

Testimony - God and Baseball: Three strikes, but you're not out

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GOD AND BASEBALL: Baseball is one of Americas beloved national pastimes and of course has expanded on as a great world-renowned sport today...hmm, sounds so providential, and it's game rules have maintained consistency since its earliest beginnings. Hmm, what could have inspired it to be so seemingly associated with the Divine Principle? There are so many similarities: numerical symbolisms, for example strike 3, ball 4, 9 innings,...those who understand Divine Principle, you could understand my point. Those who have not yet encountered Divine Principle, well, stick around and you will find out soon enough. The baseball diamond from a bird's eye view itself is like looking down at a four position foundation as it symbolizes an unbreakable bonded relationship between God and man, and the object of the game is that everybody gets to come home...just as God would hope.

Also, and only this really matters personally to me, but my dad was an awesome catcher in the triple A ball club and was major league baseball material in the making had things like the Korean war never had broken out. He made try outs for the Boston Red Sox and out of 300 hundred catchers they took 3 of them and he was one of them, but when the Korean war broke out his plans got interrupted.

When my dad was a kid in his teens, he used to catch with Sandy Cofax in the days before Sandy Cofax became a well-known major league ball player. Yes he kept his name. Interestingly, I was also told that my uncle, my dad's brother, was telling my dad when he makes it big, that he should take the letter 'a', out of his last name changing Denaro into Denro, as in Bobby Denro. My dads name was Robert Denaro. Anyway, from the stories I had heard, I learned my dad used to throw the ball back to Cofax faster than Cofax pitched it in from the pitcher's mound. There was a time where my dad would catch Sandy Cofax's pitch barehanded and would shout out, "C'mon Sandy, burn it back in there", as he threw it back to him for the next pitch.

Well, my point to this is a bit irrelevant, because what I really want to convey to you is how I was initially contacted with the members of CARP/Unification Church movement, and how God must have had a strong hand in all of the upcoming developments that I am about to unfold to you right now, and if it was not for baseball or as the rules thereof, then in 3 strikes I could have been out of the pickings for good; so here is how it all began for me.

One summer afternoon in early July of 1978, as I was just trodden along downtown San Diego, I believe my back pack may have been stored away in the Greyhound lockers by this time, although I cannot really recall that point, but anyway as I was walking, I ran into a young lady by the name of Sally. She introduced herself and she wondered what I was doing and if I did not have any plans she wanted me to go to their dinner program.

True that I had nothing to really do, at least that I knew of, and just continued to talk with her. It must have been around 2:30 in the afternoon, and she asked if I would not mind to come to their house for a dinner program, although it was still early yet, and so I obliged her.

As we settled in the house, she was talking to me about principle, but I did not really understand in so much depth what she was saying, but whatever she was talking about, I sensed a logic to it and I did not sense any real threat about what she was sharing.

While she was talking, I also noticed a drum set behind her, but I just continued to oblige her as she was speaking. Then she mentioned a 2 day work shop that everyone attends and she had an application I was in need of signing and a 10 dollar fee, and I started to feel a bit uncomfortable about that for some reason, but I did not let her on to that feeling I was having and just let her continue to talk. I did not say I would or would not participate.

As more time passed I asked if she did not mind if I tried playing the drums, and she gave me the go ahead. I was terrible with the drums, but I had a few lessons under my belt so I gave it a whirl. After a while passed, Sally had asked if I could help her prepare dinner by cutting some fruit for a fruit salad, so I obliged her with that as well, besides, she was probably getting annoyed with my drum beat..., I know I was getting pretty bored with the sound I was making as I come to think about it.

Well I went along and slipped into this apron she offered, and I remember how uncomfortable I felt as I started putting it on, but I was doing my due diligence, and began chopping up some apples.

Then 7:00 PM rolled by, and all the troops from their day out began to show up with their guests. I all of a sudden felt like a captive. I watched everyone with their guests arriving and I started feeling like I myself was going to be the evening meal. Then I noticed one of the girls that came with them. She looked tired and fatigued, and she had a back pack with her too. But when she stopped in the doorway she whispered to the person that she came with and a minute later she was gone.

I was greatly disappointed she was not staying, and so I wanted to do some reconnaissance, so I told Sally that I would be right back, and I left from the place I was cutting up the fruit, (I was just about finished anyway), and went out to look for her, but I did not know where she went. I slipped my apron off as I was glancing from left to right wondering where she could have gone, and then I spotted her at the bus stop bench pretty close by. I ran over to her and said hello and I immediately let her know that I was not part of the group, and like her, I was also just invited.

I learned she was from New Jersey. I told her I was from NYC and I also was just traveling and if she would like, we could get together and travel. And so without hesitation she agreed. But, I had to let her know that I was a bit committed to stay for their event and I would meet her at 08:30 PM at the Greyhound bus station, and so she agreed with that. I said goodbye, and we would talk later.

Her name was Sally too. So Sally waited for me at the bus station. I would like to say for brevity sake from this time moving forward that I will refer to this Sally, as satanic Sally and the other Sally, the one I first met, as heavenly Sally. You will understand the reason later on.

After returning from my conversation with satanic Sally, I returned to the house and mingled with the people. I remember some of the people, like John D, whom was one person that stood out in my memory, and there were many others, but I do not know or recall anyone of them from this day forward. But, when the festivities began, I did remember they started with entertainment. I found it to be so displeasing to me. Perhaps because of the anticipation I had of meeting up with satanic Sally. Yes in truth that was why. Nevertheless, I was not humored from the entertainment and all I wanted to do was leave. I was really uncomfortable but felt responsible and committed out of respect to heavenly Sally.

Then came the lecture and now I was really getting stressed and even more so uncomfortable especially when the word God was mentioned. As the lecture was continuing, it was probably almost over, I could not sit still and I had to get up or something, and heavenly Sally, who was sitting behind me, held my shoulders to keep me seated, and whispered to me if I can wait till it is over....I was feeling the pressure but I remained, in spite of how antsy I was feeling.

When the lecture was over, I was all ready to split, as in so long or sayonara. I said my goodbyes and heavenly Sally looked dumbfounded. She had no idea what must have been going on inside of my head. All I had on my mind was that satanic Sally at the bus station was waiting for me, so I told the heavenly Sally that I need to go, and that I would be back another time.

I told the whole group I would definitely look them up. I felt so strongly that I had to justify my departure, but I just knew I had to get out of their before I die. I kept their little ad with a picture. The picture was a drawing of their white cute cozy house. I kept this and I said goodbye....well that was a **Strike 1. A swing and a miss.**

Well, needless to say, my summer was what it was for a person like me for that time. I spent a couple of weeks of the summer of 1978 with satanic Sally. Oh yeah, me and satanic Sally had talked about the meeting place where we first met and laughed and joked about the members of the cult group as we called it etc...and we spent our time together traveling from north to south bouncing from hotel to hotel just living a dull non-altruistic uneventful life with no vision whatsoever and after that fling was all done, I saw satanic Sally off as she returned home, and as for me, my summer took another turn into uncertainty and as more time elapsed, I found it was time to fly back to my apartment in NYC as summer was ending and my funds were running low.

Back to NYC I went. I kept the San Diego cozy white house picture with me on the side of my desk. It was always there to remind me of my incarcerating experience with the cult group, but the funny thing that lurked in my mind is that I recall I told heavenly Sally and the group of them I would be back. I felt a little bit guilty about that since I was believed to be a man of my word.

Anyway, I kept that cute white house picture on the side of the desk which was next to the scale I was using which I used to weigh out pounds of marijuana into smaller grams. I was selling a pounds worth of nickel and dime bags every three weeks. This was one of the ways that I was making money to sustain myself, and my apartment was a smoking furnace where my friends or acquaintances were always coming over buying weed from me and smoking it there with me.

I would always think to myself, what the heck am I doing? Why am I doing this? Also I thought, there has to be a more legal way to make money too. Anyway the more I smoked I was learning I was getting more

and more irritated and frustrated with my life. I was sensing that something is wrong.

I was out of control of myself and I was out of control to stop people from coming over. I did not like many of them and they were all pretty much derelicts. Anyway they were not my friends and I did not know how to say, "no more". But I was selling and they were buying. So, I decided the only way to end this was to get out. So I made plans to drive to California and become a stuntman.

That was it. I did not have to say no, I just packed up to escape this mad house that I once called home and let my friend take over my lease. In the back of my mind, I figured there has to be a stuntman school somewhere out there in LA that I can go to so I can learn how to become a stuntman. That was all I used to think about anyway and besides I figured I should live up to my childhood nickname. I was told in the early 70s that I looked like John Travolta in his movie, Saturday Night Fever that came out in late 1977. I mean literally 3 to 4 times a day for months that is what people said, "hey you look just like John Travolta", they would remark. That embarrasses me today, but at the time it was the coolest thing to hear. I figured, I could be his stuntman...I was pretty young and naïve, but that is what was going on in my head. **Ball 1...and the count is strike 1 ball 1:**

Preparation to leave NYC:

The time finally came...the summer of 1979. I quit my job at Doyle Galleries, and said goodbye to all my family and friends. I had bought a van that I earned selling marijuana and driving a taxi cab on week nights while also painting Park Ave apartments as another side job. What a moon lighter I was. No pun intended.

On the road I went with my drum set intact and my rabbit fur skinned blanket and whatever else I could load up, and off I went...making sure I had all my beer and an ice cooler of ice. What was I doing with that stuff as I think of this...I was following a tradition I learned from the people I grew up with. I was always high. Smoking marijuana and drinking beer or liquor was an everyday occurrence for me since the age of 12 years old.

Off I went, starting out on Interstate 87 N and then 90 E and eventually, and one day as I was driving across what now was Interstate 80 West passing through Ohio, I pulled on the shoulder to roll a joint. As I got involved with the rolling process, I looked up and noticed a police car had stopped in front of my vehicle, and that sure did shock me. I thought to myself, where the heck did that come from? Then 'tap' 'tap' on the driver's side window, and I turned to glance, and there to my surprise was a big burly police man standing and staring at me through the glass. I froze for a split second and the joint I was rolling was right there in plain view, and even though he saw it, I instantaneously tossed it like a magic trick gone bad. I was hoping I could turn back time, but that was not at all possible. The policeman said, " come on out of there!" I thought to myself, no way. But I caved in and obeyed him and there I was standing out of my vehicle and he began asking me what I was doing...I told him I was heading to California to become a stuntman. He asked to see my bag of goodies, and was asking me what all this stuff inside it was...he pulled out the pipe and asked me what this was, and I was embarrassed to tell him... but I mumbled with a low voice, " it's a pipe"... "a what," he asked? "It's a pipe, a pipe," I said half ashamed and half frustrated. Then he asked about the bamboo, the hash cube, the marijuana etc...and then he said, " you see all this?, (as he was holding the bag)...well, I did not see this!" He blurted. He tossed the bag back inside the van. And then he went on to say, "and that knife you are carrying, (I was carrying a 6 inch Buck knife blade on my belt) you cannot wear that, you will get busted. The only reason I stopped is because I thought you were having car troubles."...He told me to be careful and to watch myself, and then he went to his car and drove off leaving me with my thoughts.

The funny thing about all this was the only thing I could think of while all this was happening is that I would be left without any drug. I did not even consider I would be in jail... heck I did not even realize that what I was doing in my apartment was a felony selling marijuana by the pound. I told you I was dumb and naïve. Eh? **Ball 2 (and the count is 2 balls and one strike).**

Well I finally got to San Diego. Why I went to San Diego to this day really makes no sense since I was supposed to go to LA. But the fact is the prior year I stayed in San Diego and roomed with an international student named Ali who was from Iran. At that time Ali was attending SDSU but they were still on a summer break and I was looking for a place to stay for the month of August so I rented his room. This event had occurred after a few weeks after having met satanic and heavenly Sally of that same summer year.

As I roomed with Ali, I learned a lot about his culture and we became good friends. I also made friends with next door family neighbors and winded up selling my 10 speed bike I had accumulated as I was hanging out in San Diego. I winded up giving the bike to his sister with a promise to mail me the money, and since she never paid me I came in person to collect. But when I arrived I learned that they moved out and so did my friend Ali. So for some reason I just commuted day by day from San Diego to LA.

I finally found a stuntman association in LA and when I got there I saw a room full of gentlemen, whom I just assumed were all stuntmen. I was going to go in and talk to them but I was told by the front receptionist that I cannot go in there, but then her phone rang and as she picked it up, I being insistent and

not accepting no for an answer, snuck in so that I can ask some questions. As I entered the room I noticed everyone was busy talking and they were making lots of noise and everyone seemed as though they were having a good time, but I interrupted everyone as I said, "Excuse me I understand you're all stuntmen here?" The room got so quiet you could hear a pin drop. I pursued further, and I asked, "Say I want to become a stuntman! What does it take to become a stuntman," I blurted. They all broke out in laughter.

While they were still laughing, one of them from the group took me to the side. He put his arm around me like a father would wrap his arm around a son, and as we walked towards a separate room he began explaining the ropes to me. He explained the life and the circumstances and I was thinking in my thoughts this would not be an endeavor that sounds like I even have a shot at.

Well that was that and I had to put the brakes on the stunt career. That pursuit would remain on the back burner. As I spent more time in San Diego, I noticed an ad on a school billboard for flying lessons....I thought that would be cool,...It would cost \$800.00 to get my license, and my wheels started spinning in my head and I was going to pursue this. I had the money, but I had a few distractions along the way. For one, I met an old friend from my old neighborhood named Joey Vega. He noticed me as I was parking my van in front of the bar. He was standing outside because he was the bouncer. As much as I was surprised to see him, he was even more surprised and we embraced like long lost brothers.

One day while I was at his apartment, he and his girlfriend were arguing about who is going to buy the beer, and I peculiarly volunteered. I noticed that it is not in me to be so thoughtful, but I sensed I should do a good deed, and so I did my due diligence and bought the beer. While I was coming back from this noble endeavor, again, an uncommon occurrence, I crossed paths with this guy and girl named Carla and John. They asked me what I was doing here in San Diego, (at that time I was wearing a blue tee shirt that read 'Where the hell is Miami' embroidered in white on the front), and I let them know I wasn't from Miami but NYC, and I came out here to attempt to become a stuntman, then they were so surprised and got excited and told me they're with this group and they're making a movie and I should try to come and be a part of it.... I was so naïve but I was excited about the possibilities so I let them know I would come...and so they gave me the address, and I went there the next day around 6:00 PM.

As I got to the destination I could have sworn the place looked familiar. I was walking across the street and saw the house, and I was sure but not exactly sure, that was the same house I was a year ago. I got the jitters and decided to keep walking because I am pretty sure it was the same place, but then I heard a voice calling out, "Hey, New Yorker." I glanced over and saw it was John. I thought to myself, darn it, he caught me. I was spotted...oh well. So I bit the bullet and decided to walk over, and I was invited inside. As I mingled with everyone, I noticed a picture by the wall that I thought was where a white board used to be hanging, and as I approached the picture I tilted it upward to see what was behind it and sure enough there was a white board. Then I thought, "I knew it, yup this is the place all right....darn it", I continued to think.

"Making movies? Get out of here," I thought. But it was interesting I thought and somewhat strange that I should be thinking this, but, I noticed that I was enjoying the company and I was enjoying the food and I noticed that I was so confident. I enjoyed their music I enjoyed their fellowship and I enjoyed the entertainment, and then the lecture began, and there it was again... a similar topic and oh gosh they talked about God, and oh my I was starting to feel all oozy and really uncomfortable and I turned inwardly into my invisible shell once again...."Geeze, What the heck is this," I thought. Well the end of the program came and it was time to sign people up for the 2 day workshop in Long Beach. I was asked if I am going, and I smiled and said, "no thank you, I cannot." I left everyone and parted my way. **Strike 2 (and the count was ball 2 strike 2).**

A week passed by and I was still commuting back and forth from LA to San Diego. I recall that I used to park on the side streets and when I woke up I would drive to Balboa Park to play some basketball and afterward, take a shower before heading out to LA.

One day I had a great idea. I decided instead of parking in the street I could just drive straight to Balboa Park in the evening and when I wake up I would already be there. So that evening, I drove to the Balboa Park where the gymnasium was located. I parked my van in a section of the huge parking lot, but I noticed there were some security guards who were watching me. I did not like this spot and felt uncomfortable so I decided to move the van under the light at the center of the parking lot away from the security guards. It was a good spot right under the light and away from the guards and also it was nice and visible to roll up a joint for a night cap. After I finished smoking, I went to the back of the van to lie down and go to sleep. A few minutes later the van began to shake and move...I was startled and quickly looked up and around wondering what the heck was going on and got out of the vehicle only to be surprised to see a car that just smashed through my front grill with its right quarter panel by which it devastatingly totaled my van. In minutes 2 to 3 police vehicles and the whole security department was on the scene.

They started asking me questions as to what am I doing here etc..., and as for the other car that caused the accident, well, I saw that the driver was so drunk he could not even stand never mind keep his eyes opened. Well the interrogation was over, and after the police got my story they understood I had nothing to do with being gay and meeting someone at this so-called bath house, as I had learned that was what they originally thought that was why I was there. But needless to say I had to have the vehicle towed.

I walked around till daylight. I finally seated myself on a bus stop bench across the street from my friend Joe Vega's apartment, and I noticed that my friend was just 2 blocks away from the San Diego Beach Street house that I recently par took in. I remember thinking I had 2 options. Option 1: I could disturb my friend, but it was too early to bother them or Option 2: I could go to the white house on Beach Street and say hello and ask for a shower and in this case I went with Option 2.

As I approached the foot of the stairs I could see the edge of the couch and a person sitting down, and as I got to the top of the stairs the person, took a glance in my direction, and then took a double take with surprise as if he knew me. He smiled at me and said, "holy cow you look like John Travolta." I said, "yeah, I get that a lot." He continued to look in amazement and was quite friendly and he introduced himself. "I am Rocky and I am John Trovolta's body guard," he replied.

I thought that was pretty funny and I was surprised, but I was also excited about that too, and I, like I said, was young and naïve and oh so gullible. But this was really all very true and very legitimate and so very strange and at the same time interesting. Well, we got all warm and fuzzy. Rocky, whose real name is John Brady, was excited to meet me and was also very interested in my upbringing and wanted so badly for me to show him around NYC. He also wanted to introduce me to one of the Californian Philly cheese burger joints downtown, and after some time past, Carla, whom I had met with John that previous day also came on the scene and was also very excited to see me too, and she told me Rocky just came back from a 7 day workshop and we should go to a 2 day workshop with Rocky...and Rocky was all for it and I was all for it as well. I was thinking to myself that I was not going to let meeting John Travolta slip away from this unique and surprising opportunity....so I was ready to do anything to stay friends with Rocky and to see how meeting John Travolta would have opened up opportunities as well and so I was ready to deal with the 2 day workshop no matter what.

The next day came and when I got to the first day of the work shop I went through the morning just playing along with the lecture trying to embrace it but I could not get past the problems I was having. At the Long Beach center there were these 3 ring leaders so to speak, as I referred to them only in my thoughts of course. They were named, Nate, Ashley and Ian, and I did not feel this at the time but they turned out to be great brothers, but I was having issues with the mention of God and the rules of the separating boys and girls and no drugs, etc....but when we got to the second part called the Fall of Man, my world immediately turned over....I could not contain my tears and my sorrow. I never in my life could conceive of God being a suffering God. I was never able to conceive of anything in the Bible except to be just a book of fairytales.

I was dumbfounded and hurt hearing about God's suffering and aching heart. I don't know why I was so affected by it, but in good honest truth I was immensely struck. When it came time to ask what I thought, I told them I could not even believe this really happened in shock as I still was. Then it was lunch time and someone said we are going to have a discussion about it during lunch, and I thought, "LUNCH? How, can you even eat after hearing something like this?" I questioned.

As the 2 days unfolded and History of Restoration came I saw immediately how the providence of restoration was truly a formula for world peace. I sensed this is truly the solution that will bring about an ideal world, and I also sensed that these Moonies were going to get the glory and I wanted to be part of this, yes I wanted in. I saw the logic and nothing could make so much more sense as this has, and I was literally sold. I just knew this was absolute truth. I recall how valuable it would be to teach this as they taught this and that I would like to learn to teach this too, although I never told anyone that but I strongly remember these thoughts, and its as though its stamped as my destiny somewhere. Now, this does not mean my faith was never challenged, it was indeed, but those are little tidbits I can share in another chapter. So, a **homerun was hit with the bases loaded. That is what we would call a Grand Slam.**

Well, In closing, I thank God for his patience and for playing by the rules. Let's compare God and baseball in summary of all that has transpired. Like the baseball rules that have stayed so, so consistent, God is also an eternal, absolute and unchanging. There are 9 innings, representing formation, growth and completion, We have sacrifices in baseball, and there are plenty of those in the old testament and new testament, ...If I had not been able to have those interventions as I was being groomed to get me where I belong, the game would have been over and at strike 3 I would have and could have been out, and God would have sought for a new player to continue where I was unable to. But maybe with God's grace, just like there are 9 innings in the game, although we cannot assume God is playing 9 innings...we may or may not have more chances, but I guess that is why we need to be good sportsman, stay united and connected... after all, has it not been said that it is not who wins, but how we play the game? But we do have some more challenging roads and hills and valleys to cross. I am still here playing and I can share some more adventures as more time unfolds, but all in due time or all in God's time-table to be more technically correct....