
Chapter Eleven
LISTENING FOR THE MYSTICAL VOICE OF GOD

Arriving at the farm next day, Dianne and Cookie approached me from the house. They clearly positioned themselves between the door and me. Whatever this was, it wasn't good. I knew she was talking because I could see her lips moving but, "What?" The news was soul deadening. Shortly after crossing into Kentucky everyone in the vehicle, including the driver, fell asleep on the interstate. The car left the highway like a torpedo packed with people, exploding into a concrete abutment. The impact slammed the engine through the firewall and into my brother's chest, killing him instantly. The force was so great it snapped the bolts holding my brother's seat, driving him back into Tom Miller, pinning Tom in the back. The driver, his back broken, pulled himself through the shattered window and agonized as he tried to help free the others before the vehicle burst into flames. With the remainder of the details providing the stuff of nightmares I only remember falling back, the house itself catching me, providing the plane on which I might more easily wither to the ground.

It has since occurred to me that Larry never, really did any of the dirty work. He always sent someone else. As my pastor and life-model he should've been the one presenting the awful news while carrying healing in his arms. The Good Samaritan, though a stranger, sought to exert

healing influence by pouring oil and wine into a wound. I was no stranger and my pastor was no Good Samaritan. He sent the heart-broken wife and Dianne the "enforcer." I think he was uncertain of my response and felt it more prudent to have someone, other than the potential "blamee," break the bad news. Absolute confidence in directions from the prophet took their lives. Funny the prophet didn't foresee that. Stevie Wonder could see that sending habitually, sleep-deprived people on a trans-state "mission from God" in the middle of the night was stupid. Larry and I were in process of dissolution.

With an age difference of 18 months Randy and I were never separated that long our entire lives. We were "best men" at one another's weddings. No one else ever thought I qualified. Gilbert and my mom were married when Randy was born so he never carried the "I wouldn't know my Dad if I saw him in a police lineup" baggage. But he had problems just the same. He grew up angry at the world. As a 5 foot something adult, he told me he felt cheated in physical stature: he felt small. In a 1950's, concrete jungle the pecking order for the entire neighborhood is brutally established by age five. In that arena, size matters. I'm confident there was much more to it than that but Randy was receiving ongoing therapy for a violent temper when he was eight. I don't think they helped him. Born with a capacity for fury, he learned to compensate for what he felt was diminutive stature by throwing the first punch, wielding the first knife or pulling the first gun. That's neither hyperbole nor poetic license.

When "Unca Ree," as Shannon called him, first met Cookie I asked him what he liked about her. Among other things he confided, "She's tiny. I like the way she feels in my arms." Gently touching his broken places she began to soften him even as he, repeating the cycle, began to abuse her. My brother knew he was damaged and in need of some serious fixing. Of his own life he wrote,

"I was there in Sodom, down at the bottom,
That's where He took me from."

Cookie couldn't fix him but she did begin to teach him something wonderful about women. It's a lesson most men don't learn until they've made some colossally, bad choices. Simply stated, the wrong woman

will emasculate us: cause us to lose our identity but the right woman will civilize us: bring us home from the hunt. Of his civilizer, Randy wrote,

"Going around in circles, didn't know what to do
Going around in circles then I saw you circling too."

The darker the night the brighter the light. If my brother's testimony lay only in the sparse verbiage of the previous paragraphs it would serve only evil. But understanding what he *might have* become only makes what *he did* become that much more praiseworthy. He came from emotionally crippled parents incapable of commitment whether to marriage, children or anything resembling a conscience. He came from indifference, squalor and violence. He wasn't a pretend, "wannabe" tough guy. By the time he was 17 he'd already become the proverbial nail by which all other hardness is measured. From that genesis he became a man so resolutely purposed for good it killed him. He died doing something he believed in. They make movies about guys like that.

Do you suppose there are many like Randy? People who claw their way out of unbelievable circumstances only to go supernova: a wonderful flash of brilliance just before the end? James Dean lives. Do I compare my kid brother with James Dean? Of course not. James Dean couldn't handle the pressure. Especially now. He's famous for being famous, a thoroughly American lunacy. He didn't die attempting the rescue of people who were unaware they were drowning. All we get from Jimmy D. is, "live fast, die young and leave a good lookin corpse." That's a pretty easy goal to hit. Randy, on the other hand, became consumed by the notion he owed something to his entire generation: that souls hung in the balance. He exhausted his money, time, youth and life for what he believed was unchallengeable guidance from God. It sounds like Gandhi but I believe the world filled with such people: people who quietly sacrifice everything though none notice or even care. They are men and women who, with sometimes-malevolent examples themselves, clarify the distinction between respect and admiration.

We want to *do like* those we respect. They inspire us *to do*: to clean our desk, order our day or live within our means. We want to *be like* those we admire. They inspire us *to be*: more kind, loving, humble or a

genuinely better human being. That's my brother's legacy with those privileged to know him. His life challenged others *to be* something more. While his anger was never completely healed it became wonderfully diluted in the larger pool of his entire character. When we consider the sacrifices made for what he believed was the good of others, all of his critics combined cannot point to one such courageous heart among them. Well meaning relatives, raising his children, never had the opportunity to know the change in his character and Randy's children never heard much good about their dad. From a long line of "better world," builders he lived his last years loving his children and listening for the mystical voice of God.

Left with little but a brass buckle from the melted, nylon belt he wore, Randy's funeral, like that of Tom Miller was closed casket. Chariots of fire have taken too many Elijahs. We buried him next to Brett in the Mennonite cemetery behind their church house. Larry performed the ceremony using my brother's casket as the altar for an altar call. You know the old, "With every head bowed and every eye closed" routine? It was, in some ways, fitting to the death of an evangelist but it didn't do much for grieving families. As in Eleanor Rigby, "No one was saved." Cookie was now left with three children in a battle for which she had no heart. Raising these babies with any hope of normalcy under conditions as oppressively abnormal as these was fantasy.

Most of the next six months are a blur but I clearly remember my brother's lionization. He and Tom were lauded as classic examples of Christian commitment worthy of our delusion. Any sacrifice short of theirs shouldn't complain about anything. "Dig in. Try harder." They didn't know Randy. He contemplated leaving and wasn't thrilled with everything Larry was doing. Neither did "the old man," as scripture calls it, the man he was before, completely die. Beneath the stoic visage of Prophet in Waiting he struggled like all people of faith. We were sitting on the front steps of the CRC farmhouse. Too hot inside for a haircut, I had a towel round his shoulders and invoked the powers of my St. Charles education. I don't remember how we got on the subject but, with face pointed downward as I trimmed his neckline he said very softly, "I know acid (LSD) is wrong but I hope there's something like it in heaven." *That* was my brother. I doubt he shared his revelation with many. At the CRC Farm harmless confessions were not.

Time blurs pain and we who deemed ourselves the living continued down our own Trail of Tears. We started a Christian School getting assistance in structure, organization and curriculum from the greathearted people at Zion Pilgrim Mennonite Church. Our kids didn't belong in public schools since witches and warlocks were becoming educators. We were taught that a national, educational conspiracy existed to kill faith in children and undermine parental authority. New laws, holding parents criminal for disciplining their children, were read to us in church services. Interpretations, of course, saw such items as evidence supporting a conspiracy theory. The history of the Illuminati was linked to America's Counsel on Foreign Relations. Weaving conspiracy threads into a web, it was all part of Satan's eternal war with God and His people. We couldn't understand why the rest of the Christian world didn't see it.

A 23-page "white paper," written by Pam Massmann and published by the Church, was entitled, "Behind the Blackboard: A plot against America's youth." The largest heading on the front page yelled, via upper case letters, "A SIX POINT PLAN FOR THE DESTRUCTION and CONQUEST OF THE UNITED STATES." A brief quote from Stalin finished off the cover. "When a country is selected for attack we must first set up before the youth of that land a mental barrage which will forever prohibit the possibility of that youth being molded into an armed force to resist our armies." God was moving the nations of the world toward Armageddon and Larry believed himself in possession of the train schedule.

In his introduction, forward and "about the author" sections, Larry laid down the *indisputable* foundation for veracity. "This is but a kernel of what is to be the final paper. Documentation in the finished work will be indisputable, as much of the data will be taken from reports of agents of the best informed intelligence agencies of the Western World as well as information gathered from the better research papers." And you thought I used long sentences. I'm glad it included "information gathered from the better research papers." I'm not sure I trust the "best informed intelligence agencies of the Western World" to possess that additional knowledge. These booklets were mailed to select individuals around the country. In the forward, Larry wrote, "Also, we are open to favorable responses to this effort that could be published in the finished work."

You've got to give him credit for having "big, steely ones." Nothing like soliciting your own propaganda.

He said, "The Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations supplied large amounts of money to propagate the philosophy of Marxist educationalists. This is the reason the Rockefellers and friends spent billions of dollars to influence the American educational system from the professors and teachers to the textbooks." The ultimate goal of all this was another quote from Stalin. "The use of philosophy, mysticism, the development of the liberal cult; the furtherance of atheism and agnosticism" were all designed to "nullify, to neutralize, to discredit the teaching of the word of God." The final paragraph of the booklet wrapped it all up. In telling something "about the author," Larry wrote, "She found out the sponsors and mechanics of this century's American education and how it is being used to brainwash America's youth into the same unconscious hatred of Christ, the Bible and America that Nazi Germany had for the Jews." They have a name for that now: rant. This from the same, comic genius who gave us, "The sins of America against the black man must come into judgment for she has not properly repented. The Communists will use the blacks for violence in the street then kill them by the truck loads and they'll know it was just another white man's trick."

Other believers viewed us as peculiar without knowing how peculiar we really were. Not quite "weird" perhaps, but certainly different. They also saw us as inspirational. It was, in fact, the indefinable difference that attracted many. Amish-Mennonite in our appearance, mystic-poet in our vision, urban-gangster in our approach to everything that mattered, we became a complex soup stirred by the hand of one we thoroughly believed a prophet of God. Not figuratively or metaphorically, but actually a prophet of the Living God: one of the *last* Elijahs, providing rare opportunity to see into the very mind of Deity.