they would then have two major problems. First, they would have let me down and cost me my job after I treated them so well. Second, if I lost my job, whoever replaced me would never treat them as well as I did. That philosophy of using guilt and fear got me through over fifteen years of management occupations, and it worked quite well. To this day I employ these traits in my secular work). I grew my hair long, at least five years out of style by then, simply because I'd always wanted to and because I could. That was also a direct slap at Mother, who was constantly begging, pleading and praying that I return to Jehovah before it was too late, before something terrible happened to me. I would have none of it; no way was I going to return to that meddling bunch of busybodies and all those ridiculous rules, restrictions, and timekeeping. My dad was also on me, however, for a much different reason. He saw what I was doing and where I was headed. He may have been happy that I *split the truth*, but he definitely wasn't pleased that I had gone so far in the other direction. He reminded me that it was never too late to go back to school, and he also reminded me that although fun and good times and partying was fine, I was going to have to grow up sooner or later. He used an old depression-era expression that left a hearty impression on me. He let me know that someday I was going to be out on my own and would need a lot more money than I was currently making, and that it wasn't a likely prospect at the rate I was going. His term was much more inspiring than burger-flipper, galley slave, or office boy. His term was *ditch-digger*. As in, "People who don't finish school end up digging ditches." He'd said this same thing six years back, but this time his argument made sense. After all, I might have been acting and living like a rock star, but I sure wasn't earning much bread. Mick Jagger and Steven Tyler and that crowd might be able to guzzle booze and party for the next thirty or forty years, but I sure as hell couldn't afford to. Again, his argument made sense, so I signed up for a four-month night class and prepped for the state GED. In essence, I took my twenty-two year-old, longhaired, popular ass back to school and got my diploma. When I told my dad that I had finally graduated school, I don't think he was ever more proud of me, before or after, than he was on that day. I felt pretty damn good about it myself.

I moved into a better position at ETS after that; the money was better, and the hours were full-time. Then I spent a full week in the hospital and three more on the couch popping pills after my appendix went bad. I made more friends, and nobody I was hanging out with at the time knew anything of my embarrassing past. I was asked to join one of the intramural baseball teams and, even though I stunk at ball because I had never played any sports in school, I started almost every game because I was so much fun to be around. I was like a kid in a candy store, and my enthusiasm was contagious. My playing did improve over time, but I was never really all that good. I could handle the bat, put the ball in play, get on base and score runs, but in the field I might as well have been trying to catch the ball using an empty catfood can for a glove. It was just so much fun, another social activity, more people to get acquainted with, more girls to flirt with, more good

times to be had. All was well, but I was still boozing and stoning, still jerking around, and I still had that whacko girlfriend with the bad news brother. She and I stayed together off and on for a while, but I was completely free of her by early '81. The problem was, I had gone from not being able to get a girl to not being able to get rid of a girl, namely this one. There's not a lot to be said about her that pertains to this story except this: I discovered that I had no idea how to break up with someone. I had always been the *dumpee*, and now I desperately wanted to be the *dumpor*. But I didn't want to hurt her feelings, didn't want to feel guilty, didn't want her friends to think I was a jerk, didn't want her crazy brother to kick my ass. I had blossomed alright, but I suddenly realized that my old buddy Gary from that long ago party was right - I was way too agreeable, and way too nice to people. I needed to toughen up some, but how in hell was I going to do *that*? I'd been raised a marshmallow, and except for some rare cases, I'd never stood up to anyone. Afraid of the kids at school, afraid of Mother, afraid of the elders, that was me. It was all coming back again, and now at twenty-three, I couldn't even stand up to this scrawny nutcase who I had actually loved at one time. All of our constant bickering and her chronic complaining were throwing a monkey wrench into my otherwise happy-go-lucky little world, and I couldn't deal with it anymore. When I finally did do the breaking up, it wasn't pretty, and we did not remain friends. It was hard, and it took a while, but I did what I had to do. Leaving her was almost like leaving the Witnesses again, and I couldn't have that scenario wafting through my brain on top of everything else. Sandy, imperial bitch that she was, did her best to get even, and she was damn good at it. She hit me twice where it hurt, good solid blows, before she finally went away. First, she phoned my dad and told him that I had lost my license over all my notorious speeding violations and that I was currently driving on a Pennsylvania license that I had obtained by lies and deception. This was true, and I had kept this nasty little fact hidden for quite a while before she blew the whistle. Second, she called me one night about a week later, pretending to be nice. Said that even though I was a shitty little jerk, she didn't want us to be enemies because we'd spent so much time together. Apprehensively, I said OK. She said she wanted to tell me a little story, and then she would leave me alone, if I wanted her to. Again I said OK. She went on to say that she felt really bad for me because of what had happened when I was little. *Ah, shit, here it comes*, my little voice said. She said she knew all about the time when I was real sick and I needed a blood transfusion, and my mother had said there was no way she was going to allow her son to have blood, because it would go against the ways of Jehovah. The doctors told her I would die without blood and she said if that was Jehovah's way, then so be it. My father supposedly had to whisk me away in the middle of the night to an out-of-town hospital so I could have my blood transfusion and remain alive. That was the reason my folks had split up for three months back in 1962. How did she know all this dirt, I asked of her. She said she'd heard it from my cousin Eddie, who lived nearby. I told her Eddie was full of shit, and next time I saw him I would knock him on his ass, then I hung up. It turns out the story wasn't true, but for a short scary time she had me wondering. Would my mother really have sacrificed my life in the name of Jehovah? I questioned my dad about it and was assured that I was never that sick, never in danger of death, never needed blood. It seems that a good amount of my dad's relatives were not very pleased with his wife after she discovered Jehovah and turned his world upside down. They couldn't stand the Witnesses and they were all appalled at the way I was being brought up. It seems young

cousin Eddie knew that my girlfriend had a strong dislike for my mother too, and he decided to stir up the pisspot a little. He had no idea she would throw it at me in such an ugly manner, and he was extremely apologetic when I called him on it. Sadly, cousin Eddie is no longer with us, but there it was, just another reminder of that old mess, come to life again.

Through 1980, my personal evolution continued on. I discovered that I enjoyed reading, and since as a boy most of my reading was of a Witness-indoctrinated religious nature, I'd never had the chance to enjoy much fiction. The extent of my childhood fiction consisted of *The Happy Hollisters* and *The Hardy Boys*. I never read any of the classics in school; no Shakespeare, no Orwell, no Huxley, none of that. In the summer of 1980, at the urging of my friend Stephanie, I read *The Hobbit*, and I loved it. Of course I had to follow it up, and I became completely immersed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Also during this same summer, both writers of this work went to the movies one rainy night and saw Stanley Kubrick's masterpiece *The Shining*, starring Jack Nicholson. Having so thoroughly enjoyed the movie, I'd decided I should read the book. I asked Stephanie, an avid reader, who the author was. "The one and only Stephen King," she replied, and added, "he's one of the best." I immediately went out and bought the book. Enjoying that particular tale immensely, I searched for more and began devouring his earlier material with gusto. I found especially intriguing his massive tome *The Stand*, which is his own rendition of the end of the world as we know it and the ultimate showdown between good and evil. Simple plague, no physical destruction, a docile Armageddon. Hence my passion for horror and fantasy was born, along with my odd fascination for doomsday scenarios (but then again, is it really all that odd?), and I've been enjoying it ever since. Mother, upon seeing Stephen King books in my room, had a total meltdown. "That demonized garbage you read! Get it out of this house! You've let Satan in. Get that garbage out of this house!" So of course most of my books now had to be stashed under the bed or in the back of the closet with my record albums. Toward the end of that year, John Lennon died, a sad event indeed. I went to the memorial in Central Park with some friends. At two in the afternoon on Sunday, December 14, 1980, a ten-minute period of complete silence was called for and observed, with half a million people in attendance. During that time, not so much as a dog barked, not so much as a baby whimpered, not so much as a cough or a sneeze issued from anyone. (*come together...right now...over me*) About halfway into it, the sky clouded over and a light snow began to fall that lasted about two minutes. Yoko appeared at the window of their Dakota apartment holding young Sean, looked down upon all her husband's fans and admirers, and smiled and waved to us all. We heard later on that no snowfall was reported anywhere else in New York City or beyond. On that day, I realized that there was a lot more to existence than the opposing concepts of Jehovah and Satan, good and evil, black and white. My mind opened up a little bit more on that day, although it still had a long way to go. Thank you, John.

Through '81 and '82 the social whirl was extraordinary. I'd made even more new friends after joining the ball team. Nobody knew of my past and I was wallowing in my ongoing normalness like a joyous fat pig in a steaming and stinking lake of mud and dung. But I was still drinking, pretty much every day now - during and after ballgames and bowling,

after work at Don Young's when there wasn't a game, on the weekends hanging out with friends, before, during and after numerous parties. I was still smoking pot, still hitting the pills, with no thought to growing up whatsoever. As Mr. Springsteen said once upon a song, I "never once gave thought to landing." In the spring of '81, my buddy Tim and I did our first official spring break in Florida, a week in Daytona Beach. The place was a veritable hive of booze, drugs and sex-starved college girls, and Tim and I jumped in with gusto. We visited a place along the beach that was actually called the *Oral Sensation Blowjob Station*; I am not making this up. It wasn't a bar, but rather an entire top floor of a hotel; where people could come and go and pretty much do as they pleased. Such goings-on have since been outlawed in Florida and spring break is a mere shell of what it used to be back in the eighties, but what a blast it was at the time. I felt insulated now - I'd finished school, so that meant I'd accomplished something important. I was working full time and paying my way in the world, but there was something missing, and I still couldn't see it. I was staring down the barrel of my mid-twenties, and I was still living at home. In the summers a bunch of us would rent a house at the Jersey shore, in what would become an ongoing tradition, and it would be nothing but a seven-day party. The place would sleep seven or eight, officially, but we'd cram in twenty to thirty people, all drinking, all smoking, all causing a ruckus, all just having a good old all-American good time. On Saturday night we'd cut a hole in a watermelon and dump a full bottle of vodka into it, then shove the whole damn thing in the back of the fridge and let it fester for the rest of the week. Come Friday night, we'd pull it out, whack it up and eat it while we cleaned up the place. We'd smoke pot out of apples by carving a hole in the top and cutting through to the side. We'd put the pot in the hole on the top and suck the smoke through the hole in the side, and then when we were done smoking, we'd eat the apples. We'd drink on the porch and smoke on the roof, then stroll the boardwalk and wander the streets totally wasted. How we didn't locked up even once I'll never know.

Along about this time my good buddy Dave from ETS, who was an aspiring rock musician, asked me if I wanted to join his band as a roadie. The pay was poor and the work wasn't glamorous, he'd said, but the perks were fabulous. The band was Steel Breeze. Dave was the keyboardist and one of the vocalists, Steel Breeze being one of those rare bands in which every member was an accomplished singer. Steel Breeze was a rising star on the Trenton-area rock scene, which at the time wasn't much of a scene at all, just a collection of run-down camel-piss bars in questionable neighborhoods. But hey, everybody has to start somewhere, and these boys had very high hopes. And they were *good!* I jumped like a dog on this. A roadie for Steel Breeze! Now, on top of being a normal, popular, good-looking regular guy with lots of friends and lots of dates, in addition to playing on the best ball team in the intramural league, I was a member of a full-fledged, honest-to-Jesus rock and roll band! My joy was unending. I was thrilled. I had always wanted to be in a band! I reminded myself, a bit wistfully, that if I had followed through on my guitar lessons four years back, I might be *on* the stage instead of *behind* it. But it was all good, and my embarrassing past was the last thing on my mind. Along about a few months later, there was a bit of upheaval and strife amongst the members of the band. It came about that the lead guitarist, Nick, was undergoing a transformation in his life. He let us know that there were certain songs he would not be able to perform any more because the lyrics went against his newfound religious beliefs.

Soon thereafter he left the band completely because pursuing a career in rock music went against the grain of his recently discovered faith. Memories and feelings came flooding back yet again, because this new faith that our friend left us behind for was that of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Most of the guys didn't know too much about the Witnesses, just that they were a bunch of strange ducks that weren't allowed to do much of anything. My good buddy Keith asked me if I had heard of them or knew anything about them. My brief reply was: "Yeah, I've heard of them," then I quickly changed the subject. I didn't want to go there... I stayed on with the band after Lenny, an equally talented musician, replaced Nick. I graduated to doing the light show and lived the life of a weekend rock star for about a year, until Steel Breeze dissolved and the band members went in their own directions. Some married their sweethearts, some got real jobs, some left the area.

Not all was rosy during this period, though. There was a car wreck back in '81, I remember. I had left where I had been around one in the morning and was heading home, which should have taken no more than ten minutes. Two hours later the impact with the utility pole brought me back to my senses, and I clambered out of the wreck of my car and looked around to see what I had done. I was on Spruce St behind Korvettes, in front of Ed Cahill Chevrolet, and I had no idea how I'd gotten there. What I did know was the right side of the car was completely obliterated and if I'd had a passenger, the crash would have certainly killed her. In the back on the floor was a Shop-Rite bag filled with empty whiskey bottles, beer cans and used cups, just all the crap that had been accumulating over the past few days. I grabbed this bag and heaved it off to the side of the street even as the cops were pulling up. They did not cite me for DWI, and to this day I wonder why. They saw the bag; they poked through it, they wondered how it had magically appeared there along the side of Spruce St in front of the car dealership. They questioned me about it but of course I knew nothing. Maybe during the nearly two hours I drove around I had sobered up, or maybe the speed in my system cancelled out the alcohol, I have no idea. But all I got was a ticket for careless driving and, later, a bill from PSE&G for the damage I'd done to the utility pole. An even thousand. The car was totaled, I needed stitches (I still sport the scar; it's hidden under the mustache), and I ended up losing my license (again) for six months because the careless driving rap put my points over the limit of twelve. I was expecting the cold steel cuffs, but all I got was a ride home with the tow-truck driver. By the time the band split, I was twenty-five, working the same job, still living at home, still drinking and stoning, still playing ball and bowling, still doing Spring Break in Florida, still renting houses at the Jersey Shore in the summer and still having a grand old time. Man, life was good...

Because I enjoyed reading fiction so much, I decided I wanted to write some. Another hobby. In 1981 I wrote the first three chapters of *The Cydronium Chronicles*, which was finally published in 2007. After spending spring break in Daytona Beach with my ol' buddy Tim, and reading *The Stand* a second time, I came up with a neat idea for a plot that was part psychological thriller and part doomsday fiction. Late in 1982, when my time with the band came to a close, I wrote five more chapters. Also, late in 1982, I became involved in another serious relationship. My newfound love, Sheryl, was none other than the ex-wife of the bad-news brother of my whacko ex-girlfriend Sandy. I mean, what was I thinking? Was I purposefully looking for trouble? Had I gone insane?

And she was a package deal on top of it all, with an eight-year-old daughter. We got along reasonably well for quite sometime, and we were together long enough to share two Christmases. A lot of good times were had, but she was more serious than I was and, in the long run, that was the fatal blow to our relationship. That, and in the end, Mother. Toward the end of our time together, Sheryl made a comment to me that was very wise, but of course I took it as a criticism and blew it off. "You have to grow up sometime. You can't stay nineteen forever," she said. How right she was. I was twenty-six, but I was stuck at nineteen, which is exactly when I left the Witnesses and began my self-taught education in the school of life. Think about it. By this time she was twenty-six with a nine-year-old kid, divorced, and making more money than me. Sex, fun and games with Mr. Peter Pan here was great, but it was getting a little old, and did I even have a clue that she was interested in something much more serious, stable and permanent? Of course not. All I wanted to do, still, was party, play ball, hang out, bowl, drink, and dabble in my newfound hobby of writing. The only difference was now I had a steady girl to drag along to my parties and games and bars. Did I say *steady girl*? Good God, I was twenty-six... Sheryl and I began to fight more and more over this matter, and I just didn't want to be bothered with her bitching to me about growing up. Again she was right, of course, and things were about to get a bit more ugly in my life. In October of '83, we had a massive fight over me going on a weekend mini-trip with my folks and sister. I had to give in to *somebody*, which pissed me off to the high heavens. My mother's constant caterwauling about how we should continue to take family vacations no matter how old I was had begun to wear thin on me, and I was especially sick of the derogatory names she would call my friends, particularly Sheryl. "Don't give in to that filthy whore, you're place is with the family," she spouted with vehemence. But my girlfriend's consistent bitching about how I was too old to run off on a family trip every time my mother snapped her fingers was also annoying me to no end, though it did make quite a bit of sense. Knowing that no matter what I did, there was going to be a fight with *somebody*, I decided to please the only one who *really* counted - me! I declined to go on the trip, evoking many bitter words from my mother and silent disappointment from my dad. I also declined to spend any time with my girlfriend that weekend, and spent most of it guzzling shots and beers, smoking the leaf and cruising the highways and byways of the Jersey Shore. I'd had enough from both sides and knew I needed to do something to rectify it, but I still had no idea what. Less than a month later my father was dead, and I realized I had the blown the opportunity to spend what turned out to be the last family trip with him.

Two days after my father's death, Mother was on a spool, preaching and expostulating about the resurrection in yet another thinly disguised attempt to get me to *return to Jehovah*. "Now you have to come back to Jehovah. Don't you want to see Dad again? Give up this worldly life you're leading and those filthy hoodlums you associate with so you can at least see Dad again. Don't do it for me, do it for Dad." That really boiled me, using my father's death as a ploy to get me back into the flock. Again, she meant well, and sadly, she truly believed what she was saying to me, but it still made me angry. It brought back all the ridiculous stuff we had pounded into our heads as kids again. Out of all the weird Witness beliefs, the resurrection concept was one of the hardest to get my head around. Think about it. Anything that had anything to do with coming back from the

dead was strictly forbidden, because it was of Satan. Communication with the dead, séances, mediums, Ouija boards - all prohibited. Vampire stories, ghost stories, the afterlife - all demonized and not to be so much as mentioned in passing conversation. Yet it was their firm belief that all persons who died throughout all time, even the so-called wicked ones, would be resurrected to a paradise earth after Armageddon. Reading *Salem's Lot* or watching *Poltergeist* was tantamount to being in league with Satan and inviting his demons into the house, but we were commanded to believe the dead were all coming back at Jehovah's bidding after Armageddon and all the Witnesses would be happily reunited with all of their deceased loved ones. How bizarre. I refused to discuss this matter with her, and left the room without further words. Six weeks later, Sheryl and I spent our second Christmas together, but all was not well. Several weeks into January it was all over but the shouting (and there was plenty of that; my chronic drinking wasn't doing much to improve my personality and temper). I said some nasty things to her because, even then, I wouldn't allow myself to realize that she was right. The girl needed to get on with her life; she'd had more than enough of my juvenile behavior, and she called it off. Rightfully so. Shortly thereafter, I was in my room, on the phone with Sheryl, trying to reconcile, trying to talk, trying to at least remain a friend. My mother burst into my room, screeching: "Get off that phone. I hear you begging that whore. Get off the phone to that filthy whore!" She spouted these pleasant words loud enough to be heard on the other end of the phone line; Sheryl heard this dastardly diatribe and said to me this: "You hear that? That's ok with you and that's why there's no hope for us, so just stop. For God's sake, save yourself. Get your ass out of that house and *grow the hell up!*" Then she hung up. That turned out to be our final conversation. Fifteen months and that was the way it ended, such a shame. If my mother hadn't burst into my room and shot off her big fat mouth, I might just possibly have been able to patch things up, but my mother's despicable outburst was the killing blow. I was furious. I knew Sheryl was right; I knew I had to get out. Two words she said rang true: *save yourself*. I knew I had to grow up. I was twenty-six. I'd known since my father died two months back that I'd have to get out, that I'd have to find a way to move on, because the glue that had kept our precarious household together for all those years was finally gone. My dad was always on my side, and he was gone. The family was dissolved; it now consisted of my mother, my nineteen-year-old sister whom Mother had turned into a timid, submissive little follower of Jehovah, and me. It wasn't going to work. I was on my own, and I had to save myself. My dad was gone, now my girlfriend was gone, and most of my friends were moving ahead with their lives. You know; marriages, careers, mortgages, children... I was in a state of high piss-off, and I blew my stack. I'm not proud of how I acted, but I did what had to be done and I said what had to be said. I let it out. I ranted and raved and cursed and threw stuff, with my mother standing defiantly before me *in my room* and my poor sister cringing in the background. Then I stormed out of the house and commenced to drink. Alone. I will stress here that I do not hate my mother; in fact, I don't hate anybody, but on that cold hard day in late January of 1984, I hated her with everything I had. It was *three months* before I spoke to my mother again, but it was *over a year* before I finally moved out.

I knew I had to leave. I had to face facts. I began checking out the papers for apartments and the like, looking into renting a shore house for the entire summer instead of just a

week, even considering moving down the shore for good, but I continued to procrastinate. I didn't spend much time in the house, and as long as I kept my distance and kept my mouth shut, life continued to be shakily peaceful. What happened next requires a brief flashback to the previous summer, 1983, and the family vacation at Cape Cod. Mother had been conducting a Bible study with a young woman from Trenton who had a four or maybe five-year-old boy and an estranged husband who was completely opposed to the Witnesses. Dad had rented the Cape Cod beach house for the entire month of August, but I didn't stay the whole time, as I was working, pretty much just going up for the weekends. Certain members of the congregation with whom my mother was friendly were invited to visit the beach house for weekends or other timespans that would fit their schedules. My Aunt Dot stayed for a week, and several sisters stayed for different time periods. The young woman from Trenton was invited to stay for a weekend, with her little son. Arrangements were made for her to ride up with Aunt Dot on Saturday and she could ride back to Jersey with me on Monday, as I had to be back at work on Tuesday. This young woman was twenty-three and quite attractive, and, asshole that I was, I got a charge out of flirting with a woman who was studying to be a Witness, turning on the charm and coming on to her, because I was *off-limits*. She was still married, although separated, and I was still with Sheryl at the time, but that didn't stop me, oh no. Well, I must have pushed it a little too far, without even really trying, because she responded. She liked me, and suddenly I felt guilty for toying with her affections. I liked her too, would have gone out with her, would have leapt into bed with her if I could have, but I knew that would have been mental suicide. Did I really want to hit the sheets with someone who was studying to be a Witness, studying with my meddling mother no less? No way, but Mother must have gotten some notion of what was going on, and she became righteously indignant toward us. She pulled us all together later that afternoon and said that she had determined that our original plans were a bad idea. It would be improper for her to permit this young Bible student to ride in the car with me for six hours. And why? Because she was responsible for this young Bible student's *spiritual welfare*, and the temptation of being alone in a car with a young man for an extended period of time simply could not be allowed. This was Jehovah's way, and not to be questioned. I pointed out that we wouldn't be alone in the car; we would have the kid with us, but that didn't matter. Other arrangements would have to be made. We would be leaving ourselves wide-open to the lure and enticement of fornication, and that couldn't be allowed. We mustn't put ourselves in a position to be unsupervised and allow Satan to tempt us with the *wicked desires of the flesh*. Like I was going to halt the car and take her right there on the side of the Connecticut Turnpike with the kid looking on and the traffic whizzing by. I was dumbfounded. I mean, this was preposterous, even for my mother. I couldn't believe she was actually serious about this, but she was. I glanced over at my dad, who was in the kitchen. He gave me a sort of sad but knowing half-grin, shook his head, grabbed a Rheingold and his binoculars and headed out to the afterdeck to scan for dolphins and boats. I looked at my aunt, who was nodding slowly in agreement, and I knew it was over. I opened my mouth and started spouting off about the stupidity of the dirty-minded Witness doctrine and all that, how they see sex and Satan *everywhere*, but it did no good, only served to make it worse. My mother was bound to enforce this idiocy, and that poor girl was going to have to find another way back to Jersey. I don't recall

what alternative arrangements were made for her, but I do know that *I* drove the 300 miles south to Trenton alone that Monday morning.

Fast-forward to February of 1984. I had stayed in contact with the young Bible student (whose name I'm going to protect) mainly because she was studying with Mother and was over to the house occasionally. Mother continued to look at us with a kind of guarded suspicion, as if we might de-evolve into barn animals, seize each other, slash each others clothing away and begin copulating right there on the dining room rug. And I continued to flirt with her every time she came around, mainly because it made my mother nervous, but also because I was good at it and she liked it. What a jerk I was... By this time Sheryl was gone for good and I was single again; miserable, lonely, bitter and angry, and the young Bible student took this opportunity to offer me words of comfort, to offer me her company, to be there for me. We went out a few times; to dinner, bowling, for drinks. We went to Don Young's often enough for some of my ETS friends to get to know her, and get to wondering what in God's name I was up to now, running around with a hot skinny bottle-blond Hispanic Jehovah's Witness who still wore her wedding ring. We even took a trip to Coney Island once. The trip to Coney Island was great; it was a mid-February Sunday afternoon and cold as all get-out, and we were like two kids on their first date. She helped me to be happy that day. Most of the arcades were closed, but the bars were open, and of course I drank too much. My little Bible student had to drive us home but she had no clue as to where we were, so I whipped out my city maps and, feeling important, I navigated from the passenger seat drunker than a hoot owl. I didn't do a very good job of it though; we managed to pass through most of Brooklyn and Queens before we finally found the right bridge to get us out of the city and back to Trenton. And the strangest thing was my mother actually offered to look after her son so we could spend that day together, and I briefly wondered what the hell that was all about. I didn't really care, wasn't even speaking to her, but it knocked around in the back of my mind - why would Mother approve of us spending the day together, alone, when back in the summer she wouldn't even let us be in the same car together? She actually encouraged us to go out, and she looked after the little son on several other occasions, too. Well, it didn't take a brain chemist to figure out what she was up to, what she was hoping would happen. I was blind to it for awhile (strong drink can do that) but I soon concluded that she was hoping that this young Bible student and I would fall in love, that I would then return to Jehovah, and all of us would live happily ever after. She never once considered the possibility that we would fall in love and I would *not* return to Jehovah. At this point I felt like I was on a runaway train, emotionally and physically, and heading for a total plunge off the nearest cliff. My friends were there for me, although there were whispers amongst them that they were a little worried about me; I was acting in a rather reckless fashion, not being myself. I missed Sheryl, and made no excuses about the fact that the breakup was my own damn fault. My drinking was a constant; I wasn't smoking much pot anymore (too boring), but I still enjoyed my speed. I wasn't an addict, never took it that far, but I was using just a bit too much. I loathed my mother at this point, and made no excuses about that either. My little Bible student knew I was an emotional wreck, knew I missed my girlfriend, knew I missed my dad, knew I was a heavy drinker, and knew how I felt towards my mother. That put her in a rather awkward position: on the one hand she had become a Jehovah's Witness because of my

mother's teachings and looked up to her as a true minister of God, and on the other hand she was now spending a whole lot of time with this minister of God's own son, who was a worldly drunk pining after his lost worldly girlfriend. A worldly drunk whom she had completely fallen for. And so this poor, misguided, freshly minted Jehovah's Witness was already breaking the rules by dating an unbeliever, even though the unbeliever in question was the son of the very person who had brought her *into the truth*. I can't say that I actually loved her, though it was pretty close; I believe the complicated nature and circumstances of our relationship served to make it larger than it really was. We were actually very happy for a short time, but in all honesty, I couldn't say for which reason I was so much into this young Bible student. I was on the rebound and needed comfort, yes, but I didn't pine over Sheryl all that long; within two weeks I was back to my normal (normal?) self and having fun again. Yet I was dating a Jehovah's Witness eight years after I had run nearly insane from the Kingdom Hall. And not just any Witness, but a Witness that my mother, whom I abhorred at the time, had brought into the truth. Why? Why would I want to date a Witness, any Witness, after what I went through all those years ago? I reminded my little Bible student that she would catch a whole load of trouble for dating a nonbeliever, and that pep talks from the elders were certain to begin happening soon. I also reminded her that she would without a doubt be disfellowshipped for fornication if we took our relationship much further, which we did, but she didn't seem to care. And what was my motivation? Did I love this girl, or did I just want to shove this in my mother's face: *"You brought her into the truth, and I pulled her out of it. You helped wreck it for Sheryl and me, so I took one of yours. I fucked your little Bible student and now she's mine! You thought she'd bring me back, but it didn't work!"* Good God, was that my motivation? I'd like to think it wasn't that drastic, I'd like to think I wasn't that much of a total bleeding asshole, I'd like to think I didn't go to bed with that sweet girl just to even a score with my insufferable and reviled mother, but in the end I just don't know and probably never will. I do know that I never really *loved* my little Bible student, but I didn't want her to get in trouble over being with me, especially since I knew she cared more for me than I did for her. I didn't want her to be disfellowshipped *for no reason*, because I wasn't going to stay with her. I couldn't. I liked her, I cared about her, and I was touched by just how much she cared for me, but I didn't love her. I was a drunken, drug using, mentally unstable, selfish asshole and I simply didn't want to bring this girl (and her cool little son) down with me, particularly since I had no idea where I was going. I impressed upon her that I was no good for her, that I would only bring her pain in the long run, that she'd be jammed in the middle of the rift between my mother and me, that the Witnesses would shun her because of me, that my drinking would cause trouble for all of us. She would have stayed with me forever but I let her go, and it hurt me to do that, because I was *comfortable* with her. She loved me, but I was merely comfortable with her, and I couldn't continue to hurt her like that. I don't know what ever became of her. How ironic that my last *worldly* girlfriend before I settled down was a Jehovah's Witness. A month later, I decided it was time to shed some of my shaggy, out-of-style, longish hair. My buddy Dave gave me a business card for a newly opened hair salon in Pennington, and the rest is history...

By mid-spring, I was speaking to my mother again, though I was very careful to watch my words, and I kept my distance, both emotionally and physically. We took a vacation

to Hilton Head with her, my sister, my cousin James and another Witness girl who was a friend of my sister. While there, I wrote a thirty-something-page short story concerning mind control that eventually became Chapter 23 of the *Cydronium Chronicles*. When I got back it was time for another haircut, and I asked the proprietor of the salon in Pennington if she'd like to go to Don Young's for a few drinks. Maryann and I started dating the following week. Though I didn't know it yet, my eight-year phase of self-destruction was about to end.

I had a girlfriend again. I had another chance, and I swore to a God that I didn't even believe in anymore that I would not, in any way, allow myself to bollix up this relationship like I did all the others. I also swore that I would not let my mother pitch any more monkey wrenches into my life; not this time, not ever again. Maryann caused me to realize that my friends, Sheryl, and my dad were right all along. It was time to grow up, and grow up I did. And, lo and behold, it wasn't that hard! I fell in love with Maryann, and she with me. Maryann was intelligent, gorgeous, kind, a lot of fun. She owned her own business at age twenty-three, and she knew what she wanted out of life. She had goals, a concept that was foreign to me until then. She came from a great family in a wonderful neighborhood in the stately little town of Stockton, fifteen miles north of Trenton. What she saw in me I'll never know, but it worked. I was ecstatic. I cut back on my drinking and usage of other stuff, set some goals, opened a savings account. I learned a lot from Maryann, who had been raised by a normal family under normal circumstances. We had a great first year together, and we planned a June wedding. Getting together with Maryann opened my eyes completely; I now knew that there was more to my post-Witness life than just partying, that there was indeed a real world out there filled with untold opportunities waiting to be taken advantage of, a vast landscape of life to be enjoyed. I finally realized that after my escape from the Watchtower Society, I had gone too far in the opposite direction, and it was time to strike a balance, time to let the pendulum of my life swing back some and settle in the center. It was time to calm down, get off the roller coaster and, again, grow up. And this time it worked. This time I got it right.

Around the spring of '85, my mother was talking about selling the house, for financial reasons, and wanted to know what kind of place and in which neighborhood we should start looking. As gently as possible, I her told her there would be no more *we*, and that when the house was sold, I would go my own way. I had a serious girlfriend, I was twenty-seven years old, and it was high time to leave the nest. This evoked a combination of bitter tears and angry words, sort of a Jekyll and Hyde litany that revolved around me breaking up the family again. I pointed out that I was a big boy, I had finally grown up, I had a decent job and could take of myself, and that she should be happy for me. But no. "You don't have Jehovah. You'll never make it out there in the world. They'll eat you alive!" What? Had she slept through the past eight years? Did they just not happen? I told her I'd be getting married soon, and we'd want a place of our own. "WHEN?" In June, I told her. She deflated like a pierced parade float, and shed some tears that didn't faze me at all.

We found an apartment in Pennington, half a house actually; it was nice, on the second floor, a bit small but with a big yard. It was right across the street from some ETS friends of mine. I moved myself in two months before the wedding. I was free! I had shed the final skin of my oddball childhood and danger-filled young adult years. I had made it this far, and I had everything to look forward to. The future was bright! Ah, but a mere few weeks later, my Witness-tainted past surfaced again, this time in a rather ugly fashion. Would they ever stop haunting me? This time it was Mother, again, and how she tried to throw a monkey wrench into our marriage plans; when she couldn't get through to me, she went to Maryann's mother. Maryann had invited my sister to be included in the wedding party as a maid of honor, but this was something my sister, as a faithful and devoted Witness of Jehovah, would not be able to do. Though my sister was glad I had found someone to settle down with after all my years of running amok, her beliefs would not allow her to take part in the rituals of a worldly wedding. However, Mother was not so glad about my plans. So, Mother penned a letter to Mrs. Vitale explaining to her how we were a family of Jehovah's Witnesses and how I had been *led astray* in recent years and had *wavered in the faith* and developed a few bad habits along the way. She explained to Mrs. Vitale how we do not intermingle with *worldlings* and certainly do not marry *unbelievers* who are not *in the truth*, and that the best thing she could do for all concerned would be to convince her daughter to step aside so that I could rightfully *return to the flock*. She there took the opportunity to do a little preaching and Catholic-bashing, too. Made me look like an idiot. It took a lot of work to repair the damage that letter did: Maryann called me all pissed off and said: "we have to talk about your secrets and who you really are." I had no idea what she was talking about; I thought maybe some ex-girlfriend or someone else was badmouthing me. I had not one stinking clue the Witnesses were coming back to haunt me again, triggered by my own mother trying one last-ditch attempt to wreck my future and take away my new happiness. I explained to Maryann and her folks (heavy-duty Catholics) that everything in that letter was true, except for one thing. I had left the Witnesses *nine years before*. My mother was being rude and meddlesome and I didn't blame them at all for being down on me because of it, and I hoped they would accept me as I was, not what I had been in another lifetime. They were good people, and the rest is history. In a way it was a good thing - my mother lost her final battle to get me back to Jehovah, and I once and for all grew the hell up.

Mother never would have gone to the wedding had it been held in a church, but we were married at the Fountainhead in New Hope by the mayor, Jay Snyder (also the local chiropractor). The Catholics are rather strict, too, and I wasn't Catholic, so we couldn't get married in church until I took a bunch of classes and became an official Catholic. I remember the priests weren't very happy about my Jehovah's Witness background. Six months later, we had a church wedding ceremony at St Johns in Lambertville. Both my girls were also baptized there. The wedding was a success and the honeymoon was great - four weeks in England, Scotland and Florida. Nine months and five days after we said, "I do," Baby Lauren entered the world, on her due date, on Maryann's mother's birthday, on the first day of spring, in 1986. I was twenty-eight and finally living as a normal human being with my own family. Baby Amy arrived in 1991, a Christmas Eve baby and another true gift to us. We are still together in the great year of 2009, and I'm proud to say our worldly kids are about as normal as any kids can be.

And so passed into history the bittersweet period of time that I call *the aftermath*. I call it that because, looking back on my reckless behavior of the time, it easily could have had a much uglier ending. All those years of drinking, all that drug use, driving the car after leaving the bars, the parties and the concerts; the ghetto back streets I fearlessly prowled in Trenton, New York and Philly in search of illegal fun, some of the characters I associated with, some of the stupid things I did. I was a rebel in every sense of the word. I was like the driver of a truck with bad brakes heading down the mountain and approaching a sharp curve, so deeply involved in the scenery of my own little world that I couldn't see that I would soon run out of road. When Maryann found me, I responded, I woke up, and I began pumping those brakes. I slowed the truck in time and enough to navigate the curve, and did not allow it to plunge over the mountainside! *I did not crash!*

If I may quote Robert Plant, from *The Battle of Evermore*: "The pain of war cannot exceed the woe of aftermath..." Those words ring true as I look back on that era, because by 1985 the war was over, and the aftermath had dissipated.

The pendulum had swung back. Peacetime had arrived. Life goes on.

In 1988 we moved up to Stockton and I started working in North Jersey as a restaurant manager. I didn't see much of Trenton for a few years except when I went to visit my mother and sister, which was about once a month.

In 1991 I started working for John Hancock, my sorry two-year stint as an insurance salesman, and that was when I put Michael's girlfriend and soon-to-be second wife Jenn to work, making cold calls to life insurance prospects. In '92, at Jenn and Michael's wedding reception, I insisted the DJ play some Queen music, and since he had none available, I provided some for him. I knew Michael was a Queen fan, as was I, and with Freddie Mercury having so recently passed on, it seemed only respectful and appropriate to play some of their music. I made sure the DJ played *She Makes Me (Stormtrooper in Stilettos)*, and when he did, people started wondering what the hell they were listening to. I told everybody that song was in my opinion the greatest love song ever written. I don't imagine even Michael swallowed *that*, but at least I tried. In my opinion, it *is* the greatest love song ever written. Just before Christmas that year, I quit Hancock (shitty salesman that I was) and went on to drive a limousine for about a year. A-1 Limousine of Princeton, that was an excellent job. The pay was poor, but I had a ton of fun. In 1994 I started working multiple jobs for financial reasons. That began a ten-year period when I was a fulltime manager and semi-fulltime tax preparer and fulltime parent. I went back into management and also started at H&R Block. I managed a Burger King, a Wendy's, a Boston Market, and then finally landed at Quick Chek in 1997, where I stayed until we moved south in 2004. I was so busy working the jobs, squeezing in basketball and cheerleading events and school stuff for the girls, trying to jam in a little fun now and then (the shore houses in Wildwood and Bradley Beach, the trips to Florida and South Carolina), normal family stuff and all that, that I had no time to be bitter, resentful and depressed over my bizarre past with the Witnesses. I forgot all about it and the only time I was reminded of it was when I visited my mother, my sister and her husband Steve in

Trenton, and then it was always in the present tense. That's why there's not a lot of aftermath in these later years - I was too busy living life and being a normal guy, and I do mean *busy*. I actually thought everything was OK, but since we've unlocked this festering, smelly vault, I now know that most of my failures and problems even during that time all stem back to the beginning, to my upbringing and subsequent escape. Interesting, huh? How it all comes back, like bad spew...

When my big break from the Witnesses was final by 1976, my sister was twelve. Still a little kid, and growing up as an exemplary little Witness child, doing all the things she was supposed to do. The difference was that she believed everything she was being taught, swallowed everything she was fed. She had no rebel spirit, no sense of question, and no interest in anything outside the organization (although she did like some of the music I was into at the time). She would not have considered leaving the Witnesses, not ever, because the organization and our mother had way too strong a hold on her. She was brainwashed in the full sense of the word. Watching my antics after I left the Witnesses didn't help matters any, as she considered my conduct and lifestyle during my first eight years in the world to be utterly deplorable. She was nineteen when our father died, and within a year and a half I was gone too, moved out and happily married to a woman of the world. Therefore she grew up and into adulthood as a full-fledged Jehovah's Witness, a pioneer, a sister righteous and upright and very firm in her beliefs. In 1991, she married a brother who had served at Bethel for some time. A good man he was; kind and gentle, and they were very happy together, and they continued to live their lives in the ways of Jehovah. In 1999, their son Collin was born. He arrived two months premature, and the pregnancy was a hard and dangerous one. The issue of blood arose, and my unspoken fear was that if it came down to the worst, my sister *would* allow herself to die due to the Watchtower Society's relentless aversion to blood transfusions even when medically necessary. The heartbreaking thing was that her husband and our mother would go along with and possibly encourage such a choice, because it was the way of Jehovah. It was at this time that I learned there was a hospital in northern New Jersey where some of the doctors are Jehovah's Witnesses. This hospital had broken new ground in the science of blood substitutes and the like, and many Witnesses go there when they have medical emergencies. The situation, though critical, did not become so dire that my sister would have to put her life on the line to obey the Society's rules. The baby was born and my sister lived through it, though it was touch and go for a while. She was given the sad news that her first baby would also be her last, as another pregnancy would most likely kill her, with or without blood or blood substitutes. So mother and baby went home after a few weeks, but a happy ending was not to be. Several years later she was diagnosed with breast cancer. On October 4, 2004, at age forty, the disease took her life.

My sister Cynthia dedicated her entire life to Jehovah, to the Witnesses, and to the Watchtower Society, yet Jehovah did not answer her prayers. Jehovah did not answer her husband Steve's prayers. Jehovah did not answer our mother's prayers. My prayers also fell upon deaf ears. I was a thousand miles away and a day too late... She never knew anything else...

In that year, 2004, after nearly thirty years away from the Witnesses, I experienced a brief moment of *what if-ism*. As in, *what if, just what if, by some astronomical odds, against*

all logic and all common sense and everything I stand for, what if they were right? What if Jehovah really is God? What if... People will try anything in desperation, right? What's to lose? I learned a long time ago that the worst that can happen when you ask for something is that the reply will be no. So for the first time since I was a teenager, I lowered my head and spoke these words: "Jehovah God, our heavenly father..."

And continued like this: "...she has been your faithful servant since her very birth, has known nothing else, has glorified and sanctified your name and has loyally spread the good news of your kingdom since she's been old enough to talk. She has literally devoted her entire life to you. She has a good husband who is as dedicated and faithful to you as he is to her, and she has an innocent little son who is also being raised to devote his life to you. She has family who loves her. All I ask is that you please consider sparing her life from the cancer that is about to take her away from us, just give her a little more time in this life. I pray this in the name of your beloved son, Christ Jesus. Amen."

I should have known better. God *damn* it, *I did know better...* But I tried.

For me, and also for Cousin Michael, life goes on. We live from day to day, we pay as we go, and we hope for the best, ever so grateful that we've survived this long. Sometimes when I look back, it seems like being here in 2009 as an active, productive member of human civilization is an anomaly, that I've made it this far only through pure providence, through total luck. On the other hand, I don't believe that for a second. Every step of the way has been a learning experience, an education in real life, and I have been extremely privileged to find people along the way that have accepted me for who I am, and for who I am still becoming. And yes, for whom I used to be. I have been blessed with good friends, and my family is priceless. I have yet to graduate from the school of life, but I'm getting there. I continue to learn something new every day and I'm doing all right, thanks to my friends, my family, and my own stubborn and resilient spirit.

A journey of many miles must begin with a single step. This journey is by no means over.

What a long, strange, trip it's been...

Chapter Seven – Aftermath and Reflection - What if? (Michael's Story)

I don't know where to start with this, it's very sad to me to relive these thoughts again and know that I am sitting in the same place I was twenty-five years ago.

Out! Gone! Away from all the nightmares of the congregation and the Kingdom Hall. Away from all the people who tore my life out of my body, stepped on my heart, and took any bit of hope I had away from me. Yet, there was a problem, and to this day, there still is.

Let's start with my three marriages. One to a person who just wanted to be out of her house and had no interest in me or anything I liked. Another to a person that was a very decent young woman, but the key word there is *young*, and another to a person who actually stood by me for the last twelve years despite all my holy rolling negativism, but that's not to say that we don't have our moments in the fighting ring. But I don't blame them, I blame only me. I have an attitude problem that will stay with me until the day I am buried. And maybe even longer if I figure out to haunt the world for a while.

The nightmares still carry on even after being away from all those self-proclaimed speakers of God. The holy worshippers of the past left such a hole in my body and soul, that I have no desires anymore. I have no hopes for myself and, at forty-five, I don't see any light at the end of the tunnel; just total darkness. I therefore throw myself into the futures of my son and daughter, and my only hope is that they can get at least two or three steps further than I ever did. My thoughts are always with them as it may be too late for me. I almost NEED them to go forward and leave their marks on the world, to be successful, and have fun doing it. However, I will never force them to do anything they don't want to with the exception of this - they *will* stay in school and not make the mistake I did by quitting. They will try to be good students. Other than that, they will forever have my total and complete backing in the choices they make, and I hope to provide them with the common sense to steer them in the right direction if they stray.

Below is a list of the things that I wanted to be. Like all kids that have dreams, the list changes with each aging year. However, in my life, the list was changed with each passing day, or hour if it was a Kingdom Hall night. You will also see, to the best of my memory, the reason I was TOLD I could never be any of this. Keep in mind that there were always two reasons for the excuses; one was that Jehovah would not appreciate or approve of it, and the other was the viewpoint only shared by my parents and the holy worshippers of God. My list:

Meteorologist - No need for them in the New Order because Jehovah will not allow anyone to be harmed by bad weather. Rain will be rain only to replenish the earth.

Astronomer - Why would one have a need to be something as pagan as this? There is no other life in the universe except for the life that Jehovah God himself has created here on Earth.

Policeman - No need for cops, as there will be no crime. Jehovah's people are peaceful sheep. The elders will see that Jehovah's word is preached and those who do not comply will be exiled forever.

Scientist (any type) - Again, no need for science or scientists because Jehovah will not allow pagan thoughts and worldly theories to enter into his righteous new order.

Teacher - All of Jehovah's teachings are in the Bible and unless you plan on teaching them to the children born under Jehovah's wing, there will be no need.

The job that was picked for me to pursue until the end of the world arrived and Jehovah cast out all the bad was that of a door-to-door salesman. This is what I called the Jehovah's Witnesses version of going door-to-door, pioneering, preaching the good news of Jehovah's kingdom to the sheep of the world. People needed to be saved and the good word was to be spoken to as many of them as possible. By the way, there was no monetary pay, no financial incentive for this job. You were paid and rewarded with the feeling of saving a life. I'm sorry, I call it *ruining* a life, and since I already had enough of it, I wasn't going to do that. Well, here I sit nearly thirty years removed from it all. I sit in a dead-end job where my big mouth gets me into trouble every time I open it. I sit at a desk where the work I do means nothing to me and no reward is possible. I sit in the world that I so wanted to be a part of thinking...what if?

What if is all I am about most of the time. *What if I didn't drop out of school? What if I went to college to be something that I wanted to be? What if I was born to a normal family and not the one I was chosen for? What if?* They said there was no need for school as it would all be useless in the New Order anyway, so at sixteen, I quit. Now, at forty-five, I still have all those thoughts of being nothing stuck in my head. I guess in so many ways, they were right. I was so badly brainwashed just before I escaped that I actually believed I would never be anything at all but a magazine-hawking, Jehovah-spouting, good-news-gushing door-to-door salesman. All of them; my parents, the elders and the other Witnesses, had me believing that I was wrong. There was no life in outer space. There was no need for science and technology. I pissed my twenties away, pretty much the entire decade. I drank a little, but not much since I hated seeing my father drinking like a fish and being drunk most of the time to escape his own miserable existence. I did minor drugs, too, but no hard stuff. I was as rebellious as anyone could be. I hated my parents for what they did to me. I hated my brother for not trying harder to save me; yet now I realize he was the one who actually released me in a way. I didn't get up and go because my get up and go had got up and went so many years before. One of my wives told me to stop living in the past, but little did she know that I was trying to avoid the past as much as I could, but it kept creeping back up on me. It would always find me and leave me with a gaping hole in my heart and mind, a hole in my soul that I knew I could not crawl out of.

To this point, it comes back. I see some of the things my son does and I see me. I fight so hard to keep him from any of the mistakes that I have made, yet I know he has to trip and fall from time to time. Just not off a cliff like I did. My daughter too; I see so much

in her eyes, yet I see so little as well. Not her, not him; again, me! Because my life was destroyed and I was not strong enough to mend it, I don't have the means they need to make it. They will have to fight for everything they want, as their father will be able to offer next to nothing in financial backing. Sure, I will be there for them every step of the way; but they deserve so much more than I can give. Words of encouragement will go very far, but let's be frank: cold hard cash is needed in today's world to get any farther.

Brainwashed is an understatement. What they do to people should not be legal. Look at some of the other cults out there: *A comet is coming! Joining us and riding the comet shall save ye! All you have to do is kill yourself so you can hitch a ride.* The Witnesses surely don't preach like that, and I firmly believe that they never will; but it's along the same lines. No physical death, but quite possibly a mental death. *Join us and you will live forever under the wings of Jehovah God and Christ Jesus his son.* Well, let us not forget that the damn planet won't even be here forever, let alone the human race! The Witnesses also don't pass the plate around to collect money like other religious organizations, although they'll never turn down a handout. But they will drain your self-resources; they will take your thoughts of life out of your head and exchange them with their own. They will tell you that there is no need for anything but Jehovah and his flock. They will lie to your face and then brag to others about how they just landed a new fish; a fish out of water, defenseless, and breathing only what little life they allow. They kill any thoughts you have by pounding the word of the organization and the dictum of the Society into your head. They tell you that rock and roll music will destroy you because passion other than to Jehovah is pagan and wrong; since life of the flesh is no good, they take your flesh. If you give a scientific reason as to why the sky is blue, the elders will first detain you for hours of lectures, then preach the next day that the sky is black. What they don't tell you is the sky is only black at night, yet even then, its blue - just look down from space. At any rate, whatever you think you know is thrust out of your head at warp speed and replaced with their beliefs and their beliefs only. They paint this wonderful picture of no crime, lions living along sheep, cats and dogs living in harmony, people of all races co-existing in loving peace. Does the movie *Ghostbusters* ring a bell here? Sure, it would be nice to have all this, but human nature, or the nature of the beast, will not allow this forever. So I would guess that Jehovah would spring another *end of the world* on us to wipe it all out again. How long will this go on? Take no part of the spoils of the world, only the fruits of Jehovah. This is drilled into your head from day one.

Yes, life during the Witness days was torture to me. However, they drove their points into my brain so much that life after them is no picnic either. They hurt you so badly during your time there that you can never fully rebound from it. They kill off any form of life you had and make sure you never will have any thing other than them - until you escape. Then, if they baptized you, you are disfellowshipped. I was lucky enough never to be baptized. In fact, I don't think they ever wanted me to be because I kept coming at them with questions about life in general. Any child that grows up in this life of Jehovah will never know what it means to be a child. Unless of course they are among the ones that can get away with anything they want to, which during my childhood was most of the kids in the congregation we were a part of. However, they still have no notion of the real world because they cannot be a part of it. They cannot have a birthday celebration,

observe holidays, join teams, or anything. They cannot play sports unless it's amongst them and then it's monitored to be sure there are no competitive actions taking place. They cannot go out and find a girlfriend or boyfriend if he or she is not a part of Jehovah's organization. It's so sad. They cannot grow up and learn how to live any other way than with Jehovah and his association. Heaven forbid if anyone of them ever asks the question, "Is there life anywhere else than here?" My lord, they will be thrown before the elders and *exorcized* in the name of Jehovah.

Getting out was a wonderful thing for me. By the time I was twenty-five, I was beginning to talk to my mother again. Sadly, she passed when I was just twenty-seven. We began to connect again, but the damage was already done. My dad and I were distant, but not a great deal. He also passed, six months after my mother. Yet, even though we were trying to become a family in our own personal new order, we could never be what those disgraceful families of the world were. We could never be happy with each other. Why? Because we were taught not to tempt the fruits of the world. We were programmed to be that way, drilled with the admonishment that the world is no good. We were told that a family that sits and eats together and watches TV or listens to music was no good, unless it was the rod of Jehovah's songs playing in the background. All those old TV shows like *Happy Days* and *Leave it to Beaver* and *I Love Lucy*; they were considered pagan families that spit in the face of Jehovah. Why? Because they were happy with the fruits of the world, and that could not be allowed! My parents died with new ideas in their minds, but the family was already gone. Gone before it even had a chance to live.

Fast forward to today. I sit here at work, in the dead end job that I get nothing out of and still in possession of talents that were never tapped or shaped or taken advantage of. I feel different that I'm gone from those days of old, and yet I long for those days of old. I long for a chance to relive them, but in a different, worldly way. A productive way. I sit here and wonder. *What if?* Ah, but there was good too, after my escape, and I cherish those memories. Here now I will share some of that good.

I'll start with 1980, when I was seventeen. I'd gotten my license and was driving; and playing ball with Larry and the ETS team. McQuaide's Brigade was name of the team, later to become the Chickenhawks. We had tons of fun; as you know, I love to play ball, but then, early on, I wasn't all that good. I was chubby and clumsy so they'd stick me out in right field like Timmy Loomis from the *Bad News Bears* but I didn't care, because *they let me play!* These worldly, fun-loving people actually accepted me, and it felt oh so good. Larry always played second base because he couldn't catch the ball to save his behind, and by keeping him on second the rest of the team was usually able to cover him and make the plays. After the games we would all go to the Wayside Inn on the Pennington circle for pizza and beer, but I always felt kind of uncomfortable. I was not into the beer scene and I truly did not fit in with most of Larry's friends. I wanted to, don't get me wrong, but I didn't know how. Like Larry, who wanted to so badly fit in and somehow figured out how to do it, I was struggling with it and had no idea how to master it. I had a severe identity crisis going on, and I was too young to fit in with Larry's

crowd. However, Larry did his best to make me feel better about it, and even though he would never admit it, he knew I was still too young.

In 1982, things were pretty cool. Late in the year, when I was nineteen, I went out to Los Angeles to spend some time with my brother. Ron was working for Forry Ackerman as the assistant editor of *Famous Monsters* magazine. While out there, I met Anne Robinson of the *War of the Worlds*, Nai Bonet, and many others. This was the time of my life. I was in Hollywood; meeting all these people I had to sneak to watch on TV and in the movies while I was growing up. The highlight was in December when I went with Ron to Anne Robinson's house just above Dodger Stadium. I walked out her front door and just stared at the stadium. Being a pseudo-Dodger fan, it was almost as good as being inside watching a game. While there, I got to share cigars and stories with Carl Ballantine, who played torpedoman Lester Gruber on *McHale's Navy*. He knew everything about the Trenton area, and told me stories of how he and Ernie Kovaks used to bum around in town. He was sad to hear that so many of the places he went to were no longer there and that Trenton was in a downslide. Anne was a wonderful hostess and within an hour I was feeling very much alive. I was beginning to feel what life was really meant to be. These people were from the world; you know, the wicked folk that lived outside of Jehovah's realm. The ones that I was always taught were evil and no good and inspired of Satan. Guess what, Mom, you were wrong! These people *made* the world. They gave their artistic views to people everywhere and they shared their stories with *me*, a sorry kid from Trenton who knew next to nothing. I departed the Left Coast three days after my birthday. It was a sad day for both my brother and I, as neither of us wanted me to leave. I was finding out how the world really worked, and being in Los Angeles was the best place for me to do this. On my twentieth birthday, January 17, 1983, my brother surprised me with a gift that will never be topped. He invited Angus Scrimm (Rory Guy) over for dinner. Angus is the Tall Man from the *Phantasm* movies. He even brought a kiwi pie that he had made himself. What a worldly person *he* was! He stayed for hours and we had the greatest time. He signed autographs, took pictures, and even gave me that famous shoulder pinch from the movie while growling "BOOOYYYY!!!" My blood ran cold when he did that. Sadly, it would soon come to an end and I found myself heading back to Trenton, back to the sadness, back to not fitting in.

In 1984 I was dating a girl who I would end up marrying two years later. She helped me get my GED and I was starting to feel good again. Getting that diploma made me feel better, like I had finally accomplished something. I graduated high school at twenty-one, a year earlier than my cousin! Nothing much else went down in '84, and turning twenty-one didn't seem to be much of a milestone for me. I was twenty-one, big wow. Who cares? Now I can drink, I can vote, I can go off to war; again, who cares. Wait a minute; I could do all of that shit when I was eighteen...

In May of 1986, I embarked upon my first marriage. What a farce that turned out to be! There was really no marriage because I was being stupid and doing things that I thought were right, trying to act out in ways I did not understand. She cheated on me endlessly and my so-called friends knew about it and never told me. We were only married

officially for a few months before getting divorced. Thankfully, I learned some lessons from that; however, not enough. I was a fake and I knew it. I still had no idea how to act and what to say. I was a lost cause but I was trying.

I drifted about for a few years, working here and there, not much happening. 1990 turned out to be both a really good year and a very sad year, languid and bittersweet. I became reacquainted with Jenn, the girl who would become my second wife. We knew each other from our bowling days and she was a good person, with a heart of gold. Shortly after we started dating, my mother had a massive heart attack and died on the way to the hospital. At the time I was working for GE Astro-Space as a driver/warehouse worker in a temp job that paid damn good money with plenty of overtime. I was on my way to Valley Forge, over an hour deep into Pennsylvania, when it happened. Upon arriving at the job, the receptionist who I shared coffee with each morning came running out the door and told me to get back to East Windsor in a hurry. All she would say was that my mom was very sick and I needed to be there. When I got back, Jenn was there to greet me and we took off for the hospital. Jenn already knew that she was gone, but she did not want to tell me right away, and to this day, I appreciate that. When we walked into the hospital, the first person I saw was Uncle Nick, who had taken over as my favorite since Uncle Ray had passed a few years back. Seeing Nick, I assumed all was good, because Nick was not a hospital person; like me, he couldn't stand being in one, but he didn't have good news for me. He told me what happened and I felt that my entire world had ended. I just broke down. I was crushed, and remained so for days on end. My mom and I had just started to communicate again over the past year or so, and she was trying so hard to make up for all the time we had lost while being stuck in the Jehovah rut; for all the time that being Witnesses had stolen from us. She loved Jenn, even though she had only known her for about a month; she got a kick out of her. Jenn once told her that she looked like she was landing an airplane when she talked, and my mom yelled at her for that, but she yelled at her in a laughing way. That was my mom; if she yelled at you, she liked you. If she was quiet around you, she hated you. Just ask my cousin. She was full-blooded Italian, and proud of it! Jenn and her family were a big help in the days that followed; they were there for me in everything that happened. Jenn took over in helping my father, who had brain cancer, and did the cooking and cleaning and anything else he needed while I put myself back together. I will never forget any of that; I *can't* forget any of it. Jenn and I became engaged in early 1991. Regretfully, the cancer in my father took its toll and he too passed away. I was always the closest to my father, even though I stayed distant in many ways. I hated his drinking and that drove me away from him, though now I know why he drank so much. But he taught me how to fish, he stood up for me while we were stuck in the Jehovah rut, and he was always understanding of what I was going through. Although he was powerless against the tide of my mother and the congregation and the elders, he never turned a blind eye to my struggles. He stuck up for Larry too, when Clemente and Zimrod were hammering him about Katie and all that other ridiculous crap, not that it ever did any good. And again, Jenn was there through all of this, as she watched me lose both my parents in just six months time. Now she had to put up with *me*, deal with *me*, and take care of *me*, like some runny-nosed pissbag infant. I had never faced anything like this before, and even though she had never faced it either, she was strong, far stronger than I ever was. In May of 1992 I took a shot at a second

marriage and tied the knot with Jenn. Larry had missed the first wedding but he was at *this* one, with Maryann his wife. We were both Queen fans and Freddie Mercury had recently died (all this *death*), and one thing that stands out in my memory is that at the reception he supplied the DJ with some Queen music to play, and succeeded in raising some eyebrows when he got him to play *She Makes Me (Stormtrooper in Stilettos)*. He proclaimed that this was the greatest love song ever written, and the playing of it was essential at all weddings. Full of shit he was, and I suspect my cousin may have been drinking that night, and I really don't think that song is normal wedding fare, but then again, what the hell is normal in our lives? I remained a bastard and a dummy and still Jenn stuck by me. Her mother seemed to understand me for what I really was. She once told me that although she had no idea what I was feeling and thinking, she could tell that I had suffered a bad life. When we found out that Jenn was pregnant, her mother told me that I would relive life again, through the eyes of the child that I never got to be. Carolyn, you don't how true that statement was.

A year later, the best thing happened - my boy Sean was born. Sean came into the world at 2:38 a.m. on Saturday, July 31, 1993. A little guy, just short of seven pounds, but a great big scream when he greeted us. He became the center of my world the very second I held him. As I looked down upon this living, breathing, little human being I said a few words that I know the nurse heard, but I am not sure if Carolyn did, "*Oh my God, this is mine! I have to protect and care for him, in a way that no one ever did for me. This is my baby!*" Even with Sean though, Jenn and I became more distant as the months went on. I still had not gotten over what happened to my parents, I was still dazed and confused over the double loss and not handling it well, and I was still hooked on the past life that ruined my childhood and everything up until then. Sadly, by 1994, the year we lost our dear Uncle Nick to leukemia, my marriage to Jenn was over too. We divorced that year, though I'm happy to say that we remain civil and friendly to this day. But damn! Divorced again. Do I blame the Witnesses? Of course I do! However, I was just beginning to see that it wasn't only them, it was I as well. I was not letting go, and to this day, I still have a hard time doing so. I ruined what was the perfect scenario; a good-hearted, fun-loving, outdoorsy type wife and the perfect son she gave me. I wrecked it all because I still hadn't learned how to act and I was still so utterly foolish!

A year later, I met up with an old girlfriend from way back; Donna, and we started dating again. We later discovered she was pregnant, and Baby Lyndsay was on the way. Donna and I married in November of 1996, and there I was, married yet a third time! Would I ever learn? Or would I just keep trying until I got it right? Anyway, on December 18, 1996, Baby Lynn was born. This new baby was a pain in the neck. Most infants sleep eighteen to twenty hours a day, but not Lynn. She *stayed up* eighteen to twenty hours a day, and spent most of those hours crying. However, she turned out to be the perfect little girl. She knows to this day, and she knows it well, that Daddy is a sucker. When she looks at me with those big brown eyes, she knows she will get what she wants. She is very financially aware, though, and she never asks for anything that's too expensive. But if she wants something that is only a few bucks, let's just say that she knows how to get it.

I've been married to Donna for going on thirteen years. Sean has lived with us since he was in third grade; he is in high school now. My stepdaughter Jessica will graduate this year, and she is a story for another time. Suffice it to say that she will graduate, move on with her life, and never know who I really am. She thinks I don't like her, but that is not true. I was just able to read her well and I knew what she was going to do. She once said I was a nothing; oh, if she only how true that really is. Even with Sean and Lynn, I still feel the void in my life; of having never felt what it was really all about. Carolyn was right, I do see life differently now, through the eyes of the child I never was. Yet, it's still empty, but not because of the kids; no, no, no! They gave me my life back, but unfortunately, it was thirty years too late. I work so hard to make sure they never feel what I did. I give in to Sean and Lynn because no one gave in to me, as I imagine Larry did with Lauren and Amy and will do with Little John, and would be proud to admit it. He wanted his girls to have everything he didn't, and it seems he did a right good job of it. I want my kids to have what they want, even if it means that I have to go without, that I have to miss out on something. I want them to work hard, go to college, get great jobs, have families, and enjoy everything their father never had. I want them to understand that when I have my bad days, it's not them, but it's me. I want, no, I *need* them to be happy.

Life continued to roll along and for a while, nothing monumental took place. I met my good friend Phil in 2002 and spent some years getting back in the groove of my job at ETS, where I've worked for eight years now. Along came the fall of 2008 and my whacko cousin developed this crazy idea that we should dig up all of our dead dogs and inhale the stench, yank every skeleton out of every closet that we had ever nailed shut and poke through the bones, then crawl back into the reeking caves of our distressed childhoods and allow the bats to plunk down great gobs of guano upon our balding heads. And he had the nerve to call it *therapy*! Best idea he ever had, and here through 2009 we're still going at it!

This year marked the twentieth trip I made to the great wide north, Canada and upstate New York. For the past three years, Sean and I have made this trip to both catch tons of fish, and to enjoy the outdoors. Each year we find something else to make us realize just how small we are on this planet. This year, while checking out a new spot to fish, we noticed a large nest on top of a utility pole. In the nest was a baby eagle. We were amazed at this sight. Shortly after taking a few casts, Sean walked down the road to try another spot. We both heard her; loud, yet somehow soft calls from the mother eagle. She circled a few times, letting Sean know he was too close for her comfort, then landed, quite majestically on a tree about a hundred feet away. She seemed to know that we didn't mean any harm to her or her baby. After Sean reached his destination, she softly landed next to her baby in the nest and watched every move we both took. We also were treated to the scene of a mother fox and her young. They were playing in an open field while the mother just sat there, taking the playful bites from her babies, and seemingly not minding at all that they were being watched. The outside world is my escape, and my son enjoys it too, though being a teenager, not as much as I do. He gets this from both his mother and me and he is learning to respect this planet more each day. If he were to grow up like I did, he would have no respect, and no love of the world like we do

until someone showed him how to get out, like Larry did for me. The trip was good, but I have to say, not as good as others; this last year has really stirred things up inside of me. I've become more distant again and more depressed, not enjoying the things that I always did. But for one week, it was good to get outdoors, good to be with Sean, and good to be away.

I didn't stay in touch very well with my cousin, or the rest of the family for that matter. Busy with kids, working full-time, trying to live and produce and function as a normal human being, all that good stuff. Larry and I saw each other at tax time, and once in a pink, polka-dotted, yellow-striped moon. That was more because of me than him though, and I am still like that; I just don't do much. I really am a deeply depressed person and I don't care about much anymore. I went in the complete opposite direction of him. I am very happy that I have a wonderful son and daughter, and do all I can to make sure they never feel anything like I did, but when you get down to the skin and bones of it, I'm still stuck in a rut because I never gave myself a chance. My own damn fault. The Witness shit lived, and still lives on in me. I admit though, that I had many good times and still do; fishing, outdoors, baseball. Without that, and without Sean and Lynn, I'm sure I would have been dead long ago. What if... *What if?*

By God, what if?

Chapter Eight – On Brainwashing and Cultism

We are not here to accuse the Jehovah's Witnesses of being a cult, nor are we here to accuse them of brainwashing their subjects. Again, we will let you, the reader, be the judge of that.

The American Heritage Dictionary's two definitions of *brainwashing*: 1. Intensive, forcible indoctrination, usually political or religious, aimed at destroying a person's basic convictions and attitudes and replacing them with an alternative set of fixed beliefs; 2. The application of a concentrated means of persuasion, such as an advertising campaign or repeated suggestion, in order to develop a specific belief or motivation.

Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary's definition of *brainwashing*: A forcible indoctrination to induce someone to give up basic political, social, or religious beliefs and attitudes and to accept contrasting regimented ideas.

Some scholars have come to use the terms *brainwashing* or *mind control* to explain the otherwise spontaneously mystifying success of some fast-acting episodes religious converting or of recruitment of inductees into groups known variously as new religious movements or as cults. Brainwashing is also known as thought-reform or re-education and consists of any effort aimed at instilling certain attitudes and beliefs a person has; beliefs that are sometimes unwelcome or in conflict with that person's prior beliefs, knowledge, attitude and personality. As to brainwashing, I don't imagine the Witnesses practice deep and dark brainwashing techniques by torturing their subjects with the thought reform process. This isn't the CIA and the Witnesses are not an MK-ULTRA mind control experiment. They are not Jim Jones or the Branch Davidians. Instead, they use a more subtle approach, a gentler type of indoctrination, a gradual programming of the mind. Why else would the Witnesses believe that God is unable to get through to the people without the aid of the Watchtower Society? Why else would the Witnesses believe that no human being has the mental capacity to understand the Bible without the assistance of the Watchtower Society? Why in the world do they believe that every utterance issued by the Watchtower Society is pure gospel and inspired of God? We believe the answer is quite clear - Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that way.

I can remember numerous times when our mothers would proclaim that *new light had been presented by the organization* concerning any number of subjects that were essential to the Witnesses. When any change in doctrine came about (and those changes were many, like the ones concerning rape, blood fractions and substitute military service) it came from this *new light* that was presented in either a *Watchtower* or *Awake!* article, or in a new book issued at a summer convention. Our mothers, along with everyone else in the congregation and the worldwide Witness population, swallowed it all without so much as a thought to a question. When the Society claimed that God had changed His mind about something, the sheep took this as gospel, without a doubt. My question always was, and still is, this: Why would all-powerful God need a group of old men from

Brooklyn to allow the people to know what He wanted them to know? And even if He did, why *these* men?

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary's eight definitions of *cult*: 1. A particular system of religious worship, especially with reference to its rites and ceremonies; 2. An instance of great veneration of a person, ideal, or thing, especially as manifested by a body of admirers; 3. The object of such devotion; 4. A group or sect bound together by veneration of the same thing, person, ideal, etc; 5. Group having a sacred ideology and a set of rites centering on their sacred symbols; 6. A religion or sect considered to be false, unorthodox, or extremist, with members often living outside of conventional society under the direction of a charismatic leader; 7. The members of such a religion or sect; 8. Any system for treating human sickness that originated by a person usually claiming to have sole insight into the nature of disease, and that employs methods regarded as unorthodox or unscientific.

The term *cult* typically refers to a unified social group devoted to beliefs or practices that the surrounding culture considers outside the mainstream, with a notably positive or negative popular perception. In common use, *cult* has a positive connotation for groups of art, music, writing, fiction, and fashion devotees, but a negative connotation for new religious, extreme political, questionable therapeutic, and pyramidal business groups. For this reason, most, if not all, groups that are called cults reject the label. A former member of the infamous Unification Church, Steven Hassan, who is now a renowned mental health therapist and exit counselor, has developed his own model to determine how destructive mental domination can be understood in terms of four basic components, which form the acronym BITE: Behavior Control, Information Control, Thought Control and Emotional Control. It is important to understand that destructive mind control can be determined when the overall effect of these four components promotes dependency and obedience to some leader or cause. It is not necessary for every item on the list to be present. Mind-controlled cult members can live in their own houses, have nine-to-five jobs, be married with children, and still be unable to think for themselves and act independently.

There are at least three ways for people to leave a cult: Of their own decision (walkaways), through expulsion (castaways), and by intervention via exit counseling and deprogramming. Most authorities agree that some people experience problems after leaving a cult. These include negative reactions in the individual leaving the group as well as negative responses from the group such as what the Watchtower calls disfellowshipping. However, disagreements are plentiful regarding the frequency and the cause of such problems. Exit Counselors believe that most people leaving a cult suffer from connected psychological problems including feelings of guilt, shame, depression, inadequacy, and fear. Feelings of guilt, shame, and anger are seen to be the worst with castaways, but walkaways can also have similar problems. People who had interventions or some kind of rehabilitation therapy also experience problems but are usually better prepared to deal with them. In many cases, the problems do not happen while the individual is in the cult, but after leaving, which can be very difficult for some members and may cause some form of psychological pain. Reasons for this include such things as

conditioning by the religious movement, uncertainties about life and its meaning, having had powerful religious experiences, an affection for the founder or leader of the religion, an emotional fear of losing favor with God, bonding and friendships with other members, the realization that time spent with the group was wasted, and the new-found freedom with its corresponding responsibilities. Such reasons may prevent a member from leaving a group even when he realizes that some aspects of the group are essentially wrong. In some religions, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, members have all their social contacts within the group, which can make separation extremely disturbing. Leaving such a group can be devastating, especially if one is kicked out. I believe it is a safe assumption that the stigma of being disfellowshipped is one of the Watchtower Society's most powerful deterrents.

My personal and exhaustive research on cults has produced some concepts and perceptions that are extremely interesting to me as a former Jehovah's Witness. Again, I was there. For months, I pored over material from encyclopedias, religious and political magazines, websites and scientific publications in an effort to learn more about cults. I was never convinced that the Witnesses were a cult in the critical sense of the word. I would admit that they were a very strange, weird, unconventional, snobbish, meddling bunch that left me an emotional cripple for a good long time, but I could never go so far as to label them with the word *cult*. After all, they preached *against* the cultlike religions, along with all the other so-called false religions. My mother wouldn't have allowed herself to be swallowed up by a cult and then force me into it, would she? She wasn't that dumb, was she? No, the Witnesses couldn't be a *cult*; they were just a bunch of strange ducks that were not allowed to do much of anything. I must say that, Witness background notwithstanding, I found the subject of cults and cultism to be very fascinating indeed. Here I will share, objectively and without prejudice, some of the things I learned about cults.

Cults are not strictly religious. There are also commercial, self-help, and political cults. Religious cults are the main subject matter here, but I have also been exposed to the commercial ones. A modern definition of *cult* is basically any group that employs mind control and deceptive recruiting techniques. Cults mislead people into joining and intimidate them into staying. A cult will have a polished and well-rehearsed front that hides what the group is really like. They tell you how happy you will be once you join up, but you will not right away be told what life in the group is really like, or what they really believe. These things will be fed to you slowly and gradually so you don't notice any change at first. Eventually you will be practicing and believing things that at the start would have caused you to run the other way.

By using *exclusivism*, cult leaders convince people that their organization alone has the truth, and all the others are in the wrong. They need you to believe that there is nowhere else you can go and still be saved, and if you ever leave their one true church you will be doomed. This is a fear-based control mechanism to keep people in the cult, and it gives the leaders tremendous power over people. If they can persuade you to believe that leaving the group is equivalent to leaving God, then you will obey them even if you disagree with them to avoid being kicked out of the group. In this way exclusivism is

used as a threat to control your behavior through fear. Cult leadership thrives on fear. To disagree with the leadership is the same as disagreeing with God. The leaders will claim to have direct authority from God to control many if not all aspects of your life. *Guilt* is used to control people in the sense that they must always try harder, set higher goals, and that what they are doing is never enough. You will also be made to feel guilty for not always obeying the cult's written and unwritten set of rules. Also used are what are called *breaking sessions*. This is when two or more members and/or leaders attack the character of another member, sometimes for hours on end. Some cults will not halt these sessions until their victim is crying hysterically. Also used are *love bombing* and *relationship control*. A cult knows that if it can control your relationships then it can control you. When you first get involved in such a group you are surrounded by instant friends and such a vast outpouring of loving kindness and tenderness that you just want to melt. This seems so excellent; how could a crowd of such wonderful loving people have any kind of bad intentions? You'll find out soon enough, because if ever you disagree with them or go so far as to leave the group, all these wonderful new friends will vanish like dust in the wind. This is an unspoken threat that influences your actions within the organization. In matters that you might normally question or complain about, you will keep your mouth shut because you don't want to be ostracized or excluded. Cults don't like outsiders to have any influence over their members, so they will strive to maneuver your time to maximize your contact with members and minimize your contact with outsiders. These outsiders include your family and friends, and most especially those who oppose your involvement. I would advise people to exercise caution and care around any group that tells its members who they can and cannot associate with.

Those who control the information also control the person. In a cult any information from the outside is considered evil, especially if it is in opposition to the group. Members are told not to read such information and not to believe it if they do read it, because only the information supplied by the group is the truth. One cult labels such information *spiritual pornography* while another cult calls it *apostate literature* and will expel any member caught with it. These cults train their members to immediately destroy any critical material they receive, and are instructed to not even consider that such material could be true. It seems to me that a legitimate group would have nothing to fear from their members reading critical information about them. In a cult, members must be careful of what they say and how they act. They have an image to uphold, and their eyes and ears of the leaders are everywhere. Lackeys, puppets and spies abound. Everyone is encouraged to watch out for struggling brothers and sisters and report to leadership what they observe. In this sense the cult members are trained to not only deceive outsiders but to deceive other members as well. The members are kept so busy with meetings and other group-related activities that they become too occupied and too tired to think about their involvement. This *time control* helps the cult keep the members immersed in the manufactured environment and also helps keep members away from friends and family; from outsiders. To sum up, in a cult, nothing will be allowed that can be more powerful than the cult members' allegiance to the group and its leaders.

So then, what makes a religious group a cult? Experts' opinions on the subject of cultism tends to be complex, with the discussion ranging across the spectrum from the docile

God-fearing Amish, all the way through to the kool-aid swilling suicidal followers of Jim Jones' Peoples Temple. Many scholars are inclined to shy away from using the word cult these days because they believe the term has become too controversial. They prefer more politically correct labels such as *new religious group* or *alternative religious movement*. To some others, however, there's no reason to treat the term *cult* as a four-letter word if a cult is what the group appears to be. If the shoe fits... Experts also have differing opinions about what puts a group into the cult category. Some give the label to any religious group that doesn't hold to a specific set of doctrinal beliefs, while others say the only reliable dividing line is whether or not a group obeys the law. But no matter what they call them, there exists the same structure in behavior, the same structure in dynamics, and groups that fit this pattern are very often unstable. We don't feel we should label a group a cult simply because of its theological beliefs, but rather, these groups should be judged by their behavior. However, we are certainly not afraid to use the word! Again, a classic sign of a cult is that it has a charismatic leader or group of leaders who hold a tremendous amount of sway over the members. Another common characteristic is isolation, and in some cases that isolation is physical, with members' comings and goings being restricted. Most often the isolation takes the form of the members becoming completely absorbed in the group and its activities. An especially troubling sign is when members are asked to cut off contact with family and friends. Also common is a persecution complex, where followers often have an *us against them* attitude, perceiving simple disagreements as attacks on their character. They are trained to believe that those criticizing them are actually going against God. Another giveaway is when a group teaches that anyone who leaves them is flawed. Healthy groups generally believe people can have good reasons for leaving, but not so with cults. The anti-cult movement often acts as if there are easy answers to the question of whether a group is dangerous, but things are rarely that simple. Most involve judgment calls and opposing points of view. What may seem sinister to one person may be perfectly normal to another. One question to ask when evaluating religious groups is what kind of fruit they produce. That's helpful because while the customs of some groups could be called cultic under the criteria of anti-cult organizations, they might not fit that particular pattern. The Amish are one example. Determining whether such groups are dangerous is subjective. Important questions that must be addressed are: do they make it emotionally difficult to leave, do they maintain members' dignity, how much freedom do they allow members, is there some structure for handling conflicts and how do they deal with expulsion from the group.

People also must consider how accepted certain behavior is within that particular religious tradition. For example, becoming a monk may seem strange to many people, but it's a very accepted part of the Catholic custom. Such factors also must be weighed in evaluating the stories of people who have come out of a group. In some cases, people's horror stories stem from truly dreadful things that happened to them, but in other instances, stories are tainted by a change in ex-members' viewpoints. People can have mistaken or highly idealized notions about what life in a particular group will be like, and then become bitter when the reality fails to match the expectations. That can happen because a group engages in false recruitment activities, or also when people jump to join an organization after listening to a lot of hype but don't bother to take the time and effort

to thoroughly investigate it. Most of the spiritually abusive groups share common characteristics. One feature of such groups is control-oriented leadership, wherein communication with outsiders is limited and questioning isn't allowed inside the group. Sometimes the control extends into intimate areas of followers' lives, such as the previously mentioned prying into the bedroom routines of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Lifestyle rigidity is also common, with some groups having an almost unfathomable list of rules. One group we learned about banned striped running shoes because they supposedly were connected to homosexuality. Another forbids its members to use the word *pregnant* and instead have to say a woman is *with child*. Such groups are also spiritual elitists that use arrogant or high-minded terms to describe themselves and often have disparaging descriptions for other churches. They present themselves as the model Christian church or the perfect Christian organization and claim to provide unparalleled fellowship and superior spirituality. These groups also exhibit paranoia, perceive any criticism as persecution, and paint people who leave as defectors and say attacks against them are ultimately the work of Satan. By describing criticism as slander, they can ultimately be shielded from criticism, almost elevating themselves to martyr status. Our research indicates the number of spiritually abusive groups is growing due to a spike in the number of independent churches in evangelical and fundamentalist circles. People are attracted to them because they are less formal and less hierarchical than traditional churches. With that independence, however, also comes the potential for trouble.

So then, are the Jehovah's Witnesses a cult? Again, you be the judge. We will go so far as to say that, in our humble opinion, based on our experiences and research, the answer would be yes. But that is merely an *opinion*. Any readers out there who are current or former Jehovah's Witnesses may notice some glaring similarities between these textbook examples and their own experiences. There are former Witnesses who will agree with us and there are those who will not. For most members, it is the ideal religion. For others, like us, it is a devastating experience that can shatter lives and wreck relationships. For some, it's neither. It is up to the individual to answer that question.

The label is no way as important as the experience itself.

Chapter Nine – GLOSSARY

Watchtower Society jargon, vocabulary, terms and concepts.

Armageddon: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that a total world battle will take place soon. All people and institutions not affiliated with them will be destroyed. Jesus as King and His heavenly host will battle with Satan and his armies. Satan will be defeated.

Anointed class: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that only a limited number of people (144,000) will live in a spiritual heaven with Christ Jesus. All other faithful Jehovah's Witness believers will live in paradise on Earth.

Apostasy: Renunciation, criticism and opposition to one's former religion.

Assembly: Many congregations gathering for several days of meeting and instruction, Circuit assemblies are held twice a year and the larger District conventions are held annually.

Awake!: A semimonthly family magazine published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (hereafter referred to as the Society), which features articles about human interests, religion, and practical sciences.

Babylon the Great: Derogatory reference to any religion aside from the Witnesses; Satan's kingdom, also called false religion.

Back calls: The Jehovah's Witness will make return calls if a person shows the slightest hint of interest or requests more information on the initial visit. The Society encourages persistent visitation.

Baptism: A candidate approved by the Society is totally immersed in water during a public meeting, usually a circuit assembly. Mass baptisms are also conducted and candidates may number in the hundreds at one service. Such immersion is performed by brothers in good standing, and is required to become an active Jehovah's Witness and to survive Armageddon.

Bethel: This is the designation given to the official headquarters of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, located at 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, New York. Bethel also serves as the location of the main printing facility for the Society's literature.

Bible study: Faithful Jehovah's Witnesses stress a literal belief in the Bible and seek to engage interested people in home Bible studies. A one-on-one meeting in the home of someone who wishes to learn the teachings of the Witnesses, conducted using Watchtower literature in conjunction with the Bible.

Blood: The soul is in the blood. Blood is sacred because life is sacred. The only proper use of blood is sacrifice.

Bloodguilt: Guilt is acquired: 1) by bloodshed, including support of a blood-guilty organization such as Babylon the Great; 2) by eating or drinking blood in any way; or 3) by failing to preach the good news of the kingdom.

Brothers (the): A collectivization of male Witnesses. Used when referring to the body of elders, or the leaders in a congregation.

Branch committee: This committee is appointed by the Society and has general oversight of the Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in an entire country or group of countries.

Christian: Jehovah's Witnesses are the only true Christians.

Christendom: This derogatory term is used to refer to Protestant and Catholic groups, which are thought to have been established in the fourth century by the unbaptized Roman emperor, Constantine the Great.

Circuit: A group of about twenty Jehovah's Witness congregations. A circuit overseer is the supervisor of the group.

Circuit assembly: Member congregations of the circuit gather at specified times for fellowship, inspiration, and indoctrination. The sessions are held in public facilities or Assembly Halls. Mass baptisms of new converts are often conducted at these meetings.

Circuit overseer: This official leader of the circuit visits each congregation twice or thrice a year, and usually stays a week at a time.

Congregation: A group of Witnesses who regularly meet at the Kingdom Hall for five meetings per week.

Convention: A large gathering of several Circuits running several days to a week, usually in a large city.

Demons: Fallen angels who became followers of Satan. Satan and his demons were cast out of heaven in 1914 and have roamed the earth ever since.

Disassociation: Voluntary removal of oneself from Jehovah's organization. Viewed by Witnesses as suicide and turning one's back on Jehovah, disassociated persons will be destroyed at Armageddon and go to Gehenna.

Disfellowship: A member who is judged unfaithful or of committing wrongdoing is rejected by the Society and involuntarily removed by the elders.

District overseer: This leader supervises several circuits and is responsible for conducting circuit assemblies. He spends one week in the circuit for each assembly held.

Elder: A qualified brother appointed by the Society to a leadership role in a congregation. *Body of Elders* refers to all the elders in a given congregation.

Emblems: The unleavened bread and wine passed around the congregation during the Memorial. Only members of the 144,000 who expect to go to heaven are allowed to partake of the emblems.

Evil Slave: Former Witnesses who openly oppose the Watchtower Society.

Expelling: Also referred to as excommunication or disfellowshipping. Members may be expelled for many reasons including but not limited to adultery, fornication, homosexuality, greed, dishonesty, drunkenness, murder, idolatry, apostasy, and divisiveness. The offending member may be received back if he or she manifests sincere repentance.

Faith: Blind devotion to the dictates of the Watchtower Society's teachings. Dedicated Witnesses sometimes describe themselves as being *in the faith*.

Faithful and Discreet Slave/Servant: The Society's version of Jesus' prediction that God would institute a special servant, or slave, on Earth, with the sole spiritual authority to represent Him and to interpret the Bible. The Watchtower Society represented by the Governing Body applies this title to itself.

Field Service: House-to-house distributing of Watchtower literature.

Gehenna: The *second death* or *eternal death* from which there can be no resurrection.

Gentile times: Jehovah's Witnesses believe this is the period (from 607 B.C. to 1914 A.D.) when Jews were in disfavor with Jehovah.

Governing body: This select committee of Watchtower leaders determines and establishes all doctrines and practices of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They are a group of anointed brothers residing at Bethel claiming to be enlightened by Jehovah, and consider themselves to be the only channel of communication between God and mankind. The Governing Body could conceivably be likened to a collective popelike entity.

Great crowd or other sheep: This is the multitude of people that are faithful to Jehovah, but not selected for heavenly life. They will live in the paradise established on Earth after Armageddon.

Great Tribulation: A time of much strife on the earth directly before Armageddon. It begins when the governments of the world, led by the United Nations, openly attack the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Goat: Term given to people who oppose the Witnesses, those who *turn a deaf ear* when preached to. This comes from the definition of goats being stubborn.

Hades: The Watchtower refers to this as “mankind’s common grave, where the dead and buried ones are unseen.” It also corresponds to Sheol.

Hell: The Society does not believe it is a place of torment or fire. They reject the doctrine of eternal punishment, saying all non-Jehovah's Witnesses will be annihilated at the final judgment.

Hypocrite: One holding a certain belief, but not embracing these same values oneself. Most non-Witnesses are considered hypocrites.

Impalement (of Jesus): The Watchtower Society carries no thought of a cross made of two timbers. Instead, they believe in only an upright stake, called by the Witnesses a *torture stake*. Witnesses claim the concept of a two-piece cross was adopted from the pagans in the third century.

Judicial Committee: A meeting of three elders appointed to conduct a hearing or trial with a Witness who has been accused of breaking the Society’s regulations, or of committing Biblical wrongdoing.

Kingdom Hall: The building used for the meetings of the Witnesses. This local meetinghouse is never pretentious and is usually limited to a seating capacity of around 200.

Memorial: The mandatory annual observance of the Lord’s Evening Meal, similar to communion in other churches. Only anointed Witnesses may partake of the bread and wine, while the rest of the spectators merely observe.

Millennium: According to Jehovah's Witnesses, this is a period of 1,000 years that follows Armageddon and consists of paradise on earth for the faithful survivors and a selected group of resurrected people.

Ministerial Servant: A brother assigned to assist the body of elders in congregational matters.

Ministry School: A weekly meeting that instructs Witnesses in communication and public speaking skills through giving short talks in front of the congregation, the eventual goal being to outfit them for door-to-door preaching. All Witnesses are expected to attend and participate.

New Light: New insight concerning Witness doctrine which they believe to be channeled from God to the Governing Body, presented through the Society’s literature or speakers at assemblies and conventions.

New System (or New World or New Order): The paradise that Jehovah will bring to Earth after Armageddon, where obedient mankind will live forever under the direction of Christ Jesus.

New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT): The NWT is the official translation of the Old and New Testaments by the Watchtower Society, published in its entirety in 1961. One unique and disturbing feature is that, in some cases, conventional translations are changed to fit Jehovah's Witness theology.

Organization (the): The organization of the Watchtower Society, including all congregations and their leaders, the headquarters and branch offices and printing facilities. It claims to be God's solitary association and the only true religion on Earth.

Pioneer: A Witness who devotes 100 hours per month in the field service (recently reduced to 90 hours).

Placements: Watchtower literature given to non-Witnesses at the door or left at public places for people to read.

Platform: The stage in the Kingdom Hall where the brothers address the congregation and dispense sermons. Statements made from the platform are considered to carry great weight of major importance. Also referred to as the podium.

Presiding Overseer: The elder who is in charge of the body of elders in any given congregation.

Publisher: This is the name given to faithful Jehovah's Witnesses who distribute Watchtower literature door-to-door and serve the Society as directed.

Reinstatement: The reacceptance back into the organization of a person who was disfellowshipped or disassociated.

Remnant: Name given to the anointed group of 144,000 who will be whisked up to heaven when they die.

Resurrection: The Witnesses belief that every person who has died since the beginning of human existence will be brought back to life after Armageddon to be awarded a second chance to serve Jehovah.

Service Meeting: Weekly meeting geared toward teaching and recruiting methods to be used when preaching to outsiders, usually immediately following the Ministry School.

Service Report: Monthly report required to be turned in, showing number of hours spent in field service, number of magazines and books placed and number of Bible studies conducted.

Sheep: This is a person who is interested in a home Bible study and is a prospective member of Jehovah's Witnesses. This comes from the definition of sheep being meek and submissive. Those who are not interested are called goats.

Society (the): This term is sometimes used to describe Watchtower Society leaders who are supposedly directed by God.

Spiritual Food: All information fed to faithful Witnesses from the Society, including doctrines, scriptural interpretations, literature and wisdom offered from the platform.

Stumble: The causing of a person to leave the organization due to flawed conduct by a Witness. Such a corrupt Witness would be considered a *stumbling block*.

Territory: Geographical area assigned to each congregation to cover in the preaching work.

Text (the): Daily reading from the current yearbook, usually a scripture followed by commentary to be discussed briefly before the start of the day.

Theocracy: Jehovah's Witnesses do not have a democratic organization. They submit to the rigid control of a few leaders and believe that the entire organization is under the direct rule of Jehovah. They believe they have a theocratic ministry to perform. The term *theocratic* is used to describe someone who adheres to all of the Society's rules.

Trinity: Jehovah's Witnesses reject the Trinity. Jehovah God is alone in authority and has no equal. The Holy Spirit is not a person, but an active force of God. Jesus is a being created by Jehovah.

Truth (the): The ongoing teachings of the Watchtower Society, deemed to be the absolute truth, inspired of God.

Watchtower: First published in 1879 and now a semimonthly magazine, the *Watchtower* is the official theological publication of the Watchtower Society. The unsigned articles present Watchtower Society positions on biblical doctrines and matters.

Wine and strong drink: Alcoholic drinks are regarded as gifts from Jehovah, but must be used in moderation. Drunkenness is condemned in the Bible. Habitual drunkenness is cause for expulsion from the congregation.

World (the): Existence away from the organization.

Worldly: Any person who is not a Witness, or any Witness who does not possess a theocratic attitude.

Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses: Published each year, it reports the worldwide statistics and service of faithful members. Daily Bible readings and comments are also included.

Elements of this glossary were gleaned from meticulous research as well as the authors' memories. Again, don't forget; we were there!

Chapter Ten – Revelation

So there you have it.

I want to emphasize again, here at the end, that we are not out to smear or besmirch the name of any member of the Jehovah's Witness organization, or the organization itself. This is our story, our confession, our *revelation*, passed on to you exactly as it took place. The statistical and biographical information we've provided was thoroughly researched and can be verified in numerous reference materials readily available to the public. The personal accounts, remembrances, childhood tales, and all the times both good and bad that we lived through are true and actually happened. If what we have to say makes the Watchtower Society look bad in any way, so be it. You, the reader, be the judge. It is what it is. This story may anger some people; some family members, some old friends from our Jehovah's Witness days. It is not our intent to hurt anyone's feelings, but that doesn't mean that it won't happen; in fact, we're certain that it will. I still believe, more than three decades later, that those involved in our personal situations did what they believed in their hearts to be right. They wanted what was best for their kids. They lived their lives in strict obedience to the Watchtower Society, in anticipation of the reward of everlasting life. This everlasting life they wanted for themselves and also for us. It was a noble goal but, unfortunately, it didn't work out.

And remember, dear family members and old friends - you were there, too!

As you, the reader, have gleaned from these pages, our childhoods and our years as members of the Jehovah's Witness organization were not all fun and games, and not all of our days were pleasant. Again it is not our intention to slur or offend the Jehovah's Witnesses or anyone who is associated with them. Our goal in telling this tale is merely to allow people to know that these things *can, do* and *will* happen. Our goal is to move people to think for themselves, to investigate, to look around, and to ask questions and expect good solid answers.

If you are considering becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses, do yourself a favor and look into it first. Don't believe everything you read and everything you hear. Dig into the material, and do some research on your own. Act as if you are going for a new job or buying a new car or hiring someone to work on your house and just go ahead and *check things out!* If after you do so then you still think this is the organization for you, then by all means, go for it! But go for it knowing exactly what you are getting into.

If you are currently one of Jehovah's Witnesses, some of what we've written may resonate with you. You may be experiencing similar goings-on, or you may think we are completely full of crap. Either way it's all right; we're just pleased you had the presence of mind to actually pick up the book and read it. We are delighted that you took the time, and had the intelligence and interest to look into things, to investigate, and to see what we had to say, whether or not you might agree with us.

If you are a former Jehovah's Witness, there is a personal reason for that. If the reason is in any way close to what we've written here, then take solace in knowing that you are not

alone. Many people have left this organization over the years, for any number of motives, and we hope our story might offer you some comfort, some reassurance and a little consolation.

May the undeserved kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ be with the holy ones. Amen.

THE END

Afterthoughts

Names -

In the chapter *Dialogue*, some of the character names may have caused a bit of confusion. Michael's parents are Marian and John. In the text, Michael refers to his mother as both *my mom* and also by her nickname of *Pepper* and he refers to his father as both *my dad* and *John*. I refer to his father sometimes as *Uncle John* but most often simply *John*. There is also John who is my son-in-law, Little John who is my grandson, and we also make mention of two more famous and worthy Johns, Elton and Lennon. My younger sister Cynthia is often called by her childhood nickname, *The Bunn*. Steve was her husband and Collin their son, my nephew. Michael's older brother is Ron. When Michael refers in *Dialogue* to his Aunt Glorya, he is speaking of my mother, and when he refers to Uncle Scotty he is speaking of my dad. We have an Uncle Jim who is Michael's father's brother; his wife and our aunt, Joanie, is the sister of both our mothers. We also have a cousin Jim, a cousin-in-law actually, Jim who married our cousin Angie in 1976. Jim is also the first name of Brother Zimrod, whom we speak of throughout, and of Brother Camelton, whom you remember from *Dialogue* always smelt of booze. And don't forget my Witness buddy Jimmy Powell, who was involved in the tossing of the dummy off the roof. We speak of our uncles; Ray, Nick and Frankie, but rarely use the salutation of *Uncle*. In addition to Uncle Ray, we speak of Brother Ray Van Dinizio from our congregation, Brother Ray Franz from Bethel and even Ray Bradbury the science fiction author. We hope not to get all these Rays, Jims and Johns too mixed up in the reading. Last names have all been changed to protect privacy issues, but all the first names are accurate and truthful.

Places -

We grew up in Trenton, New Jersey. The Parkway, Greenwood and Hamilton (Klockner) Kingdom Halls are located in and around Trenton. We spent a lot of our formative years in Asbury Park, New Jersey, where our grandmother owned a rooming house. Our mother's sisters Dot and Joyce hail from Asbury Park, along with our mother's brother Uncle Ray and his wife Betty. Uncle Nick lived in Trenton and Uncle Frankie lived in the one-stoplight burg of Imlaystown, out in rural Monmouth County, just about halfway between Trenton and Asbury Park. Joyce's husband, our wild Uncle Pat, was an Asbury Park cop who saw battle during the riots of 1970. Just south of Asbury Park in Bradley Beach is the Bradley Kingdom Hall, where Michael spent a lot more time than I did, and where he suffered his chicken pox attack. The circuit assemblies were held in Buckingham, Pennsylvania, at an assembly hall built for just that purpose, in the spring and fall. Buckingham is in rural Bucks County, about twenty miles northeast of our homes in Trenton.

Times -

Michael was born in 1963 and was immediately indoctrinated. He was out by 1978. I was born in 1957, indoctrinated some two years later, and was out by 1976. The bulk of the time we spent together in the Witness world was from 1969 through 1975. We missed a lot of what happened to each other even as it was happening, mainly because of the five-and-a-half year age difference, but also because our parents saw fit to keep secrets. They

meant well, yes they did. But in the name of everything holy, they should have known better...

Update –

It is with great sadness that I announce to our readers the passing of Michael; my cousin, my brother in spirit, my good friend. Michael left us after a brief but ugly battle with cancer, on October 5, 2014. He was very proud of the part he played in bringing this book to life, and I will continue to offer it in honor of the incredible contribution he made to it. His passing leaves a hurt that I don't imagine will ever fully heal.