

My first workshop in Booneville

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Photo date and location unknown

The Friday night I first arrived at workshop, my spiritual father, Larry Bear, and I rolled out our sleeping bags on the floor of the Chicken Palace in Booneville. This was a long, wide building with a somewhat low roof. There were around 30 other brothers sleeping there that night, and when we woke up, there were about 15 more.

Waking up consisted of Joshua Cotter and Rick Joswick strumming guitars and singing “When the red, red robin comes bob bob bobbin along...” while cheerfully shouting “Time to get up! Jump it, brothers!” While I was still opening my eyes, several brothers were jumping up from the floor, some of them still in their sleeping bags.

We stumbled to the bathroom, sluiced our faces with cold water, brushed our teeth, then made our way outside where a giant circle was forming. A sister wearing bright red gloves led us in the Hokey Pokey.

We were formed into groups, and I was in Dr. John’s group for the weekend. We sat and choo choo powed together. For the uninitiated, this was where everyone joined hands and chanted “choo choo choo, choo choo choo, choo choo choo, yay yay pow!” (there is a story about the spiritual origins of this) I thought, what the heck, this is California.

Then we went back into the Chicken Palace, which now had chairs set up in it, and started singing. There was Joshua Cotter and Jennifer Hagar on guitars, and Rick Joswick on drums. We stood up and sang, some people jumping up and down and clapping. They played up a storm. Rick was beet red in the face by the end.

The weekend lectures were broad and general, starting with the Elephant story, the Cause of Crimes (misuse of love). I don’t know if I was really struck by the Principle until the 7 day workshop, but I remember feeling glad to be there. Due to my spiritual guidance, I already knew I was in the right place.

So when Sunday evening came and some people were getting on the bus back to the city, they gathered around me. “So, Sammy (to this day, Larry is one of 3 people on Earth who can get away with calling me that), what do you think? Do you wanna stay up for the week?”

I looked at them like they didn’t get it. “Of course.” I mean, you are the people I was sent here to meet, right? And here I am. So where else would I be going? I don’t know how much of that I said.

When the 7 day lectures started, they had my full interest. I was particularly struck by the spiritual and physical sides of man, and the 5 spiritual and physical senses. And the Fall of Man. I year ago I had

meditated hard on why there was so much hurt, and had received spiritually that uncommitted sex was the main source of pain for people.

I had studied Taoism and Buddhism, but I had never heard anything as clear as this. It was like looking at something in a microscope, then turning it and seeing it more clearly. Then turning it again, and it seeing it yet more clearly. And on and on, beyond what I could imagine.

The singing was also a big part of the experience. The band was pouring themselves into it. We sang long and loud. I really was never so good at singing before this. I would try, but I had no sense of what my voice sounded like. My own parents actually believed I was tone-deaf until I plunked a tune on the family piano. But at Booneville, I discovered what it felt like to put all yourself into singing. And there were amazingly beautiful moments when the room was filled with a sense of oneness and harmony. I often heard a high, clear trumpet playing along, especially on the Holy Songs. There was no one there, physically, playing a trumpet. But I heard it often.

And the sheer amount of bright, white energy coming off the leaders was unlike anything I had ever experienced. They just went around beaming at each other. I had been vegetarian for 3 years and was so spiritually sensitive that if someone got angry within 30 feet of me, my stomach started hurting. This place was flooded with tidal waves of bright energy.

And what a group of people it was. There were rednecks, Christians, hippies, nerds, jocks, business guys, artists, hunters and vegetarians, spiritual seekers and atheists. Somehow they all got along in some kind of crazy human stew. They called it family.

There was song we sang after hearing about Jacob and Esau, "We are climbing/up Jacob's ladder/ I wanna sit down/" We were in a big circle with our arms around each other's shoulders, kicking and stepping in unison. The spirit was amazing, as was the atmosphere. The Chicken Palace was an old chicken coop, and when 70 of us jumped up and down together, the old chicken dust started coming up through the floorboards.

Following the example of Jacob in the Bible, we practiced love-bombing each other. You divided your orange and passed it around the group. Then you divided your sandwich and passed it around. It got to where the group leader had to say "Ok, everybody, stop sharing and eat now."

They encouraged you to be your corniest self, applauding wildly when you shared or sang something, anything. Brainwashing? I don't know... I already knew I was prepared to meet these people and I was going to be there for a while. Their persuasion was kind of wasted on me, but if they had acted like holy icebergs or elite snobs, I suppose it would have made it hard to stay. Anyway, I didn't have to agree with every single thing they did. Deep down I knew I was supposed to be here, and this was the clearest teaching I had ever heard. I knew I wasn't going anywhere else.

I wanted to do a ceremony with the brothers where I gave away everything I had with me, till I stood there naked, to symbolize my giving my life over to this teaching, this family. But one day when I wanted to go out into the rain in my bathing suit, they freaked out, and I realized a naked ceremony wasn't going to work here. So instead, I settled for getting my hair cut and shaving off my beard.