

How I Joined the Church

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Photo Belvedere, date unknown

I grew up in Hudson, Quebec, a town of 5,000 people where you knew everybody's face, where they lived and what their dog looked like. I was living in Montreal, going to theater school and meditating a lot. I was receiving spiritual messages like "You are being prepared to meet a small group of people with a new understanding that will turn human history the way a wheel turns around its axle." Quiet spiritual voices inside of me. I was also just about vegan.

When I reached my 21st birthday, I got this message: "Your time of preparation is finished. Go to California. As long as you are on your path, you will be taken care of. Do not try to get a place to stay or a job. Just go."

Well, I had never been out in the world on my own before. Certainly not traveling across the continent. So when two of my friends from theater school decided to drive across Canada, I went with them. We ended up in Vancouver, where I did the two things I had been told not to do: I found a room and got a job, carving candles for a business run by the local Hare Krishnas.

Time passed, my friends went home and I stayed. At Christmas, my parents were asking me to come home for the holiday. I knew I was supposed to go on to California, but I'd never missed a Christmas at home before. I was torn in two parts, and I couldn't make up my mind. Every five minutes I'd change my mind and I was making myself crazy.

I thought, if I go to California, I'll have this "I should have gone home for Christmas" thing hanging around me, so I decided to go home, because I knew it would feel wrong. And that would mean I wouldn't have that "I should just go home" thing hanging over me.

So I went back, did Christmas, saw the play at my old theater school, saw my old friends. It just felt dead to me. The night I saw the second performance, I started to walk home, got one block, turned around and went back in. "Goodbye," I said to the first person I saw "I'll see you in eternity." "Where are you going?" "California."

Nile, a guy I didn't know very well, said "I'm coming with you." He was into the Guru Maharaj Ji, who was in Malibu. So Nile and I, along with Beige-O, his huge yellow Labrador, got an Auto-Driveaway car (something I learned about from reading "On the Road") to Boston.

In Boston we got another car to Phoenix, Arizona. It was January, and a huge ice storm had covered most of the US. We drove for hours on snowy, icy roads, with Beige-O's rancid breath pouring over us from the back seat. I knew somehow that I wasn't going to see Guru Maharaj Ji, but Nile and I felt that there were 'extra pairs of hands' on the wheel as we drove.

We got to Phoenix, then we split up and hitchhiked into LA, to meet up at the apartment of our former drama teacher in North Hollywood. There was a hitchhiker every twenty feet for as far as you could see on the highway out of Phoenix. The etiquette was, you walked to the end of the line. So I walked for quite a while. Not even close to the end of the line, I stopped at a gas station to get a drink, and a man walked up to me and asked if I wanted a ride. "We're just going to Pomona." he said. "Ok" I said. I had no idea where Pomona was.

They put me in the back of their camper truck, with a tray of pineapple pastries to eat. I lay on the mattress and slept. They woke me up in Pomona. I went into a gas station and bought a map of LA. It was huge. I had never seen a city so big, with so many different parts to it.

I stuck out my thumb, and got a ride from a cocktail waitress going to work. She offered me a joint, and I said no thanks. After she dropped me off, a taxi stopped for me. I was about to say I didn't want a taxi, the driver rolled his window down and sang out "I'll take you anywhere in LA for two bucks!" He had just dropped someone at the airport, and wanted to get back into town.

I gave him the address of my friend, and he drove me right there, motor-mouthing about how great LA was the whole time. My spiritual messengers were right: I got rides offered to me, and then I got door to door service as well.

My friend was there when I arrived, and Nile and Beige-O got there soon after. We talked. Realistically, we were both Canadian citizens and I had \$19 on me. "Do you want to work, why are you guys here?" our teacher asked. I said "I'm looking for a spiritual community, maybe one that has a farm where I could stay."

"I know just the place." he said. "Krishnamurti's people have a place in Ojai. I'll tell you how to get there. In the morning, go down the hill, and across the street there's an onramp to 101. Take that to Ojai."

"Sounds good." I said. In the morning, I got another spiritual message. Unlike my quiet inner voices, this one was very loud. "TODAY IS THE DAY YOU'RE GOING TO MEET THE PERSON YOU'RE HERE FOR." Every part of me was vibrating. I thought I'd better get out to the highway right away, or I might miss the person. I imagined the guy introducing me to the new truth would be a hippie with long blonde hair, a bushy beard and goeey blue eyes driving a beat-up station wagon.

Nile walked me down to the corner. He was heading over to Malibu to see his guru. My nerves were on high alert; I really didn't want to miss THE PERSON, and if I wasn't there when he came by, then.....I could miss him. I was dying to get across the street.

Only my feet were stuck to the sidewalk. I could not move them off the corner. Nile and I stood there, having an inane conversation about weather and gurus and dogs. We got a couple of ice cream cones from the drugstore and stood there eating them. And I still couldn't move my feet off the corner to go across the street.

Now, I should mention that I had bought a huge, oversized, acid-yellow backpack. Something that would have stood out in almost any weather. It hurt your eyes in sunlight and probably glowed in the dark.

Well, after about 20 minutes on the corner, a voice behind me said "Are you guys traveling?" I turned around. "Yeah."

"Where are you going?"

"I'm hitchhiking up north to find a spiritual community with a farm."

"Oh, really? I belong to a spiritual community that has a farm!"

Half my brain was checking him out: three-piece business suit. Short hair. White shirt and tie. Briefcase. 'Right. You sure don't look like you come from a farm.'

But at the same time, all my spiritual tension - all the sense of driving, going, looking, waiting, just stopped. Pssshhh...ding! "This is the guy."

I don't much remember what we talked about as he drove me to an apartment near UCLA. I remember talking about making up for things our ancestors did and when he asked me about myself I said "I'm a quiet, moony kind of guy," and I remember thinking "Why the heck did I just say 'moony'? I never use that word."

That evening we had spaghetti, and Toni Lee gave the elephant talk and delivered an imaginary slide show. "Look at the wall and imagine this. Click. Here's Booneville, a beautiful place with hills and a creek. Click. Here we are eating soybeans and smiling. We smile a lot. Click. Here we are....."

They didn't have to twist my arm. I slept for a few hours before the van left for the Bay Area. Laurie Baer and Nevin Colglazier woke me up by singing "When the red red, robin comes bob-bob-bobbin along..." which I thought was neat. They piled me into a van with a carpet cleaning crew for the long drive to San Fran.

We pulled into Hearst Street in time for dinner. I walked into a houseful of people with dazzling smiles and bright white light beaming out of them. I had checked out a number of spiritual groups, but nobody had been this bright.

Another spaghetti dinner, another elephant lecture and a real slide show later, and I was on the bus to Booneville. The weekend started with waking up in the Chicken Palace, the red, red robin bob-bob-bobbin, the Hokey-Pokey in a big circle, lots of singing, a giant barrel of natural peanut butter. I felt like I was home.

At the end of the weekend, they clustered round, smiling eagerly. "So, Sam, do you want to stay up for the week?" I thought 'Why are you even asking me? You're the group right? The one I am supposed to meet? So, I'm here already.'

That's what I thought. What I said was "Yes."

As far as I am concerned, I joined when I met Laurie Baer on that street corner in North Hollywood. There wasn't any doubt that this is where I was supposed to be, and that has been underneath everything since then.

We had a feeling back then that changing the world would take six months, maybe a year if everyone caught on like we did. It didn't quite work out that way.

Interestingly, though, after I was matched and Blessed, and we had our first two kids, we decided to move to where their one living grandparent was: Ventura, California, on highway 101 and right down the road from Krishnamurti's place in Ojai, where I thought I was headed back on February 3rd, 1978. Don't tell me God has no sense of humor.

So how did you join the family/movement/church?