

**MI RACLE
OF
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Monkey Puzzle Press
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OURS WAS A religiously split home growing up. On Saturdays my father went to a fundamentalist church called the Worldwide Church of God. They distrusted society and believed in many of the old ways, thus the rod was never spared; otherwise, the bible said, giant eagles would descend to peck out the eyes of disobedient children. Though he called my sister, two brothers, and I “savages” on a regular basis, our father was protecting us from giant eagles. Mother went on Sundays to a different Christian church, whose beliefs were vocalized in our home nowhere near the extent of my father’s. She was kind and patient and forgiving, but she rarely talked specifics.

I never found out exactly how they agreed on this situation, or rather agreed to disagree. It was a democratic measure in an otherwise patriarchal dictatorship. In my third grade class I knew of Catholics, Lutherans, Mormons, and even a guy who proclaimed his to be a family of “cyclists,” but no one with a situation like ours.

The arrangement short circuited us kids from ever having to go to church. Instead, we were religiously home-schooled through bible studies led by my father. Mother sat by, clarifying or wielding her veto power when needed. If one of us wanted to go to church, democracy continued—we’d have to go to the other’s as well. Which meant, basically, a whole weekend of church, and who wanted that?

Being the youngest and always perversely curious, I tried it once when I was around ten. Father’s church was very strange, with service held in an unornamented structure with metal folding chairs and no crosses or stained glass. Everyone’s clothes and hair styles were obsolete, like you’d landed in the audience of a Johnny Carson rerun starring Burt Reynolds in flared denim. The men sported sideburns and mustaches and polyester lapels, the women

with spun hair or curled over their ears in print dresses and white heels. The kids my age looked deflated and plain. There was no singing and much time was spent extolling the church's global expansions and specific scripture seemed only a launching pad for talk of the fallen world's mistakes and misinterpretations of the true word. There was groaning, eye rolling, and even outright laughing as the pastor poked fun at the modern world. Everyone left looking slightly more energized but in their rightness they seemed somehow smaller.

Mother's church had the expected accoutrements—a cross, regular pews, colored glass—but it was no less strange for me. They sung songs about “our father” and “hosanna” and “the lamb of God,” and many were snappy, played by a live band that in all respects but their kind smiles and soft slacks resembled Black Sabbath. The talk of scripture was reverent and I watched as my mother read along and found comfort in the words and joy in their meaning. At certain times her eyes closed and her hand or both hands would rise up slightly above her head, almost as if she was readying to tap a beach ball. She was not alone in this. She, and others like her, seemed to be receiving something from the experience, something more than self-righteousness. Spontaneous and flexible, I figured it was the stuff that sustained her through her week of dictators and savages.



“POOR TREE,” MY father said each December when passing our always-modest noble fir in the corner of the living room. Even though his church was “Christian,” it did not believe in Christmas, calling the day a “pagan holiday.” So too Easter and Valentine’s. “Poor rabbits,” he’d say. And, “poor cherubim.” My mother was allowed to keep these holidays with us and in return held her tongue to my father’s sarcasms. To any such biblical decrees that claimed

to be black and white, the furthest she'd go was, "I don't believe in a God that is so strict."

My father's church also forbade its members from voting. Perhaps this was worshipping false idols, but it didn't keep my father from voicing preferences.

"Reagan's got it right," we often heard him say, always in Mother's ear shot. "Government doesn't work. It can't work. That's why he should stay in office."

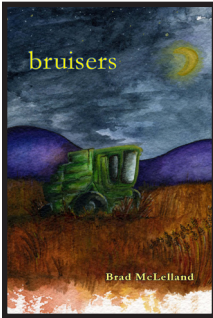
My mother, wearing her Mondale/Ferraro t-shirt, would roll her eyes and mutter to herself, "Sure, so he can continue making a mess proving himself right."

"Give Caesar his due, but just," he'd say, looking at his pay stub every other week. "Government should leave its hands out of our lives. Less taxes, that's it. And for Pete's sake let us ride our motorcycles without helmets. Let us kill the beasts of the field unencumbered by regulations as God intended!"

The fact that he didn't own a motorcycle or hunt was beside the point.

(to be continued)

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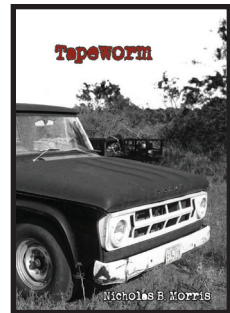


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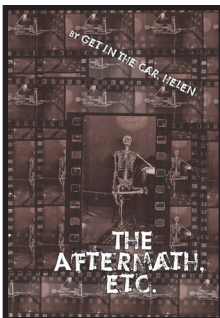
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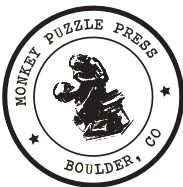
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ISBN-10: 0-9826646-2-1



Memoir / \$3.00

Growing up in a devout Christian home, one gets familiar with the scripture about sparing the rod and spoiling the child. But what about sparing the child?

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