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Dedication page: Unification Church symbol (center circle represents God; four bars the four position foundation, the basis for all creation; the 12 rays the 12 gates to new Jerusalem (Revelations 21:10-14); circle arrows the universal give-and-take amongst God, Man, and creation (energy for action, multiplication, and maintenance of life)).

Title page: Marble wall relief at the World Mission Center, New Yorker Hotel.

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## Table of Contents

	Preface to This Edition —	<i>i</i>
	Prologue —	<i>iii</i>
I	Meeting the Moonies: <i>My Axial Moment</i> —	1
II	Joining Up: <i>The Ideas That Grabbed Me</i> —	15
III	Indoctrination: <i>Learning the Ropes, Seeing the Warts</i> —	31
IV	California or Bust: <i>Processing Fish, Searching for Truth</i> —	57
V	On the Mobile Fundraising Teams: <i>Money and Lies</i> —	87
VI	A Falling Out: <i>Organized Violence, Bureaucratic Indifference</i> —	115
VII	On the High Seas of Alaska: <i>Life, Death, and Poverty</i> —	169
VIII	Back to School: <i>Persecuted by Moonies and Their Enemies, Too</i> —	213
IX	In the Middle East: <i>Journalism and Censorship</i> —	243
X	U.C. Berkeley: <i>Conflict, Love, and Duty in a Blender</i> —	257
XI	Off to the Big Apple: <i>Leaping Into the Tiger's Maw—Not!</i> —	305
XII	A West Indies Life: <i>Sex and Marriage in the Missionary Position</i> —	329
XIII	Aloha Hawaii: <i>Seeking Love, Getting Hate</i> —	373
XIV	Return to New York: <i>Discovering My True Worth</i> —	391
XV	At the Seminary: <i>Blessed Dreams at the Gates of Despotism</i> —	405
XVI	To the Fatherland: <i>Angels, Beatings, and Disease Near the DMZ</i> —	457
XVII	Trek to Florida: <i>Chemistry, Good and Bad</i> —	481
XVIII	One Last Effort: <i>Reverend Moon's Call to Washington</i> —	509
XIX	The Ultimate Victim: <i>Ostracism, Divorce, and Despair</i> —	537
XX	An Emerging Victor: <i>The World and I</i> —	569
XXI	Reverend Moon and America: <i>Feet Shot Full of Holes</i> —	589
	Epilogue —	595

# Preface

## *The 2023 Edition*

THE 2023 EDITION (DELAYED TO 2024; SORRY) YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS IS MY world as I wrote about it in 2003. Unification Church leaders, individuals, cultural references, and so on are from the decades leading up to it. I reedited the prose for style and clarity and added this preface and an epilogue from when I published it 20 years ago to a handful of friends for their response. They gave no accolades. Julian Sherry, as he's known in this book, advised me not to publish it at all.

"Well, that's disappointing coming from you, of all people," I said.

His tone came off cagey. "What you're saying . . . I don't think it's helpful for you or the church. You'll regret putting it out there."

*Will I, though?*

Then life sped up too much to carry it forward anyway, so through the cracks it went. In 2017 I discovered I'm an empath, a budding spirit medium and, according to my children, 'neurodivergently' ADHD and a high-functioning autistic besides. Altogether, it fired me down the barrel of my "healing through awareness" book *The Story of Life* (2022; sample at back), a revelatory Morphean red pill that's a "welcome to the real world" mind opener. After bullseyeing booksellers everywhere five years on, I realized this old manuscript's voyage through two decades of Moonworld, abusive love relationships, marriage–violence–divorce, and my inevitable Jabbokian confrontation with victimology carried its own healing power.

My account isn't an evil-Moonie-cult tell-all, a gory tale of domestic woe, nor an I-hit-rock-bottom-while-crying-in-my-beer journey of self-discovery that put me on the stairway to heaven. These have their place and offer their own kind of emotional experience. My story comes from scars, not wounds. If you were ever a Unificationist or some stripe of idealogue, a domestic violence victim or maybe a perpetrator, a near-suicide feeling crushed 'neath life's ironshod boot or love's heartless hate, or just can't stop shooting holes in your feet, this book might open

your awareness to paralyzing, scapegoating victimism and a path of transitioning to your own life-giving victorism. It couldn't hurt.

The book comes out of my 1983–2003 journals, which Rev. Chung in his 1983 Berkeley, California God's Day (January 1) speech prevailed on me to start as a future testimony. It imbues my story with the freshness of experiences thoughtfully recorded in the moment. It doesn't mean I didn't inadvertently misreport something or that another's point of view won't differ, only that I honestly put my encounters to paper as they happened instead of dredging them out of hazy memory years later. I didn't construct dialogue out of whole cloth but took it from my journals verbatim, paraphrased according to how I narrated the event, or reconstructed from memory in accord with my journals and honest reflection on the gist of what was said and my take on the speaker's personality and language. I compress some events that unfold over short periods into single scenes for clarity.

I make no attempt to accuse any person of villainy nor vengefully cast them in a bad light, but only to convey how I directly and indirectly experienced them and their effect on me. My tale isn't a manifesto on who or what they are. In some instances, I come off at fault or worse. As you read the acts of my play you may think I'm only venting or wreaking havoc, but my story is about *me*, not *them*; they're players reacting to or provoked by me in the context of situations I helped create. I don't know their motivating sufferings, struggles, or hurts nor how nice, kind, and beloved of others they are in different contexts. We all feel we're the hero of our own story; I think all concerned acted in sincerely righteous (if fanatical or deranged) belief and not with malice aforethought. And, too, people change with time.

In that vein, I change the names or characteristics of those who might not want their mad monkey in my circus because, to paraphrase Marty Rubin, I'm not so outrageous as to tell their tale. Where I haven't—I don't tell you which is which—it's because it would make the story too much a lie or confuse the narrative entirely. This especially is the case regarding Unificationists since, in nearly every situation, it was their position in a particular time and place that created the context and conditions for my incidents with them. I claim only my interpreted experiences and reactions as fact regardless how I narrate events.

I considered novelizing my tale but felt it would lose most if not all its healing possibilities. Besides, the American Unification Church is a story that needs an honest appraisal of its good aspects juxtaposed with its bad—benefit versus harm—which, so far as I can tell, no one's published. That said, I hope you have a positive experience with this book.

Christopher McKeon  
Southwest Colorado, USA  
August 2023

# Prologue

I WAS FLYING HIGH WHEN I HIT THE GROUND. THE REVEREND SUN MYUNG MOON came shrieking through my hippiedom-bloated, change-the-world mind in the waning days of complacent America's tradition-shattering youth revolution midway through my first blackboard lecture on the coming of the second messiah. I couldn't understand from whence it came. Nobody had mentioned it. But there it was, a banshee panicking through my skull.

"Rev. Moon! *Rev. Moon!* Shit, it's the Moonies! Run! *Flee! Ahhhhhh!!*"

For just a tick I wildly eyed catapulting through the plate glass window not ten feet away. Then some 20 feet below I saw snow-covered, scalpel-edged granite and dead, spearpointed branches tearing and stabbing my soft body crashing headlong down the ironhard mountain. It soberly chained me to my folding metal chair two rows back from Ms. Forgettable droning through her book-in-hand lecture.

Here I was in a group of maybe 15 twenty-somethings looking hard into this new brand of Christianity for some sign of my future. I saw myself 'changing the world,' whatever that meant; ending war, poverty, injustice . . . getting rid of the world's arseholes is what all my pious talk was really going for.

What a double-take when my 'spiritual mother' who'd enticed me up to this rural, flower-mountain suburb in Nederland, Colorado grimly said, "Before you can change the world, Chris, you first have to change yourself."

"Whaaat?" *I don't think so.* "I want to fight evil, not be some holy roller."

"Just listen, okay?" She patted my knee. "You'll get it."

*Hmmph.*

In that simple contradiction lay the root of the most complex, controversial, and demonized love-hate relationship religious Americans have found themselves in since the righteous run amuck strung up Joseph Smith. On the one hand, we youngers wanted to follow Rev. Moon like the Pied Piper's rats.

“Following Father’s direction is the core of our life of faith,” Unification Church national pastor Michael Jenkins remarked near the change in millennium. “The direction he gives is not just a reaction to current affairs but is based on God’s direct revelation and many years of preparation.”

Being a good Unificationist is primarily about obedience. Theoretically, to Rev. Moon. But obedience regardless. On the other hand, and in spite of the holiness we imputed to him, we knew his oft-corrupt and vicious organization and our unexamined participation in it was ultimately leading us to some sort of doom we dimly perceived over the horizon but hoped wasn’t really there. In these rose a tension between him, God, and us and therefore our obedience to his institution, its founder, and our own conscience . . . supposing, on the off chance, it survived.



*My friend Miyako gravely  
gifted me this photo in Kodiak, 1983.  
I tearfully prayed with it for two decades.*

He and his church are ever at loggerheads, its revelation and institution enmeshed in mortal combat. My conflicts involved my rooting around for a way to respond to his inspired direction in the context of an anti-inspirational institution. For all its lip service to his revelatory messianism, the institution shudders at the uncertainty and instability it creates. To ward off Rev. Moon’s explosive spiritualism spreading unchecked, it relentlessly interferes with the natural development of Moonism in our members. Becoming like him, which he demands of us, poses a mortal threat to his Confucianly bureaucratic movement as an institution despite most efficaciously advancing his vision. This contra-dynamic has the simple effect of hammering a wedge twixt him and his church; he drives off in one direction, his church another, and we members pinball off this flipper and that

toward the inevitable TILT. The net result is confusion, frustration, chaos, failed efforts, anger, blame, resentment, and a wholesale loss of devoted membership for quacks and scoundrels. And, naturally, Rev. Moon complains to deaf ears, his bullheaded own the most hearing-impaired of all.

Nevertheless, and powerless to stop ourselves because of an indefinable link to his core Divine Principle teaching, tens or maybe hundreds of thousands of young, middle-class Americans like me followed him through the interpretive lens of the church till our moral compasses were spinning in our own Burmuda Triangles that swallowed whole our patience, endurance, and self-identity. It turns out there *is* a primal connection between external accomplishment like changing the world and internal growth and development like changing myself. And evidently I couldn’t do the former without first accomplishing at least some of the latter.

*Damn, that’s some bullshit.*

And the church spins on like a bald tire in Georgia red-clay mud throwing up a lot of *stuff* but getting nowhere except in its own mind. Rev. Moon and his church foolhardily created for themselves a nasty, insoluble conundrum that, as it did me, breaks down members' trust in and sacrificial devotion to ostensibly *the* Messiah anointed by Jesus Christ Himself and hounds them to their fetid graves.

Despite the persecution I bore at the hands of ignorant and arrogant church leaders and eventually my choking, sucked-in-breath recognition that they'd been showing me the door for most of these 21 years together—kicked out or urged to stay away a record-setting 12 times—I don't look on those years as a loss, waste, or failure. And I don't view Rev. Moon as the Pied Piper . . . or the Angel of Death, for that matter, nor the engine of my impoverishment. Rather, it was a chosen voyage of enlightenment mostly (unfortunately) through howling storms and brutal seas that pummeled my little ship of life onto heartless rocks.

Wrecked; oh, *fuck* yeah.

But alive. And still on my journey . . . if I wanted to continue.

After 21 years of sincere, fingernails-scrabbling-at-rocks toil to fit in with and please Rev. Moon and his insatiable church, I expected more outward success and inner happiness in the end. I wasn't ready for a sort of Heideggerian nothingness, my faith and devotion hanging by a thread for want of its creator's touch.

I envisaged my talents and capabilities well used by him at his organization's top echelons in the way Mom once said, "Your father and I always thought you were smart enough that, if you'd joined the priesthood, you'd have ended up at the Vatican."

"Ha!" I'd rebutted, feeling pejorative. "They don't allow marriage and I'm not going through life a monk. I'd only wind up with some lonely troubles in the nunnery . . ."

She didn't reply but I caught an *Oh, Chris* headshaking sigh in her eyes.

Regardless rank, I at least expected Rev. Moon and his vaunted leaders to take me in earnest as a meaningful participant. Why not? I wasn't anybody's chopped liver. But I wasn't the pliant organization man they demanded, either. Instead, I took him and his call to be like him as gospel; an out-of-the-box innovator that ended up a pain in the ass maverick, an enemy of their institutional state. *Oops*.

"You tired, you poor, you wretched 'B'-member bastards yearning to breathe free—donate ten percent to our better world and go worship with the Baptists."

Leaders quietly rejoiced imagining their persistent blackballing bringing my attendance of their Messiah to a lonely, sad, ignominious close. Notwithstanding the real carnage wrought by so-called cults, their greatest crime is filling followers with a vision while blocking them from realizing it. The frustration in not achieving a deeply held conviction—the agony, says Maya Angelou, of bearing an untold story—is worse than death.

Burdened by a parentally loving God ardently preached but only desperately dreamed of while slip-sliding through 21 years a Moonie that spawned the cruelest



*For me, this is the man of holy faith he ever was regardless future trappings.*

sense of victimization, was it possible to experience happiness much less Real God before I punched my own ticket? If I didn't want to yank the flusher on God's noble gift, I'd have to teach myself to steer *my* course off rock bottom by following *my* instincts and confronting the sea on *my* terms and nobody else's. That's the only way to handle a howling wind like Rev. Moon and a treacherous, unlighted rock like the Unification Church: take the bull by the horns and put it down.



# Act I

## Meeting the Moonies

### *My Axial Moment*

*I* was a sour young man of 21 when I separated from the United States Coast Guard along the end of December 1980. Crippled in my right knee from a line-of-duty accident exacerbated by ineffectual care in the federal government's Public Health Service, I'd just had a real doctor slice a broad happy face across it. He flushed out the "ground hamburger" of dense, floating bits of medial meniscus and scraped smooth the scored-up backside of my patella. A horse needle of morphine in post-op oddly hurt worse. I'm largely immune to painkillers, so it struggled just taking the edge off though calmed my violent trembling. After a year on crutches and no follow-up rehab, I'd ambulate four more on a cane. But for now, five weeks later, I hobbled across the wintry street—eyes peeled for hidden ice—from my older sister Mona's Denver apartment to the 7-Eleven for candy bars and chips on a darkening February afternoon, 1981. *Star Trek* was about to grace her TV and I was in a hurry to get back with snacks.

She lightly stamped her feet outside the store holding something in her hand and sized me up as I passed. A cardboard box balanced atop the trash can beside her. I'd never noticed folks loitering at storefronts with a ravenish air, eyes seemingly x-raying my pockets. I thought the sight odd but shrugged it off. This was America after all and weirdness abounded.

"Hello," she said pleasantly to my curious look.

An absent "Hi," and I beelined for the snacks aisle. Exiting five minutes later, she pounced.

"Would you like to buy a scroll?"

I gave her and it a once-over. "What's that?"

"It's a Chinese tiger scroll." She modeled it higher up.



*Boot camp at 19. TRACEN,  
Alameda CA. Feb., 1979.*

“I don’t know . . . looks kinda—”

“It’s bamboo.” A broad, glowing smile. “It’ll look great in your house.”

My house. *Ha*. But, what a concept! “Does 7-Eleven know you’re selling stuff right outside their store?”

“Oh, yes.” She showed even more teeth. “I have their permission.”

*Huh. How ’bout that.* It’s a sure bet they didn’t know she and fellow fundraisers-cum-proselytizers, so blithely permitted on their doorstep, were extracting customers from circulation piecemeal. I looked her over with a mildly yearning eye. Italian looking on the slightly emaciated side if you discounted her padded, thigh-length coat. Dark hair; kind of puffy, thick. Five-six or -seven barefoot. Big smile, nice straight teeth. I approved. She was from Brooklyn, I’d discover. She looked it.

“Well, how much?”

“Just five dollars,” she cooed.

*FIVE dollars?* That seemed a lot of dough for some dumb looking cheap scroll with a tiger printed on it.

“Hand painted,” she corrected me.

Still, it didn’t cost \$5 to fill up my 1970 Opel Kadette’s gas tank. I really didn’t like her buttonholing me for money right outside 7-Eleven, especially with a bag of junk food in hand because I felt guilty saying no. I was developing a pretty defensive attitude. “I don’t have any money left over anyway after—well . . .”

“It’s for a good cause,” she purred, the smart, skeptical saleslady.

“What cause?” nibbling her bait.

“It’s for a Christian group.”

And . . . hooked like a fish sure the worm it saw was alive and tasty but not scoping the sharp, grabby point. It was easy getting her five bucks because, for the previous two years, I’d been searching far and wide for a church that embodied my idea of spiritual life. The Catholic Church I grew up in—*confirmed*, for Pete’s sake—was so dead and boring I abandoned it altogether the second I was free of my parents in college to dig through Protestant ones. My Irish grandmothers would’ve sprouted horns and forked tails if they’d seen it.

But what could I do? Catholicism in the 1970s seemed a relic of Druidism: heavy on ritual, light on content. Watching the pious past their prime unable to recall the Lord’s Prayer without the *Monthly Missalette* convinced me it was a cabal of hypocrites and lazy ones at that. How hard was it to memorize? My catechism teacher made us do it. What was *their* problem? Yet, my 2-year search in the Coast Guard found me no church I felt happy with. Each seemed wonderful till I realized no one cared about anonymous servicemen blowing two jiffies or three through their congregation. We didn’t merit the effort. I tried some Catholic churches on the off chance but, no diff: shackled to the past, lost in ritual, thinking a folksong group—my family ran one in St. Jude’s down the mountain in Lakewood, Colorado—would make them relevant and interesting.

Well, for a while I’d given up. After my discharge I wanted to return to college but, for the life of me, couldn’t figure out what I wanted to *do* in life. Geology with its chemistry and molecular constructions was beyond me; I’d proved that at Western State College in Gunnison, Colorado. Oceanography, which really appealed to the

*wandersman* in me, didn't look possible, either. Too much math like everything I liked except art, and what money was there in that? Still living on Daddy's nickel, how would I even pay for it? For the moment, none of it mattered. I was shackled up in my sister's waiting out the long days healing by reading, watching *Star Trek*, and playing guitar. The life of Reilly. Well, a painful Reilly. Crutches weren't my thing and I'd well and truly wearied.

My soon-to-be 'spiritual mother' was eyeing her mark with an inviting smile lighting her face. What an irony that she, too, was once—but are you ever really *not*?—Catholic. I couldn't say no, almost compelled to fork over my last dregs of cash. It didn't matter which Christian group it was going to and I didn't ask. She'd made the claim and that was enough. Who'd lie about that? Boy, howdy.

I went for the tiger scroll. She handed me a new one in a box. I hung it on my sister's wall where it probably drove her as crazy as my incessant guitar practice.

"How many times are you going to play that Popeye tune, anyway?" she said. "It's getting pretty annoying."

"Till I learn it." *What else?*

"Well, learn quieter." But it was a small apartment.

I felt sort of taken by this woman who now stuck her hand out and said, "My name's Ginny."

We chatted over an hour, our steamy breath wafting away like *Star Trek* and her sales numbers, just the two of us shivering under our hanging words in the icy twilight outside a cookie-cutter 7-Eleven. Sometime after dark a boxy Detroit van crunched into the snowy lot, inside faces aimed our way.

"My ride's here." That was unexpected. I'd supposed her car was in a parking space. "I have to go. Can I get your number?"

*Well, yeah.* Not often a woman asks for that. I scribbled out Mona's and curiously eyed a few men climb out of the van, gather up her goods, then all wave goodbye.

"That was weird." I languidly crutched for Mona's lamenting *Star Trek*.



**IT WAS THE** beginning of a new life unknowingly eschewing college, a 'normal' career, money, and social credibility. That didn't matter in my young twenties. The world was my oyster. Old age and responsibility seemed impossibly far away.

Though snagged, the hook wasn't set. I still imagined my life hadn't reached any defining moment—its proverbial fork in the road—and was comfortable hobbling home to Sis. The next day I plopped into her sofa for another round of *Star Trek*. Then, of all things, *she* calls in the middle of the show. What gall! How could I keep a conversation going with one eye on Captain Kirk struggling with reprobate aliens, pulling on his boots after a commercial-break roll in the futuristic hay, saving the universe from evil, and me gobbling down Gene Roddenberry's great vision for what human society could be if it wanted? If there was one thing that really caught my attention it was visions of a peaceful, caring future that saved the world from the bucket of hell it was. I wanted to save humanity. I was a superhero.

In junior and senior high school I crouched on the commode daydreaming of defending Earth from invading aliens with futuristic tech I'd found secreted on a

remote island by dead, good-guy aliens. I recruited top fighter pilots from the world, even the irascible USSR, and sent out emergency calls when aliens showed up. We flew out for battle around the moon, over cities, hand-to-hand on teeming sidewalks, or crashing afire in jungles. My hands were swooping, jinking spaceships landing, taking off, and visiting the US president as I whispered film dialogue and soared far through imagination. What fun! At the height of my adolescent writing career I'd clacked it all out on Mom's ancient, cast iron Royal into a 300-page adventure yarn, the triumphant future novelist. I hadn't yet happened on *Star Trek*, but thought I was clearly on Roddenberry's wavelength when I did.



*Me, Blair, & Mom at home on North Turkey Creek. Summer, 1978.*

My mind was naturally lost in the vast reaches of the universe when taking in *Star Trek*. Carrying on a phone conversation had me trailing off into babbling as I lost track of where the hell I was. We managed some sparse talk before she gave up with a laugh. She oddly rang the same time over several days but it was apparent I had an attention deficit. We agreed she'd call back when I wasn't slugging down alternate realities.

We got pretty friendly the next two weeks. She let me gripe over the sorry reality of my post-service, pre-college, no-clue life to let free my soul-sight lurking within. It felt good and didn't occur she was telemarketing her church. I was just a 21-year old cripple a nice girl was courting . . . so long as *Star Trek* wasn't sifted out.

I finally agreed to her "Christian organization's evening program" invite for Thursday night. "It's just a dinner and a presentation on what we do. I'm pretty sure you'll like it after all you've told me."

"Well, why not?" Mona watched me go with sly eyes. "Back soon!"

I parked my faded green Opel along a snow-crusted street at 1440 High, a 3-storey, early twentieth-century brick home the other side of a glaciated, winter-dead lawn in a quiet Denver suburb. The foyer, living, and dining rooms seemed altogether cavernous when I stepped inside. Scattered across the connected rooms were cheap tables covered in white like some Bohemian café. Stairs led to a primal darkness.

"Oh, you're Chris?" said the young woman bolting the freezer door behind me. "Wait here, I'll fetch Ginny!"

Lungs huffing frost on shifty feet, my skin was hot. I sensed everyone giving me a foxy once-over, sizing me up like a plated chicken. After I'd gone all in I realized each was passing judgment on their mate's new catch, wondering if I was worth reeling in although, in those days, anyone breathing was worth a pull . . . well, except blacks. At or near the bottom of desirable converts, they had to work hard to join; really want it. Something about "debased spiritual character" had American whites—clinging to a vestigial authority in the church—and racistly worse Japanese leaders steering blacks clear of their cozy heaven on earth. Rev. Moon had a different (at least, public) attitude:

For the white members, I warn you to be nicer than anyone else to the Negro people when they come here. You must be humble to them . . . It happened a few days ago, that one of our members encouraged a Negro woman with a baby to be seated in the rear, and she was hurt and left. And I thought that she could instead have taken care of the child, babysat the child, and let the mother hear the speech. (*How To Be a Leader* 1973)

My former best friend Jerome recounted through a strained laugh how his 1970s New York City Unification Church center loudspeaked each morning, “Good luck to everyone witnessing today . . . and remember, don’t bring any blacks.”

West Indian black himself, he saw it a delicious irony that he got the same picky admonition as if white; a convoluted equality, to be sure. I never encountered it on the early ’80s West Coast, but many American and African blacks bitterly complained to me over the years of the racial obstacles placed in their way. In qualified fairness to the church, its public attitude toward blacks rotated one-eighty by the late 1990s because—I might be as cynical as Jerome here—practically the only group listening to Rev. Moon’s message by then (and especially by 2003) *were* blacks. With or without whites fearing blacks spiritually muddying their waters, the Unification Church remains the white man’s worst nightmare because, try as they might, the Asian hierarchy never trusts them with real authority in anything and emasculates them like Roman slaves. But they’re the puppets they made themselves, ever choosing never to aspire higher than the subordination they wanted blacks persistent enough to join to accept as their own white-puppet status. One disfranchised group disfranchising another. Even Jerome conceded this sorry reality was a tastier irony than his own fish-out-of-water days.

I handed over my coat and Ginny padded up to greet my fidgeting self. *Whew*. Now in the clutches of someone I ‘knew,’ my nerves eased and muscles relaxed. We tossed some small talk across our table and then a ‘waitress’ served our dinner. Simple chicken and veg, nothing fancy. I noticed one table using actual crockery and wondered why I was eating off paper. But it was small potatoes, hardly registering in my mind. Those resentments wouldn’t come along for a couple more years. In the meantime, I was enchanted. Everyone was friendly, eager to please. My service-inspired cynicism was beginning to feel so *déclassé*. I decided it could just stay in its room for the evening lest I wind up looking pathetic; nothing’s drearier for a cynic than being surrounded by optimists.

A warm glow pervaded me. I lit up as the center of attention. Other guests were getting their share but, for the first time in years, I felt someone caring about *me*, *respecting* me. The military robbed me of all that dignity.

**IN THE LATE** 1970s the service was emerging from the Vietnam War a changed, all-volunteer institution. Recruits had fancier educations, bigger egos, and flying expectations. Low-end enlisted demanded more respect. Several I knew insisted subordinates *and* superiors address them by their proper rank.

“Don’t call me ‘Chief,’” we got tongue-lashed one day. “I’m *Master* Chief.”

“Don’t call me that,” a plain vanilla third-class scolded our mustanged executive officer. “I’m not your son. I’m Petty Officer Jones.”

That was great. The power of human equality. I was all for it. Yet, in the casual enlisted world, it grated my nerves being subordinated by titles. I was too low on the totem pole for respect-by-rank to be empowering at all. As much as I demanded personal dignity from others, I refused to be institutionally demeaned. If that meant diluting or refusing the respect they also demanded, then so be it. Seaman First Class—practically a steam bucketeer—was demeaning all on its own.

*I'm so much better than that, and capable of so much more.* Hell, I had 1-½ years of college when few enlisted had any. That made me as good as any officer or NCO, dang it, regardless my short time-in-service. If I hadn't been crippled up, I'd have made first-class petty officer by the end of my first tour but most likely entered officer's candidate school (OCS) for a commission. I tried on my boss' scrambled-eggs headgear one day when he stepped out of the office *sans chapeau*. I dare say, it sat damn nicely all squared off and pulled low on my brow. By that standard alone, I made a great officer. I admired myself in his mirror before hurriedly vacating his space. I wasn't entirely fearless.

My career dreams were cut short on a hot Mississippi night June 30, 1979. Some blasted idiot managed to stall his car *sideways* in the divided four-lane paralleling the beach in Biloxi, Mississippi. I couldn't see it in the midnight darkness till the brake lights on the car passing me lit up and I flew past him scanning the seemingly empty black road.

*Shit!* White letters in a jet field leapt at me. I flew down the gears on my Honda CB750-4 motorcycle, stomped the rear brake and squeezed hard on the front. The bike nosed down. My weight shifted heavily onto my hands.

Sand glittered in my headlights and I caught my breath. Turning tight enough to make the 90-degree, 20-foot exit to the service road and avoid the heavy American cruiser just on its far side looked impossible. The last thing I wanted was to drop my bike and guillotine my legs twixt car, road, and bike. I was now aimed straight for the front wheel and instinctively knew it wouldn't give an inch when my bike accordioned against it.

*Damn.* If only I could tighten my turning arc just another foot I'd clear his front bumper and crash in the sandy side median. But the road grit wouldn't play ball. So many clear thoughts shot through my mind in less than a second. *How fast a person thinks!* Memories played a slide show even as I analyzed my impending doom hurtling larger and furiously clawed straws.

When I'd first noticed the inky vehicle materialize in my low beam, its white passenger door lettering lighting the impression of a police car I was just too dumb to crash into, I was clocking 60 MPH. I calculated the distance to the car, my stiff deceleration, and the time to collide all fairly instantaneously and with no algebra skills at all. The result: out of time. My best course was to get the hell off the bike before I went through the handlebars. I rocketed off the footpegs with all my strength. I figured I'd sail over the handlebars to land agreeably in the beachy patch between the roads and roll to a nice, safe stop. All good.

But a half-second too late. The bike slammed into the car's front wheel at 30 MPH or better. The wheel snapped 90-degrees right. Handlebars whipped round. The rubber throttle handle jammed my pubic bone mid-jump, fortunately just above the

family jewels I hadn't yet had much opportunity to polish. The grip's rubber burned down my corduroy to my inside right knee. It promptly hyperextended and ripped the medial meniscus, changing what would've been a maybe graceful swan dive into a crazy, elliptical spin. Passing over the car's hood, 'Taxi' in white atop the roof rotated through my field of vision. I dimly wondered why I hadn't seen it before. A wave of relief I hadn't busted up a police car swept through me.

Then I plopped into the worn-mattress earth like a well-baked potato. I rolled only once but my face shield roughly shoveled sand deep in my mouth. Choking and sputtering, I shed my helmet and eased onto my back to catch my gritty breath. A roadside motel perched over the service road. Its languishing patio guests, trying to beat the oppressive heat of the night, followed my spectacle. These folks now swirled around me. I tried to sit. Pain roared up my leg.

"Gah!" I groaned.

In a chorus they advised me to lie back. "The ambulance is on its way, buddy," somebody hollered in my pain deafened ear. "Don't worry, you're gonna be okay."

"Am I?"

A cadaverous black man in black slacks and a sleeve-rolled white shirt jogged up. White rag in hand, he loudly proclaimed his innocence. "That's my car you hit! You didn't see me waving this? I was flagging you down! Ain't my fault, man."

News to me. And so was the late '70s Deep South. I didn't appreciate he was possibly concerned over mowing down a white man. He was just a dude to me. Then the medics sirened up and clustered over me. They slipped a new-fangled but leaky air cast mandating reinflation every few minutes over my right leg.

Traveling to the local clinic I said, "Why no siren? Don't I rate that?"

"Don't need it," one said.

"I just wrecked my bike! I'm in pain. And you're stopping at red lights?" I'd been 20 years old 30 whole days now but thought I was pretty big stuff. They laughed and chatted amongst themselves. *Pfft.*

Like a lot of events in my life, this one had its quixotic moments. Along with its driver, the taxi was a deep, unreflective black, invisible till my lone headlight landed on its white door lettering. How'd the other car see it first? The real joke was crashing in Biloxi and flying over the city line into Gulfport. My wrecked bike a smoking heap on Biloxi pavement, me broken and spitting Gulfport sand.

The cops didn't know who should take jurisdiction to write the report. Ultimately, Gulfport's police chief approved a version blaming me for following too close. A *stalled car*. He was one of those beefy Southern cops flaunting a '60s buzz cut, bull neck, a barrel for a chest, and forearms like Popeye.

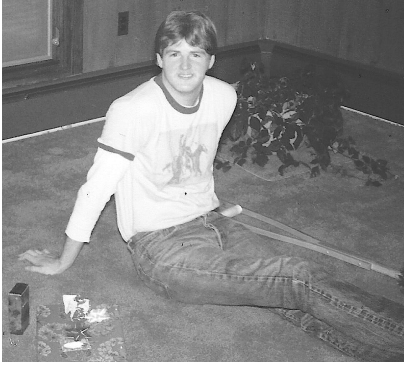
"The car was sideways before I even arrived, Chief, not to mention invisible in the dark." I slumped over crutches supporting my ankle-to-hip plaster cast since he didn't keep a chair for mere citizens in his brown paneled office. "And how could I be following a *parked* car anyhow? If you submit that, the insurance won't pay."

"That's what the investigation shows, young man. The report stands." Gruff eyes shot to the door.

I rolled my own hard enough to break after turning to shuffle out; I didn't know, he might've locked me up for that. Respect, right? The first real injustice of my life

was incensingly bitter on my palate. *I'll have to pay the damages myself, thanks to this mulehead*, I silently groused.

**THESE EVENTS RATTLED** through my head listening to Ginny at our faux café in 'High Street house.' They formed my character, influenced my responses, dictated my behavior. My experience following the accident dead soured me on authority figures and unearned respect. Unearned from *me*, that is. A person can spend their life earning credibility but if, in their encounter with me, they fail to inspire or just piss me off, I don't give it. I *can't* give it. Ironically, I often feel hurt and offended when people don't automatically respect *me* based on my past accomplishments or title, such as it is. This condition, which I call hypochondriatic hypocrisy, was probably one source of my problems in the military as well as in the Unification Church. But I comfort myself that it was only a mild form while my persecutors seemed wholly given over to its pestilence.



*Christmas & crutches at 7,500 ft. in 1979.*

As I finished up dinner enjoying the warm glow of Ginny's attention, her authorities went into action. We gathered in the living room, the old wooden pocket doors trundled closed, and Bruce Grodner orchestrated a short video or slide show. He looked younger than his likely late-twenties in black hair over Jewish-looking features; another Catholic Italian from Brooklyn, I thought. He amused me with a coffee mug a member gave him with 'In Grod we Trust' emblazoned on it. Ten or so years later, when nearly all I'd ever owned besides my precious Fender guitar

had been lost, stolen, or sold, I noticed he still had that cup. I admired his fortitude holding onto his prized possessions better than I ever did.

His presentation was electric. They screened photos of their various global organizations teaching peace while helping the great unwashed. The basic points of their guiding principles—which name they adroitly avoided—rested on typical Christian values I recognized and approved.

*Impressive. This is a happening group. Going places. Changing the world. I like it!* Young, energetic, idealistic folks devoted to their cause. *Committed.* They obviously had money, manpower, and a guiding philosophy. *All they need is me!*

My heart was humming with positive energy for the first time in three years. The shattered wreckage of my failed engagement to Diane, my first true love in college, was breaking loose. My injuries, pain, crutches, evil executive officer, inattentive commanding officer, the incompetent Public Health Service, its indescribably lovely and doting Vietnamese nurse Bui who fell in love with me till she found out I was only 20 . . . all these spiritual aches and pains misted away and retreated from thought. I was alone with myself and surged with a lightness of being I'd all but forgot. I was galloping with wild abandon down this exciting road when I heard "special workshop retreat in the mountains for a weekend seminar."



*Whoa!* My reverie screeched to a halt. “I think I need a little time to think on it,” I said to Ginny.

“Of course. No problem at all. I’m so glad you came.” She smiled deeper. “Can I call you again?”

I considered her request already knowing my answer. “Sure, why not? I really like what I heard. I dig your group. Seems like a breath of fresh air.”

“Because we are.”

Nerves jangled, though. I felt crowded. A little *too* cared for. I needed bracing arctic air, the sight of my own breath in this world to ground me. I wasn’t afraid of them. It’s just my debacle in the Coast Guard was a bloodsoaked horse’s head I couldn’t shake. I trusted nobody. Even so, my thoughts were giddy with anticipation. A sense of purpose and direction budded in my heart’s polar valleys.

I motored home to my sister’s quiet and contemplative but racing under the hood. I mulled it over a couple days, then decided to attend the workshop. Their global perspective and laser focus on “Restoring the world,” whatever that meant, captivated me. I didn’t know it was the Unification Church. I’d never heard of it nor Rev. Moon but, even if I had, it wouldn’t have dissuaded me. It was an exciting event in my otherwise morose life. Who needed a name? I’d never heard of cults, their alleged threat, wacky Eastern religions, or demonic, messianic wannabes. It was enough that Ginny called it a Christian group. There were a million of them out there. What difference did it make which one?

Their personalized attention enamored me. I was a ‘guest’ worthy of effort. After two crushing years in the service, that kind of appreciation was an aphrodisiac. Pure night and day. I came out of cold, heartless rules-and-regulations to meet warm, loving ‘heartisticness.’ And it crawled with icingly beautiful, unattached girls. What could be better? God *and* women. I was surely no monk. My college Dear John over freshman summer was a gaping wound dying for a suture.

**I DIDN’T KNOW** then how fantastically hidebound the Unification Church was or would even more so become. In those days, there were so many Americans in leadership positions that the Johnny-come-lately Japanese who’d later rule it under a stiff, hobnailed boot were constrained to a somewhat hands-off policy toward American methods and attitudes in reaching out to their countrymen. Those joining up were the cream of the hippie crop who’d survived drugs and free sex with a mostly sound mind and STD-free body; the most socially aware, change-the-world brigade the United States had fronted since our wigged Founders stomped all over monarchy and good form and Yankees crushed genteel, slaving Southerners underfoot.

Unfortunately, all that changed about the time I joined. Rev. Moon handed the Japanese a whip they cracked across Americanism in a vain attempt to transform our movement into their mindless, hierarchically bureaucratic, amoral, WWII Japanese Imperial Church they thought perfectly suited God’s top-down ideal. Flush with seeming victory over American economic hegemony in the mid-’80s coupled with our presumedly irreversible political and cultural decline, Japanese Unificationists saw Americans as the crap of the crop. Yesterday’s story. Plus, I think older Japanese wanted payback for the war. They certainly made a person feel that way.

The funniest example of it was the day Mr. Sato, Colorado's senior church leader, got a dose of Brooke Shields modeling Calvin Klein's *haute couture* on television not long after I'd joined and moved from High Street to the Boulder center. Brooke was coyly purring through Mr. Sato's television, "You wanna know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing," when his ears burned off from her pornographic insinuations. He banned blue jeans from his church centers.

"What the hell are we gonna wear?" I wondered of Julian Sherry, Boulder's center director and a growing friend. "Who of us owns anything *but* blue jeans?"

We all agreed Calvin was a rake and Brooke maybe a step away from a skin flick, but this was our American uniform Mr. Sato was messing with. I complained long and loudly of the stupidity, arrogance, and futility of his order.

Julian finally said, "Okay, I'll talk to Mr. Sato and let him know that Calvin Klein jeans aren't the same as Levi's and Wrangler."

"You have to *explain* that?" *Puh-leeze.*

He laid a gentle hand on my shoulder. "Just cool it. I'll let you know."

"Fine. Okay."

What was left of the free-spirited, liberty-minded idealists I'd met early in '81 would be exterminated by 1984 at the hands of vicious Japanese feudal lords like Mr. Kamiyama who were determined that immoral, ungodly American members would walk, talk, and eat like decent, upstanding, moral Japanese (hence, I learned to use chopsticks . . . but they did introduce me to curry rice; *yum*). And gutless, faux Christian Americans made it easy for them.

I foresaw none of the psychological warfare the Japanese would unleash on the American congregation, and 1981 seemed a watershed in Japanese-American relations. One reason was the hauntingly fresh memory of the Korean-Japanese Moonie combine smashing the United States Senate's craven hatchet job to deport Rev. Moon; jailed, if they were lucky. Minnesota Democrat Senator Donald Fraser accused him of spying for the Korean Central Intelligence Agency. Colonel Bo Hi Pak passionately rebutted the charge to a packed Senate chamber.

Until the later 1980s the Korean side of the church felt largely veiled from us rank-and-file Americans. We knew they were there but, like fantastical overlords, most of us had never met let alone seen one. We could rightly imagine them phantasmal high priests never deigning to set foot outside their holy of holies onto soiled American ground. The Japanese had day-to-day operational control, demigods to me who knew it and reveled in it. I never thought anybody could give them orders but, evidently, they interpreted them in some fashion from our super-god Koreans.

Colonel Pak's performance before the Senate subcommittee was released in book and video as *Truth is My Sword* for multiple, mandatory elucidations in every church center. I can still see the old boy tensing over the heavy wooden table in the ornate chamber, the room behind him packed, the floor in front smothered under photographers. The single microphone on the table boomed his passionate, tear-stained defense of Rev. Moon as a man of God. A real fuck-you to Fraser. "You nailed Reverend Moon's name and the Unification Church to the cross. You have crucified us . . . you are being used as an instrument of the devil . . . You may get my scalp, Mr. Chairman, but never my heart and soul [which] belong to God."

Heady stuff. I wondered why our most senior executive styled himself *colonel*. The church explained that during the Korean War he was at the Korean Army officer's school and desperately thrown into the fray. He survived a tank unit the communists had decimated. A casualty, he listened as they traipsed the battlefield shooting the wounded. He avoided their notice and survived the war, rising to colonel. With such exploits providing credibility and awe, everyone addressed him by his military rank, maybe because Korean Unificationists in those days could count on one hand those with even a wisp of social standing. We Americans weren't privy to Korean and Japanese leaders' holy first names and it was certainly a *harakiri* offense to use it if we were, so they were whatever title Rev. Moon bestowed.

Realizing the Japanese and Koreans required that we address them as mister, reverend, doctor, or colonel while they addressed us only by our first names was my first conscious encounter with racial elitism, probably because I mostly grew up in the Nordic Rockies where we never got our chance to participate. Unless one was a senior leader or joined rich, any title predating church life was irrelevant unless it served a public relations purpose. If I'd joined with a PH.D. or a senior commissioned rank, I'm pretty sure my career in the church would've been agreeably different.

Joo Chon Choi, the Korean leader of church-owned International Seafoods of Alaska, said when I earned my ordination in 1985, "You are arrogant to think your title of reverend means anything." Well, titles *after* joining didn't rate. Unless it was a church-sanctioned PH.D. Or it wasn't me.

Going off to the weekend workshop would've been unthinkable if I'd had the slightest inkling that I'd be later telling these stories. At High Street, I'd seen only Americans, which is to say, whites; no asians, hispanics, or blacks. That experience would repeat at the weekend retreat in yuppie Nederland.



**I BID MY** leery sister goodbye and motored north to Boulder, then west up Boulder Canyon. I arrived handily by early evening through snowpacked dirt roads and parked on the shoulder where a quick getaway (if needed) was most efficaciously had. Goosebumps ran up and down under my coat outside my car. I shivered and took in my surroundings. Snow sparsely covered the ground where the weak sun landed strongest. In the greater shaded areas there was still a couple of feet.

I'd switched out crutches for a cane to give mobility a try and limped down the short, dirt driveway, negotiating the snow and ice with difficulty and a near fall; my cane could've used a spike tip. I was weak and often tired from surgery. My chest seized at the thought of retearing my knee in a breakneck tumble into the small parking area some 12 feet below grade where they'd erected a volleyball net alongside a large, modern, multi-storey wood-sided home bird-nesting on a vulturous slope. I nervously rapped on the heavy door and hove a long breath to calm down.



*Colonel Pak.*

A thick clutch of strangers milled inside but the crowd eased my tension. Ginny latched onto me and got me feeling comfortable and looked after. Our first shared meal was built around some alien chemistry that was horrifyingly centerstage for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Literally. Years later when haters were insisting that Moonies lured unsuspecting recruits up to their ‘retreats’ for a diet devoid of brain food, I laughed at their studied ignorance.

“Just what in the heck is this weirdness, Ginny?”

“Technically, bean curd. It’s called tofu.”

“Beans, you say? Green beans, lima beans, what kind are you talking about?”

“Forget it. Total protein and nutrition is all you need to know. They say it’s better for you than meat. You’ll love it.”

“Better?” I was feeling harpy. Food matters. “What do you take me for?”

“Hungry. Now, eat up.”

I came to loathe this ubiquitous, unknown gelatinlike ‘food’ over the weekend and the following two weeks I ended up giving them. I was a meat-and-potatoes man, a western-states American through and through. For breakfast, we shared it with hot oatmeal. I tried valiantly to chew and swallow the gooey stuff but couldn’t get that horse feed down my throat for love nor money.

“It’s normal American food,” she sternly laughed. “Why’re you complaining?”

“Okay . . . but I’ve never had it before. Must be the blandest, most tasteless gruel to ever insult my tongue. Shouldn’t it taste like oatmeal cookies?” I drizzled yards of sugar and cinnamon to no avail. “How ’bout cold cereal or eggs?”

“Ah, sorry,” one of the house leaders piped up, “we don’t have any.”

“Quit bellyaching,” Ginny said, good-naturedly nudging me at our Japanese-style floor table. I’d stretched my bad leg out beneath it and tucked my (for the moment) good one under my thigh, my spine doing the work of a chairback but failing in sharp fire under gravity. “Didn’t your mom—?”

“No.” I slit-eyed the brown, gloppy pool of death with tight lips and exhaled heavy air through my nose. Ginny tucked in eyeing me sidelong. I mourned my empty pockets and considered pulling the ripcord on this adventure but . . . *nah* . . . seemed petty. It turned out Colorado Moonies were just church-mouse poor and giving their best. Tofu was cheaper than meat and who didn’t like oatmeal? They boiled, broiled, fried, baked, grilled, or served the firm blocks raw for each veggie meal. It was all so very Asian—for me, hippyish—but as yet I had no inkling Asia had a part in this play. High in protein or not, my body wasn’t metabolizing it. Several days and my hands were jumping beans and my legs rickety twigs. I was 21 and a rangy six-feet-six and needed solid cowboy feed to heal.

“Ginny,” I eventually said, “You know I’m recovering from surgery. I need meat, eggs, potatoes, cereal—that sort of thing—or I’ll have to leave. I’m literally ready to fall down and stay down.”

Not sure if liability or recruitment ranked first for her. “Okay, okay. No need to leave. I’ll talk to . . .” and she went to bat. A bodybuilder’s tub of protein powder, whole milk, cereal, eggs, and periodically even meat materialized like magic just for me. While suckers gummed down goop and grout I chewed good, solid American cuisine. Boy, did I chuckle over this when the bigots said, “Obviously, they were

depriving you of protein and contact with others without you knowing or they couldn't have brainwashed you into joining.”

“They did have interesting lectures, you know.” Didn't matter. They'd already brainwashed themselves.

My next two hurdles were getting off the unyielding, morgueish floor that we 'brothers' curled up on for a paltry six-hour rest that was far too short. Neither could my wracked knee take stretching out for long. Yet, bending it to roll on my side brought new pain to my hips. My surgery craved copious sleep and I just couldn't stagger up at 7 AM like everyone else and still function. Lack of rest was the second cause of my shakes. I wore out quick as an infant. That was my story anyway. With all my granny grievances they secluded me in a basement storage room where I could sleep on a thick, soft pallet through the noisy wakeup but rise in time for my special breakfast, protein shake, and the first lecture at 10 AM.

I was probably the most pampered Moonie recruit ever seen in this country before or since. One of the happier records I hold in the Unification Church.