

## 1

Jonestown, Thanksgiving, November, 1978

And, where was I? On the west coast. I turned eighteen in Los Angeles, visiting a friend and his family. We had known each other growing up in a small town on the East coast. They were British. They had become Scientologists, and so, lived within walking distance of headquarters, in Hollywood.

I was homeless, penniless, bitten by wanderlust, psychotic. I had left Dad's with a bus ticket, \$100, and my bike in a box. The sky in L.A. was overcast for the entire three weeks at my friend's house. At night, the orange of the sodium vapor streetlights colored the sky so it was bright as day.

The day I left L.A., Sam traded his backpack for my bike. Then, we raced on his performance motorcycle across the city, to the start of the coast highway, one o one. The drizzle cut into my face.

In a couple of days, I hitched up past San Francisco. I ended up in a six dollar motel, made of cinder blocks, painted hospital green. It was very dark. I could hear strange, animal noises all night, while a gale blew outside.

Later, I started on Grant's Pass, near Eugene, aiming to reach the interstate that goes through Oregon to Seattle. In a small village, I ventured into a general store for a snack, around noon. I had enough money for a little bag of pretzels, and only a dollar more. At the check stand, my fit though malnourished body stood near a larger man, with a soft, curly black beard.

"Where ya goin' ?"

"Canada... ", pause

"Are you alone?"

"Yeah"

"Have you eaten?"

"No."

"Come out to the ranch, we'll have supper "

"O.K." said demurely, without conviction.

"do you have family here?"

"No. They're expecting me at home pretty soon."

"When?"

"ugh" a non verbal passivity.

Quiet bustle resumes.

Outside, the door opened behind me.

"Want to come along?"

I shrugged, and my feet shuffled my acquiescence.

"Well..." I said, vacillating.

"There's room..."

"O.K." I softly relented. He was satisfied. He spoke little more.

## 2

Driving, driving, driving.

Now, on a dirt road, over an hour, and miles from Grant's Pass. Too far to walk with thirty pounds in my pack, all my worldly possessions. Totally lost. No orientation with the overcast sky. We ended up high on a bluff, overlooking the ocean.

There were half a dozen buildings in the compound. There is a large, wooden cross, thirty feet high. It is late afternoon. Hunger persists. I am introduced to the bunkhouse, assigned a cot. My unease steadily grows.

I am left alone, to rest. There is a guy lying on his cot, opposite mine. Young, skinny, blonde hair, with his wrist draped over his brow, in apparent despair. I remain silent. Daylight began to fade. I was given a sandwich. It was strange. I imagined many things. Nothing contradicted what I imagined.

It was dark. Somewhere in Northern California, in November, so the air was fresh, and damp, and electric. The wind over the bluffs was driving the cold rain. As I stood outside to smoke some tobacco in my clay pipe, without a hat, my long hair was drenched.

Afterward, Ephraim found me on my cot. He invited me to meet with a group of my peers. Down the stairs to a small room with candles, there were five others. A hefty, yet gentle man, Ephraim, his purpose was plain. As he held a bible, he spoke of friendship, community, purpose in life, simple service. Yet, I found contention with his aim and method. It all seemed like a lot of promises, too good to be true. It was just another system of mythology. He began paying more attention to the others.

In my mind, I still wondered.

And, the wind made itself noticed. And, I felt the dark night calling; the quiet of solitude. I made excuses and went outside, evoking no protest or deterrence. And, I imagined the gap in my heart he said He could fill.

Where am I? What difference does it make for one who has nothing? He said there's no gray area; there's no lukewarm. Like Pilgrim's progress, the way is narrow.

**3** Thanksgiving Day. I was happy to be given a menial task. The sky was brighter, this day, less wind and a light mist of rain. I moved a pile of debris from one side of the yard to the other. It seemed pointless, like an ill conceived test of my pliability.

I was not allowed in the dining hall all day. Someone brought a light lunch while I toiled with the other novitiates, doing futile chores. I wandered off to find some respite with nature. I was on the edge of the compound, above a ravine, when Gabriel found me. He seemed more inquisitive, and sympathetic as we talked. One angel who could protect; yet, in ways I could only guess or imagine, yet, he convinced me of nothing, except that, of all, he may be the most trustworthy.

Later, the bell was rung, triumphantly, calling us to dinner. I hadn't seen Ephraim all day. I looked for him, then sat opposite the kitchen, at one of the long tables, with my back to the room, close to the exit. I glanced around, furtively, and though the room was full, no one spoke to me.

I needed water, but as I approached the kitchen, I was intercepted and asked to sit down, and to be patient. I returned to my seat, having failed to voice my thirst.

After a while, the food was served. A prayer was offered. Something about giving of ourselves to provide the meal. Ephraim was still missing. There was bread, and potatoes; I wasn't sure about the meat. Someone said it was pork. I was hungry, so I ate it.

**4** I had overheard someone say a bus would be taking a group to Sunday Service in town. Early in the morning, I gathered my pack and waited in the central open area of the compound. A school bus arrived. In a little while, a small group assembled by the bus. I mingled myself with them. I didn't know what time it was.

"Are you leaving?" from someone strange.

"Yes. They're expecting me" I replied, even though it wasn't true.

"Go tell David!"

"I'll go" the person ran to one of the buildings. Three people came from the building, walking purposefully toward me.

"You're leaving?"

"Yeah. I've got to get home."

"Have you accepted Him into your heart?"

"Yes" another lie.

"Are you baptized?"

"No" more honestly.

"Have you been born again?"

"No"

"We have to do this now" he said. "Can you kneel?"

I glanced, sidelong around me.

"Right here and now" he said.

I knelt, with my pack...

My pack! Where's my pack? Water dripped over my head.

"What is your name?"

"the rock."

"Do you open your heart to him?" he asked with severe conviction.

"Yes"

"Will you serve him always?"

"Yes"

"Never forget us." the last words spoken.

Head bowed, I peek. The sound of a long blade being drawn behind me. Inwardly, I turn up to the sky: cold, overcast, featureless sky, of no solace. I resign to my fate.

SWOOSH!

a bird? I almost hear the sound.

I stood, dizzy a moment, lifting up my pack. I did not turn around to see what I may have left crumpled there. I climbed aboard the bus. The novitiates sang songs as we drove into town.

The backpack was later traded to my brother for his car, a '58 Comet. When the car died, I sold it for scrap for \$50 and bought a guitar. The guitar would later be borrowed and smashed, out of envy. Another loss... .