

How I Got to Know Father at the Federal Correctional Institution, Danbury - Part 4

Bill Sheppard, as told to Laura Reinig

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I personally went through a lot in my life, but look at what Moonies go through! I just read the last Today's World about the wedding [of the 36 Couples of the second generation, June '86]. There was some severe suffering that those parents and children went through. The parents had to work very hard to bring their children up in the right tradition. How can children live in this society without having a girlfriend or boyfriend? I can't imagine it. It's difficult to understand for those of us who have not been prepared throughout our lives to receive the Blessing. That's a hard thing for people. How did they ever get through it? Talk about fear! Being matched with someone? Oh my gosh! But they're so faithful, it's amazing.

"This is right!"

Father has reconfirmed beliefs that I've always had, beliefs that I solidified after going through suffering in my life, starting from the belief that there is a God, that you do have responsibility, and that there are changes you must make.

There's been a dramatic change in me, that I know. It's like, "Wait a minute! This is right! Things that I thought were right have been right all along!" For example, now I know that the things that happened to me do have some sort of a meaning. Also, a person must know what his responsibility is. And I realize that there is a certain amount of value in suffering. I certainly can attest to that factor.

I went through some terrible tragedies in my past. Then my wife and I prayed and prayed for seven years to have children, and all of a sudden we had a child. Then we suffered with our daughter and went through all of those medical complications, and then I went through a trial. Now I find myself in prison for some reason and I don't know why I've been given such a long sentence. And then I meet this guy! And I say that with respect.

One of the most important things I learned from Father was a seemingly simple concept of indemnity, which is hardly a simple concept. I mean, first I read about it and then we talked about it, and then I thought, "Yeah, okay, indemnity. It sounds good. Isn't it like life insurance?" But I realized that it's not just a term; it's a very important understanding.

Father told me it was significant that I had to wait exactly seven years to have a child. A number of other things happened in my life that Father found meaning in. I said to myself, "Hey, something's happened. You went through those things for a reason." I found that there was a common denominator of suffering that I shared with Father, and that's one of the reasons I felt I was meant to be here. I know that meeting Father was important to my life.

I have found, after having many relationships with people, that there is a common "something" between two people who have both experienced suffering. I find that I can communicate well with such people, whether they believe in God or not - that is, if they've risen above it, if they haven't become bitter. I don't

walk around saying, "I'm okay, everything is fine." I know bitterness very well. I know it on first-name basis. But I'm talking about facing fear or death or whatever and rising above it in some way. I think it may be easier to go through suffering and find your own heart than it is to go through life never having to suffer.



My connection to Father

This, I believe, is the essence of where my connection to Father lies. Going through the same kind of suffering - that's what bypassed years of discussion between Father and me. It was as if we had known each other for a long, long time. We started at the point where most people are only after many years.

Knowing I went through that suffering eases somewhat the bothersome effect of my being here instead of another Moonie. In other words, to a certain degree, I feel I did pay some dues. Still, I wish there were others who could have been here. I know many other people wanted to be here with Father if they could have.

One thing has changed in me: Now I look upon these abrupt changes and sufferings in my life as a challenge, whereas before I could wallow in self-pity as well as the next guy.

I've fought the judicial system more than anyone on specific issues, and I will do it again; I think they know that. But believe it or not, I don't have an adversarial relationship with them. That probably has a lot to do with the fact that I've been able to forgive everybody. I don't mean blanket forgiveness, because I don't think you can do that. You have to do it individually; you have to forgive the judge, your co-defendants, whomever. I don't like being here, but I think I'm making the best of the situation. That has a lot to do with Father's influence.

Since I've been incarcerated I have received hundreds of letters of support from my community. Lots of people have written letters to the warden or to the parole board to try to support me. I don't want to talk about my own case, but I only mention it just to give you an idea. These are people that I've known for as long as 30 years, people that I may have done something for, never expecting anything in return. They also suffered in their lives, and we suffered through things together. Now those people have tried to support me and my family with the problems we have. I tell you, it comes back, it all comes back.

Someone else could explain all this much more eloquently. I could talk about many things specifically, but when it comes to this whole situation, I have such a deep feeling that I find it hard to put it into words. My wife, myself, and my daughter are as close as any family could be, but it's difficult for me to explain to my wife about my relationship with Kami and Father and for her to really understand. That's one of the things I wish I could do better.

So how do I keep my momentum? Well, do I keep it? No. I wish I could say that I did. I fail just as much as anyone else; maybe I stumble more. Do I have a direction? I guess I do. There are old cliches, like: Your word is your bond. But those are not just cliches - those are very important things. It's a very high standard Father set, which I believe in, but I didn't realize that perfection was obtainable before. Now I believe it is. And that's what Father epitomizes for me.