

Religion or ripoff?

"Experience" in Amsterdam

by Dennis Milewski

Editors note: This is the first in a series of articles dealing with the activities of religious cults. Mark Boling, an honor student and graduate of Guilford High School describes his experiences with the International Society of Krishna Consciousness which he joined in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His parents tell how they brought their son back to Guilford.

It was to have been a summer to remember.

And it was.

Mark Boling was looking forward to a promising future in medicine. He had recently graduated in the top ten per cent of his class at Guilford High School, had received several scholarships and was preparing for a pre-medical program at the University of Kansas. He had been an Eagle Scout. His mother described her son as "goal oriented, very logical and not particularly religious."

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Last summer was special in another way. As a graduation present, his parents were sending Mark, and his twin brother Mike, to Europe. Mike went to a youth camp in France while Mark decided to roam around

the continent, eventually arriving in Amsterdam.

There he joined the International Society For Krishna Consciousness and gave up his family ties and the material world to live the carefully structured, spartan life of an initiate in the cult.

"It began with a free meal at the temple," Mark said in a telephone interview from Topeka, Kansas. He is preparing to enter the University of Kansas later this month. "I had never heard anything like that before so I went back to the temple. I wanted to learn more about the philosophy of the movement, I didn't see it as a religion then."

"Once he knew Krishna," he said "He would have an ultimate knowledge and was giving up his education. He hoped we understood."

He called his father soon after and asked if he could delay the start of his education.

"Three weeks later we received a letter," Mrs. James Boling recalled. "Mark said that he had found ultimate happiness and a lessening of anxieties. 'Once he knew Krishna,' he said, 'he would have ultimate knowledge and was giving up his education.' He hoped we understood."

The cult then used a variety of

means to subjugate her son, claimed Mrs. Boling.

"These included sleep deprivation, isolation from normal society, inadequate diet, constant chanting, the destruction of his ability to believe his own consciousness and lack of physical comforts — all intended to build dependence on the group," she said.

"We knew we couldn't leave him in the cult. We spoke to the Helanders (whose daughter, Wendy, left Guilford to join the Unification Church of the self-styled Rev. Moon) and others in Georgia, Ohio and Toronto; parents both successful and unsuccessful in retrieving their children.

"We knew that we basically had one chance, to approach the group unaware of our hostility, to catch them off guard. Then we had to keep him until he knew what was going on. If we failed, they would put him underground. We were warned, 'Do it right the first time'."

The Bolings contacted a deprogrammer. They paid for his trip to Amsterdam and made plans to follow.

Mrs. Boling described the events that led up to the "deprogramming" of their son, in a London hotel room. The Bolings and an unidentified deprogrammer had left Guilford in a desperate attempt to bring their son home.

"We were advised to take mace and tranquilizers," Mrs. Boling said. "We went prepared for anything."

"The miracle," as Mrs. Boling refers to Mark's return, unfolded in a single day. At 6 a.m. Mr. Boling hid across the street from the temple where Mark was staying. There he observed the routine of the members, copied down license numbers of the cars they were using and then, suddenly, saw Mark leave the building — alone. He was finally certain that his son was in Amsterdam.

"We had tried to reach him by phone," Mrs. Boling said. "The switchboard operator would say that he was busy or that he was not in Holland. She would always ask two questions: 'Are you his parents?' and 'Are you in the United States?' Once we were within three blocks of the temple and we were scared to death that she might pick up on the street noises."

Mark had received their messages and called home later that morning. His 16-year-old sister told him that their parents were out "but she didn't know where."

"Mom, dad," he said. "What are you doing here?"

At 9:30 a.m. the Bolings, including Mike who had arrived from France, went to the U.S. Consulate. At 3 p.m. they went to

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