

Message: Beverly Goodman, My Spiritual Journey Aug. 1, 2024

There are many journeys we take in this lifetime. It will be interesting to hear about some of them in the coming weeks. When I read this month's title, I thought of my journey to be here in this place. A physical journey, yes, but hopefully a more interesting spiritual journey; one that will inspire you to put your story into words, if only for yourself.

My story began, as far back as I know it, in a small town in Nebraska, with an older sister and a younger brother. My mother was primarily a homemaker, my father was first a carpenter and then a road construction laborer. He helped build highways and runways during World War II and consequently, we moved a lot. My siblings and I went to many schools in a nine month period. It was hard to make friends to keep because as soon as we did, we moved. From Nebraska to Iowa, to Missouri, to Kentucky twice, to Oklahoma twice, to Kansas, to Texas, to California, to Minnesota—then to Gillette, WY, then Cheyenne, & on to Denver, CO. On my own I made it back to WY and the University where I met & married a Cheyenne native and we raised our family in Cheyenne.

I was 10 years old in California at the end of the war in 1945. I've heard that 10 is an impressionable age among all our years and it was so for me. AS hard as it was to make long lasting friends, I did make a few and one was in Santa Ana, California who was a neighbor in our trailer court. That's what we called them then. They were not pretty mobile homes that people have now. Ours was definitely a trailer house, 21 feet long, a fold down table, a couch at each end that folded out for beds. One had a single bed over the end of one for my brother. There was no bathroom, we used a communal one in the center of the court. As I look back on the one picture I have of it, it looks----poor.

One of my nieces says, "Yes, Aunt Bev, it was extremely poor". I guess I didn't realize it at the time, having nothing to compare it to, and also because I was secure in the love of my family.

This one long time friend of mine who lived in the same court was a pretty constant companion. We played with our dolls and slept sometimes in a tent in our small yard. During that time Gerrie's father took us to a lady's house set up with small benches and a flannel board on which she placed various figures telling different Bible stories. My mother had taught me the nighttime prayer of "Now I lay me down to sleep" which I recited every night. I didn't particularly like the "if I should die before I wake" part, but I said the words pretty faithfully. But one night after our Child Evangelism story on the flannel board, I remember an "Ah Ha moment when I thought "Something here is real. I'm not just repeating words, someone is listening. God is real". I didn't see a burning bush, or hear a voice on high, but from then on, my antenna picked up on godly things. I was surprised a few years ago when I visited my friend & penpal of 80 years, and she told me she didn't remember those flannel graph stories! Her journey took her elsewhere but today we share a faith born a long time ago. We've seen each other 3 times in the 80 years since we parted.

Along the way , when she could, my mother would take us to Sunday Schools & Church. Presbyterian was her choice, but I had cousins in Minnesota who were Lutherans and so it was there I memorized the 10 Commandments, the books of the Bible, and many Bible verses. In Gillette, we were Presbyterians again, as we were in Cheyenne. It was there where I suggested my brother & I be baptized. We were, in a simple not impressionable ceremony one evening, not even during a church service, where a minister we didn't know sprinkled our heads and said "Good evening" and little else. I was not moved.

But I was in college at the Univ. of WY, and another long time friend since then took me to a Bible Study group led by a fellow student in her basement dorm room. It was during that time I heard of the “closet thing”. You know, when Jesus chastised the Pharisees about praying on street corners in order to be seen by people? They should go into their closets & pray, to be seen only by God. Well, I did it. I literally walked into my dormitory room closet and said, “I accept you, Jesus, as my Lord & Savior”---a typical Born Again moment in some circles.

For a number of years, most of my adult life, that experience was the center of my life. I met and married my husband while in Laramie and we started our family there. He was attracted to the Lutheran Church so there I was again. He had been raised in a Pentocostal church where he remembered being so scared that he hid behind telephone poles waiting for his parents because he thought God would strike him down for the sins he’d committed that week. He did that while his Catholic friend was going to Confession hoping to rid himself of his sins. I hadn’t had to deal with those experiences, but I did have problems believing that one must be baptized to enter heaven. What about our baby who died at 3 months before being baptized? And what about taking Communion believing it was the body & blood of Jesus? Not a pretty picture. Nevertheless, we both taught Sunday School, I led women’s group studies, Bible School, even taught a caticism class for awhile and Richard served on the church council for many years. Talk about the blind leading the blind. However, Richard did draw a line with one of the creeds, the line that says we were born sinful and unclean. He would not say that and I was always conscious of his silence when we came to that part. Nevertheless, our participation in the church worked for us for quite awhile. Until it didn’t.

The next step on my spiritual journey came when my sister-in-law introduced me to an author named John Shelby Spong, an Episcopalian bishop who was on his own journey, exploring the Christian faith and its relevance today. It is no longer resonating as it once did, and there are many of us “exiled Christians” looking for a new home. In his book ‘Why Christianity Must Change or Die’, Shelby describes the toxins that are poisoning the church. “He calls Christians everywhere into a new reformation for a new age. He proposes a Christianity premised upon justice, love, and the rise of a new humanity. With courage & imagination he has chosen to fight for the reconciliation of the mind & the heart of the church in the contemporary world”. I bought into this as much as I had with my closet experience. I’ve read most of his books and have ended up wondering, What now?

After my husband’s “transition”, (my new term for death), the church’s message had lost its appeal. This may be partly because my two daughters had become world travelers & told me that there a lot of people out there who believed in a power greater than themselves who did not use the name God or Jesus. One thought after another entered my mind & I acutely felt my discontent.

I moved to Denver in 2014 to be near my daughter Sandy. I lived there for 7 years with my other daughter Laurie living with me during the winters when she wasn’t doing her Laurie thing working & traveling elsewhere. Laurie & I wanted a church experience and began looking around. There was a church near my home that we visited once. It had

a typical Evangelical message and we both said, “Been there, done that”.

There is a large church between Sandy’s house & mine & its marquee on the corner said, “It’s different here”. I thought it looked big enough that I could get lost, just attend and not have to teach, serve, lead, or even come if I didn’t want to. I started attending. And believe me, it’s different. I walked in and saw large pictures on the walls of Buddha, and other deities I didn’t recognize, and I heard beautiful music so loud I had to sit in the back to be easy on my ears. And I heard a message centered around me and my mind and my choices. “Change your mind, change your life” seemed to be bywords of the place. It is a large congregation, 3 services on Sunday holding as many as 500 at a time—exiled Christians every one. When asked, people will say nine times out of ten that they are former Catholics or former evangelicals. Some are former Lutherans & Presbyterians too. This Mile Hi church is a part of a New Thought movement, new as of 1927. It and others are called Centers for Spiritual Living and its headquarters are in Golden, CO. It is not just non-denominational, but an inter-faith movement that recognizes God as a Spirit that lives in everyone and everything. And this spirit is one, with no counterpart, no Satan, no hell. Heaven is within us, hell we experience when we deny this spirit and refuse his gifts. He doesn’t cause it, we do. This movement began under the direction of a man named Ernest Holmes and he called it the Science of Mind & Spirit. Its congregations are called Centers for Spiritual Living. Its basic teaching is that our minds control our being. We are what we think we are. Change your mind, change your life. We are a product of our choices. It reminds me of my grandson when he was very young, still in a car seat. One day we

had gone to a WalMart where they served pizza and he loved it. The next day we went to a tea shop and he wanted to go back to “Walmart & refused to get out of the car. So I left him there where I could see him, and went back a few minutes later & explained the situation & asked him what he wanted to do now. After thinking for several seconds, he replied, “I guess I’ll have to change my attitude”. Out of the mouths of babes, right? He was a perfect little gentleman in the tea shop. This movement also teaches us to pray affirmatively, not asking & pleading, but acknowledging what he has already given us.

This was my second life-changing experience. It makes so much sense! I was so excited about it and wanted Richard to know that I had found what he had been looking for. And this was the clincher—one Sunday the seat next to me was vacant and when I thought, “I wish you knew”, the seat next to me was no longer vacant, and my mind heard a voice that said, “Don’t worry, Bev, I know”. But it was and still is not easy for me. My spiritual journey has been long in one direction and at first I felt guilty. What do I do with JESUS? And all the other stuff? I was told by one of the ministers that everything is involved in evolution. My faith has been evolving.. I’m not betraying Jesus. I’m just thinking of him in a different way.

I left the Mile Hi church in 2021 when Laurie built a house in Sheridan and asked me to come & live with her. And Bernie Barlow of this congregation invited us here. Laurie and I find kindred spirits here and we feel loved and welcomed. I miss the vocal spiritual expressions of a Spirit that unites us all, but I am grateful for the opportunity to express myself and share all this with you. I admire your devotion to public service and your determination to serve, accept, and

acknowledge the oneness of us all. I hope to be more a part of that as I am able and as long as you will continue to be tolerant of my so illiterate computer skills. A final step in my spiritual journey, but not the final one. There is more to come, who knows when? It can't be far. I believe we are spiritual beings having a human experience. What's beyond this human journey? I look forward to finding that next experience. I hope you do too.