

*The Deprogramming of Kirsten Nielsen*

My name is Kirsten Nielsen. I'm 24 years old and was born and raised in Oakland California. It's really on my heart to relate to you in my own words my experience of being kidnapped and deprogrammed 3 years ago from a group of people now known as the North East Kingdom Community. My hope in sharing this with you is that perhaps you will be able to see more accurately and clearly the truth of the situation presently at hand in Island Pond Vt.

First of all, before I go on, I think it would be good if I explained a little bit about my life before I came to this Community. I came from a fairly close knit family of six. I have a twin sister and two younger brothers, all of us very close in age, and 2 wonderful parents whom I love and respect very much. My father owns a small sound company known as "Swanson Sound," and has faithfully provided for his family for many years. My mother has aided my father as a secretary off and on over the years they've been married whenever she could, and has spent most of her life diligently caring for the needs of her husband and children. I think I can speak for the rest of my brothers and sister and say that our childhood was a fairly good one, holding many fond and rich memories for me. We did many things together as a family; camping and Sunday outings, swimming, sailing, hiking etc.,

But growing up into adulthood was a completely different story. As in the case of most people, my teenage years were very difficult. I'm just thankful that time moves at the rate it does so the painful moments don't last too long. When I look back on those years it makes me glad they're over. I came bursting out of childhood with all the energy youthhood has to offer - seeking for life and meaning and all the answers to the question, "Why?" Even though my parents faithfully fit God into their schedule every Sunday, religion in general held no answers for me. Observing this empty ritual and the outcome of their way of life only left me confused, doubting the very existence of God and all together left a bad taste in my mouth. I became very restless to say the least.

I was obstinate, belligerent and downright rebellious. My cry for a reason why became a desperate, frantic search. Everywhere I looked I only saw hypocrisy and meaningless routine. I didn't want to settle for it and I thought I would die if I ever did. I started getting into drugs pretty heavily and after the 9th grade my school attendance began dropping off rapidly. The days I spent out of school almost exceeded the days I spent in school. My parents suffered greatly during this time. Out of complete frustration and not knowing what else to do they would often call the police, turning me, as well as my other brothers and sisters, over to the authorities whereupon we would spend anywhere from 5 to 28 days in Juvenile hall, depending on their (my parents) eagerness to make negotiations.

Things only proceeded to get worse. The reality of there being no way out except to conform to a meaningless, traditional, unjust society, was beginning to take its toll and deep depression was more often than not, my emotional state. It seemed like my only hope was in turning 18, yet not even that excited me too much. I knew deep inside that receiving a few more liberties wouldn't really change my life, besides 18 seemed a long way off.

On one of those rare occasions that I'd been in school, a stranger propositioned me on my way home and I took him up on the offer for some easy money. Even though this never became a habitual occupation of mine, from that day onward it wasn't something I turned down when the opportunity arose. Even though my parents provided more than my main necessities the temptation for earning some fast spending money was too great.

It seemed that every law ever made was there for me to break. This was my greatest source of entertainment as well as for those with whom I associated. So as time went on many more offenses such as theft and prostitution were being molded into my personality. I continually justified myself for doing this, always pushing it to the back of my mind.

Nevertheless, I guess I don't need to say how greatly this affected my conscience and sense of dignity and self worth. I really felt between a rock and a hard spot. Getting a job was completely out of the question for me - you either had to have a high school education

or a car, both of which were unattainable for the present, not to even mention my extreme lack of responsibility.

During my 16th year my aunt and uncle helped share in the responsibility of caring for me and so I went to live with their family for about 9 months. When I returned home I saw that things hadn't changed much. My parents not only continued to struggle with all of their children, but with each other as well. Finally, they separated for about 4 or 5 months. Just after my parents had gotten back together I went to Juvenile hall again. I think the reason I remember it so well is because I had my 17th birthday there. I think the charges were for not going to school and this time I stayed in for quite awhile. During this time, through several court hearings I was awarded to the court. Nevertheless, I was allowed to return home again. To say the least I was beginning to feel quite tired and hopeless and when I was locked in that last time I only had one desire and that was never to come out again. But after being there for about a month I began sobering up a bit.

New strength started surging through me again as my desire for freedom increased. I really knew the idea of conforming was a ridiculous one, but I felt that if I could get out of California for a year or so, or at least until I turned 18, I might have half a chance. It was maybe 3 weeks after I was out that my parents called the police on me again. I can't remember what it was for, but I was already packed and prepared to leave. I didn't know what to do right at first and so for about 3 weeks I stayed with my brother (who was also in trouble with the police), in a large meadow not far from my parents house. We lived in a tent not eating much during this time, but when we got real hungry we went to a woman who lived not far from the meadow named Joyce Hendrickson. She was kind enough to give us something to eat and would listen to all our problems without telling our parents where we were. As time went by I became increasingly paranoid knowing that if I was caught again I probably wouldn't see daylight for a long time.

I finally decided to leave California, going up be the northern coast line then cutting across Oregon. My final destination was New York City. I didn't know when I would get there or what I would do, but I felt it was my only hope and I knew I had to leave right

away. I mentioned it to Joyce and she really wished I wouldn't go, fearing it would be dangerous for me to hitch-hike alone.

She didn't try to stop me but just suggested that if I was going through Chattanooga I could probably stay with her brother Gene and his wife Marsha who ran a delicatessen in there. She told me they took in a lot of people who needed a place to stay and something to eat. This sounded good to me and I decided that if everything worked out I would rest for a few months in Chattanooga. before going on to New York. Well, a few days later after getting some things together I left with about four dollars and fifty cents. Six weeks later after quite an adventuresome, rugged, tiring trip I finally made it to the Yellow Deli in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and from the very first moment I met these people I loved them.

I was so astonished at the genuine love and care and sincere interest they showed towards me. They didn't reject me because I was this way or that way, but they just accepted me the way I was. They truly befriended me in a great time of need. At this point there were about 150 people in the Community. I was amazed by their unity and great love for one another. They talked with me much about Jesus Christ, who is the only son of God, and the new life they'd found in Him. They told me they'd given up everything to follow the Lord and to love one another as their very own selves. I knew this great hope they offered me was real by the peace and happiness that flowed from their lives and after spending a few weeks with them I had no desire of ever leaving. The few years which followed were extremely happy ones for me.

Naturally after I'd been there a short time I let my parents know where I was and told them all about this new life which I'd found. They were very relieved that I was okay and I think they were really happy when they heard I'd become a Christian. I'm a very faithful letter writer and I wrote them fairly often letting them know how I was doing and especially about my growing convictions.

Finally in September of 1977 my parents came to visit me and my sister, Johanna, who had also come to the church from Los Angeles about 5 months after I had. Even though I could tell they were very glad to see us it was obvious they felt a little uneasy and skeptical. My parents professed to be Christians yet there was no real unity between us. I didn't really know why this was, but I thought perhaps it could be they sensed this decision

I'd made for my life was something more permanent, rather than just a phase that would pass away with time.

Well, a few years went by and the gap between us only seemed to increase. They'd had other plans for my life and wanted to know when I was going back to school. When was I going to get a job and earn some money for myself? They felt I was wasting my life with this group of people. In spite of this, I believe they could see I had never been so happy.

In Dec. 1979 my sister and I were getting married and we invited my parents to the weddings. Actually my sister had been planning to get married a few months ahead of me, but we decided to get married together (a week apart) so that my parents would be able to come to both of their daughters weddings knowing they probably wouldn't be able to afford two trips across the country just a few months apart from one another.

At the time, I was living in Vermont where most of the community had moved to. I had just come down for my sister's wedding in Chattanooga, and also to meet my parents. The plan was that a week after my sister's wedding we would all rendez-vous in Island Pond, Vt. for my wedding so my parents would also have a chance to see the community there.

Finally, two hours before my sister's wedding my parents arrived. Because of the increasingly negative view of the church I became a little suspicious and alarmed about the events of their arrival, not forgetting my parents tendencies in times past. But all my doubts fled away when I saw how relaxed and happy they were to see us. I was excited too, because my brothers had decided to come also. The last time I'd seen them they were shorter than I was and now they towered over me, reaching 6'1" and 6'3"! I could hardly recognize them! They'd changed so much, but I guess I had changed, too. Anyway the time was running very short. But nevertheless they convinced my sister and I to go shopping with them. They said they hadn't had any time to buy us a gift and they really, really wanted to get us something before Johanna got married.

The main reason we decided to go wasn't so much for the gift, but for the opportunity to spend time altogether with my family. In great excitement we all jumped

into their rented silver Mercedes and drove to East Gate shopping mall. We all happily talked together as we rushed around trying on this and that. My father and brothers quickly got bored (so I thought) and wandered off. After about 45 minutes, we all met back at the car. As we pulled out of the parking lot my sister and I were totally unaware of the car that backed out in front of us and which now led the way. My mother had us busy showing my father our new clothes so it was a while before my sister and I realized we were headed in the wrong direction, winding around in an unknown residential district. My sister mentioned several times that she was growing increasingly concerned about the time, but my mother just kept the conversation flowing, asking questions about the weather and what not and I really felt my Dad was doing his best to find his way back. Not a hint of anxiety or doubt was in my mind.

A few minutes latter, my father drove up a steep private driveway parking the car in the rear of a large, bright, green and blue house out of street view. Suddenly everything seemed to be happening at once. My father quickly got out of the car as a group of about 7 or 8 people emerged from the house, none of whom I'd ever seen before. My father walked directly up to one of the men and shook his hand. It was obvious they'd met before. My brothers had also gotten out of the car with my father, but they remained nearby guarding the car. Johanna and I just looked at each other in sheer horror. My heart fell like a stone as I knew the thoughts and feelings I'd had earlier but pushed to the back of my mind, were now coming true. We were being kidnapped. and for what other reason than to be deprogrammed by this Ted Patrick, who we'd heard so much about.

I can't hardly express how betrayed I felt as my mother turned around in the front seat, looking at us, her watery eyes reaffirming the reality of this nightmare. The old familiar, hopeless feelings of former years rushed upon me like the embrace of an old friend. I was in a stupor and felt numb, as if someone had just hit me and I could hardly speak. Just then someone told us to get out of the car. My mind began racing as I frantically searched for a way of escape, but saw there was none as we were led, completely surrounded, into the living room of the house.

Here we were met by Naomi Kelly, the only face we recognized outside of our family. As I'm sure you're well aware, she is a woman who had been kidnapped and

deprogrammed about 6 months earlier, but never returned. She greeted us cordially and smiled, but by looking into her cool eyes and observing her collected composure, it became immediately apparent to me she was miles away. I definitely knew no help would come from her. My sister had been friends with Naomi and knew her much better than I, for she had lived a total of 6 months with her in one of the communities in Dalton before Naomi was taken. Upon seeing her, Johanna, full of hope and innocent concern rushed up, greeting her, asking if she was okay! What was she doing? What was going on? Looking back on it now reminds me of a person calling into an empty cave for someone, but getting no response, only the echo of their cries. That's how Naomi was -- unresponsive, impenetrable, hard, and immovable - void of all life.

As we all sat down in the living room she began to inform us as to what was going on. She only said what I'd already concluded - my parents had hired Ted Patrick to deprogram us (whatever that meant), but that he wouldn't be able to come for another 3 or 4 days due to so much business. Nevertheless, the deprogramming procedures would begin immediately.

She continued on and on telling us how we'd been brainwashed - held against our will, trapped and enslaved etc.,etc. I could hear men in the background discussing security measures - how they'd taken handles off doors, boarded up windows, guards here, guards there - " Was this just a bad dream?" I asked myself, as I sat there in utter amazement thinking how absurdly ironic all this was. Here they were doing the very thing they falsely accused us of. They talked of someone brainwashing me, yet I'd never been treated like this before this very day.

After a short while my sister and I were led into separate rooms - I was taken upstairs with one woman and my sister was led down a hallway into another room with Naomi. The next 3 days were days like I hope never to experience again. I felt as if my mind would snap in two. Even though we were not deprived of food or sleep, we were continually harassed. We were not allowed to sing or read a Bible or go anywhere by ourselves, not even to the toilet. We could only stay in our room and listen and listen and listen. All kinds of lies and accusations were spoken to me from morning until night about

people I'd lived with for the past 4 years, people who I knew so well and were dear friends of mine. Ever since it'd known them, they loved me with the love of God, opening wide their hearts to me as well as their home, sharing everything they had with me. My gratitude and love for them went much deeper than just a normal friendship. For through the message I'd heard from them I'd been led to eternal life.

Before I'd met this people *"I'd been wandering down a long, lonesome highway, my burden was heavy as I traveled along. But then I met Jesus, what a wonderful hour. I'm so glad that I found out He would bring me out and show me the way."* This is part of a well known hymn that we often sing, but it's really what happened to me! All I know is that I'd been born again! Every day of my life before I came to the church was total agony. I would continually ask myself why was I created? Why do I continue to go on living? I had no purpose and was drowning in my loneliness. I was even beginning to think that perhaps death held an answer.

My words just don't do justice in expressing my joy in meeting Jesus Christ, my Savior! People are right when they say my life drastically and radically changed. I actually went from being a chronically depressed person, prone to extreme outbursts of anger, to a happy, free person - a new creation. Is this really so strange? I once was dead in my sins, lost without any hope, but now I'm alive to Christ! I once did not know God, but now He's my friend. He's given me the most wonderful thing a person could possibly receive - His very own self, His comforting Holy Spirit.

I hope you can understand why this is a great cause of rejoicing within me. I'd come to the end of my road and in my darkest hour of complete despair I found the very sweetness and essence of life itself. I found the only One who has the power to raise the dead, giving new life to those who are dying and for the very first time in my life I experienced a clean conscience, free from the bondage of sin and the heavy yoke of guilt. And I can definitely say this new life which I'd received didn't make me want to return to the same empty pattern of life I'd had before, NO!, quite the opposite, it made me want to spend the rest of my life learning to love and forgive my brothers as God had so richly loved and forgiven me.

The only question is, "Is there anything wrong with loving the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself?" The people that were hired to deprogram us were obviously convinced there was a great deal wrong with it. They threatened us by saying they had as much time as it took for us to finally see things the way they saw things - weeks, months, years - however long it took. They were in no hurry. They said there was no way we could ever escape, and that it would be impossible for anyone to find or rescue us. To say the least, I began to feel very hopeless. The hours seemed to go on forever. Finally around the third day, after accomplishing their first goal in bringing me to a completely emotional and unstable state, I began to weaken and doubt whether I'd been deceived or not.

Their main tactic was fear. They continually compared us to other cults and after Ted Patrick arrived we were shown movies and many video tapes, especially concerning the mysterious tragedy at Jonestown and other terrifying incidents. It wasn't long before I began giving in to the pressure, greatly desiring that all this would end. I'd never been so confused in all my life. When I found out that my parents had spent \$ 20,000.00 to have my sister and I deprogrammed I really knew they themselves were thoroughly convinced that what they were doing was right.

Thinking about it really made me feel bad because I knew this was all money my father didn't have and he'd probably be in debt the rest of his life. I knew they had done all of this in ignorance and because they really loved me, but I felt that even if I wanted to return to the community I couldn't. How could I knowing my parents had spent all that money on me in vain? I think I began to think my parents were right more from exhaustion than anything else. Nevertheless, against my heart and conscience, I consented to speaking against the church on TV and to news reporters. I knew the things I said weren't true, but out of various pressures I said them anyway.

After about a week my sister and I flew to San Diego, California to where Ted Patrick has some houses for rehabilitation purposes. Here we spent about 2 weeks along with some other people who had also just been deprogrammed by concerned parents from

other groups. Ted had hired several people who had formerly been deprogrammed by him to help get people just taken from cults readjusted to the activities of the world again.

Naomi, who was one of these people, took my sister and I around to ice cream parlors, hamburger stands, cocktail lounges, fancy restaurants, and movie theaters. We went to different places and bought new clothes, got used to things like coffee and cigarettes and in our spare time watched lots of TV. We did everything the world thinks is "having a good time" - having everything momentarily appealing to the senses, but a far cry from ever satisfying the soul.

My heart felt so empty and void of peace. I never felt so miserable in all my life. I kept thinking about all my friends back at the community and how much they loved the Lord and one another. I knew deep in my heart the Lord had delivered me from this world of sin and what was I doing now? The thought of returning to the church seemed impossible after all that had happened, especially all that I'd said to the press concerning the church. How could I go back now? Would the Lord ever forgive me? Oh why did I say all those lies anyway? I knew the things I'd spoken weren't true. Oh, my conscience, oh my heart! I felt as if I could die. I wished I'd never been born.

Finally after 2 weeks in San Diego we flew up to where my parents lived in Oakland. My father got me several jobs working as a waitress in catering halls, restaurants and private dining rooms. I enrolled in college almost immediately, just trying to stay as busy as I could so I wouldn't have to think about anything - trying to numb the pain of a broken heart. Whenever I got to thinking about everything it just left me feeling angry, and very bitter. Why did my parents do this to me? I felt as if the rug I'd been standing on had just been yanked out from under my feet.

Everything I'd found life to be had been taken away from me, leaving me lost and spinning in darkness - and in the quiet recesses of my mind I began to ask the old familiar questions again - Was God real? Was he the One that led me to the church in Chattanooga, delivering me from the hell hole I was in? Did He do it just so that I could return to it again 4 years later? I often compared the way of life of those around me to people in the church. Everyone around me seemed frustrated, empty, and very lonely - some people tried to cover it up, but I could still recognize it because it was in me too.

Christians seemed to be the biggest pretenders. They walked around with big smiles on their faces - talking of love yet who did they identify themselves with? Not the homeless, not the destitute and certainly not the downtrodden, those who didn't fit into society. I thought the Son of Man came to earth and died to set men free, breaking down all barriers between people. I remember seeing this happening somewhere and it definitely wasn't here. As time continued on I saw my true desperate condition more and more. It was obvious that not only was the world trapped, but so was I. Some people just showed it more than others.

No matter how much I wanted to change I couldn't. I had no power. My heart longed for the truth and to be back in fellowship with God and His people. With time my desire grew stronger and stronger. Finally, a year and 8 months later, I decided to throw in my lot with those who'd given up everything to follow their Lord. I knew I'd rather be dead than to continue on against my conscience in this meaningless existence. When I came back to the church I saw that my heavenly Father welcomed me with open arms. He loved and forgave me just like He did the prodigal son.

I can honestly tell you I've never been so happy in all my life since I've returned. I'm glad to be back in the land of the living again. I once wrote to my parents and I told them I felt like a plant that's finally receiving water after many years of drought. Experiencing eternal life and the forgiveness of my sins has only made me consciously aware of one thing - a debt of love which my heart longs to pay with every day of my life.

If what I'm doing with my life is what people call wasting your life then let it be said. For this is just what was probably said of Mary Magdeline, the prostitute. Upon seeing the Lord she took her very costly vial of oil and with many tears of gratitude anointed His feet and dried them with her hair. Many who were present there in the room were very offended and in great anxiety and alarm said, WHY THIS WASTE? For this oil could have been sold and given to the poor, a much more noble and worthy cause in their opinion, but Mary continued undisturbed by their remarks for she knew who was sitting in the room with her. She knew that this was her Savior, her Deliverer, her new found love, her only hope. This gratitude that welled up within her overflowed from the very depths of

her heart causing her to worship the Lord, totally abandoning herself to the One who had saved her soul from death. She was unaware and unconcerned about the cost of the oil for she knew it was nothing to be compared with the gift of eternal life.

I don't mean to be preaching to anyone at this point, but this is simply my testimony. I know all that has happened to me the Lord has used it for the good and for His glory, because my relationship with Him has been made more secure and is continuing to grow. Even as I speak to you now I'm aware of an overflowing joy in my heart. I know that I am His and no circumstance or anything man can do will be able to separate me from His great love for His seal is upon me.

Nietzsche, one of the world's prophets once said in regard to Christianity, "I would believe in your Redeemer if I saw you more redeemed." I guess this is why almost 7 years ago this month I began to put my trust and hope in the God of Israel, the same One who parted the Red Sea and rose from the dead.

I saw, for the first time, people seriously responding to the cries of their heart, sincerely longing to follow the Lamb of God, to be set free from the world and its system and to be healed and purified in every aspect from all their inward disorders. Their motivation came from one desire and that's the one day they could run with great anticipation and confidence to Him, their Lover, unashamed at His coming which, as it is written, will be in a time when most will not expect. My heart bears witness of God's great love for me as His people care for me daily, helping me to bear my burdens. In all the years I've known Him He has never left me or forsaken me. I might have left Him, but He has never left me. He has remained faithful even when I've been faithless. Because He first loved me I love my Redeemer - He is an unmovable fortress and unchangeable rod to me. And I say without any shame that I am nothing and can do nothing without Him. I am a weak and needy person, desperate for His daily salvation and cannot go on apart from His life. I guess I could go on about this love affair of mine, but to bring to a close all that I've said I'd like to stress the cruelty of deprogramming and the great mental abuse as well as the physical mistreatment in taking a person against their will.

One of the things I hope that you will consider is the question, "Where does deprogramming leave a person?" Most of the people who are deprogrammed are

intelligent, cognitive people who are fed up with the world, seeing through all its superficial gimmicks and are dissatisfied with all it has to offer.

So what do you offer a person after you're taken everything away from him that he holds dear, everything that he's found to be reality? You leave him in exactly the same place as he was before, offering him the same lifestyle he previously rejected. There is no other direction for him to go. It's like offering a person vinegar after they've tasted the delicate sweetness of aged wine. I'm convinced that if it were possible to conduct an honest survey of what happens to the majority of these people who have been deprogrammed the results would be quite shocking for you, I'm sure. I just adjure you, not on a spiritual level, but simply on an intellectual level, to really consider the great injustice here.

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