

My Story

When I became a part of the movement, I was about 23 years old. Like most men my age, I was impressionable and thought I knew it all. However, I was also introverted; I internalized everything. Once I fixed my mind to an idea, belief, or feeling, I accepted it and looked only to find supporting evidence. This was the perfect set of flaws for a movement concerned only with unquestioning compliance with its doctrines and propaganda.

I wasn't a member that long. -- maybe a year -- before I was being groomed for deeper involvement. Outside factors also played a role. For example, I lost my studio business, lost my vehicle, and then lost my apartment, all within a short period of time. In the midst of all this, I had to be hospitalized for a serious strain of the flu.

A movement leader of the time saw that my life was falling apart, and he took the opportunity to intervene. He offered all the things I needed: to repair my truck, and to get work and a place to stay. This turn of events would eventually lead to my introduction to the criminal world.

It was surprisingly quick -- only a few months -- before I was heading down the path of no return. The leader who'd "helped" me then arranged for me to meet

Two individuals, Guttman and Langan, who purportedly were doing things to advance the movement. They asked me to join, but they gave me only a few hours to decide. I would have to leave with these two strangers to do exactly I knew not what. It was completely an impulsive decision.

My participation in the movement and the robberies went entirely against my upbringing. I was raised in a loving, non-violent, non-racist and law abiding family. I have no criminal history or any violence in my past or present. To this day, 18 years after my arrest, I have maintained clear prison conduct. Some have suggested I was brainwashed. Maybe so. But that seemed like an excuse to me. I choose instead to acknowledge my errors, learn from my experience, and make the right changes to move on.

This was no jailhouse conversion. I started becoming disillusioned shortly after I got involved with the robberies. Two significant things began the process: First was the fact that in the year we were together, the group never discussed any movement ideology. As a result the effects of the propaganda had begun to wear off. Second, and most significantly, I was traveling across the country, seeing many different states, and experiencing the wider world around me. I began to see that the

ideology failed to hold true in the face of the reality before me. It was not easy to accept, especially because by then I was in too deep. I struggled with my growing disillusionment, though at the same time I wanted out. I also feared the consequences of simply backing away.

Over the years, I've talked with others like me. I have sorted through the factors and events that deluded my thinking. I've reconnected with the values of my upbringing. I have educated myself by investing hundreds of hours in self-study, and college and correspondence courses. I've overcome the plans that put me on the path of no return. I learned to think objectively -- something starkly absent in my thinking at age twenty-three.

Most importantly, I've used my education, talents and skills to help others, and to improve the quality of the environment around me. I have spent thousands of hours teaching many classes in a wide variety of subjects, and I've helped hundreds of men of all backgrounds and ethnicities over these many years -- mainly, how to avoid the pitfalls that harm our lives and stand in the way of happiness.

Finally, I've surrounded myself with positive people who value meaningful relationships based not on extremist ideologies but on love, respect and compassion.

To those who share these sentiments, I welcome your comments and, especially, your own stories.

Sincerely, _____

Scott Stedford