

David Knapp: Past History, Present Activities and Future Goals

I was born in Chicago, Illinois on December 19, 1948. Having been raised in the Jewish faith, I was Bar Mitzvah'ed and confirmed. High school athletics was very important to me and I earned letters in football, swimming and track. I also held several high school offices. Graduation from high school marked the end of my life in the Chicago area. I moved to Los Angeles to attend the University of Southern California.

Moving from home for the first time, as it is for everyone, was a major transition. The separation was somewhat lessened by the fact that my grandparents lived in Palm Springs, 100 miles away. Our family was very close and visited California each Christmas. I excelled in the school of business, graduating with honors and a grade point average of better than 3.5. After my freshman year, my family was unable to financially support me due to treatment of my brother's learning handicap. Therefore, I applied for and received a California State Scholarship while working part time as a bookkeeper and a furniture mover to meet expenses. During my last two years at USC I opened a record store with a friend. We didn't make much money but we learned a lot.

With law school as my next clear step, I took a psychology class as an elective and the direction of my life sharply changed. Instead of law school I chose to begin graduate school in counselor education, again at USC. While school was stimulating, I found that I yearned for more direct field experience. While at graduate school I began working part-time at Beverlywood, a half way house for 120 emotionally disturbed young adults. I received room and board and \$70/month. After six months I was the director of the therapy program, administering and supervising some 50 part-time counselors. This required a full-time commitment and for the time being I discontinued graduate school.

One year later I left to start a boys home for 15 teenagers. This task included everything from counselling to shopping for groceries to being a big brother. For three years The Family Home was filled to its capacity. During this same period of time I completed my masters degree in psychology and became a licensed marriage, family and child counselor. The experience at the boys home was enriching and stretched my abilities. Finally, the long hours took their toll and we sold the home to another child care center.

During the next few years I began a small private counselling practice while at the same time holding part-time jobs as a drug/alcohol abuse counsellor, a city college counsellor for the physically handicapped and a volunteer in a hospital program that provided counselling for cancer patients and their families.

These were also the first years of the humanistic psychology movement in California - with its encounter groups, "up-front" attitude and eastern philosophy. This movement became a boom and affected almost everyone who was in the field of psychology. These ideas interested me both professionally and personally. With another friend, I made plans to open a hospice,

a facility to care for those who are dying. Intent on doing this right, I set off for Europe and England to visit the Hospices there - among the oldest in the world. At the same time, I had heard of a therapy/growth center that was combining humanistic psychology and eastern philosophy in a way that was not even available in California. I decided to visit. This place was the Rajneesh Ashram in Pooana, India.

Being in India was in itself a disorienting experience - the poverty, dissentary, disease and the feeling of going back in time several thousand years. In the midst of this was a growth center that had all of the newest western group and individual therapies. The therapist in me marvelled. Rajneesh followers looked a bit ridiculous to me with their clothes and necklace. Yet I found myself intrigued by the thousands of well-educated and apparently successful people from the world-over who were there. Most seemed intent on learning about themselves psychologically. In the middle of all of this was Rajneesh - inaccessible and looking ever-so-wise from his lecture podium. Many of his words rang true, especially after one is elated from the personal growth one thought one experienced in the therapy groups. In retrospect I can see how the western therapies were used to "open" people and how we all attributed this new openness to Rajneesh. Sadly, it worked. I became a follower. I went back to America, never having visited any hospice, to dispose of my affairs. My parents were, needless to say, angry. Friends and clients were shocked. The school where I had begun a Ph.D in psychology the year before, sanctioned by request to continue graduate work in India.

I returned to India and I became a therapist at the growth center. I worked long hours and learned new skills from therapists from around the world. I was also able to complete my Ph.D. dissertation study. In a professional sense I could justify my experience, people seemed to be helped by the therapy. What I could not see was the exploitation of the vulnerable state of mind that people were in after they were in therapy. It was in that state that many became followers. On the contrary, I was proud to be at the forefront of what I thought was a tremendous experiment in human growth. This pride and feeling of specialness permeated the Rajneesh Ashram. It became the foundation for what would become arrogance and aggression when the group moved to Oregon.

I returned to America with the intention of continuing as a therapist for the center in southern California. However, because of my background in land-use and zoning (fighting for the boys home) I received a special invitation from Sheela to come to Oregon. Sheela's position and her personal invitation contributed to my enthusiasm. There were about 25 people on the ranch when I arrived. How the ranch grew is well documented. My role at first was to help develop the ranch by using the legal system efficiently. My work was rewarded by my becoming mayor of the city when it was created. As before in India, we were led to believe and chose to believe in our specialness. However, the atmosphere soon changed to defensiveness and a psychology of us and them.

My first significant dissent to this was in October of 1981. I had told Sheela that it was possible to amicably work things out with the people in Antelope. I also criticized her inflammatory statements to the press in a letter to Rajneesh. The "message" from Rajneesh that I got back through Sheela was that I was a coward, that as a minority we needed to assert ourselves in order to survive and that I should learn from Sheela. I was demoted in my

work department and for a brief time thought about leaving.

The message above turned into a theme. We asserted to the point of aggression and eventually alienated even our friends. This siege mentality became a self-fulfilling prophecy which we as a community created ourselves. Survival was a paramount priority - survival of the community and survival of Rajneesh's vision. Gradually the means were more and more justified by the ends. Defensiveness became paranoia and the feeling of being attacked. Finally, as a result of an internal power struggle, Sheela left. I felt relieved and had decided to go to California with a woman who is presently my fiance'. This relief was very short lived as Rajneesh exposed the paranoia and its rotten underside. However, in his effort to purge Sheela he ultimately exposed himself.

Even as I write, I am still amazed at how Rajneesh has maintained his following of well-educated and well-meaning people. His ability to manipulate through giving his flock a feeling of specialness is certainly part of it. It is also true that what he shows to the rank and file bears little resemblance to the reality he is. It is only those even more "special" few who actually see him that know more of the reality. In any case, I am grateful to be finished with that episode in my life.

I have been fortunate since leaving the ranch. I found that I still had a family and friends who supported me even after I had virtually abandoned them for seven years. It was ironic to become friends with persons from the very government that had been the "enemy." No, the U.S. Attorney, the A.G., the INS, and FBI were not monsters bent on stamping out the freedom of a minority religion. In working with these agencies, I was glad to play whatever role I could in exposing the truth.

Unfortunately, a great deal of danger existed because of my co-operation. Both Rajneesh and Sheela had an investment in my continued silence. I am grateful for the support and protection which the government has afforded me and my fiance'. We have been in the Federal Witness Security Program for almost a year. This has not been an easy time. We left a seven year nightmare hoping to reunite with our families and have found ourselves instead to be completely isolated from everyone we know. It is lonely at times - but it is safe. We miss relating to people who really know us. The first months, during which we had to testify, were the most difficult. We were asked not to work in the location of our new identity so that we would be available to travel and testify.

In the past four months I have been working and feeling productive again. While I am not allowed to give a lot of detail because it may reveal my whereabouts, I can say a few things about what I have been doing. For a while I had been supervising sales personal in a nutrition company. But mainly, I have been working in the field of psychology. I have associated with a psychiatrist and have been seeing about 15 clients each week in my office or the hospital. I have also set up an innovative program to provide psychotherapy to the elderly in nursing homes. This program is the first of its kind in my area. I have been giving stress management seminars to businesses, as its a subject that I have a bit of experience in!, teaching classes on parenting at a YMCA, learning about technical evaluation of sex offenders, and organizing

a group of professionals to provide continuing education for mental health professionals. This week I start working part-time as an adolescent and family therapist at a local hospital. I have been very busy and it feels very good.

I hope the future will bring me back into contact with my family and friends. This can happen when the danger level lowers. Diane and I intend to marry next year. My career choices may be limited depending on the outcome of my plea-bargaining and sentencing. Psychology and real estate are among my main interests. I am currently licensed in both of these fields but the disposition of these licenses depends on legal issues that need resolution. I would like to finish my Ph.D in psychology if it is legally feasible.

Notwithstanding a mountain of legal debts, the isolation of being a protected witness and the uncertainty of my professional future because of legal clouds, I feel optimistic and hopeful. I feel I have learned a lot, albeit much of it through mistakes. Thankfully, I am confident that these are mistakes I will never make twice.