

# SOUL ADVENTURES

Lighthearted Experiences of a Soul Found

*To believe that you are only the body, is like being lost in a foreign land. Our true homeland is Infinity, Omnipresence. Here on Planet Earth we are only visitors—Soul Adventurers on a brief excursion blended within a physical body-suite vehicle.*

LuxmiH Eve-Lyn Forbes



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One ship drives east, and another drives west,  
With the self-same winds that blow.  
'Tis the set of the sails, and not the gales  
Which tells us the way to go.  
Like the waves of the sea are the waves of fate  
As we voyage along through life.  
'Tis the set of the soul which decides its goal  
And not the calm or the strife.

—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "The Winds of Fate"*



God Bless this book  
And all who had any part  
In bringing it from Source  
To your reading pleasure,  
With deep gratitude to . . .

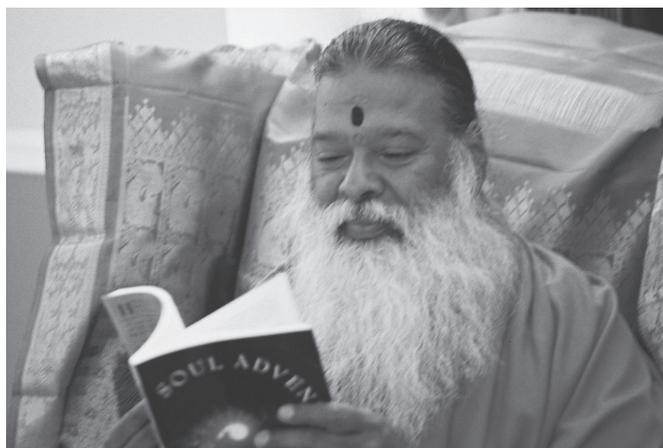
*Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji*



# Dedication

In Recognition Of God In All, Everywhere Present, Brilliantly Evident In:

*Puja Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji*



Sri Swamiji Reading First Edition of Soul Adventures (Photo by LuxmiH)

The greatest thing that we can do is to see the divinity in every face, in every form.

*—Baird T. Spalding, Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East (5:35)*



I am ever present to those who have realized Me in every creature. Seeing all life as My manifestation, they are never separated from Me. They worship Me in the hearts of all, and all their actions proceed from Me.

*—Bhagavad Gita 6:30–31*



# Appreciation

*The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.*

—Helen Keller

*To Sri Swamiji, a living embodiment of Spiritual Truth, God in human form:* Thank You for Your Presence, Love, and Masterful Guidance. Sri Swamiji's Presence was felt throughout the book-writing process.

*To Prasad, who brilliantly reflects Sri Swamiji's Light; a tireless miracle worker; kind, generous, with a phenomenal disposition; such a perfect model of purity and selflessness:* Thank you for your huge heart and your help over the years. You are very much loved and appreciated.

*To Radha Krishna, now Sri Manasa Datta:* You are joy and enthusiasm personified. I love your wonderful distribution of play and piousness. You are bighearted, funny, a dazzling light that shines and shines and shines.

*To KC, Sudha, Gautham, and Aparna:* You opened the way to Sri Swamiji. I remain in awe of your sincere devotion, integrity, and vast generosity. You are my inspiration. Thank you.

*To Datta Devotees worldwide:* It was your clarity and humble example that helped me overcome ugly skepticism. Especially devotees from India, who demonstrate pure love, are warm and welcoming, and for accepting me when I could barely accept myself. It was your integrity and devotion that so clearly revealed the fruit of Swamiji's blessings. During my dark-

est hours, I remember thinking, “If Sri Swamiji can help me become just half as amazing as these devotees are, then I want to be a Datta Devotee.”

*To Doctor S, a gentle, caring, marvelous physician, especially for the confused Soul:* Thank you for helping me bridge the spiritual and cultural divide. I was a sick puppy, and you were kindness and patience personified. Your help during my confusion, resistance, and ignorance will be forever appreciated.

*To Padma, Ishwari, Sahana, Barbara, Jaya, Bilva, Vikram and especially Caron, who stepped up to the plate to masterfully help with the technical aspects of getting the second version of the book ready for printing:* Thank you all for your help and encouragement. I deeply appreciate every one of you. I know that I have behaved like a brat at times. (Not me!)

*To my three sons, Steve, AJ, and Ren, who have come to accept that their mother is . . . different:* Thank you for choosing to be born through me anyway.

*To my birth family, especially my mother, father, sisters, and brothers:* Thank you for accepting me, even though it must at times feel as if I am a foreigner in your midst.

*And last, but by no means least, to Paul, my wonderful husband, life partner, my honey, and the only person who has been able to live with me for any length of time:* Thank you for who you are and for seeing the best in me. You are the kindest, most gentle being on this planet. You’ve been my safe harbor to come home to. Bless you for never criticizing or attacking me, though God knows that I gave you plenty of reason to do so. It is true that my explorations have led you down “interesting” highways and byways; yet somehow you’ve managed to take everything in stride. What a guy! Without your love and nurturing acceptance, my life would have taken a whole different trajectory.



*Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.*

—Marcel Proust

*He who created this world, and us and is sustaining it, is a Master Musician. He is ever playing soulful and enchanting music. We have to train ourselves to listen to that delightful music, and to render ourselves instruments for the expression of that Divine Music.*

—Teachings of Sri Swamiji, from *Follow the Master*



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# INTRODUCTION

*When a devotee is ready to know God, the Lord sends him a guru. Through the wisdom, intelligence, Self-realization, and teachings of such a master, God guides the disciple. By following the master's teachings and discipline, the disciple is able to fulfill his soul's desire for the manna of God-perception. A true guru, ordained by God to help sincere seekers in response to their deep soul craving, is not an ordinary teacher: he is a human vehicle whose body, speech, mind, and spirituality God uses as a channel to attract and guide lost souls back to their home of immortality. A guru is a living embodiment of spiritual truth. He is an agent of salvation appointed by God in response to a devotee's demand for release from the bondage of matter.*

—Paramhansa Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest*



*I am waiting for your book . . . the book of your experiences.*

—Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swamiji

**W**ell, beloved Swamiji, wait no more, because here it is: a rollercoaster ride of ups, downs, flubs, foibles, enchantment, and devotion.

For many years Sri Swamiji suggested that I share my experiences in a book, but I delayed because I did not feel qualified. So what changed my mind? Desire! Desire to share my life lessons and growth experiences. Desire to help others with the process of giving up appearances and letting go of attachment

to material form. Desire to build bridges between cultures and beliefs, especially for people like me who may be clueless about the role and significance of a Guru. Finally, desire to reveal through my adventures the reality that we live in a Design-A-Universe, where Universal Cosmic Energy, God within all, *translates and projects thought and emotion* into physical actuality. Deep within everyone and everything exists a wondrous Spiritual Power, clothing Itself in matter and physical form. This awareness along with glimpses of Unity Consciousness are but a few of the awakenings I've had during my Soul Adventure romp around the world with Swamiji.

Personal experience gathers knowledge that leads to wisdom. It enhances growth, unfolds the Soul and Spiritual Knowledge already latent within. I am hoping that you can relate to some of my life lessons, though my story will be no substitute for your own precious experience. For instance, I can give a detailed description of a *rambutan*, describing the rough texture, reddish appearance, delicious flavor, and sweet aroma; but until you actually have the sensory-rich experience with this delicious Indonesian fruit (which is similar to a lychee) for yourself, you'll only have a vague idea, a partial understanding.

Likewise, I am sharing Soul Adventures with you, and where you've had similar experiences, you might enjoy and possibly relate on some level. However, in areas out of your realm of familiarity, you may discover that the discriminating human mind (ego) will judge, categorize, and perhaps dismiss the events by placing them in little mental boxes labeled "good, acceptable, believable" or "bad, unacceptable, unbelievable." It is often human nature for us to build walls of separation based on perceived differences. This was certainly true for me because I had a heck of a time understanding what a godsend and a privilege it is to have the Spiritual Guidance of a Guru. I was too busy resisting and believing in alienation and separation.

Yes, having a Guru was way out of my cultural and spiritual understanding, and in the beginning it certainly ruffled my rebellious feathers. In fact, I was so far off course that I confess to being indignant at the very idea that *any* man had the competence

or ability to guide me. I was the expert on how to live my life. I simply did not trust anyone else when it came to life direction.

Speaking of culture and religion, it is important to know that there's no conflict of interest between religion or spiritual practice and having a Hindu Guru. In fact, many devotees become more involved in their chosen form of worship or particular spiritual path as a result of having a Spiritual Guide such as Sri Swamiji. Swamiji says that if you are a Catholic, be a good Catholic; if you are a Muslim, be a good Muslim. Swamiji has many followers who are very active in their various religious denominations. Swamiji's mission is not about religion. It is about helping you achieve Spiritual freedom, or *Moksha*.

Although I may appear to be sacrilegious at times, I believe that my experiences show that God's Love knows no bounds. I have firsthand proof that God loves a rascal just as much as He loves a *rishi* (Hindu Sage), *because God is in All*. I think you'll find that we each have both rascal and *rishi* inside of us, for it is contrast that promotes growth and expansion within the Spiritual Domain that is everywhere, all at once.

My goal and intention for this book, other than not wanting to keep Swamiji waiting any longer, is to show the unfolding and evolution of life through my experiences. As I give an honest account of my inner and outer adventures, sharing in raw detail my ignorance and my gathering of knowledge with Swamiji at the helm, perhaps my story will in some way enhance your knowing. As you will see, it hasn't been smooth sailing for me. Mine was a rather turbulent passage of East meeting West along a bumpy path toward enlightenment.

I admit to having a warped sense of humor, which shows up as I consciously expose the obnoxious inner workings of my human mind. Please do not for one moment mistake this as disrespect aimed at my precious Spiritual Master. To give you an idea of how far I have come and what influence Swamiji has had on my life, I chose to be brutally honest about my perspective, my internal dialogue, and my external activities.

If you are of the opinion that Spiritual growth is serious business, then consider the following: Over the years I have

seen people rolling in the aisles with laughter during some of Swamiji's discourses. His Holiness has an absolutely brilliant sense of humor. Heaven is indeed mirth. I have noticed too that each person who closely serves Swamiji has a remarkable, delightful sense of the funny side, especially Prasad, Sri Manasa Datta, and Krishnapa at the Mysore Ashram.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "If I didn't have a sense of humor, I would have committed suicide long ago." I can relate to that only too well. We must have mirth, or we will have madness.

I recently read Deepak Chopra's bestselling book, *Why Is God Laughing?: The Path to Joy and Spiritual Optimism* (Harmony Books, 2008). Dr. Chopra writes in his dedication: "To Mike Myers, who showed me that true spirituality means not taking ourselves too seriously, and to lovers of laughter and wisdom everywhere."

Similarly, you will find in the Bible: "A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Proverbs 17:22).

I also like what Ramtha says in *The Secret* DVD (2006) and companion book by Rhonda Byrne (Simon & Schuster, 2006): "Engage in life lightheartedly. Approach everything with lightness and laughter." This rich philosophy is one that I have forgotten to embrace all too often.

As a young child, early life experience, I became rather serious. In fact, I forgot how to laugh. Laughter did not come naturally to me; it was something I had to learn or perhaps relearn. Luckily, I grew up in a culture where laughter is a vital coping skill, a delicious tonic that repairs broken hearts, bones, and tortured feelings. Time and time again I've seen humor heal, not only by uplifting the spirits but by actually creating conditions that chemically inject the immune system with strengthening agents, as witnessed in Norman Cousins's terrific book, *Anatomy of an Illness* (Bantam, 1991), an account of how laughter healed him.

Below is part of an e-mail from Prasad to me. It came in May 2008, after I'd written to Swamiji relaying the story and my appreciation for my mother's swift recovery. In Zimbabwe, a few days after her eightieth birthday, my mother was mistaken for a meal by three (supposedly tame) lions. I include Prasad's quote because

his e-mail was the catalyst for my willingness to be myself and dare to share experiences in my idiosyncratic style.

*“Sri Swamiji was overjoyed to see the photo of your mother and the hilarious narration of your story,” Prasad wrote. “Sri Swamiji heard it three times and laughed out loud all three times. He said that He is amazed that you keep your sense of humor which is a good quality missing in many people these days.”*

Finally, if you don’t laugh, you die; and if you do laugh, you die anyway . . . so you might just as well go ahead and laugh. Enjoy the ride.

*Forgetting for the moment all anxieties, and to laugh hilariously is conducive to good health. Laughing and making others also laugh, generates a unique energy which enlightens and enlivens life.*

—Sri Swamiji, from *Follow the Master*

With my mother, an indomitable spirit, courageous and full of good humor



# ONE

## EARLY BEGINNINGS

*First, with all your being, know one thing: that your own thought when you stand, is one with that thought which brought forth the worlds.*

—Baird T. Spalding, *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East*

I was born in a brier patch. Actually, it wasn't quite a brier patch, but the situation was just as prickly. To my mind I should have been born to comfort, luxury, and style in America. Someone, I'm not sure who, either misread the delivery note or did not have a GPS, because I ended up on a totally different continent. The only similarity is that both continents begin and end with the letter *a*.

My first glimpse of planet Earth came from inside a suitcase room, next to the delivery room of the maternity ward, at the Lady Chancellor Hospital in Salisbury, Rhodesia. (That's a city in South Central Africa, now known as Harare, Zimbabwe.) Talk about imprinting! One look at my life clearly shows that I've been trying to live out of a suitcase ever since.

In addition to not being born a Rockefeller in the USA, I evidently chose to come through an audacious mother and a rowdy family who, for some unfathomable reason, regularly abandoned the comfort and safety of our well-constructed home to risk life and limb in flimsy tents . . . camping! In the bestial African bush! Thick with fierce animals: cantankerous

elephants that barreled down on us at terrifying speed, snakes that spat a blinding venom, hairy spiders as big as the palm of a man's hand hiding in our beds, and crocodiles disguised as floating logs in the river, silently willing us juicy morsels to the water's edge. Then there were lions, they would certainly eat us (if there was absolutely nothing better available, that is). Actually, three lions did have a bit of a go at my mother when she was eighty. But thanks to her guardian angels (one of whom I am certain is an Avatar with the initials SGS), she recovered in record time—probably even before the lions fully digested parts of her body. (Old meat can be tough, you know.)

Another clue indicating that I was meant to be a Rockefeller was that whenever I asked my dad for anything, his standard response was, "Who do you think I am? Rockefeller? Well, I'm not! I'm the *other* fella." Strangely enough, that logic always seemed to explain away our financial limitations.

Cosmic emphasis that America was my intended destination came at age eight with my first glimpse of a program on our brand-new TV. The reception was practically nonexistent. A static noise almost drowned out the voices while the snowy, ghostlike black-and-white pictures faded in and out. Nevertheless, *Leave It to Beaver* opened my eyes to another world with freedom of expression. When I heard Beaver talk at the table or win a debate with his parents, I just knew that America was the place I was supposed to be. I was *never* allowed to talk at the table, and debating with adults was definitely out of the question. Perhaps that explains why I am so vocal now, and oh, how I do love to debate and challenge the status quo.

Even though I am third-generation African, growing up in Africa was no joyride for me. I did not want to be there and, for the most part, I felt like an alien in a family who loved me but surely wondered what planet I was from. There were events in my childhood that hurt me deeply. In order to survive, I became an angry, rebellious, tigress-teenager tumbling down the road to hell.



## CONVENT LIFE

*There is no need to search for Truth. Truth is already there, in each one of you but it must be revealed.*

—Sri Swamiji, from *Silent Teacher*

As a young child my mother exposed me to a variety of beliefs. Although she was not religious she taught me to pray before going to sleep at night. I attended Salvation Army Sunday School for a while. I learned about African Witch Doctors and Medicine Men, and I embraced my grandmother's belief in reincarnation. My family did not go to church but I sometimes went with friends who were devout Catholics. Consequently, attending church was limited to weddings and funerals, pretty much a hit-or-miss event—mostly missed. Therefore, it came as quite a shock to me when, in my early teens, my mother packed me off to a Catholic convent. Not just down the road nor in the next town, but in another country altogether!

I cannot imagine what my mother was thinking. Most likely it was an act of sheer desperation. Perhaps she figured that only God was equipped to deal with whatever it was that ailed me. According to all, I'd become an unholy terror.

At around age thirteen I traveled four days on a soot-spewing steam train to an austere convent boarding school in the heart of the Orange Free State, in South Africa. From my point of view this convent was not a loving, nurturing environment as portrayed in *The Sound of Music*. In my opinion, it was overly strict and had no saving graces whatsoever, probably because my energy was like sandpaper to their silk.

I only went home once a year, so I learned a lot at that school. For instance, do you know that if you are made to kneel as a form of punishment for what seems like hours, your lower back aches and you end up with transformed knees? By kneeling on a cold, highly polished floor, the body forms perfectly round dents where knobby knees once used to be. Yep, that's

what I learned at school. Instead of becoming more angelic, which is what the nuns intended, the fires of my rebelliousness burned with a steady glow.

While at the convent, I became aware that there was no unity under the Christian umbrella. The different religious streams—such as Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Dutch Reform—did not celebrate their similarities and appreciate their distinctiveness. Each form of worship believed that the only true path belonged to their particular organization. Other forms of worship were discounted as being hell-bound, that's for sure. This disturbed me and I couldn't help but feel it to be hypocritical.

For example, at school we all wore the same school uniform, said the same prayers, and I am sure we prayed to the same God, yet the Catholics treated us Anglicans like second-class citizens. Since we were in a Catholic convent, in their eyes I am sure they were correct.

Sometimes on Sundays we would be permitted leave the high walled convent to go for a walk in small groups. After attending their church (*kerk*), the Dutch Reform children would acknowledge those of us in Catholic convent uniforms by pelting us with stones and yelling in Afrikaans (a South African Dutch derivative language), "Hell's Angels." Actually, some of them may have been continuing the fight which escalated in the Boer versus English war. Or perhaps it had more to do with being bratty kids than anything to do with religion at all—the point being senseless animosity between different ideologies.

Instead of seeing God in all forms, everywhere present (Unity Consciousness), ignorant human egos wield the sword of religion, skin color, or culture to attack one another. Evidently, we do not understand that we are in fact attacking aspects of ourselves. As long as we believe in divisions, how will we come to know that we are all part of the flow, the One Ocean of Loving Infinite Intelligence?

Living in a convent, we prayed a lot. The bell for Angelus would ring three times a day beginning at six in the morning. Actually, I liked the prayer breaks. Taking time out to pray was

a reminder of God being more important than whatever else was going on. At the sound of the bells, we all stopped what we were doing to become centered in prayer.

Later while living in Indonesia, I heard the Muslim “call to prayer” five times a day, setting a peaceful cadence and rhythm to daily life. Speaking of which, did you know that *Allah* is the Arabic word for God, just as *Dios* is the Spanish word for God? I read this in *My Journey* (HarperOne, 2002), a book by Dr. Robert H. Schuller, of Crystal Cathedral fame. In his autobiography Dr. Schuller tells of a visit to the Grand Mufti of Syria, who explained, “Muhammad brought the story of Jesus Christ and the Ten Commandments and beliefs in one God to the Arabs. Before, they had all been infidels—worshipping many, many pagan gods” (497). The Grand Mufti Kataro later tells Dr. Schuller, “Extremism discolors the beautiful face of Islam, which is peace. Any Muslim who participates in violence is not a true Muslim and is not promoting Islam” (501).

I mention this because Muslim extremists have done much to damage how many in the world perceive the Muslim faith. Consequently, countless holy and deeply spiritual Muslims have unfortunately been tarred with the same disingenuous brush.

Something else I learned at the convent was that they could lock up my body but I still had dominion over my unfettered spirit. Needless to say, I was seldom cooperative. My guess is that the nuns broke out the altar wine to celebrate when I finally left the convent for good. For everyone’s good.

The best thing about being locked up in the convent was that I disliked my environment so much that I escaped by losing myself in prayer and schoolwork. It was the first time in my life that I did well in school, although I never gave up tormenting teachers and testing them on their career choice.

Sister Saint Aiden was my all-time favorite target because I felt that she took life way too seriously. (Notice how I project my own “stuff” onto others?) To my mind she went overboard by being excessively dramatic. Using her long skirts for effect, she swished and minced around the room, reminding me of a large female version of Mr. Humphries in the British sitcom *Are You*

*Being Served?*, except “The Saint” as we called her, minced and swished with more dramatic flare.

The Saint was both my dormitory mistress and my English teacher. No matter how hard I worked on the essays I wrote, her remarks in red ink were consistent. With devilish delight, she’d scrawl across my paper in thespian style, “You can do much better than this!”

Grrr, she drove me crazy! There was just no pleasing her. By the time the third essay came back with this huge red declaration across my work, a plan for exposing her unfairness began to form.

We were reading *Ring of Bright Water*, and our homework assignment was to choose a descriptive scene from the book and rewrite it in our own words. My scheme was to plagiarize the book, and when The Saint wrote her usual comment across my paper, I’d have her. I gleefully shared my plan with my classmates. We waited in mischievous anticipation while The Saint gradually handed back our papers, one by one. I could barely contain myself, except . . . she didn’t hand me my essay. Had she discovered my plot?

Returning to her desk, Sister Saint Aiden read my homework assignment to the class. When it was over she said, “Now, that’s more like it. I knew you could do better than the drivel you’ve been handing me before.”

Everyone snickered, and instead of being elated, I felt robbed. My plan to expose The Saint had backfired, making me the one with the red face.

Wouldn’t The Saint be surprised today to find out that I am a published author and have written for magazines internationally? Or maybe she really did believe in me. Either way, I’m grateful that she evidently saw more in me than I saw in myself.

Yes, I learned many valuable lessons at Greenhill Convent, so far, far away. One of the most important was an introduction to the power of the mind. It occurred not in the classroom but early one morning while standing outside in freezing weather waiting to go in for breakfast. I only had a thin jersey because that was all we ever needed back home in our mild Rhodesian

climate. As I stood shivering, my body aching from the cold and my hands swollen with chilblains, an inner voice gently asked me, “Do you remember how hot it was in summer?” I did! In fact, I could remember standing in that exact spot absolutely wilting from the intense heat.

To give you some idea, the weather at the convent in the Orange Free State, South Africa, is similar in extremes to that of the American Midwest. The Rhodesia-Zimbabwe climate, on the other hand, is more like that of Southern California. Imagine having only California clothing to wear in the middle of a snowy winter and you’ll have some idea of what I was experiencing.

Anyway, back to the mind–power lesson: As I stood there vividly recalling the heat of the summer, I noticed that I had stopped shivering and was feeling warmer. The voice suggested that I live in the warmth of summer every time I felt cold. That’s how I survived that brutally cold winter. Thank You, God! This was my first taste of living in a Design-A-Universe where thought and emotion created my experience. I was able to focus on being warm within and gave no mind to the snow and ice all around me.

I also learned that no matter how strict or structured the rules were, as far as I was concerned, rules were made to be broken. And they often were. The rebel in me became an expert at testing brittle limits.

To gain extra freedom, I attended confirmation classes on Wednesday afternoons at the Anglican Cathedral down the road. Supposedly, I had been christened in the Church of England. I have my doubts about this, though. Nevertheless, Dean Cross gave a lively, entertaining, almost irreverent spiritual education. I really loved his take on things and looked forward to his weekly classes.

Freedom from the convent walls also came on Sunday when I was permitted to attend church service at the Anglican Cathedral with my friend Lesley and a few other boarding school Anglicans.

Being teenage girls, we secretly scrutinized the young men at church. We were generally disappointed by the wimpy, pious

lads. That was, until the day we spotted an absolutely heaven-sent, gorgeous, blond-haired, blue-eyed guy. Unlike the customary nerdy attire, this one sported tight bellbottom pants and a modern Beatles-style haircut. We were kneeling as if in prayer during communion when Lesley nudged me with her elbow. Our eyes discreetly followed him as he came bopping down the aisle after receiving communion. We turned, mesmerized by the guy with a self-confident bounce. He made his way to the back, hopped up on the pew, and imitated Charlie Chaplin on a tightrope, wobbling playfully behind kneeling nuns. Suddenly, he dropped down onto his knees right between two of them and closed his eyes in prayer. The nuns' stark black habits made the blond youth seem cherubic. Wow!

"What's a fabulous guy like that doing here?" Lesley whispered.

"Yeah, and look how unafraid he is of the nuns!" I shot back a glance in his direction.

After the service our charming chap was standing confidently right next to Dean Cross.

"This is my son, John," Dean Cross announced with pride. No wonder he was so comfortable with the nuns! John was a bit of a wild child and not anything like his virtuous, dutiful brothers. Did I detect a note of interest from him?

"Mother Superior wants to see you in her office, right away!" one of the prefects informed me later that Sunday afternoon.

"Oh, Lord, what have I done now?" I was no stranger to Sister Marguerite's office.

"I have a note here from Dean Cross," Sister Marguerite said, looking down at me as if I were a bad smell under her nose. "It seems that you have been spiritually deprived over the years and require extra confirmation classes. He wants you to go over to the rectory on Sunday afternoons from three to five, starting today. He also asks if you can go in street clothes rather than your uniform. That's rather unusual, but I can go along with that, I suppose."

Relieved that I was not in trouble, however I felt hurt and indignant because I thought that, under the circumstances, I had

been a pretty good confirmation student. Also, it wasn't fair that I had to give up what precious little free time I had. But at least I would get a break and I could wear street clothes. That in itself was a rare treat.

I nervously walked up the path to the rectory. I'd never been there before. Our classes were usually held in the last couple of pews at the back of the Anglican Cathedral. No sooner had I rung the bell than the door swung open. My heart skipped when I saw John standing there beaming at me.

"Hi! Come on in!" He seemed to be expecting me.

"I'm here for extra confirmation classes," I stammered.

"Oh yes, that! Would you like something to drink? What kind of music do you like?" he asked as he led the way into the parlor.

"I don't think I'll have time for socializing," I answered, expecting Dean Cross to come rushing in at any moment.

"Yes, you do. Dad and Mom are out and won't be back till after six. So we have a couple of hours, at least." He had a most disarming smile.

"But the note said—"

"I know what it said. I wrote it. Rather good, don't you think?"

His devilish act paralyzed me with fear. If the convent discovered that I was listening to The Beatles while alone with a young man, rather than learning about the Divine Order of things, I would definitely be expelled.

John, on the other hand, was confident that there was nothing for me to fear. So I spent several pleasurable Sunday afternoons listening to the latest music with John while his folks were out. I suspected that Dean Cross was in on this, though I never found out for sure.

John had more disrespect for rules than I did. He blatantly broke many regulations that the Catholic nuns at the convent tried to strictly enforce. Since he was the dean's son, albeit from another religion, there was reluctance to say or do anything about it, for fear of straining relations between the two churches. This did not stop them from getting on *my* case, however.

The final straw for me was when John rode his noisy moped right onto the convent grounds in the middle of the week to bring me some comics. This was a triple Bozo no-no. Boys, midweek visits, and comics were all strictly forbidden. I decided that no matter how wonderful he was, John was going to get me into more trouble than our friendship was worth. So I bade him a sad farewell. It was exhilarating while it lasted, though.

Not too many years later, I was sad to find out that John, while on mandatory military duty, was killed in action on the South Africa-Mozambique border, proving that only the good die young. John had a beautiful, albeit outrageously independent, spirit.

Another lesson came after I became bored with antagonizing the nuns. Now, before I continue, I think that the nuns had pretty much concluded that I was an incorrigible little demon or one of hell's angels, at the very least. So you must understand the consternation that I caused when I decided that perhaps I might like to turn over a new leaf and become a nun. When I mentioned this to Sister Cecilia, bless her, instead of screaming in horror, she managed to restrain herself, turning bright red at the idea, and suggested that "God has to call you to become one of Christ's brides."

I think she was trying to tell me as nicely as she could that becoming a nun was by invitation only. However, judging by the response that I got from young men, I figured that I was a pretty fine catch. I felt sure that Christ would want to improve the overall looks of his bridal community, so I replied, "Well, how do I know if God called? Perhaps I just wasn't listening?"

By now the sputtering, crimson-faced nun looked like a trapped, panic-stricken rabbit ready to make a dash for freedom.

"You just *know* without a shadow of a doubt, that's all." Lack of breath was causing her face to swell.

"But that's the trouble, you see. I *don't* just know," I persisted.

Out of sheer desperation, Sister Cecilia pulled out her rosary, frantically running the beads through her agitated fingers. She must have been imagining the havoc created by having someone

like me in the holy halls of the inner sanctum. It was way more than a nun should have to tolerate.

“I do not feel qualified to guide you on this matter. Perhaps you should ask God.”

With that, she wheeled around and flew down the corridor with her black habit flapping behind her like a giant raven’s wing. My guess is that Sister Cecilia went straight to the chapel to ask God for protection.

No harm to me, I decided to do just as she suggested: go and ask God.

Although I was an Anglican, I figured I could just as easily find God in the Catholic Cathedral as anywhere else. Besides, it was convenient and it wasn’t off limits as was the Anglican Church down the road from the school. Although the tall ceilings and gorgeous stained-glass windows made the cathedral cool, the energy was warm and inviting. I went as close to the altar as the pew would allow. Alone in the silence, I knelt and posed my question to God.

I don’t actually remember the exact words I used, but basically I said something like, “God, I am thinking about becoming one of Christ’s brides. How about it?”

Within an instant, I received the answer: “No!”

“No? What do You mean, no?” I certainly was not expecting that response.

Then in my mind’s eye, I saw an image of a skinny man who had a coffee-colored complexion, sitting cross-legged on the ground. He was almost naked, with some sort of cloth worn below the waste; it looked like an adult diaper. This man seemed to be in a cave, somewhere high up in a remote location. His eyes closed, he seemed withdrawn from the world. The voice went on to suggest that this was me in another life, and in this present life, I was to do God’s work. However, I would not be cloistered away in a convent. I’d be more living among the general public and I wouldn’t belong to any organized religion. Nonetheless I’d be reaching and teaching people who did not necessarily believe in God or traditional religious organizations..

Rejection turned to euphoria. This was an option I had not considered, and so it was like having my cake and eating it too! I was also led to understand that my unhappy childhood had reason and purpose. What an enormous relief that was, because up until then I'd felt that life had been a long, unjust, and unfair series of events. Discovering that there was a plan behind my childhood pain and that it evidently made sense to God . . . well then, bring it on! (Huh! Little did I know what I was asking for.)

Many, many years later, after a whole lot more grief, I finally came to know that suffering is an attitude and, in fact, a choice. Instead of feeling cheated out of a blissful *Leave It to Beaver* youth, I realize that my life was “boot camp for life preparation.” It strengthened me and gave me compassion and understanding because I've been there and done that. I've walked numerous miles in a variety of moccasins, that's for sure. I now know that circumstances and situations have always been the fruit of my thought. No longer do I feel like a victim, because that which did not kill me has served to make me stronger, aware and thus victorious.

