

How I Got to Know Father at the Federal Correctional Institution, Danbury - Part 1

Bill Sheppard, as told to Laura Reinig

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Part 1 of an interview that Laura Reinig, Today's World Magazine associate editor, had with Mr. Bill Sheppard at the Federal Correctional Institution, Danbury, USA, in July 1986. Bill Sheppard became a close friend of True Father's during their time together in the prison.

The interview took place in the small, office-sized chapel where Father, Mr. Takeru Kamiyama, Bill, and Larry Evola, another friend of Father's, used to pray early Sunday mornings. Bill explained that Father would sit in one chair, and Mr. Kamiyama, Larry, and Bill would sit facing him, and then they would pray.

Laura considered it a privilege to go to Danbury camp and interview Bill. She saw the hill where Father stood to wave goodbye to Mother. "I could almost see Father standing there," she said. They saw the visiting room where Father had received his family and his many visitors. The prison authorities also allowed her and photographer Ken Owens to visit the dining room that Father had worked in.

"I loved talking with Bill. He seemed like a delightful combination of a very fatherly man and an impish little boy. Bill told me, 'You can't lose your humor in a place like this. If you do, you go crazy'."

The interview lasted four hours, and Bill talked freely on a wide range of topics-what he had gone through prior to his term in Danbury, how he got acquainted with Mr. Kamiyama and then with Father, how his outlook on life changed upon knowing Father, and how he maintains hope for the future.

Bill Sheppard: When I first came to Danbury in April 1984 they asked me what I wanted to do. They try to classify you, find out where they can best use your skill. So as it turned out I was taken immediately outside. One fellow and I did the landscaping. This camp was nothing but mud at the time-everything was mud; the interior was completed but the exterior had no trees, no shrubs. It turned into a major project. I worked a lot to pass the time. It wasn't fashionable to do a lot of work - not weekends or nights, not the hours we were putting in.

It was about the beginning of July 1984 at the time we were finishing. Just in time for someone to come! Rather strange! After I completed the main landscaping work they asked me to keep working outside on the grounds, which I was very glad about.

When Father and Kami [Mr. Kamiyama] first came, it was such a big thing. I mean it was, "Who is this fellow?" Many people surrounded him in hopes of getting close to him. He was a curiosity. They both were. I remember people saying, "Which one is Moon? Is he the tall fellow?"

They put Father in the end cube, the smallest cube there was, where there were no windows and no access to him. I believe it was for security reasons. His cube happened to be very small and it was right next to a closet where they kept the mops and junk, so it wasn't the nicest place in the world, that's for sure.

I was living in the same dorm where Father and Kami were living. I lived right near a doorway, which gave me a panoramic view that looked on all the top bunks. I couldn't help but observe Father and Kami.



Close to God

At that point, I believed very deeply in God. I definitely had respect for religion - but not organized religion. Because of the medical situation with my daughter and the tragedies that had happened in my family in the past, I felt I had a very close relationship with God.

My wife and I had been married in 1968 and we had tried for seven years to have children, and we were just about to give up. Then all of a sudden we had a daughter. Of course we were very, very happy. It was an emotional experience and it made us very close. There were a few complications. Externally my daughter looked beautiful, but my wife had an inner feeling that something was wrong.

She was in an incubator, and we constantly talked to her. I would give her massages and do different things with her. But the baby was not getting enough nourishment; she could not suck correctly.

They told my wife that she would have to breastfeed using a pump and they'd have to freeze the milk. The problem with that is, any type of stress will stop the milk production. My wife was going through a tremendous amount of stress. I can remember she was connected up to a machine. It was like being in a closet. The pump would be going, and I was wondering if my daughter was going to live or die.

We finally found out that she had congenital heart disease. She was given last rites; they didn't expect her to make it. She went through an operation, and it was a long and scary process. But she recovered, and then she came home with us. That would have been a moving experience enough, but a week later the symptoms came back. She had to go to the hospital again and have another operation. And then after that, my daughter had a stroke. So things kept building and building. Finally, we were able to take her home.

It was an unbelievably stressful situation - just unbelievable. Our main thing in handling this situation was to draw whatever strength we could from God. But how do you handle it for yourself mentally and emotionally and spiritually?

That whole experience made us become very close parents. In today's society you tend to go in your different directions, that's very easy to happen. That's why this experience, I think, turned us around.

When I was incarcerated here we had a terrible problem in that my daughter, who's six now, wouldn't leave my wife's side. My problem was that I was so very close to her. It was like she had two mothers, if you will, because of the situation.

My mindset

After I was in here I had been going through recounting that situation in my own mind. "You've gone through the situation with your daughter - now what? Now you're incarcerated. How do you get the strength to go through this?" Talk about indemnity, you're looking at a long period of suffering.

And that was my mindset, if you will, when I met these two Oriental people. Here I was in Danbury and I was working outside and I had a 10year sentence and it just didn't make any sense. It was like I was being plucked out and put in this situation.

At that time I had started going to Bible classes. They have volunteers that come up here, basically fundamentalists, who go over the Bible. I got involved out of curiosity. I was Catholic, and had gone through as an altar boy. So this was a good opportunity. I was reading the Bible constantly - things that I'd missed. So I found myself reading the Bible, going to Bible classes, and observing Rev. Moon! It was a strange situation; especially for someone who is not ultra-religious.

In Bible class I would ask questions and I would argue. I shouldn't say I'm a skeptic, but I'm not afraid to ask if I don't understand. A lot of times I had to say, "I don't know what you're talking about." At the time, just before I sat down to talk with Father and Kami seriously, I was having a problem with the fundamentalist Christian point of view that the only way to heaven is through faith alone, irrespective of any good works. In other words, you have no responsibility. It just went against my nature; it just didn't seem right.

Just about that time, I would see Father and Kami periodically sitting out in the back, and I'd be working out there on the grounds. And I remember Father would pass by. I didn't even know whether either of them spoke English. We'd just smile and say hello.

I was well aware of the media and what the media had said about him - a monster, brainwashing, whatever. Whether or not that was true I didn't know.

Getting to know Father

Through a number of experiences at the camp, Kami and I started talking. During that period of time we had a few discussions-three-way discussions; Father took a backseat. He was very, very quiet. We'd talk about different things; but not at any length. We really didn't know each other that well.

Over time Kami and I developed a very close brotherly relationship, and I asked him if he would come with me to Bible class. He said, "Okay, as long as we sit together." He didn't want to be put into an awkward situation. He didn't want to create an atomic bomb if he said something controversial. He trusted me. When someone said something outrageous he just had to speak up. And then there would be a banter back and forth, in good spirits. It's a dangerous thing in prison and in religion if you're not coming from a good heart. Most people took it right.

At my request, Kami and I began sitting down and going over his interpretation of the Bible. He was very reluctant to preach about the Unification Church. Certainly Father did not preach. Father had promised he was not going to be "converting" people. As far as the wardens were concerned, they didn't have to worry about him brainwashing anybody. I was very much aware of Father's promise.

At that time my relationship with Father was not a very deep relationship, quite honestly. To me he was a very nice elderly Oriental. At times we had sat in the visiting room - my wife, my daughter, and myself - near Father and Mother, just giving them respect and privacy, but we didn't really talk.

Kami would keep telling me about Father. Many things I couldn't relate to; many things I couldn't understand. I knew that this elderly Oriental man was very important to Kami. His complete importance - to the world, let's say - I didn't know. We were only dealing on an individual and family level.

Our relationship grew

Father and I got to be very close a few months before Kami left.

Father would take any free time that he had and he'd play pool for hours. It wasn't one of my favorite things, but I'd wind up playing pool with him. But most of my time with Father, both before Kami left and after he left, was spent talking, communicating with him. It wasn't playing pool. The time Father and I spent together was very serious. It was difficult because there were always people around.

A few months prior to Kami's leaving, little did I know that everything Kami and I had shared, Kami had reported to Father - every detail about me! He had told Father about my own personal background and a number of things in my case. Father knew everything by this time. He knew more than I did!

I questioned Father. I learned what he believed and how he thought. And I saw how he treated people. He was tremendously respectful to everyone and their opinion. He wasn't liked by everybody, but he was respected by everybody, no question about that. He gained respect, and people's image of him and the general atmosphere of the prison began to change - slowly.