

Original EXTENDED Version of
Rabbit Hole- Under the Name
Confessions of an Antichrist

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Dedication

I've written this autobiographical work primarily to get it all out and onto paper so I can finally shelve it on my bookcase. Jacob, my harshest critic and most ardent supporter, says I am much lighter and happier now. I count among my blessings a partner with my best intentions in mind the entire 17 years we've been together and friends whose support and love continue to grace me with beauty. Having reached the lowest points anyone can reach, I have been graced by a chance to embrace all that life gives. God watches over me and loves me.

Besides Jacob and my friends, my therapist Mrs. Smith is part of this book, too; without her deep and abiding faith and work, I could not have nailed down the timeline of events I had to thrash over for years. My sister was inspired to write a book of her own and has yet to read my "manifesto," but our will to record our lives gave us the opportunity to discuss old matters and finally put them to rest. I have no idea what the future holds, but I have accomplished what a journey asked me to do, and here it is: my gift to myself, my contribution to the world, the tale of the struggle for my soul and how I gained the whole universe in the process.

I also owe Elana and William more than I can repay; without their help and guidance and support, I would never have gotten through writing this.

To perpetrators still on this side, you might want to contemplate generational karma. Rather like the concept of the sins of the father being visited upon the sons unto the third or fourth generation, generational karma also applies to groups of people who get together and focus their energies on doing evil to others. Every fear, anxiety, tear, scream, and pain awaits you in the darkness of the afterworld, where you will experience not just the crimes you personally committed but of all those committed by your group as well for however long they were perpetrating. Believe it: the suffering you caused has a life of its own and is already feeding on those who refuse to turn away from evil. This "entity" is always eager for more to join the party. Living, concentrated black emptiness awaits those who have dedicated themselves to perpetuating evil in their lives

and the lives of others. The only version of Hell that the universe knows, it is offered as a gift to those who have worked so hard for hate and destruction.

But if it is hope you want, realize God will wait until the last of His flock returns, and we are all children of God. How and when this will occur depends upon the individual. If I were you, I would begin acts of contrition now because the hourglass is running out, and it is easier to fix things on this side than on the other.

Introduction

My parents, before I was even a gleam in anyone's eye, were involved with some very warped individuals who worshiped the Devil. Even my conception was mired in the darkest of situations with the darkest of humankind doing unthinkable things to victims who included my older siblings as well as a myriad of other children.

Rumors and conjecture still surface in Omaha about the early 1960's to the mid-1980's when a group of rich men drove a local bank called the Franklin Credit Union into the ground. Books like *The Franklin Cover-Up: Child Abuse, Satanism, and Murder in Nebraska* by John Decamp (1992) and *The Franklin Scandal: A Story of Powerbrokers, Child Abuse & Betrayal* by Nick Bryant (2009) tell about the pedophile ring that swindled Franklin Credit Union out of \$40 million and went all the way to the White House. The British documentary "Conspiracy of Silence," scheduled in *TV Guide* magazine to be aired on the Discovery Channel on May 3, 1994, was cancelled at the last minute, due to pressure by influential members of Congress; however, it can still be seen on YouTube.

The Artichoke Program's MKUltra and local Offut Air Force Base, headquarters of [U.S. Strategic Command](#) (USSTRATCOM), were also somehow involved. Beginning in the Cold War Fifties, MKUltra's 149 projects were dedicated to pushing the frontiers of *trauma-based mind control* via drugs, hypnosis, and torture to break the mind into compartments that could then be programmed and controlled. The story told to Congress members privy to its existence – the American public was never told – was that it was a "necessary evil" in the race against the Soviet Union to create the perfect spy. Dissociative identity disorder (DID), once known as multiple personality disorder (MPD), was the result, and many MKUltra victims have continued breaking down over the decades since the 1975 Church Committee (United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities) tried to expose its existence and failed, and even since the 1995 Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments tried again. Victims such as Cathy O'Brien and

Chris deNicola have testified, but thanks to the “embedded” corporate media, most of America and the world still don’t know.

Whether or not what my siblings, friends and I went through in Omaha was part of a government program and conspiracy, I couldn’t say, but considering the missing children in the area at the time, not to mention the hundreds of reports of child abuse and no real investigations, it is easy to assume that the criminal drama around children was well funded and definitely well connected. Missing and abused children fueled Omaha’s version of the mid-Eighties “Satanic panic,” and to this day none of the cases associated with that time have been solved or prosecuted in any way. One after another, “Satanic panics” like the 1983 McMartin Daycare case in Manhattan Beach, California, in which hundreds of parents claimed that their children had been made victims of satanic practices going on through the Presidio military base (finally closed in 1995), were covered up, thanks to organizations like the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF). The HBO movie “Indictment: The McMartin Trial” (1995) portrayed this cover-up. Years later, it was revealed that members of the FMSF board were connected with and funded by the North American Man Boy Love Association (NAMBLA). The Franklin cover-up in Omaha, home of USSTRATCOM, was no different.

My father was a violent man, abusive in every way. In his younger years he was a gangster wanna-be, gambling, drinking, and womanizing with children, his own and others. My mother was a narcissistic drunk who was aggressive when victimizing. Promiscuous and selfish, an utmost hand-wringer, she goaded my father until they became physical with each other. Both were intelligent and physically attractive and neither had a problem with what was occurring in our family, as both financially benefited from selling their children for sex.

For a long time, I just figured that my parents’ friends were a bunch of sick rich pedophiles enamored of the 1960s and 1970s cinema genre of witchcraft and the devil, like Vincent Price movies or *Creature Feature* featuring *Rosemary’s Baby* – drunk, drugged-out narcissists paying my parents to do what they wanted with my older siblings and me. I figured the satanic stuff was just one step beyond hedonism, and that my father in his high priest red robes (signifying blood sacrifice) would be the fall guy if the group were exposed. The fact that both of my parents participated in orgies involving children was sickening but not surprising. But Satanism is far more than a movie set. Practicing the black arts, whether intentionally or not, leads to what lives within the shadows, and you never know what you are going to attract by dabbling in such things. Having experienced it directly, I am one who believes that some doors are meant to remain shut. But fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and if anything was true about my father, it was that he was a fool.

My siblings and I always believed that a demon lived inside my father as a result of his practices with the dark arts. Whatever it was, it wasn’t *him*. When enraged, he became *someone else*, his grey eyes going cold like a dead fish, and then his atrocities knew no bounds. Children are intuitive, and considering

my parents' "social activities," it wasn't a difficult conclusion to come to. My father was very proud of being a generational Satanist of a bloodline coven of witches. Realized through their associations with a group called the Colonial Dames, our family discovered we were first in power in the 13 colonies, first to arrive in America, and distantly related to Beethoven. During my teen years, I pointed out to my father that if we were the first to arrive in America, then that meant we were the worst because back then, being sent to the New World was like a death sentence.

Whether generational or due to my parents' activities when they were young, the fact was that *something* indwelled my father. Perhaps ritual blood sacrifices opened him up to being inhabited by something *unnatural*, in the Nietzschean sense of *If you look into the Void, the Void looks back into you*. But my father and his friends did more than *look* into the Void, and in turn we all got more than we bargained for.

Tales of an Antichrist

From conception on, I was always considered the family "bad seed." The night I was conceived, my mother had been three months or so out of the hospital after a terrible car accident in which both of her kneecaps were ripped off, bones broke, and she experienced a serious head injury. She'd actually been considered dead for half an hour until she began moaning. Anyway, that night she and my father got into an argument. None of my three older siblings, the youngest of whom is twelve years older than me, remember what the argument was about, but they do remember that it became violent and that my father ended up raping my mom in front of them. When she discovered she was pregnant, my father told the family and neighborhood that he couldn't be the father because of a supposed vasectomy. (Later, with another wife, he would conceive two more children.) So my mother was ostracized from family, friends, and neighborhood, and I began life as the bastard child of a rape.

As if that wasn't enough, the family doctor told her I was a tubular pregnancy and that she should abort me before I broke through and both of us bled to death. Despite the pain she was in, she refused. Her excuse was that she was too busy, but later in life she told me she was hoping to die in order to get away from my father. Then one morning she awoke and the pain was gone. I was one of 100,000 babies that found its way into the womb. For this reason, my mother felt I was some sort of miracle. She went into labor on Thanksgiving night and I wasn't born until December 6, 1966 at 6 a.m., and to say it was a complicated birth is an understatement. I was breach with my hands behind my head. As I came out, the resulting pressure on my mother caused her to have a stroke and die for six minutes.

So you can see why my birth deeply affected my self-conception. My mother may not have been a jackal as in *The Omen*, but my conception and birth always made me feel like some sort of weird version of it, just without the special powers. As far back as I can remember, I've feared waking up and being

if not *the* Antichrist, then *an* Antichrist. This may sound crazy, but given the family I was born into, it isn't so hard to understand. I never WANTED to be the Antichrist, but I feared that the *thing* living in my father would someday live in me and that I would somehow become like him. It wasn't just that I was born into a family of sociopaths, nor was it just being sold to a bunch of pedophile Satanists that caused this fear. It originated at birth.

Because of this fear, I have always had an unusual relationship with God. As a child, I read everything I could about God and the devil to find some way out of what I considered my fate. I read the Bible from front to back numerous times. I studied Eastern religions, Greek mythology, and any occult book I could lay my hands on. I believed myself to be in hell and was desperate to get out. I tried to kill myself several times. Once, when I ended up in the hospital as a teenager, my father asked me why I didn't just jump in front of a train. That is the kind of advice you offer a "bad seed," I guess.

As a result of my traumatic childhood, I was diagnosed with severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and have been on SSI assistance for over a decade now. What my siblings and I went through as children sold over and over to a bunch of pedophile Satanists was unspeakable enough, but add to that the devastating abuse in our own family that basically destroyed all of us. My oldest sister and brother are dead now, one from mysterious circumstances and one from a lifetime of alcoholism and intravenous drug use. My other sister suffers from an autoimmune disorder that is deteriorating her bones, and I have been in therapy for over a decade now, am on medication, and have had to be hospitalized twice due to severe depression. None of us have been able to keep jobs, and for the most part our lives have been complete chaos.

Also, I am gay. My sisters were always convinced it was due to the abuse I suffered as a child and that I would outgrow it, but I never have. My father and his family added it to the "bad seed" role, further contributing to my belief that I was inherently bad. Much like the Catholic Church, my father believed it was okay to hurt children but a sin to be gay as did his third wife, my stepmother, a narcissistic, vicious, unattractive, shrew-like Jesus freak Nazi. Twenty years his junior (a year and a half older than my oldest sister), she became his secretary shortly after I was born while my mother, after 18 years of marriage, was finally divorcing him on grounds of emotional and physical cruelty. Long before the divorce was final, my father moved in with his secretary and eventually – because his parents demanded it – married her, a union commonly referred to by my siblings and me as a "marriage made in hell." While my parents were complete opposite in many ways, my father and stepmother were a perfect pair. Birds of a feather flock together as they say.

A few years later, my mother abandoned me – who, due to a head injury and having been completely broken during the divorce, she became a drunken prostitute so I was forced to live with my father and his wife. The Brothers Grimm stepmother in "Cinderella" was nothing compared to this woman, not to

mention my father's violent and deviant behavior. Like my mother, my stepmother was aggressive victimizer; unlike my mother she'd grown up as the fat, ugly, and abused girl of two alcoholic parents on the "wrong side of the tracks." Like any sociopath, she was verbally abusive and physically aggressive, using her belief in Jesus to justify any nasty thing she could think of. She was a thoroughly miserable, cruel, and lonely woman.

I suffered through incredible abuse until the age of 18 then left three days after graduating high school. Although my father no longer practiced Satanism or sexually abused me, he became a weird Christian zealot who justified abusing me for being homosexual which was impossible for me to hide even at a young age, calling me an "animal who only went off of instinct," and that I "deserved to die or go to jail," that Jesus "hated homosexuals so I would burn", etc. I grew to associate Jesus with my abuse, believing that the beatings and assaults were because of something wrong with me, and figuring that therefore Jesus couldn't love me.

As you can guess, religion has posed many problems for me. For years, I felt more anger than love towards Jesus. Besides, believing you are going to be the Antichrist one day puts a damper on the whole saved-by-the-Cross idea. At this stage in my life I can honestly say I love Jesus. God was another matter totally. I have always had a relationship with God, albeit tumultuous. Though I grew up feeling abandoned by God, I never lost faith in God's existence.

Finally in my late twenties, after getting into therapy, I discovered a spiritual practice called Shamanism which is usually associated with the Native American medicine faith. My particular practice, since my mother was Irish, is more Celtic in nature. Shamanic practice entails ritual and drums and produces an effect of a "waking dream" in order to symbolically explore the spiritual world lying within us all. Angelic spirit guides and out-of-body experiences fit perfectly with my background of growing up believing in demons and witchcraft. Little did I know that my siblings and I were right about the demon in my father, and that Shamanism would save my soul.

The Myth of Satanism

I once heard that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the people that he didn't exist. However, when I was a child in Omaha, I assure you that he was partying hard and having a great time. The public was aware that children were disappearing, but no one really knew what the disappearances meant. Even the most fantastic tales didn't approach the truth, for who could have believed that a group of rich Satanists were in control of Omaha, and that abducted children not used in ritual sacrifices were being sold to a human trafficking ring?

As my father's son, I was expected to practice blood sacrifice. The misconception about Satanists is that they kill only babies, but it was my experience that a baby doesn't offer enough blood. In blood sacrifice, it's all about the blood and the endorphins released into it when a person is under a great deal of fear and pain. The blood then acts as an aphrodisiac if drunk at the crescendo of suffering. Blood being that which God said not to spill, Satanists exert extreme effort to spill as much blood of children. High ceremonies mean murdering young boys and blood sacrifices always end in orgies.

The belief that someday I would take my father's place as high priest afforded me no advantage regarding my own pain and trauma, but the ritualistic rapes I experienced were nothing in comparison to what else was happening. At a local funeral home on the outskirts of town, my father and his friends furthered their enjoyment by playing horrible games of hide and seek in which children were told that if we were found, we would be killed. I was put in a casket inhabited by a corpse. Sometimes children were buried alive; once I was forced to lie on the grave of a young boy to see if I could hear him scream. My sister later told me that they often dug the children out, but the psychological damage had already been done. I lived through my own personal holocaust, in which I was both executioner and victim.

Atrocities were committed in my honor, and I was often forced to participate in them. As a result, I suffered constant nightmares of children coming from their graves to enact their justified revenge on me. Although I was removed from all of this by the time I was ten, the nightmares would continue; because of these dreams, I would eventually seek counseling.

During childhood every day meant I could be next. Each minute was a fight for survival while our young minds struggled to find a way out of the hell we were living in, barely able to cope with the chaos we were experiencing, believing no one would listen to us if we told, and scared of the consequences we would face if we told. In many ways, the experiences of my siblings were worse than my own, given that my father was much worse when he was younger. When he wasn't selling them on the sex market, he was hog-tying them and driving around with them in the trunk. Engaged in some sort of competition as to how deviant the abuse could get, one time he and his friends buried them up to their necks and left them after convincing them they were being left to die.

Rich, affluent and powerful, my parents and their friends were far from the image of the gothic teenage weirdo's generally associated with devil worshippers. The depths of many of their beliefs were well thought out and complex. Doctors, lawyers, law enforcement, high ranking businessmen and politicians – the people involved were community pillars, rich, well educated, well connected, and completely drunk on the power their group wielded.

Although there are Satanists who proudly attest association with the dark arts – Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), Temple of Olympus aka Ordo Astrum Serpentis, Temple of Britannia, and America’s own version of a church of Satan, the Temple of Set – most, as you can imagine, don’t advertise their practices, probably from fear of association. Such was the case in Omaha. As a child, I couldn’t tell anyone what was happening because I couldn’t trust who was involved and who wasn’t, and what was happening was so crazy that I figured no one would believe me even if I told. People were adept at looking away, fearing they would somehow become involved in things too sordid to speak publically about.

In 2008, a book entitled *Ritual Abuse in the Twenty-first Century: Psychological, Forensic, Social, and Political Considerations*, edited by Randy Noblitt and Pamela Perskin Noblitt, hit the bookstores saying that ritual abuse and satanic ritual abuse (which are not the same thing) are not only happening today in America but are and have been a long standing problem worldwide. A collection of essays written by experts in their fields from around the world, explore the history of ritual abuse, detailing victims’ experiences, from the time leading up to, during, and after America as a nation experienced the moral hysteria of “Satanic panic.” Though the essays do not mention events in Omaha, it was nonetheless like reading part of my life story and held answers to childhood puzzles that had perplexed me all my life. In many ways, it was a life-changing book in that it gave me the validation I lacked.

Still, there was no mention of demons, nor of what my siblings and I grew up with. Whether the people involved were just a collection of rich wacko’s enamored of the Devil or involved in a government project to terrorize and dissociate victims, horrific as my experiences were, I experienced a strange and twisted methodology behind what they were doing. There were reasons for the rituals and ceremonies, reasons why they believed a devil lived in my father, reasons why it would someday live in me.

A Satanic Fairytale

The Satanism I was raised with was apocalyptic in nature and grounded in ancient beliefs of myth and prophecy, many of which are pagan and Gnostic in origin, as old as humanity. All of it was grounded in a Judeo-Christian language.

To understand the theology of Satanism, you have to go back long before Jesus Christ, when *mythos* was just as important as *logos*, back when intellectual mystics later referred to as Gnostics, under the influence of Jewish, Egyptian, and Greek mythology, developed convictions concerning the Fall from Eden and beginnings of humankind quite contradictory to the evolutionary ideas taught today. Later considered heretics by the Roman Catholic Church, these Gnostics believed that the true sin in Garden of Eden didn’t lie in eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil but with a God Who envied Man’s new-found knowledge; that humankind’s problems began not with the Serpent that

revealed wisdom and knowledge but with a jealous and vindictive God Who cast Man and Angel alike out of paradise to selfishly prevent Man from eating from the Tree of Life, too.

As a child, I was told that there were two Gods: the God of Israel, God of the Old Testament considered the God of history, transcendent and "unknown" to Man, ineffective, envious, and tyrannical; and the God of humankind, ruler of the world, defender of personal choice generally considered the Serpent in most Christian texts. Back when humankind was new, God's female counterpart was devoutly worshipped. The Jews knew her as Ashera, the wife of God. Egyptians knew her as Isis, the Greeks as Sophia or Wisdom. Regardless of the name, this female aspect of God represented a special knowledge residing within, which can only be discovered in stages, a process the Greeks referred to as *gnosis*. Often worshipped in rituals involving sex, the Sophia aspect of *gnosis* was seen as holding the keys to life and death.

I was told that the Archangel Uriel guarded the gates to the Garden of Eden. Referred to as the Flame of God, Uriel was the angel of Divine Presence, archangel of salvation, keeper of Eden. Uriel recognized the power of life residing in Eve, and believing in free will and free choice, revealed to her the secrets of Good and Evil by allowing her to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As a result, Uriel was banished from Eden by the jealous God and handed the book of Hades that forbade him to enter Heaven until every soul in the world had been tested. All that has happened to humankind since resulted from this event. Anxious to return to Heaven, Uriel had sex with Eve and produced Cain, bestowing upon him godlike abilities. Later, to subjugate Eve and the divine power of the deep feminine within her and thus keep her secret knowledge (*gnosis*) from humankind, Sophia sent seven angels to rape Eve and produce Abel – all fueled by the tyrannical God jealous of the relationship between His two creations, Man and Angels, in an attempt to eradicate the consequences of the hidden secret knowledge now at humankind's disposal.

Secret knowledge is very important to Satanists, who believe the answers to life and death are found in the occult (hidden knowledge). As they see it, salvation (perfect *gnosis*) comes from experiencing all manner of sin. Libertine behavior acted out in rituals includes invoking certain angels, who in turn offer their services and protection. Satanists believe the commandments of the Creator God reflect ill will and envy, and that those who follow His laws do so out of bondage, duped by His promises that only end in death.

Rituals rotate around these premises. For example, disembowelment reflects the truth that humankind is the progeny of the Serpent and is done to offer a special reverence to the hidden parent residing in the shape of a snake within us all. Although disembowelment rarely kills the victim immediately, as a child listening to the screams I always wished it would. To be sacrificed in a Satanic Eucharist is considered an honor, a blessing that frees innocents from their bonds of life and sends them back to their Creator. Bathed and well-fed days before their deaths, they are exposed to the best life has to offer. But since the Creator decided long ago that life should be pain, God's favorites are delivered

back to Him with a message as to how bad that pain can be. During rituals, emotional outbursts are not tolerated. Tears are viewed as a sign of weakness and dealt with ferociously. Self-control (dissociation) is always expected.

The Creator is not viewed as omnipotent nor omniscient, given that he had to ask Adam where he was after he ate from the apple of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Satanists thus believe in the power of Uriel – Angel of Repentance, Bringer of the Cataclysm, Angel of Prophecy – and other earth-bound Angels, who, with Satanists' help, will one day be strong enough to rule over Heaven. For their devotion, Satanists are rewarded with unimaginable power and riches, as has been true for generations. Considering the social status that each Satanist outside the coven held, I believed this to be true. As my father's son, the next vessel that Uriel would inhabit, I would take my place as Antichrist in the war with Heaven in the days of the Tribulation, which would occur in my adulthood.

Many Satanic prophecies depend upon the constellation Ophiuchus the Serpent Bearer, as it will reveal when the gates of Heaven open once more. Ophiuchus began with the Egyptian Goddess Isis aka Sophia, female counterpart of the Creator God, mother of Creation. Through history, Isis has changed many times, until – due to persecution by male-dominated religious sects that displace all femininity beyond what remains under male control – she morphed into the male healer Asclepius. Raised by Chiron the centaur, Asclepius became the constellation Ophiuchus, symbolic of the great mystic healer standing as the 10th sign in an astrological chart of 13, the most feminine of all the signs. Mayan calculations used a very similar astrological chart, as did the Chinese and French mystic Nostradamus.

Zeus killed Asclepius with a lightning bolt because his power to heal threatened Pluto's reign in Hades, thus safeguarding the key to Man's immortality. Later, Zeus resurrected Asclepius by placing him and the Serpent (symbol of renewed life) among the stars. Today, Ophiuchus *wrestles* with the Serpent power between Sagittarius the Centaur, the mentor who taught him healing, and Scorpio whose occult stinger he controls. Ophiuchus' heart lies at the heart of the universe, where the gates of Heaven are located. Just as the Mayan Calendar and Nostradamus predicted, so the Satanists I grew up with believed we are in the last days. Around 2012, the Earth will align with the heart of Ophiuchus and usher in the Antichrist, at which time Uriel will usurp the Archangel Michael's power.

Although this knowledge was bestowed upon me as a great honor, it terrorized my entire adult life until it all came to a head on my 40th birthday. What would happen then would change everything.

Satan Worship in America: A Disclaimer

All Satanists are *not* alike. What I am explaining speaks only for me and my experience, for there are as many divisions to Satanism as there are denominations in Christianity, and Satanists have varying opinions when it

comes to worship and the reasons for their practices. America's history of worshipping Satan reveals this.

Back in the 1960's, Anton Szandor LeVey (1930-1997), author of *The Satanic Bible* and notorious cult figure, started the social experiment known as the Church of Satan. LeVey developed his church as a way to mock Christianity and the Bible: he regarded Christian theology as a collection of myths and sought to promote the other side of the argument by casting Satan as a champion for personal freedom and individuality. Reflecting the hedonism of the 1960's, the Church of Satan was an example of free love and devotion to the narcissism that was a part of the time.

Then in 1975, one of LeVey's ex-students, US Army Lt. Col. Michael Aquino, broke away from the Church of Satan to found the Temple of Set. Like a Satanic Martin Luther, Aquino created a separate sect. Whereas the Church of Satan didn't believe in God and was formed basically to mock the very concept of the Christian God and Bible, Aquino's Temple of Set believed in an Antichrist who would rise and lead his followers to absolute power. Their faith was in the Egyptian God Set, brother of Isis (Gnosis) and Osiris (Freemasonry) as well as their arch-nemesis. Like all Mystery religions, they had their own astrology, numerology, dark magic, and prophecy. In 2008, the Temple of Set hosted a worldwide conference in San Francisco that members from four continents attended. Obviously, the Antichrist business is doing well.

May the Church of Satan and Temple of Set serve as a simple example of how *legion* Satanic philosophies can be, even among Satanists.

MKUltra

Now that the Catholic Church is mired in scandal for conspiring to move and hide pedophile priests for generations, people are beginning to realize that conspiracies do in fact exist. The fact is, they always have. The rich and powerful have always done what they wanted, and as it is said, *Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely*. Such was the case with MKUltra and Project *Artichoke* run by the CIA.

Many in Omaha at the time of my childhood believed that the Satanism being practiced was linked to the government and it's local Offutt Air Force Base. Victims associated with the Franklin Credit Union told stories of government involvement in abuse and trafficking and directly named MKUltra as part of their "training." Years later, when I was trying to make sense of what happened to me as a child, I began researching MKUltra to see if there was any connection to my experiences.

The history of MKUltra begins with Adolf Hitler and his obsession with the paranormal and the occult. During World War II in concentration camps, horrible experiments were conducted on prisoners in an attempt to understand, amplify, and control psychic abilities that Hitler and his SS were convinced would help Germany win the war. They employed hundreds of Germany's best

minds, bringing them together to effectively commit atrocities against their fellow men to better understand *and control* the mind.

After Germany was defeated, the United States was determined not to allow the data from these experiments to fall into Russian hands. In 1946, convinced that these German scientists could help in America's postwar effort, President Harry Truman authorized *Project Paperclip*, a secret operation to bring Nazi scientists to America in hopes that they could work on our behalf during the Cold War. By 1955, more than 760 German scientists, many former Nazis, had been granted US citizenship and given prominent positions in the American scientific community. Project Paperclip was *supposedly* discontinued in 1957 when West Germany protested that we had stripped them of their "scientific skills."

But earlier in 1951 a project called *Bluebird* (later renamed *Artichoke*) was established by the CIA, designed to invent techniques for *special interrogations* (similar to what is being done at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib). A document issued in June of that year described the essential elements of the program as physiological research that could lead to a better understanding of the constituent factors in human behavior. By using physiological and pharmacological research, the military would better understand the action or effectiveness of various agents in connection with efforts to control human behavior. In other words, mind control.

As a result of Nazi data gathered in concentration camps and delivered to the CIA, a Hydra of projects was spawned, including the umbrella project MKUltra, brainchild of Richard Helms, later a CIA director, and Allen Dulles, CIA director at the time. A secret government program supposedly designed to defeat Russia in brainwashing, MKUltra employed drug therapy, electroshock, sleep deprivation, memory erasure, sensory modification, and a myriad of other techniques now called *enhanced interrogation*, more commonly known as *torture*. Unwitting victims were exposed to radiation, lethal biological agents, etc. – all in the name of "national security."

In 1973, after being tipped off about a forthcoming congressional investigation, DCI Helms ordered all MKUltra records to be destroyed and spread the "official" story that the program had been terminated in the late 1960's. Happily, 20,000 pages were overlooked. After being declassified and redacted, a small fraction of the original documentation reveals highly disturbing government crimes against humanity on unwitting American and Canadian victims. MKUltra then surfaced for brief public attention in 1975 as a result of hearings conducted by the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence chaired by Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho). With most of the documentation destroyed and no one connected with the MKUltra project working at the CIA any longer, public indignation fizzled away. Given that my experiences didn't end until 1976, and that the victims of the Franklin scandal were speaking of MKUltra abuses well into the 1980's, if any of the events in Omaha are related to a "secret" government project like MKUltra, then it seems that business as usual continued after the Church Committee much as before: in secret.

Books like *The Manchurian Candidate* by Richard Condon (1959) and *The Project MKULTRA Compendium: The CIA's Program Of Research In Behavioral Modification* by Stephen Foster (2009), among others, have trickled out about America's history with mind manipulation and control, and though it may be difficult to believe the American government could be so corrupt, I have observed vast similarities between the objectives of the MKUltra project and what was happening satanically to us as children. Abuse and being drugged during rituals was common. Though drugs probably made anal penetration less painful, they also made it difficult to determine what was real and what was not, making it easier for me to tell myself I was dreaming. A psychological attempt to shield me from the horrors I was experiencing? Perhaps. And yet besides ambiguity, drugs also added fear and terror. Sleep deprivation came with the territory of growing up in my house, given how violent the household was. Often, my enraged father would wake us up at night and beat us; then, having worked himself into a frenzy, he would rape us. As a result, I had difficulty with sleep for years into adulthood.

Although I was never diagnosed as such, my sister was diagnosed with dissociative identify disorder (DID). From what I understand about MKUltra, DID was a primary goal. Breaking the mind into compartments and afterward programming the different compartments for different functions was part of building spies and assassins. Our experiences might have been designed to effectively cause psychotic breaks. Whatever the objectives at the time, in the end it basically destroyed our psyches. A lot of the torture seemed like sick experiments, but one event above all makes me wonder if what we went through wasn't some sort of *programming*.

At about seven, I was brought into a room in which a dark-haired boy sat with a dog and three men. Judging from how the boy was clinging to the animal, I believed it to be his dog, but looking back I realize he could have been clinging to the dog out of fear. While being intensely observed, I was forced to watch as the boy was first tortured with cigarette burns and threats of death, then forced to kill his dog with a knife. Afterwards, sobbing and terrified, he was tied to the chair. I was told he was weak and therefore unworthy to live. As a tribute to me, I was ordered to kill him and release him from his life bonds. Saying no under such circumstances, especially as a child, was not an option, but even so I found myself unable to commit such an act. I complained that I couldn't do it because he was looking at me, my hope being that my excuse would excuse me from committing murder. But the three men were not to be daunted. Grabbing hold of the boy's head, proclaiming they were doing it in my honor, they removed his eyes with a scalpel. Even now. I can hear the boy's screams. Once they realized that the screams were bothering me, they removed his tongue. The sounds of his gurgling screams were finally enough; I plunged the knife handed to me into his chest. The point of this ritual I can't say, but I remember that the men didn't take their eyes off of me. Whether it was a government project or ritual of fanatical weirdoes, I couldn't say, but try as I may, I will never forget those eyes.

Psychic ability was expected, and I was taught at an early age how to look into a person's eyes and see what they are hiding. I was also taught that there are three kinds of people: the material, basic cattle to be used at will; the psychic, ambassadors to the third type; and the spiritual, the level I was expected to achieve. Encouraged to open myself up and trust my intuition early, it may have been why my father, who eventually came to fear me, told me on a daily basis that I was *an animal who only went on instinct*. For many years I hated my father. In fact, like a good Satanist, I hated both my parents.

Growing Up in Paradise

Being groomed to be a psychopath lasted until I was ten, at which time my family took a turn for the worse when a father of an abducted little girl forced a series of events that would in the end save my life.

Like I said, back in the 1970's in Omaha an inordinate number of child abductions were occurring, including murders. During that time, a dark-haired little girl, a playmate of mine, who lived a few blocks from us disappeared. Soon afterward, my father, his third wife, and I moved out of Omaha to a town 45 minutes away. I didn't think much about it until the summer of 1976, when her father knocked on our door. Desperate to find his little girl and knowing that she and I had been playmates, he'd tracked us down years after the fact and wanted to know if my family knew anything about her disappearance. Inviting him in, my father sat with him in our living room as his third wife prepared refreshments in the kitchen and drugged his iced tea. They waited until he passed out, then dragged him into the basement and tied him to a chair.

My father then called my oldest sister Cindy and my older brother Stephen, both of whom did the bidding of my father until the day he died. With his third wife, they decided to perform a ritual of our own, without the help of my father's friends. They were all panicking and they needed to involve me to ensure my silence, so as a group they decided I could handle what they were about to make me do. Desperate times call for desperate measures, as they say. So late that night, as we surrounded the unconscious man tied to a chair, my father doused him with lighter fluid and my stepmother handed me the match that I was forced to throw on the man, thus lighting him on fire. He woke up instantly and his screams pierced the confines of our basement. I stood with my hands over my ears. Grabbing a shovel, my father plunged it into his stomach and silenced him instantly. My stepmother then ordered me to my room where I sat huddled in a corner for the rest of the night. Afterward, we quickly moved out of state to a small town in northern Iowa where I would live until I left at 18.

The damage from that night PTSD'd me into a mess. Plagued by nightmares, I became unable to control my emotional outbursts. Posing a severe threat to my family. So my father and his third wife stepped up my physical abuse until I had a psychotic break at twelve. Not knowing what to do with me, they sent me to

stay the summer with my older sister in Minnesota; she had been removed from their care at an early age and placed in foster care.

My sister had her hands full with me, given how I constantly lied about everything and stole from her friends. She was also involved in her own physically abusive relationship at the time, struggling to overcome childhood experiences she knew I was enduring at home. She was patient with me until the day I physically attacked her son, at which point she called the police. The details of what happened are unimportant, but immediately after attacking her child, I tried to kill myself by taking pills I found in her medicine cabinet.

For the first time, not only were the police involved but doctors and social workers as well, and they all wanted to know why I was having a psychotic break. After telling them that I was the Antichrist and needed to die, and after listening to my sister's explanation as to what she believed I was going through, the Minnesota courts ordered social workers to monitor my father's house in Iowa after I was returned to him.

The small town in Iowa where we lived was isolated and 30 minutes from the Minnesota border. Everyone saw us as a bunch of weirdoes. I was psychologically fractured and unable to hide the fact that I was gay, so I grew up with no real friends. Lonely, angry, and hopeless, a month later after returning to my father's house and convinced I was saving the world, I tried to kill myself again. Thanks to a social worker, I ended up in a mental hospital for five months, a life-changing event.

When I'm asked how I survived what I went through as a child, I always look back on the events leading up to my hospital stay as when things began taking a different turn. Though unable to convince myself that I wasn't the Antichrist, it was the first time in my life that I wasn't being abused, and as a result I began to realize that abuse didn't have to be a way of life. At thirteen, this was a major revelation.

Another revelation was that I was of above average intelligence. Having no self-esteem after being told by my father and his third wife that I was not only evil but also stupid, I learned early not to trust my perceptions concerning what was going on around me. My reality was constantly being rewritten by denying the abuse and the actions of my parents in that abuse and by constantly being told what I knew to not be true. I came to distrust my own experiences and intelligence. Those five months in the hospital gave me a chance to explore who I was without my father, stepmother, and their friends rewriting me. Although no one believed me when I told them what had been going on at home all my life, I felt a freedom I had never felt before.

Although the hospital recommended a group home after my stay, I reluctantly agreed to return home with my father after a tearful reunion. Other than when I

was admitted – when he asked why I didn't just "jump in front of a train" – it was the only other time he was to visit me, though he sent his wife one other time to attend a family counseling session. Still, I loved him, and though I knew the physical and emotional abuse would continue, I figured it was better to return to what I knew rather than take the chance on something new. Years later, my therapist told me this was symptomatic of abuse survivors, but I chided myself for years afterwards for my decision. However, everything happens for a reason, and this was no different. Try as they might, neither my father nor his wife could beat out of me the budding self-confidence that began during my stay in the hospital.

Returning as a gay mental patient, which my father referred to every chance he could, I was pretty much a leper at thirteen. At the local café, he told everyone I was a "crazy fag." In fact, discrediting me became a lifetime commitment of not just my father but of most of his family, and then there was my own bizarre behavior. Lying to keep everyone at a distance, I told fantastic tales about my mother. Constantly uptight, I disrupted classes and spent much of my time roaming the hallways. Unable to hide the fact that I was weird but unable to tell anyone why, I spent a lot of time trying to say and do the right things to fit in and failing miserably. And being gay in the early 1980's in small town Iowa was anything but well received.

It was worse than being bullied: everyone went out of their way to avoid me. Having no friends other than teachers, I excelled on stage and played every lead in every play from freshman to senior year. I owe my drama teacher more than I could ever repay. She gave me the opportunity to escape my life by giving me the chance to be someone else during my high school years, as well as giving me a safe place to go. Despising my parents, most of the people in town felt sorry for me but, as in Omaha, had no idea what to do. Classmates laughed at me, and with only 33 people in my graduating class, I spent years being the class joke.

Humiliated by the physical abuse I endured and having no one to tell, God became my only confidant. Believing in the training I had undergone as a child, I convinced myself that I could sense God in the elements around me. Existential in nature, my relationship with God would be one of the few constants I could count on in my life. I avoided my conviction that I was the Antichrist and went out of my way to make God proud of me, probably because no one else in my life liked me, hoping I would be able to skip the whole responsibility of being the Bringer of Doom and all.

In my later teens, I grew taller and beefier than my father and his third wife and began to fight back. I was never brave enough to strike them, but I spent a great deal of time verbally fighting back, which at first made the physical abuse worse. However, a person can only be treated like an animal for so long before he has no choice but to fight back, and by my late teens I had reached the point

where enough was enough. Highly intelligent, I became good at mind games. Once, hiding a butcher knife in my bedroom, I waited days for my father's third wife to find it, knowing that she routinely went through my things. When I came home, she was hysterical and convinced that I was planning to kill her and my father in their bed at night. Harsh but effective, they began to think twice about beating me. I used their own paranoia against them and slept better for it.

Three days after graduating from high school, I left their house forever. At the time I had no idea where I was going or what I would do, but any place was better than where I was. As I look back, I realize that in many ways it was fate that I was about to jump from the frying pan into the fire.

Returning to Wonderland

After roaming around for the summer living off the compassion of strangers, I found myself living with an older man who was kind enough to offer me a place to stay until I got on my feet. After a few months, with no job, no car, no money, no hope for a future, and constantly fearing when the other shoe would drop, I once again grew depressed and decided to kill myself. At 19, death had become preferable to what I was afraid would happen in my future.

I waited one morning for my friend to leave, then blew out the pilot lights on the gas stove and sat down, expecting the gas to eventually overwhelm me. Five minutes later, however, I received a call from my oldest sister Cindy who, sensing something was wrong, asked me what I was doing. After telling her, she convinced me to turn off the gas and, calling back five minutes later, informed me that my mother needed help. She was just getting out of the hospital after drinking herself into a diabetic coma and was willing to wire me a bus ticket to come back to Omaha. Having no idea who my mother was, and from the stories my family told me expecting the worst, I nonetheless agreed. The next day, I returned to Wonderland.

According to my family, my mother had come back from the hospital a completely different person after her car accident the year before I was born. Once driven, brilliant, outgoing, and ambitious, she had become a binge drinker and a bar fly, commonly taking men home from the bar and making a few bucks in the process. "Drunken slut," "whore," and "skank" were words often used to describe her. I remember the venom dripping whenever my father and his family would speak of her, which would generally be directed at me for being "my mother's son."

I had a great deal of rage against her for abandoning me, but my anger was nothing compared to that of my older siblings who blamed her for our entire childhood. Too weak to save us from our father, she was best friends with many of the pedophiles who abused us. My siblings held her responsible for my father's actions in a way that I who was much younger never quite understood.

Years later, I realized that my oldest sister and brother probably never felt safe showing their anger toward our father, so took out the brunt of their blame on our mother.

Although I too was angry with her, I still loved her, and in many ways it was hard not to feel sorry for her. Abandoned by everyone in the family, she had spent her life in and out of hospitals and now she'd drunk herself into a diabetic coma and had been systematically raped for two weeks by her roommate, a disgusting old troll drinking buddy. Had another friend of hers, worried, not come to check on her and called an ambulance, she would have died. This was her pattern. Another time she fell in the snow, passed out for eight hours, and got frostbite. Before that, she'd spilled a 32-cup pot of coffee over herself for third degree burns. The list went on, always hurting herself while drunk, sometimes spending weeks at a time drunk with drinking buddies and glasses of Gordon's gin, chilled, no ice.

As with most binge drinkers, she was a Jekyll and Hyde. After moving in with her, I discovered a completely different side to her when she wasn't drinking. Gracious, intelligent, and funny, my mother wasn't the one-dimensional being my family made her out to be. Although awkward at first, given that neither of us had any idea who the other was, we eventually grew quite close, becoming friends as well as mother and son, although her drinking would be a problem until her kidneys failed and killed her in the end.

Coming together was not an easy process. Conflicted, I bounced between hating her and needing her desperately. With little respect for her and her drinking, and constantly angry due to the abuse I had just escaped from, I wasn't much of a caregiver. I blamed her for abandoning me and resented the fact that I now had to take care of her. As a result, I would often fly into loud fits of outrage, screaming at her about the indignities of my abuse. Desperate to reach out to me, she endured my rants quietly, in the end expressing her sorrow and regret for what had happened.

For my part, I was angry with God, the world, and myself, and I began shoplifting and experimenting with drugs, which infuriated her. I don't wish to give the impression that my mother was timid and quiet. Just the opposite was true. She was one of the most opinionated and outspoken women I have ever known and often voiced her disapproval over the choices I was making. Concerned that my anger would one day get me into trouble, she would often tell me to go "beat a tree" and "yell at the wind." Strong-willed and spiritual, she constantly urged me to seek out God, in whom she believed emphatically, though not in religion. She urged me to talk with her, to use her as a sounding board so that things would stop eating me up inside. As a result, we had long dinner conversations in which, for the first time, someone was actually willing to listen to me.

But that was when she wasn't drunk and calling the police at three o'clock in the morning and having them wake me up to throw me out. Gin made my mother mean, and the care she offered me when she was sober disappeared the more that she drank. The worst alcoholic I have ever seen, my mother often spent weeks sober and then would spend just as much time consuming gin. During drunken episodes, she would sit in a chair and drink for weeks, often not getting up to eat, sleep, or urinate, surrounding herself with "friends" such as the one who raped her for two weeks, who would enable her to drink nonstop for weeks at a time. They often showed up during the first two weeks of the month when she got her disability check, then disappeared when the money ran out.

A month after my return to Omaha, my mother received a call from another friend who wasn't interested in drinking but in meeting me. Saying that "a little bird told him I was in town," he asked my mother if he could come and meet me, perhaps to offer me a job. As an old business partner of my mother's and a prospective job opportunity, I agreed to visit with him. I was nervous for all the wrong reasons, given that old habits died hard with my mother. Even though it was the hope of work that drove me, even then I sensed that I was inviting the devil back into my life.

The Prince of Temptation

BJ was in his early twenties, newly married with an expecting wife, and living in the apartment downstairs from my mother. Hearing all about me from my mother the night before I arrived, he anticipated my arrival before I even knew him. Bisexual, he was excited to have a gay man living in the same apartments, though I was nothing like he expected when we met. Later, he commented on the fact that I dressed like some sort of Jehovah Witness (having a grandfather who was an elder in the church, he would know). Nonetheless, we struck up a friendship. To me, he was a paradox: married and yet an effeminate gay man. Although I wasn't attracted to him in a sexual sense, I found him intriguing. It wasn't that he was unattractive. Quite the opposite: both he and his wife were physically stunning. However, he was physically small and suffered from what I call a "Napoleon complex." But he was far from weak. One of the first stories he related was how it took eight or nine police to subdue him just a few months before when he'd gotten drunk and out of control. Prone to violent rages, he had a severe problem with alcohol. But I didn't know any of this yet.

Being the first person my own age I had ever met who knew what it was like to be gay, we struck a bond immediately. He was friendly, personable, and – I would learn later – a complete mess. As we got to know each other, we realized that we both had survived terrible abuse. He'd lived the majority of his life in an area of Omaha called Carter Lake and his parents were a weird opposite to mine: his father the alcoholic and his mother the sociopath aggressor. The fact that our abuse was similar in severity was what bonded us tightly for better or worse.

His wife, though beautiful, lacked all social graces. Their basement apartment was immaculately clean, but it was hard to notice anything but the countless cats they had, the fur and smell permeating the whole area. Highly opinionated but not very educated, BJ's wife was overbearing, shrewish, and generally hard to take for any amount of time. Of course, the first night I didn't realize of this. I gladly accepted a dinner invitation from them, happy to finally have people my own age in my life. That dinner party was a clue as to what was to come. Later, I would find out that the delicious steak sandwiches BJ and his wife served that night originated from my mother's freezer. Stealing my own food and graciously serving it to me was just a small indication of the darkness BJ promised, but at the time I was just glad to have a friend. However, the carnival was just getting ready to begin a events would play out and secrets would be revealed that would change me forever.

At the Gates of Hades

Omaha is a much different place today than it was in 1985, much less than when I was a child. After child abductions and ritualistic murders, citizens were breathing a collective sigh of relief at the arrest of John Joubert, a 20-year-old airman stationed at Offutt caught in January the year before killing two paperboys. Although he had absolutely no connection to previously abducted paperboys, nor in the ritualistic murders of previously discovered children, it was something, and citizens were beginning to feel safe.

It was the 80s, and like almost everywhere in America drugs were flowing, and especially in the gay community, which was surprisingly large at the time. Rumors abounded in the gay community about sex parties with children present, drugged-out orgies attended by the elite somehow connected to abducted children. But I wouldn't learn this until later on. At 18 and new to Omaha, the gay lifestyle seemed like paradise as I was finally able to be myself. But that newness would quickly wear off the more I discovered.

From my experience as a homosexual, there are three types of gay guys. First, there is the homosexual, a person who just happens to have sex with another person of the same sex. Then there are gay people, activists hanging out at the Castro in San Francisco, joining bowling clubs, attending social events, and generally hanging out with those who, if not gay, then are still open-minded enough to accept the difficulties of living the gay lifestyle.

The third type of gay guy is in no way politically correct. Jaded, bitter, and critical, they use anyone to achieve whatever they are interested in at the moment – drugs, money, sex, position, it doesn't matter. Feeling a sense of entitlement either because they are young, desirable, powerful, or rich, they live a life of hedonism, never once concerning themselves with the pain their narcissistic life styles cause others. At that time, power in the gay world was concentrated in this third type of group, many of whom were married but

nonetheless were having gay and straight sex and causing chaos in all the lives they touched.

My mother's friends were shady, especially the man I was about to meet, a man I'll call Dick for the rumor that said despite being small in stature, he was endowed with a very large penis, which he paraded around like some strange circus act. His reputation was notorious. A member of a wealthy Omaha family, he had become a flaming homosexual, proudly parading his sexuality at large parties he gave at his house, a spacious, colonial-style mansion in a rich area of town. A paradox of sorts, he was also a member of the Hell's Angels and would often invite motorcycle groups to his parties, ending in orgies in the upstairs rooms, or so I was told. Later, I would discover that there was more to the story, a lot more.

For all intents and purpose, our meeting was uneventful. He came to my mother's apartment and didn't stay long, though he seemed to be sizing me up the whole time, asking about my education, appreciating my manners and intelligence. Finally, he asked if I would like to come to his house at a later date to discuss a job in his interior design company. That a wealthy business owner would show interest in me gave me a real lift, and I readily agreed. Before leaving, however, he made a strange comment, something about how much better looking I was than my brother. Assuming it was pure flattery and that he was making a play for me, I blew it off. Still, it struck me as an odd thing to say. Later, I asked my mother how Dick knew my older brother. She replied quickly that they had met once and quickly changed the subject. Dismissing it as nothing, this small event was a foreboding of things to come.

In the Devil's Den

Dick's job offer was nothing like what I was expecting. Meeting him at his lavish mansion a week later, I was told that I would be maintaining his house – dusting, vacuuming, general cleaning as well as cleaning the pool daily once it got warm. He said he was about to leave for his vacation house in Hawaii and would return in a couple of months. To solidify the deal, he handed me a roll of money, \$1,000, more money than I had ever seen in my young life. Assuring me it would be wonderful, he grabbed hold of my butt as I got up to leave. Not wanting to throw a fit, I blew it off, figuring I would deal with it if the time ever came.

At 19 and having gone through what I'd gone through, I could be a pretty docile kind of guy. Sexual abuse has an effect on a person's psyche, let alone everything else I experienced, and coming from years of isolation, I was desperate for attention. Not that I would ever have sex with Dick, money or not, but I figured that a grab now and then was no big deal. Laughing it off, I walked out with a job and a thousand dollars richer.

I was attractive, but never felt like it. In high school, I'd been plagued with terrible acne. I was scolded for eating too much chocolate, but the truth is I rarely ate anything, let alone chocolate, given that I had no job or money. My father and his third wife would commonly refer to me as "zit head" and "pimple face." Mysteriously, the acne cleared up a few weeks after escaping their house, but I still felt like an ugly, stupid, useless piece of crap whenever I looked in the mirror for years afterward.

Though physically active, I still came from my father's house 6'2" and 160 pounds and looked like a concentration camp victim in my clothes. Isolated in that small town Iowa, I was used to jogging ten miles a day. Running connected me with God in a way nothing else did, and it was a wonderful escape. Being the first in town to own a walkman, I would lose myself in my runs, forgetting the suffering I was enduring at home.

My mother was on and off binge drinking during this time, and when she was sober she would tell me to "look straight ahead, do my job, and get the cash." So not able to wait on Dick for the time he was gone, I went to an area called the old Market to get a job. Kids gravitated to the area because back then it was THE place to be if you were anyone, and I figured it was as good a place as any to get a job. My first job was under a Godfather's Pizza at Stars Restaurant. Billed as an exclusively gay establishment, it nonetheless served a diverse crowd, though many of them were indeed gay. In the month and a half that I worked there, I was reintroduced to the seedy side of Omaha. I wasn't much of a waiter, but by flirting with patrons, I discovered that men were bringing young boys in and referred to them as "trade." They then served as entertainment for the rest of the table. Godfather's upstairs was generally filled with all sorts of kids and I sensed a connection and began to grow uncomfortable. Having been nicknamed Prudence at a party for refusing sex, I saw the sordid way sex was being manipulated as wrong. But I needed the job and so did what everyone else seemed to do: I looked away, meanwhile rejecting offers with a smile while walking away and feeling disgusted and dirty.

Drunk, my mother would say cryptic things like, "I didn't know what I was dealing with" and that I should "get out now, while I still could." Later, when she was sober, I would ask her what she meant, but she would always dismiss it as the drink talking and change the subject to her soaps or bowel movements that she was fond of describing.

BJ was the only other person I told about the situation going on at the Stars. Laughing it off, he'd say there was "nothing wrong in making a buck" and if I wanted to, he could introduce me to some people. Horrified at the prospect of prostituting myself, I declined, though secretly I was intrigued as to how he knew such people.

Finally, unable to deal with the fact that child prostitution was taking place, my paranoia got the best of me and I quit. I figured my mother would be dismayed, but she seemed relieved. "Just get another job" was all she said. Escaping Stars and thinking I was better for it, I had no idea that I was just beginning my journey into the devil's den, nor did I realize that my curiosity in BJ's offer would get the better of me in the end.

The Run

As a young gay kid technically unable to get into the bars until I was 21, there was very little to do other than to hang out at a place in town called "the run," a two-block radius surrounding the local jail a few blocks up from the Old Market. With the Greyhound bus station across the street and a bar around the corner called The Run that allowed teens in after one in the morning on weekends for after-hours dancing, teenagers made it a popular place. Men drove around the block over and over to pick up tricks and trade, tricks being sexual hookups and trade prostitution, money always changing hands. Boys walked around the jail, selling themselves 20 bucks at a time. Sometimes 30 to 40 kids or more would be hanging out on the wall by the Greyhound bus station or sitting in their cars in the parking lot. It was a veritable meat market for old trolls looking for sex.

The Run bar itself was something else altogether. Dark, smelly, and generally filled with falling down drunks, it was the only place for teens to go on weekends. At one o'clock, they would empty the bar, clean the glasses, put the alcohol away, and a half an hour later open their doors for after-hours dancing that lasted until four in the morning. As a result, "the run" was packed every weekend. I've heard that nothing good happens after one in the morning, and looking back on what was happening on the run, I'd have to agree. As a kid, it was exciting and fun, but now I realize how dangerous the run was. Besides prostitution, there were fights or "fag bashing": uncomfortable straight boys with their girlfriends dancing at The Run would be hit on by a gay guy in the bar and fists would fly.

Another bar called The Hollywood, down from the police station, had been torn down by the city after allegations of child pornography being filmed in the dungeon in the basement of the establishment. As a kid, it was hard for me to believe the rumors that snuff films (porn ending in murder) were being filmed down there. Instead of investigating the allegations, the city decided to tear down the bar and put up a parking garage.

A bar called The Stage Door was located right across from the police station, up the street from The Hollywood. It was a hot spot at the time, but the manager quit after being accused by a Des Moines mother of being involved in 1982 with abducting her son Johnny Gosch, yet another paperboy. Once again, there was no investigation into the allegations, nor any investigation into Gosch's

disappearance whatsoever, but those who heard about the situation figured the manager of The Stage Door left just to avoid any problems.

Behind the police station was another bar called The Max, a one-room crap hole with a doorman named Tank, a fat, unattractive middle-aged man who allowed minors into the bar if they submitted to a blowjob. Finding the prospect distasteful, I declined and thus alienated myself from the bar for a time. A couple of years or so before the whole Franklin Credit Union went sour, The Max went from being a one-room shit hole to a five-bar extravaganza in a matter of a year and a half. With a state of the art light and sound system, it became the nation's most talked about gay bar. If rumors are true, it owed its overnight success to helping Franklin launder \$40 million of bilked money.

So the Omaha "gay lifestyle" was pretty out of control at the time, on the run and in the bars as well. If I had to use one word to describe the gay lifestyle back in the middle 80's in Omaha, it would be CORRUPT. Corruption has its own entertainment factor, though, and most were too busy having fun to notice. Believing that the party would never end, the shit would end up hitting the fan and would have a far-reaching effect that would surprise everyone.

The Denial of Existence

After what happened in my childhood, why would I ever return to Omaha? For the longest time, I had no answer. Even after years of therapy, my reasoning was vague, always claiming that I had no place else to go other than my mother's, so I did what I had to do. It took years of therapy before I would even let myself think about what happened in my past. Before that, I lied to myself and everyone else. As a kid, I did everything I could to deny my existence and pretend I was somebody different. Lying to yourself can be very effective, especially when you so desperately want to believe what you are saying. I dismissed the memories of the physical and emotional abuse I had endured at my father's house as simply the creations of the mind of a severely abused child and nothing more. I was accustomed to living in severe chaos and denying that anything was the matter, so I did what I had learned to do: I dismissed what I was experiencing. Besides, I had taught myself never to think about the trauma I went through, and the power of denial can be a powerful tool.

Denial has a strange effect on the psyche, though, and being a liar takes its toll on the soul. By my refusal to deal with what had happened to me as a child, my mind therefore processed the information in other ways. I was plagued by constant nightmares, unable to sleep, afraid of what I would see in dreams. Sleep deprivation heightened my already erratic sense of fight or flight. I couldn't keep myself from panicking over nothing and the stress added to the paranoia I felt, further alienating me from me. Later, I discovered that I was experiencing Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to the Satanic ritual

abuse I had suffered as a young child *and* to the ritual abuse I suffered under my father and his third wife. Ritual abuse without the Satanic aspect is simply abuse dealt out on a daily basis to the point that being beaten and treated like an animal becomes the everyday norm. Both types of ritual abuse impact the victim, and for a long time it was just easier to focus on the years of daily ritualized abuse than on the bizarre, scary stuff buried deep in my past. So I wasn't the happiest of children and spent most of my time in my room with my nose in a book to survive my father's house, a psychological pattern that carried into my young adulthood. Books offered an escape fundamental to my survival for many years, allowing me brief moments of living imaginatively in realities other than my own. Years of hours alone in my room, that's how I learned to live in my head where I could read, journal, and talk to God. Often dark and cynical, I spent inordinate amounts of time worrying about when the next bad thing was going to happen. Overwhelmed at my father's house, I fought deep self-destructive periods of depression and hopelessness. Dealing with my mother's alcoholism as a young adult was more of the same, and in the end I stopped caring so as to avoid constant feelings of rage and depression. Under the vise grip of severe stress, not caring became my only way to cope. Deny, lie, and look the other way became my motto.

Grasping at straws of a severely challenged self-identity, I spent a lot of time focusing on the fact that I was gay. I had used it as a weapon in order to embarrass my father and his third wife in our small town, and they had used it to beat me down. Their horror at having someone call and ask if the faggot was home gave me a certain satisfaction, the only trophy I could come away with, though it always hurt me. Deep down, I believed that being gay was just one more indication of my Antichrist future, and quite honestly as a child I would have given anything not to be gay. I was conflicted, battling what I believed to be right, such as the fundamentalist conviction that homosexuality was wrong – in comparison to who I was. Growing up, I learned to treat my sexuality as a sword and shield, striking at my father and his third wife's hypocritical sense of propriety, and at the same time shielding myself, using it as a way to distance others from me so I could feel safe.

Safety and the inability to feel safe have been strong constants in my life. Growing up as I did, I had the stability of a roof over my head and clothes on my back but rarely ever did I feel safe. Never once was I allowed to forget that I was my mother's son. Outings with my father and his family always ended in arguments as I would sometimes become enraged by their comments about my sexuality and fire back my own insults. At home, beatings and living with people who consider you an animal is never a safe or nurturing environment.

My mother, on the other hand, accepted my sexuality without question, remarking when I told her about being gay, "Thank God, now one of my children will have some taste." It was because of this that I first grew to trust, then to love my mom. She may have been the worst, the dirtiest, the most

promiscuous alcoholic I have ever known, but she loved me, and for a long time in my life she was all I had, although her alcoholism made her far from safe. This would change in time and I would eventually surround myself with individuals who collectively would change my entire outlook on life. Whether it would be for the better was questionable, for we would all be swimming with the sharks in the end, but in the beginning it was really fun to have real friends.

The Prince of Charms

Have you ever met someone for the first time and felt like you have known them forever, like you'd been friends in another life? I have only felt this way a few times in my life, and David was the first. Standing outside The Run in jeans and the black fringe jacket that was all the rage of the 80's, I was waiting for after-hours to open with my friend Mark Anderson. Mark was a really cool older guy who had befriended me a few weeks after I arrived in Omaha. He showed me Omaha on his motorcycle and never made a pass at me. I felt comfortable with him, and for awhile was under his wing.

It was Mark who called David over and introduced us, much to my chagrin. But once David and I began speaking, our conversation ended up lasting all night. Never sexual between us, I instantly felt this brotherhood between us. I invited him back to my mom's after dancing so we could keep talking until early morning about God, creation, the universe, and life as we knew it. Other than BJ, it was the first time that I spoke with someone my age about the things that interested me, and David was no slouch when it came to his own philosophy on life. Intrigued by each other, we became instant friends.

A year younger than me, David also came from a chaotic background, which was probably why he veered toward danger his whole life. He was an only child in an upper middle class family up. His father had been career military, and his mother was a social climber homemaker. Both were pretty much disinterested in David, who found himself abandoned at an age when his parents could legally do so. He'd gone into the armed services to get an education, but after stealing a bunkmate's boom box and almost being strangled to death, the Army threw him out with a dishonorable discharge, which was fine by David, just as long as he got out.

Although incredibly personable and funny, growing up gay as an only child in a disapproving household was lonely. Whereas I blamed God and raged over the injustices in my life, David believed that everything happened for a reason, and therefore carried a strange sense of peace about him. He was determined to enjoy his life, despite living by the seat of his pants most of the time. He compared himself to The Fool in the Tarot deck, always on the edge, stepping off the mountaintop, happy to take on the world at any moment. Completely enamored of David, I personally identified with him in a way I had never experienced before and would always consider him my first real friend and

brother. As for BJ, he was busying himself with newfound fatherhood, so in the beginning David and I had a lot of time to hang out on our own.

A week after our meeting, I discovered that David was living with an older guy who had carved holes in his bathroom walls so he could watch young boys shower and pee. I insisted that David come and stay at my mother's and bunk on the couch for as long as he liked. So he moved in with us the following week and we became inseparable for the next year and a half – until he was murdered and I had to run for my life.

The Angry Atheist

At the beginning of my young adulthood, I wasn't like David in believing that everything happens for a reason. I was extremely angry at God and blamed Him for all I had gone through in my short life. In childhood, I'd received great comfort from relying on God, but in my late teens I'd grown skeptical and come to believe that God, like everything else, was just something I had made up in my head. I bounced back and forth between belief and atheism, striking back at God by denying His very existence. Looking back, I think I felt abandoned by God.

My mother had her own relationship with God. Explaining that she had no need of a church, she would often just look up and say, "Hey, pal," and then say out loud what was bothering her. Considering her lifestyle, history, and the fact that she often drank herself into oblivion, it was easy for me to dismiss her faith as empty words and view her as one of the most hopeless individuals I had met. Still, her relationship with God was undeniable, and when she was sober, she often tried to offer hope and compassion to deter my rages.

It is said that our personalities are formed by the time we are three and depending on those formative years, you either view the world as safe or not. Confused by much of what I had experienced in my childhood, I spent a lot of time feeling completely lost and stressed. I had been completely tromped down by the people in my childhood and often wondered what I had done to God to deserve what I had gone through. Unable to express how I felt, I felt alienated and alone. Though I still could feel the presence of God, I didn't want it. I believed the world was evil and that the bad guys always win, so it was hard for me not to fall back on the old teachings that God is demanding and distant. In the fight between Cain and Abel, I'd been taught that before killing Able, Cain declared there is no afterworld, no consequences for bad behavior, no good reward for the just, and no punishment for the wicked. At this point in my life, it was easy to see how true the old teachings were. Confused as to why God had created me in the first place, I spent a great deal of time wishing that I had never been born.

But what I'd been told about my mother had not been the real story. My father had destroyed her. She too had endured his beatings. We discussed my conception and birth and it dawned on me that my mother had been just one more person my father had used, abused and discarded when she no longer served his purposes. Although a product of her own life choices, she had been as broken by my father as we all had, while he'd come out smelling like a rose. My mother, siblings, and I were left to suffer the consequences of his behavior. The injustice of it all fueled my rage.

Though estranged from my father and his family, I still suffered mentally and emotionally from their abuse. Picking up where my father and his third wife left off, my brain looped over and over again just how worthless I was, constantly undermining me. Feeling that the world could rot and me along with it, I spent a great deal of time feeling sorry for myself, unable to find a way out of my predicament. Battling such anger all the time was exhausting, and I often had headaches and body tension along with the panic attacks, all the while blaming God for what was happening to me.

David had an interesting saying about *evil* being *live* spelled backwards, and he thought the stress I was force-feeding myself was an example of it. I adamantly disagreed, declaring that evil was a living breathing force that compelled people to perpetrate terrible atrocities upon each other. Agreeing to disagree, David would always reiterate that everything happens for a reason and that there's always a bigger picture that we just can't quite see. "Yeah, God sucks" would be my usual reply, but in the end, years after David was gone, I realized he was right. In many ways, we both were.

Quantum physics teaches that without the friction life offers, we would soon cease to exist. Under that argument, it can be said that evil is a necessary component of life, and therefore, in and of itself, is natural. Solely inherent in human nature, the concepts of good and evil are the battle zone of humankind, not for the larger forces of Nature. Morality separates us from the primates and connects us with our humanity, offering us the choice to become better or worse than what we already are.

Whether or not the evil in Omaha was natural or necessary, I couldn't say, but it certainly was pervasive, and I was about to get another bittersweet taste of the darkness I thought I'd buried in my past. Like the slow-boiling frog sitting in tepid water, I wouldn't realize I was on the menu until the very end, and by that time it would be far too late.

Something Wicked This Way Comes

BJ finally met David and we all started hanging out together. For all intents and purpose, it could be said that both were an incredibly bad influence on me, but free from restrictions and rules, I relished the fact that for the first time I actually had friends my own age. BJ said that the best drugs could be found in

the gay community. With his connections and my money from Dick and tips from Stars, we smoked countless bags of pot. Smoking for the first time in my life, it was like nothing I had ever experienced. Getting high released me from the stress I constantly felt. Marijuana energized me in a way I wasn't used to, and I began a routine of "waking and baking" with David and BJ, much to the dismay of my mother. "Drugs and friends, they come in that order," David would say as he puffed on BJ's bong, and we would all laugh, not realizing how true his insight would turn out to be. Never considering the consequences of what we were doing, David and I allowed BJ to constantly press us to do try new experiences and we were happy to oblige.

Acid was also in heavy supply at the time, and BJ pushed us to try it. Uncomfortable with the thought of using drugs, I held out for months, but with the urgings of both David and BJ I finally broke down one night and tried it. The best way to encapsulate the experience of acid is by comparing it to a religious experience. It pried open pathways in my mind and I fell for hours into the grace of God. BJ explained that the experience vastly depended upon the environment and the company you were keeping when high. The three of us spent hours talking about God and man's relationship to the universe, high on both drugs and life.

David was the most adept thief I have ever known, and he began to teach me the finer nuances of shoplifting. Sometimes we had contests of who could steal more and would go all over town stealing from business after business. Once my mother realized that I was stealing all my new toys, she became enraged and warned us that we were going to end up in jail. But David and I just laughed and disregarded her good advice while planning our next escapade. The best way to steal is right out in the open and I became accustomed to simply walking out of the stores with merchandise: answering machines, clothes, books – it didn't really matter, I just took whatever I wanted. Once, falling behind in our contest of who could steal more in a day, I walked into a bookstore and left with six hardcover books. But my abilities didn't compare with David's, who could pretty much steal anything. His crowning achievement in thievery was an entire Bose sound system.

My mother's apartment became a Grand Central Station, with new friends and acquaintances constantly coming and going. For me, it began as a version of paradise. My lonely existence had finally come to an end, or so I thought at the time. The activity even seemed to slow down my mother's drinking.

Mark Anderson came around often on his motorcycle and took us for rides. He didn't approve of the drugs or the stealing, but generally minded his own business and kept quiet about our activities. Being in his late 40's to early 50's, I think we made him feel young again, and he enjoyed our company as much as

we enjoyed his. In some ways, Mark was a father figure for us. Later, he introduced me to his friend Walter Carlson. Quiet, shy, polite, and middle-aged, Walt was pretty docile next to Mark's outgoing personality, blending in with the wallpaper whenever he came over. He lived in the basement of his parent's house over by Crossroads Mall. Neither of them realized that meeting us would mean their future downfall.

On weekdays, the three of us got high and hung out, sharing in a way that only comes with youth, pouring out our souls in hours of talk and seeking solace in the comfort each offered the other. None of us having it easy growing up, we all had tales to tell. David was somewhat secretive about his childhood, saying only that his parents didn't like him and spent most of their time avoiding him. Convinced that both of them hated him because he was gay- he never really said much about his parents or what his life was like with them. Ostracized in school, he had grown up the weird kid, something BJ and I understood all too well.

Unlike David, BJ was incredibly forthcoming about his childhood. Growing up with an alcoholic father and an overbearing, narcissistic, beautiful sociopath mom, he had found himself in a lifetime of situations that no person should have to experience. Once while drunk, his father had awakened him and demanded that he do a back flip for his friends. BJ broke his shoulder blade in the process, but neither of his parents took him to the hospital. As it result, it had mended badly. His mother, always in search of a new husband, had a history of marrying and divorcing men as well as occasionally lighting fires and collecting insurance money. Bounced between the two until his mother remarried a man who didn't like him, BJ's life had been one letdown after another. He'd married his high school sweetheart, his only hold on stability, despite a gay childhood. He bragged about being able to get into the bars since he was 15 because of his "connections" and was a compendium of information concerning the ins and outs of the Omaha gay scene. Excited at the prospect of being "hooked up" with his friends and getting into the bars early, I realize that was the beginning of the end for us in many ways. I sensed a hidden darkness in BJ but dismissed it, feeling I had met someone who had had it just as rough as I did.

We spent weekends on the go, hanging out, socializing, dancing. Neither Mark nor Walt ever came dancing with us, but they eagerly soaked up the stories we had to tell. Getting high and going down onto the run around nine o'clock at night became customary on weekends, hanging out before after-hours opened. Finally feeling like I was beginning to fit in, I started to allow myself to enjoy life for a while.

Eventually Dick returned from Hawaii and asked me to start my cleaning position, which by this time I was not all that anxious to do. Hanging out with David and BJ had become as addictive as the drugs we were partaking. Never

having had friends, I was pretty co-dependant when it came to our camaraderie and I wasn't willing to stint my friends' company easily. BJ suggested he had a way for me to make money without having to work, but my mother insisted that I take the job, Dick being her friend and all. I would soon learn that both BJ and my mother wanted the same thing: to pimp me out. But they needn't have worried. I would soon discover just how small Omaha really was, and how tightly wrapped in my past my present and future were to become.

A Pederast's Playground

The summer of '86 was an emboldened time for those involved in nefarious activities in the Omaha area, and having dodged the "satanic panic" bullet with the arrest of scapegoat John Joubert, Omaha became a free-for-all of anything goes. Working for Dick, I was quickly going to come up to speed as to how true this was, and how pervasive the activities occurring at Stars actually were. Other than knowing that Dick had been a family friend my mother had worked with when she'd been well enough to work, and that he'd struck out on his own and left her behind, I didn't know much else about him. His house was an over-the-top Victorian, every corner and nuance of every over-decorated room filled with expensive eye candy, never allowing the mind to relax. Cleaning his house gave me a clear impression as to how wealthy the man really was.

I wasn't allowed upstairs, as he was renting the rooms to some bikers that he knew. I cleaned the rest of the house and the pool shaped like a penis and balls, with two circles and an oval in the middle, perhaps in honor of its owner, a voracious sex fiend constantly obsessing over his next lay and speaking about it incessantly. Small, thin, and aggressively effeminate, Dick was all hands when he spoke to me, which bothered me no end. Considering the source, I kept laughing it off. My mother said it was just how Dick was and that he meant no harm by it, compelling me to continue working up to the time that all hell broke loose.

A few weeks into working for Dick, after watching him parade around with bikers and pubescent boys, I began to suspect there was more to him than met the eye. I never saw any money switch hands, but I suspected that sex for hire was going on, among other things, which made me very uncomfortable. David laughed and told me to get over it, while BJ just listened, quietly sizing me up. Not finding much support, I continued working for a few more weeks until it all crossed the point of no return.

Dick came into the house with an extremely attractive biker who lived upstairs and asked me to come into his bedroom where he said he was hanging curtains to talk about my wages. Mom had been on a binge for a week or so, and I was stressed from that and not sleeping well. Dick offered to give me a massage. I declined until Dick pointed out that his friend was also in the room so I had nothing to worry about. Against my better judgment, I complied. I laid down on

his pedestal bed a good four feet off the floor and he sat fully clothed beside me and began massaging my shoulders. As I began to relax, he started down my back, commenting on how tense my muscles were. Finally, using the excuse that he wanted to massage my lower back, he straddled me. I felt his erect penis on the crack of my ass through our clothes. He began rubbing his erection on me and I panicked. I threw him off and onto the floor, knocking the wind out of him.

Scared he was hurt, both his friend and I rushed to his side. I profusely apologized, convinced I had over reacted, and implored him to forgive me, that I was young, etc. Still struggling to catch his breath, he looked up at me and hissed that youth was no excuse, that "when I was six, I was going on twenty six so he didn't want to hear any excuses about my age." Taken back, I stood up. Still furious, he told me that I was "nothing like my older brother." Obviously noticing my befuddlement, he smiled coldly and said, "I was fucking your brother at ten years old. We all were, and you know what? He loved it."

Those were the last words between us. I left immediately, angry and confused over what I had just heard. My mother had lied to me. Dick was one of the people from the past I had spent years telling myself didn't exist. But instead of talking to my mother, I did what I always did at such times: I kept it to myself. It is amazing how secrets can eat a person up, and this one was a difficult one to swallow. I told myself that none of it was true and kept my distance from Dick, a self-admitted pedophile. Years later, I asked my brother about it. He confirmed what Dick had said, but told me that if I told anyone he would kill me.

Sensing that something bad had transpired between Dick and me, my mother too kept silent, often catching me looking at her that prompted her to ask, "What are you thinking?" Beginning to understand the anger my older siblings had toward her, I would just smile and say it was nothing to avoid the argument that would have ensued, had I said what was really on my mind.

Once again jobless and broke and tired of hearing my mother bitch about how she was sick of taking care of me, I told BJ I was ready to meet the "friends" he said could help me out and that I would try it once. A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. At the time, I had no idea that it would be that kind of step, nor how far I would find myself as a result.

In therapy, I've learned that until recovery, abuse survivors have a tendency to put themselves in situations in which they will be re-victimized. Such was definitely true for the three of us, especially of BJ and me, both of us having suffered from major childhood ritualistic sexual abuse. Prostitution looked like the norm at the time. I felt there was no other option, given that I couldn't keep a job. BJ assured David and me that it was no big deal, there was big money to

be made in it, etc. I had no idea that I was about to meet the Devil who would exact a price that would claim all of our lives.

The Devil's Handiwork

BJ explained that there were men in town who were constantly seeking the company of young boys and willing to pay large amounts of money for it. He said he was running boys for a man named Alan Baer, a wealthy businessman eager to meet young men such as ourselves, and the fact that both David and I were of age was a big plus in the mix as Baer had just gotten busted for soliciting sex with minors and was being extra cautious regarding age. Fined only \$500 for the charge, he had skated right through, but was still paranoid of another Omaha "witch hunt."

BJ went all over town meeting young boys in the Old Market and the Greyhound bus station, hooking up with Boys Town boys coming into Omaha for the day. He befriended them like he had me, then introduced them to Alan for a commission. His own mother had brought him to Alan at a young age and he'd become a courier at 14, his reward being access to bars by 15. Referring to himself as a Baer boy, BJ explained to David and me how nice it was to have a powerful man who could do things for him, and assured us that if we let him Alan would do the same for us. All BJ had to do was make the phone call. But instead of impressing me all his talk, he'd only scared me. So I backed out. I was intrigued by the easy money, but wasn't ready to take on the role of pimp just yet.

David, on the other hand, was all for it. Always jumping in feet first, he was constantly seeking the next adventure. To him, the danger sounded like just one more experience to add to his growing list of adventures. I stood my ground, but after the two of them went at me for hours, I relented and agreed to meet another of BJ's friends just to test the waters. Peer pressure coupled with our usual competition made it hard to continue saying no. Afraid they would leave me behind and all alone again, I often went along with what was going on despite the little inner voice telling me that I was going in the wrong direction. No one held a gun to my head or anything like that, but I was always conflicted and desperately afraid of loneliness. Still, I was about to enter a territory I would regret.

BJ made a phone call and I hustled my mother out of the apartment to a friend of hers across the street that everyone called Aunt Ruth so I could have some alone time with my "gentleman caller." My mother was on a walker at the time and getting around for her wasn't that easy, so she asked me what I was up to. I assured her that nothing was going on, but she still managed to overhear the three of us talking as she was walking across the street. She yelled several times at the top of her lungs, "I am NOT living in a brothel!" Horrified, I tried to quiet her ranting by apologizing and saying I would only be an hour or so and

she could come home. She looked at me and quietly said, "You have no idea what you are getting into," then continued to Aunt Ruth's, ignoring me the best she could. All I could do was go back to the apartment and face the consequences of my behavior.

I would like to say that it was an awful experience and it all ended there, but I can't. Michael Van was about 5'9, thin, dark hair and mustache, and one of the hottest guys I'd ever met. BJ and David went downstairs and left us alone. Nervous at first, it ended up being a really hot sex session, resulting in mutual masturbation. He gave me \$100 and told me I would have gotten more had he been able to fuck me and that he'd like to meet me again sometime. Having no interest in anal intercourse, I waited for him to leave, then went downstairs to give the other two the details. My mother returned to the apartment, poured a drink, and stayed drunk for the next week and a half.

The Devil Himself

My first impression of Alan Baer was something right out of *Planet of the Apes*. Though resembling a small primate, he would prove to be one of the most intelligent men I have ever met. He picked me up at my mother's apartment and we drove around in his black sports car, speaking of my education, my background, and funny enough, my family. Asking me how my father was should have been my first clue that he too was somehow connected to the sinister happenings of my childhood, but I just ignored my inner voice and continued answering his questions.

Alan was the biggest game player I have ever met, and everything about him seemed like a game. By keeping me off guard with questions, he had a way of getting information out of a person without them even knowing it. Using flattery and coy knowing smiles, he had a way of making a person feel comfortable. I found the ride to be fun and the man intriguing. We drove into an area of Omaha called Fairacres and he pointed out a large mansion with a tent in the backyard. He was having a party, he said, and went into great detail as to the work involved in throwing such a gala. Later, I would discover it was all a lie. He did live in Fairacres, but that particular mansion wasn't his. Not knowing this at the time, I was suitably impressed, which was the game he was playing. Dropping me back off at my mother's, he handed me \$50 and asked if it would be okay to call me in the future, that the \$50 was payment for the time I just spent with him and he looked forward to seeing more of me. Thanking him, I told him my number, got out of the car, went into the house, and told BJ and David everything.

A week later, Alan called and I agreed to meet him at his Twin Towers apartment eight blocks from where I was living. I knocked on the door of 2J and he opened the door. He was in shorts and sweating profusely. For an older man, he was in great shape, thanks to the veritable gym he'd fashioned in the living room with a bike, a treadmill, and other aerobic equipment. It dawned on me

that I was standing in the middle of his run-down bachelor pad. He explained it was a great get away from his workday. Alan had a way of coming off as just a weird old guy, and was extremely charming in his strange way, allowing one to dismiss his behavior as mere eccentricities. Nothing was further from the truth, however; he was a real snake in the grass with a motive for everything he said and did.

Walking on the treadmill the whole time, he probed who I hung out with and who I met by asking about BJ and David and what we did when we hung out. Happy to answer his questions, I told him the basic situation at my mother's house. He was a complete gentleman, never once suggesting sex. When our time came to an end, he handed me \$250 and walking me to the door, told me he would be in contact.

My mother kept trying to convince me to steer clear of all of this and get a job unconnected to what I was currently doing. She implored me to rethink what I was doing. I found her objections to be hypocritical, given that she'd done the same thing herself. I have since discovered that the best lessons to be learned are from people who have made the same mistakes previously. But of course I "knew everything" back then and disregarded her warnings as jealousy. Just what she was supposed to be jealous of, I couldn't say, but I wasn't accustomed to thinking things out since I had no need, knowing everything as I did.

In the next few weeks, I met Alan a few times, always driving around in his car having conversations. He liked my vocabulary and that I was well read, and we often spoke of politics and what was happening in the world. Getting paid every time we met, sometimes up to \$500, against my better judgment I started to genuinely like the guy. So by the time he actually asked to have sex, I was a willing participant.

His penthouse apartment on top of the Brandeis building was in stark contrast to the Twin Towers apartment. Lavishly decorated, with dozens of animal heads on the wall, it was elegant in its masculinity and incredibly impressive. Nervous and eager to get sex over with, I asked if I could use the bathroom, at which time he told me that he wanted me to shower as well. Having just taken a shower before I walked down, I thought it was a strange request, but was in no position to disagree. I simply asked where the towels were.

Considering David's experience with the pervert and the holes in the wall, you'd think I would have been nervous about being filmed. In retrospect, I realize that I probably was, and that the whole thing was some weird sort of set-up, but at the time I was too nervous at the prospect of what I would have to do to think much about it. Alan ended up giving me a blowjob on the balcony of his penthouse. I was uncomfortable with the buildings around us, the people working in them, and couldn't get into it. My lackluster performance ended in

stopping 20 minutes later. We got dressed and he handed me \$500, then showed me to the elevator.

The next day, my mother had an acquaintance of ours by the name of Andrew go down and tell Alan that I was emotionally unstable and dangerous. When Alan told me, and that he had decided it was best that we end contact, I became enraged and returned home to find Andrew and my mother sitting down to a nice bowl of hot chili. It was hot as hell in my mother's house, being the dead of summer, and Andrew had taken off his shirt and was sitting, bare-chested on the couch, blowing on his chili to cool it off. What happened next, try as we might, none of us ever forgot.

Due perhaps to the abuse I had experienced, I flew into a rage I couldn't control. It was like I mentally moved aside and let my body take control, then watched myself rage as if I were someone else. This was the last time I would allow myself to get so out of control with another person. Grabbing a knife in the kitchen, I walked straight up to Andrew and put it to his throat, warning him that if he moved, I would cut him from ear to ear. Jumping in reaction, he spilled hot chili all over his bare chest and began sobbing, scared and in pain. Mom stood up on her walker and begged me to put the knife down. I demanded to know what he had told Alan. It was like I was someone else, watching myself from afar, and all I can remember is my mother pleading and Andrew sobbing and a female friend of mine who had come with me to the apartment urging me to leave with her and stop the madness that I was provoking. I told Andrew that if I ever saw him again, I would hurt him, then I put the knife down and walked out. Andrew left never to return, and my mother and I – again separated by her interference in my life – never once spoke about what had transpired. Terrified by my own rage, I did my best to forget the episode, although the damage had already been done in me personally. Every time I looked in the mirror, I saw the devil and felt like a psychopath – exactly what my mother had chosen to warn Alan of.

Our business relationship was over, but Alan's influence on my life was just beginning, and in the end my friends would be decimated and I would end up running for my life

The Prince of Power

Back in the mid-80's, Thomas Thompson wrote a book called *Celebrity* in which three friends come together, form a friendship, and then collapse – a foreshadowing of what was about to happen to BJ, David, and me. We had even adopted the names from the book: BJ the Prince of Temptation always tempting us to go one step further; David the Prince of Charms enchanting everyone he met with his personality and laughter; and myself, the Prince of Power, the one who never quite fit his name. Not as good looking as David and BJ, and uncomfortable in social situations, I lacked their grace and charm and sexual

prowess. Both were able to get any guy they desired. Yes, both left me in the dust when it came to sex.

Nor was I that great of friend, given my few boundaries and no idea of what friendship really was. I was demanding and unforgiving and jealous of their relationship. I began spending a lot of time away from them, especially after BJ introduced David and Alan Baer and they began hanging together, not to mention that BJ was still a favorite of Alan's. Besides, BJ and his wife and new baby were busy in their own chaos, as was David, who was getting more and more involved with downtown sex parties where sex, money, and drugs flowed. He was quickly becoming enmeshed in the world that my mother had denied me.

More and more, I was hanging out at Carter Lake where Mark lived. He and Walt and I were having cookouts and hanging at the lake, and I'd help mow Mark's lawn. It was fun associating with them, laughing about nothing. Walt was slowly coming out of his shell, and the three of us talked about science and history.

Meanwhile, BJ's chaos was growing. He was drinking pretty heavily, as was my mother. Like my mom, he was an incredibly mean drunk. One night, he terrorized the whole apartment, attacking his wife, chasing the neighbor lady and her five children out of their apartment after chasing his wife into it, and everyone somehow ended up hiding in my mother's apartment while I tried to deal with a madman in the hallway who wanted his baby girl but was too intoxicated and out of control to be trusted with her. He ran down the hallway and slammed into our backdoor over and over, as I stood on the other side pressed against the kitchen counter and bracing the door with my legs. Finally exhausted, he sped off in his car and totaled it a few miles later. A few days later, I slammed the backdoor and the whole frame fell into my mother's kitchen, a dramatic anticlimactic event exemplifying what had just happened.

David slept through the drama, not wanting to deal with the chaos. Angry with both of them for different reasons, I felt like things were spiraling out of control and began further distancing myself from them. The shoplifting spree was becoming a thing of the past for me, as I started to realize that I was tired of feeling like a criminal all the time and couldn't keep a grip on anything. Constantly robbed by the influx of strangers we had going through our apartment. David, sick of me coveting his things started stealing clothing I wouldn't wear and things I didn't want. It was true that I was angry that BJ and David had left me behind to go and live life in the fast lane. I constantly blamed BJ for bringing Alan into our lives and conspiring to take David from me. I was jealous of all the fun they seemed to be having and so I tried to control David as if I owned him. Our relationship became more and more strained as he fought for his independence in spite of me. Everything was slipping through my fingers.

That Christmas was the last really nice time we would have as a group. Some sort of *grace* fell upon us and helped us to get along. David's parents had tempted him with a trip to Hawaii, and then dashed his hopes at the last minute. Hearing of this, Cindy, living in Florida at the time, duplicated everything she was giving me and sent it up a few days before Christmas, making David very happy in the process. BJ and his wife were getting along, no one was drinking, and it seemed that things were once again falling into place. The calm before the storm, little did I know that it would be the last time we would have a chance to be together as friends. A Judas in the group, One would run, one would die, and two would spend years of their lives in prison.

King's Men and Baer Boys

The gay community in '87 was extremely ostentatious, with two well-known groups of "kept" individuals called "Baer boys" and "King's men," nicknames meaning they were being kept by rich men in town, Alan Baer and Larry King, president of Franklin Credit Union and a well-known Republican. He sang at President Ronald Reagan's inauguration while at the same time bilking the credit union out of \$40 million, though that wouldn't come out until later. Alan had married into the Brandeis family and thus had a vast fortune at his disposal. His foundation supported arts and culture in Omaha, and he owned several successful businesses, as well.

Gay men constantly pandered to these men, hoping to find favor with them for money and position. Intricately involved in the gay community at the time, Alan and Larry funded lavish charity galas in the bars and hosted even bigger parties at their homes. "King's men" oftentimes provided muscle for Larry's enterprises and parties. Young black males acting as bodyguards and bouncers generally came off as dangerous, the sort I stayed away from.

Being a Baer boy or King's man was prestigious. Along with money, it often meant an apartment, a car, being invited to all the best parties with all the best drugs. The tradeoff was Baer boys and King's men were expected to entertain guests at the parties and make sure everyone was having a good time. Trips were granted to the chosen, such as when Alan wanted to take BJ to Florida with him. Not fully trusting Alan and having a new wife at the time, BJ declined, not all that certain of what would have taken place down there had he gone.

The negative side of being involved with Alan and Larry was that it was precarious. Displeasing them in any way meant finding yourself out on the street without a moment's notice. They could come out onto the street to find their cars missing, repossessed by the very men who had given them in the first place. There were always strings attached. I have heard it said that if you give a man enough rope, he will hang himself, and this was especially true for these arrogant, boastful, and temperamental men who enjoyed watching people squirm. Working under such men could be fun but could also end at a moment's notice.

For people like Dick and Peter Citron, a local columnist at the *Omaha World Herald* who used to work with my mother at the *Sun Times* until it folded and eventually went to jail for pedophilia, Omaha was a virtual playground for the rich, connected, and demented. Plenty of people knew what was going on because it was blatant and often presented as “in your face,” but since local law enforcement was in on it as well, there was nothing anyone could do or say. The early to middle 80’s were right before the Internet, so people weren’t as connected. Besides, rich men were making masses of off-the-books money with drugs and prostitution and little to nothing could be done.

In the beginning, I went with BJ and David to the parties that were always impressive in the scope of ostentatiousness. Sparing absolutely no expense, Larry and Alan would throw party after party, blowing thousands of dollars at a time. Connected with all kinds of powerful people in town, you never knew who you would see or what you were likely to see them doing. Bathroom coke breaks were the norm at the time. Publicly, Alan and Larry were dead set against drugs, but everyone knew what was going on as groups of people would hang out in the bathroom filling their noses. It was the 80’s and everyone was doing it, so it didn’t seem bad or wrong, and the money being made off it was incredible.

Kids were at these parties, the big reason I began declining every time BJ and David invited me to go. Although child prostitution wasn’t out in the open, everyone had to know what was happening. Blatant and accepted again, people will overlook almost anything if there is enough money involved. Always a free bar, it seemed easy enough to order another drink and look away, figuring the kids wouldn’t be there if they didn’t want to be. It all began to break apart around the first of the year in ’87 when rumors of an investigation into Larry’s Credit Union began to circulate. Investigations into children had already begun, so people began to whisper about a bad moon rising, which put a damper on the never-ending party.

Thinking I was insulated by not being personally involved in any of it, I didn’t know that for me the party was just about to begin, and by the time it was done I would be standing alone, with no dance partners left.

The Unraveling Begins

Even with the arrest of John Joubert, , the problems associated with child abuse and prostitution didn’t go away with him. The truth was the party had been raging for generations but was beginning to wind down, so the question was who was going to get stuck with the bill? Being the men they were, Alan and Larry had quite a few enemies looking for any reason to nail them, and kids and money were used to bring them down.

The gay community was abuzz with rumors of satanic practices, child pornography and snuff films, and a myriad of other crimes that had been taking

place in the gay bars and the Old Market area. Iran Contra was just beginning to hit the news, and there were those in town knew that Omaha was involved with shipping cocaine from the Contras. A local dealer in town by the name of Kevin Dobson, connected with Dick and his Hell's Angels, had been bragging for years how he'd been running guns down there and shipping cocaine back, which was why Omaha was the coke-rich area it was. Offutt Air Force Base was accused of performing secret government projects on children in the area. A couple of years later, the famous three victims came forth and the media circus began.

The summer of '87 was when what I call Project Clean-up really began. There is a great deal of power to be had in a campaign of fear, which is what ensued that summer. Unable to quiet the talk any other way, it suddenly became very dangerous to be a "Baer boy," due to the epidemic of "suicides" in the group that summer. Almost all of the "suicides" opted for the method of wrapping plastic around their faces, which quietly raised fears in the gay community. Given that suicides are not reported by media nor tracked in any way, the community at large was unaware of what was happening, and those in the gay community who knew anything quickly learned to keep their mouths shut.

Despite the fact that many of the people involved, such as Dick and Peter Citron, were my mother's best friends, I adamantly denied that what was happening had any connection to my family's past. But I was soon to be awakened in a way that would force me to pull my head out of the sand. First, I went with acquaintances to the funeral of a gay guy who had shot himself in the head because they promised that hot gay guys would be there, which seemed as good a reason as any to go. After sitting down in the pew and spending some time looking around, I opened the memorial program and immediately recognized the name. suddenly sick to my stomach.

I'd known C.B. Rogers when I was 15. We'd been introduced by my uncle's daughter who would later humiliate me by saying in a room filled with my father's family who then viewed me with further distaste that since he was gay and I was gay, it just seemed natural to set us up. As David said, everything happens for a reason, and this proved to be an example of that. Back then, C.B. lived about a half mile from my grandmother's condo whom my family often visited. I would walk to his apartment when I could and hang out with him as the only openly gay man I knew. Not that he wasn't hot: 5'9" with sandy blond hair, a mustache, and a tan. In his middle twenties, he was like some hot 70's porn star, and I found him fascinating as well as good in bed. He took me to The Hollywood bar when I was 15 and showed me the dungeon set-up in the basement, dark, scary, and incredibly creepy. I demanded to leave immediately, freaked out by what he was showing me. When the town tore it down and built a parking garage on top of it, I said good riddance, though now I realize there was more than one reason The Hollywood was sent into oblivion.

After being narked out by my cousin that I was doing the wild thing with an older man, my father got involved and squelched the relationship with C.B.

Sitting at the funeral, I knew that Rogers was too supremely narcissistic to ever kill himself. I got an uneasy feeling that not all was as it seemed and I left shaken, unaware that more fallout was about to land in my front yard.

Mark and Walt were then charged with crimes against children, which I found to be ridiculous. Mark had invited three hustlers to spend the night on his living room floor and had either inadvertently or intentionally touched one boy's butt. The boy's parents tried to extort money out of Mark and failed, then had turned to the police and pressed charges. Suddenly, the town's only newspaper the *Omaha World Herald*, whose owner was reportedly involved in the Larry King scandal, began touting Walt, the shyest person I'd ever met, as the Pied Piper of Pornography. Mark and Walt were proclaimed as menaces to society. Mark said that he wanted to keep his distance while all of his troubles played out. Everything was turning upside down and I didn't know what to think. Besides Mark withdrawing, things had cooled off for David, BJ, and me. Both had been deeply involved with Alan Baer and had disassociated themselves from me, perhaps due to leading secret lives I knew nothing about. Despairing over my failed friendships, I once again found myself alone, miserable, and angry with no job, no money, and really no options. My mother began pressing me to leave town for a while and visit Cindy and I finally gave in and let her buy me a bus ticket to Florida.

It's funny how we can look back and see that more was going on than we were aware of at the time. My mother's demand that I leave irritated me. I saw it as yet another example of how she was trying to control my life in her newfound role as my mother. Now I realize that she was saving my life by sending me away from a situation she was afraid would somehow envelope me. Had it not been for a conversation I had with God, I wouldn't have gone.

Riding the bus one afternoon, I found a New Testament in the pocket of a jacket I hadn't worn for a year. Alone on the bus, I told God that I was going to open the New Testament and do whatever it told me to do. Letting the pages just fall open, I looked down and before me in black and white was the story of the rich man who had gone to Jesus inquiring what to do. *Give away all you own and follow me* was the basic gist, and figuring that when you ask God a question and actually receive an answer that you should follow through, three days later I stood with nothing, having either returned or gifted out all the things I had stolen in the past. I will always look back on this experience as one of great release. To be quite honest, it was better than any Christmas I had ever experienced.

Ready to escape what my life had become in Omaha, I packed a suitcase, hugged my mom, and got on the Greyhound bus headed for my big sister's; believing I was leaving all the chaos occurring around me behind. I couldn't

have been more wrong. Oblivion awaited me, ready to slam me into a desert where I would wander for years.

The Summer of Loss

The summer began well. Within a week of getting to Florida, I found a job at a local resort as a waiter in a barbecue restaurant right off the beach and my own apartment. I was able to move out of my sister's right away.

Our relationship had always been tenuous. She'd saved my butt more than while she and her family lived with my father and his third wife and me, but she could also be vindictive and vicious. A game player to the max, she was expert at setting people up. After everything had gone down in '76 and I was committed a couple years later, she and my brother had turned me in to the Minneapolis-St. Paul police as the serial killer frequenting gay bars at the time. Later, she told me it was because I looked like Jeffery Dahmer. Not bothering to consider that such a thing was not only implausible but impossible, I pointed out that at the age of 27 my brother ALSO looked like Dahmer. Needless to say, I didn't trust her. Her husband, an overweight, loud, and critically obnoxious man, had always disliked our family and being a member of that family, he often reminded me of his distaste. Her children, the oldest of whom was a year and a half younger than I, were just as obnoxious. As an adult, I choose to avoid their drug-taking, beer-drinking, up till four in the morning party lifestyles.

Occasionally, I hung with people from work, but most often I found myself writing in my journal on the beach alone. Watching storms roll in like clockwork every afternoon, I imagined I was watching God on the ocean, the wind and rain picking up until I was surrounded by lightning and thunder and had to leave the area. It was a daily religious experience. The ocean spoke to me in a way that touched me deeply, comforting me in a way I'd never felt before. Feeling normal for the first time in my life, I excelled at my job and was promoted from waiter to front room manager. In many ways, it was the best two months I'd ever had, but as always it was all about to come to an end.

My mother had taken to calling me with her concern about David and the things he was telling her. Sworn to secrecy, she wouldn't tell me what was going on, only that he was in over his head with Alan Baer. David and I weren't speaking at this point, having ended our friendship because I was a greedy, overbearing leech. I was concerned but had no idea what to do. Testing the waters, I wrote BJ and told him what was going on and my intentions. Using BJ as a sounding board, I explained what I was going to say to David, hoping that BJ might give a heads-up to David. Having reached the point of being big enough to say I was wrong, I relished the thought of David forgiving me and working things through, and resuming a friendship.

I will never forget the next week. Magically, according to the media, the problems facing allegations in Omaha would all go away. It's funny how controlled by the media we are. It was in full force the week David died.

Catching me during a dinner rush, drunk off her ass and sobbing, my mother had been calling all over town looking for me. Thinking it was just another drunken tirade, I answered the phone abruptly and demanded to know what she wanted. She asked me if I was sitting down. Irritated at her dramatics, I told her to spit it out so I could get back to work. "David was shot in the face and killed by his roommate" were the only words I heard. I dropped the phone and caught myself almost beginning to wail in a restaurant filled with people. Hanging up on my mother and going into the back office, I felt as if my world had just come to an end. Not in control of myself, I began to sob. A few minutes later, the phone rang again. Thinking it was my mother calling back, I answered demanding to know what she wanted. BJ was on the other end of the line, saying, "I wanted to be the person to tell you." Thanking him for thinking about me, I told him I had to go and hung up.

David Klotz died September 6, 1987, a little over a year and a half after we first met.

I spent the next two weeks sobbing every day. Still, the universe wasn't done with me. Omaha media stories that week were about David being killed by his roommate Mike James, John Joubert being convicted and sentenced to death, and the conviction of Mark Anderson and Walt Carlson, sentenced to prison for 20 years. A circus as well as a kangaroo court, no real evidence linked the two to any crime, but they'd still been found guilty. It had even come out that the parents had tried to extort money out of Mark before going to the police, but justice remained blind. The public associated their names and faces with crimes against children, conveniently and effectively distracting the public from sordid but substantive rumors and sacrificed two men and a convicted killer to vent all their anger and frustration on. Convicted by the media, it worked like magic. However, I knew the situation and was in disbelief that two friends I had known so well were actually going to prison for the 20 years, and Alan Baer, guilty of pandering sex with minors and of so much more, only received a \$500 fine. The disparity enraged me, but overwhelmed by the death of my best friend, I was too involved in my loss to be able to articulate my feelings well.

Having to buy a plane ticket two weeks in advance, I spent the next two weeks sobbing, waiting to fly back to Omaha to say goodbye to everyone in my life. Unable to work my job – I was fired a week later and completely felt as if my life was over. My despair was a living breathing thing that dug its claws into my heart. I often found myself doubled over on the floor, crying in fits for hours at a time. Locking myself in my room for days, I began to scare my roommate who didn't know what was going on. Unable to talk, I spent night after night crying myself to sleep, dreading the next day as more of the same.

Coming back to Omaha would change me forever. Driving through downtown Omaha, I saw the same three hustlers who had accomplished putting Mark Anderson and Walt Carlson in jail, selling themselves down on the run. Disgusted but not surprised, I finished the cab ride to my mother's house staring at my hands.

Drunk, my mother went on and on about talking to David about the roommate he supposedly wanted to kick out. I never met Mike James, the man accused and eventually convicted of killing David, nor did I ever want to. But soon I was going to question his innocence in a way few would. He'd just gotten a job as a bank security guard, complete with gun. Having no training or guidance of any sort, Mike became accustomed to pointing the gun at people and pulling the trigger over and over as kind of a joke in a playful kind of way. He hadn't known the gun was loaded when it went off on the second click and entered David's cheek, blowing out the back of his head. It killed him instantly. David had been laughing at the time, the only saving grace of the entire situation...

Unwilling to answer my questions about Alan Baer, she told me to "steer clear" of the situation. But BJ would put it all into perspective for me and answer my questions, throwing me over the edge in the process. Present at David's death, he explained that David was deep in debt to Alan Baer. Knowing that my mother and I had been talking, BJ wanted to know what I had been told about what had been going on. Unaware that my mother had been, up to this point, silent about all of it, he assumed I knew and began impressing upon me the importance of keeping my mouth shut. Not sure what he meant, I asked him. He looked me straight in the eye and explained that Mike had no idea the gun was loaded. Realizing that he meant *he* had slipped the bullet in, I paled, speechless. BJ stood and told me he had a gift for me from Alan Baer. Wanting nothing from the man, I demanded to know what it was. BJ reached up to a shelf in his hall closet and retrieved a red-spotted towel.

"This is what is left of David" he said, trying to hand me the towel of brain and bone fragments. Horrified, I began putting things together in way that I hadn't before. "Let your past go" was part of the conversation BJ and I had, though most of it is still a blur. The fact that BJ would slip a bullet into a gun and then set up another man to kill David was too much to handle, but realizing that Mark and Walt had been sacrificed in all of this as well... It was like living a nightmare, complete with blood and gore in the towel right before my eyes. Everyone in my life had been annihilated, and the only two left standing were BJ, involved in ways I didn't want to know, and myself. *Just live my life*. That was what I was being told to do. But how do you do that when you have just gone through a nuclear war?

Leaving the next day on the bus to Florida, I was in a state of shock and complete disbelief, suffering a severe case of survivor guilt, wondering why I'd been spared when everyone else I knew had been taken. Scared, confused, totally alone, I once again found myself in the desert where I would remain for the next several years, wandering lost.

For the next six months, jobless and soon to be homeless, I basically lost my mind and began telling people that I had \$521 million frozen in a bank account of drug money and that someday I would be rich when I could get at it. Ridiculous, constantly making a fool out of myself, I still thought it was better than being me, destroyer of all my friends. I spent no time with my sister and her family, fabricating a life that didn't exist, although in the end it would become complex. Some people actually believed me, and it was amazing the lengths to which they went to please me. I got involved with an airman stationed at the base down where I was living and began weaving a fantastic web of lies to a man I was supposedly dating, feeling worse about myself daily. He wanted to get out of the service and involved in his own chaos, so I convinced him to tell them that he was gay and dating me, not realizing that they would court martial him as a result. Convinced that everything I touch turns to shit, I left in the middle of his disaster and called his family in hopes that they could help him. They arrived two days after I left and he called me, infuriated that his parents were sitting in his living room. I told him everything or at least about the bogus \$521 million dollars.

Given that I had just had a breakdown, I returned to Omaha broken and downhearted. Scared of staying, I was making plans to go to the East Coast before the bus even pulled into the station. BJ had gone to Massachusetts to live with his mother and get away from Omaha. His marriage destroyed, his life overturned by guilt and regret over the "do or die" situation Alan put him in, he scattered like most of the people left alive and not in jail, some fearing being implicated in the upcoming investigation into Franklin. Dick picked up shop and went to Hawaii where he would eventually die of a disease, though what disease was a question. In the end, only a handful of people would be implicated, and out of those only a smaller handful would ever see jail. All neat and tidy, the people of my past dodged another bullet, and barring an act of God, would remain free to prosper while I spent years running from myself, trapped in an unspeakable hell.

The Franklin Fiasco

Public perception may have been manipulated and controlled, but there was still the matter of \$40 million missing from the Franklin Credit Union. In 1988, the FBI finally raided and shut down Franklin Credit Union and seized all of Larry King's files and property. Although there were allegations that he was running prostitutes into the White House and was involved in many nefarious acts concerning children, he was only brought up on charges of fraud and those concerning the pilfering of the credit union. Larry King and Peter Citron, the columnist for the *Omaha World Herald* who would die of AIDS in prison, were the only persons of influence to be implicated.

Most of the focus would fall on three victims I call the "famous three." Involved in King's prostitution rings, they came forth with allegations concerning Robert Wadman, Omaha's ex-police chief, Larry King, Alan Baer, and a slew of other

wealthy businessmen. Although their fantastic stories of abuse resembled mine, I saw one of the three on television and personally knew him to be a pathological liar. Having little stomach for the whole mess after what I had just experienced, I basically turned a blind eye, not giving a damn how it all played out.

But the message was loud and clear to victims. Another of the three, Alisha Owen, ended up spending more time in jail than the perpetrators, and in solitary to boot, for refusing to recant that the police chief was the father of the baby she had as a minor. The grand jury decided to throw the book at her and lock her up for years for her indiscretion, effectively silencing any other victims who wished to come forward. The buck stopped with these three, and other than putting away Larry King, whose involvement was undeniable, the matter was finished. Well, not quite. Thousands of victims were involved, but history has only chosen to focus on just three, and their testimony took precedence over all of the proceedings.

The funny thing about the "Conspiracy of Silence," the British documentary that was supposed to air on the Discovery channel but was pulled the day it was to hit the nation due to Republican influence, is that it addressed the three victims and major players of the scandal, but not the entrenched crime in Omaha. The media then tore apart the wild claims of the three victims and their mental illness as the stories kept changing and becoming more bizarre, never considering that going through what they had gone through would make anyone crazy. Backed by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation that had defeated similar allegations in California in 1983, the press vilified the three as liars, claiming they were conspirators in a carefully crafted hoax, though never expounding on who exactly could be behind such a hoax and *why*. Given how large it was, who could the group guilty of pulling the wool over so many Americans' eyes be? The original conspirators, if they exist, still remain at large. The Franklin matter resolved, Larry King went to a federal prison to live for the next decade and a half or so. The matter would have ended there, had it not been for an ambitious Prosecutor named Gary Carador seeking the truth as to what really had happened in Omaha. Interested in the thousands of reports of child abuse allegations, he trod further into the lion's den in order to discover what else lay behind the mess that Omaha was eager to forget. He began following up on the allegations of child abuse and pornography until his private plane was blown out of the sky on July 9, 1990 with his young son aboard while returning from a trip to Chicago. Conveniently, his plane crashed in Omaha's ex-police chief's jurisdiction, one of the very men Caradori was investigating. All evidence destroyed, DeCamp's investigation was dropped.

Years later, I would hear Alan Baer brag at a church Christmas party how he had avoided the ax by simply pulling all of his foundation money out of Omaha

for a year. Realizing what the man did for Omaha, and the fact that his money controlled many facets of the city, no one had gone after him, thus forever solidifying his power in the workings of Omaha. Able to get away with anything, the man was his own state, walking away Scot free from any repercussions he caused. Not seeing Alan's monkey face again would be a blessing. I associated him with one of those lower primates that pick up their own shit and throw it at people. I knew he had won, and there was nothing I could do about it. He had other plans concerning me, however, and years later, after returning to Omaha, I would once again have to deal with him.

Travels in the Desert

Completely fractured by what had happened, I was desperate to get away from Omaha, my family, and most of all myself. Beaten in a way that most people will never know, I suffered a great sense of defeat over what happened, feeling that the people responsible for stealing my childhood had somehow hijacked my young adulthood, too, destroying it as they always did.

With a one-way ticket and \$60 in my pocket, I was headed to BJ whom I had forgiven for David, knowing that he had been caught in the crosshairs of Alan Baer. He was living with his mother and a boyfriend of hers at the time and I had no idea of what I was walking into. But anyplace was better than Omaha, so I took my chances and went, hoping for the best. It turned out that after a month with BJ, I realized he was a mess so I ended up sending him back to Omaha with the money we'd used to rent an apartment after closing it out. He was having a breakdown and was suicidal over the fact that life as he knew it had ended along with his marriage. I felt it would be best for him back with his grandparents living in Carter Lake. Eaten by guilt and regrets, we never spoke about what had just transpired back home.

I was estranged from my family, even from my mother who, although saving me in many ways by sending me to Florida, was still involved in what had happened in Omaha in ways I didn't yet understand. I had grown uncomfortable with her, and what had just transpired in my life had been so devastating and dark that I didn't know who to trust anymore. The old adage of keeping your friends close and your enemies closer was certainly applicable to BJ, and yet our relationship was much more. We'd both been victims of a situation. I still loved him as my brother, and as adept at forgetting the past as I was, I chose not to think of David and his death but rather concentrated on helping both BJ and me get through the aftermath of what was left of our lives.

Sending BJ back to Omaha effectively made me homeless with no job and no money. Once again, I was alone. BJ's mom and her boyfriend Rick had broken up. Rick offered to let me stay with him and work at the mailing company he was conducting out of his garage. Grateful, I accepted, and it turned out to be the longest job I have ever had: I worked there for the next year and a half.

Rick was a decent man, although incredibly demanding. Being the only child of a moderately wealthy family, he was used to getting his way and prone to temper tantrums when he didn't get what he wanted. In his early forties and moderately attractive, he fashioned himself somewhat as a playboy, womanizing every chance he could. He even went after his best friend's wife as they filed for divorce, lustfully reaching out for her even when his friend came to stay with us.

Despite the fact that he was a hedonistic, temperamental, womanizing pig, I grew quite fond of Rick. He had a great sense of humor and was one of the most generous people I'd ever met. I found him endearing in a way that was refreshing. Besides his home the business ran out of, he had a lake house as well and we spent a great deal of time between the two. The mailing business was fast-paced and generally stressful, so the times at the lake were special. Being out in nature connected me with the spirit of God. I would often just stand by the lake, breathing it all in. Rick and I actually spent a great deal of time talking about the universe and our relationship with it. I had overcome my anger at God and clung to my relationship with Him as the only real, truly safe one I had left. I began to resume my prayers in hope of finding some direction.

It was my depression that drove a wedge between Rick and me, first with the business and then with us personally. Despite my attempts at suppressing the past, I was often overwhelmed and it would envelope me and put me in bed for days. I couldn't eat. All I had the energy to do was sleep and pee, avoiding human contact and personal hygiene for days at a time, unable to talk to anyone about what was bothering me. Sleep was the only way to prevent it all from constantly replaying in my brain. The harder I tried to run, the faster it followed me. Often, it caught me offguard. I would tear up and begin to cry, unable to tell Rick or anyone else why. An emotional disaster, I felt responsible for David's death, regretting the letter I'd sent BJ the week before, and the fact that I didn't even have the chance to apologize to David for the way I'd treated him. Guilt for everything I'd done was eating me alive, despite my attempts to suppress the memories.

Finally, it reached a point that Rick couldn't take anymore. Rick sat me down and told me I had to leave, that my depressions were beginning to have an effect on him. He gave me a month to find another job and place to live. He said he would help me with in any way he could. I quietly accepted his demands and made plans to go. I'd be homeless the next year and a half as I drifted from one place to the next, always making friends willing to put me up and staying until my welcome wore out, which it always did. I'd have a collection of jobs and get fired from every one, generally because I was a complete and utter screw-up. Waiter jobs were a dime a dozen, so I went from place to place, working a couple months at a time before being terminated, living hand to mouth in cities like Boston, going from one gay guy to the next.

I started sexually acting out, often having no idea of my sexual partner's name. Believing I was fated to suffer, I made the decision to begin exploring the life I'd denied myself, figuring if I was going to burn in hell, I might as well enjoy myself. Allowing myself to become promiscuous was breaking all the rules but was liberating, too, and anonymous sex provided a wonderful escape. Discovering that men actually wanted me empowered me. I was somewhat desirable. Given that sex was the only power I felt in my life, I started to become addicted to the experiences.

There is a distinct difference between being homosexual and living the gay lifestyle. The gay lifestyle is based solely on sex, a focus on one aspect of human nature, and is inherently unhealthy. Driven by youth, flesh, and a hedonistic lifestyle, the emptiness of the superficial gay lifestyle is undeniable. Hanging out in the bars, the music, lights and glitter always came to an end, then I either went home with someone or I didn't. The bars were meat markets and everyone was looking for someone, be it a lover or a one-night stand. The gay lifestyle is very lonely and it is hard to make friends. Growing up gay in America is far from a picnic. Many gays are jaded by the time they reach adulthood. Effeminate males are picked on while growing up, so many gay men are filled with stories of abuse, either at the hands of their family or being bullied in school. Not to say every homosexual is a product of abuse, but there is a constant there that I have found by being gay.

I was homeless much of the time, sleeping on couches and floors of friends who let me live with them for periods of time. Until you're actually homeless, it's hard to imagine the disparity of not having a secure place to lay your head. The hardest thing for me, what I remember most, is not having any keys, for me symbols of security. No place to live, no car, a handful of clothes to my name, and no keys. Having a place to lay my head for the night took precedence over finding a job, and the search kept me in a constant spiral of despair.

I hooked up with some people who were using cocaine, so I began to experiment with the drug for the first time. At a party one night, having never used coke before, I smoked five rocks and snorted five lines, not really seeing the whole point. The first 30 seconds after smoking crack, I felt like I was being run over by a freight train of clouds. The feeling was fleeting, followed by my heart racing, which made me uncomfortable. Promising that I would see Rick that night, still on friendly terms with me, I left the party and drove a car he'd loaned me to his house. At Rick's, we smoked a huge joint and I stayed about an hour, then left when I began to feel sick. I must have passed out at the stop sign at the end of his block, because all I remember is waking up and feeling my heart racing.

Getting worse by the minute, I drove back to the party and begged my friends to go with me to the hospital, which they declined, suggesting I try another line in the hopes that it would calm me down. Scared that I was having a heart

attack, I left and went in search of a pay phone and called Cindy collect. Crying and scared, I told her what I had done and what was happening to my heart. Panicking and not thinking straight, she calmed me down by telling me that everything would be okay, then convinced me to go to an emergency room. I hung up and went in search of a hospital. After ten hours, they released me a little worse for wear. My chest hurt for two weeks, making it hard to breathe but an undeniable reminder that things in my life were completely out of control. *Drugs and friends, they come in that order*, rang in my head, as true today as it was back then, but desperate to avoid loneliness, I continued to hang with my associates. Scared of coke at this point, I eventually got tired of watching people get strung out to the point where they would intensely search the floors looking for any trace of crack that might have fallen there. Reminded of my mother and her alcoholism, I eventually faded out to find a new place to sleep with another friend.

Boston afforded many opportunities to explore my spirituality and I was desperate to return myself to God's graces, despite acting out as a complete whore. While staying with a man in the Back Bay, I was entranced by the two-block pool of water that I mistakenly believed was the Scientologists right up the road from Copley Square, so I picked up the book *Dianetics* by L. Ron Hubbard to see what truth lay within their beliefs. A great book up until the last four or five chapters, I realized I didn't have the money to be a Scientologist; it seemed like a moneymaking scheme.

While waiting tables at an Ashram in the area, I had the opportunity to pray and feel what it felt like to have a group of people focusing, consciously building the energy around them. The power of the mind can be an amazing thing, and believing what the Bible said about *two or more being gathered in My name*, the energy in the building seemed almost tangible.

BJ's grandparents had grown up Jehovah's Witnesses, so I took the opportunity to explore what they had to offer. Studying with a family, I was amazed by the devoutness that church members showed. However, I realized that my sexuality would always be an issue and eventually drifted away.

I still believed that everything I touched turned to shit and the old fears of being the Antichrist began to resurface. Though I had successfully not spent one night on the streets during my periods of homelessness, proving that someone was obviously watching out for me, I convinced myself that I had been abandoned by God and again began entertaining the fact that I was fated for something terrible. Feeling I had abetted the murder of my best friend, I was stuck in a limbo I couldn't get out of, feeding the hopelessness I already felt, adding to the stress of being homeless.

After the Bank of New England got caught with \$600 million of bogus real estate and crashed, I got to the point where I couldn't feed myself any longer and I decided, out of the blue, to call my father and ask for his help. It was the one and only time he ever helped me, and to this day I still don't understand why he did it. He bought me a one-way ticket to fly back to Omaha so that I could

return to my mother's house. Thanking him profusely and thinking that the man actually loved me, I gratefully accepted his gift and packed my clothes, ready to leave the chaos of the East Coast.

Thirty minutes from Omaha, it hit me that I was returning. Though embarrassed that I was in a plane full of strangers, I began to openly sob about going back into a hell I would never escape. Grief and fear crashed over me in waves until I couldn't control the emotion. I was relieved that I finally had someplace to live, but returning to Omaha was another defeat in my long list, and I couldn't help feeling sorry for myself.

Little did I know, but I was on the road to my salvation. I stopped crying after getting off the plane, aware that I was once again standing at the edge of Wonderland. Scared of what surprises lay ahead of me, I resigned myself to my fate and "jumped off the cliff," not sure where I would land.

The Only Constant Is Change

The early 90's gay lifestyle was night and day from what it was in the mid-80's. Stars was gone, The Hollywood long gone, The Stage Door wound down and closed, unable to compete with The Max that was dominating the bar scene. The Run had been cleaned up and police were patrolling the area, arresting both trade and "johns" alike (men driving around looking to pay for sex). After-hours was still going, but the run itself was pretty much no longer the teenage hangout it once was. Alan Baer had faded into the background and was no longer the party animal he was – at least as far as the gay community was concerned. Larry King was in jail, Peter Citron was either dead or dying of AIDS in prison, and the "famous three" had been silenced. Other than Gilberto Montoya appealing for a new trial in 1991, revealing the drug connection with Kevin Dobson, his pot dealer friend Mike Dillon, and Garcia-Escobar – all Contra suppliers – there was little paperwork showing there had even been a problem in the Omaha area. With all the loose ends neatly tied up, Omaha returned to normal, though much more tame. All was quiet on the Western front.

Everyone I'd known had scattered. My only friend was BJ, who was divorced and living with a new girlfriend who had five kids. She was a friend of ours from the past and had been one of my closest confidants before I left. Reconnecting with them was the only real bond I had to the area. My mother's drinking had increased and she was back to living with the man who raped her years before when she lay in a diabetic coma. Besides resembling Bill Paxton in *Weird Science* when he turned into a bibulous, puss-spouting creature, the man had sores all over his body from not bathing and the smell of decay wafted around him, often catching me off guard to the point where I almost wanted to retch. None of us spoke of what had happened years before, basically pretending that none of it had happened. We just went on with our lives, busying ourselves with

the tasks of everyday living. The pink elephant in the living room was avoided and subconsciously controlled by the avoidance.

My father with my stepmother and their two kids, had moved back and were living out in West Omaha, the nice part of town. Thankful that he had helped me to get back to Omaha, we still remained estranged, as I couldn't stand him or his third wife. Living some distance from each other, we never ran into each other. My older sister Emily had also moved back with her husband and four children, and although a mere ten minutes from my father's house remained estranged from him as well. I'd occasionally see them when they came to visit my mom, whom I'd chosen to live around so I could keep an eye on her. Emily and I began to develop a relationship different from the one we'd had when I was a child.

Growing up with parents who utilized the divide-and-conquer mentality, none of my siblings were very close to each other. Cindy and Stephen had a somewhat close relationship but tumultuous. Estranged from the whole family, Emily had grown up like me, isolated and despised, none of us trusting the other, compelled to set each other up for our father's amusement and acceptance. We were far from the Brady Bunch, and it was hard having no real sense of family.

Stephen was also living in Omaha at the time with his new wife, a whorish alcoholic with a bad, lopsided boob job. While I was on the East Coast, he'd returned to Omaha to throw him and his family out of my mother's apartment. Incessant drinking meant the police made frequent calls on their household. It was hell on their three children, one of whom was my brother's biological son.

I began attending the gay church in town and met a man named Art who was a little over a decade older than I, a teacher at a local school. A fundamentalist Christian, Art began my return to God. Often disagreeing, we spoke about religion and God constantly. He was like no other Christian I'd met. Living by example, he believed that love conquered all and treated others how he wanted to be treated. Always a gentleman, he never once made a pass at me, and I came to enjoy his company more and more every day. Working job after job and living place to place, Art was the only stability I had. Although no longer shoplifting, doing drugs, or hanging with bad crowds, I was pretty much a lost soul.

Sexually active in a way I hadn't been before, I began making a name for myself as the town whore. Though I went dancing alone every weekend at The Max, I rarely left that way. Art tried to impress upon me the consequences of my behavior, but at that time I found solace in the company of strangers. Wanting to be desired and feeling that my body was the only thing I had going for me, I traveled down the path of debauchery, single, free, and loving every minute of it – or at least that's what I told myself.

Having no one to love and no one left to love me, I spent a great deal of time wherever I was living. I wasn't exactly agoraphobic, I just didn't like to go out much and often chose to stay home. One of the reasons I couldn't keep a job was that some days I just couldn't get up, let alone go out my door. Scared of becoming overwhelmed in public, I spent a great deal of time hiding out in my room, reading books and writing in my journals.

Omaha was a vat of old memories and everywhere I went pulled at my heartstrings. Nostalgic for the past, I spent a great deal of time reminiscing over the adventures the three of us had when we first all got together. Colton was an enigma to me, and though I still loved him and chose to spend time with him and his family, I hated him in a way that I couldn't describe. The past was always simmering on the back burner, so I consciously ignored my feelings and kept silence, putting the past on a shelf where I figured it belonged. I think the reason the past repeats itself is that the universe is constantly trying to resolve the issues we have with each other. Cyclic, history has a way of repeating situations over and over, the only difference being where we choose to land in those situations. It's like what my mother used to say: "Things can change in a New York second." No truer words were ever said. Things were definitely about to change. I was about to come head to head with my destiny.

Sira

I have never prayed for something and not gotten what I asked for, in some way or another. My life seemed like a collection of miracles, at least when I wasn't feeling sorry for myself, which was quite often.

Hanging out with Art and listening to what he had to say about how I was living my life, I realized that I was incredibly lonely. Lying in bed one night unable to sleep, I asked God to either send me a dog or a boyfriend. A day and a half later, Sira came into the picture to change my life forever. A couple of guys in the neighborhood had thrown her over the fence where Colton's children were playing and asked them to watch their dog for a minute. Never returning, Colton had called me and told me that he and his family had a new dog and encouraged me to come and take a look at her. As with David, I recognized something immediately in the German shepherd/Golden Lab mix puppy and claimed her as my own. I took her home, in love the moment I laid eyes on her, a big fluff of yellow hair and cute as all get out. Still, I called the Human Society and local radio stations in case anyone was looking for her.

That night, she had several bouts of diarrhea all over my floor, so I took her to the vet the next day. She was infested with worms, which didn't speak well of previous owners. I paid for the medication and vet bill, figuring that whoever claimed her would reimburse me for my expenses. By the end of the weekend, no one had claimed her, which was good because I wasn't willing to let her go. I named her Sira, the female form of Sirius. The first relationship I ever had that

was safe and sound and in which someone needed me, Sira would teach me more than I ever could have guessed about myself.

Nonetheless, she was a handful when young. Although just a dog, she depended on me and I grew to value our relationship more than I ever knew I could. She compelled me to be more stable and reliable as she, unlike me, had to eat every day. My mother and Sira took to each other the minute they met. Surprising the hell out of me, my mother declared that Sira was meant to be my dog and I couldn't abandon her.

We moved into an apartment about six blocks from my mother's place. Often, I'd take her with me to hang out at my mom's when she was sober. I'd cook dinner and we would sit and watch *Murder She Wrote, 20/20*, and the myriad mystery shows my mother enjoyed. I'd listen to her talk about her soaps as if they were real people, then to her recap of the day's events, and we started to once again become close. I was working as a banquet waiter, a job that I actually kept for some time. Although the pay was good, the hours and the work were laborious, and I often came home tired and stressed. Knowing that Sira was waiting for me was a comfort, and it was the thought of losing her that often forced me out of bed and off to work in the mornings.

I'm sad to say that in the beginning, I was quite abusive with her. A rambunctious puppy, she often would find herself in trouble, and my problem with anger meant that I'd often smack her with my hands or kick her even while wearing shoes. It all came to a head some months after having her, when I attacked and almost killed her. It was Easter weekend and we'd worked 15 hours, gone home to sleep five hours, and returned to work another 18 hours. Tearing down and setting up banquet after banquet, I was beyond tired and to the point of near dementia. A co-worker on the verge of becoming a friend gave me a ride home and when we walked into my apartment, I saw that Sira had basically destroyed my kitchen. She'd dug up and chewed to pieces all the linoleum on the floor. Completely flipped out, I beat her severely in front of my friend, not once considering how it made me look. Later, I discovered a huge knot on her head so large I was surprised I hadn't killed her. Declaring this to be the last time, I never again hit her, but at work the damage had already been done.

My co-worker told everyone what he had witnessed and it began to go around that I was violent. Paranoid that people were looking at me as a bad person, my days were numbered as I again began to fade into myself. Lasting impressions last forever, it seems. Though I was sorry for what had happened, regret never matters when you are fodder for gossip. Years later in therapy, I learned that we often act upon the beliefs of our self-perceptions. Believing myself to be a bad person, I was acting in ways to solidify that self-perception. A self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, I believed I was bad and so acted accordingly. Whatever the reason, the result was the same: isolation. The good news is that my relationship with Sira transcended all of that in a way that allowed me to be

myself. Sira taught me forgiveness and patience. She had gone through what I had put her through and yet adored me all the same. Being my only constant loving companion, she offered me a relationship that would continue to change me until the day she died of old age.

God often speaks in strange ways. She may have been only a dog, but she was the first being to teach me about unconditional love. A gift from God, she saved my life in many ways. She helped me to realize that God wasn't finished with me. My faith was renewed because my prayers had once again been answered.

Marching Gaily Forward

Sex, like most things in my life, has always been weird for me. The product of ritualized sexual abuse, I often found myself conflicted with my sexuality. I viewed the act itself as dark and somewhat dirty, but still was addicted to the physical contact I was getting from my anonymous encounters. Still, I was making a bad name for myself in town and feeling terrible about it in the process.

There is a certain power in being desired, and feeling powerless in every other aspect of my life, I felt compelled to sleep with as many men as I could. Being a top in a city of bottoms, it was pretty easy to get laid, and if I had a bedpost, it would have been filled with notches. If the gay lifestyle is known for anything, it is sex, and I had every intention of taking advantage of that fact.

The frigidity I had when David was still alive was gone, and although I had started to let myself loose as a tribute to him after he died, it had become a solid part of my identity. Led by my sexual compulsions and loneliness, I hung out in bars on weekends and parks and bookstores the rest of the week. This behavior is typical for sexual abuse survivors, and so it was hard to say what was behind my many sexual encounters. However, reaching out in all the wrong places represented so much more to me and was the only human contact I had. Colton had returned to the East Coast to live with his mother, leaving his life in Omaha behind him, which included me. We were still friends, but had drifted further apart, unable to talk about the very things we needed to. My mother was drinking constantly. Apart from Sira, I had no one to hang out with.

Omaha parks were filled with homosexuals just as lonely as I was. With the run closed down, there was nowhere else to hang out or hook up for sex. Omaha is a very closeted town, and always has been. For example, both Larry and Alan were married and yet their propensity for young men was well known. The parks were full of married, confused, scared men who found solace in the gay men just hanging out. Many times, they just wanted to talk, so I spent hours listening and talking about what it was like to be young and out with men who, even if just for a moment, enjoyed life through my eyes. I came to enjoy my new capacity, thinking that I was helping people for the first time.

I was always in between jobs, unable to handle the stress of having to be out in public all the time, and so, having no other contact with people – since most people usually get all the contact they can handle at their jobs – anonymous sex was a great escape for me. Often, the sex was incidental; the real attraction was the company giving me a chance to escape from living constantly in my head. The moments of physical bliss were when I could escape all the memories. Years later in therapy, I would learn that what I was doing was called *displacement*, escaping my emotions by projecting them onto something or someone else. But all I knew at the time was that it helped to make me feel better. At least for awhile.

Promiscuity takes a toll on the soul, though, and it's hard to respect yourself when people around you are whispering about what a whore you are. The gay community in Omaha has always been small, and after the Franklin thing it had become even smaller, and gossip is often harsh. Full of single prima donnas, the focus had gone from the continual party back to the traditional gay lifestyle values of youth, beauty and sex, everyone in competition with everyone else for any good looking man in the bar at the time. So I told myself that the gossips were only jealous and who I slept with was my business. I couldn't count, let alone tell you the names, of most of the sexual encounters that I had back then.

When we're intimate with each other, we share our energy. Because an exchange of energy always occurs, partners should know who their partner is. Sleeping with arbitrary strangers and absorbing all that energy makes one's life chaotic. My life was spinning faster and faster the more strange encounters I sought out.

No longer into drugs and never much of a drinker, I spent the weekends dancing on the speakers at The Max, four foot high platforms raised over the dance floor, looking down on the people on the floor, it was like dancing in my own little world. Concentrating on the music, I imagined the energy all around me and used my intense weekend workouts as a chance to pray and give thanks to whatever I was thankful for at the time. What had once dominated the bar scene in Omaha was gone, and dancing on the speakers at The Max was sometimes the only safe place I had to go.

Contrary to my father and his third wife, I don't believe that homosexuality is a choice, and so being gay wasn't an issue with me when it came to my relationship with God. Promiscuity was another matter altogether, and Art, who was generally busy at work but still around occasionally, would counsel me on the repercussions that my behavior was having on my life and my outlook on life in general – always in regard to his faith, which he devoutly believed in. Regarding the love he believed in, I would often tell him that he lived in a world that didn't exist and that his ideals would screw him in the end. Looking back, I realize that Art reminded me of myself before everything happened, back when I had the idealism that good wins out in the end, and true love exists. Jaded by

my past and believing that I knew how the real world worked, I patiently listened to Art's arguments, then disregarded them as quickly as he said them.

It was like I was bipolar when it came to my views about God and sleeping around. While I was out searching for sex, I just pretended God didn't exist. Out of sight, out of mind. I'd make excuses for my behavior, and since there was no real attachment I found the lack of intimacy safe. Having nothing to do with my sexuality- it was based on my background, and the defenses that I developed back then to survive. Sex was power, and I sought it often.

Semi-dating several men at the same time became customary – social suicide in the bar scene. Colton's saying, "If they aren't paying my bills, feeding my face, or sucking my dick, I really don't care what people think," became my mantra, and I dismissed the effects my behavior was having on me. No man is an island, and promiscuity began to take its toll. Unlike Colton and David, I began to realize that I would be unable to celebrate my gayness indefinitely. I was getting older and, like on the old series *Logan's Run*, at 30 you start becoming less desirable in the gay world. Already undesirable in my own eyes, I figured that my fate was the solo life my past was full of.

But God had other plans for me. My old life was ending and a new one was about to begin, much sweeter than I could imagine. A sex ridden sinner's prayers were about to be answered and I would find myself on the path of understanding before I knew it, all at the hands of God.

The Wonder of Love

A little over a year after Sira came into my life, I was a carefree bachelor and loving every minute of it, or at least that's what I told myself every morning I woke up alone. Even though I was fucking a lot of guys, I never allowed them to sleep over, and I left their place right after sex. To avoid any chance of relationship, I tried to date unavailable guys, either because they were married or they had a boyfriend. Married guys were my preferred group to play around with because they generally want only sex – at least up to the night of a certain after-bar party, when all of that changed.

I tended to avoid parties, but I'd promised friends of mine that I would go to a party someone I knew was throwing, figuring it wouldn't end up in an orgy like many after-bar parties did. The freedom that comes with being gay can be taken to extremes, usually by young "twinks," and it was hard to know if you were going to hang out or it would all end in a free for all. Being a one on one kind of guy, the group thing panicked me and I'd usually leave at that point. I walked from my apartment, figuring if anything got jiggy I would just excuse myself and slip out. But the party turned out to be quite tame, with people hanging out, drinking beer, and talking. Flagger me over, I joined my friends and accepting a beer sat down to listen to the conversation.

Scanning the crowd to see who else I knew, my eyes came to Jacob. Like David and Sira, there was something about him that I instantly recognized, though I had no idea who he was. In his early 20's, blonde, 5'8" and cute, it wasn't his looks but something else, something deeper. We spent the night in our perspective groups but caught each other's eye and stared at each other. Looking into his eyes, I saw being together forever. When the party came to a close, I positioned myself in such a way that he had to walk past me. He turned and said hello and asked if I could walk him to his car. He told me he was new in town and knew no one but his roommates. We made plans to go to the zoo, which in Omaha is quite spectacular, exchanged phone numbers, and said good night.

Funny how fear operates. I'd stood David up the first time we'd planned to meet. It was raining the day I was supposed to meet him at a movie theater and what I told myself was that I didn't want to get wet taking the bus, so I blew him off, not even bothering to call. Later, I apologized, at which point we became fast friends. Well, I did the same with Jacob. After calling one out of the three phone numbers he'd given me and getting no answer, I decided to stay clear, confused by the emotions I was already experiencing.

But then that weekend, I walked into the bar and ran directly into him. At first, I ignored him and tooted around the bar, scoping out that night's crowd. But then I found myself walking up to him and apologizing for not calling. Forgiving me immediately with a beaming white smile, he offered to buy me a drink and we spent the whole night talking. Just out of college, he was a new assistant manager at a local music store, struggling to make his way up the retail corporate ladder. He'd never been in a gay relationship and said he didn't want to rush into anything. I emphatically agreed with him, telling him that I was just interested in friends and nothing more. Through all the talk and dancing, I couldn't get past the feeling that I'd known Jacob in another life or something. Everything about him seemed familiar.

At the end of the night, Jacob offered to drive me home. As we pulled up to my place, I told him that if he wanted to spend the night, he had to park around the corner, which he did immediately. Not exactly sure what the hell I was doing, I led him upstairs and we had a night of incredibly passionate sex. From that moment on to what is now, so far, 17 plus years, he has never left. He closed out his lease and moved in with me a month later.

And so we started our life together like many typical young gay couples who move in together right away, completely, overwhelmingly in love. Knowing that many relationships end within the first year and the "in love" couple end up hating each other, I tried to keep some emotional distance. A few months in, I told Jacob not to fall in love with me and tried to downplay how head over heels in love I was. Understanding me in a way that I had never been understood before, again like we had known each other in another life and were just

resuming where we left off, he took it in stride and promised not to fall in love. No blame. That night, we slept in each other's arms. I can't say enough about how beautiful our coming together was.

When I broke off with one of the guys I'd been dating before Jacob, he cried and said prophetically, "You are going to live forever with this guy." Of course, I denied it, assuring him that Jacob was probably just a passing phase. But he was right. It was the love at first sight story and we took it incredibly fast while trying to tell ourselves we were taking it slow. Having spent a lifetime denying that true love existed, there I was. It was quite a contradiction to contend with.

And Sira loved Jacob. They became fast friends and I noticed how sometimes would gravitate more toward him than toward me, which made me little jealous at first, but I quickly came to the conclusion that it was just about *who* Jacob was, loved by all, including Sira.

But it wasn't all roses and champagne. We've had terrible fights that ended up in screaming matches. Actually, the first fight occurred the night he officially moved in. I'd immediately taken out to the trash a Ouija board he'd just purchased, declaring I wasn't going to have that crap in my house because you never knew what doors would open when playing with it. He yelled that I was being superstitious and unreasonable, which was probably true. But it was my place and what I wanted stood. I was a Type A, he a type B, and opposites attract. We couldn't get enough of each other. Spending every waking moment we possibly could together, we got to know the intricacies of each other's personalities quickly. The more I discovered about Jacob, the more I loved him. His work ethic was like none I had ever seen, having worked a job since he was 14. Giving, compassionate, and funny, he quickly makes friends and never makes enemies. Exactly what he saw in me, I couldn't say, but the fact that I could see it in his eyes every time he looked at me how much he adored me was enough for me.

And outside pressure arrived eight months into our relationship. My mother drank herself into another diabetic coma and almost died this time, killing her kidneys in the process. No longer able to care for herself, she explained that she had to choose either living with one of her kids or going to a nursing home. Forced to decide whether or not to put my mother in a home, I said to Jacob, "If you love me, you're gonna love my mother because she is coming to live with us." Jacob offered no argument, and we began planning for her, unaware that we'd begun a miraculous journey. A month later, the five of us (including Sira and my mother's cat) began living together with no clue as to how we were going to do it. We all rolled up our sleeves and got busy with the day-to-day process of getting along.

Like everyone else, my mother took to Jacob immediately and became a surrogate for the mother he'd never had. Forbidden to drink in our house, she spent the rest of her five and a half years left sober and on dialysis three times

a week. Jacob and I took care of her, not foreseeing that it would solidify our relationship in a way that nothing else could. David was right. Everything happens for a reason, and this was no different. But what we didn't know was that a family explosion was coming and that the past would once again rear its ugly head.

The Dragon Stirs

Around the time Emily turned 40, she had a nervous breakdown that triggered memories from the past. When she began talking about those events everyone wanted to stay buried, she broke the silence in a way that none of us could have seen coming.

For some time now, my father had been trying to reach out to the four of us, first to Cindy and Stephen and eventually to Emily and me. Each of us had our own tenuous, problematical relationship with him after years of little next to nothing other than bad memories that occasionally surfaced. I certainly was reaching out, desperate to have a relationship with him, though expecting the worst. Regardless of the past, I loved my father and blamed his third wife for much of the abuse I suffered in their household.

So the four of us were all in contact with him when Emily began remembering the past and talking about it. For years, we four had been at each other's throats, setting each other up, sacrificing each other in order to survive. I'd spent years listening to him criticize everyone in my family as if he and his third family were some sort of prize. His divide-and-conquer strategy meant silence or suffering the consequences of making waves. So you'd set up someone else to take a fall to deflect his disapproval and earn a reprieve as his "chosen one." It was a game no one could win for very long, and it drove all of us apart.

Here's an example. Accustomed to being the ugly duckling that everyone picked on, Emily finally earned my father's good graces for the first time in her life when she went to college for degrees in sociology and psychology to become a therapist. Proud that one among his offspring was actually going to college and getting a degree, my father constantly impressed upon us the difference between her and us: she was making something of her life and the rest of us weren't. Accustomed to being at the top of my father's game, Cindy and Stephen became angry. Instead of congratulating my older sister for her hard work, they waited for Her Highness to make a mistake so they could pounce on her and knock her from her perch.

And they didn't have to wait long. A few years into college, she began having problems. Plagued with nightmares and childhood memories she like the rest of us had repressed for years, she began losing sleep. From the combined stress of raising a family, going to school, and being unable to come to terms with what she was remembering, she began speaking about her abuse for the first

time and created a ripple that soon became a tidal wave that inundated the entire family, washing over everyone. She remembered Hummel Park, a city park on the northern outskirts of town where many of the rituals took place. She remembered Dad's practices as high priest and the human sacrifices and terrible abuse at the hands of both our parents and their friends. She began obsessing over the past, unable to escape the memories flooding in, trying to take the time to absorb what they meant.

Waiting until the day they knew she was visiting our father, Cindy and Stephen conspired to tell him about what Emily was saying so as to destroy her budding relationship with him. A few minutes before she was to walk in the door, my brother called and told my father what she was saying. The bomb he threw would detonate over all of us. Confronting her and her husband at the door, my father asked if it was true what Stephen had just told him. Figuring that there was nothing to lose at this point, Emily looked my father in the face and told him that she was finally breaking the silence. As this was happening in the living room, my stepmother was on the phone with Cindy in Florida who over and over was saying she wasn't with our father at that time (she most definitely was), which ammunition my stepmother used against my Emily. Growing pale and repeating over and over that he was the "best father he knew how to be," our father finally asked Emily and her husband to leave and that he never wanted to talk to her again. He shut and locked the door as they left. To the rest of us, he subsequently declared that she was disinherited and was never to be mentioned again, and demanded that we all follow suit or suffer the same fate.

I heard about it from Cindy, Emily, and my father, and I grew angry that the past was coming up again. Naively, I felt it was all over and better left in the past. Cindy campaigned to convince me that Emily was lying while at the same time mentioning Dad in red robes symbolizing blood sacrifice. Neither my estranged brother nor I bothered talking, as I was already hearing it from all sides. Our father defended himself, saying he wasn't perfect but had been the best dad he knew how to be, half-heartedly calling Emily a liar, although we all knew the truth, etc.

I was livid with Emily for not keeping her mouth shut. I blamed her for exposing what I had spent my life repressing. Never admitting that our parents were responsible and that I should be blaming *them*, I focused my rage on her while catering to my parents.

The whistleblower position is never an easy one. Everyone abandoned Emily: her natal family, her husband and children and in-laws. No one believed the bizarre devil-worshipping stories she told about our childhood. She was a crazy liar, her memories mentally ill fantasies. Needless to say, both my father and mother avoided talking about it, and we all did our best to forget Emily, telling each other that she had always been a "trouble maker." Once when she came to visit and was sitting in the kitchen, I asked my mother if she had sacrificed any

babies in Hummel Park lately – a poor attempt to camouflage the situation with humor – and Emily left, declaring she had no interest in listening to my mother’s denials. Before slamming the door, she looked at me and called me a coward. We didn’t speak for months after, doing what all dysfunctional families do: dismissing each other from our lives. I heard that she went into the hospital a few times, emotionally crippled by the injustice of always being the family scapegoat, forced to deal with our childhood alone, disbelieved by everyone, shunned in a way I will never know.

Later when I went through my own breakdown – also shortly after reaching the age of forty – I would discover that the path she forged before me made my journey easier. Having to eat crow and apologize for my past actions, I would shift from treating Emily like crap to viewing her as my savior. She understood where we had come from and was thus a fundamental support system during my own breakdown when I had to face my own demons and be forever changed from the *inside* out.

Mother Dearest

Like me in those early years with Jacob, my mother had not recovered from the reality of her past. Now that alcohol was disallowed and all her drinking buddies were either dead or off in bars someplace, she was left with just Jacob and me and a whole new lifestyle. Veering between being a loving, gracious individual to a “princess and the pea” shrew accustomed to people doing her bidding, she was finding old habits hard to break. Neither Jacob nor I were willing to play the servant role and dialysis was a crapshoot. Sometimes she could handle it fine, other times she would come home sick and exhausted, convinced that horror stories about patients dying during

treatment were about her own fate. Each time she left, I wondered if she would return and what condition she would be if she did. Those years of watching my mother die took something from me, but gave me much more in return.

Jacob and I rented a sunny house with light in every room and moved my mother into the brightest room. Complaining at first, she grew to enjoy the sunshine and looking out the windows when there was nothing on television. Surrounded by our friends, her social workers and visiting nurses, she began to enjoy company *without* Gordon’s gin chilled with no ice. She would sit in the kitchen smoking cigarettes and telling stories about her childhood, still able to bewitch a room with tales of the Great Depression and her father, a renowned artist. It was often hard to get a word in edgewise.

Jacob and my mother loved each other, and she often referred to us as “her boys.” Rising to the challenge of taking care of an elderly sick person, Jacob broke the bar on what was expected of boyfriends, and I loved him more every day as I watched him patiently interact with my mother. Often telling me that Jacob was my lifesaver, my mother loved the fact that we were together. During our arguments, she would often intercede on his behalf. Sometimes I’d

pout that she cared for Jacob more than she did her own son and she would bring me to my senses after a lot of hemming and hawing on my part.

Being her caregiver was very hard on me, and the daily stress it put me under was sometimes unbearable. One night, she fell and broke her hip and had to have a second hip replacement, going from a cane back onto a walker. Considering that 50% of the people who go through hip replacements don't make it, it was nothing less than a miracle that she'd survived a *second* one. However, yet more disability meant more inconvenience, which meant more battling with depression. Once, I had to bathe her because her bath lady couldn't make it and I saw for the first time how *emaciating* her treatments were. When she sliced her foot getting into the shower, it bled chunks forever before I was finally able to stop the bleeding. That night, Jacob had to deal with my wracking sobs and frustration. I couldn't prevent her deterioration and despaired of the life she would never have. Only the brave need apply for aging. At the kitchen table in the morning, we three would drink coffee, Mom smoking her cigarettes, and talk about everything. Nothing much was out of bounds, like when Jacob became uncomfortable with us talking about what a cute butt he had. Many times, our conversations involved the news, as Mom read the morning newspaper religiously, then whipped off the crossword puzzle in ten minutes. Liking the sound of her own voice, she'd often read the clues aloud not for help but just to have something to say. I miss those morning conversations.

Jacob and my mother were both optimal optimists. He spent a great deal of time giving Mom and me pep talks and lightening things up with his sense of humor, and Mom turned to her faith to get her through whatever she was suffering at the moment, never allowing herself to wallow in self-pity for long. In many ways, watching her deal with her illness was an inspiration to both Jacob and me. She often commented that it was God who helped her through the dark times, and encouraged Jacob and me to seek the same help. Jacob had grown up without religion and enjoyed listening to us talk about our faith and the fact that we both found proof of God in nature and the world around us.

We sat for hours discussing the details of her childhood and the experiences that had brought her to where she was. She'd been adopted. During the Depression, her adoptive father was supporting not just their family but several others and so felt justified in molesting her whenever the pleasure took him. My mother's adoptive mother was a large woman and, like many women whose husbands are abusing their daughters, didn't like her much. With an emotionally and physically abusive mother and a sexually abusive father, she, like me, grew up in the grip of terrifying oppression. I began to see my mother as a person instead of blaming her for not being the mother I had always wanted her to be. Still, we always skirted what had transpired when I was a child and continued to blame Emily for even bringing it up.

We talked about the world as it was when she was a child and how it is now, about faith and God, moments I will cherish forever. Neither of us was interested in Jesus, and for good reason. Mom hated the Catholic church after what my father had put her through. I didn't hate it, but I sure had a hard time stomaching what most people viewed as symbols. Traditional services sent me into panic attacks. As a child, I'd been taught that the crucifixion was a grotesque representation of how easy it is to destroy a messiah of the Creator God. Then there the whole *body of my body, blood of my blood* emphasis that was always too close to the cannibalism we had practiced at every sacrifice. After the hymn refrain *washing our hands in the blood*, we finally walked out never to return. Father S. came for dinner to convince us to return to the church. Figuring we'd all have a nice time getting to know each other, neither Jacob nor I had any idea what my mom was planning, though we knew her ability to speak out and voice her opinion, solicited or not. As dinner began, she announced that there would be a lot less babies found in plastic bags in trash containers if the Catholic church would allow abortion, then went on to recount experiences of "whoring herself to the churches, singing in a red dress every Sunday in protest." Inappropriate comments fueled by anger continued throughout dinner. When we'd finished, I extricated Father S. by offering to show him the garden I'd planted. Giving the garden a cursory look, he all but ran to his car, at which point he remembered that we'd made dessert for the rectory and that he had to go back inside and say goodbye to Jacob and my mother. The next day, I called to thank him for coming to dinner and he said he'd just been sharing the dessert with the nuns and describing my mother to them. Laughing that she sure had "spirit," I always wondered what he'd *really* been saying about her.

Cantankerous and constantly exerting her independence, she spent a great deal of time hiring and firing home visiting aides and nurses, saying she hated being treated her like she was deaf and stupid just because she was in a wheelchair. She'd lose patience with them, then give them an earful as she showed them the door. Even sick, she had a presence, and people rarely questioned her when she was angry. Jokingly threatening to wheel her out into traffic, I learned to laugh off some of her over-the-top intensity.

Once in a while, I take out the photo albums of when she was living with us. Look at the photographs as a whole and you see a peculiar pattern. When she first came to live with us, she looked fairly healthy but her eyes and facial expressions were dark and unhappy; she was either frowning or smirking in many of the photos. As the photos go on, her body is obviously deteriorating *the light* is starting to shine in her eyes. She's smiling and genuinely happy the further her body goes downhill because her spirit is getting lighter. No longer dosing herself with alcohol, living and loving with Jacob and me... I still get a warm feeling when I look through those albums.

In his book *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker argues that much of human existence is based on the fear and denial of our own mortality. Most of humanity lives day-to-day putting death out of their minds, even as the world

crashes around them. As a society, we shove death into the shadows, rarely speaking of it in public let alone in the quiet of our own homes where we do our best to insulate ourselves from the mortality all around us. Given that every death I'd experienced in my traumatized life was something horrible, I too did my best to not think of my mother's impending death, despite the fact that she was wilting away before my very eyes. Shamanism would eventually change my views, but the practice was still new to me when she was dying and I didn't have the tools to adjust appropriately, trapped as I was in the caregiver syndrome in which I identified solely with her and her death and the guilt I felt for not being able to do anything other than watch her wither away. I couldn't leave the house for more than two hours at a time because I'd start to panic, plagued with images of her alone at home, dead in her bed. Jacob and I were consumed by the drama of my mom's deterioration.

She picked up every virus that lurked around her dialysis treatments and shared them with me when she came home. Jacob worked during the day and was lucky enough not to get the case of red eye that she and I got, but neither Jacob nor I could escape the horror of her shingles. Inflaming the nerves it attacks, she got it on the right side of her face and looked like Elephant Man for a week. The worst part of the disease, other than the fact that nothing could be done to help her, was that she was completely out of it for the week that her face was swollen – that was until she started screaming. Shingles makes the nerves feel like they're on fire, and the first time she went through a flare was in the middle of the night. Her screams scared us to death, and we had no forewarning of the next flare-up. It would catch all of us off guard. Excruciatingly painful, there was nothing we could do other than suffer through it with her. It lasted for months and wore all of us down in a way that was hard to deal with. The attacks are generally worse at night, which robbed all of us of restful sleep. Able to do nothing more than sit with her and hold her hand, both Jacob and I had a hard time watching her suffer.

About eight months before she died, we brought in a hospice group to help, as caring for her was overwhelming us. She argued adamantly against having hospice in the house, assuming we were giving up on her. She finally conceded when I explained that her care was becoming too much for us to handle. Looking back, I see her terror of impending death and how it made her struggle against her fate, sick as she was. I have often wondered if she didn't use the shingles to wake us up not because of the pain but because of her fear, often just wanting us to hold her hand.

Hospice was extraordinary, and I came away with a great deal of respect for what I perceive to be a calling from God. Treating my mother's death with respect, their only concern was for her comfort and giving Jacob and me a much-needed break. They scheduled nurses, bath ladies, doctors, and social workers so we could get away for greater periods than we were used to and

focus time on our relationship. It also gave us a chance to spend time at church, with which we were becoming more involved.

A few months before she died, we were sitting at the table one morning when she looked up from her morning newspaper and said, "I want to thank you." Figuring that an insult was next, I braced for the reply and asked, "What for?" She said it was the first time in her life that she was neither abused nor abusing herself and she wanted to thank Jacob and me for giving her that opportunity. The fondest memory I have of her, I will never forget that day.

Learning to accept my mother's frailties, I was becoming more patient and understanding, actually becoming the caregiver I never was when younger. Slowly, I was gravitating away from the selfish child I was before and becoming genuinely caring. Taking care of a dying individual changes a person, and both Jacob and I were changing, thanks to my mother. In many ways, learning how to love from Sira, Mom, and Jacob would save me as much as we saved my mother.

But I was still lacking my own recovery. I was unable to sleep for long periods of time due to the stress of taking care of my mother on top of the things I'd gone through, remembered and not remembered. Unknown to Jacob, I was still sleeping with men all over town, unable to control my sexual compulsions. Secrets are a killer in a relationship, and I spent much of my time enveloped in guilt, convinced I was a bad person and more like my womanizing father than I cared to admit. All of this meant I was often in an emotional state of turmoil and flying off the handle over nothing. Both Jacob and my mom pushed me to fill out disability papers in hopes that I could get financial assistance for treatment. Because I wasn't able to keep a job and support myself, Jacob started looking for a job to support us both, telling me to concentrate on getting into therapy before anything else.

So I was crashing emotionally and was acting out in ways I couldn't control. Losing my mother was something I was certain I wouldn't be able to deal with and as a result I was doing anything I could to escape thinking about it, hoping that I would contract a disease so I could die alongside her. Jacob and I were no longer intimate. He assumed it was just due to the stress over my mom, having no idea that I was behaving in such self-destructive ways. Not wanting to hurt him, I distanced myself further, unable to be in physical contact with him due to my own actions, unwilling to tell anyone, I was a terrible person, etc.

I spent a great deal of time feeling sorry for myself, fighting severe depressions as a result. My siblings were pretty much out of the picture, given that they blamed my mother for what had happened in the past and wanted nothing to do with her. Jacob's family had just learned about his sexuality and were busy dealing with that. So we found ourselves in the boat alone. Our friends, however, often came to visit my mother when she was able to entertain.

The strongest woman I have ever known, my mother kept a positive disposition even now with undeniable grace. Our friends had no problem listening to her repeat her life stories, her conversation and disposition as captivating as Betty Davis, smoking her cigarettes, pausing at all the right places, her timing impeccable. And she was still a looker and told us of her conversations at treatment with older gentlemen. Something about her attracted people to her, and the closer we got to her death, the more I found myself missing her company. She could always make me laugh, and it was fun to watch her interact with others, although you could never predict what would come out of her mouth. But then that was part of her charm; people either loved her or hated her. Those who loved her would go to the ends of the earth for her, and I grew to adore my mom in a way that I never thought possible when I was a child.

The Metaphysical Church

About a year before my mother died, Jacob and I learned of an up and coming church in town that honored all paths to God, so we decided to check it out, in hopes that it would offer us a well-deserved break. Not that we didn't love my mother, but and now that she was contracting disease after disease due to the treatments wearing her body down, we were overwhelmed with the health crisis she was constantly in. Her social workers and visiting nurses suggested an outlet for *us*, a few hours away, and church seemed like a good idea. Well, it was more like a Las Vegas nightclub performance or pep rally for God than anything else. The Sunday service was a celebration of music and messages of hope and love, and no songs about blood, no Eucharist. At least it was safe. The philosophy was New Age – energy, through our actions we create our own lives, spiritual texts, quantum physics. They said the Bible was a collection of stories that, if interpreted in a metaphysical manner, offered secret knowledge that we humans should take within ourselves in order to learn about ourselves so as to bring ourselves closer to God. Their liberating perspective on life was desperately what I was seeking. I became enamored of the message that I with God's help was master of my own destiny. So Jacob and I not only started attending but sought to get involved in any way we could.

By this time, I was on disability, taking meds, and seeing a therapist. Internet had come into everyone's home, and chat rooms were full of men looking for discreet sex. While Jacob was at work supporting me, I'd meet men online and disappear for a few hours a day. Neither Jacob nor my mother suspected. I excused my bad behavior by telling myself that I was unable to control myself. My compulsions were a serious albatross around my neck causing me to distance myself from those that I loved and to live a life of secrets, like my father.

My first round of therapy ended badly due to hooking up with a psychiatrist known all over town as a drug pusher who gave me everything my sister was

taking (he was her doctor as well). He was overmedicating me with pills that didn't relieve anything. I wasn't bipolar, I didn't suffer from dissociative identity disorder (DID), so the 900 milligrams of Depacote he had me on daily did nothing but make me fat. I was still unable to sleep and prone to severe panic attacks. From the stories I'd been hearing, I suspected that he was a quack – and his nurse was my therapist and had been talking about me to a friend of mine who was also seeing her! Feeling violated, I dumped them all, figuring them for junk science. I spent the next couple of days sick in bed, not realizing that quitting Depacote cold turkey can cause seizures.

Overwhelmed at home, unable to contain my emotions enough to hold down a job, I signed up for courses at a university in the area, but couldn't concentrate on the material and dropped out. Needing something more than taking care of my mother and compulsive liaisons I felt terrible about, I thought that volunteering at the church might offer relief from my compulsions and give me something to focus my free time on. So I put all my eggs in that one basket.

A larger than life man I'll call "Stormy" (for reasons I'll explain) was the leader of the church. Stormy was open about being a reformed alcoholic currently in a married relationship with his gay lover who worked the church with him. Stormy had been a lounge singer and performer, spending years in bars making money and getting drunk. After an epiphany, he'd gone to ministerial school, changed his name and reinvented himself as a metaphysical Southern Baptist tent revivalist. Having grown up in the South as a Baptist, it was an easy transition for him to make and he was remarkably successful at it. Upon arriving in Omaha, he and his lover quickly had taken over a failing church and it was paying off.

Every Sunday morning, Stormy shone like a star on stage and pumped out pep talks about how we were all quite capable of dealing with the problems in our lives, that God loved all of us and the universe only wanted to provide for us, that all we had to do was act in a way to help manifest our prayers into reality. Stormy already had a following in town and was filling more and more seats every Sunday until there was standing room only. Desperate for direction and wanting to change my life but not sure how, I wanted to help others for the first time in my life and spend time focusing on God, which Art assured me was the only way out of my predicament.

Art dismissed the church as The Church of the Bicycle. He saw right away that Stormy was nothing more than a glorified snake oil salesman. But then Art believed that Jesus was my only salvation and urged me to rethink my decision about getting involved with a church that believed in anything and everything. So we agreed to disagree and I kept going to the church I now refer to as The Cult of Disillusion and later Jacob referred as The Church of the Misfit Toys, referring to the Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer cartoon shown on television

every Christmas. None of us knew that the church would become a factor in our lives for several years to come.

Part of the draw was the real sense of community Jacob and I both hungered for. We felt we'd finally found a place where we could be ourselves and still fit in, which was why we began reaching out to what we felt was an extended family. The congregation was filled to overflowing with eclectic individuals full of new and sometimes unusual ideas and convictions, and the church was a place where everyone could share what they believed without judgment. Feeling as out of place in society as we did, many had gravitated to the church for the combined opportunity of community and fitting in, and in the beginning it was a very loving, giving place.

Being fairly proficient in the kitchen, we volunteered to cook every Sunday for when service let out. Although it kept us out of the sanctuary when Stormy was doing his thing, we loved the gratitude for the food we prepared, and working in the kitchen was great fun. Making the bread that everyone broke with each other after worship was a spiritual experience in itself, and Jacob and I began looking forward to Sunday mornings, figuring cooking was better than Stormy's pep talks.

And he had big plans for the little church looking for direction. He wanted to take it from a small congregation to a big radio-television *cult* ministry. Stormy and his lover assumed control over everything, including the board of directors, and everyone eagerly jumped on board, excited by what Stormy told them about the prospects ahead.

Just weeks after our arrival, Jacob and I heard rumors about Stormy was sleeping with male members of the congregation. Just figuring they were a couple of fags running a church, we disregarded the rumors in the beginning, given that we were more interested in the community of individuals, anyway. But it was a bigger issue than we thought at the time. Once, Stormy even called us homophobic. To me, homophobia is based on a fear of the unknown. Having been exposed to the gay lifestyle all my adult life, it wasn't the fact that they were gay that bothered me so much as their pretentiousness. Their sexuality just happened to be part of it.

But we were a minority in the church. His devout fan base did anything he asked and no one seemed to notice or care about members drifting away, Stormy being a dynamic speaker on Sunday mornings but no good when it came to pastor-parishoner intimacy. A year or so after coming to the church, he and his "wife" held a divorce ceremony and publicly separated, though they both continued running the church, just not together. Their divorce seemed to open the door for yet more Stormy promiscuity; he dated all over town, though everyone avoided talking about it.

Around the time his promiscuity expanded, two things happened to further separate

Stormy and me. That Christmas, it finally dawned on me how bad my sexual abuse had been and I was having a great deal of trouble dealing with the anger I felt toward my father and his third wife. Jacob urged me to go and talk to Stormy, as he was our minister and must counsel parishoners when the need arose. Figuring what the hell, I called and made an appointment for us to go and see Stormy at his home. Needless to say, the meeting went badly. After listening to me for ten minutes, he declared that he was my spiritual savior and that, with his help I could overcome the "drama" I was experiencing. Slightly irritated but not sure why, I responded that I was my own spiritual savior and that what I experienced was more than "drama." Taken back, probably because of my tone of voice, he then became irritated and the conversation ended with us shooting barbs at each other until Jacob decided we should leave. Infuriated by being talked down to like I was a child, I spent the walk home ranting and raving while Jacob quietly listened. At his wit's end, Jacob demanded that I get a list of therapists from my mother's social workers and begin calling them so I could see someone as soon as possible. I began seriously looking for professional help.

The second incident occurred later at my mother's memorial service when he made a pass at my 17-year-old nephew. But I'm jumping ahead. In the end, we would have no good will left towards each other, but the real *coup d'grâce* was when he went out of his way to bring Alan back into my life. *That* would be the proverbial last straw.

A Time to Talk

I had no one to really talk to other than Jacob and my mother, and I was even keeping secrets from them. So you would think that I would have looked forward to having someone to tell my most intimate secrets to, but just the opposite was true. I had no faith in therapy and basically attended the appointment I'd made to placate Jacob, figuring it was a waste of my time. But given that I didn't have a job and had nothing better to do, I went. Last on the list of about 15 therapists, I had liked something in Mrs. Smith's voice and left a message. My last therapist had been the female nurse of that drug-pusher doctor, but I still felt more comfortable talking with a woman than with a man.

To be honest, straight men have always intimidated me – not the ones I slept with (I never considered them all that straight), but the butch, womanizing, beer-drinking man's man type that generally encapsulates the straight man persona. Not being overly feminine nor overly masculine, I get 'noided out by straight men. Obviously, gay men don't have the same effect on me, but I still couldn't see myself going to a male therapist, even a gay one. Actually, I wouldn't see a gay therapist *especially* if he was gay. Not that gay therapists are inherently bad therapists, but my experience had taught me not to trust

many gay men due to their penchant for playing games with those closest to them. What can we go by other than our own life experiences? I had found plenty of reason to distrust the gay men in Omaha. Of course, I was no better than them at the time – I was still out having affair after affair and guilty of playing plenty of games myself – so much of my reasoning was no doubt based on projection. But that’s how it was.

Mrs. Smith was attractive and well put together. Fairly tall, smartly dressed, with styled hair and glasses, she looked like my conception of a competent therapist. Her office was small with bookcases filled with psychotherapy books, a desk, a chair for her to sit on during our sessions, and a nice leather couch for me. I felt comfortable almost right away. Figuring she was like everyone else I’d told my story to, I gave her a condensed version of my childhood, the basics of my family background and how all of my older siblings and myself had been destroyed by what we experienced in our lives. I prefaced it all by explaining that we are all products of our experiences, that I could “see into people” in a way that made both of us uncomfortable. Briefly, I described my relationship with God and impressed upon her the esoteric nature of my spiritual beliefs, including my fear of waking up and being the Antichrist. She listened intently and asked a few questions for clarification, and in this way we spent the first few sessions getting to know each other. Despite what I was telling her, she still wished to continue seeing me.

When she learned what church I was attending, she suggested that I pick up *The Way of the Shaman* by Michael Harner as a way to approach my spiritual concerns. She said that my “abilities” sounded shamanic in nature and thought that looking into a native American way of spirituality might be a way to stave off my fears. Explaining that Harner’s book dealt with the practice of dream work, which might help me master the nightmares that were so debilitating. Intrigued, I went home and ordered the book online, unable to find it in any of the bookstores in town.

She explained that it wasn’t her job to confirm or deny my experiences but rather to help me to focus on learning to live everyday life and to face those things I was unwilling to face. As a Jungian, Mrs. Smith had a way of drawing out my shadow side, my darkness, so I could examine it. She said therapy is useless if one doesn’t work hard at it, and still it could take years, warning that I should be in it for the long haul. Angry at first that she didn’t believe me and therefore refused to take my side, I have come to respect what she taught me throughout my years of therapy.

Everyone has defenses and mine were in full swing the first few months. I had images of raping her in her office and as a result almost abandoned our work early on. Terrified of such fantasies, I told her that I no longer wanted to see her again. But after I explained why, she assured me that it was just my old defenses working to keep me from getting healthy and not needing them anymore. It was miraculous how I learned to discern when my mind was fighting the therapy and how talking about it made the negative fantasies and

defenses disappear. Designed to help me persevere through the horror of my childhood, the defenses that saved me when I was young were now getting in the way of my having a productive and happy life.

One defense was lying. Uncomfortable around people, I lied to safeguard myself by making people keep their distance. Originally, it was my childish attempt to keep from being beaten and to insulate myself from both the reality of the abuse I was going through and the humiliation I felt at being treated like an animal. But as a young adult, my old defense made for an incredibly lonely, self-isolating life. When I'd returned from Florida, I'd concentrated on stopping the behavior and had some idea of how it had worked as a defense, but my work with Mrs. Smith put *all* of my defenses through a serious workout. I learned a lot about my PTSD mental disability, even how to recognize when a panic attack was on the way. The attacks had been getting worse; once, I'd passed out in a department store. I became aware of some of my "triggers" that would begin the attack – events, someone saying something in a certain way, even smells –and began identifying situations I didn't want to be in as well as the behavior that generally got me there. Assuring me that I was a normal person who had gone through some abnormal events, Mrs. Smith often said it was a miracle that I didn't end up dead or in jail as my dad had predicted, given that most people gravitate to what they know, and abuse was pretty much it for my formative years.

I am often asked what I talk about in therapy. I think of all the things I don't want to talk about and bring them up in my sessions. In the years I was with her, Mrs. Smith helped me bring my shadow side into the light and in a way re-parented me. She helped me to get my emotions under control by giving me the guidance I never received as a child.

At one point, my agoraphobia threatened our sessions. Not wanting to leave the house or drive the car, I often cancelled our appointments at the last minute, further hindering my treatment. It wasn't that I was scared of going outside, I just didn't want the stress of being *exposed* in public. When she demanded that I honor my appointments or she would drop me as a patient because she had a business to maintain and boundaries were exceedingly important to her, I began attending therapy on a regular basis. Most people see a therapist once or twice a month, but due to the abuse I had suffered and its uncontrollable effects, at one point I was seeing her three times a week. Given the grounding and reprogramming I needed, it was a lifesaver.

She helped me see the anger I felt towards my mother for drinking herself to death as well as the guilt I felt for her ill health. By walking me through my emotions in such a way that I was able to understand them, Mrs. Smith helped me to become a better caregiver who could feel not just what I felt but what others were feeling. She explained the caregiver syndrome I was suffering and began helping me come to terms with my mother's impending death, including

getting me to think of my future afterwards. Compassionate and patient, she allowed me to be intense and didn't shy away like most people in my life did.

Finally, she helped me to stop sexually acting out by pointing out how I was re-abusing myself every time I sought sexual gratification outside of love, an insight I had never once considered. While I thought that behavior was the only aspect of my life I felt I had any control over, she helped me to see that my actions were not only hurting those around me but myself as well, and in terrible ways. It was true. The guilt I felt about Jacob by sleeping around overwhelmed me on a daily basis and became just another reason to feel bad about myself. But until I made it conscious in therapy, I had no idea how to stop myself.

Finding the right person to examine your life with, a person schooled in how the mind and personality work, is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself. I suggest everyone treat themselves to at least a few years of therapy. But Mrs. Smith was about to have her hands full, as my past was about to grab me by the balls once again. She didn't know it, but she was about to walk me through Wonderland, but this time I wouldn't be running from the darkness, and what I would discover about myself would border on the miraculous.

Shamanism

My first real experience with Shamanism was with a woman named Kathy, a talented and gifted shaman in Omaha. Schooled in spirituality and with many certificates, she was an incredibly intelligent woman who eventually received a full scholarship to study for four years in Ireland and write about ancient Celtic shamanism.

Generally associated with Native American medicine men, shamanism was the first spiritual practice of humankind and is thus in every culture from Europe to Asia to Africa. Like the old *mythos-logos* paradigm, shamans perceive a spirit world as well as consensual reality, given that *mythos* continuously plays out in our lives through guides, angels, demons, spirits, and ghosts. By contacting the kingdom of Heaven within, every individual has the capacity to interact with "the other side" through what I like to call active prayer. Instead of quieting the mind, the shamanic practitioner listens to a gentle drumbeat in a darkened room with eyes closed and encourages the mind to go where it will. Working symbolically, the shaman experiences a waking dream in which he or she receives guidance and information from guides on the other side.

When I met Kathy, I only knew that she would guide me in seeking to retrieve parts of my soul that I'd lost during the trauma and fear I'd undergone as a child. I laid on a blanket on the floor while she walked around me, burning sage, blowing smoke on me and shaking a rattle, telling me that she was cleansing me and asking for guidance and protection from her guides on the other side. Though I felt uncomfortable and a bit silly, I also felt that I *had* lost parts of my

soul. Scared and having no idea what to do while she went on her "journey," I closed my eyes and allowed my mind to go where it wanted as she lay down beside me, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, ankle to ankle. To an onlooker, it would only have looked like two people lying together on the floor listening to the constant beat of a drum. But on the inside, the drumbeat changes the brainwaves from beta to delta, tricking the mind into thinking it is asleep. The result is a waking dream that, focused inward, means the shaman can go practically anywhere anytime.

All of a sudden, I was seeing myself standing in front of a small dark-haired woman and thinking, "Wow, she walks well," as I watched her come toward me and put her hand to my face, stroking my cheek, telling me how proud of me she was. All the while telling myself that I was only imagining this encounter, I kept being surprised by how upright she was moving, and with such agility. Then Kathy completed her journey and sat me up. Cupping her hands on my head, she blew onto the crown of my head three times to symbolize the three aspects she had brought back from the upper world (guidance from ancestors, angels, and God), the lower world (power animals), and the middle world, the world in which we exist, which is a dance between dark and light. Then she relit the sage and beat her drum as she walked around me singing thanks to her guides for helping her and protecting us.

A soul retrieval enables the shaman to see a person for who he really is, as well as aspects of his life he's hiding, even from himself. Such was Kathy's ability to see me when she came back. With pure admiration in her eyes, she told me that she had never met anyone who had gone as far spiritually as I had, and she was convinced that I had an important role to perform here in this world. Having no details of my past or my belief that I was going to become the Antichrist, she was convinced that I was a gift from God. Kathy revered me in a way I wasn't used to. Years later, Kathy came to Emily's spirituality class as a guest speaker. After listening to her lecture on Shamanism, my sister introduced herself as my sister and asked if she had any tips on how we might further our spirituality. In front of the entire class, Kathy told her that our family should be teaching others about God and the spirit and not the other way around. Caught off guard, Emily said later that class became uncomfortable for her because afterwards everyone looked differently at her.

Kathy's conviction that I was somehow connected to God gave me hope that I might be able to thwart my fate, and I decided to further explore what Shamanism had in store for me. Power animals being particular to shamans, I would later do quite a bit of work with Bear, Wolf, and Dragon, each of which stood symbolically for an attribute lending power to me. I worked to bring the awareness of each animal into myself and change myself in the process. For example, when I feel weak or scared, I focus on Bear energy, bears being fearless, protective, and beautiful. I focus my mind on what it is to be a bear, then try to emulate it. When Kathy set out to retrieve the parts of my soul I had lost, Bear presented himself to her to help.

The day after my soul retrieval, I was talking on the phone with Cindy. For whatever reason, she mentioned my great grandmother who died before I was born and described her. Her description was remarkably like the woman I had "seen" during my soul retrieval. Cindy said she'd been horribly crippled with osteoarthritis and could barely walk, which would explain why I was so surprised by how well she was walking. I have come to believe that my great grandmother helped me from the other side and for the first time in my life, someone in my family was actually proud of me.

Considering my past, it was easy for me to embrace Shamanism. In a way, Shamanism and Satanism are polar opposites of the same coin. Both believe in God and the spirit world. Both perceive the existence of psychic realms and the influence of angels and demons, though their interactions with these realms are night and day. Satanic power grows by taking from others, shamanic power grows by helping others heal. Rituals, prayer, and worship are essential to both for how they bring the mind and spirit closer to the other side of existence. Satanists are more aggressive than shamans and do what they can to defile and separate themselves from the light, whereas shamans honor the light and do what they can to live within it as planetary light bearers. Satanists prefer chaos, shamans balance, but both act out of their deepest desires. Whereas Satanists seek to derive power by invoking demons, shamans seek balance between the light and dark, believing that both are *God experiencing God*. For Satanists, the experience of life is a life-and-death contest, whereas for shamans it is more a dance, a complex interaction between light and dark that sparks the creative friction we call life.

Most different, however, is how Shamans and Satanists look upon death. Satanists achieve power by absorbing others' life force at their moment of death, whereas shamans believe that true power is the ability to experience one's own personal death at will. By separating themselves from physical existence over and over again, shamans learn to release the worries and bonds of life in shamanic practice for the final separation. Accustoming oneself to moving in and out of the energy of God and the universe improves one's "map" for when the time comes to achieve a truly worthy personal death.

In *Quantum Mind: The Edge Between Physics and Psychology*, Arnold Mindell connects physics and psychology through Shamanism, explaining that much occurring on the other side can be explained by quantum physics. For example, the law of thermodynamics states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed but only travels in levels of greater to lesser intensity, constantly striving for a state of balance at which point it transforms from one state to another. Like the law of thermodynamics, human beings are caught in an energy state between God the knowing and God the experiencing. Wanting transformation, we seek to experience everything life has to offer in order to once again grow closer to God the knowing.

I have come to believe that all prophets of God were shamans in their own way, mostly through visions and dreams, realms in which God connects with us and

offers guidance. The grace of God can only be felt, not communicated, as anyone who has felt the presence of God will tell you. But the feeling is transformative and as undeniable as it is indescribable. As Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is within," which means it can only be perceived through *inner* senses.

Asked if I truly believe that Shamanism works, I always like to relate a story about the weekend Susan and I attended the Death and Dying seminar. She often attended weekend shamanic seminars with me, being an incredible visionary in her own right. Finding strength in her spirituality, she had begun to blossom in the church, graduating from the friendly but shy fly on the wall to the confident, intelligent, involved woman I always knew she was. The land campaign had been going splendidly and she was proud of the fact that she alone had brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars to help purchase the new land for the new church.

She arrived at the seminar in tears. Having spent weeks preparing the paperwork for the bank loan to finance the land, she'd arrived at her church office at six the previous morning, nervous about the meeting later that morning, and found Stormy changing the numbers on the loan request by hundreds of thousands of dollars. Discovered, Stormy told her that he was making some last minute changes and that they should keep it to themselves. At the meeting, Stormy dominated the conversation, not allowing Susan to say a word concerning the church income. In the end, the numbers failed to meet the bank's expectations and the loan was denied. Susan had finally experienced Stormy's corruption first hand and was beside herself.

With perfect timing, the universe drew both of us into the shamanic practice of "psycho-pumping" in the middle world, the one we live in and generally call reality, the one Susan had run full tilt into the day before. By this time, I'd taken basic and advanced classes in Shamanism at the Michael Harner Institute and was pretty knowledgeable as to how it worked. That first day, we were asked to go to a place in our minds where someone died and see what would happen, I figured it was a good time to check on David, I went to the apartment where he was murdered and found him standing in the kitchen. Sensing my presence, he turned and demanded to know what I was doing there. Then, a light appeared and standing within it was David's old lover who had died of AIDS a few years before. Recognizing his partner, David walked into the light, leaving me standing alone in the apartment. I came back feeling rejected and disheartened, wishing that David had been happy to see me. Given that I was still struggling with the fact that I never got the chance to apologize to him, I just figured that my mind was playing out a scenario that I believed would have happened, had it happened for "real."

The next day, as I was preparing for the last day of the seminar, I walked into my studio and saw David's military jacket nametag sitting in my trash basket. After his death, Colton had given me the jacket and I'd removed the nametag

when it didn't fit me anymore, then stored it in a box in the studio closet. But there it was, and me with absolutely no idea of how it got out of the closet. I reached down to retrieve it and was struck by the thought that I was pulling our friendship out of the trash. Tears sprang to my eyes. It was a message from David that my apology had been accepted.

But the story didn't end there. The second day of the seminar, we separated into two groups to plan psycho-pumping with other people. Susan's group would mentally go to an airplane crash that had personally affected a woman in the group to see if they could find any spirits needing help in crossing over. In a way, her group decision became symbolic of The Cult of the Disillusioned and a sign of things to come for her. My group would mentally come to the apartment Jacob and I had rented near the Gerald Ford Memorial after my mother's death. We'd been having a lot of paranormal activity – lights going on and off, people walking around at night, our dogs agitated and barking at nothing visible – and it was starting to scare our friends. Even Jacob, a nonbeliever, was having a hard time explaining what was happening. The two groups plotted their journeys for the next day.

That night, I told Jacob about my group's plan to journey to our apartment. Laughing it off, he told me to "knock myself out." Having grown up without any religion or spiritual belief, Jacob the no-nonsense, practical businessman disregarded my practice of Shamanism as definitely being off the beaten path, but never once criticized my beliefs, having seen how they helped me, though he couldn't profess to truly understanding *how* they helped me. After my group journeyed to our apartment the next day, I listened to what everyone had to say, figuring since it was my apartment that it would be best for me to listen rather than share what I'd experienced and thus contaminate others' experiences. Remarkably, each contributor correctly described the layout of the apartment and definitely discerned a problem with spirits. In fact, each one saw the apartment as a sort of Grand Central Station of spirits. They also saw Jacob.

I immediately went to the phone to call Jacob to see if it was true that he was at that very moment lying in his underwear on the couch in the living room, watching television and talking on the phone. I figured it had to be damn near impossible, given how modest Jacob is and how he hates both watching television and talking on the phone. He demanded to know why I wanted to know. "Just answer the question," I said, and I repeated it. Embarrassed, Jacob confirmed that he was indeed doing all those things and demanded to know how I knew. When I told him that the entire group had seen him in the apartment, we were *both* slightly taken back. And when he came to pick me up, he was further taken aback when people in my group recognized him and complimented him on his cute, hairy legs. Having no idea how it was possible that a group of people could have seen him, he still couldn't deny the fact that it

happened, and the experience gave both of us a better appreciation of Shamanism.

Practicing Shamanism has a way of calming down the soul, and after a few journeys Susan began to feel more at peace – and more articulate about her experience with Stormy. Going from distraught to livid in a couple of days, she began to realize how betrayed and angry she was. A week after the seminar, Stormy ran her out of the church after assaulting her with some outrageous statements when he had her alone in his office, assuring her that the church thought she was “bad news,” and informing her that everyone just wished that she would leave altogether. Referring to her as “evil,” he blamed her “ineffectiveness” for his actions with the loan papers, despite the fact that the money we already had was due to her diligence. His right hand one day and his public enemy the next, Susan gave up. Unable to quite believe that Stormy would actually say such things to her, I was convinced a week later when it was my turn because I knew the real story as to why the loan failed.

Travel in the middle world or to any of the three realms of the spiritual world is also known as *astral projection* or directing the spirit out of the body in order to explore what the spiritual world has to offer. Through the mind, journeys require faith in oneself and in God. As the death and dying seminar proved, God has a way of offering the universe’s own sense of “proof” that some might call coincidence. But coincidence after coincidence become pattern, and throughout my practice I’ve begun to see a definite consistency. Mrs. Smith was correct in assuming that Shamanism has a lot to do with dream work, as dreams are the primary focus of practice. Eventually, I could travel back into them once awake and psychically change them, which definitely helped to take the fear out of nightmares. Mentally changing the outcome meant emotionally and mentally changing the energy associated with them and freeing myself from their shackles so disturbing to me when I was awake.

I have come to the conclusion that there are three types of dreams. The first are just the brain symbolically processing everyday events. A good example might be dreaming of driving in a red truck on a deserted road with fields of sunflowers on each side of the road. Every aspect of the dream – the red truck, the deserted road, the fields of sunflowers – is an aspect of your self, plus the observer experiencing the dream. Taking all the aspects together can give dreamers a new perspective on what is happening in their lives. In this case, it’s about being in control of “driving” your life.

The second kind of dream is the memory dream. I constantly found myself back in the chaos of my childhood, reliving the trauma over and over. Obviously not able to change the past, Shamanism gave me the tools to go in and change my psychological outlook concerning the trauma events so that I might change myself instead. Going back into my nightmares while awake meant exploring the memories while still being able to lower the intensity of the emotions of fear and despair, reminding myself that I was safe. In a way, Shamanism is a form of self- hypnosis that, if practiced, can be an effective tool to consciously

lowering trauma intensity so it can be brought out into the light of consciousness and explored.

The third type of dream is what I call the journey dream – dreams in which your soul leaves your body and goes on journeys without the hindrance of body awareness. These dreams are more like visions than dreams. Waking tired in the morning and feeling like you had a busy night may mean you've been journeying. Although the soul has gone where it wanted while we were asleep, it doesn't mean we'll remember exactly where we went or what we learned. Sometimes all one remembers is an unusual *longing* to return.

Shamanism for me has been a gift. It has helped me to explore the shadow side of my personality as well as the part of me that lives in the light; to control my abilities and focus them in a way much like what I was *forced* to do as a child. Its gentle and nurturing approach has been much more effective than the horrific experiences Satanists subjected me to, believing they would strengthen me. By opening up within the shamanic structure, I have garnered a much better understanding of the world in which I live and myself, and this has saved me.

But I would still have to go head to head with the demons of my past. People would once again have to die.

The Death of an Icon

A week before my mother died, the flu put me in bed for five days. Jacob helped when he was off work, but I still had to attend to my mother and so she ended up catching whatever I had. Fulfilling an old wish of hers, in the end, I would be the cause of her death. Instead of being horrible, however, her death was the first death I'd ever experienced as a beautiful transition.

The morning that she got out of bed for the last time, we all realized that something was wrong. Having false alarm after false alarm throughout my mother's life, I was used to hearing that she wouldn't make it, but this time Jacob and I knew it was serious. She'd survived diabetic coma after diabetic coma, pancreatitis, and a myriad of other ailments, but now we sensed it would be a common case of the flu that would bring on her demise. As I carried her back to bed, she told me how sorry she was. I called Hospice and the nurse confirmed what we already knew: her organs were shutting down and she was in the dying process.

Having experienced more death in my life than anyone should have to, I was now able to view a *normal* death, and it would forever change me, and Jacob as well. I called Cindy and told her. She came straight away, along with her children who loved their grandmother dearly. They arrived before my mom slipped into the last coma she would ever experience, and she and Emily were able to make amends, forgiving each other and tearfully telling each other how much they loved each other. Surrounded by her grandchildren, children, and

friends, she slipped into a coma knowing that she was loved. She brought us all together in a way we hadn't managed on our own so that we could put away our differences long enough to come together and realize how much we really loved each other.

We played her favorite show of all time, "The Sound of Music," on the television and took turns sitting with her, holding her hand and swabbing her mouth with water to keep her from being thirsty. I spent a lot of time sobbing, distraught that I was losing such an important person in my life.

She waited until Jacob's watch to finally let go. Peaceful and quiet, the moment has remained sacred to Jacob who experienced her death not as the terrible, scary experience he imagined but as a natural and beautiful experience. Strange to say, her body had a glow about it. We all saw it and commented on its luminous beauty. As beautiful in death as she had been in life, her features found a peaceful repose and she went out as she had lived in the end, with a kind of grace not every death can assume.

Although we knew she was against churches and religion, Jacob and I nonetheless chose to have the funeral at our church, as it was most convenient, given the circumstances. Stormy agreed to perform the service, and we made the date far enough in the future so that Cindy could make the drive from Florida. The funeral was beautiful. Stormy was miffed that he never got a chance to give his eulogy due to so many people standing up to praise her. I focused on the love people were sharing as they recounted their memories, finding it amusing that this was probably the first time many of them had ever gotten to get a word in edgewise with her. Finally unable to dominate the conversation, my mother nonetheless captivated the room. It was a wonderful experience, although we missed her terribly.

During the reception after the service, Stormy made a pass at Emily's teenage son, only one of many embarrassments we were to suffer that day. Cindy's adult children decided to push each other in the snow and came back to the reception drenched. Their mother had grown agitated during the service, determined that "the truth" be told about my mother. Finally, she sent her son up in front of the group to talk dirt about her and he made some unintelligible remarks that no one understood, thus infuriating Cindy even more. Later, we would learn that her adult kids had brought guns to sell in Omaha. Emily's kids said their cousins were pill-popping, gun-toting maniacs who seemed out for chaos. I couldn't have agreed more.

After the funeral, having had enough of my family to last a lifetime, I decided to break contact with my older siblings now that our mother was dead. With as much water under the bridge as there was, I figured it was a healthy thing to do. All we talked about when we got together was the past, and I was ready for new beginnings. Little did I know that I was about to run head on into the very people guilty for many of the atrocities of my past. I would blunder right into

their labyrinth and entangle both Jacob and myself. The carnival was starting up and we were in for a wild ride.

The Show Comes to Town

Months before my mom's death, Stormy and The Cult of the Disillusioned began their campaign to become a power in the Omaha spiritual community, stepping up their efforts by moving into a nearby school while selling the property and looking for another more appropriate to the growing congregation. His sermons attracted close to a hundred new people every Sunday and the church was growing exponentially, as were the financial contributions. Jacob and I were promoted to being "spirit singers" up on stage every Sunday morning to cheerlead for Stormy at the beginning and ending of every service. At that time, we still totally believed in the church, and our new exposure gave us the opportunity to get to know more of the congregation. Both Jacob and I had been in theater during high school and took to our stage-front exposure like fishes in water.

After Mom's death, the church and its people were a great comfort to me, and although I didn't personally care for Stormy, his presence was undeniable. A few months after her death, Stormy introduced me to a woman named Susan and asked if I was interested in forming a group for the upcoming land campaign. Susan would be my boss and oversee what my group did. I enthusiastically accepted and thus began my relationship with Susan, a road that would lead to my downfall in the church. Susan was both a shaman and a Reiki master adept at manipulating energy, so I fashioned her as somewhat of a fairy princess able to float down hallways and touch everyone with her magic personality. Gracious, caring, and outgoing, she was a pleasure to work with, and Jacob and I grew to love her as much as the rest of the congregation did.

Jacob and I developed a group called "Gifts from the Heart" and petitioned the congregation to offer their services, time, and money in a way that showed our dedication to the land campaign, and it worked splendidly. Raising over \$90,000 in the first eight months, churchgoers couldn't give enough for their new church. The more involved we became, the more we had to hear about Stormy, and many of the stories were quite disturbing. Certified by the church to pray with people as a prayer counselor in the position of "last resort," I was hearing troubles firsthand because I was willing to listen.

All light on stage every Sunday morning, Stormy also had a dark side. Stormy was a perfect example of a non-drinking alcoholic or dry drunk. He was no longer getting drunk, but the actions typical of an alcoholic – lying, lashing out, and blaming others – dominated his every day actions. Much like the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes," he surrounded himself with people who insulated him from many of the issues facing the church. Members objecting to the direction the church was taking were being run out of

the church by Stormy's tactic of isolating people until they felt they had no recourse but to leave.

Susan was hearing the same things we were but convinced us that dealing with people like Stormy was a necessary evil when it came to building a church, and assured us that the good he was doing far outweighed the impact he was having on a select group who "probably couldn't be pleased anyway." Unconvinced, we looked away anyway and focused on ourselves and what we were doing for the church.

The Bible says that there is a special penalty for "standing in the light of God and claiming it as your own," which was what Stormy was doing. It is especially painful to be attacked by someone you consider to be your spiritual advisor. He belittled anyone he felt was beneath him or threatening in any way. Like his own version of Katrina, he brought chaos into the spiritual lives of his followers. Many of the members who walked away felt so violated that it hit them deep in their spirit. Unconcerned with the effects that he was having on people and engrossed with his own ego, Stormy sought more and more power. So it was only a matter of time before he attracted the attention of like-minded individuals like Alan Baer.

By this time, Jacob and I had already been befriended by one of Alan's best friends, an ex-priest who had been involved with founding the gay church here in town, a man I'll call "Brutus" because he was the first of my friends to turn on me when I later began investigating my family. Omaha doesn't need six degrees of separation, so finding someone in the gay community connected in some fashion to Alan wasn't all that difficult. However, though never once did I consider the possibility that Brutus was somehow connected to the events of my childhood. Brutus and his lover came up to us after the service one morning and invited us to dinner, which we were glad to accept. Brutus had joined the church after us and had gotten involved, though he and his lover were still breaking from the Catholic Church. The beauty of The Cult of the Disillusioned was that you could be of any denomination, even be a member of another church, and still become a member of The Cult of the Disillusioned, as the church prided itself in celebrating all pathways to God.

Standing 6'7" and weighing well over 300 pounds, Brutus was an extremely large man who was handling aging well, being in his late 60's to early 70's. His lover looked frail, often standing in his shadow, Brutus was gregarious to the point of being overbearing, often commenting that he was going to leave his lover for four 15-year-old boys. It was nonetheless obvious that they cared a great deal for each other, having been together for over 30 years. Suspecting nothing sinister, other than the fact that Brutus had an appetite for young boys, Jacob and I immediately befriended the two men. Both were teachers and we enjoyed their intelligent conversation. The fact that Brutus didn't like Stormy or

his lover also gave us something in common, and we often discussed the gossip going around the church.

A couple of years ago, while reading *Ritual Abuse in the Twenty-first Century: Psychological, Forensic, Social, and Political Considerations* by Randy Noblitt and Pamela Perskin Noblitt, I learned that people associated with cults often seek out their childhood victims when they are adults to reestablish a connection with them in order to keep an eye on them. Standing where I do now, I realize that is exactly what Brutus was doing, nor was it a coincidence that he was intimately connected with Alan. By seeking us out and befriending us, Brutus went out of his way to become accessible to us both. He encouraged us to seek him out when we needed anything. I did notice how he always tried to steer me away from therapy, discredited my budding Shamanic practice, and constantly encouraged me to let go of the past and forget about what happened when I was a child. Egocentric and self-involved, not once did I consider why he would be so invested in how I dealt with my past until a couple of years later when he would threaten me about the investigation I was pursuing. By ingratiating himself into our lives, he quickly became one of my closest confidantes for many years.

A few years after the whole Franklin Credit Union thing calmed down, my father with his third wife and their two kids had moved back to Omaha. He'd come to visit my mother and me a few times before her death and was his usual critical, hypocritical jerk-head self. We spent much time arguing about my choices in life and the disrespect he showed everyone, especially my ailing mother. Making it clear that he had a new family now and having no desire to have anything to do with Broom-Hilda and her two children, I shied away. Some part of me wanted him to be part of my life, but being in his life was never easy, and when he started acting like an asshole, I distanced myself from him once again.

Obviously, the devil was still never far away. Alan Baer was about to come back into my life for a third time, and this time he would focus on Jacob. Not the kid I used to be, this time both Alan and I would walk away changed.

Family Boundaries

About a year after my mother's death, Jacob and I ran into Emily's son working in the same business mall as Jacob. He greeted us with hugs and demanded to know where we had been, saying that the family gossip was that we had duped an insurance company and left the country on the run. So that was Cindy and Emily's stupid conclusion as to why I stopped talking to them after our mother's death. We assured him that we hadn't left town and made plans with him for later in the week, then continued on our way to lunch. Later, I called both of my sisters and reestablished connection, not realizing that it would mean bringing chaos back onto my doorstep.

There's so much to cover up hardly anyone in the family holds truth in high regard, each changing history for the delusion or fiction of the day, like the latest one about my absconding with insurance money. When confronted about it, each family member denied believing the rumor and blamed another for saying it. Despite all of the dysfunction, having my sisters back in my life is a comfort. Whoever said that it's better to be alone than in bad company obviously wasn't as lonely as I've been throughout my life. You can pick your friends but not your family, so I resigned myself to once again having them in my life because existence without them is just too lonely.

I've always been the bad guy family scapegoat, especially for Cindy and her family in Florida. She had never come to terms with the damage done to her during her childhood and as a result had raised an out of control family. Embittered, she spent an inordinate amount of time creating misery for others, like fabricating a notorious past for her crazy, gay younger brother, like the 13-year-old serial killer story. On the other hand, I *did* believe her rumor about my father, who had a vasectomy, not being the father of my stepmother's children because they're my brother's offspring. Present during both conceptions, my brother had a way of disappearing right after the births. Inappropriate relationships abound in our family, so it wasn't difficult to deduce, given how touchy-feely my stepmother was with my brother and how much closer in age they were than she and my father.

After my father and my stepmother returned to Omaha with their two children, Cindy told everyone that the third wife had been molesting their young son in the shower. After talking with my father about it, I concluded she was right and reported them to Child Protective Services (CPS). Then, despite having made the same complaint to CPS three years before, she called the social worker and said I was crazy and it wasn't true. In a family like mine, I never knew for sure what was true and what wasn't; all I could be sure about was that the parties involved would bare-face lie if confronted.

Emily is a family scapegoat, too – the crazy troublemaker that Cindy and our father tried to divide me against. I've disregarded their biases primarily because I am close to my Emily who are night and day compared to Cindy's kids. As for my brother, he was always out of the picture for me, probably because he was another version of my father. His ex-wife ended up on the national watch list of sexual predators and he eventually died of Hepatitis C.

So it was only a matter of time before gossip began flowing, and pretty much disregarding everything coming out of Cindy's mouth, I confronted the talk head on, even to confronting my father about my own physical abuse, figuring the only way to heal was to confront the issues head on. My therapist Mrs. Smith was concerned that I was in a detrimental relationship with my family again simply for the sake of being in relationship, so she made me question my motives and helped me to look at what had been unconscious. Once I learned that most of our behavior is unconscious, I was committed to exploring and

talking about my intentions in order not to cling to unreasonable expectations and set myself up all over again. As it turned out, things fell apart with my father and I ended up walking away again, but not before I wrote him the following letter explaining how I felt. Growing stronger, I was beginning to articulate what had happened to me and how I felt about it.

December 25

Dad,

It is Christmas and all day I have been thinking of you. In fact, I've been thinking about you for a lot longer than that, but today I finally picked up pen and paper to share with you my thoughts. Cindy told me recently that you were suffering from prostate cancer, so I figured I shouldn't waste any more time, as so much of it has already been wasted.

Many things have been coming together for me, mainly due to conversations between the two of us right before I concluded that I needed to distance myself from you. Several issues have come up for me, things that have struck me as odd, and though I wasn't sure why at the time, I have reached a point of understanding that leaves no doubt in my mind.

Most of my life, I have blamed your third wife for the things that happened to me. Most of the abuse I can remember rotated around her, and I looked upon you as a weak and ineffective man who was too browbeaten to stand and defend his children. This began to change, however, after you and I got into the conversation regarding the time when you took me into the garage and beat me. You laughed when I said that you had beaten me with a 2x4, correcting me that it

"wasn't a 2x4 but a 1x6, but it probably felt like a 2x4." Not realizing it at the time, I later realized that not only did you find humor in beating a 13-year-old child, but that you derived a sense of pride from it as well. Had the roles been reversed, and had it been me beating you, I seriously doubt humor would have been your response, and I found it incredibly painful and difficult to accept that my father could have such a callous disregard for my feelings regarding an event I found incredibly traumatic. Let me just say, before you begin defining my sense of trauma, anyone who gets beaten, regardless of the circumstances, experiences trauma. However, I did not recognize the full extent of the abuse, as you well know.

It was in one of our last conversations that I found the key to why I felt so strange telling you that it was neither natural nor right for a grown woman to be taking showers with an eight-year-old boy and having you respond that it was okay because she was making sure his back was clean. It is incomprehensible how a man could be willing to allow a child to be molested without feeling compelled to do something about it. Hearing you say this clarified for me that not only did you know what was happening, but you also condoned it. You found it acceptable that your third wife was molesting your youngest son.

I am finally remembering what you did to me, dad. I remember you, your third wife, and me, all of us naked and me being forced to lie on your third wife while she held my butt so you could rape me. I don't need you to validate this for me,

and I have had more than enough of your lies. It defines why I have had many of the problems I have with my life, why sex and intimacy are almost an impossible combination for me, and why I feel so alienated from the world, although I have a plethora of love in my life. The explanation is unfortunately simple: I had monsters for parents.

You know, dad, I can't even fathom what it must be like for the two of you to look in the mirror and realize that you are nothing more than a couple of perverted child rapists, monsters, who are not only capable of but guilty of incredibly sick sex crimes against children. Your very own children.

I never wanted to see it, dad. Children have an almost impossible time comprehending and admitting that their parents could be capable of such atrocities. This is why I could not believe Emily, why I was so vehement in calling her a liar. But the time comes when one has to turn and face the demons and stop running. After I finally looked at it, it finally made sense – not just about me, but about us all.

What it must be like for you to know that you have created such pain in your life, that you are the kind of people other parents warn their children about. The hatred I feel for you at this moment is incredible. What you stole from me was something incredibly precious and sacred. Then to realize that you have gone out of your way to convince me that it was all my fault, that I was nothing more than a piece of shit who deserved everything I got. As you did with us all.

In writing this, I am finding it virtually impossible to remove the image of you reading this and becoming sexually aroused by the memories of what you have done, what you are probably still doing with your youngest child. I hate what you have done, I hate what you stand for, I hate who you are, and most of all, I hate what you've done to me. I hate feeling so violated, and I am in incredible mourning for what you willingly, selfishly, and brutally took from me. From all of us.

One of the hardest aspects of all of this for me, dad, is that even though I hate you beyond belief, I also love you. You are my father, and boys need their fathers. So knowing myself, I realize I will reach a point of forgiveness, although I am far from that now, and I find it heartbreakingly frustrating that you and I will not be able to work this through in order to heal. Obviously you and your third wife suffered severe abuse as children, but you had no right to inflict the same devastation on us. There just isn't enough time to heal from this.

So where do we go from here? I'm sure by now you are probably freaking out, not because what I am saying is wrong but because you know what I am saying is the truth. In no way am I threatening violence against you, although I can't say I haven't entertained fantasies of inflicting extreme physical pain on you both for what you have done to me. It is not in my nature. The two of you have enacted violence and rage on us all, and I am little to nothing like you. Violence would only add more pain to the situation and it is already full of so much pain I can barely stand it as it is. Besides, exposure offers much more satisfaction and perhaps in time will allow us all to heal. I am no longer going to protect your secrets, and there is no reason I should. I have no guarantee that you won't

just continue with your youngest, and I feel compelled to honor my responsibility to protect children when I can, unlike you who use them to get off by raping them.

Emily warned me not to send you this letter, that it would stir things up and that you would get a lawyer and take me to court. Although you will rant and rave and blow smoke up everyone's ass, taking me to court is not something you will want to do. In fact, you will do anything you can to dismiss me and avoid exposure. You know I am telling the truth, and you know, given the opportunity, it will not be that hard to show that you both are child rapists. Although courts can't heal the wounds, exposure will bring out the truth. Your secrets have done nothing but serve you and hurt everyone else involved, and I for one have had enough. What I want is not validation, for I know what happened. Nor do I need you to say you believe me. What I want is vindication, and if there is anyone in this family who can accomplish that, it is me. I'm not scared of you because I know two things: One, it is already too late for you to stop the truth from coming out because too many people are already aware of the situation; and two, I am comfortable knowing that both you and your third wife have always been somewhat intimidated by me because you know that I am not afraid of you and you can't control me. I am going to publically expose what you did to me, what kind of people you are, and prove to you and my brothers and sisters that it is you, not us, who should feel shame at what you did to us.

Dad, I didn't understand how I could sit in your house and you could come to mine, knowing that I had turned you both into CPS for your third wife taking showers with your son, and yet my older sister wasn't allowed near your house after you confronted her for saying you were involved in a cult. Now I understand, though. You were hoping I would never remember what you did to me. What is that, dad? Why is it that you have always tried to make me out to be an unstable liar and generally an all-around bad person? I think you've been hoping and praying I wouldn't remember because you knew that if I did remember what you had done, I wouldn't take it lightly and I certainly wouldn't take it lying down. You raped me, dad. I know this now without a shadow of a doubt, so stop trying to kid me or yourself. Physically, mentally, emotionally, and sexually, you have been nothing less than a monster.

One last thing, dad. You are a good one to preach Christianity and what you believe to be Jesus' will. Knowing this, I can pretty much guess that you believe in hell, and further, I can guess you believe you are going to burn there for the horrible atrocities you have committed. My belief is that your salvation is in your own hands. Until you admit what you have done and honestly face it, you will never be able to ask for forgiveness and thus never be able to forgive yourself, making it virtually impossible for any of us to forgive you. Haven't we all been living in hell for too long? Don't wait until you are on your death bed with prostate cancer before you face yourself, for forgiveness given out of pity is worthless. The time has come. Neither of you are going to be victorious in hiding from the world for much longer who you are and what your true faces are.

For once in your life, dad, be strong and do the right thing before you run out of time. Do you really want to face God with this on your shoulders and in your heart?

*Sincerely,
Your Son*

Empowered by finally telling the truth, I sent the letter not only to my father but to all of my siblings. I took it to my stepmother's church and their son's school. Although nothing came of any of it at the time, other than alienating me further from my father and my stepmother, telling the truth was freeing for me, and I relished the feeling despite losing chaos in the family. Nor did I foresee the changes my correspondence would have on my father, but it is true that the closer we get to death, the more important the concept of salvation becomes. Later, I would learn just how important my letter was to him in the end.

A Metaphysical Explanation of Existence

In the beginning, there was this energy that I will call God the Knowing Who wanted to experience life. Being pure awareness of Itself, God the Knowing divided into two parts, Itself and God the Experiencing, both connected by the life force of creation flowing between the two states of being. The law of thermodynamics states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed but instead moves to higher and lower intensities to ultimately seek balance. Without friction between the two forces, a kind of death occurs. In other words, death is inevitable and natural. However, since everything is a part of God, given that nothing exists that isn't God, and God never dies, then death is an illusion. In the end, we simply graduate to a new form of consciousness. This process of evolution is what I call the breath of God.

Most Satanists believe that the concept of an all-powerful God is more theory than fact, and that bad behavior doesn't lead to consequences if one is smart and powerful enough to avoid them. Satanism celebrates the ego and hedonism hopefully abhorrent to God. I, on the other hand, believe in the karma Jesus taught: that we reap what we sow. Even chaos theory supports this proverb by pointing out how small differences yield widely diverging outcomes. If a butterfly flapping its wings is causally connected to a storm on the other side of the world, what can human moral or immoral acts do? Simply put, we are responsible for the energy that we share with the world, whether we choose to be aware of what we are doing or not. First, what we believe affects what we say and do. Then the energy of those beliefs goes out from us into the world in our actions and words, then returns *seven times* the strength of what we originally sent out to further shape our beliefs, and the cycle begins again. The law of cause and effect states that when something happens, it causes something else to happen, which causes something else to happen, and so on. In human life, it works like this: I get into my car all pissed off at the world and drive like an ass, cutting people off, going slow when I could just as well get out of the way, etc. – all in an attempt to assert the dominance and control of the

bad mood I am desperately trying to escape and separate myself from. Anger and fear dominate how I impact the world. My sense of responsibility to care nullified by my bad mood, I helplessly observe how my behavior is negatively influencing others.

I cut off a woman who has just had a fight with her mother. She sees the smirk that helps me justify that what I am doing is strong even if it is wrong. The smirk adds to the rage she's already struggling with. She goes home and gets into a fight with her husband who's had a bad day at work. He jumps on his son, not realizing that his son just spent the whole day being bullied and made fun of in school and is hanging on by a thread. The son kicks the dog, etc. And I'm the butterfly that set it all in motion. As for how I will reap what I've sown, life will decide how to make me more responsible for having knowingly or unknowingly created storms in others' realities.

Looking at chaos and cause and effect from another angle, the law of attraction reigns supreme. Put out negative, get negative back. Put out positive, get positive back. Whatever you want, plant the seed and watch it manifest. You want love? Then offer love. You want respect? Then offer respect. You want compassion? Then offer compassion. Act negatively and see how you like yourself and the world around you. Feed rage and watch your relationships spiral downward.

Reaping what we sow. We are all responsible for the energy we send out. As Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living," and living an angry, lonely, isolated existence drains the soul in the end and effectively sends it to the devil, *evil* being the word *live* spelled backwards, and killing the joy in your heart is about as backwards as you can get.

One of the fundamental problems I have with Satanism, other than its disbelief in the divine presence of God, is that it *lies* when it negates or laughs off the law of karma. There is simply no way to stop the cyclic cause-and-effect of energy. Like self-fulfilling prophecies, thoughts in the mind reproduce after their kind and you will find yourself acting in ways that reflect your beliefs. Compare viewing the world as your personal power trip and viewing the world is a school in which to learn to cooperate and support and share with many different kinds of people. *Paranoia and pronoia*. Where we choose to fall between the two is up to us.

Thus Satanists are committed to convincing human beings to turn away from God and believe that laws like karma can be gotten around. Promoting fear and isolation helps to subjugate people to their will. Adolph Hitler is still the best historical example of how well subjugation to hatred and fear still work once the world is painted as godless and bereft of spiritual laws that say we can create a positive world through positive actions. If history seems cyclic and prone to repeating itself, look to propaganda and how it distorts the truth. Yesterday, it was the church that was programming how we view life; today, it's the media. Fear, war on drugs, war on terror, violence, depression – all to keep consumers

and voters in a constant state of agitation. But as Satanism taught me, negativity is only negativity, not a viable philosophy of life.

And it isn't rocket science to realize that narcissism is the enemy of self-awareness, as are ignorance and self-complacency – all of which are promoted by our media. Does this mean that the 1% of the population that owns 98% of the wealth is conspiring to keep people hopeless and vulnerable? I can't answer that question, but my experience is that the rich and powerful can do whatever they want. The Satanists I grew up around taught me that the world was theirs, the proof being that Satan wouldn't have been able to offer the world to Jesus had it not been his to offer in the first place. The devil's greatest trick has been to convince the world that he doesn't exist. Even a thief will tell you that the best way to steal is right in front of the mark because no one can believe that a thief would be so blatant.

Chaos theory, karma, cause and effect, attraction – all exchanges of energy within our conscious choice, whatever the media says to the contrary. As David sagely said, "Know yourself, control yourself, and give freely of your time and energy." The older I grow, the easier it is to see how true living comes from celebrating life, not exploiting it. True power is love. The more you love, the more love you have; the more love you have, the greater power you have over your life.

And the Band Played On

Back at The Cult of the Disillusioned, Susan and I thought that a cookbook would be just what the congregation needed to bring them closer together at a pretty chaotic time due in part to the church's growing pains and pressures of fundraising for the building campaign. Money was pouring in from everywhere and Stormy was filling the seats every Sunday. In public, Brutus thought it was a great idea and suggested that we look for someone to back the printing. But then taking me aside, he privately questioned my ability to undertake such a task. Because I looked to him as a kind of father figure, his constant mixed signals bothered me, plus he seemed to have little to no faith in God whatsoever and often criticized my faith, equating it at times to believing I'd been abducted by aliens. Later, once I learned what he'd been involved in years before, his antagonism toward a God who could exact justice made sense. At the time, however, I just found it peculiar that a "man of God" had so little faith.

A few months into the Gifts from the Heart fundraising project, Alan Baer's assistant Chris called to schedule a time for Alan to call at our home (he had gotten our number from Brutus) to discuss a financial contribution and the fundraising campaign. Alan jumped on the phone immediately, and neither of us referred to what had transpired years before. I agreed to meet him, figuring that any contribution was good, regardless of who was making it.

How I could have anything to do with him after what had transpired between us is not an easy issue. With good reason, I believed that nothing could be done to stop the man as he had more money than God. After skirting the Franklin Credit scandal, his power in Omaha was absolutely uncontestable. Never once did he pay for the crimes he was guilty of, other than paying a nominal fee for soliciting sex with minors. He was untouchable until the day he died, and the old adage "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer" was made for him. Those who fell on Alan's bad side usually paid horribly, so it was best to keep him on your good side. Now that he had become involved with The Cult of the Disillusioned, I really had no choice but to interact with him, considering that he had become one of our biggest and most solid financial contributors.

One of the most self-satisfied, egocentric game players I have ever known, Alan had a way of frighteningly reminding a person that he was the one in control. As one example among many, Alan owned a theater I once performed in, and as a birthday gift for our director he presented a marionette puppet with \$100 bills taped to the hands and feet, plus one taped to the crotch. What Alan was reminding the director was that he basically owned him, though the director didn't know what to make of the gift. This was what one could expect from Alan, the snake in the grass ready to strike at any moment, and he didn't want you to forget it. His money and criminal position made him a formidable force to be reckoned with. Many in town rightly feared him.

Brutus, godfather of one of Alan's grandchildren as well as one of his best friends, assured me that there was nothing to fear from Alan and encouraged me to allow him to help me with the cookbook Susan and I were organizing. I agreed to work with him on the church campaign, but had no intention of involving him in anything personal. Needless to say, Alan made me nervous, given how he was capable of anything.

Jacob and I had been relieved of spirit singer duty. Neither of us minded, as we were both becoming concerned over what we kept hearing about Stormy. Susan too was concerned about Stormy and Alan bedding down together, the lack of proper tracking of the money pouring in from everywhere, etc. When stressed, Susan became distant and quiet, and because of her high position in the church didn't feel it was her place to gossip. Believing we were doing what was best for the church, the three of us found it easier to just look away. But as the Irish statesman Edmund Burke said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." We were about to learn the bitter truth of his words.

Meeting with Alan was not easy, so I took Jacob with me for moral support. Not really understanding the history between us and despite my warning that with Alan what you saw was never even close to what you got in the end, Jacob found Alan fascinating and was eager to meet the man behind the legend. I couldn't get the image out of my head of the last gift I received from Alan: the

bloody towel with David's brain and bone fragments in it. This time, I promised myself, I would keep Alan as far away from Jacob as I could.

The meeting with Alan at a restaurant was strange as always. He spent a great deal of time staring at me while asking Jacob questions about me – as if I wasn't there: how we met, how much Jacob knew of my past, almost as if Alan was probing as to whether or not I was talking about things I had previously been warned to keep silent about. The only questions he had for me were about my relationship with Stormy and why I had the problems I did with him. (Of course, Brutus, like Colton in the past, was talking about me to Alan. But I didn't realize that then.) I felt like I was being set up and did my best to respond vaguely, assuring him that the church was solid as was my commitment, despite any misgivings I might have about Stormy. Finally, I turned to Jacob and said we really needed to get going, then asked Alan what he was interested in doing for the campaign. He handed me a check for five hundred dollars made out to Stormy, smiled, and wished me luck, then got up and walked out.

This was the first of many experiences with Alan during The Cult of the Disillusioned period. Each would be equally strange, each one building to the breaking point. Finally, Jacob and I would break from the church and Alan would follow us. – But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The cookbook was working as expected, lightening up members as they talked about old family recipes and leafed through other gourmet cookbooks from among the congregation. We solicited the help of two artists in town who'd designed a collection of pictures symbolizing spiritual practices; I planned to use them as page breakers to separate the categories. I relished all the organizing and planning that came with editing a book, but burying myself in work didn't safeguard me from all the chaos going on at the church.

You can take the alcoholic out of the bar, but you can't take the bar out of the alcoholic. The bigger we got, the more Stormy and his ex turned the Sunday service into a lounge act. All that was missing was the bar. In hopes of getting on television, Stormy's sermons became more and more obscure, finally ending up as a "let's all feel good" philosophy. Stormy and his posse dominated the whole church, and those voicing any dissention were quickly silenced and run out of the church.

One parishioner painted a particularly dark picture of Stormy. Coming to me in tears, she explained that Stormy had come to her mother's bedside right before her death. After whatever he said, her mother had refused to see her daughter and died a short time later. Stormy then told the woman – unattractive, somewhat slow, a loving person often treated poorly by head members of the church – that her mother had never loved her and only loved her brothers, and that was why she'd refused to see her before dying. Infuriated that a minister

could be so heartless, I held the woman in my arms while she cried for a good 30 minutes, emotionally crushed.

Mrs. Smith often listened in disbelief to the things that I was telling her were happening, concerned that I was once again placing myself in a chaotic situation and repeating behaviors I was in therapy to correct. I was unwilling to relinquish the sense of community that I felt within the church and so spent hours sorting through emotions, telling myself it wasn't all bad.

And it wasn't. Jacob and I housed two of a troop of Tibetan Buddhist monks for a weekend. Our neighbors got a kick out of watching them in their traditional robes and sandals walk around the front with our dogs, inspecting the trees, bushes, and flowers in a reverent appreciation you don't often see. The younger of the two was fluent in English, so Jacob and I heard stories about his culture and its struggles. We shared meals together, touched over and over again by their reverence for life. Every moment was a blessing to them. Had we not been involved with The Cult of the Disillusioned, we would have never gotten the chance to have such a wonderful experience.

As David said, nothing happens by accident. Working with Susan was also a blessing that I couldn't deny. Because of what I'd gone through as a child, I've always been a little "off," if you know what I mean. Despite my tendency to be hard to deal with, Susan understood me in a strange way and always found a way to get around the obstacles that my mind threw out. She let me work on the cookbook at home because I was having difficulties coming in to work on it. She was always smiling, and her gracious and loving energy put me at ease and calmed me when I was facing particularly hard situations in the church. As more members left hurt, she had her own misgivings but being from a dysfunctional childhood and good at compartmentalizing her feelings, kept assuring me that it was a necessary evil for the progress of the church.

As Stormy's right hand in the land campaign, Susan had to work with Alan Baer, too, and found it as impossible as I. By sharing stories about Alan, we discovered that we had more in common than we thought. She'd run around with Baer boys when she was 15 in the early Eighties and knew more about the bar scene than I did.

God works in mysterious ways, and The Cult of the Disillusioned was having an effect on my relationship with Jacob. Looking at what an asshole Stormy was got me to thinking about my own behavior and my intense guilt about my promiscuity and sneaking around. There I was, judging Stormy for behaviors I was guilty of. Watching how he interacted with others gave me a chance to learn from his mistakes. Damn if he didn't become a sort of reverse spiritual guide in the end, though it was far from what he would have expected or wanted.

Finally unable to take it anymore, I went to Jacob and told him that I was sick of walking all over him and if he didn't start holding me responsible for my bad behavior, I was going to end the relationship. We both knew I was sleeping around, but not knowing how to broach the subject with me, he had been remaining silent. My greatest terror was that I was becoming like my father. The issues I had with Stormy, Alan, and the church paled next to the consuming fear that I was destined to become my dad because his blood flowed in my veins. I desperately needed Jacob to help me with my boundaries to keep that from happening. The blatant disregard my father showed for those closest to him had always been tolerated, with no one saying anything. If Jacob started holding me responsible for the pain I was causing him, it would help me to hold myself responsible. As Mrs. Smith said, my sexual acting out was a re-victimization of myself. Growing up in a family with no boundaries meant I would have to re-condition myself to take responsibility for my actions without beating myself down into the ground. Enlisting the help of those closest to me (namely Jacob) seemed like the logical place to start.

I don't think that anyone foresaw what was to come next for The Cult of the Disillusioned, but I think it is safe to say that it caught everyone off guard. It would be the first time I'd ever seen Alan take it up the butt himself. Stormy was about to show us just how strong his propensity to create chaos was and we would all find ourselves spinning in the winds of his upcoming tornado.

Further Journeys

To Brutus' dismay, I was furthering my studies in Shamanism and being healed in the process. Working from within my inner consciousness, I was beginning to expand my worldview and how I looked at life, and it was calming me. My journeys worked within the context of what I understood, but at first they were frightening. The first journey was the worst, though the journeys I would take after my father's death would be even more frightening.

Soon after my soul retrieval with Kathy, I didn't wait for the upcoming introductory class to see if I could actually journey myself. Alone in my apartment, I lit some incense and said some prayers for protection and guidance, and as my stereo drummed lay down, closed my eyes, and waited to see what would happen. The drumming calmed me, and with the incense, I drifted away. When journeying, I let my mind to go, allow myself to daydream, and my imagination take me where it wants. I let my mind play out while allowing myself to become a bystander, much as if I were actually dreaming. Shamanism is like a form of self-hypnosis with a strong emphasis on self-help and strengthening the psyche.

In the books I'd read, it said to find a safe place in your mind to begin your journey – a field or beach, some retreat where you are comfortable. To get to the upper world, picture yourself going through a hole in the sky.

Psychologically, that will bring you to a world that is bright and cheerful. In the upper world, you will meet ancestors, guides, and angels, basically anyone you need for guidance and support. If your intent is to seek out specific advice, this is the level you would visit. Accessing the lower world is much the same. Picture yourself in your safe place and find a hole you can go *down* into, maybe a rabbit hole like Alice in Wonderland, or imagine following the roots of a tree down, or swimming down to the bottom of the ocean or a lake. The important aspect is to imagine going down into a hole and coming out into the lower world on the other side.

For me, the lower world is always forested and shadowy, not in a bad way but like when vegetation blocks out the sun. Full of lakes and forests, the lower world is peaceful and serene. It is in the lower world that Shamans believe you can connect with your spirit guides represented as animals. Bear energy heals me, Wolf energy commands, Spider energy captivates, and so on. Shamans don't *become* the animal they imagine so much as take on the animal's attributes and try to derive a personal sense of awareness as a result, believing that the lessons of the universe can always be found in nature.

The middle world is the most dangerous and the hardest to navigate because it is connected to the material plane in a way the other two aren't. You might encounter definite pockets of extremely concentrated negative energy. Many of the dead as spirits are trapped in the middle world and angry, particularly those who while alive lacked clear concepts of right and wrong and thus got caught up in experiences they were unable to release at death. One of the most important tools of the Shamanic trade is the ability to help such spirits cross over into the light. Only an adept Shaman is able to safely navigate these invisible perils in everyday life.

Perhaps because of my past, this was the plane I ended up on during my first journey. Standing beside an angel, I was surrounded by chaos in the midst of the Great Bang, watching planets fly past and out into the universe like they were nothing. I was informed that I was part of the stardust making up all the life in the universe. Frightened by what I was experiencing, I ended the journey as soon as I started it. I ripped the mask off that I had over my eyes and was confronted by a sight I will never forget. I was surrounded by beings. I could see their iridescent outlines in the darkened room all around me in a circle. Although I have always believed in ghosts, I had never seen one, let alone a group of them. I let out a scream and dodged for the lights, freaked out in a way that is hard to explain.

I reached for the phone and called Kathy. Believing every word, she was amazed at the intensity of my first journey, given that many people aren't able to succeed in journeying until after a significant number of tries. She believed that what I saw was the universe reaching a point of rebirth. The record meteor shower that night for her validated what I'd seen. Having been a shaman for years, she thought that finding myself surrounded by spirits was significant. She asked if I knew why they were there. I intuited it was because they were proud

of me and what I was doing. Kathy encouraged me to take further steps in the practice.

For me, the stories of Noah getting every species in two's on a boat and the cloud and pillar of fire Moses followed for 40 years are symbolic, not real history. Nor am I sure that Jesus died on the cross, and if so, what special significance it would have for me. Coupled with the whole Antichrist scenario that kept me from believing that the likes of me could be saved, I certainly didn't view the world through Christian lenses. Art passionately argued with me about the salvation of Jesus Christ being the only thing that would save from the turmoil of my past, and urged me to spurn the occult and return to church – not The Church of the Bicycle – and start praying rather than journeying.

But I've never wanted to be saved from my sins. I enjoy learning from my mistakes and have always believed in karma, one of the greatest gifts of my life. I believe that our souls are tempered in the flames of experience. Do unto others as they would do unto you, or rather in our narcissistic culture, do unto others as they would do unto themselves, because everything we do returns to us many times over.

I had grown tired of "washing my hands in the blood" and equating Christianity with a celebration of the death of their savior. For me, the importance of Jesus Christ was not that he died but that he lived and what he preached while alive. The first rule, Love; the second, Know Thyself. The Kingdom of Heaven is within! Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, this is what makes the New Testament new. I told Art that I was going to go with my interpretation rather than his.

It is true what we were doing as a shamanic group shared similarities with what I grew up with, and that journeying was a natural and normal transition away from Satanism, similar in focus and concentrated on psychic abilities, but vastly different in practice. Like high priests, shamans deal with the spirit world and the archetypes within human beings, but in a way wherein the primary focus is one of bringing balance, both psychologically and spiritually, with nature providing the example of balance. In both Satanism and Shamanism, energy is everything, but the shaman attempts to blend with the energy, not dominate it, and bring harmony to people's lives. Both have their ceremonies, drums and rattles, candles and incense, but in shamanic ceremonies the singing and chanting attempt to offer a celebration unto God rather than the inverse. And finally, instead of breaking children's will through trauma that makes them feel abandoned and alone, Shamanism encourages group journeying, believing that there is power in "two or three are gathered in my name," as Jesus says in the New Testament.

Most interesting in the contrast between Shamanism and Satanism is what shamans call the *dismemberment journey*. In a visionary state, I was once eaten by a swarm of piranhas, and another time ripped apart by crows. Old

myths are filled with this theme of the hero being dismembered, journeys in which the soul is ripped apart so that it can be transformed. Satanists have for centuries distorted this psychic transformation into something literal and terribly destructive. Each time I underwent the shamanic dismemberment journey, something in my life fell apart and was transformed into something better than before.

In a class on Celtic shamanism, I was introduced to the archetype energies of the Irish Goddess Brighid and her son Lugh. Brighid as the Mother of Creation stands in the power of the dark feminine, whereas Lugh is a trickster spirit who grants wishes, but you must be careful what you ask for because he likes to stir things up as much as he can. Identifying with both, I was able to explore my strong feminine side as well as my playful masculine side by visualizing the two at different times, trying to meld my intentions with what I thought theirs would be, and trying to emulate their feelings so that I might incorporate them into my behavior.

Psychoanalyst C. G. Jung explains archetypal energies as symbolic aspects of the psyche that every human, in some way, aspires to. The Hero, the Trickster, the Mother, the Father, the Son, the Daughter, the Old Man – all are psychic states of being that humanity has an innate connection with. Symbolizing both good and bad, they signify desires and fears. Remarkably, we are each of us born with an awareness of archetypes Dr. Jung called the *collective unconscious*. When our myths and legends were our teachers, we honored the sacredness of each state of being in ways we are now unable to comprehend. As our myths have more and more sunk into the unconscious, so has the sacredness they inspired, leaving us a people yearning for the answers still held in the secrets of our buried myths. Shamanism is a way I can honor the collective unconscious teeming with archetypes, and reconnect with my spirituality in a way that neither fundamentalism, Christian or Satanic, could ever offer. Given both Jungian and shamanic respect for the dream, Mrs. Smith was interested in seeing whether either could help me with my nightmares that had now become chronic, sometimes robbing me of sleep for weeks. Of course, all of this would come crashing down and I would find myself being ripped apart in this middle realm.

A Great Unveiling

Things were unraveling at The Cult of the Disillusioned. A demanding perfectionist, Stormy's ex took over the music and the band and often inspired thoughts of punching him in the face. In his overly laced blouses, he seemed to fashion himself as Vampire Lestat, and it was true that he was quite capable of sucking the life force out of people. With Alan's help, Stormy and Sunday services went cable access station. Rumors circulated about Brutus having inappropriate contact with minors in the church. I wanted to believe the rumor was connected to Brutus and Stormy butting heads at staff and board meetings, but Brutus' jokes about 15-year-old boys didn't help.

At the special town hall meeting about how to deal with the allegations, Brutus was glaringly absent. Many felt it was inappropriate for the church to be doing such things in public, and I was the only one who personally defended Brutus. It was a sense of things to come.

Bent on impressing Jacob, Alan invited us to dine with him and his wife at their home in Fairacres. It was impeccably decorated with rooms of Asian art, and his wife was charming, her mannerisms and way of speaking reminding both of us of my mother in a way we found endearing. A powerhouse in her own right, she was from old money and had brought a fortune with her into the marriage. Perhaps ignorant of Alan's true nature, she was a very devout Jew. She didn't care for Stormy and like Art considered him a snake oil salesman. She entertained us with her views on not just Stormy but on The Cult of the Disillusioned in general, never once concerning herself with the fact that both Jacob and I were members. Brutally honest in a way I hadn't been around since my mother, I found her refreshing and wondered what the hell she saw in Alan.

Alan often invited discomfiting dinner guests without letting us know, such as at an exclusive restaurant in one of the casinos in town where he was well known, and who should arrive but Stormy and a date. Most recently, Stormy had objected to my request that we keep track of how many cookbooks sold and where. For reasons I would soon learn, it had increased the friction between us. Alan sat smiling, watching us sneer at each other. Angry that the monkey man had once again set me up, I fought back with passive aggression. After the hosts ordered, Alan a salad and his wife a sandwich, I convinced Jacob and Stormy's date to join me in ordering the expensive steak Dianne with lobster tail, then spent the rest of the evening carrying on pleasant forced conversation with Alan's wife while angrily staring at Alan and Stormy. Offended by my submissive but blatantly rudeness, Alan's wife refused to dine with us again. I'd hoped that Alan would follow suit, but I couldn't have been more wrong.

At The Cult of the Disillusioned Christmas party, Stormy stood up to exclaim that "our church is the loosest church in town and everyone is drinking so we'd better all stay because we never know what could happen." I'd stared at my plate while Alan bragged about how he'd got out of the Franklin thing years before with money he'd channeled through his foundation and into Omaha, laughing about his invincibility and making innuendos about killing people and how easy it was to dispose of problems if you had the knowhow. Jacob and I left immediately after dinner and I ended up vomiting the rest of the night, unable to get Alan's smirk out of my mind.

After Susan left the church, Stormy made an executive decision to replace me as head of Gifts from the Heart and effectively removed me from cookbook sales, as well. Once this occurred, Jacob had had enough and was encouraging me to let The Cult of the Disillusioned go, along with the cookbook I'd spent so much time producing. When Stormy next disbanded Gifts from the

Heart, I quit, walking away from the community I'd once felt so passionately about. Disheartened, I felt beaten once again. Brutus was still around, but we both had busied ourselves with our own lives and rarely got together. Six months later, Stormy left the church, too, and returned to Hawaii no doubt to begin another divide-and-conquer ministry in another cheated church, leaving Alan high and dry and his fans to wonder what had happened. Even with him gone, I vowed never to return to the church, choosing instead to let go and let God.

Then out of the blue Alan offered Jacob a job.

Unhappy with his current employment, Jacob was intrigued by Alan's offer, but wanted to know more before he made any decisions. I can't tell you what the job was or what it entailed because I knew for a fact that Jacob would turn Alan down. Not once had I interfered with Jacob's career choices, but this time I put my foot down and told Jacob that he was going to say thank you but no thank-you. I wasn't willing to listen to any debate. We fought the entire weekend before he was to meet Alan. Jacob was a realist and knew that all wealthy men are dangerous and Jacob wanted a shot at having the kind of power to which Alan had access. Tired of barely scraping by, he felt that Alan could open opportunities that he didn't have (which would change in the future and without Alan's help, I am happy to report). Knowing just how dangerous Alan could be, I was not to be swayed.

That Monday, both of us arrived at the gay restaurant to meet Alan who was less than thrilled to see me. Asking me how long Jacob and I had been together, Jacob proudly answered. Staring me straight in the face, Alan then replied, "Yeah, I had one of those once, too."

I took what he said as a direct threat and sat throughout the interview, waiting for my moment. It was true that he was dying of prostate cancer and that his health had become a roller coaster of doctors and recommendations as he fought to avoid dying. He was beginning to look a bit frail, but I knew he was as evil as ever. I'd had enough experience with him to realize that referring to our relationship in the past tense was a direct threat and knew that for me it was now or never.

When Jacob excused himself to go the bathroom, I turned to Alan and said, "I feel sorry for you." He demanded to know what I was talking about, so I explained how all he had around him were people who wanted something from him. Had he been a clerk at a grocery store, no one would have looked twice at him. I expressed sympathy for his plight and how lonely it must feel to know that people only loved what he could do for them, how hard it must be never knowing if people actually loved him or just loved the things he could give them. Enraged, he said not a word until at last he excused himself and left, not even bothering to say goodbye to Jacob. It was the last time we would hear

from Alan. He would be dead in November 2002, eaten alive by his own asshole – a fitting death for a man who had screwed so many.

A Major Faux Pas

Although tedious and painful, therapy was going well. Through self-discovery, I was able to identify and change the behaviors I was unhappy with, but it took an inordinate amount of time and work. But I kept at it, figuring that the only way to curb unconscious acting out in myself was to plod onward, exploring my thoughts and feelings regarding why I saw life the way I did.

Jacob was certainly growing sick of hearing about my infidelities with strangers and at last began holding me accountable and confronting me when he was angry or unhappy. Having grown up in a family that did not welcome his opinions, he was starting to learn to stand up for himself. Though a new experience for him, he became adept remarkably fast. Anyone else would have left me long ago, but Jacob loved me in a way I wasn't used to. Even now that he was beginning to hold me responsible, he was still expert at loving me unconditionally, often forgiving me before even before confronting me.

As for the Antichrist obsession, a friend of mine cut me down to size when she exclaimed, "You're the Antichrist? You? What are you going to do, insult people on their clothing choices? The minute they feel bad, you will, too, so you won't make much of an Antichrist." Still worried that I would become like my father, her comment helped to ease my fears and now, whenever I think back on her comment, I laugh.

Mrs. Smith was convinced that the Antichrist conviction came from my family doing their best to pigeonhole me into playing the bad guy. Often telling me that I wasn't as crazy as I believed, she hoped I could overcome the effects of the trauma through mentally exploring memories and reliving the feelings associated with those memories in a safe place where she could help to guide me in letting the past go. In other words, to get to Heaven you sometimes have to go through Hell. Even Jesus Christ had to do this during his transition to Heaven. Facing my demons within, I had no idea that I would eventually face a literal demon because the Cult wasn't finished with me, even after Alan's death. I wouldn't know this until my father's demise.

Shamanic seminars came along less frequently and I was no longer involved with The Cult of the Disillusioned. My faith was not less, but I was putting it on the back burner and not thinking about it much. Faith takes work, and I was tired of worrying about God. I was also disabled and out of work and had an abundance of time on my hands, perfect conditions for the idle mind to become the devil's playground. Having nothing better to do, I was spending a lot of time sexually acting out and eventually was busted in the park. Omaha police busted

an inordinate number of men in the parks, but had a hard time controlling crime downtown. Still, this bust was a blessing in disguise.

It was a January night after the Christmas I wrote the letter to my father and Jacob and I had just had a fight. I had driven to the park after midnight to smoke my last joint. Jacob was vehemently against drugs, so I kept my occasional marijuana use to myself. It was below zero that night and I figured I'd have a chance to be alone, calm down, and zone out enough to go back home. Conflicted over my sexual abuse as a child, I had begun telling myself that it never happened, and that I was wrong about my past. Worried about the letter I had just written, all I wanted to do was get high and escape.

Denial is strong in those who have experienced great trauma, and it was especially true of me. I found it more comfortable to tell myself that I was crazy than to consider the implications of what had happened to me. I spent a lot of time trying to escape the memories constantly intruding on me. Desperately lonely, my mother and the church gone, I spiraled down into the hands of the law. An undercover policeman pulled up in a blue Ford pickup exactly like what my father drove when he worked for a propane company. In a ball cap, clean-shaven with a mustache, he was the spitting image of my father when he was younger. Rolling down his window, he asked what I was up to and if I wanted to go for a ride. Uncomfortable, I agreed to meet him on the darker side of the park closer to the road. Long story short, I got in and out of his truck twice, unable to escape him for reasons I couldn't understand. Adamant, he kept asking if I wanted to blow him or if I wanted him to blow me. I wanted neither but didn't want to hurt his feelings, and so ended up telling him we could meet later on at the parking lot of a nearby grocery store, which got me busted.

I had had more sex than I could remember in the parks, but on this particular night I was neither looking for nor wanting sex. And yet there was something captivating about the cop who reminded me of my father. I found myself feeling like a child, unable to escape a situation I knew was wrong. Feeling like I had been set up, I was angry and argued with him while he wrote me a ticket for soliciting sex and told me that men only came to the parks for one reason. I knew otherwise, but also felt like karma was coming to bite me in the ass. I accepted the ticket, left the park, lit my joint, drove home – and immediately told Jacob about the whole episode.

The next day while talking with Mrs. Smith, I had a hard time dealing with the fact that even though I had wanted to extricate myself from dealing with the policeman, I had felt *frozen*, unable to do anything other than what I was told. Getting in and out of his truck a couple times, I had plenty of time to extricate myself, but like a deer in headlights, I felt trapped and responded to the situation much as I would have as a child. She explained that it was common for victims of abuse to find themselves in situations resembling the original trauma and for them to feel as immobilized as they did as children. Although

my behavior was inappropriate, it was understandable considering what I had experienced as a kid, and she felt that much could be derived from the experience if I was willing to honestly explore it.

Jacob took it in stride like everything else and supported me as I tried to fight the entrapment in court. I chose to fight the charges rather than plead guilty, believing that what had happened to me was happening to men all over town, perhaps as a backlash against the gay-dominated days of the 80's. Omaha had begun a no tolerance for homosexuality campaign and the police were busting up to 400 men a summer in the parks around town, then publishing their names in the newspaper and on television, even proposing to put the names up on a billboard. Several men committed suicide after their lives were destroyed.

Everyone in my life knew about the charges I was facing; I had started to become forthright about my life. Although I had been guilty of having sex in the parks in the past, that night I had no such intention. I started out fighting the charges but ended up pleading no contest after being told that there was no way out of the charges. In and out of his truck twice, there was simply no way to prove that anything but what they said happened. So I paid the \$98 fine and at least kept my name out of the news. Although it is one of the most humiliating experiences of my life, I have to say that I am glad for two reasons that it happened:

One, it is evidence of what I went through at a time when I really needed clarification. Because the policeman reminded me of my father, I found myself reliving the mindset of what it was like to be a child and experienced once again how *powerless* I felt. The experience served to convince me that the fear I felt for my father was real and not something I had made up in my child mind. Projecting my dad onto the policeman "triggered" me back to what it was like to be a child. As a result, I was able to explore buried feelings associated with my father.

Secondly – even though it wouldn't be until years later – the experience gave me the chance to reach out and get closer to Art, who would experience his own trauma of being abducted by an escaped rapist and held hostage for three days. The man escaped prison guards with a *papier-mâché* gun made from the cardboard middle of a toilet paper roll and happened onto Art as he was coming home from the gym. By this time, the convict had stolen a realistic toy gun, with which he tricked Art into his apartment and eventually tied him up to his bed. Dialing the phone with a pencil in his teeth, Art finally was able to call the police three days later. After a shootout a few blocks from Art's apartment, the police apprehended the rapist and saved Art from his captivity.

Never having really understood my trouble with PTSD, Art gained a whole new appreciation for my plight in life, and we often spoke of his experience and how it had emotionally affected him. Boldly declaring that I would never have let anyone tie me up, I then looked back on my situation in the park and called Art to apologize, realizing how wrong I probably was. Had the man in the park been a serial killer instead of a policeman, I most likely would have found myself

paralyzed and then dead. Had I not experienced the entrapment, I might never have known such an important aspect about myself, and I certainly wouldn't have been able to understand Art's suffering regarding his own vulnerability. I regret having wasted so much of my life in the parks, but I do not regret being busted. It was a wakeup call, an undeniable proof that I was running out of control.

If we allow ourselves, there is much to be learned from our mistakes. The key is not to be shamed into thinking that one event or situation defines you as a person. Within the context of our therapeutic relationship, Mrs. Smith showed me the value of this way of thinking. Together, we examined every nuance that caused me to fill the void inside with strangers. She taught me that the only thing we are able to truly control is ourselves, and that the only constant in life is change. By delving deep into my psyche, I came to see that my life needed serious change and that I could only achieve it by intensely focusing on my behavior.

The World around Me

Colton returned to Omaha the day my mother died, wasted on the train with his youngest daughter and hysterically distraught that he was back in Omaha. We didn't see each other until later when he would describe how broken, lost, and confused he was, having found nothing on the East Coast after his mother died about a year before mine. Released from her spell, he seemed to be experiencing his own version of the caregiver syndrome by wondering what was left for him, now that his mother was dead.

Those who have grown up with neglect and abuse generally have codependent bonds with their parents. Colton struggled for relationship with his mother as I did with my father, both of us constantly trying to win the approval continually withheld. Both his mother and my father were sociopaths who were rarely rational and forced people to jump hoops, masters at demanding the self-sacrifice and deprecation that kept both of us captive well into adulthood. I understood Colton like a brother, but didn't trust him. When he came back to town, Alan was still alive and kicking and I still resented Colton for getting us into the mess years before ending in David's death. But then he'd been inducted into Alan's world at a very early age. I didn't hate him but rather looked at him as yet another of Alan's victims and therefore forgave his transgressions. Omaha criminals had a way of involving defenseless kids who couldn't protect themselves. Still, Colton and I avoided each other for years, distanced by our common past.

Brutus was actually fulfilling the role in my life that Colton once had, reporting to Alan about me, though it wouldn't be until several years later that I would realize it. Extremely intelligent Brutus contacted me through the Internet, posing as an older woman interested in The Church of the Disillusioned. After

the “woman” wanted me to talk dirt about the church and its leadership, I figured out that it was Brutus. You would think that I would have ended the friendship there and then, but desperate for a father figure, I didn’t, plus I wasn’t the best at picking real friends.

A month before Jacob bought a house, Brutus needed a traveling companion to accompany him to Seattle. His attendant had canceled unexpectedly, so I agreed to go with him. The three-week trip began normally enough. We adjusted to being in a car together for hours at a time, catching up on The Cult of the Disillusioned, Stormy and his ex, our perspective partners, and the beautiful scenery. The one topic Brutus was adamant about not touching on was my past, telling me to just get over it.

Things began to change the night he had a nightmare and woke up the whole household where we were staying, screaming, “Shut the fuck up!” Scared out of a dead sleep, I checked on him. He was still asleep. We asked him about it the next day, but he said he didn’t remember, then told me he was dreaming of Stormy and his ex. Considering the town hall meeting Stormy had held to embarrass Brutus, I just assumed that was it and put it out of my mind. But things drastically changed between us. Brutus started getting mean and critical of everything, chiding me about my therapy and spiritual practice. After returning to Omaha, we didn’t speak with each other for some time.

I see now that Brutus, my father, and oldest sister didn’t want me exploring my past or giving it a great deal of thought. Encouraging me to forget it and walk away, it made people uncomfortable. It was true that I had grown used to keeping silent, not wanting to weird anyone out with the horror stories of my past. Because I depended on the counsel of my friends and considered Brutus to be one of my closest friends, it hurt me when he was so unsupportive. Later, I would discover that he had his reasons.

Other than Jacob, Emily was the only one who supported my therapy and commented on how much it seemed to be helping. She and I had come to terms regarding her conflict with dad, and I was enjoying spending time with her family, and the conversation was usually far off in left field. Her history of going in and out of hospitals may have broken her marriage, but she was still optimistic and incredibly proud of herself for finally getting her masters. At the top of her class in both her bachelor’s and master’s programs, her future seemed bright, and for the first time she started seeing what she had to offer. Both of us were estranged from our father and found comfort in each other’s company, the two black sheep of the family.

Cindy was another story. Though we’d gotten closer after our mother died, she still played games, especially between dad and me. She even caught herself in her own lies, and then would explain, making excuses for all the inconsistencies in her stories. The chosen one until my father’s third wife’s first child, she had

been displaced in a way that broke her heart. My father broke her nose when she was a teenager and she had run off to Florida to escape my family and their abuse. You can take the girl out of chaos, but you can't take the chaos out of the girl. In a loveless marriage with a clan of unruly children and later alone, she spent much of her time living in a fantasy world of lies and delusions that would prove her downfall.

The more Jacob called me on my bad behavior, the closer we became. The park incident had opened my eyes, and with Mrs. Smith pointing out how my sexual acting out was re-abusing myself, I slowed my promiscuity. But to change behaviors, you often have to change the playground they occur in as well as the playmates themselves. I stopped going to parks and bookstores looking for sex. Grateful that Jacob hadn't dumped me during this self-destructive time, I found myself caring so much for him that I didn't want to keep hurting him.

Much like Colton, I had been searching for family all my life, and when my mother was alive, she, Jacob, and I had bonded into a family under the harshest of circumstances, and its *grace* lasted in our relationship even after my mother died. Patient and understanding, he understood that my behavior was a result of what I had experienced as a child and hoped that he could help me grow past it in a way that would make me happy. His greatest concern was that I was always unhappy and he did what he could to cheer me up whenever he could, regardless of what I was guilty of. His was the first unconditional love I had ever experienced. He saved me in every way another person can save a person.

I began exploring my artistic side by way of a sewing machine. Proficient at sewing, I set up a studio in our home and started making wall hangings. I never made much money at it, but was still gratified that everyone I knew wanted me to make something for them. I spent the next few years sewing away. Much like a drum beat, there is something comforting about the sound of a sewing machine in action, and I fashioned my work area as one of prayer, a place to meditate and be active. Sewing became a way to once again explore my spiritual side, and once again I found myself thinking of God and of love while I worked. And when Cindy called to say that my father's health was poor and that he was having a hard time reaching out to me even though he wanted to, I decided to make a piece of artwork for him as physical proof that I loved him. Actually, I decided to instead reach out to his third wife, believing that he would get the message in the end so that he might reach out to me, as I was afraid of once again being hurt. Then during a journey, I was told to offer the gift to her and not him. But I ignored the message until it began invading my dreams. I finally decided to make the project with her in mind.

She'd been the only "mother" I'd known since I was three. My mother had gallivanted all over the nation as an alcoholic, so we didn't have much of a relationship when I was a child. Forced to call my evil stepmother "mom," I

certainly struggled with forgiveness. At last, I sent her the following letter with the wall hanging that took me months to make:

Mom,

*When I first embarked on making this Celtic cross, my intention was to make it and hang it up as a talisman to remind me of my spiritual path. Before I had even begun to trace it out, I had given it a name: Faith in **Descent ion**, it being my belief that to ascend into heaven one must first descend into hell in order to face darkness and come to terms with demons within. This wall hanging symbolizes the light that would comfort me during my journey. Hanging on the wall, it would remind me that no matter how dark or ugly or scary things seem, it's okay and I am safe because God is within me showering me with love, assuring me that no matter what happens, no matter how dark it becomes or how long and hard the road seems, eventually storms will pass and balance will be regained.*

When I create artwork, I do so with intent, for I believe that doing something with conscious intent is much like casting a spell – that the focus of your energy shifts and opens a space, allowing the universe to bring you what you need. Prayer is another name for it, but in a way that you believe and realize that the Great Spirit has already answered you before you even finish speaking the words out loud. Of course, the true power of prayer is not that it changes the will of God, but that it softens our hearts and opens our mind and spirit to the infinite possibilities, changing us instead.

Throughout the months it took to make this, I spent a great deal of time contemplating our relationship and past history. It is funny the things art brings out of the soul if you allow it. So many intense emotions poured forth, compounded by the fact that I am where I am at this moment in my life. I feel as if my eyes were opened and I have reached some point of enlightenment. You see, I realized if this project was truly to symbolize my spiritual beliefs, it should not hang on my wall but on the wall of someone who needs to be assured that regardless, they are loved by God and the Universe. My heart tells me that person is you.

I have thought quite a bit about recent conversations that you and I have had and discovered two important things. First, in spite of everything in the past, I still have deep, strong feelings for you as my mother. Second, and perhaps more compelling, I realized that you see yourself as unredeemable. I always felt you hated or at least despised me a great deal, and always blamed myself. Now, however, I am not so sure that it all hasn't been a projection for the feelings you hold for yourself. I know well how this works, for it has only been by seeing it in myself that has allowed me to see it in others. Having to learn how to forgive myself has given me the opportunity to see past my own baggage to get at what I feel is the most important thing: finding compassion and understanding for both myself and those around me.

A core belief of mine is that there are no coincidences or accidents. Rather, life is a dance instrumented by God and played out by the Universe, and no one is capable of thwarting the will of God. There is no separation between God and man. God is everything and everyone, everywhere. So that which happens does so because it is supposed to for whatever reason. This in no way negates our responsibility for our choices, for we are definitely responsible for the things we do and the energy we share with others. In the end, we always reap what we sow. If everything is the handiwork of God – and I don't believe there is anything that is not the handiwork of God – then those things that we are terrified to view in the darkness of our own hearts and actions are also instruments of God. I believe God is found even in the darkest, most shameful parts of our being, and even though it is unbearably painful to honestly stand fully conscious, if one does it long enough – regardless of how painful, heart wrenching, or traumatic it may be – you can feel an undeniable sense of God's love, for it is in the shelter of this port that made weathering those storms possible in the first place.

I am concerned you have hard days ahead of you, especially after dad passes, and I just wanted you to know that regardless of the past, regardless of things that have happened and the things you have done, have hope and try not to despair because God and the Universe love you, and in the end when we pass over, the only hell awaiting us is the true and undeniable knowledge of the love we denied ourselves and others while we were here. For me, the only way to avoid this fate is to open my heart, be honest with myself, and try to be brave enough to take the chance to cultivate love whenever I can, amending grievances, both mine and others', regardless of the cost to my ego. If your focus is one of holding onto and controlling life and others, you will see devils ripping from you all that you hold dear. But if you take responsibility for yourself and realize you must first BE the change you wish to see in the world, suddenly the devils transform into angels and help you release yourself from the chains that bind you so that you may become who you were always meant to be.

Please accept this wall hanging and perhaps hang it on your stairwell to serve as a talisman offering comfort and protection for you and your home, reminding you that no matter how dark the days ahead may appear, all will work out because God and the Universe love you, as do I.

*Wishing you the Best,
Your Son*

So I dropped it off at her work, once again allowing my hopes to rise only to have them dashed against the rocks once again five days later when Cindy called to tell me that my stepmother had sold the hanging. I have heard it said that one should give freely with an open heart, and I figured that the gift was sold because I resented giving any piece of me to that woman and was only doing so because I was asked to do so in a shamanic journey. Relieved that she didn't keep it, I was only sad that my father had most likely not read the letter I

wrote, given that it was more directed at him than his third wife. But I would get my chance to speak to him a few weeks before his death and hear his admission that would change all of our lives forever.

Skeletons in the Closet

Cindy was enraged to discover that my stepmother was taking the downstairs phone off

the hook to keep us older kids from our father in hopes that he would die and we wouldn't know. What bothered me more was how she and my brother pushed to make him seem crazy. My older sisters argued against it, finding him to be rational and cantankerous. But still there was the push to discredit him. Death brings out funny things in people, and there was no question that my stepmother was greedy. My father had money from his parents and grandparents, and if there was one thing that the third wife valued, it was wealth. Assuming it was some sort of greedy game on the part of my brother and the third wife to keep the money between them, I waited, figuring it would all eventually come out in the wash. Neither integrity nor honesty ran very deep in my family, so I kept my distance, thanks to Jacob's urgings.

It wasn't that Jacob disliked my family; he just didn't like the effect they had on me. Jacob liked balance and peace and found me difficult to deal with after I'd been with my family. Once, Jacob, a friend of ours, and I went to Chicago for a week and Cindy decided to drive five hours from Michigan with her husband, one of her daughters and her two children in a small sports car to visit us at the hotel the day before we were to leave. Needless to say, they were a bit wound up when they arrived. While all of us were sitting in the hotel lobby, my brother-in-law went on and on about the abuse I'd endured from my stepmother, laughing about how awful it must have been to take showers with her. Paralyzed, I had no idea what to say, nor did anyone else. It went on for an hour until Cindy decided it was time to leave. Back up in the room, Jacob and I ended up in a screaming match. I was livid that he hadn't done anything to help the situation. Of course, none of it was his fault; it was my own helplessness speaking. Later, I apologized, but it ruined our vacation. None of us spoke the whole trip back home.

This was how it was with my family. I thought my attachment to them was because blood is thicker than water, but Jacob said it was my "messiah complex," my need to save everyone around me. He suggested I channel the messiah energy someplace more healthy instead of allowing myself to get caught up in family chaos. I knew he was right, and began delving deeper into my Shamanic practices and artwork.

My sessions with Mrs. Smith were intense as I plowed through the confusion I felt by being pulled in so many directions with regard to my family. The anger I felt toward my mother was still raw, and I was also angry with myself for not

being more of a son to her, although Mrs. Smith often explained that my parents' choices were not my fault. I was scared that I'd end up like them, figuring the nut doesn't fall far from the tree. Assuring me that I was nothing like my parents, Mrs. Smith often worked with this fear, explaining that the nut may not fall far from the tree but then is often picked up by birds, squirrels, and the wind and carried further than the little nut could ever imagine. This analogy made sense and helped me accept that I am nothing like my family, especially my father. Night and day!

I would especially realize how true this was when my father brought Cindy and Stephen to Omaha to see him before he died. At the time, no one was really speaking to Emily and I wasn't speaking to my Stephen nor my father. Since the letter I'd written him years before, I had had no intention of rekindling our relationship. That left Cindy, so we made plans to see each other when she came up. My stepmother made all of the travel arrangements and planned to be off work the entire time of my brother's and sister's stay, probably so that she could watch over everything. Then after visiting Jacob and me, Cindy, always unhealthy, ended up in the hospital and had to stay several weeks more to recuperate before she could fly home, which thwarted my stepmother's plans. So my brother, the homeless alcoholic, extended his stay, too. Looking back, I now realize that my brother and stepmother were concerned about what my father might say on his deathbed, and that keeping my brother around was their attempt to keep conversations from revealing family secrets.

The night my stepmother took my brother to the airport, I called my father's house to talk to Cindy to make plans to see her before she left. Grabbing the phone from her, my tearful father begged me to come and see him, telling me that he had something to tell me. Making me swear that I would come immediately, he gave the phone back to my sister, who was just as surprised as I was. Assuring me that neither my brother nor stepmother was home, Jacob and I drove the 20 minutes to my father's house.

My sister met us at the door and ushered us into the living room where my father was sitting on the couch. The sight of him took me aback. He was no longer the oppressive, domineering man he had been but was now a frail, sad individual who looked deeply troubled. He began the conversation by telling me that he had read my letter more times than he could count and it had made him do a lot of thinking. Looking me straight in the face, he said, "I have skeletons in the closet." Cindy turned white, but remained sitting beside him saying nothing. Later, I realized that she turned white because she knew what he was trying to tell me. Jacob and I stared at him. Scared about the direction the conversation was going, I placated him with, "I know, dad."

He grew agitated, rising up in his seat and leaning forward. "You don't understand. I have SKELETONS in my closet."

Scared that Cindy might have a heart attack, I pressed him to change the subject, assuring him that I understood but didn't want to talk about it right now. When I broached the subject with Emily at a later point, she said he'd said the same exact thing to her. She had dropped by on him with a friend and he had told her about "skeletons in the closet." Figuring he was talking about all the stuff from our childhood, she'd shut him down the same way I did, saying she didn't want to discuss the past and that all was forgiven.

I did my best to put it all out of my mind, content that my father had acknowledged my letter and admitted his guilt. I have often regretted not letting him explain exactly what he was talking about, and if I had one moment of my life to live over again, it would be that one. His words would plague me after he died. But much would happen before that event.

The Archangel Uriel

After his admission, my father and I spoke off and on for a few weeks. When he told me that he had multiple sclerosis – the protective sheath covering the nerves is eaten away by the immune system – I asked Cindy about it and the next day all hell broke loose. She had told my father and his third wife about my phone call and they were infuriated. My father denied ever telling me about having MS, making me feel crazy. Mrs. Smith asked me, "Do you distinctly remember your father telling you he had MS?" After I said yes, she told me that regardless of what my father and his third wife said, it had happened. Angry that my father was trying to once again rewrite my reality, I distanced myself for the last time.

Did he really have MS? I don't know nor will I ever know. My stepmother sealed his medical records. Emily believes she did this to prevent us from contesting the will and that maybe MS was why they were convinced he was going crazy. But he didn't have MS symptoms. I think she sealed the records because he was coming clean about his past and keeping us from the records effectively keeps us from knowing any of the people he might have talked to during his time with Hospice. If the records say he was incompetent, we would have reason to contest the will and there is no doubt that she was afraid that we might try to claim all that she considered hers and was doing everything her greedy mind could think of to prevent that.

I saw him one last time a week before he died. I wanted to assure him that when he died, I would come and find him and help him cross over in hopes that he wouldn't be so scared to face his mortality. I stopped at his house and said what I had to say. Desperate that I stay, my father – despite my stepmother's prodding that I should leave – exclaimed that although not in the will, he'd left insurance policies for the four of us older children, even if he hadn't been much of a father. I blew it off, knowing that if there was any way my stepmother could get her claws into those policies, she would already have done so.

Throughout, she sat by his side, dominating him like she used to me – a fitting karma for a man who cared so little for so many. Still, seeing his suffering firsthand brought me no satisfaction. I told my father goodbye and headed for the door as fast as I could. I was 39 and it was the last time I would ever see my father on this side. His death would change my life, but not for the reasons I thought.

Three days before he died, I began having nightmares about a demon. I'm in Jacob's and my old apartment standing in the kitchen. The doors leading to the living room and dining room are shut tight. I hear a demon on the other side of the door leading to the living room; it's slithering around, making a sound like nails scratching glass. There's a knock at the front door and a woman enters the apartment only to be attacked by the demon. Her screams and that of the demon awaken me in a panic. The nightmare repeated itself over and over, with the demon attacking a different woman each time. I'd had plenty of nightmares, but this one was different in that it felt so *real*, and the repetition felt like the universe trying to tell me something. Mrs. Smith suggested that I use my shamanic practice to go into the dream while awake to see if there was anything I could do as I was afraid to close my eyes and thus losing sleep. I didn't know that my father was dying, nor could I ever have imagined what was about to happen.

On the third day after two nights of nightmares, Cindy called and said that my father had died. After suffering years from prostate cancer, he had finally succumbed to death and Cindy was devastated. Unable to speak on the phone for more than a few minutes before breaking down, she took his death the hardest. After we hung up, I sat stunned, spending the rest of the day trying to make sense of my feelings, as I seemed to feel nothing. My father was an enigma. I'd loved him very much and yet despised everything he stood for. His past aside, he'd grown to be a narcissistic, selfish, deceitful person who had created a great deal of harm in his life, and it was difficult to dismiss the pain he'd caused just because he had passed. But true to my word, I still had every intention of finding him on the other side and helping him cross over.

Shamans believe that the soul goes through a process after death, letting go of the ties that bound it to its previous life, and that it needs at least three days to complete this phase. Even Jesus Christ took three days before ascending. So shamans give the soul that time to reacquaint itself with the other side. For my father, I decided to give him ten days because he would have quite a bit to work through on the other side, living as he did when he was alive, angry, spiteful, and bitter, with "skeletons in his closet." I figured it would be best to give him some time to try and make amends on the other side, not realizing that my own soul would be on the line before I would ever get a chance to help my father.

The morning after he died, I found myself possessed by the very demon we had believed to be residing in my father. As I approached my studio, I heard a

terrible voice in my head say, "You're not like the others." Shamans believe in possession, which is the whole reason behind praying for protection before journeying. Leaving the body alone can open it to being possessed by spirits. The truth is I didn't believe in possession and had never experienced anything like it. In fact, just the week before I had laughed at a staunch Catholic friend of Jacob's who was recounting how realistic the film *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* was. He'd been terrified by how the devil can possess the bodies of mere mortals. I scoffed at him and said that the true story was that the girl's parents and priest all went to jail for starving her to death. I went on to say that I believed that demons had better things to do than possess humans, that possession was silly, etc. And now here I was, facing the very thing I had mocked.

All I could see in my mind was a being of all eyes and tongues, desperate, angry, and extremely powerful. I began having flashes of life memories as the thing searched my mind, looking for something to grasp onto. As it looked into me, I could see parts of it that were incredibly old and incredibly sad. In all of my journeys, I'd never encountered such a hopeless being. I wasn't so much scared as I was interested, as this seemed to be the moment I'd been prepared for as a child. I heard, "You can do anything you want in this life now, and will never face a day's consequence for what you do." I felt great power within me, but along with the power came an overwhelming sense of *corruption*.

Instinctively, I knew that the thing inside of me was offering more of the same darkness I had tried to escape from my whole life. Exhausted by the transition from my father to me, it faded away soon after. I felt it curl up like a snake, asleep, and found myself consciously alone in my own body again.

Calling Susan and waking her from sleep, I told her what I had just experienced and asked what I should do. Calming me, she explained the process called "extractment," a shamanic exorcism. Although not common, it was not unusual in shamanic practice. In fact, a practicing shaman in town specialized in extractment and she suggested I call him. First, I talked to Mrs. Smith about it. Taken back, she wasn't sure what to suggest, but did her best to help me explore the demonic experience in our session. Jungian-wise, she suggested that it could just be programming playing out, perhaps what I'd always believed would happen when my father died. Assuring me that schizophrenics hear voices *outside* their heads, not inside, she did her best to convince me that I wasn't crazy, which I thought might be happening. Believing that there would be no harm in letting it play out, she suggested that I take Susan's advice and have the extractment to see what would happen. Fascinated, she expressed interest in hearing all about it.

That afternoon, I called Cindy and told her what I intended to do. Remember: we were all raised to believe that something dwelled within my father. Although I was the only one who had any form of spiritual training by way of Shamanism, each of us possessed our own abilities. Cindy was convinced that if I let the demon inside of me go, we would lose our "powers." Both of my sisters were adept when it came to occult practices, from visions of the future to psychic powers. Cindy could look into people's lives and see what troubled them,

whereas Emily was a fantastic card reader but spent much of her life trying to avoid her visionary abilities. I am not good at psychically seeing the future, and although I can read cards I am nowhere near my Emily's skill. We were all shaped by our experiences as children and as such believed in the powers of magic and the spiritual world. We also believed in the demon that now seemed to inhabit me.

I argued with Cindy that our abilities came from God and not from demons, and dismissed her claims that we would lose anything, at which point she claimed that it would just come to her. However, as it scanned me earlier that morning, I did pick up that it hated women with a vicious, seething hatred, so I knew that what my sister was proposing would be impossible. Did the demon hate women because my father hated women, or vice versa? So Cindy called Emily and tried to get her to convince me not to go through with the extractment.

That night before bed, I prayed for an answer to my dilemma, and when I awoke I knew what I had to do. Back in my studio the next morning, I began talking out loud, feeling stupid but not caring. I'd had no dreams or nightmares the night before except for one that told me who I was dealing with, where he had come from, and why he was here.

"Your name is Uriel, is it not? The one we worshiped when I was a child?" I asked.

It answered, "That I am."

"And you have to do anything I ask of you, no matter what it is?"

"You only have to command me. What is it you desire? For I can bring that very thing to you."

"Since you have to do anything I want you to do, no matter what it is, then this is what I want. I want you to go to God and ask what it is that God wants you to do, and then I want you to do that."

Catching him off guard, Uriel was nonetheless bound by my request. Having no other option than to honor my request, Uriel became silent and we didn't speak further.

I had no interest in using this being. I had awakened that morning realizing that I had to help him with his overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Believing that he would never be able to return to the light, he was willing to burn the world down in order to force the hand of God in hopes of ending his suffering. The thing is, though, God is all forgiving. The Revelations belief in an eternal lake of fire is to scare the masses into submission. Think about it. God says to forgive and love your enemies at the same time he plans to throw them into an eternal

fire pit. Does that make sense? Knowing that God will wait until the end of time for every last member of his flock to return, I felt it was time for this being to see the truth.

I called the local shaman set up an extractment for the upcoming weekend. Speaking with his wife, I explained my predicament. A practicing shaman herself, she was completely open to what I was telling her and we discussed our particular practices, she and her husband favoring native American Shamanism and I Celtic Shamanism. We made plans to get together on the weekend. Later that morning, my dear friend Shelly, a strict Catholic believing in possession, called from the East Coast. I explained about my father's death and the possession. Shelly had no problem grasping what I was telling her and asked what I was going to do. I recounted the conversation I had with the shaman's wife and mentioned the work I'd done with the Celtic Goddess Brigit. Assuring me that I needed to do it immediately- Shelly made me promise to call back immediately.

I called the shaman's wife back, but she had already called her husband at work about the "shamanic emergency." They expected me that evening for the shamanic extractment. The sense that Uriel was inside me was undeniable. Crazy or not, I felt I had to play it out, no matter how weird it was. Years later in *Cult and Ritual Abuse: Its History, Anthropology, and Recent Discovery in Contemporary America* by James Randall Noblitt and Pamela Sue Perskin, I would read about possession, ritual abuse, and dissociation. Quoting Father Jeffery Steffon from his 1992 book *Satanism: Is it Real?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Productions), they give the Catholic Church's official position regarding the reality of Satan, evil spirits, and demonic possession. Citing Father Richard McAlear and Betty Brennan, experts on demonic possession, Father Steffon explains how the church believes it occurs:

First, a demonic spirit can attach itself to someone through a wound or trauma. Fr. McAlear calls this a ministering spirit. Secondly, a spirit can attach itself to a person through a repeated sinful action or sinful tendencies. This is a cardinal spirit. One way to remember some cardinal spirits is to remember the capital sins – that is lust, pride, gluttony, sloth, envy, covetousness, and anger. These sins are against the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. These virtues are the hinges of other virtues. Just as other virtues are in some way tied to the four cardinal virtues, so some spirits are tied to, or hinge upon, the cardinal spirits. A third way is through a person's generational heritage. People inherit their make-up from their parents – their physical attributes, mental abilities, psychological makeup, and spiritual characteristics. If parents have been involved in the occult, generational openness for the oppression will be passed along to their children. Exodus 20:5-6 states that a father's wickedness is passed on

to his children for four generations, but blessings for a thousand generations upon the faithful. Finally, a demonic spirit can attach itself to a person through involvement in the occult.

Given that I fit into every category, it was no wonder that I found myself in the position I was in. Figuring I would do the extractment and that would be the end of it, I looked forward to getting my life back, in addition freed by the fact that my father was dead. Unconcerned as to whether this was a true spiritual experience or one that my fractured mind was using to repair itself, I was willing to do what I had to do to get through what felt like a precipice.

A Shamanic Extractment

The shaman I went to see was nicknamed Bear, and for good reason: his size and dark hair and beard made him look like a big grizzly. He ushered me in and had me sit in his living room. He or his wife had draped prayer blankets over everything to keep spirits from attaching themselves to objects during the extractment. He took a moment to get a feel for me, explaining that his wife had told him of our conversation and inquiring how much I knew about the extractment process. I said I knew virtually nothing about it and that it all seemed strange to me. He took my ignorance in stride and pointed out that even if I didn't believe in what was happening, I was still sitting in his house. Laughing, he explained that people who experienced what I was experiencing often had a hard time believing that it was happening but assured me that what I was going through was very real.

The ceremony itself was simple. Bear lit a candle, burned some incense, and prayed over me and the area of the extractment. Asking for help from the other side, he prayed and sang as he beat the drum, walking around me in a circle. Finally, he sat down in front of me and told me to stare into his eyes. I felt myself drifting away as Bear asked me to mentally move to the side and allow Uriel to take over my body. His wife, sitting beside him, quietly said prayers as Bear invoked the demon into talking.

The experience of listening to myself talk was strange in that the words weren't coming from me. There was no speaking in tongues, no projectile green vomiting, or any other theatric generally associated with exorcism. Instead, a kind of grace fell upon the room, making the air around us almost glow. I could feel Uriel's anger and fear, but because he was bound to our contract, he had no choice but to cross over. Anxious to be rid of him, I nonetheless wept, feeling a sense of loss but not understanding why. I was soon to learn the answer.

Bear helped Uriel to the other side. How he did it, I still don't understand. In all of my practices, I have never attempted to do an extractment because I don't

quite understand how it works. I physically felt him leave me and sighed a breath of relief. Then Bear looked at his wife and asked if we were done. Surprisingly, in a shocked voice she said no. That was when I felt the presence of someone I had felt since childhood. Telling her husband that a woman was inside of me, Bear's wife told me that I had to let her go. That's when I realized that my tears had been for her.

Suddenly, I felt overwhelmed by a feeling of love from the female presence inside me. Mrs. Smith had often asked me how I overcame my childhood. I told her about the voice inside constantly assuring me that everything was okay and it was the people around me who were crazy, not me. Believing all those years that the voice was a part of me, I now realize that a spirit nurtured me enough to get me through the hell of my childhood. Knowing it was time for her to leave me and cross over, I felt overwhelming gratitude toward her for the love that got me through my loveless childhood. I envisioned her gently brushing her hand against my cheek and felt her leave me and cross over. Then it was over.

Bear finished with another prayer ceremony and his drum, thanking God and the universe for its help, singing praise and thanks as his wife continued to quietly pray. Afterwards, explaining that it was customary for the shaman to send the "patient" home with gifts, he gave me some wood from a Joshua tree he'd come across in his travels, a packet with corn and tree shavings in it, and a crystal that looked in a way like a village. Telling me that native Americans believed you were never poor as long as you had a couple of grains of corn in the cupboard, he said the packet was for my oldest sister having the problem with our father's death. He too was amazed by how easy Uriel's transition had gone, confirming that Uriel was ancient and on the earth since before the days of Mesopotamia, the most powerful being he had ever encountered. Exhausted and sad, I thanked Bear and his wife and bid farewell. I felt like I had lost a piece of myself and was confused by the whole experience.

Later that night as I lay thinking in bed, I felt I had just come through a crucial test. Now that Uriel was gone, I wondered what might have happened had I just ignored his presence and gone about my business. Never once while he was in me had I contemplated what it would have been like to have his power. I believed in the verse, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" and have never regretted my decision, although I couldn't help imagining what it might have been like to have such power. Letting the scenario play out in my mind, I thought of my father and what it must have been like for him. One of the most evil and misguided men I have ever known, he never paid a day's consequence for his misdeeds, and yet in the end he suffered intensely. His virtue less life left him utterly alone, surrounded by vultures eagerly awaiting his demise. Though never publicly exposed, he paid for his crimes, I had no doubt, and a lifetime of regrets is an awful thing to take with you to the other side. My father was the epitome of someone who despaired in the end.

That night, I dreamed of a celebration, one of the most joyful dreams I've ever experienced, and the next morning I found it difficult to leave the party for a new day. The past was over and life was beginning anew, better than before. But perhaps no good deed goes unpunished. It turned out that I had a little more to do in hell.

A Funeral And A Death

My father's funeral gave my stepmother her moment in the sun, proving that you can take the dumb ass out of the trailer park, but you can't take the trailer park out of the dumb ass. Obviously not understanding the concept of "guilt by association," she posed as both victim and savior, referring to my father as a liar and as much of a cheat in life as he was in cards, and while some might consider him a piece of art, most just considered him a piece of work, etc. It wasn't that she was wrong in what she said, for my father was all she said and more. What bothered me was that she didn't go far enough. As much as she would have liked to disassociate herself from him, she and my father were two peas in a pod – violent, vindictive, self-serving, manipulative pedophiles. I had two questions: *Who did my father cheat?* and *Where was she the three decades they were married?* Birds of a feather, both she and my father cheated people and she accepted his behavior and benefited right along with him. It never dawned on her how people might look at her by saying such half-truths about the dead.

My father's death and funeral were in stark contrast to my mother's in that she died surrounded by loved ones, not ghouls. At the memorial, Emily and I were the only two members of his second family. I reached over and touched her hand to calm her agitation, whispering to cheer up because we were finally free of his terrible family. Considering what was said, I was glad that Cindy hadn't attended as she would have not been able to control her rage and would have made it all worse than it was. Even Jacob and I had to leave before the last song ended because of my fantasies of strangling the "bereaved" widow, and I certainly didn't want to give her the satisfaction of seeing that she'd gotten to me.

Bragging about getting away with everything, during my father's funeral my stepmother made mention of my father having a plane and flying back and forth between some "mines" that they owned at the time. Considering their past, I have often wondered what was left IN those mines. The remains of dead children, perhaps? Maybe, but I would never know for sure. Strange that she would mention something at my father's funeral that was so far in the past- as he hadn't flown since we left Omaha when I was a child, but I am sure there was a reason that my stepmother felt inclined to put this bit of info about my dad in his eulogy. Shoving the past in our face was something she enjoyed and so there was a definite reason she decided to add this aspect of my father at his funeral, for whatever reason.

Now that my father was dead, I assumed that all surprises were over. I couldn't have been more wrong, given the skeletons he'd referred to. The first skeleton began with Cindy's insistence that Jacob and I let her live with us, claiming she was fearful that her husband and oldest daughter were planning to kill her. When she wouldn't tell us why they would do such a thing, Jacob and I dismissed her insistence as just more of her penchant for drama. Not stopping with us, she told her doctor and nurse about her fear and they reported it to Adult Protective Services (APS). They'd just begun investigating her claims when she was found dead. Due to her history of heart disease, no questions of foul play were asked, even when it was discovered that she'd been alone with her oldest daughter and husband the morning she died.

My mother used to tell a story about when Cindy was six or seven and came home from school saying that she'd seen an ambulance run into a school bus and explode, strewing bodies over the road. Incredulous and horrified, my mother asked whether or not the story was true. Facing her, my sister replied, "No, but it's interesting, huh?" Warning her about being the little girl who cried wolf, my mother couldn't have been more on the mark.

The day before her death, I sent her a prayer blanket I had made for her, along with the packet Bear gave me after the extractment. Her oldest daughter claimed I'd poisoned her mother, but the police officer went through the prayer bag and found nothing but corn and wood shavings. Why, with her mother's health problems, did her oldest daughter – the one my sister said was going to murder her – try to blame me?

Neither my niece nor city manager brother-in-law had a consistent, cohesive alibi regarding the morning she died. His first story was that she'd been half in and half out of bed when he left early that morning for work and didn't check to see if she was all right. But their stories kept changing. If she died of natural causes, then why were all the changes concerning the story of her death necessary? They refused to allow an autopsy. The doctor signed off on her heart problems even after her claim that she was going to be murdered. Perhaps that's how they do things down in Florida. After her death, APS made one phone call to the family and met with incredible resistance. They didn't follow up.

I was devastated by her death. She'd been the oldest and I the youngest. She was born on 6-12 and I was born on 12-6. Yes, we fought like cats and dogs, but we also shared a special bond. She'd saved my life more than once and I felt awful that I hadn't helped her when she'd cried out to me. I could not forget the desperation in her voice before she died. I will always regret not taking her seriously and helping her in her hour of need. Later when I was involved in an investigation regarding my parents and their past activities, I would wonder if what she and our father discussed the night after his admission about skeletons in the closet had led to her demise. After all, she remembered everything that had transpired during our childhoods.

Jacob and I flew down to help with the arrangements. Her family pretty much avoided us, especially when I demanded an autopsy. They claimed that after her heart surgery, she never wanted to be cut open again. Considering that she was dead and wouldn't give two shits about an autopsy, I decided to journey two days after her death and not wait the third day to ask her what I should do. Right there in the hotel, I connected with her immediately after going into trance. Regarding the autopsy, she told me that it would turn her family upside down and she would rather avoid it. She warned me that a storm was coming and told me to "prepare my house." Then she said, "Okay little brother, now do your stuff." Next, we were both standing on a road between two fields of wildflowers. Our extended family was standing in a group down the road, calling to her. After joining them, she turned back and waved, then they all disappeared, once again leaving me alone.

After journeying, I dropped the push for an autopsy and focused on just getting through the rest of our time down there. Jacob later referred to our experience in Florida as National Lampoon's American Funeral, meaning the constant party, the funeral no exception. Her husband and children popped pills, drank, and fought like chickens in a coop. The only thing they didn't do was drag my sister's body out to dance. Jacob came away angry, declaring he would never again subject himself to that side of my family, whereas I came away broken.

I'd lost most of my family. Again, I assumed the past was finally over. No more connections other than those with Emily and her family. Jacob was incredibly grounding for me, but even he couldn't foresee what was coming. The ride we were on wasn't stopping; it was speeding up. Unable to leave well enough alone, my father's widow was just warming up.

Lest We Forget

Ten days after my father's death, I did a journey to help him cross to the other side – right before my oldest sister's death. As angry as I was with him, as much as I despised his life and the things he was guilty of, I still loved him and couldn't leave him in the dark. I prayed for him before journeying, but still found him huddled in the dark, naked, despairing, and alone. Two phantoms flew above his head, tormenting him, his spirit enveloped in guilt and shame as he lived and relived the version of hell he'd constructed. I prayed for God's assistance. The minute I finished my prayer, a tear materialized in the fabric of the darkness and two angels walked through it, going to each side of my father and gently lifting him and carrying him into the light that disappeared the moment they all went through. Back from my journey, I performed a celebratory drumming and thanked God, the angels, and universe for helping to save my father.

The whole experience with Uriel had given me a new perspective. If God could forgive Uriel whose crimes far exceeded my father's and draw him back into

heaven, so God could forgive my father. Besides, it was not my place to judge my father, and considering the condition I found him in, he seemed to be punishing himself enough for both of us. We all carry both the love we share and the evil we do to the other side.

I once told a friend that this lifetime doesn't make any difference, and yet it makes all the difference in the world. I have always believed in reincarnation. Through reincarnation, the law of karma gives us a chance to make right our previous wrongs and experience our mistakes so that we learn and grow from them. Part of the spiritual evolution, reincarnation is referred to as "world without end" in the Bible and other older spiritual texts. Energy never dies but travels from denser intensities to higher, more ethereal intensities. The consciousness life experiences offer gives us the opportunity each time around to choose which direction we wish to go, whether closer to the dark, as my father chose, or closer to the light as I have chosen. Life is designed to help us learn about ourselves through the consequences of our own behavior. If you don't like how your life has turned out, then choose again. Follow spiritual laws and draw closer to the light; ignore the laws and gravitate toward the dark. It's as simple, and painful, as that.

Due to their unorthodox pasts, neither my father when he was alive nor his third wife appreciated my take on life and God. Emily said that members involved with Satanic cults often become Jesus freaks when they break away, which certainly fit my father and his third wife. As fundamentalist zealots, they used religion to condemn others and excuse themselves under the misconception that Jesus only loves those they deemed acceptable. They preached to me that my sexuality was going to land me in hell when they themselves were guilty of practically destroying me. Their hypocrisy was more than I could endure.

A week before her death, Cindy said that our father's widow had inquired if I'd done my journey to help our father cross over. I'd always intuited that my spiritual practice made both my father and my stepmother uncomfortable and now felt that Cindy was involving herself in things she had no business sticking her nose into. Later that night, Jacob told me that he'd received an email from my stepmother asking the same thing, so I called and apologized to my sister. Still, I didn't trust the widow's motive. A week after Cindy died, I would discover what she was up to when she sent Emily and myself an atrociously written letter discussing our father and mother and her place in our family. Barely understandable, she babbled incoherently about being the savior of our family and how she deserved all the money, setting herself above my family, exposing how competitive she'd always felt with both of our parents.

Despite how self-destructive both my father and mother were, my stepmother had played the other woman and proverbial last straw, destroying my parents' relationship. From the wrong side of the tracks, her father died when I was a

child. I remember driving up to his burial site with my father laughing at how glad we were that the old man was dead. A violent, uneducated alcoholic, he'd done nothing with his life but create misery, and his wife was more of the same and as alcoholic as my mother.

Along with her letter was an unsigned personal note to me saying that my father wished for me to have his hat, \$100, and his best wishes, then sent my older siblings \$1,000 each. But her slap in the face backfired. As a shaman, I perceived the hat that my father wore while dying to be a powerful gift. The summer after, Emily would take her to court and expose the mysteries of our childhood once again. My father's skeletons would have the last word yet.

A Case of Road Rage

The summer of the lawsuit, I was attacked and almost murdered on the road. Thinking at first it was road rage, I came away wondering if it was something more. Emily and I had been going to garage sales and had parked near my father's house for about 30 minutes to reminisce about dad and the *good* times we'd had with him (and there were some). Then we drove to a sandwich shop for lunch, planning to spend the rest of the afternoon searching for treasures in people's junk. When we left the restaurant, a car pulled behind us and began following us. Traveling east on Center Street, the car behind us got in front of me and slowed down until we were at a stop sign. He could have turned left and down 121st or gone straight down Center to the interstate half a mile further. But what he did was trap me behind him, jump out of his car, and head for me. My sister screamed, "Oh my God, he is coming to kill you!" I unbuckled my seatbelt and opened my car door. As he reached in to grab for my face and head, I yelled, then reached through my open window and twisted the fat on his stomach, backing him away enough to get out of the car. A good three or four inches taller than me, he resumed his attack on me. Cupping the back of my head with one hand, he used the other to get a grip on my face and jaw. I knew he was trying to break my neck, and there I was, trapped between my car and my attacker. Panicking, I yelled for him to get the fuck off me as I attempted to knock his hands away from my face.

Suddenly, I felt the presence of Cindy. She put her hand on the small of my neck and relaxed me, then told me to calm down and become still. Figuring that I was giving up, the man increased his aggression. The knuckle of his forefinger brushed against my teeth as I heard Cindy say, "Not yet." Time slowed down to almost a stop and helped me focus on she who was in the process of saving my life. The next thing I knew, the meat of his huge hand between thumb and forefinger was in my mouth and she yelled, "Now! Lean forward and bite the fuck out of him!" which I did.

The response was magical. He snatched his hand from my mouth. I'd needed braces as a child but never got them and so had spent a lifetime grinding my

teeth down to sharp, ugly nubs. Being bitten by them was probably like having piranhas chomp down on him. I have always hated my teeth, but I have to admit they probably saved my life that day, along with my dead sister. The minute he backed off, it dawned on me that this stranger had just manhandled me. In seconds flat, I went from being afraid to enraged. Obviously catching on to the fact that I was sizing him up and trying to decide if I could throw both of us into oncoming traffic, he ran back to his car. As he jumped in, he turned and yelled, "You bite like a little girl!" Of course, it infuriated me even more, so I got back into my car and we had a 110 mile an hour chase onto the interstate, both of us weaving in and out of traffic as I tried to catch up to him and make him crash his car.

Meanwhile, my sister was trying to calm me down, begging me to slow down and let the bastard go, fearing we were all going to end up dead. Finally, I calmed down enough to regain a semblance of rationality and got off the interstate, satisfied with his license plate number. We argued about going to the police. I was convinced (and rightly so) that the Omaha police would do absolutely nothing and it was just a waste of time. She convinced me that it was best to let the police know what had happened in case the man might himself try to press charges and that I should report having bitten him out of self-preservation. With his blood on my shirt, I decided she was right, so we drove downtown to the police station. No help at all, the Omaha police at least took a report and wrote down his license plate.

Whether random road rage or an assassination attempt, it was one of the scariest moments I have ever experienced in my adult life. Later, while enmeshed in a family investigation, I would wonder why he'd come out of nowhere to target me.

It's Who You Know, Not What You Know

Although angry with my father's widow, I was not all that interested in taking her to court to fight for the blood money Emily felt was owed to us. My interest was whether or not my father had *truly* intended to provide for us or not. I didn't journey for the answer because I was uncomfortable with my father at the time and had begun to shy away from my practice after my experience with Uriel. I wasn't sure anymore that what I was doing was healthy due to things over my head opening me up. Besides, lawyers cost money, and Jacob and I didn't have any to spare for a legal battle. Since my sister was as poor as we were, I figured it was moot. However, Omaha was connected, and for some reason strings were pulled to "help us."

Because my father's side of the family had Jewish blood, years before my older sister converted to Judaism and was therefore connected to the Jewish community in Omaha. Her temple directed her to a prestigious law firm and a

lawyer I'll call "Shady," one of the sneakiest narcissists I have ever encountered. Beside the \$5,000 retainer he required, it turned out that he had a conflict of interest: my father's widow's daughter had married into a rich Jewish family and Shady represented her parents-in-law. Thus Shady was no more than two degrees away from the very person we were attempting to battle.

Then there was my sister's ex-husband's friend Kevin Dobson, Omaha's primary dealer who was heavily involved with the coke trade in the 80's and as a result connected to many of the nefarious activities going on then – even bragging about he was connected to the whole George H.W. Bush Iran/Contra scandal. Connected to the Hell's Angels and mafia in Omaha, he was larger than life in a malevolent, seedy kind of way. For some reason, Kevin decided to write my sister a check on the condition that we use Shady and his law firm. Red flags went up for me. Considering Kevin's history and reputation in Omaha, I said to decline his offer, though I never really believed the stories until we were months into the "lawsuit" and Googled his name. What came up scared us both, especially the Omaha appeal *United States of America v. Gilberto Montoya*, submitted August 26, 1991 and decided Dec. 26, 1991. Montoya was the nephew of Pablo Escobar, the Contra cocaine dealer the CIA was colluding with. Steven M. Watson argued for Montoya and Donald L Schense for the U.S. government. In June 1989, Florida residents Montoya and Juan Garcia-Escobar drove from Miami to Omaha with two kilograms of cocaine concealed in a cooler. They delivered it to their customer, Kevin Dobson, in the presence of Mike Dillon, Dobson's friend and a cocaine and marijuana user. Montoya and Garcia-Escobar remained in Omaha for several days until Dobson had sold enough of the cocaine to pay them for one kilo. They then returned to Miami where they were arrested some months later.

...Montoya was convicted of a conspiracy to distribute cocaine in Omaha in June 1989. The alleged conspirators were Montoya, Garcia-Escobar, and Dobson. Although the only transaction proved was the transporting from Florida and the distribution in Omaha of two kilos of cocaine in June 1989, the testimony tended to prove that the conspirators viewed this transaction as the start of a continuing relationship.

...an almost offhand comment by Dobson during his direct testimony:

Q. Mr. Dobson, what was that discussion in regards to fronting cocaine to you from Miami from Mr. Montoya and Juancho [Garcia-Escobar]?

A. Juancho had told me that [Montoya] said that he would bring me up six kilos of cocaine and leave them with me, that I could sell it at my leisure along with a couple hundred pounds of pot... for Mike Dillon to sell at his leisure....

Dobson was criminal and possibly CIA. My oldest sister and her family lived in Florida. Was there a connection? Was this why Kevin and Shady wanted to back our case?

Uriel Revisited

My 40th birthday on December 6, 2006 was a complete game changer for me. I was no longer plagued by nightmares or the fear that I was the Antichrist, and the experience with Uriel had healed many parts long needing it. I had come to think that it had been my mind repairing itself rather than some strange spiritual experience, and had now lulled myself into a false sense of security. The day itself was uneventful. Birthdays for me are times of reflection. Both Jacob's and my birthdays fall so close to Christmas that it is generally not financially feasible to celebrate all, so he gave me his customary small gift and that was it – until that night, that is. I kept waking up in a panic, unable to remember what I'd been dreaming about. After awakening the fifth time, I knew that something unconscious was on the move. Unable to remember what I'd been dreaming, I went back to sleep with the intention of *waking up in the dream* so I could see what I was so afraid to face.

In the dream, I was standing in the middle of a pentagram with 12 people standing around me in a circle, chanting. Trying to ascertain why Uriel hadn't taken me over yet, they'd decided to perform a ceremony to coax my soul out of my body long enough for Uriel to take control. Apparently, they didn't know that I had released Uriel in March after my father died and were desperate to regain the control they'd lost from his crossing. Angry, I demanded that they stop what they were doing immediately. Being in the middle of a pentagram as a child was familiar territory, but being emotionally forced back into that spot in my dream as an adult raised an instant and consuming anger that woke me from the dream. I looked at the clock: six in the morning. I jumped out of bed, resolved as to what I had to do. Most people would have just assumed it was a dream and let it go at that, but I awoke believing that what had just transpired was real. I no longer perceived that my experience with Uriel was completely made up and decided to go on a journey to find him and see what was happening on the other side.

First, I enlisted Susan to drum for me. I was unsure who exactly was in my dream and decided not to take any chances, given that it was spiritual warfare. Unlike when Uriel possessed me, no part of me doubted what had just happened, and the thought that I was still astrally connected to those who had practiced Satanism during my childhood was unnerving. Knowing the magic these people could wield, the child part of me was scared. Susan's help insured that I could make the journey safely. *Two or three gathered in My Name*. Another doing the drumming and singing prayers of protection is more powerful than doing a journey alone. Able to offer prayers for guidance and

protection, the drumming shaman effectively watches over the one journeying, making the experience feel more safe and grounded.

At her house, she lit a candle and burned incense as together we said prayers for protection. She began beating the drum and I went into my trance. The wave lengths of my brain began changing, dropping from Beta to Delta, and I began to dream. Lulled by the beat of her drum, I proceeded inside. Uriel was alone, surrounded by a dark cloud. Things had not gone quite as I'd hoped during the extractment. Trapped by the bonds of his own making, he had not gone into the light but had remained in some sort of limbo, caught between the middle world and other side. Finding him enveloped in misery, I did what I had come to do. I asked him to release those who had been sacrificed to him. Bound to his victims, he'd been unable to cross over. Asking him had an immediate and intense effect. What transpired next was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen on the other side, and it would forever change me.

The darkness surrounding Uriel disappeared instantly, and a blinding light exploded out of him, so bright I had to look away. Three giant ornate gates materialized out of thin air and began opening. Through the gates, I could see the shores of a new world not far away. I was witnessing the gates of the new earth opening.

I saw people, too, a countless number of souls released from their sacrificial bondage to Uriel and migrating in droves towards the gates of the new earth. Awakened from a deep slumber, they were singing and celebrating over returning to life. The numbers told me that Uriel had been on the rampage far longer than I'd realized. I began to finally understand what I was observing. All of Heaven seemed to be celebrating Uriel's release. He was now bathed in light, his chains dropping as he spread his wings and stretched off the last of the darkness. The high-pitched melody I was hearing affected Susan's drumming and their concert was exquisite.

Before ending my journey, I placed the pentagram of my dream the night before in the palm of my hand. Symbolically equating it with the coven's power, I blew into my palm and scattered the pentagram like sand. I then thanked Uriel whose smile beamed. It was the first time I'd ever seen him smile, and I felt his love wash over me before returning to myself.

Susan clamored to know what had happened, saying that her drum had never sounded so beautiful and powerful. I told her what I had seen, and when she asked what I made of all, I said with certitude that humankind was on the verge of a spiritual evolution, whether it meant the prophesized "last days" or not. I was certain that something big was occurring on the other side.

Later that morning, Mrs. Smith was unsure what to make of what I told her, and even more so when two weeks later the Republican Party fell apart and you needed a scorecard to keep up with the scandals hitting the media. I am not

trying to suggest that all Republicans are Satanists – such an assertion would be silly – but the material and spiritual worlds influence each other in their attempt to reach a balance of energies. *As above, so below*. Thus the timing between Uriel’s release and toppling Republican scandals was more than academically interesting.

Changed by what I had just seen on the other side, I decided to explore my family’s past in order to validate childhood experiences I was remembering. From this point on, things were going to get very weird indeed.

Down the Rabbit Hole

My 40th birthday and experience with Uriel flooded my dreams with memories. I dreamed of a little girl who lived up the road from us. It was her father my family murdered when I was ten. From that dream, I turned to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children site to pull up files on missing children in Omaha. The files only went to 1984, but I need cases in the 70’s. In early January, I called and talked with a woman who suggested I file a verbal report and she would send it to the proper authorities. Figuring I had nothing to lose, I told her all detail I could remember, even that many of the details had come to me through nightmares. Then I hung up, expecting that would be the end of it. When I told Brutus that I had called the National Center for the Missing and Exploited Children, he angrily demanded to know exactly what I had reported. In a loud voice, he said I was in over my head and began making veiled threats, insinuating that I might want to reconsider what I was getting into. He brought up Colton’s nephew, suggesting I’d had inappropriate contact with him when he was 15 (which wasn’t true). I was completely taken aback. I hadn’t known that he even *knew* Colton, let alone anything about his family. Shocked by his reaction and what he was saying, I ended the conversation and hung up, then called Jacob at work and related the conversation. He pointed out that Brutus had been one of Alan Baer’s dearest friends and suggested that Brutus might have been more involved than we’d considered.

I began to awaken to a whole other tack on my past. Despite living in the same town, Colton and I had very little contact with each other. I now realized that the primary barrier was our *common* past. We’d gone on our own ways and never saw or spoke to each other. For me, he represented the past I wanted to get away from, and even though Alan was dead, I didn’t trust Colton, given that I was never sure what he was capable of. Now that Brutus had alluded to a relationship with Colton I never even considered, I came away wondering what else I didn’t know. It was one thing to know rumors of Omaha’s past, but it was another to prove it.

In February, I received a phone call from a Nebraska State Patrol officer. Politely, he said he wanted to ask me about some of the details in my verbal report, giving me the impression that he might have something he hoped to flesh out. The only time he got agitated was when he asked me why I hadn’t called the police myself. I explained that I didn’t think anyone would believe me, after which he asked if I thought what I remembered was “real or not,”

further indicating that he knew something he wasn't revealing. I assured him that what I remembered did in fact happen, then he told me he'd be in touch if he needed any more information and we hung up. For the first time in my life, I had hope that something in my past might be substantiated. I began to form a plan as to what I could do to help. I waited two weeks and then called the Nebraska State Patrol myself to speak with the officer in charge of cold cases. I explained that I had filed a report with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and had received a phone call from an officer whose name I didn't know and would like the officer's name. After I ran through the gist of my report, the officer said he would be in contact as soon as he discovered anything.

A week went by and nothing. I decided to contact a local reporter who had just done a story on one of the abducted children back in the 70's. So I met him at a local coffee shop and told him my story, including the reports I'd filed, speaking with the officers, etc. He asked if he could contact the Nebraska State Patrol and I said yes, of course. He called me back the next day and said that the Nebraska State Patrol had no evidence that I had even lived in the town where the crime was committed. Frustrated, I called my old elementary school and had them fax my school records to the reporter and me.

Irrked that I was facing one more cover-up MO at the hands of Omaha's finest, I decided to jump in with both feet and immerse myself in my own investigation. So I bought a video camera and began posting 10-minute videos on YouTube about the events of my past s
so as to make sense of them. I filmed the first video outside my family's duplex in Fremont where the crime I'd reported had taken place. I brought up Cindy's death and implored the public to come forth with any information they might have, posting both the Nebraska State Patrol cold case officer's number as well as the reporter's contact info.

When I told Shady about my first conversation with the Nebraska State Patrol and briefly described the original crime, he was uneasy but assured me that if it came to dropping the case against my stepmother in favor of my investigation, he would do it. Then he wished me luck and I walked out of his office. Emily was beside herself with what I was attempting to do. She'd already come to the conclusion that there was nothing we could do to achieve any justice for what had happened to us and now wanted to forget and move on. She urged me to stay out of it and warned me that there would only be heartache and no one would listen. I probably should have listened to her because in the end she was right. At the time, however, I believed that exposing the crimes my father was guilty of was my duty as his son because of generational karma. I felt that the sins of the father fell upon the shoulders of the son, and knowing what I knew and my place in all of it meant that I had to at least try.

Jacob was totally against the videos, feeling I should distance myself from my father and his family rather than involve myself in their misdeeds. He disagreed that I needed to "fix the situation" in my typical messiah complex way. As his partner, he certainly supported me and understood my desire to somehow make my past all right, but he distanced himself from my video activities, agreeing with Emily that no good could come of it. Mrs. Smith too had concerns, although she understood my reasoning. Explaining once again that it wasn't her place to take sides and admitting that she didn't know much about what I was speaking about, she spent our sessions helping me to come to the terms with the grief I felt over losing most of my family all at once. Looking back, I can see what a handful I was.

The second speech I wrote and videotaped was more detailed than the first. I wrote it to better explain my position on the Internet and to give Mrs. Smith a better idea of what I was up against. It was this speech that started things spinning. In the end, not even Mrs. Smith would be able to prevent me from falling off the deep end, leaving me beaten and broken less than two years later. I entitled it, "You Need to Know Why I Still Need Help in Solving a Murder," and it attracted every nut case involved with the situation. Here is the transcript:

I did a previous video entitled "I Need Help in Solving a Murder" in which I am seeking any information I can find on a man who went missing in 1976 or so after going in search of his missing daughter – a man, most likely a policeman, my family forced me to kill. It is difficult to explain the complexities of the situation in which I find myself, let alone in a 10-minute video, and I have never liked being in front of the camera, so added to the intensity of where I was and what I was saying, needless to say I was nervous. Hopefully, this will be better, although after I am finished, there are those who are going to think that I'm nuts. Funny enough, I've been where you are, and that was exactly my mindset at the time. However, things change, and now for me it has become a question of whether or not I will do what I believe is the right thing, regardless of the consequences. After a lot of soul searching, I know unequivocally that there are times when one must stand alone if need be to do what he knows is right. Some things must be defended, especially those who cannot defend themselves, regardless of the cost. So with that, I want to explain why I think I have had to go to such extraordinary lengths to get a murder investigated.

As outlandish as this may sound, the real story behind the Franklin Credit Union, the biggest scandal ever to hit Omaha, was that in the 1960's and the 1970's, George H.W. Bush, Sr., head of the CIA during part of that time, was conducting secret experiments on the effects of extreme torture and fear on children in a funeral home in North Omaha – just one of the things happening to children disappearing during a rash of child abductions here in Omaha in the 1970's, abductions that are well known and yet have never been investigated, let alone prosecuted. I believe this is what prosecuting attorney

Gary Caradori discovered when he and his 8-year-old son AJ were blown out of the sky. Funny enough, after his death, all of the investigations into what was happening in Omaha stopped abruptly.

It has been hard for me to accept that the very year I try to have this crime investigated, 100 police officers, an unprecedented number for Omaha and unfortunately the very people who could help, all suddenly retire. Two weeks before the police chief himself abruptly retired, President Bush himself was in town. I cannot help but feel that all of this is because they realize the same thing I do: that although hundreds of reports police received regarding children being abused have disappeared, chances are the victims who made those reports haven't. And neither now are they children.

Chances are, people out there still remember the big white funeral home decorated in over-the-top Victorian décor, every room a parlor. They may even remember the closets leading to passageways and the terrible hide-and-seek game in which if you were found you were killed. The passageways were tunnels from so dark you couldn't see to so bright you were blinded. Children had a hard time thinking because they were so drugged and terrified of the screams of children being tortured somewhere beyond where they were hiding.

Perhaps some people remember the gatherings in Hummel Park where child after child was raped on the grand staircase. Or how the entrances to the north side of the park were blocked and the so-called Devil's Head was not so much a talisman as it was a lookout point on which you could see the traffic for miles in both directions. Maybe they remember the scary band of drunken, drugged pedophiles and their cult-like behavior.

I remember recurring nightmares that I believed could simply not be real. But I'll bet this is a reoccurring theme in documents that no longer exist, especially considering the people I've spoken to who have had the same recurring nightmares. How is this even possible unless it is not a nightmare but a series of memories?

With as many problems as George W. Bush has in his presidency, to imagine that he wouldn't be concerned with a situation that could shift the debate of whether the Bush Administration tortures people to exactly how long he and his family have been practicing the art, and exactly who they have tortured before we had camps around the world, seems unlikely. Neither Sr. nor Jr. was born president; they were born like the rest of us, so to speak, and therefore are subject to the laws of man, just like the rest of us, whether or not they ended up in positions of power. And though this may surprise them, they are definitely subject to the laws of God.

And to those who consider me a conspiracy theorist, let me ask you a question. Had I come to you ten years ago and told you that the Catholic Church would be almost bankrupt due to a conspiracy to protect, hide, and reroute hundreds of pedophile priests, what would you have said? More importantly, what do you know now? Interestingly enough, I have discovered that the Catholic Church was involved in Omaha, too, and allowed Boystown orphans to be used by pedophiles not limited to Catholic priests.

The abduction of Todd Bequette is only one case illustrating the blatant lack of investigations into abductions in the 70s. Todd was abducted at 13 in the Old Market, a hunting ground for children at the time. Now an adult, Todd hasn't been able to get anything about his case, no paperwork of any kind, nothing about how the police did nothing, or about Terry Roy Holman never being prosecuted or never even being charged in Nebraska, or about how private detective Denny Whelan finally found him. It is as though he was never abducted. Todd and I have emailed a few times and he has told me that he does not believe his case has anything to do with the Franklin Credit Union. I believe he is right, but I have a feeling he and the children he was forced to lure have everything to do with the case I am speaking about. If nothing else, the Todd Bequette case is a big shiny red flag leaving me with the question of why – if so many children were being abducted at the time – why was there never any investigations into them, let alone prosecutions?

If the city of Omaha can afford to give such extravagant retirements to their police force, then surely they can afford investigations into such heinous accusations, especially considering how many accusations have been made. And to those Omaha officers receiving such generous pensions: surely you realize that this is unfinished business that happened on your watch, and that it is totally unfair to ask the citizens of Omaha to pay so handsomely for a job that wasn't done; and surely, in all the decades these allegations have been there to pursue, there was ample time to do thorough investigations. Alisha Owen was sent to prison for years after making allegations, so there must be some paperwork that can show what did and did not happen in Omaha involving child abductions and abuse. Whatever the case, I am sure that Omaha's finest will rise to the challenge and do what must be done. After all, for Omaha PD to not protect our children and to not prosecute those who abuse them is a major dereliction of duties and not the legacy anyone honorable would wish to leave.

I believe we as a society must stop this double standard of justice. Our leaders must be held accountable for their actions just as we the people they serve are held accountable for ours. What happened to me at ten has been called the rite of accountability, meaning you are forced to do a crime and can't talk. Otherwise, you'd be held accountable and go to jail. This is the rub. Now as an adult, I am doing this because I am holding myself accountable, and because I believe it's the right thing to do. I will not stop.

So Brutus, dear friend of Alan Baer of 35 years, it makes no difference how many death threats you infer my way, I will not stop until I find healing and closure for those who have been hurt by this mess. I feel an obligation to do this. It is like I said in the card I sent you: do not let old age overcome you before you make this right because if you do, I fear the consequences of your behavior will be dire. As a man of God, you should realize that in the end God will not be denied. Your behavior pains me because I considered you a very dear friend. But judging by your threats, you are not only involved but have something to hide as well.

Hopefully, my next step is to set up a contest. If the police won't look into this, perhaps amateur investigators would like to try. One way or another, it will be looked at. We live in a different day and age; secrets are not as easily kept as they once were. And these allegations are far from new. What IS new is that they are being made by someone whose family was intimately connected. As strange as it may sound, I believe we are at a turning point in society, and to fight for the darkness is to be owned by the darkness. Like it or not, at one point or another, every one of us is going to face God.

I can't tell you who to call; I wish I knew myself. Maybe just send out the word and we can reach some point of closure in this together as a people. Funny enough, I really feel like God is with me in this, so any prayers you could offer that these people find closure, healing, and peace would be great. Thanks again – and I will most likely be seeing you later. Peace.

The Wonderland Polka

A couple of months after posting the video, I was contacted by a woman on YouTube connected with a website devoted to the Franklin Credit Union and all of the conspiracies surrounding the failed bank. She explained that her father had been a Hell's Angel murdered on an Indian reservation and had many tales of government conspiracies and black helicopters targeting her house and phone lines. Considering what I was posting, I figured it was best not to judge and so decided to check out the website. It was filled with information collected onto a forum and a chat area. I learned about the MKUltra connection to the Franklin scandal and found a plethora of leads, knowing that by myself I wouldn't be able to do a really thorough investigation. Still suffering from PTSD, even the website was triggering and feeding the paranoia I already felt on a daily basis. I was irritated that I couldn't get anyone to listen to me and angry that I had to go to such extremes to have my past investigated. In the beginning, expressing myself on the new website released some of the stress. Encouraged to talk about my experiences, I began relating memories to complete strangers, believing that the truth would set me free.

The more I read about all the issues tangential to the Franklin Credit Union, the less it all made sense until I discovered the 1982 Johnny Gosch paperboy abduction case in Iowa. I read his mother Noreen's book *Why Johnny Can't Come Home* (2000) detailing before and after events, and the website dedicated to her quest. This case started me questioning in a new way. First, Johnny had been classified as a runaway and the police had refused to investigate his disappearance from the very beginning, despite the fact that he was one of two paperboys to disappear in the Des Moines area. Second, the same U.S. Army lieutenant colonel involved in both MKUltra *and* the McMartin daycare "Satanic panic" scandal *and* one of the "Famous Three" victims involved with the Franklin Credit Union scandal was the high priest of a well known Satanic church that will remain nameless as well as personally involved with the Bush family – and the abduction of Johnny Gosch. Years after his disappearance, Johnny was briefly resurrected as a Washington, D.C. callboy named Jeff Gannon. Though this too

eventually slid into the memory hole, one has to wonder why it got the coverage it did. My sister and I knew one thing: the lives of most abducted children were short-lived as they were used and murdered soon after. If Johnny Gosch survived, he was one of the few. The wealthy men involved in Omaha abductions had a tight hand on the situation.

I continued making videos explaining what I'd gone through and posted a longer video on MySpace detailing the events that had happened in densely wooded Hummel Park on the far edge of town, including the sacrifices. Mrs. Smith spent hours listening to me relate my experiences on the website, concerned that I was involved with strangers who might have intentions that I wouldn't eventually appreciate. Jacob felt the hours I spent at the computer were a complete waste of time. How could a bunch of strangers in a chat room help me? But I was addicted, spending the first few months learning as much as I could about child abuse and abductions in Omaha, then increasingly questioning others' findings and watching attitudes in the chat room change, not yet realizing that Internet "relationships" were as confusing or undependable as my family's mix of truth and lies.

A retired FBI man by the name of Ted Gunderson had taken over the investigation into the allegations regarding Franklin Credit Union after prosecuting attorney Gary Caradori was killed. Given his contact information on the website, I called him. One of the first things he told me was that the CIA and government were infested with Satanists who had attacked him with a microwave weapon. Besides sounding a lot like my father on the phone, Ted was a wealth of information and so I befriended him, despite misgivings. He sent me a report he'd written detailing activities of CIA-sponsored child abductors known as The Finders. At last, I saw the *scope* of what my father had been involved in. Ted's assertion that a large, secret, protected network was abducting children for a variety of purposes, from MKUltra to Satanic sacrifices, was believable. After reviewing figures on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website, it was evident that something in the shadows was devouring our nation's children.

Eventually, however, both the website and I decided that neither of us was what the other had initially perceived. I was banned from the chat room. People who had expressed a desire to help me now began threatening and ridiculing me and I had no way to respond. It happens a lot on the Internet. Angry and feeling discredited, I nevertheless continued documenting Omaha. The next video, "A Walking Tour Through Pedophile Heaven – Omaha, Nebraska's Real Legacy," was a 30-minute walk through the Old Market area, up to the police station, and then over to the Run, with me narrating where things were in relation to the Franklin Credit allegations of child prostitution and abuse. (It's still on YouTube today under "A Walking Tour of Downtown Omaha, NE."), and can be found on the website JohnnyGosch.com.

While walking and narrating and filming that Sunday morning, it dawned on me how my obsession with the "investigation website" had kept me from my real

investigation into abused children in the area. I decided to confront the publicly involved personalities, like police chief Robert Wadman of the Franklin Credit Union downfall era. I emailed him and it was if I had gone to war and put myself on the front lines. In the following emails, I have left out the name of the mother of the abducted child, for reasons I feel are important- and will refer to her as TABM henceforth, (the abducted boy's mother).

An Email Conversation with Omaha NE's Ex-Chief of Police

Robert,

I was very disappointed not to hear anything from you after sending you an email, so I thought I would try again. You see, my friend, I have tried to get my parents to take me to court about all of this over and over and over- to no avail- so when I was told that you were eager to take people to court, I figured we could help each other out. I am willing to bet that I can help to make this happen, so let's just say that both of us have had a prayer answered.

I just wanted to let you know that the videos are definitely NOT the only thing I am guilty of doing. The communications I have had with the media, politicians, and victim advocacy groups have almost been daily, and now that I am involved with this to such a degree, it has pretty much taken over my life. You see, this time I know you don't have the Alan and Marsha Baer foundation money to think about since he's dead and out of the picture. So now, maybe we can get some real discourse about all of this. I mean, did you really think it was fair to send Mark Anderson, one of my dearest friends, and Walt Carlson, the man you all dubbed "The Pied Piper of Porn," to jail for decades while not even giving so much as a slap on the hand to Alan and his sex with minors counts?

I have also sent everyone on a similar mission. You see, if they start looking at all that child porn being collected in Europe, we all know that they are not only going to see the eatery Stars (down in the Old Market) but especially in the child porn and snuff films they'll see The Hollywood – you know, the one Omaha tore down when all of these allegations came out. I'll bet you weren't betting on anyone remembering any of this. Funny how Ted Gunderson and his friends didn't know anything about it.

Last of all and probably most importantly, I've told people that the bodies of those children are buried in legitimate graves in Forest Lawn Memorial Park off of 48th street in North Omaha. I know you guys thought you were so clever about that, but let me ask you this (now that people know about it and are looking into it): exactly HOW are you going to retrieve what you left? IF you

don't, you realize you're leaving it open for someone else to go and look. And I assure you, everyone is going to want to see.

This is the deal, Robbie: you all better deal with this before you draw your last breath because if you don't, you're going to end up right along with your savior and friend Alan Baer, who, by the way, won't be saving anyone's ass this time. Get your fancy clothes ready because one way or another, we are going to end up in court. () is the LEAST OF YOUR WORRIES NOW, MY FRIEND. – By the way, you attack her one more time and I'll return the favor. You do have media where you live, don't you? So far, everyone has been really really interested in this, so I bet the people in your hometown would find it equally so. Better call your lawyer now.*

You want to deal with someone, threaten someone, intimidate someone – well, here I am, Robbie. I'm listed, feel free to call. Just realize that I will be recording the call and sharing it with everyone when we are done. Things aren't going to go well for all of you with all of this, FRIEND. I look forward to hearing from you.

P.S.

Also, () – you remember, the mother you've been intimidating and harassing for trying to get answers for 25 years now about her abducted son – has nothing to do with this. I am cc'ing her so she can see what I am doing. After I send this, I'll be sending it out to everyone else, but I don't feel you need to know who they are. That will be your surprise.*

-- Original Message --

From: Robert WADMAN

To: d shur

Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 10:55:26 AM

Subject: Re: Hey Robbie- its your old friend from Omaha again

Mr. D. Shur:

I'm sure you are aware that Alisha Owen was found guilty of perjury for the lies she told about Robert Wadman. These same lies are now being spread by (). If she doesn't want to be sued, all she has to do is delete the lies about Robert Wadman from her web-site. She is a sad case, and the only reason she has not been sued is her pathetic position. Robert Wadman had nothing to do with any of the things she has experienced. If her lies are not removed, she will be filed against. Just ask yourself, why would she put my phone number and e-mail address on her web-page? If she wants nothing to do with this situation, all she has to do is stop spreading lies about me.*

Dr. Robert Wadman

Professor

Criminal Justice Department

>>> d shur < 6/25/2008 9:59 AM >>>

Robert-

We are not speaking of (*). What I would like is for you to respond to my accusations. You realize that they only need to find *one child* in those graves to credit what I am saying. Whether or not (*) is sad is beside the point. But since this was all going on and you were chief of police at the time, are you actually going to tell me that you have no idea what I am talking about? Really? I'll bet I can prove otherwise or at least give it some help. By the way, when I told her that Sam was my boss and manager at The Stage Door, she was incredibly thankful. So you really think I am the only gay man left alive that remembers that? Really?

I look forward to hearing for you. And more than that, I hope that we can eventually meet in person because I would love to have people interview the two of us together. Doesn't that sound like fun?

D

From: Robert WADMAN

To: d shur

Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 11:13:17 AM

D

My phone number is (xxx)xxx-xxxx. I'm at my office and I would be glad to talk to you about the nonsense you are writing about. I have never been involved with any of the allegations you are making. Your writing appears to be a little nutty and I want you to know directly from me how hurtful these lies have been to me and my family.

Dr. Robert Wadman

d shur < 6/25/2008 10:18 AM >>>

Robert,

I'll call this afternoon. I need to set some things up, but then I would be more than glad to talk with you. If you have never heard of any of these allegations, then how exactly have they hurt you? Neither (*) nor most people know what I am talking about, so I have been very solid on sending out daily emails

explaining all of this. I know: you all thought that if anyone would say anything about this they would sound nuts. But you know, I was told you were this evil big bad man who attacked at a moment's notice and your emails sound as if you are shaken. I bet I can help increase that.

I'll be talking to you this afternoon.

Look forward to it,

D

*From: Robert WADMAN
To: d shur
Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 11:23:21 AM*

*D:
I won't be in my office this afternoon and you don't need to set anything up. I have been hurt because the lies about me have destroyed my consulting business.
Have a little courage and give me a call.
Dr. Wadman*

d shur < 6/25/2008 10:25 AM >>>

Trust me, Robert, I have courage. But I also know that you are a game player. That's okay. I come from a family of game players. I am just not home right now. But trust me, I will be calling you. Have no doubt about that.

D

*From: Robert WADMAN
To: d shur
Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 11:30:07 AM*

*D:
It is obvious that you don't have enough common sense to just call. Are living in a fantasy world with no real people in your life. Call (xxx) xxx-xxxx. I would be glad to answer any of your questions. If you don't have the courage to call, stop bothering me.
Robert Wadman*

d shur > 6/25/2008 10:39 AM >>>

It is DEFINITELY not going to be that easy. We both know that I am not going anywhere, nor are the all the people that I have told.

Hmmmm. Babyland. Does this area in Forest Lawn sound familiar? Big joke, huh? Let's see if you keep laughing.

*From: Robert WADMAN
To: d shur
Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 11:44:08 AM
Even though you statements appear to be idiotic, I would be glad to talk with you at anytime. I have a search firm looking up your address and I will be in touch.
Robert Wadman*

d shur < 6/25/2008 10:53 AM >>>

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Robert-

We both know that you are desperate to find out what I know. The problem for you is not what I know, but what I have told. I am not just some kid who found himself in this. I grew up with it. I know so much more than you are comfortable with.

I have told about everything, friend. Babyland means something to you, as it should.

Funny- you don't seem to be full of threats with me. And calling me crazy might work with someone who isn't self-aware, but we all know you are fucked. This is all coming out, and as police chief, especially with your history concerning all of this, I don't think you are going to be able to separate yourself.

I will be calling you today.

D

*From: Robert WADMAN
To: d shur*

Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 12:42:46 PM

D:

I've tracked from www.xxxxxxxxxx.com/world/murderous-secret-need-be-uncovered-Omaha. They referred me to "GoDaddy.com" which is apparently your web-master. Give me a little more time, and you will be in contact with my attorney.

Robert Wadman

>>> d shur < 6/25/2008 11:51 AM >>>

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You know, it occurred to me that you have my phone number as well. As far as your attorney, send the paperwork because I ain't gonna stop until we are in court. But I think I made that quite clear in my email – you know, the one you read on xxxxxxxxxxx. Also xxx. and myspace, and (*) put it on her site at my request and won't take it down until I AM TOLD BY A JUDGE to remove it.

I am not afraid of you, dude. I know who I am. You do, too, I think.

Karma can be a real bitch.

--- Original Message ---

From: Robert WADMAN

To: d shur

Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 12:54:59 PM

D:

I know you are in Council Bluffs and there are four different Shur in the area. I'm trying to get it narrowed down.

Robert Wadman

>>> d shur < 6/25/2008 12:07 PM >>>

This suspicious message has been removed due to offensive wording in order to comply with Weber State University email policies. If you wish to receive the message, please use the daily digest quarantine feature and release this message.

Robert,

You have my phone number. Call the Nebraska state patrol guy, I'm sure he will help you.

Of course, I already have given everyone all of your shit, and emailed all of this correspondence to everyone.

You, my friend, are going to deal with me, and not the way you think, either. And if anything should happen to me, I have given everyone enough info to go ahead, as well as made hours of video tapes talking about it all. You do know that the Supreme Court has ruled that type of info can be used in a trial?

We live in a different day and age, dude. Do what you want and I'll make sure I bring it right to your front step.

D

-- Original Message --

From: Robert WADMAN

To: d shur

Sent: Wednesday, June 25, 2008 1:18:14 PM

D:

I've tried (402)333-xxxx. Is this the right number?

Robert Wadman

Robert,

Oh boy, now I can show that you got hold of my father's third wife who has been dealing with this for about a year and a half now. She left me a message on my YouTube videos. I am sure you old friends have quite a bit to talk about, you and my dad being in the same child-killing cult.

Thanks. That's what I was looking for.

D

P.S.

By the way, my phone number is 712 256 xxxx, as I PLAINLY TOLD YOU IN MY EMAIL.

By the way, she already knows I'm not afraid of her. Maybe you should try calling your friend Alan. Oh wait, he can't help you.

(Just a side note: Babyland is the area in Forest Lawn Memorial Park where many of the children who were buried or cremated found their final resting place among the legitimate graves of other children.)

Obamaha

Before all of this happened, things started getting very intense for me in February 2008, when Democratic candidate Barack Obama came to Omaha to solicit votes and I tried to elicit his help, figuring he was my only hope to get anyone to investigate any of this. The experience was so bad that I subsequently did a video for YouTube. This is that speech:

I generally try to stay out of politics but I have a question for Mr. Obama. I contacted your Nebraska campaign office the morning you came to Omaha about helping to get justice for a bunch of murdered kids. In my conversation with your campaign office, I asked that you view my YouTube videos "I Need Help In Solving a Murder" and "You Need To Know Why I Still Need Help in Solving a Murder." I also asked that you look at the BBC documentary "A Conspiracy of Silence," which is related to the situation of which I am speaking.

My question is, where do you get off telling the American people that you care what is happening to them when it took you less than nine hours to sell out getting justice for a bunch of murdered kids in order to further your political career and have Omaha named Obamaha for the day? In my opinion, your sell out denotes your sense of character, and your "change" movement just seems like more of the same, just packaged slightly differently.

You weren't late in getting to the Civic Center, although you took to the stage an hour and a half late. Your caravan arrived before the man got hit by the car and had to be taken by ambulance to the hospital. I know this because – oddly enough – I was standing in the driveway and had to move when your white van and car arrived at the 17th Street exit. So since you weren't late, obviously something delayed you from taking to the stage for an hour and a half. Our mayor knows that it is my opinion that he and his buddies are more interested in their multimillion dollar stadium and their \$55 million trolley system that they want to build than they are in getting justice for a bunch of murdered kids, especially murdered poor kids, ESPECIALLY considering that they were killed by rich pedophiles. In fact, I think that they would like it if this whole situation just went away so that it in no way hindered their \$55 million trolley system and multimillion dollar stadium. I also suspect our mayor knows that I believe that those murdered children deserve more than just having Omaha called Obamaha for the day.

Say what you will about me, I believe that the BBC documentary "A Conspiracy of Silence" should have been enough to at least give you pause. However, a sellout is a sellout is a sellout. And to say you didn't know, that the Nebraska campaign office failed to tell you, is a bit more like George Bush than anyone should feel comfortable with. He was never informed, didn't know, never knew, wasn't responsible, and worked with an inefficient staff as well.

Mr. Obama, I think you need to understand that the American people can do more than just offer you their money and their vote. Who needs to make a public display of themselves when they are standing on the floor five feet away from the stage on which you are standing and there is the Internet and YouTube?

So my question again, sir, is this: Where do you get off telling the American people that you care what is happening to them when it only took you less than nine hours to sell out a bunch of murdered children in order to further your political career and have Omaha called *Obamaha* for the day? I know that these children were poor, but let me ask you: Don't you care about justice for a bunch of murdered kids?

The whole experience downtown at the Civic Center was very strange, and I will never forget it. Jacob despised Obama and everything he stood for and warned me not to waste my time, urging me to forego getting involved with my past. He said I was becoming obsessed with my childhood and it was changing me in ways he didn't care for. Mrs. Smith said the same thing because I was becoming increasingly angry and had abandoned both my artwork and my spiritual practice for something she saw as very dark. Compelled, I disregarded their concerns, convinced I was doing the right thing.

So I stood out in the cold for hours, waiting to get into the Civic Center to hear Mr. Obama. I talked to my friend Doris about the semi that kept driving by with a huge picture of an aborted baby on it. The mother in front of me had to keep turning her two children away every time it drove by, which was when I loudly said, "How nice it would be if we actually cared about the children that are here" and "if the men who cared about aborted babies spent time actually caring about those babies after they're born, we wouldn't be in the world we are in today," which comments elicited applause around me, a bright moment for me, especially when the mother turned and thanked me.

At last inside, I stood so I was closer to the stage, which gave me an opportunity to notice how much Nebraska's leaders looked like criminals. A group of them stood talking and looking straight at me, giving me the impression that I was the topic of their conversation, especially when they didn't bother to turn away when I was facing them. Jacob was right. I was wasting my time, but I chose to stay anyway to see what Obama would say.

During his speech, he never once glanced in my direction. One of his body guards directly across from me stared me down. After hearing how he was going to send everyone to school and solve global warming in his first four years, among other promises he couldn't possibly keep, I left angry and disheartened. Omaha being a small town with the scandals of the past well maintained and hidden, I figured I had gotten the attention I did because my memories were a threat.

Everyday Life in Wonderland

It is easy to forget about God when you are walking through the middle of hell, and I was no exception. Confused and struggling with who I was in relation to my past, I knew that I was changing, and not for the better. I'd spent a great deal of my life denying everything that had happened to me and had become quite comfortable in being considered "crazy," though Mrs. Smith argued I was no such thing. The more I learned about Omaha and the people connected with its nefarious dealings, the more I realized that it hadn't gone away but had grown in complexity and scope, and not just in my head.

The issues I was unearthing were so dark that those around me urged me to get out of all of it. We received 17 death threat calls on our answering machine in the form of a heart monitor bleep. The numbers registering on caller ID came from a local hospital. At first, Jacob thought that our phone had gotten caught in a computer loop, but when the hospital said that the numbers were assigned to room phones and pay phones, he changed his opinion. Someone had been calling our house and leaving the messages. Jacob's pleas to get out became more urgent.

But I felt responsible for exposing a horrible, evil situation connected to my past. Fighting this fight was somehow my destiny, especially when I found out that one of the three ritually murdered boys in the 80's here in Omaha vacationed with his family at the same lake in Minnesota on which my family had a trailer. Ricky Chadek and his abduction began to become a concern for me. It all pointed to my father and his sick friends, and allowing the bodies to be found – given the efficient disposal system they had going, like cremating or burying bodies with legit dead kids in Babyland – appeared to be some sort of message.

When I mentioned how Gunderson's report on The Finders mentioned a group of people profiting from abducting children, Emily told me to look up the case of an abducted 11-year-old in St. Joseph, Minnesota on October 22, 1989 named Jacob Wetterling. In two photographs of two men, one of whom was the abductor, one looked exactly like my father. The second photograph looked nothing like him, but the hat on his head was an exact replica of the one my father wore. When I told her it was our father, she said she'd followed the case

from its beginnings. She'd lived in the area and had always thought it was him but didn't know who to tell.

The next day, I called the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and filed a report, then called the foundation the abducted boy's parents had created in his memory to tell them what I suspected. Asking me which picture I believed was the abductor as only one picture was, I told her that the bald man was my father, whereas the other picture copied the hat my dad wore. I then said that I bet the boy was abducted in a big blue truck – the utility truck my father drove all over the area as a Northern Propane gas man. She confirmed it was true.

I began sending out daily emails to everyone I could think of – media outlets, victim groups, anyone who might be able to help me. That's when I began descending into a depression the likes of which I hadn't felt since I was a teenager. Isolated in my search, no job, spending most of my time immersed in the very worst society had to offer, I became insolent, bombarded by chaos, incredibly defensive. All I wanted to do was get my father's activities investigated.

Also depressing was the fact Cindy's adult children were castigating me with vicious lies on the Internet. While in the chat room with others, my nephew related how I had supposedly raped them in the laundry room of my father's house in Iowa and that I was a liar because I was a pedophile. I couldn't defend myself because I'd been banned, so I called my sister and demanded that she get on the website and argue for me. She did, pointing out to others that our nephew was high on pills. But it didn't stop there. Later that night, I went on Yahoo messenger to talk with my oldest sister's other children, making sure I kept a copy of both our website chat and the conversation between my niece and me in which I pointed out that although her sibling was lying, it did support what I said about my father's house not being normal. The next day, she went back onto the website and changed the story, saying I'd molested three boys and not her brothers in a corn silo. When that story proved impossible, it changed to three boys molested outside of a town they lived in up in Minnesota. As the story kept changing, the argument was the same: I couldn't be trusted because I was a pedophile. On the one hand, they were trying to prevent me from having their mother's death investigated, which I was desperate to do, figuring that it had something to do with my family's past. Four years later after their father died, my nephew apologized to me for the pedophile lies, explaining that he was protecting my father's widow and it was the only thing he could think of at the time.

I probably would have forgiven the whole thing had it not been for my family's social security numbers going over the chat in the website right after the accusations. Figuring they'd originated from my stepmother who'd given them to my niece, etc., I assumed that my social security number was among those

given up and I was livid. I filed a police report and turned it over to the agencies involved with identity theft, mortified that my father's family would go to such lengths to victimize me. That was when I started having serious problems with anger and sleep.

The court case we had going against my father's widow had gone poorly, and both Emily and I walked away feeling that we'd been duped. Email after email, Shady explained that these things took time, that he was having problems with my stepmother's lawyer who happened to be her cousin. At the end of our \$5,000 retainer, Shady produced my father's "will." It was my father's name at the bottom of the will, all right, but the signature was in my stepmother's handwriting.

At the end of the ordeal, we got a letter in the mail telling us that if we wished to pursue this case any further, we would have to go to court immediately as the statute of limitations was due to expire at the end of that year. Shady had played us, first for his loyalty to the family that my stepmother's daughter had married into, and second to keep things quiet and out of court. Having never been able to force my father or his widow into court, I'd hoped to be in front of a judge long enough to explain what I'm detailing in this book. But in another way, I'd achieved what I had set out to do: the fraudulent will was my proof that my father hadn't lied when he told me that he had included us as beneficiaries. Years later, Jacob and I saw Shady on a flight back to Omaha from Chicago. Judging by his reaction, I was correct in assuming he'd swindled us. Neither of us said a word, but hooked eyes. His look was stricken, after which he stared at me after he sat down. Jacob urged me to let it go, but I turned around and stared into Shady's eyes to give him a taste of the anger I felt toward him. He then lowered his head and from what I could tell, spent the rest of the flight cowering in his seat.

It wasn't just my father's family that went into attack mode but complete strangers as well, and not just in chat rooms but in real life. Soon after the death threats on my phone, I was contacted via email and told that a man named Doc Marque wanted to speak with me. He lived in western Nebraska and had been involved with Satanism not as a victim but as a practitioner of the art – in fact, as an "Illuminati witch." During our first conversation, I realized that this man had written books about how he'd tortured people and yet here he was, free as a bird, gay as Christmas, and eager to proudly share how he'd hurt children. I was polite on the phone, despite images of reaching through the phone and decking him.

My inquiry was psychologically taxing and I was again having problems with insomnia. I found it impossible to keep grounded, even with Mrs. Smith's help. Child abductions, ritual abuse, satanic churches and Iran/Contra conspiracies as well as a myriad of other dirt and death threats were difficult for her to believe. People were shying away from me, no doubt uncomfortable with the constant

anger flaring into rage at the slightest provocation. My deep voice took on an intensity that affected my tone and inflections. The intensity I was experiencing wasn't healthy, Mrs. Smith said, it being a symptom of my childhood defense system. During our sessions, she kept trying to talk me down while patiently listening to my denials and excuses about why I was unable to control myself, then explaining that my anger was like an emotional freight train that people felt run over by. Some sessions, I just yelled, frustrated by the situations I was finding myself in and again feeling powerless.

Everyone has a breaking point and mine came two years into my investigation, when I had a "brief psychotic episode." After not being able to sleep for two and a half weeks straight, I committed myself to a hospital. After spending the night at Art's house in an attempt to try and sleep someplace else and finding myself unable to do so, Art sat me down the morning I checked myself into the hospital and, looking me straight in the eyes, told me that everyone was worried about me and that I needed help, that it wasn't fair to put those closest to me through such hell. Demanding that I leave the investigation, he hugged me as I left to go home, making me promise that I would seek help. Delusional, confused, and desperate to sleep, I went to my psychiatrist's office the morning I was to meet Jacob in LA and begged her to help me. She committed me that morning and the strange events of my present followed me into the hospital, when an implausible coincidence occurred.

Breakdown

The weeks before my breakdown were awful for Jacob as well as those closest to us. Horrified, he had no idea what to say or how to help and spent much of his time on the road worrying about what was going on with me. All he could do was watch me descend into madness. Gunderson suggested that a microwave weapon was being used to inundate and silence me, possibly from as close as a neighbor's house. All I knew was that I couldn't sleep and was now unable to determine what was real and what wasn't. After a week of no sleep at all, I tacked up tinfoil for insulation and wore tin foil over my ears in an attempt to drown out the ringing in my head. Later, an ears, nose, and throat doctor told me that the ringing was caused by TMJ and arthritis in my jaw. Under an incredible amount of stress, I was grinding my teeth constantly and the pain was radiating into my ears in the form of a kind of tinnitus. But without the rationality that a good night's sleep provides, I was unable to escape the growing paranoia that I was under attack.

Disheartened by finding myself in a mental hospital for the first time in my adult life, I agreed with Jacob that we had arrived at the lowest point in our relationship. At my request, he kept my hospitalization from the majority of our friends, as I found it humiliating. My sister could have sung a resounding chorus of "I told you so," but she was just grateful that I'd checked myself into the hospital, given that it was my turn to go down the same path she'd traveled

years before. Drugs helped me sleep and I began putting myself back together a couple days later. I'd lost 30 pounds and looked awful, with huge black bags under my eyes, shaken by the whole ordeal.

Concerned that I was experiencing some sort of schizophrenia, the staff was taken aback when Jacob, my sister, and our good friend Doris assured the doctor and nurse at the family therapy session that I was pursuing an inquiry into satanic ritual abuse and government conspiracy. Stalwartly, Emily related a few of her own experiences and explained that their concern was not that I was crazy but that what I was dealing with was so negative and destructive that they were afraid it would completely consume me, plus I was alone too much due to Jacob's job requiring him to always be on the road. Their concern was that I had become self-destructive by clinging to a situation that was obviously killing me.

Jacob did everything he could to cheer me up. I started to honestly accept responsibility for the effects my behavior was having on those around me, especially Jacob, and finally convinced myself to "give up the ghost," meaning the inquiry. I realized that my focus should be on those who loved me rather than on a situation that seemed to have no foreseeable conclusion.

Everyone on the ward knew what I was dealing with, given that I'd spoken about it several times in group therapy. They'd been irritated that my doctor thought I was being "delusional" (at least before the family meeting) because they knew I was correct about Omaha being a satanic ritual abuse capital. But the staff was still skeptical and disbelieving, which

made me feel Emily's isolation when she'd broken down and come to terms with our childhood. Later, I would apologize for being so mean to her at the time she needed support the most. I also better understood the resistance I'd felt for so many years whenever the past came up. So when the unbelievable happened, it just felt like more of the same.

While in the hospital, a woman was admitted who had the same last name as Johnny Gosch. Introducing herself to Jacob and me, she explained that she was Noreen's ex-husband's niece. I couldn't believe the coincidence. But instead of viewing it as an act of fate, after what I'd just experienced, I found myself believing it was some sort of set-up. She told us that Johnny was indeed a runaway and impressed upon us the fact that he had lived with physical abuse, which contradicted everything his mother was saying. Over pizza, she told us about her family and why she felt that all situations concerning her cousin were a reflection of the craziness that was part of his mother's psychological makeup.

What were the chances of running into such a person in such a place at such a time?

I returned home a week later. Jacob had taken down the tin foil. I took down all of the videos and writing detailing my past, feeling disheartened by my failure but believing that those closest to me deserved my time and energy more than a situation way over my head and beyond my ability to resolve. I had failed my father, God, and in many ways myself due to my instability. No one would listen to me any longer. Alone with my thoughts, I began to review my life, desperate to find myself in the chaos I'd created. I reached out to the friends I'd abandoned following the 12-step program and apologizing to everyone I had harmed. Going through my phone book, I called everyone I'd abandoned, which included Colton.

Rekindling Colton's and my friendship became important after I got out of the hospital. I had a need to rediscover who I was in the past and Colton was probably the only person in the world who knew me better than Jacob. When I called him after years of not speaking to each other, he asked me if everything was all right. I told him it wasn't and that I missed our friendship dearly. I apologized for abandoning our friendship and lashing out at him during the years we'd been apart. I told him that I loved him and we made plans to get together later that week just to see how things went.

Released from the bondage he'd grown up under with his mother and Alan Baer, the prince of temptation had settled down, finally comfortable in having found what he had always been searching for: a family. His wife was a wonderful woman, strong-willed and intelligent, and their teenaged daughters were well-adjusted and brilliant women themselves. They'd adopted his wife's sister's children and were a real version of the Brady bunch – a houseful of kids being raised by parents who loved each other dearly. And the love we felt for each other as brothers was undeniable. We resumed our friendship as if nothing bad had ever occurred.

Able to sleep but still under a debilitating depression, back to being alone with Jacob constantly on the road, I sank deeper and deeper into despair, feeling as if I'd been abandoned by God. I couldn't escape the despair at losing such an important battle and I spent hours crying, feeling as if I had let everyone down who had been hurt in a way that was unforgivable. Concerned, Mrs. Smith called my psychiatrist and asked that I be readmitted. Susan, who had been in the background this whole time, felt I was under spiritual attack. Given that she too had had her own childhood experiences with Omaha, she urged me to begin my spiritual practice again while Art counseled me to return to a church of some sort. No longer as isolated as I was the first time in the hospital, I reached out to friends and family and finally got a handle on my depression with the help of antidepressants. Following Susan's advice, I took a shamanic journey shortly after getting out of the hospital.

Rising Above Wonderland

The way I was raised – the Antichrist, etc. – convinced me that human beings are moving towards something spiritual, and because I believed in the Christian “last days” Tribulation, that is often what I see playing out on the other side when I journey. Now, I was no longer afraid that I was a bad guy and actually saw myself as Mrs. Smith saw me: a normal human being who’d had abnormal experiences.

After getting out of the hospital a second time, I’d come to the conclusion that there may not be justice on this side for the Omaha children I’d been fighting for, but in a karmic sense there is justice on the other side. So I journeyed to find out about Alan Baer.

I found myself on top of a mountain confronted by the most mesmerizing blackness I had ever seen. Hypnotic, this *living darkness* was calling to me in a way almost impossible to resist. Had God not turned me from its gaze and instructed me never to return to this place, I might have been claimed that day. Representing great spiritual judgment, this darkness will claim those who have chosen to share its nature the minute they exhale their last breath. They will stand where I stood and be taken as Alan was taken.

After leaving that place, I was given a bird eye view of people I’d known involved and what had happened to them once they’d crossed over in death. Powerful and hedonistic in life, they had been consumed by their own hellish desires. There was my mother who had endured years of physical torture, in and out of the hospital more often than anyone I had ever known; my father had been surrounded by ghouls waiting anxiously for him to die so they could materially benefit from his death; Dick who had died alone in a ghastly way, unable to return home for fear of retribution for his crimes; Alan who had died from the inside out, and people calling after his death to tell his widow how happy they were he was dead; Kevin Dobson the violent drug dealer consigned to a home and living out his last days as a quadriplegic – not to mention the Franklin Credit Union fan club I was once a part of. How difficult it must be for these men to face each day, knowing how their victims yearn to exact justice on them!

This journey taught me about God’s justice, not man’s, and how in many ways it was more exacting *and more exact* than what anyone on earth could have devised. I’d had no hope when I’d been so depressed I had to return to the hospital, believing that evil wins and good has little power over events. I’d been obsessed with bringing justice to the front steps of the guilty, even though it wasn’t my place to do so. *Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord.* And so I’d driven myself crazy to open myself up, break myself down, and be rebuilt. My place had not been the one I thought it was. I was only one person, and no man is an island, as they say. Now, from the big picture perspective of the other side, I was able to regain my faith along with the balance I lacked for living life. Returning home to Jacob and my studio, I went back to my artwork and spent the following year trying to forget the events that had led to my breakdown.

Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA)

In March 2009 on Friday the 13th, Yahoo featured an article about the history of Friday the 13th. At the bottom of the article was a link by a man named Benjamin Radford listing the top 10 conspiracy theories, with Satanic Cults falling under number 9. <http://www.livescience.com/strangenews/top10-conspiracy-theories.html> The article quoted Phillip Stevens Jr., associate professor of anthropology at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who claimed that the satanic cults in the 80s and early 90s "constitute the greatest hoax perpetrated upon the American people in the twentieth century." Radford then adds that no proof of Satanic activity has ever been proven, his evidence being the sensationalist claims of people like talk show host Geraldo Rivera, whose 1988 show "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground" which ended up being nothing more than bad journalism and flopped, convincing Americans that ritual abuse (SRA) was a hoax. What it taught me, however, is that there is obviously a major media *push* to discredit what is all too true too often. "No proof" does not reflect the McMartin daycare case in which 1,200 children from McMartin and eight other daycares in the area – including a Long Beach Catholic church conveniently downplayed in the news – claimed they had been victims of SRA. The fact that no convictions stuck doesn't mean it was only "Satanic panic." After the trial, forensic archeologists found the tunnels and rooms filled with Satanic relics and evidence of rites that the children had testified to, which discovery led to the questions and problems that the trial hadn't wanted to address, such as how and why did these tunnels remain hidden until after the trial? How did so many children come up with the same claims around the same time, and more importantly for what purpose? To bring down daycares? Why would parents subject themselves and their children to public scorn? The "Satanic panic" was hardly a nationally crafted hoax.

The False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) is invaluable when it comes to dismissing the possibility of SRA from the public mind. As I said earlier, much of its funding comes from the North American Man Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), with some FMSF members being on the NAMBLA board, as well. Like they say on *Southpark*, "Dudes, you have sex with children." Many FMSF theories presented in court cases as "expert testimony" have been disproved, not to mention that drugging and traumatizing a child does affect the brain and its ability to remember exactly. FMSF involvement in marginalizing the SRA issue should at least be suspect, given its NAMBLA conflict of interest. Most damning for SRA victims is Kenneth Lanning's "1992 FBI Report – Satanic Ritual Abuse." Even in Omaha, the FBI has been accused of covering up much of what was going on in the 80s concerning the Franklin Credit Union and charges of child abduction and trafficking. Thus taking the FBI seriously is suspect in itself, as is expecting the FBI to investigate itself, as in Lanning's report. Compare it to Randy Noblitt and Pamela Perskin Noblitt's 2008 book *Ritual Abuse in the 21st Century: Psychological, Forensic, Social, and Political Considerations*. Noblitt is the clinical [psychologist](#) director of the Center

for Counseling and Psychological Services in [Dallas, Texas](#), and Perskin the Executive Director of the International Council on Cultism and Ritual Trauma – both experts on what is actually a complex psychological topic, not “Satanic panic.”

For the most part, the claims of the daycare victims in Manhattan Beach, California and Omaha, Nebraska (and everywhere else) are real. Whether an organized Satanic cult or a government project under MKUltra followed by a well organized campaign to silence victims and quiet claims in both the courtroom and media remains to be proven. As Arthur Conan Doyle wrote, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

Leaving Wonderland

Children are our most precious resource. Without healthy children, the future dwindles toward apathy and animosity. As a still free society, it is our obligation to ensure that every child has a chance to become all that they can. *It takes a village to raise a child.* As children of God, whatever our age, we should celebrate the fact that each generation needs the other. Children are fundamental to our existence as a species and so we must protect and love them at all costs.

What if these are the fabled “last days” prophesied by mystics and prophets and crazies with placards in hand in the streets? As Matthew 24:6-7 says:

And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

Sounds almost like nightly news or black humor skits that promote more anxiety and fear than humor. Fires, locust swarms, flood after flood, the extinction of species rivaling the age of the dinosaurs – it is easy to see how someone might view the present in Biblical proportions. Are these the prophesied days? The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children says that a child is abducted every 43 seconds, meaning roughly 800,000 children a year. Is this not a 21st century holocaust? Above everything else, these statistics indicate last days, for a society that doesn’t care about its children is doomed.

Perhaps we’re being emotionally and psychologically “dismembered” so we can be put back together in a new way – the consciousness revolution I’ve sensed on my journeys. We’ve disconnected ourselves from community. Alienated from ourselves, we cling to cynical realism, all the while captive to a spiritual

holocaust bereft of miracles. Death and chaos reign. Stress and the endless onslaught of indignities absolve us of personal responsibility. Narcissism, apathy, and hedonism are now collectively celebrated on a second to second basis on television. Few Americans realize that self-fulfilling prophecies work by acting in accordance with beliefs that have the uncanny ability to become reality.

Does it mean anything anymore to be *made in God's image*? One thing I know: Jesus is not going to break with all of his angels from the fifth dimension and save us from that which we have wrought ourselves. We can either give God a chance to work through us or not. Again, as Burke said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

This Tribulation is calling for souls to awaken. How we live our lives will either move us toward a new world or thrust us further into the palpable darkness standing between this world and the next. The greatest law is Love. Do unto your neighbor as if he were your brother. Love your enemy as well as those closest to you. Give praise. Forgive yourself as well as others and do better next time. Judge not lest ye be judged. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the lord. – It's all as true today as it was back then.

Since the 60's, American leaders have been leading the nation toward apocalypse. One percent of the population now owns over 95% of the nation's wealth, acquired primarily through backroom deals like those that went on in Omaha. A Mad Max mentality has taken over. The flames of fear are being fanned. What will happen when the clock runs out in 2012? Will we drop over a precipice into unknown territory, or awaken and finally take responsibility?

This is not the end of the world – just the opposite: the end of the Alan Baer's of the world and the beginning of miracles. May the light of Heaven shine down upon us as evil's bondage is broken in a way that will change everything. Balance will be spiritually restored. When I journey, all I see is ancestors and angels from the other side pouring love over everyone.

Epilogue

I have spoken about MKUltra, however I am not going to discuss much about it now. Those of you who endured the secret lessons our government was teaching know of what I am speaking about, and this letter is for you.

I know that the torture that we went through as children broke us in ways that we can never get back. Trust me when I also say that I know about the residual fear that is left over from the lessons and the paranoia that it perpetuates in my life even now, well into my forties. I have spent a good deal of my life hiding, and when I wasn't hiding I was running, most of all from myself. I have done

everything I can to escape the memories of what happened to me as a child. However, there comes a time when a person can no longer run from the darkness that surrounds him, and I reached that point several years ago. In order to ascend into heaven one must first descend into hell to deal with his demons- even Jesus Christ had to do so- and, with the help of a fantastic therapist, I made the resolution to glean what I could from what happened to me in order to help me escape the continual hell that I was living in.

First thing I want to point out is that the past is the past. That is the most important thing we all must remember when trying to release ourselves from our bonds. When looking at the past, remember this; they only picked the brightest to go through their training. That is the reason we survived; because we were bright enough to adapt to everything they threw at us and our survival is a testament to that brilliance that resides within all of us. This was fundamental when I looked back at my past, and realized that, in many ways, I was smarter than my handlers/trainers.

They may have learned from us but they can't do what we were taught to do! Looking within, trusting your intuition and that knowing side inside of you, they can't do any of that. They opened a part of our minds that they can't control and which has only gotten stronger as we age. They were looking into studying the psychic side of human nature- because they were looking to stimulate that part of the brain that is dormant in most people in order to use it to control others. The horrors that we experienced as children were designed to force us to use that part of our brains and, in doing so, they taught us things that they themselves are incapable of doing.

The biggest component to our trainers' control was fear. They taught us to be afraid of everything and everyone and not to trust the things they were teaching us to do, other than what they could control. However, controlling a person with fear rarely works for long, and the more one tries to dominate with such tactics, the greater the resistance in the human spirit. Fear breeds contempt, contempt breeds anger, anger eventually feeds thoughts of rebellion, and then all hell breaks loose generally. However, what we experienced was internal and mental and so the revolution that we are involved with is all "in our own minds" so to speak. We have to fight the urge to turn the fight on ourselves, instead of focusing it outward, where it could do some good.

It is true that in the past there was nowhere to go, and none of us were able to really focus what happened to us in any way that made a difference. We have been shunned, ridiculed, dismissed, and ultimately ignored by most of society, who seems to believe that our government couldn't be guilty of such things. However, that is the past. I am finding that history has a way of returning to situations again and again, and this time, we are no longer children. More importantly for many of us the talents that they strove to impress upon us as children have only grown in their complexities. Now, as adults, we are not only

able to step into our own, but many of us have this driving compulsion to help others in the same boat as us to do the same.

I personally believe that we are on the verge of a spiritual evolution the likes of which none of us have ever seen before. The general population is getting a sense of others around them and the bond that they have with their fellow man in a way that has never been so prevalent. This shows me that the human compassion in all of us is building. For those who experienced MKUltra in their pasts, this is having an even greater affect upon us, as we were taught to look within ourselves, thus encouraging an almost mutant sense of mental/spiritual evolution. Most people don't have a sense of the mind such as we do and aren't aware of their capabilities like we are, never having been forced to use them before as we have. There is a reason why we all have the self-awareness that we do, and I believe that there is also a reason why we are all waking up from our nightmare.

Emily and I talk about our past occasionally and she is always perplexed by the fact that when she came out and began talking about her experiences, no one believed her. In fact she felt a campaign to silence her that I never have. On the other hand, I found people who, although were not a good group of people, nonetheless validated my experiences in a way that I couldn't deny. Now she sees me as some sort of activist, and she often makes comments on how different my experience is from her own, as she sees the support that is out there now for people who wish to come forward. My explanation is simple; we live in a different day and age, and everything has changed.

There are three stages that a new idea goes through before it becomes common knowledge. First it is ridiculed, then it is fought, until it is finally accepted. We are simply at the third point of the process, where we are going to see our experiences become common knowledge.

There are things that you can do. First, reach out and educate yourself. Knowledge is power, and although we were taught to be afraid, it is freeing when you begin to accept that the things you remember are not only possible but probable. (At least that was true for me.) Understanding that there are others, many others, who are in the same boat as you is helpful; one of the saving graces for me was to know that I wasn't alone. Because of Emily, I really never was, but it took awhile for me to grasp the sheer numbers of people who were also involved and survived the same things we did.

Second, remember that we have a voice, and although we were intimidated and made afraid of it at a young age, it is the strongest and most powerful gift given to us in this life. Everyone of us has a story to tell, and every one of our stories is important, no matter the details. Simply standing up and saying "This happened to me," will send ripples of truth throughout the world. There is no better way to start claiming your power.

Last, and probably most important, begin to practice what they taught you. Look within; don't be afraid to find the answers. The lessons may have been horrible, but we have the choice to overcome the fear and allow ourselves to embrace what they taught us. The biggest difference is that we have the power now. The things they forced open within us are beginning to awaken, and we are, as a group, starting to become aware of not only our abilities as individuals, but also our strength in numbers. Our handler's biggest weapon was to convince us that we were alone, were helpless to stop that which was happening to us, to convince us that we are victims. However, those days are over and now we are coming into a time that the world needs what we have within ourselves. We owe it to ourselves, to others, and to God to let ourselves shine in the way we were taught to do.

If I could leave you with one thing, I would like to impress upon you that the reason why we aren't in their little club right now is that they couldn't break our spirits because we are lightbearers. Entrenched in the darkness as children, the only thing that saved many of us was that we were forced to seek out the light, and that was something they couldn't stop. That is the thing that binds us all as a group and is actually the true power that resides with us all, giving us a commonality with each other. Now is the time to let our collective light shine, and trust me, we are all shining. In fact, the light's so bright that when I look at it as a whole, it hurts my eyes.

The Last Word, at least for now...

Putting the spiritual stuff aside for a moment, When considering the how's and why's of Omaha's nefarious past, one must always keep in mind that America- let alone Omaha- was a very different place thirty plus years ago. For example- there were no cell phones, no internet, and personal computers were just beginning to be developed. In other words- we were not able to access information as we do now, and as a result, the population depended on the media to inform us of current events. Of course, considering that many of the owners of those media outlets were some of the very men accused of participating and profiting from the drug and child trafficking that was happening here in Omaha at the time, one can guess that there was a serious conflict of interest concerning the facts that were being presented.

Back then, Omaha was a small town striving to be a big city. Thirty years ago, it was pretty much a cow town, filled with small town people trying to make a living in the "big" city at the center of the nation. In no way accustomed to the activities that came to light in the 80's, the residents here had no choice but to take what the local media was presenting about investigations into the failed

credit union, child trafficking, and activities surrounding several local wealthy businessmen who were accused of being involved. Eventually, the national media got involved and discovered that things happening in Omaha lead straight to the White House. It became apparent that the events in Omaha were well connected and heavily funded by our own government and the first Bush's presidency. However, all of this was vehemently fought against by our own local media, who suggested that Omaha was involved with some sort of "witch hunt", and that all the reports of serious abuses against children were tantamount to a conspiracy theory. Of course- this came from the very people accused of being involved.

Historically speaking, the rich have always done what they wanted. Very few of us will ever know what it is like to have the power to acquire anything we desire, to do what we want when we want with no real consequences to our behaviors. Only a select few ever truly understand the absolute freedom of having enough wealth to control the world around them- whether it be the legal system, the media, or the government.

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, as they say, and fortunes were made with the money that was generated through child trafficking and from the cocaine that was pouring in from the Contras at the time. Considering that much of Omaha's past is still deemed a "conspiracy theory" today although there is ample proof of what happened shows that the media did a fine job of covering up what happened years ago, which was that the rich got richer from crimes that most of us can not even fathom.

One question that remains is why? In my opinion, there is a psychological shift in people who have enough money to obtain whatever it is that they want. For most of the population, survival is what we are focused on. Working a job, paying our bills, feeding our families, these are all part of the concerns that face most of us on a daily basis. However, when one reaches a point where they have more than they or the generations following them could ever spend in their lifetimes, life becomes more about serving the three P's; Power, Profit, and Pleasure. Able to do whatever one wants whenever one wants- keeping one's life interesting becomes harder and harder. Achieving power over others is one way some people spice up their lives.

As to how this worked- many involved used the drugs and pedophilia as a way to blackmail and control those who didn't have a position in all of this. Politics at its finest, those who manipulated the system did so in order to keep their operations of profit working smoothly. Since Omaha was a small town, keeping a handle on the situations was not as hard as it would have been had it been somewhere larger, like Chicago or New York City.

Enamored by wealth and with those who have it, American's have a tendency to dismiss the inappropriate behaviors of the rich, which was definitely the case in

Omaha. Heavily involved in influencing public opinion, the media outlets in Omaha dismissed the hundreds of cases of child abuse reported and instead made those accused of such activities the victims in all of it. Of course, these were the same men who owned the media in town, so one again is left to wonder if the "facts" were being reported, or if it was just a case of smoke and mirrors to distract the public from the truth. Whatever the case, it is evident that the claims, for the most part, were systematically dismissed- except for the 40 million missing dollars from the Franklin Credit Union, which Larry King (not the CNN host), took the fall for.

All of this is important today for the simple reason that it is a blaring example of the evil that can be perpetrated by the rich and powerful on those that are unaware. The truth is always exposed in time, and we have reached a point where there is a definite, defined, and documented history with regards to the events that took place in the middle of our nation during the 80's. Books such as Nick Bryant's "Franklin Scandal" and documentaries like "Conspiracy of Silence" (which can be found on YouTube as well as at DavidShurter.com), detail the events that took place in a way that compel us to get more involved. The past always repeats itself, and now that this nation is facing staggering numbers in human trafficking, it would behoove all of us to look at the granddaddy of this deplorable practice that took place decades back, and how it became hidden, and remained so, until today. I believe that we could learn a great deal by reexamining the events that took place in Omaha during the 80s in order to discover why it fell between the cracks of justice. Perhaps then we will learn how to stop such blatant misuses of power in the future in order to make our nation a safer place- especially with regards to human trafficking.

Appendix I: Wonderland Statistics

"Each year, an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders (some international and non-governmental organizations place the number far higher), and the trade is growing. (U.S. Department of State. 2004. Trafficking in Persons Report. Washington, D.C. :U.S. Department of State.)

Of the 600,000-800,000 people trafficked across international borders each year, 70 percent are female and 50 percent are children. The majority of these victims are forced into the commercial sex trade. (Ibid.)

Each year, an estimated 14,500 to 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked into the United States. The number of U.S. citizens trafficked within the country each year is even higher, with an estimated 200,000 American children at risk for trafficking into the sex industry. (U.S. Department of Justice. 2004. Report to Congress from Attorney General John Ashcroft on U.S. Government Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons in Fiscal Year 2003. Washington, D.C.:U.S. Department of Justice.)

The largest number of people trafficked into the United States come from East Asia and the Pacific (5,000 to 7,000 victims). The next highest numbers come from the Latin America and from Europe and Eurasia, with between 3,500 to 5,500 victims from each. (U.S. Department of Justice, Health & Human Services, State , Labor, Homeland Security, Agriculture, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. 2004. Assessment of the U.S. Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice)."

Now- my question was at the time, how these numbers from the U.S. Department of Justice compare to the numbers of missing children- which I found on the website for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at Missingkids.com which were:

"The U.S. Department of Justice reports

- 797,500 children (younger than 18) were reported missing in a one-year period of time studied resulting in an average of 2,185 children being reported missing each day.
- 203,900 children were the victims of family abductions.
- 58,200 children were the victims of non-family abductions.
- 115 children were the victims of "stereotypical" kidnapping. (These crimes involve someone the child does not know or someone of slight acquaintance, who holds the child overnight, transports the child 50 miles or more, kills the child, demands ransom, or intends to keep the child permanently.)

[Andrea J. Sedlak, David Finkelhor, Heather Hammer, and Dana J. Schultz. U. S. Department of Justice. "National Estimates of Missing Children: An Overview" in *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwing Children*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, October 2002, page 5.]

If there are actually over half a million children who are totally unaccounted for in a year- and children only constitute 50% of those who fall into the human trafficking trade- then that means that the numbers are far higher than once assumed, does it not? I have never been that great with numbers, so I could be wrong – but both of these reports came from the U.S. Department of Justice, and those numbers are respected- so my question is- why do we have such a problem with human trafficking?

I believe that we, as a nation, must wake up to this reality- and we must do something- anything- to bring awareness and education to our communities in order to stop this atrocity from happening in our very own neighborhoods. Human trafficking is abhorrent- and none of us as a God loving people should allow such things to happen without feeling compelled to do something. With 2,185 children disappearing a day- the chances of finding yourself or knowing someone who is affected by this is greater than that of winning the lottery, statistically speaking. We must educate ourselves and start making enough noise that this horrid practice of enslaving our fellow men in a practice that destroys the souls of everyone it touches- stops immediately. As a nation that loves God- we owe it to ourselves and each other to bring this to an end.

I also believe that this problem is on the verge of getting much worse, because if statistics are true- think of how much money that could be made if you had millions of undocumented people to involve in the sex trade. Everything effects everything else- and so, considering the human trafficking problem is already completely out of control- wouldn't the numbers of undocumented poor people be like adding fuel to the fire? I would go so far as to wonder out loud if this whole human trafficking problem issue isn't one of the reasons why immigration reform has stalled so many times- as someone is getting rich off the billions of dollars that is being made each year from this practice, and the opportunity all this undocumented new meat represents I am sure has not been overlooked by those involved in this activity.

The key to solving these problems lies in educating ourselves to the problems that exist around us without turning a blind eye to the ugliness that sometimes pervades our lives. Spirituality, and believing in a higher power, also helps. Sometimes, it is the only thing that does.

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