

My amazing path in the Unification Church

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Douglas Wetzstein 1976, News World newspaper

I was 22 years old and a little over one year in the movement.

I joined in Southern Cali, and was bused to Barrytown, NY three months later to study Divine Principle.

Was educated by Joe Tully in the 40 day training program, then went to 120 day training with Ken Sudo.

At the end of my 120 day training, we were to be the first American State Pioneers mobilized from Barrytown. I was excited by that prospect, but God has a different path for me.

Before we could graduate, fundraising to pay for our mobilization was needed. But there were more vans in the state of disrepair than functional.

Volunteers were needed to staff a body shop and repair garage at Barrytown to make repairs ourselves to save money.

They needed 8 volunteers who knew auto body, or engine repair. I was familiar with both.

I wanted to pioneer but told God, if you really need me to stay I need a sign.

After a half hour they were still waiting for their last volunteer to appear before they would dismiss our class of several hundred.

When they announced finally, no one may leave until one more person volunteers, I raised my hand.

My tenure at Barrytown lasted exactly 365 days. Then off to NYC and living in Long Island City in an old Candy factory next to the iconic three red and white striped smoke stacks of the power plant at the end of the 59th street bridge.

Rewind:

While working in the body shop at Barrytown I took the occasion of my parents fiftieth wedding anniversary to ask to fly home to Kansas for a week.

In 1975 this could mean my separation from the movement. None-the-less, after warning me of outside influences, and to not go home, they bought a one way plane ticket for me to go. Thank you Joachim Becker. Looking back, it seems they thought I would not return.

When I got to Kansas, I saw the motorcycle I gave to the LA Church. My folks visited family in the Culver City suburb of LA. They dropped by the Church center in Alhambra looking for me, and snagged my bike instead, and towed it back to Kansas.

After a wonderful week's visit home, I saw my return to Barrytown in the Honda 750 my little brother made sure they retrieved.

After withstanding hours long pleading that I not return to the Moonies , I said my goodbyes with kisses and hugs.

Back at Barrytown, Hyo Jim Nim would ride small dirt bikes on the property during True Parents trips, attending the trainees who would eventually become the first wave of foreign missionaries assigned from Barrytown. When Hyo Jin saw my huge Honda he wanted a ride. When he sat on it, his toes would not touch the ground on both sides at the same time. I gave him several rides, and I would toss the keys to "Big Gerhard" Peemoeller so he could chase Hyo Jin around the property on it. Gerhard made my 750 Honda look like a tiny thing racing around with Hyung. But I digress.

I sold the bike late that summer and bought camera equipment, and a boom box cassette player/recorder.

True Parents arrived each day so Father could train and encourage the future foreign missionaries, and I liked to sneak away from pounding out dented fenders and making repairs to listen to True Father speak and take pictures of him doing it.

Film was expensive so I shot cheaper black and white film with no flash. Taking pictures of True Father was best when he was close enough to notice you, if you could do so without annoying anyone present. It was fun photographing True Father for hours on end. I would run out of film and continue to aim and click in concert with his movements and his passion.

If I would doze off, Father would stop speaking and look at me, I had missed a pose meant for the record.

Soon, Mike Lograsso gave me bulk loaded film galore. I covered True Father inside, and Mike covered Hyo Jin Nim, and siblings outside doing kid stuff.

The activity of filming True Father at Barrytown would serve me when they were looking for candidates to cover Yankee Stadium and Washington Monument. Mike showed them my work and they approved.

Fast forward:

Each Sunday we trekked to Belvedere from Long Island City for True Father's Sunday Service where he spoke of rallies to be held at Yankee Stadium and then Washington Monument.

I wanted to record that history with the camera I had been using to photograph True Father for months now.

I wanted to photograph those two events so earnestly, I prayed dear God, even if I must forfeit my camera equipment, I would like this job. I remember immediately feeling how odd my determination was. How can I take pics without a camera?

Eight days later my camera equipment vanished! I wasn't sure how to feel about it.

Then I got a call from New Future Photo requesting that I become a photographer for Yankee Stadium and Washington monument rallies. I moved out of Long Island City for Belvedere, effective immediately.

After the rallies, True Father announced the launching of a daily newspaper in NYC, and as part of the photography department, I would go there next.

As a more junior photographer to others around, I became a darkroom technician.

My job was processing all film and printing all photos chosen for publication.

Eventually more photographers were needed to cover NYC daily news events. So I left the darkroom to hit the streets as a photojournalist in NYC.

One day walking from the old Tiffany building, News World's office, to the New Yorker Hotel which was home, God spoke to me!

While walking past Macy's God spoke.

God said loudly into my conscious mind,

Hey Doug! (Just like that.)

"Do you remember when you said to me, I don't have the idea I can save the world however, if you really exist, and are working on Earth, I would like to help. And if I can help save just one person, I will feel fulfilled"?

Me: yes, I remember.

God: well, there is a sister I would like you to save, for me. Her name is Cheryl Smith.

My mind began to consider this request.

I have seen her around but know nothing about her.

Brothers and sisters stay separated because there is a danger of a romantic connection.

Okay....

1. She is a white American sister much taller than me. No self respecting guy gets romantically involved with a taller woman. Check!

2. Since childhood I always felt drawn to women of color. I dreamed about marrying outside of my boring German whiteness, and the UC was a target rich environment to fulfill that long felt destiny. Check!

3. I am fourth oldest of ten kids. I know how to be a good brother. Check!

Yes God, I will do it.

I looked up at the sky at that moment and saw I was standing directly across the street from the Empire State Building. One huge antenna to God I thought. I chuckled, and continued walking.

I thought nothing more about that conversation with God. I had no idea how to proceed, I left it all to him. I was busy becoming a hard working professional photographer representing True Parents in the City that never sleeps.

All of a sudden, Cheryl and I began getting assigned to news stories together. She wrote the news stories, I supported them photographically.

We were an efficient team producing great stories each day.

The more success we brought the News World, the more people realized we were working closely to create that success.

There is too much danger for romance, it must be stopped!

I was called into the prayer room on the 21st floor of the New Yorker by Nick Buscovich one evening to be sent away.

He was assigned as the fall guy to give me the bad news, poor schmuck.

It was determined by management Cheryl and I were too close, and set a bad precedent for others.

I was being sent back to Cali., where I joined, to start over. After all any idiot can take pictures, and Cheryl was a talented writer.

I looked at Nick incredulously at this news. I asked, " would you like to know what is going on between Cheryl and me?"

Nope! Was his answer. The plane ticket had been purchased, and I was to leave the next day.

I told Nick that he had no idea what God had in store for me, and that I was exactly where God needed me.

Nope, Nick's not interested in such nonsense. I must go.

I said I will go. But I will only go for a short providential period, and return to where God wants me to be.

Nick said, okay! Knowing In his heart I would never be allowed to return to the NewsWorld. This time, I'm the poor schmuck!

Mike Leone was doing a mini speaking tour in southern Cali that I supported while I was there, 40 days later it was finished and I was ready to return to work in NYC.

When I informed the nameless, faceless center leader of Nick's promise of return, he said I was mistaken. I asked him to call Nick to confirm. He called Nick, and reported to me that I was their member now and no longer belonged in NY.

I said, I am nobody's member but God's and True Parents, and could not follow arbitrary guidance handed down by functionaries.

My roommate at the New Yorker, Mike Lograsso, gave me a fifty dollar bill before I left NY, and said, "this might come in handy". It did.

I bought thin mints at a grocery, and sold them in the parking lot until there were no more thin mints in the store to sell.

I had \$320 dollars to take a bus back to NYC.

My first mistake was to count on the UC leadership to do anything other than allow me shelter. I was outside their circle of trust. Not a trusted sheep, and they would not allow me to ride the van on their

scheduled morning trip downtown to the Center.

By the time Public transportation got me to the LA bus terminal, the once daily bus to NYC had gone. I must have been vociferous about it because a stranger offered a solution. "There's a drive away company a few blocks away, and they're listed in the Yellow Pages call them."

It seems people will fly home and leave their cars behind to be driven home for them for a fee. And for a fee paid by me, I could become the person driving that car to our common destination.

Sure enough, the company had a Honda Civic belonging to a Naval retiree who lived in Syracuse, NY that had been stationed in Hawaii. The military would only pay to get it to mainland Cali.

I was to pay for gas and oil, I had four weeks to deliver the car, and the owner would pay me three hundred dollars upon delivery in good condition, and in timely manner. I hit the road.

I had four weeks, and I have driven across country many times in three days. Why not stop in Kansas and surprise my mom and dad with a visit? Sometimes God speaks through inspiration.

I got home, and found my mother was distraught to tears about her teenaged baby. Her last child born, number ten, and one of only two girls in a sea of boys, had run away to California. We must have passed each other on the highway.

But that's another story. I'm happy to share if folks like, but I my story continues by delivering the Honda Civic to its owner in Syracuse NY, and getting back to the News World.

After several relaxing days in Kansas, and negotiating a happy ending to my mother's dilemma, I hit the road again.

I delivered the car to the parents of the lady who just retired from the Navy and got paid. Being a clean cut Moonie, they asked if I would stay the night to meet their daughter to be properly thanked. I respectfully asked for a ride to the train station instead.

I got back to NYC, my room in the New Yorker, and my roommate who left my things as they were while I was gone.

The next morning I went back to work as a photographer at News World. My roommate was the director of the photo department.

We weren't getting paid for our work, so it didn't matter to them or me that I was producing newsworthy images again.

Soon after my return, I was awarded a Silurian award for a sports photograph of Pele that I had made at his final professional game.

It was the first award for news gathering for the paper. A couple months later Cheryl is awarded Cub Reporter of the Year by the New York Press Club.

The two problem children were somehow elevating the status of the paper to the media industry that hated it.

So confusing for the functionaries. How were these two trouble makers excelling? Satan can seem so tricky at times.

The truth is, everyone involved in this story was in way over our heads with only God to guide us.

I have new found empathy for Zachariah and Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Jesus, and his mom and dad, Mary and Joseph.

When God speaks to you, it is up to you to be steadfast in the face of relentless misunderstanding and ridicule by those whom you expect, and hope will understand and support you.

The process of the unworthy becoming worthy.

Like a worm seemingly spins the web of its own demise, forming in reality the cocoon of determination to be reborn a butterfly.