

Dealing with Deprogramming and Persecution

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Nowadays we go to church, dressed up nicely. If anyone doesn't like our church, they might give us a look. How different that is from the early days.

The week that I joined the church, my spiritual father was kidnapped by deprogrammers hired by his parents. He had to escape by diving through a motel room window. The window wasn't open at the time.

Being spiritually sensitive at the time (it's how I knew to join) I was swept up in the beautiful spiritual atmosphere at Booneville. The songs, the prayers, the chanting, the positivity. But one day I felt a huge disturbance, a clump of gut-churning anger and negativity. I found out later that day that a member's family had come to the gate with kidnappers, demanding to see them. If our brother had gone to see them, he would have been dragged away.

This was a time when persecution (not a term I use lightly) was so strong that some judges would certify that a member was incapable of handling their own life's decisions, simply because they had joined the church. The court would issue a ruling appointing family members or deprogrammers to make decisions for them, until they became sane again, ie left the church. Such laws were made for people who had dementia or Alzheimer's, but they were used for us.

One member of my fundraising team was snatched out of a parking lot. A van pulled up, three bulky guys jumped out and grabbed him, stuffed him in the van and drove off. This kind of thing happened so often that any visit from your family meant you had to take precautions.

I spent an awkward evening with a brother in my trinity and his uncle. Basically, I was there to make sure that nothing happened to him. His uncle thought it was strange that I came along, but what else could we do?

When my mother and brother visited me in Nashville, where I was on MFT, they wanted to see if I had lost my mind.

I got a motel room for them, not a fancy one, just a regular motel. When I came earlier in the day with a fruit basket and flowers, one of the women hanging around the front desk said "I take it this isn't exactly for your mother." with a knowing smirk. I answered "Actually, it is for my mother." Pause. "Well, ain't you sweet."

When I went to the airport to meet them, I was hyper vigilant. If they had hired deprogrammers, this would probably be where they'd grab me. I had a hard time believing my family would do something like that, but that's what other members had thought before they were snatched.

It probably didn't help that I greeted them, a little jittery and looking around me for anyone zeroing in on me. There was nobody. So I relaxed and we went on with our visit.

My older brother, who had taken LSD three times a week for several years, was checking me out. He thought I'd given up my free will and was letting others decide my life for me. I wanted to ask him how his free will was working for him, but I bit my tongue.

They left, satisfied that I was more competent in some ways, certifiably sane at least in the other ways. They met my team leader and team mother, Tim (can't remember his last name) and Sharon Pace. From then on every phone call home had "And how are Tim and Sharon doing? Such nice people."

Of our brothers and sisters who were kidnapped, some came back, some stayed away. Usually they had to fake leaving to get enough freedom to escape. But even those who came back seemed to struggle with basic trust. I don't know what their situation was like. For sure, our early church had faults – what religious movement made of 20-somethings with little religious background wouldn't?

For myself, I had to learn how to ground myself spiritually. I was vegetarian, which made this a challenge, but seeing the 55 gallon barrel of peanut butter in Booneville's kitchen shed was a revelation. I loved peanut butter, in fact I was mildly addicted to it. I had full permission to go out on breaks, grab a plastic bowl, and scoop it full of crunchy peanut butter. For the sake of keeping my feet on the ground.

It was good to learn how to close down spiritually when I needed to. When someone got angry within 30 feet of me, my stomach hurt. It's one thing to have your spirit open, hearing the spiritual trumpets playing when you're singing on a hilltop on a sheep farm. It's another thing entirely when you're cleaning carpets in a dive bar in San Francisco.

We covered all the chakras.

What was your experience? Were you ever kidnapped? Experienced strong negativity or persecution?

How did your family take it when you joined?

Let the stories flow.

By the way, it is fine to post anonymously on our website testimoonies.com. I know several brothers and sisters who would face difficulty in their professional life if their church affiliation were known. This still does happen. So you can write a story with no picture and a pseudonym, or just as Brother/Sister Anonymous.