
Chapter Six
THE ENTIRE PLANET WAS SHAKING ITSELF

Innocence, once lost, may never be had again. It's like time in that regard. All codes of conduct by which men live attempt to prevent further erosion of innocence via more noble choices and behaviors but the original is gone, forever. America's lost innocence was exposed and hastened in the last half of the 1960's. Our national sorrows aside, the world was in political, economic and spiritual turmoil. From the Middle East to America's Midwest, from North Vietnam to southern racist America, from the farmer in the field to the freak in the street, every life was being impacted by a distinct, evolutionary shudder. The entire planet was shaking itself.

The institutions of Christendom felt America stood on the brink of becoming a culture of corruption. With precious few restraints the counter-culture, activist youth of our nation caused middle-of-the-road patriots to ponder the possibility of anarchy. Colleges burned. Students died. National icons were assassinated. Universities were overrun. America's political conventions were hijacked as Church services were interrupted by radicals insisting on the right to read the Manifesto de jour. Between 1965 and 1968 the cities of America experienced more than 100 riots in which more than 8,000 people were either killed or

injured. It was the first time in the history of the planet in which any society had more college students than farmers.ⁱ And that fact did nothing to better us. Dylan was right. "The times, they [were] a changin'."

In Chicago, the Youth International Party (YIP!) met in a basement apartment one block off Lake Michigan in the trendy Old Town section of Chicago. Jim Lato, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and others met to plan the Revolution of the Age starting with the Democratic Convention of 1968. My sister, Laura, was one of the "others."

All any of us wanted to do was make a difference. You know, change the world? But, unlike my sister's friends, I didn't feel the need to do it *today*, necessarily. Mostly, I just wanted to get high and watch George of the Jungle on Saturday morning. I deemed such activity every bit as challenging, edifying and world changing as the agenda of the "Yippies." How could anyone take seriously an agenda that included seducing the wives of politicians, slipping LSD into the city's water supply and taking over the Nabisco headquarters for the sole purpose of distributing free cookies? The problem with the political revolutionists of the late 60's was too profoundly simple for me. First, they were nothing more than a traveling Circus of Pseudo-intellectuals who simply shouted down everyone who disagreed with them. "We are the delicate spoors of the new fierceness that will change America,"ⁱⁱ read the published declaration of demonstrators in Chicago. Spoors? Get serious. They couldn't change themselves and finally proved better fugitives than revolutionaries.

Second, they had no plan for *building* anything after the proposed, violent overthrow of our nation. Tearing things down without a single Jefferson, Washington or Adams among them pointed to a clear distaste for trivialities such as foundations or a vision that sees beyond itself. It occurs to me that one of the redeeming features of institutional Christianity is its preoccupation with building. Christians believe the tearing down essential to constructing something new actually took place on Calvary. Of the two ideologies, Christianity is certainly the superior. That still doesn't reveal my feelings about Institutional Christianity. I sometimes wonder if the only difference between the various flavors of Christians is the degree of our stuck-in-the-mudness.

"How many Christians does it take to change a lightbulb?" Five: one to do the actual work and four to stand around and talk about how much better the old light was. But I digress. It's my book; I get to.

The Church did not escape impact in the passing of an era. Like all people of conscience wherever they were found, She struggled with herself during those years. Of the many issues confronting the American Church in the waning of the 60's, one of the most far reaching was what might've been identified as the Second Jerusalem Council. All over again. "What specific, lifestyle evidence is necessary to validate the genuineness of 'hippie' conversions? And, just how far does this brotherly love thing have to go, anyhow? While we're at it, what constitutes a Church and who's in charge here?" Values were being reexamined as legalism, institutionalized in the 40's and polished to perfection in the 50's, reared its nasty Hydra-head. Something was trying to be born and birth is always painful to the body being torn. From this collision of conscience and convictions the Charismatic/Jesus Movement was born.

Contemporary Church historians Ivan Lewis and David Di Sabatino chronicled events of that movement in independent and unrelated works. Doing slight violence to their published texts for the purpose of continuity, I believe they captured a moment in time.

"At a time when the world experienced advances in medicine and technology.... rock festivals, drug overdoses, race riots and men walking on the moon became simultaneous headlines. And, while the secular world was reeling, so did the Church. The Charismatic Movement spread throughout the country and the world." [I. Lewis] ⁱⁱⁱ

"Another development was Jesus Music, the controversial combination of rock music and the gospel as one of the most efficient [and subsequently lasting] institutions of the revival. Artists and groups such as Ron Moore, Love Song, John Fischer, Larry Norman, Randy Matthews, Agape and The All Saved Freak Band are just a few of the performers who felt the need to communicate spiritual truth through a popular medium. While many conservative churchgoers lamented that Jesus

Music was a spiritual compromise, these pioneers maintained they were combating the negative influence of “mainstream “rock music. Adding to the excitement of the era was the sense that the revival was a foreshadowing of the impending apocalypse.”

[David DiSabatino]

“A renewed emphasis surfaced concerning the Second Coming of Christ. Caution became warning which became imminent predictions resulting in doomsday prophecies and panic. Hoarding of food and weapons was found among extremists and those who just wanted to play it safe. It was from these times that a group called The All Saved Freak Band came on the scene.” [Ivan Lewis]

That's me: one of the two founders of the All Saved Freak Band®, one of the very first Christian, "Jesus-rock" groups in America. Across the nation the "new music" birthed a multi-layered sub-category of Rock 'n Roll and launched an entire industry. The Contemporary Christian Music category at the Grammys, the Dove Awards and hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenue streams serve as evidence. Thirty-five years after we first produced the music it's being remembered and reproduced by others who continue to find some measure of blessing. That is profoundly humbling. Had it been only about the music, this chapter of my life might've ended less sorrowfully and more nobly. Time reveals the music as the only meaningful thing to survive the madness. I say “madness” for one cannot separate the historicity of the music from the engine that drove it, the Church of the Risen Christ.

While the term “extremist group” begins to describe conclusions it does not describe beginnings. How do reasonably intelligent human beings, indeed entire communities of reasonably intelligent human beings, remain so deceived for so long? It becomes doubly confusing as we consider the fact that stupidity is not biblically sound. And that's the lesser reason people remain silent about the details of such experiences, it makes them feel stupid: “I did *what?*” Yet, their silence is not fundamentally the silence of the ignorant or gullible. It's the silence of the violated. It's incredibly painful to realize we gave everything for what undisciplined memory can see only as delusion. We exposed our naïve and innocent spirits and were deceived, spiritually raped by one

we trusted. It cost three of our number “the last, full measure of devotion,” as Lincoln referred to it. No one reads the fine print in a dream.

I cannot speak for others, but after decades of reflection, I must acknowledge I did gain something wonderful, something of lasting value from those years. In spite of it all, those incredible days of innocence plundered mapped a road through my soul I’ve been unable to abandon. Whether such a prize is worth such a price continues debate in the minds of fellow pilgrims who made that strange journey with me. This much is certain: such highways are neither cheaply built nor easily come by.

If the life of the biblical character Abraham teaches me anything it’s this: not knowing where you’re going is the only way to get to where you’ve never been. Or, as T.S. Eliot put it, “Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.” Like Abraham, the first step may be clear and the goal may be clear but precisely how the first step relates to the goal is where the path of mystery lies. For me, the first step was music. The goal was the pleasure of God and The All Saved Freak Band was part of my mystery. They say true art makes you think. If that’s so, then the All Saved Freak Band was a masterpiece.

It was Good Friday, 1968. An eclipse of the moon was anticipated for that night. In Chicago we’d been to Buckingham Fountain just to watch the colors change. Street people find their entertainment in such unlikely places, particularly if they’ve been hittin’ on the “doobie” all night. We wrapped the evening up early as I wanted to see the eclipse from my back porch. Sandy and I found a new apartment on Burton Avenue on Chicago’s north side, not too far from the old neighborhood. It was a pretty small world in those days. Life was good. At least I thought so. Married to my childhood sweetheart with a wonderful child, enough money and plenty of good yet cheap drugs, what more could a city boy need?

Four hundred miles to the east, under the same, Good Friday moon, a small group of people were dedicating five acres of land to the Glory of God. They purchased a prime piece of property at the intersection of Routes 534 and 307, about one-eighth mile east of Harpersfield, Ohio.

Situated on a hill along the Grand River, looking north toward Geneva, it provided an unlikely spot from which to launch a spiritual invasion of nearby Cleveland. It was genuine, small-town America. Other than Cecil's General Store the only other businesses in town were the John Deere dealership and a single-chair barbershop on the third corner. The old, redbrick schoolhouse sat abandoned beneath overgrown trees since the late 50's. This town made Fairbury look like a metropolis. Harpersfield had one claim to fame: the historic covered bridge crossing the Grand River. On a small island created when the Army Corp of Engineers dammed the river, a huge, old tree provided the branches from which local folks hung ropes and a trapeze for launching into the slow moving water on hot, summer days.

The Harpersfield Community Bible Church met in the Harpersfield Town Hall Sunday morning and evening, conducting mid-week Bible studies in member homes. Borrowing heavily from the Assemblies of God in doctrine and Church structure, they were made up of families from Michigan, Illinois and Ohio. With leadership reared on Oral Roberts from the days of his early tent revivals as well as T.L. Osborn and Katherine Kuhlmann, the focus for this small group of willing hearts was to guarantee every person they met would hear the gospel. They came together for one common purpose: to impact their community and their entire generation for Christ. For that purpose they were willing to make whatever sacrifices necessary. Win big or lose big but don't be mediocre, not where the Kingdom was concerned. And the Kingdom was all that mattered to them. Their Pastor was my former mentor, Larry.

Remember the context of the era. Every person of passion and vision, whether political revolutionary or religious zealot, was focused on making a difference. That was the spirit igniting what was later identified as the Jesus Movement. The Harpersfield Community Bible Church thoroughly believed themselves obligated to a Great Commission, the faithful performance of which they would someday be called upon to give account. You know, fundamental/Pentecostal/evangelical folk? They never did grasp the fine distinctions in those titles. They saw themselves as "unprofitable servants" believing the God who held them accountable would also enable, embolden and empower them and they behaved themselves accordingly. The power of it all was that God was

stirring this same level of passionate commitment in small pockets all over America. His opportunities come equally to the strangest of creatures.

Spring blossomed into the summer of 1968. For us, it was “The Summer of Love” part 2. Looking forward, the year was billed as “the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.” Looking back, it was labeled “the decade’s proud and pagan closing parade.”^{iv} In Chicago we perfectly understood what Robin Williams meant when he said, “If you can remember the sixties, you weren’t there.”

Ingesting an inordinate amount of marijuana, LSD and amphetamines, I’m not certain my feet touched the ground that entire summer. Sometime around the end of July, Gilbert contacted Larry and spent a week working with his church group in Ohio. He came home all fired up about relocating to become a permanent part of their work. He had a vision, he said, of “five beautiful flowers melting down into five pools of blood.” The five flowers were his five children and if we didn’t leave Chicago we would all die. Gilbert was always an extremist when it came to the mystical aspects of religion. It was easier than thinking. I told him I had no intention of moving to Ohio and that he should probably give the credit for his vision to some, unpleasant organism in his stomach. He wasn’t amused and I didn’t care. I’d had all the religious world a normal body could tolerate and, as far as I could see, it hadn’t done me enough good to warrant the inconvenience. But another card was about to be played, one that wouldn’t laugh off quite so easily.

ⁱ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*

ⁱⁱ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*

ⁱⁱⁱ www.ivanlewis.com

^{iv} Peter Jennings, *The Century*, Doubleday Publishing