

Chapter 17

ALMOST HOME

It was early September when Jeff and I made our trip back to Missouri. I had been through the Ozark mountain area many times before, but this time I felt as if I were a foreigner. Susie and I had been separated many times throughout my tour in the Navy, sometimes as long as six and a half months. But no matter how long we were apart, whether six months or six days, being reunited as a family was always beautiful. Our time apart had been for a “call to duty” from an authority structure far greater than ourselves. I recall hurricane warnings while living in Florida. We were to leave our spouse and children and take the ship out to sea. I understand the necessity behind such action, but this separation had been under far different circumstances, although the call to duty felt much the same. I would return to troubling issues. Being back in Missouri, Susie and I were very near to home, geographically. Yet, in other ways, we were as far distant as we had been the last two years. Alice’s father was in poor health and was confined to the house, while her mother had a job working in town. To have their daughter, three grandchildren, and a friend with two children suddenly appear needing food and shelter was undoubtedly a burden, yet not completely monetary. I’m certain our beliefs were confusing for them, as well. Even though the numbers increased, they dealt with us quite generously. Originally, it wasn’t intended that I would stay with them on this second trip, but with Jeff’s latest doctrine of wife duality, Alice was highly upset most of the time, therefore, I was needed in order to help keep her calm.

Susie and I had known periods of separation before, but this time our reunion involved a doctrine that would affect the very core of our family. Alice dealt with the issue through fits of rage, but Susie was simply devastated. She was so scared that any rebellion might cause more calamity to thousands, as had been charged to us so many times in the past. An accumulation of doctrine had long since destroyed our future. We were destroyed by what we had that made life so precious. But if we did not go forward and fulfill the commands of god, millions would die by our failure. We still, however, seemed to have the audacity to be concerned about our own happiness. Something that appeared quite “normal” at the time was that Susie was pretty much involved with various domestic chores while Alice did basically nothing. The role-playing of different positions appears more vivid in my memory now, where at the time, it was simply “the way things were.” No contact was made with any of our family members to let them know that we were back in the region. As most of the family of the members of the group had been in some sort of

contact, it's surprising that no one knew we were there. Before heading back to West Virginia, Jeff told us to sign up for government food stamps. Dennis had been in charge of things there until Jeff's return, and had been given similar instructions.

So after a few days, Jeff returned to camp while I stayed in Missouri. We applied for and got the food stamps, which eased the burden of expenses for Alice's parents. Finding employment would be too much like settling in, and we were told not to do that. During the few weeks that Jeff was gone, one night Alice had a mental break-down. Apparently her use of alcohol had long been heavy. I knew that she drank occasionally to ease the pain of her headaches. She also used a strong over-the-counter medication quite regularly in order to relax. But one night she became very depressed. Without revealing detailed events of their marriage to us, she clearly stated that it had not been a good one. At one point, she even said that he had messed up their lives while recommending that Susie and I get away before he messed ours up, too. Again, she gave no details as to what she meant, but I interpreted it as rebellious speaking, and therefore, not truth. I was not capable of putting this together at that time, but what she failed to comprehend was that the "game" she had played had taken the lives of five people. Neither could my conscience comprehend that their deaths were wrong. To leave the group would mean that I had begun to doubt that the act of taking those lives was right—still a long way from identifying it as wrong. I cared very much for Alice, and on that night I listened to her quite tenderly. It's taken years and even the stirring of these painful memories to wake me up to just how little she must have cared about not only me and my family, but the entire group.

Eventually, Dennis and Tonya, with their daughter Molly, joined us in Missouri. While it was good to see them again, we were concerned for everyone back at the camp. It had begun getting cold when I left, and I knew the weather would be threatening, where a large part of the day would be spent around a fire. We were all talented people. Susie and Tonya were both licensed schoolteachers. Richard was a civil engineer and Debbie was a surgical nurse. I was probably the least educated among us, yet even so, I had marketable skills with boilers and turbines. Danny had about two years of college and was a gifted art student. Yet we had become reduced to the point of sitting around a fire in the "wilderness," when any one of us was highly capable of finding employment that would have met our needs. Awaiting the seer's instruction dominated, even suppressed, nearly every facet of our decision-making faculties. The few decisions we were left to make were to be done "like-mindedly" (with the thinking of Jeff). When we finally did leave the group, making even simple decisions was the hardest thing to do.

Keith had done some work for a man who owned a couple of farms in the southeast area of Kansas City. On one of these properties he had a good-sized barn, which would become our next camp. When the really frigid weather hit, it was time to move. Keith also had a friend who owned a large flatbed truck. I can only guess that a trailer was borrowed in order to bring the horses back.

With Dennis and myself in Missouri, it was now the responsibility of the few men in the camp to load the truck alone. This, too, was done in accordance with instructions from Jeff, and in the event that anything had to be left behind, a list of essentials was prepared. Danny was in charge of the camp at this point, and subsequently, in charge of the move. Because the truck had only the cab for passenger space, the remainder of the group made the trip in a huge wooden crate, or box, which had been turned upside down on the bed of the truck to block the wind. It could hardly have been a more unpleasant trip.

Once everyone was back in Missouri, the man's barn was transformed into another campsite with our individual tents set up like small rooms in the large barn loft. The horses had been offloaded at a separate location. We ran the generator until the owner of the barn allowed us to run electric cables from another building. A young man and his family who lived and worked on the property were quite friendly and welcomed us there. This arrangement at first sounded promising; necessary things for our very survival, like insulating the barn for heat, and the possibility of some employment, but eventually both fell through. We had been given the care of a milk cow, which met our needs for milk. But because Jeff wouldn't spend the money necessary for the appropriate food, the cow lost weight and the owner took her back. Damon and I were to remain at the barn to be available for ongoing chores like mending fence line, helping with cattle, any general labor. The other men were to apply for employment at a company in the city, which they did, and were hired. We had an income once again, but that was the least of our problems.

Jeff's self-image had become as large as the position he claimed himself to hold. He had not made a good impression on the local church people at the time of his first visit with Kathy's brother. Now that we were together as a group and living in a barn, matters only got worse. Hoping to ease some of this justifiable tension, some of us went to the area RLDS congregation one evening, knowing a service was being held and that a number of people would be there. But as one of the men quite appropriately put it, we had "laid a lot of seed bed for rumors" and indeed, we had. If things were not bad enough, Jeff took Kathy with him everywhere he went. This was the same area where Keith and Kathy had lived, and people began to notice. Keith received invitations for Kathy and himself to visit for supper, yet they could not go. Kathy was no longer Keith's wife, even though they were still claiming to the world to be married, and it was well known that Jeff was already married. There were questions about the Avery family during this time, too. We responded as we had been instructed. To us, telling a lie was in reality, the preservation of a sacred honor. In other words, if we were asked a question to which Jeff had given us words to respond, then our response was as an answer from god. The example often used in order to justify this principle was the tool we still use today. What spy walks into the foreign land divulging to all whom they see, that they are a spy? What a spy does, is lie. This isn't to say that these spies are just plain "liars." It's because they believe they have to hold the sacred truth in the noblest way. At one time, I had an impeccably trustworthy reputa-

tion. Among the other issues I deal with now is that loss of trust of which I was once held worthy, an attribute not easily reclaimed.

About a month after moving into the barn my brother, Rick, found us. Family members of others in the group began finding them as well. Contact with family members began weakening the hold that Jeff had on us. Sometimes I think I must have been the most deluded of all. The whole experience seemed to work as a pair of Chinese handcuffs; as the contact with family began to pull me away, the gripping hold upon me grew tighter. My family recognized our move to Ohio as a notable step of faith to begin with—no job and no housing. They had been dealing with the same vexation I had been regarding church doctrine. Then the doors opened and we had been blest; at least it appeared that way. But soon, changes in our behavior occurred and eventually all contact ceased. Having placed a call to where I'd worked in Ohio, they were told I'd quit. Now, seven months later, here we were, living in a barn in the dead of winter, not far from my own brother's farm. Hard questions were inevitable.

My parents came to see us several times while we were living in the barn. I'm sure it was peculiar to them on the first visit, as we had to ask Jeff for permission in order to leave the area just to get some ice cream. Such a treat was an unusual event, and the kids really enjoyed it. Naturally, we couldn't be gone long since a time limit had been imposed on our absence. They may not have noticed that these restrictions even existed, but Jeff was very firm about any outside influence. I recall Dennis and Tonya receiving a dinner invitation from their family. I don't remember whether or not they went, or the conditions, but the invitation was met with heavy resistance by Jeff; the occasion would require too much time away. And as a ploy to stimulate guilt, Jeff reminded them of how the rest of us would be back at the barn enduring our "wilderness" experience. My brother began visiting us at the barn fairly regularly. As he, too, was searching for theological answers to questions of his own, he was sincerely interested in what we had to say. This interest was a good thing, because it enabled him to learn things about us that would later serve to heighten his concern for us. In fact, his concern would be essential toward our eventual exit from the group. He had an appreciation for what we had been through and expressed this appreciation without the usual bias about our unorthodox methods of service toward God. The more he dropped by, the more well-acquainted he became with the others, quickly developing friendships.

Jeff was seldom around as he was constantly on the move from the barn to Mack's Creek. This was good, in that classes basically ceased. Jeff was spreading himself too thin. His presence was needed at both locations. Perhaps he'd hoped that I, or one of the others in the group, could fill the gap at times when he was away. But if he thought it, it never was conveyed to us. Anyway, his power in the group was so fabricated as to prevent any such a shared power base. Jeff's philosophy was much like that of the movie *Highlander*, which had so strongly inspired him. The essential theme entails the

principle that “there can be only one.” This was the essence, along with perhaps the most serious flaw, of Jeff’s autocracy: Living, intelligent humans become useless when robbed of their mind’s ability to think. Jeff’s misuse and misinterpretation of the scripture that we are to have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and therefore, to strive together in one mind (Philippians 1:27) did nothing but isolate its interpretive application and remold the thinking of all members into the likeness of the One, the leader, whose essence is an antichrist. The mind of Christ should stimulate freedom of thought and creativity through virtuous intentions. It should, therefore, bear fruit of life, with prosperity in peace and happiness. Hardships may occur and material prosperity may never be acquired, but the rejoicing of life and understanding of righteousness can be received in abundance. This happens by way of our individual relationship with the Father, through Jesus Christ. Therefore, as the Father works within us, through Jesus, we individually manifest his presence and kingdom on earth by way of his spiritual house and holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). By doing so, he fulfills in us the very thing we pray for, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). But in these controlled settings, all thought becomes molded into the One, rather than the Father. Freedom becomes unknown, creativity ceases to exist and in such captivity, there’s no flow, nor rejoicing of life.

I wrote no poetry during my association with Jeff, because that wasn’t a characteristic or gift that Jeff had. Danny’s creative gifts were not allowed if they did not benefit Jeff and his needs at the time. We became of one mind, but that mind was without life, without growth or expression. As the influence of Jeff began to weaken, the first to be freed from its hold were Greg and Richard. One night after doing some chores, I returned to the barn and noticed that something seemed wrong. Actually, it wasn’t wrong at all, but very right, because Greg and Richard were telling Jeff that they wanted to leave. Jeff was furious, yet after seeing how adamant they were, he told them to go. They had planned their departure ahead of time so with bags already packed, they left. Jeff called for an immediate session time. I could say “class,” but in essence it was really a session, the only oddity being that the main recipients weren’t present for his scathing wrath. He asked if anyone else wanted to leave, and of course we each said “no.” Then he went on to promise that they would be back, just as he did when Shar left, even though he’d already betrothed her to Danny. Jeff had already prophesied that none of us would be lost, so, barring any unforeseen change in this purportedly immutable god, it was impossible for them not to return.

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THE COLD WEATHER WAS AGAIN DEMANDING A CHANGE in our living conditions. The man who owned the barn became less interested in giving us work, and Jeff never seemed to want to meet with him. He invited us to his house one evening to discuss Jeff’s teachings. Jeff would not go, and made an ex-

cuse, sending instead, myself and others. Then, there were the local people who were threatening to contact social services if we didn't move the children into a warmer environment. It began to be troubling to me that Jeff's children were in Mack's Creek during the majority of this time in the warm home environment of Alice's parents. Yet despite the offers from my brother and other family members of those in the group, Jeff insisted that we stay where we were. Rick noticed more peculiarities, asking questions like, if Alice stayed with her parents, why we couldn't move in with family, and then, where did Greg and Richard go? Rick is very good at asking direct questions, so quite often it had become necessary to answer with a direct lie. At one point, he asked if Jeff and Kathy were having some kind of an affair, which was easy to respond to. Since they were "husband and wife" they could not be having an affair. But when he asked me if polygamy was being practiced within the group, there was no recourse but to respond as I had been instructed. I lied. Not long after Richard and Greg left, Debbie left. Her departure was quite secret as she left sometime in the night with a note in her tent.

Prior to Richard and Greg's departure, Alice became frighteningly unstable. There's no doubt in my mind that Alice was an abused woman. One night, Kathy and Damon came to the barn in the early hours of the morning. After waking everyone, they told us very hurriedly there was a problem with Alice. Kathy had moved to Mack's Creek to be with Jeff, but under the guise that she and Keith, having marital problems, were needing some time apart. Alice was to be counseling her. But the real point in Kathy's being there was for Jeff to have both of his "wives" under one roof. Somewhere in the venture, Alice exploded emotionally. She swallowed a large number of pain-killers with an equally large amount of alcohol. Some time after doing so, she attacked Jeff. Something terrible transpired within Alice that night, yet clearly it was a result of the pollution of abuses that had begun long before.

A few of us went to Mack's Creek with Damon. Alice was asleep, and Jeff met us at the door with instructions of what personal belongings we were to take back to the barn. Alice's parents were not aware of why Kathy was really there, nevertheless, Jeff felt it was necessary to leave. I never saw her parents, but apparently they were told that Alice had developed a drinking problem, for which they felt sorry that they had not known.

We headed back with the truck loaded, and later in the day Jeff arrived with Alice and the other Lundgren children. Alice was very nearly comatose. Damon and I helped her out of the car and up into the loft of the barn. We then took her to Jeff's tent where she remained for a day or two. We didn't know how she might respond to being there. Alice had been "mother," and she had been that vibrant character within the structure of Jeff's domain. Yet now she was a woman who had, by all appearances, lost her mind. Her arms were badly bruised, which Jeff said was from him having to hold her back to restrain her that night. I have no way of knowing whether she had injuries anywhere else on her body. Jeff's face was scratched, as well as the rest of his head, with patches of hair missing. "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth,

and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth” (Proverbs 24:17). Things were falling apart, and though I’m very thankful they did, I still find no pleasure in the destructive process that took place along the way. Unless there’s a notable contradiction within the scripture, God alone reserves the right to laugh at the destruction of fools. “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Proverbs 1: 26). Perhaps it’s not fools, but rather foolishness itself that is scoffed at here. It is not the Father speaking, but rather a feminine connotation called Wisdom (verse 20). Whatever the case, I’ve seen and experienced enough destruction to know that I can find no pleasure in it. But when fools become wise by humility and repentant change, it’s a joy to see the foolishness fall away. Alice was a prisoner in that tent, but after several days Jeff took her back to Mack’s Creek. Damon may have stayed with us in the barn, but the three younger Lundgren children returned with their mother.

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IT BEGAN TO GET DECISIVELY COLDER. There was no longer any choice about getting indoors for warm shelter. Therefore, Jeff finally allowed us to get out of the cold by going to my brother’s house. It’s said that some creatures are too stupid to get out of the rain, and in much the same way we needed permission to escape the cold. Jeff only agreed to Rick’s home as an area of refuge because he appeared sympathetic to Jeff’s teachings. Yet far more importantly, Rick was able to shelter all of us, thereby not forcing us to split up. As a hindsight observation of the decision, and definitely not one that was obvious at the time, Jeff was the one in need of a place that allowed the group to remain unified. Otherwise, the surroundings we might be exposed to would disarm his control over us. Actually, by this move, Jeff became almost completely cut off from the entire group.

My parents owned a fifth-wheel camping trailer at the time, which was equipped with a propane gas furnace. They offered to move it to Rick’s house in order to increase warm sleeping space. The offer was accepted. When moving day arrived, a major problem erupted. Instead of using the fifth-wheel in a way to best suite its sleeping capacity, Jeff decided that the seer needed the space and privacy for himself. Of course, this also included Kathy. Rick and his wife, also named Kathy, were in shock as they watched the belongings of Keith and his four boys being taken inside the house, while Kathy’s (Keith’s wife) belongings were placed in the trailer with Jeff’s things. Rick confronted Jeff with the issue and asked him if he and Kathy intended to stay in the trailer together. With this, Jeff told him yes, that they would sleep in the trailer, and asked if that was a problem. Rick was pretty upset and equally confused, yet responded that he would need a scriptural explanation. Jeff said that he would prepare a class on the topic—but he never did. However, this really didn’t matter because Rick was merely buying time. He stopped by our parent’s house on the way home from work the next day. He had a real problem on his

hands and also knew that our parents would want to know what was happening. They were heartbroken with disappointment. My dad, a licensed minister, had married Susie and I, yet our family now had become entangled in something quite contrary to their core beliefs. They'd all noticed changes in our behavior throughout the time we were living in the barn, but during times spent with them while we were living in the barn, they had come to care deeply for the group as a whole. My brother sat in on one of the few classes that Jeff taught and our parents had also attended one. I was told I could prepare a couple of divisions for them and they were quite impressed with the apparent chiasmic flow of the words. They loved us and wanted to understand the basis of our beliefs. Much of what we said seemed to make sense to them, but aside from any agreement or disagreement over various doctrinal issues, they came to appreciate the unity we had. The camaraderie and devotion we exhibited was refreshing and even stimulating to see.

As a result of how things worked out, the group stayed at Rick's for about a week. Except for Jeff, I think Rick and my sister-in-law Kathy, found the experience of having us all there a very pleasant one. Unfortunately, Jeff was power drunk, which resulted in his often-obnoxious behavior. How could Rick have known at the time he made the generous offer to us that it would create such a problem? Here was a man with a wife and two small boys who'd just opened his home to twenty people, and upon doing so, discovered that their lifestyle involved practices to which he could not consent. With Jeff's polygamous stance revealed, Rick surely felt cautious that other aspects of our beliefs might yet be unknown, and perhaps more threatening. He delayed making any open statement to us for a couple of days, until he could arrange to be away from work for a while. I noticed and was saddened by Rick's sudden and apparent lack of interest in attending a couple of classes. Then one night, while Jeff was holding class in the trailer, Rick came to the door and stated that he needed to speak to everyone. His ultimatum was that he wanted Jeff and Kathy off the property immediately. He went on to say that anyone who was willing to leave the group was welcome to stay at his place as long as they needed, until getting established again. But anyone who was not willing to leave the group would have to be off the property by the following Saturday, only a few days away.

At that point he asked to talk to me, and as I stepped out of the trailer I saw my dad standing outside. We walked over to the cars in the driveway and a very peculiar sensation came over me. As my dad and brother began firing questions at me, it was as though I was in a metal drum; I could hear their voices, but they sounded muffled. Rick became quite vocal, yet despite the fact that he was standing directly in front of me, I could barely hear him. All the time they were both speaking, my mind was ablaze with scriptures. I saw myself in the place of Amulek, as recorded in the book of Alma (*Book of Mormon*).

“And it came to pass that Alma and Amulek, Amulek having forsaken all his gold, and silver, and his precious things, which were in the land of Ammonihah, for the word of God, he being rejected by those who were once his friends, and also by his father and his kindred.” (Alma 10: 107)

As the story goes, God’s church was being restored in the region. Yet the price of this precious event was the forsaking of all material wealth and the rejection of those held most dear. I interpreted my own forsaken wealth, and now the rejection of my brother and dad, with that of Amulek’s.

Forsaking material things, along with the rejection of family and friends, is a common principle within Christianity.

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18–19)

“And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” (Matthew 19:29)

But these principles, full of spiritual meaning and application, had become quite legalistically mapped out within my mind. The words of Christ were to tell us all things what we should do. Therefore, this very literal manifestation was occurring within my life, as well. Perhaps my mind was simply overloaded with activity. Jeff, the mighty man of God, wasn’t responding like the prophetic image he’d portrayed himself to be. Surely there would be a warning to repent, a proclamation, a revelation, something. Yet all he did was pack his bags and load his pickup as quickly as possible. Even that didn’t trouble me. But when Rick brought up the issue, I had no response.

The image Jeff had drawn of the God of Israel had already become increasingly distasteful to me. I hated the things that this “god” had demanded of us. Yet this view of God that dictated to my mind and conscience, had completely eclipsed any I had previously known. The intensity that my brother and dad were expressing began to abate as they saw it was having little effect with me. We continued our conversation in the house where their tone became more tender, and continued late into the night. Since it was late and a long drive from home, my dad stayed there for the night. In the morning, his demeanor was more silent, yet still quite loving.

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THE WAY JEFF HAD OUTLINED THE SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS those few days prior to being run off Rick’s property was continued, as some were still sleeping outside in a tent. As the seer, his living conditions were crucial to our well being—he just couldn’t function as well without the appropriate atmosphere. It was therefore necessary for some of his people to sleep out in the cold

rather than allow them the warmth of the trailer. Sharon was one of those that slept outside, which was primarily due to her not having children to care for in the night, or so it was thought. She had been heavily chastised for a few months by this time, as she had been putting on weight. What the seer didn't know was that the weight she was putting on was due to a baby. Jeff had earlier prophesied Sharon would give birth to a son by her "husband" Richard. But apparently this foreknowledge slipped his mind when she actually began to show. Then again, perhaps Jeff's lack of divine insight was also due to this little baby not being a boy. In late December, Sharon gave birth to a precious little girl. The group would soon disband, but before it did, the news of Sharon's pregnancy became known.

The knowledge of her pregnancy came by way of a medical examination, not by way of the seer. When Jeff was told about it, Sharon asked if this would be the son that she had previously been told she would bear. Jeff said that he'd look in the word to find out, but that he would wager it was the son he had mentioned before. Once again, Jeff didn't give prophecies by traditional methods, but rather gave prophetic information through division of the word. I guess that in this case he figured he stood a good 50/50 chance of being right. But the real revelation in all of this was that the seer was being instructed by God, through the division of his word, to chastise Sharon for gaining weight, yet he failed to perceive that she was pregnant. Prior to Jeff's eviction from the farm he received a call from Debbie stating that she wanted to come back to the group. I don't remember the details of her return, but she was portrayed as one of God's "lost sheep" returning to the fold. It also seemed to add momentum to the promise that Greg and Richard would return too, but like the promise of Shar's return long before, it never happened.

Rick had no objection to our removal of property from the farm, as long as Jeff didn't enter the premises. Jeff told us to find a storage place for our things, which we did. Unknown to us at the time, all would be lost soon enough. Jeff told us what items he wanted to take with him and we brought them to the road each day where he waited in his truck then returned back to Mack's Creek where he was staying. Kathy moved in with family of her own. When we moved to Rick's the horses were put into his pasture, so now also had to be relocated. Rick had taken time off from work for this adjustment, so he was usually around to work on me. He was diligent in trying to break me free from the maze-like thinking that always led back to Jeff as the seer.

There were many indications that Jeff was a fraud, yet my mind seemed to be full of detours around such conclusions. Alice put it very clearly once, while we were still in West Virginia. It was at the time when Kathy was going to "intercede" for Dennis. Alice, highly upset, said "This is your god, people. Look at your god!" I had no idea what she meant, sadly, at the time, interpreting it to be only her rebellion. What she was actually saying was that Jeff, by way of his plotting imagination, thought he was our god—and we, in turn, had allowed him to become so. It was all just a game, and this was the result of what he had created. Yet even in that very decadent truth, what he claimed to

be all along—a seer fulfilling “every form of godliness”—he had become a creator.

At a much earlier time in West Virginia, we received an assignment from Jeff. The assignment was to memorize Isaiah 64:8. “But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.” Once the words were memorized, they were to be spoken back to Jeff. The highly unpleasant truth about it is that we were reflecting back to him what he had done to our minds. As with the Brother of Jared account, we were the vessels that would not be complete until it was determined that there was no light within us. Then he, as seer, would provide that light, through the pattern written by God’s own finger, just as Jesus was to have touched the stones in Jared’s day, giving them light for their vessels. Jeff had become our only source of light, in that he had become our only source of thought. So, in that sense, he had become the potter, and we had become the clay. Therefore, does the clay ask, “What makest thou?” (Isaiah 45:9)? Surely not. But, because Jeff was not God, nor any fulfillment of godliness, his creation was flawed and void of life-giving perseverance. The foundation of all that he had built within our thinking was the Pattern, the “language” from the finger of God. It was this foundation that finally cracked and provided the long needed view that Jeff was nothing but a liar.

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PRIOR TO LEAVING THE GROUP, I knew nothing of the poetic structure within the Bible. But back in Missouri again, I began to write poetry as an expression of my heart’s passion and thoughts. Referring to this in an earlier chapter, on the second trip to Kirtland, I gave a copy of one of my poems to Jeff and asked if the “pattern” resided within it, since I’d been told by people who appreciated them far more than Jeff, that the poems I’d written had to be inspired. Exactly what that means in relation to God’s direct intervention is different, perhaps, with each believer. But in this case a very legalistic belief was being imposed, and words written about God—yet not from God (by the pattern)—were determined to be blasphemy. I had eventually come to repent of this “sacrilege,” and never wrote another poem while in the group. Yet now, while living at Rick’s, my poems would serve as past testimony that would crack my convictions. My poetry had long been disposed of and forgotten by this time. Rick, however, kept the copies I’d given him. Visiting us in Ohio, and several times now in Missouri, he was gaining familiarity with the pattern himself.

One day, after many failed attempts to shake my established faith, I found him in his bedroom in a moment of frustrated laughter. When I asked him what he was reading, he shunned me off and said that it wouldn’t matter to me anyway. When it came to the poems I’d written, it really didn’t. In fact, he had asked me before if I had written any more while I was in the group and, of course, I explained to him how they had been sin and I had repented of them. I

didn't know what he was reading to provoke such a response, but I told him that we could still be friends despite the situation we were in, and he softened up. Rick was familiar only with the pattern, whereas for me, it was the language of godly thought. In matters of righteousness, there was no other way to read and I had become quite proficient at measuring the words in these parallel comparisons. He then went on to say that he wasn't all that good with the pattern, but that since it appeared very chiasmic to him, he couldn't find anything wrong in what he was reading.

In handing it to me, I saw then, that it was one of my poems. Whether coincidence or providence, our Savior only knows, it happened to be the last poem I had written, and the one which Jeff had rejected. As I read those words which had once flooded from my heart and out of my pen, something happened. Much like an old and forgotten friend, the words seemed to awaken old passions along with a memory of the view I once had of God, an image I had once loved. But these passions had lain dormant for a very long time, finding no place to reside in the structure which had been built within my mind. However, even with the scrutiny of chiasmus applied to measure the words, they flowed harmoniously together, division after division. I applied the first verse opposite the last verse and divided toward the middle. I randomly chose various center points and divided outwardly toward the ends of the poem, yet in each division, each statement melodiously blended into whatever was placed opposite.

I now hold a quite different appreciation for chiasmus as a structure of poetic writing. However, at the time, all this worked only to reveal that Jeff was out to do me harm. In fact, it almost immediately became personalized. Jeff surely knew that the structure of that poem was chiasmic; so why didn't he want me to know that? Why did he want me to throw away the poems which I did in accordance with his desires? Much like Rick at this point, I had no experience with this style of reading upon meeting Jeff. Therefore, when he had explained that they were actually not of God, I eventually came to accept that as the truth; not immediately, but I did become convinced of it within time. Rick went on to explain that Jeff had mentioned something to him about how the poems ought to be burned, and again, in my mind I asked, "Why?" None of this worked to convince me that Jeff was not who he claimed to be, yet in a very mild way, it did establish doubt. Perhaps the strongest reason I can give, was that of an increase of the already repugnant feelings I had toward this present view of God.

My decision to leave the group was a gradual one. When it was finally made, it was more with impending feelings of doom that I might be committing the unpardonable sin than having discovered that Jeff's god was not God. It finally came to the point, for me, where that god had become too ugly. I just couldn't go on any further. I cannot overemphasize that this was not a decision of Jeff's false teachings but rather a beginning of doubt, and the decision that I could simply no longer serve "Baal." Rick continued talking to me and eventually persuaded me to leave the group.

Up until that point the plan had been that, along with Jeff, we would eventually just disappear again. Rick said many times over that he wished we would decide not to leave again. It probably seemed a far simpler decision to him and the rest of our family than it was to me. The slightest hint of doubt was immediately met with conscience about the Averys, and that seemed to work as a door that slammed shut at any consideration to get out. We were almost home, in that we were back in our homeland of Missouri and among family. We were also nearer the passions and dreams and lives we had once known. Yet we were only *nearly* there. A tragic line had been crossed during the course of this journey that would block our ever returning. In sensitive ways, other lines were crossed as well.

The day finally came when I knew I could go no further. When I told Susie that I could not continue on whenever Jeff might leave again, she was initially shocked. Slowly, eventually, she formed the thought, and the words came out, "But what about the dance?" I didn't know how to respond. Fear and threats had been part of the process used by Jeff to guarantee her participation. But in a far deeper sense, she had become convinced that the dance was truly a sacred event. To leave the group would mean a denial of her participation in the "atonement" which had occurred that day; not necessarily a denial that an atonement had actually been secured, but the denial of the benefit of it, now that it was done. I can't say how long it took for Susie to completely discard the conviction she had of the dance being a truly sacred event, but much like my own re-familiarization with the conscience I had once known, I can only assume it was not done easily nor quickly.

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I HAD BEEN TO MY PARENTS HOUSE ONLY ONCE since they'd discovered we were back in the area, and that had been to borrow money. Even then, Jeff did not allow me to take Susie or the kids and I could be absent only briefly. Along with his limited number of choices, probably the main reason Jeff returned to Missouri was due to our families being there. Seeing only the potential for draining money from as many as he could, yet still cautious about such a move, he totally underestimated the influence a supportive family would have on us. With the decision to forsake the god we had come to serve, we decided to spend some time with my parents. Susie's parents lived about three hours drive from Rick, and we eventually visited them, too. But this night we left to be with my parents. The only members still staying at Rick's were Keith and his boys.

Since the ultimatum Rick had given was that members were to either leave the group or leave the farm, everyone found places to move. By the time I decided to leave, all of the others except Keith and his boys were living with family or friends in separate homes. As we left to visit my parents, Rick asked if I wanted him to tell Keith I was leaving the group, to which I responded "No." I couldn't trust anyone in the group with information like that, and

when I left I wanted to tell Jeff myself. Yet, I felt equally certain I never wanted to see him again.

As it worked out, Rick called in a few days at our parent's house to tell me that Keith wanted out too. I didn't know it, but Rick had been working on Keith. Upon hearing this, I agreed to let Keith know what I'd decided. Returning to Rick's, we settled on the timing to tell Jeff of our decision. There remained a few items at Rick's farm that were being moved either to Mack's Creek or into storage. Jeff had been making trips back and forth from Mack's Creek in order to move items that he wanted, while Keith and I had been putting other things into storage.

Rick was there the day that Jeff would make his final pickup. I didn't understand what had happened to us, and I was still far from convinced that Jeff was not who he claimed to be. Yet I had come to see that Jeff had power over me, so I asked Rick to come to the road with me, which he did. Keith was there too, but somewhat believing the lies only on a different level, neither of us could rely on the other for support. It turned out to be a very simple event—aside from the issue that I was committing the “unpardonable sin.” I told Jeff that I couldn't go any further and he responded by asking me if I was out. To this I said, “Yes, I am out.” He then asked Keith if he was out, too, at which time Keith also said yes. Jeff didn't act altogether surprised, or even angry. That said, he left.

A day or so later I received a phone call from Jeff who was still trying to sell the horses and wanted to know if someone would be allowed to come and get them. It amazes me now, how this man basically stole, or otherwise emptied us of everything. However, I wanted nothing associated with the group. It all still seemed to belong to him. Before ending the conversation, he apologized for having failed me. Even this brief interaction I feel was used as a ploy to stimulate pity for him, while yet maintaining the assurance that he was who he claimed to be. This began to change after a couple of weeks, along with changes of many types that were inevitable.

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NOT LONG AFTER GETTING OUT OF THE GROUP, I received a call from Dennis Patrick. When he asked if it was true that I had left the group, I immediately felt anxious. I wasn't at all sure as to my decision to get out of the group, and I didn't want to be subjected to any conversation with Dennis in which he might try to persuade me to come back. Yet I also did not want to be in a position to influence him to leave. Again, I left because I simply could go no further and in no way wanted to influence others to do likewise. But Dennis explained that he had just gotten out, too. He said that there were a number of things that just didn't make sense and that Tonya had been told things that created a lot of questions. He went on to say that Debbie had decided to leave (again) and that it looked like Sharon was also planning to leave. I still felt a little anxious in that I didn't want to be instrumental in pulling people away

from “God’s work.” However, just hearing the frustrations and questions that others had, mixed with our own, seemed to offer a sense of comfort.

Susie and I made plans to meet with Dennis and Tonya in order to talk. We’d spent many hours together over the past few years and, in fact, all our time over the past nine months. So, our getting together was perhaps as much of a social event as it was an opportunity for pooling our common frustrations. Yet, as we did so, a number of things began to surface that we had suppressed. They weren’t necessarily common things, in that they varied between us. Yet, like separate letters within a single word, they seemed to come together in the spelling of a unified message, and that message spelled DECEPTION. Amazingly, we were still not truly convinced. Understanding how these circumstances establish control, and then maintain it, is what best aids in a more complete escape of the mental entanglement. That sort of understanding was yet far beyond our grasp.

I began to express denials of Jeff, but from time to time things happened which would reveal the hold that was still there. Six months after my arrest, when I was incarcerated in the Lake County Jail, I received a letter from Jeff. It was a letter of warning to repent which included an “Everlasting Farewell” in the event I did not. I was sobered that the letter actually had an effect on me. Several days passed before I shook the feeling it revealed, yet in the exposure of the hold that was still resident within me, I found growth through the opportunity to deal with it.

We next made contact with Greg and Richard, and arranged to meet with them. They had left the group about a month prior to our own departure and did so in such a way as to avoid any contact. When they heard that we, too, had left they were happy to meet with us. As they had already been out of the group for several weeks, they had encountered their own difficulties in interaction with “outsiders.” Greg stated that we would notice difficulties in normal communication with others. This was quite true. We began to see that something had happened, but Susie and I had no real comprehension of what it was.

A man by the name of Ted Patrick (no relation to Dennis Patrick) came to see me while I was in jail after my arrest. (We got out of the group on December 4, 1989 and were arrested one month later on January 4, 1990.) We had been in jail about three or four weeks when my attorney brought Ted in to see me. The things he told me that day, having never met me and knowing nothing about what had transpired over the two years prior, opened my mind for the first time to the fact that this was not an isolated incident. The sad reality is that there are people who have a very good understanding of how these controlling settings work, along with the effectiveness of the processes used. A few weeks after speaking with Ted Patrick, I was visited by Margaret Singer and Richard Ofshe. Their experience and research in cults was a tremendous help toward a more comprehensive recovery from the deeply rooted effects of the abuses.

As I occasionally jump forward to things that occurred after our arrest, I hope to convey that this was in no way a simple departure. In our efforts to regain our footing, we were constantly faced with the abstract ideologies that had dominated our thinking. It's a very well known fact that no one ever seeks to "join" a cult. I hope to convey here that in somewhat the same manner, neither does one simply "leave" a cult. Therefore, during this period between leaving the group and being arrested, we were venturing away from the setting that had come to so rigidly dictate every facet of our lives. In fact, we had very little idea of exactly what it was that we left.

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KATHY WANTED TO SEE HER FOUR SONS while Keith was still living at Rick's. Rick allowed her to come on the property, as long as she came alone. He was again working daily, and Keith had a job, too. Since I was still unemployed, I agreed with both Rick and Keith to observe her visit. She dug the toe of her shoe in the gravel driveway as I mentioned things that Jeff had lied to her about. But unfortunately, I wasn't able to offer any understanding as to what we had been through. I could expose a few lies, but I couldn't really affirm any sure convictions. Therefore, the conversation was a failure in terms of helping her get away from Jeff's entrapment. By this time she had an "entrapment" of another sort—she was pregnant with Jeff's baby. I feel that if the day finally comes where she realizes what Jeff is, or more importantly, what he is not, the awakening of her involvement will be quite a heavy burden to bear.

Dennis and I had a meeting scheduled with Danny at one point, in order to tell him ourselves that we had left the group. But he cancelled at the last minute and by the time I attempted to contact him again, Jeff and he had left Missouri.

This was, in some ways, an even more confusing time period than when we were still in the group. Making decisions was very difficult, yet comments from friends and professionals bore heavily on what we did. Those of us who left the group met together a few times as sort of an ex-member support group. Greg got some legal advice, since we were not only fugitives from God in some lingering ways, but we were fugitives from the Ohio justice system, as well. Any view of the future, for us, had been completely dissolved. Even now, the memories of feeling like a rudderless ship are oppressive. Everything we knew and believed in had become unstable. I searched the scriptures to see what answers could be found, but this only led to more confusion. Since Jeff had redefined everything to us, everything I read only seemed to lead me in different directions, none of which seemed possible of fulfillment. I had relied on the seer for so much for so long that when I realized the extent of his control I found my relinquishment of it unimaginable.

My biggest problem came from my view of words. As if trying to read through mud-covered glasses, at first all I could see was the mud. At times

some things seemed to show that Jeff and his doctrines had been wrong. Yet I also continued to see things that seemed to prove him right. Eventually I had to start completely over. I had to erase all my memories in order to re-enter new information. Even though I had forsaken God, I didn't seem to feel forsaken by Him. I did not, however, have either the tools or background to comprehend any basis for such a belief. Every facet of my life before meeting Jeff had been intertwined with my relationship with God. Now that relationship was without texture, and every facet of my life was unstable. I had a family to care and provide for, so I began looking for employment. At this time, having a stable home environment seemed unattainable, yet the effort to provide one seemed like the natural thing to do. Eventually, I found employment. But none of this could last. Something terrible had happened in Kirtland, Ohio, and even if it was never discovered or made known, my heart would forever cry out for the need for its disclosure.

Susie and I had once shared a beautiful home life. With the sheer enjoyment we found in just being together, even a trip to the market was an exciting family affair. Every moment together was precious and this carried over to our brief lives together outside the Navy, too. It's clear to me that I've failed my children as a parent. To watch them grow and to nurture their footsteps in life was a passion within me long before they were ever born. The absence of this cherished responsibility and privilege is one of the greatest sources of motivation I have for placing these words on paper. Yet, another precious family was also destroyed—in a far more tragic kind of destruction. The first time I met the Chief of Police in Kirtland was in the Lake County courtroom after my arrest. A brief conversation ensued at which time I asked him the question, "How can we keep this from ever happening again?" I feel that this is still an appropriate question today.

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EVENTUALLY, KEITH WENT TO THE AUTHORITIES in Kansas City and made a statement about his knowledge of a family who had been killed in Kirtland. Whether stimulated by conscience, fear for his life, or merely spite for losing Kathy to Jeff, only he can say. Perhaps it was a combination of the three, combined with his access to a friend who works in law enforcement. Whatever his reason, the matter was now out in the open.

Being acquainted from earlier church associations, the Patricks just happened to be in the Kirtland Police Chief's office to retrieve property still in the barn when the call arrived from the ATF office in Kansas City. Debbie was with them. Since the farm was vacant, they requested permission from the Chief to enter the property. He was delighted to hear that they had left the group and that the group had eventually disbanded. With the allegations about Jeff that came from members who had earlier left the group, the call from Kansas City appeared to be just one more rumor, yet one which still needed to be checked out. Nevertheless, because Debbie and the Patricks heard the call

come through, they may have panicked as they scrapped any plans to search the barn for their property, returning immediately to Missouri. Upon arriving, they called Greg, who in turn contacted the rest of us. The news only seemed to state the inevitable. In some ways it was a relief. I didn't know when or how the police would arrest me, but I kissed Matthew and Amy goodbye as they lay asleep that night. Susie was terrified and unable to accept that life as we knew it would soon end. However, that night was uneventful.

The following day, Susie and I took the children with us into Kansas City. We rode with Rick on his way to work, but at this point he was suspecting that something was wrong. Greg had been advised to speak with legal counsel and he urged us to do the same as soon as possible. I spoke with an attorney that night who advised me to do nothing until I was arrested. He also suggested making a trip to Ohio in the event I wished to turn myself in and seek a plea agreement, which I did not do. That night was spent at my parent's house. The next morning I had an errand to run and upon returning to the house, Susie appeared at the door saying that we needed to hurry. I was gone when the call came through from Keith who'd left Susie the number of the ATF office in Kansas City. He said that the ATF told him to call each of us; that they'd begun searching the barn and once they found the bodies of the Avery family it would be too late. Apparently really interested in only Jeff, they nonetheless needed us to come in and make statements. I called the attorney I had spoken with the night before in order to see if he could go with us, but he was unable to leave on such short notice and advised me not to go—but I went anyway. Keith had asked me a couple of weeks earlier if I thought we should go to the police. At that time I answered that I really didn't know because the decision to do so involved so many other people.

Naïvely, I still wasn't convinced all we had been through had been wrong. It seemed as if we had gone wrong somewhere, but I really couldn't put my finger on just where. Yet now the matter seemed as if predestined. Susie and I, with our children, went to the ATF office. Still not certain even that was the right thing to do, once in their office, I stated that I didn't care what they did to me, I just didn't want anything to happen to Susie and the kids. I'm hesitant to write anything more concerning the specific events of their questioning, other than to say that both Susie and I gave statements that day. Certainly, I'm in no position to point out the wrongdoing of government authorities, but we were taken advantage of and lied to that day in ways not that different from the ways we'd been subjected to in our exposure to Jeff and the group. Not being one to hold grudges, I have to admit that it's all in the past now. Five people had been murdered—as the judge in my trial said, two generations of a family were killed. Some believe that punishment is the end-all answer to justice. But I feel in my heart that the question remains to be asked, "How can we keep this from ever happening again?"