

My Unificationist Memoirs - Chapter 1

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My good fortune was to be born into a Marine Corps family, and grow up as one of five children in 1950's America. My older sister, Kristine, was born 18 months before me in Sacramento, California. Shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War, the Marine Corps assigned my father to duty at Headquarters Fleet Marine Force Pacific, then on 100 Harrison Street in the City. Although at the time of my birth our growing family resided in San Francisco, our familial home for multiple generations, my parents drove across the Bay Bridge and I entered the world at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland on June 2, 1952 at eight in the morning. As I took my first breaths, severely wounded Marines and sailors were suffering and dying from the wounds of war in wards just down the hall. My mother became pregnant again shortly before my father deployed to Korea and my younger sister Catherine was born while he was away. Though our small family suffered his absence, the ravages of that conflict never directly visited us, and my father returned safely home. My younger brother Jonathon ("Jock") was born while we were stationed at the Navy Yard in Washington, DC, and our youngest, my sister Karen, joined us while our father served with the Recon Battalion in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.



The constant moving, coupled with multiple deployments for my father, could have wreaked havoc on my parents' marriage and our family life. The opposite occurred. My mother and father genuinely respected and loved each other. They met in 1939 at St. Brendan's parish in San Francisco, when my mother was a freshman at St. Rose, and my father, a sophomore at St. Ignatius High School. They married after my father returned from WWII and they had both completed their education, my mother at UC Berkeley and my father, Stanford. They exchanged vows in St. Brendan's, where they had met a decade earlier. Our family was nurtured by my parents' faith and love, and shaped by an ethic of duty to country and service for others. Though we had our moments of intense sibling rivalry, we were close to each other and fiercely loyal. Though imperfectly, our family was the school of God's love.

We often lived on military bases in quarters which abutted the pine forests of Virginia or North Carolina, islands of peace in a world primed for war. My earliest spiritual experiences mostly occurred in nature, where I encountered creation's great and deep silence, punctuated only by birdsong and my own beating heart. I spent hours immersed in reverie. While I often went running through these woodlands with siblings or my boyhood friends, much of the time I traversed them alone, exploring their far reaches through every season. In these great expanses of silence, left to my own thoughts, I tried to make sense of the God introduced to me by my family and Catholic education. I daily parsed the complexities of the Baltimore Catechism while I wandered the coastal forests, my youthful affections emerging under the pull of nature and the nearly pagan mysticism of my Irish nuns.

My forays into forest solitude made me sensitive to the still quiet voice deep within me. Paradoxically, that small and subtle voice could exert a piercing effect, which seemed to reach the deepest regions of my heart. Later, I came to understand these moments as the awakening of my conscience, a spiritual faculty which would usually manifest at some juncture in my life when I faced a decision on how to act or how to be. Although the voice emerged at a younger age, the prompting became pronounced when I was eight years old. I found a Catholic Daily Missal at the back of St. Michael's, our Columbia, Missouri parish church, in the Lost and Found. I took the missal for myself and brought it back home to use. The more I read its passages, the more the missal burned my hands as guilt ate at my conscience. When it reached the point I could no longer endure the internal discomfort, I returned the missal and poured out my heart to an

old German priest in the confessional. I wonder what Father thought of this young kid, as I revealed the terrible darkness that had nearly consumed me!



A few years later when we lived in Quantico, Virginia and I had turned 11, the Irish Franciscan sisters asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. I, of course, wanted to follow in my father's footsteps and be a Marine officer. So, with his help, I prepared an assignment that included pictures from the Marine Corps Gazette. After I had turned the project in, walking home in the afternoon, the still quiet voice persistently informed me that I was called to another path in life, that God was calling me to serve Him. The only concept available to me at that age was that such a call meant becoming a Catholic priest. My immediate response to the voice was resistance. I wanted to be a Marine officer, nothing else. Even

as I write this, the experience was so pronounced, I can feel it in my bones more than 50 years later.

That internal conflict between God's call and my desire for another way would become the central theme of my life.

Half a decade later, that familiar conflict re-emerged when I had to choose between an NROTC appointment and my opposition to the Vietnam War. While I could not see myself as a "hippie peacenik," I declined the appointment. The internal conviction became so persistent and intense, I could not find peace of mind while repressing it. With great hesitation, I began to join in protest marches. One step led to another, and soon, I was standing on the steps of the Pentagon in May 1972, burning my draft card. My father, by then a Colonel, worked inside with the Joint Planning Group of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I was arrested and sent to Lorton Federal Penitentiary and jailed with the antiwar activists and leaders, David Dellinger and Father Groppi. As I spent the next three days with them, I came away with a sense that I respected my father, the supposed villain in this drama, more than my new found leaders. During the physical course of my arrest, I told Jesus that I was leaving everything to follow him. And in my heart of hearts, that still quiet voice told me I needed to act with greater authenticity and sincerity if I was to answer God's call. Moreover, I saw that my father had repeatedly placed his life on the line to fight both Fascism and Communism. I felt conflicted. I didn't belong in the "Peace Movement," but I also was not at home in the military, the world of my father, even though it felt so essentially a part of me. This interior turmoil and the demands of conscience led me to the Cistercian Trappist monastery at Holy Cross Abbey. I will never forget the ashen look on my mother's face as she stood on the front porch of our Annandale home to see me off. My journey inextricably bound my family to a cultural and spiritual course emblematic of those tumultuous times, one they never anticipated or for which they could have adequately prepared.

While in the monastery, I began to seek the heart of Jesus through centering prayer. At one point during my prayer, I had a dramatic experience in which I heard a voice telling me that I was John the Baptist. In the Institutes of Cassian, the collected wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, there are cautionary tales of monks who are tempted by the devil with such voices. I initially felt I was in danger of losing my mind. Yet, this felt different. It resonated with the innermost part of my being and imparted to me a deep sense of responsibility. Rather than bring it up immediately with my spiritual director, I felt I should listen and watch. Soon after, as I united with this sense of responsibility, my interior life began to flourish. My abbot later assured me that the monastic calling is indeed prophetic, and I had gone into the wilderness like John the Baptist. Subsequently, I was practicing yoga out in the pasture near the monastery when I suffered a collapsed lung (spontaneous pneumothorax). I had no idea what was happening, but the pain was immense and incredibly sharp. I thought I was dying. At that moment, I thanked God for the pain and offered Him my life, repenting for having so often failed Him. I made my way back to the abbey and ended up spending five days in the hospital as my lung naturally healed. While recovering, I had a mystical experience of heart to heart union with Jesus. The encounter possessed the intensity of a fire consuming the entire core of my being. I write this knowing no words can adequately describe the power, breadth, or depth of the experience. At this moment I still can turn to the heart Jesus awakened and experience an overflowing joy.

In the months that followed, I continued to cultivate a relationship of heart with Jesus. Every afternoon, I would sit in meditation for 2-3 hours after Nones and before Vespers, and commune with God. One afternoon, Jesus came to me and I was overcome by a sense of immense and unrelenting sorrow. I couldn't understand. I felt I must have done something terribly wrong. I repented but my repentance would not relieve the pain and sadness. It was not until I heard the Divine Principle lectures from Michael Beard, during the Mission of Jesus lecture, that I came to understand this experience. But I'm getting ahead of myself.