

Chapter 7

A Very Bad Trip and two weeks at Western Institute

It was the long U.E.A. weekend and Steve's parents had no idea where he was. His mother knew that he had been in trouble at school. It upset her that Steve had not walked up one flight of stairs from the office to the library on the second floor to discuss his plans with her. As the game was held at Woods Cross, some miles from Sandy, the Stokoes did not attend and did not realize Steve had not gone out with the team. They were worried when he did not come home Wednesday night. They became more and more concerned Thursday and Friday. Steve did not call. Around 8:00 p.m. Saturday night Steve walked through the door barefoot and disheveled.. His mother was waiting.

"Mom, I've been to the mountains. I need to get a patriarchal blessing. I know who I am."

He was confident, he was articulate, he fascinated and terrified his mother. His father was attending the Samoan Missionary Reunion. Steve's eyes were glowing and he was raving.

"Look Mom, I'll show you." He took Diane down stairs, grabbed a pool stick and began shooting balls off the pool table.

"I am the chosen one. I have the power."

Diane called her sister Laraine who lives two blocks away. "Help me. Steve is home. He has obviously taken something and I am afraid that he will run again."

Laraine and Steve's Uncle Ron arrived almost immediately. Diane called Western Institute. Ron drove everyone directly to the University of Utah Psychiatric facility as Steve continued to make fantastic claims about where he had been and the things he had seen:

"I am from the Celestial Kingdom. My true name is Cane, the man who was jealous of his brother Able's offering. God turned me black and made me walk the four corners of the earth until my repentance was complete."

Steve underwent an evaluation and was immediately admitted. He was completely out of his mind. He stayed at Western Institute for ten days. When he finally came down from acid poisoning he would never be the same Stephen that his family had known before this incident.

The most frightening thing his Mother observed was the new confidence and

power Steve demonstrated under the influence of the drug known as LSD. ***I was in the celestial kingdom,*** Steve raved. ***"I know everyone's face from heaven. I saw through the veil. I broke through the Veil¹ by taking killer acid. . . I know who Jesus Christ is. . ."***

"Where is the car Steve? Where did you leave your car?" Diane needed to know. He had returned home shirtless and on foot..

"Kimme Lou from Thailand has the keys to my New Yorker. The car is between the Sun and the Moon at the base of Little Cottonwood Canyon. We are not building simply a highway. We are building God's Highway. I control a gate with the blood of the mountain on it."

His family finally pieced together what had happened. After taking acid Steve drove to a remote area in the foothills above his Sandy home. He spent three days in the mountains. On Saturday night he showed up at a party in a Sandy area not far from his home. Evidently someone at the party convinced Steve he should go home.

Watching Stephen come down from acid poisoning was a very frightening experiences for Steve's family. At times they wondered if he would ever come down. At first he was not given any medication. The staff hoped he would clear on his own. After three days Dr. R. tried the drug Uterine. But this tended to make Steve aggressive and angry.

"I got attacked last night in my dorm by three wolves, one was black, one silver, one blue. My leg is badly injured. (Steve walked with a limp.) But with so many people watching over me I can never be attacked by too many wolves. The key to my defense is the Alaskan Malamutes. They know the Northern Lights and are incredible. I am going to get three puppies. I will know them when I see their eyes. They will receive power from the Northern Lights and will be able to defend me."

Later, nurses helped Steve make an Indian dream catcher--an attractive spider web-like disk with feathers hanging from it. This was hung in front of Steve's window. According to an Indian legend, the dream catcher would filter out the bad dreams. The good ones would slide down the feather streamers to the sleeper below.

¹Hazel Moody was born to missionary parents in Samoa. When her mother died her father sent her home. Later, Hazel's dad was called on another mission. While he was gone, Hazel felt lonely and depressed until she had dream. Her dead mother stood before her, "My dear child you are not alone. Don't you know that I am with you always? Then she took a thin veil and placed it over Hazels face. Hazel tried to remove the veil but could not. She could not see her mother but she could hear her voice, "Remember Hazel, you are not alone." Because the veil in Mormon temples represents the barrier between this life and the spirit world, most Mormons visualize the veil as a curtain.

Finally Stephen was given the medication Stelazine. This drug helped him clear. During the time Steve was at Western Institute he moved in and out of reality. He felt bad about missing homecoming. He missed his new friends at Granite. He missed practicing with the team and playing in the games. He felt bad about losing his chance to start on the varsity squad.

From the Medical Report. University of Utah, Neuropsychiatric Inst.

Substance Usage: The patient admitted using marijuana, LSD, mushrooms, beer and tobacco.

Mental Status Examination: The patient was disoriented and disorganized due to the psychotic symptoms. . . He made statements about "God talking to me all of the time." . .

Content of thought: The patient denied suicidal ideation. When asked about homicidal ideation, he stated that he has "dreams of killing Brad T." whom he describes as a friend of his. He stated that he hears "the voice of God." He denied any paranoia. . .

Steve wrote in his journal,

Being here is like the movie "Groundhog Day." I wake up hoping to find myself back in reality and I am in an institution. It is the same thing day after day and I can't seem to break out of it. Yesterday [the day after General Conference], I wrote a letter to President Ezra Taft Benson and gave it to my Mother. I insisted that she deliver it to him. Mom told me that she could not deliver the letter directly. She reminded me that President Benson is old and can not talk. The letter would have to go to our Bishop. She asked if it was all right to deliver the letter to Bishop Meads.

Steve's letter to President Benson

I know with no doubt in my mind that I am a patriarch of God. I know that the Mormon Church is true. Ezra talks with God and many others in the temples that the Mormons have built. I know the future. . . I have a testimony of God. . . I have spoken with God in the mountains. I have spoken with Satan on Maui. Satan has taken control of my body several times on Maui but he can no longer touch me because I am a man of God.

People here at Western Institute think I am just an ordinary kid tripping on killer acid believing that I have seen God, But they are wrong. . . My Father, Thomas Stokoe is a man of God. He is half Samoan, half white but has 100% knowledge about God. I can tell the prophet or twelve apostles or quorum of seventy anything they want to know about the second coming. It is a lot closer than people think. My name is St. Stephen. I know the future. I have seen the stars hit the earth. . .

After several days Steve was still pretty confused but his mother believed he would recover. She hoped he would learn from the experience and remember that drug abuse had tragic consequences. Dr. R. cautioned that flashbacks might last up to one year following acid poisoning. Steve's family felt he was lucky. Pat W., a family friend with a masters degree in drug and alcohol abuse counseling, explained that some people never come down from a bad trip.

After Steve cleared and returned to Granite High, Michelle B. a cute blond cheerleader, befriended him. "Steve, you do not have to hang out with people who do drugs. You can come and hang out with me and my friends," she told him. Steve always had a thing for blonds and from that moment on Steve had special feelings for Michelle. She wrote this poem for him, and gave it to him shortly after he returned to school:

NEVER GIVE UP

When all seems to go wrong
Just try to be strong
Because all of it is worth
What you are at birth.
Do what you know is right
And you will see the light
Led from him up above
You will feel his love. . .

Steve was too shy and felt Michelle was too popular for him to ask her out when he was at Granite. However, he did call her several times during the next few months and maintained a friendship with her. Michelle was a year younger than Steve. When she came into the library she often asked how he was doing. Diane always told Steve when Michelle asked about him.

Steve and his mother had a serious talk about sex just after he returned from Maui. He found his sexual urges embarrassing. "***Sometimes it drives me crazy,***" Steve confessed. Diane told him that sexual desire is part of God's plan. "It is a special gift and an exciting part of being human. There is nothing unnatural about the sexual desire. We simply have to learn how to manage our impulses. Part of our earthly responsibility is to learn to control ourselves and save our bodies for the right person at the right time," she counseled. Diane believed Steve had a good attitude toward girls and his own sexuality but like many teens he had questions. She always tried to answer them for him.

During his first quarter at Granite, Steve took three English classes. He had a lot of papers to write and a lot of books to read. Since Stephen was still finding it difficult to concentrate over long periods of time his mother discovered that he could get

through a lot more out of the material if she read to him. Sometimes she would read for an hour or two until her voice was almost gone. She felt that it was important not to belittle him or discount any of his unusual experiences. Often she chose books such as Life after Life, and Return from Tomorrow. Steve found these books very interesting. Sometimes he would insist that Diane read a passage over a couple of times. He would marvel at the description and often say, **"Yes, that is exactly how it is."**

While reading Return from Tomorrow Steven asked his Mother to read one paragraph three times because he really identified with what the author, Raymond Moody said. Often Steve shared his unique experiences--the good and the bad--with others. Diane sat in front of him and a Skyline player who Steve knew from his Sophomore football days, at a Brighton game. She marveled about how open Steve was as he talked about out-of-body experiences. Gradually Steve stopped talking about these things. He felt most people simply did not believe him. Steve became very interested in the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price. He seemed fascinated by Abrahams' vision which dramatized written history from the time of Adam until the millennium. Steve asked his mother a lot of questions about this vision. Then he told his mother about some of his own "visions" which were similar in content to those that Abraham described.

Although Steve and his parents were attending regular classes at Western Institute, Diane felt that Steven needed to talk to a *professional* who had a lot of experience with kids that had used acid. She made an appointment with Dr. Lewis Hancock who had written When Drugs Hit Home (S.L.C.: Shadow Mountain, c.1987.) The day of the appointment Steve and his mother had a misunderstanding about where they would meet. As a result Steve did not show for the appointment. Diane went without him and described his experiences to Dr. Hancock. She wanted to know what he thought.

Dr. Hancock did his undergraduate work at Brigham Young University but was not a Mormon. He told Diane that he had counseled kids who had used acid for over twenty years. "It does not seem to matter whether the kid is Catholic, Protestant, Mormon or agnostic, after taking acid they all described the kind of experiences you Mormons call revelations."³

Many of the students and members of the staff at Granite knew about Steve's acid poisoning but took the whole thing in stride. Granite High accepts students from every social, economic and racial background. The school takes pride in valuing the individual. No one condemned Steve for the acid overdose. Later Steve's mother

³ In some users acid can mirrors a near death experience or simulate religious enlightenment. It can enhance values or a belief system. Acid produces an altered state of consciousness. Some cultures accessed this state through meditation, drums, chants, deep breathing, religious ritual or drugs like peyote or other hallucinogens.

learned that Granite District had a special program to help students with drug problems. Steve might have benefitted from that program but it was never mentioned to her or Steve by members of the staff. Coach Nielson did not allow Steve to return to the football team because students who participate in sports commit to upholding school rules and avoiding drugs. Still everyone else accepted him and treated him with a lot of understanding and support.

In an effort to keep Steve on track for graduation, Diane typed up the entries from his personal journal and handed them in as English assignments so he would not fail his English classes while he was at Western institute. Upon his return to school he was surprised to find these journal entries and other material he had written in his creative writing portfolio. In the end he decided it was safe to share his experiences in this way. He handed this assignment in for extra credit:

GOOD THINGS ABOUT WESTERN [Institute]

- 1. Teaches me how I can do other things instead of drugs.***
- 2. Teaches me about AA and NA meetings I can attend.***
- 3. Teaches me more confidence to go through life.***
- 4. Teaches me how I can change friends and get better ones.***
- 5. Teaches me how dangerous drugs are and what they are doing to my brain.***
- 6. Teaches me how to keep a positive attitude.***
- 7. Teaches me about the real world.***
- 8. Makes me remember some bad times which I had on drugs and now I have to realize that's good. Remembering the bad can help me avoid drugs in the future.***
- 9. Teaches me that I can trust my parents and they do love me and are here to help. I never thought like that until now.***

After Steve was released from Western Institute he returned as an out patient for sessions with his parents in an effort to develop the skills that would help him get along better with his family and friends. Counselors encouraged Steve's family to show him a lot of love. One strategy they suggested was to ignore Steve's bad behavior while praising and rewarding him for the any positive changes he made.

At home after his acid overdose, Steve complained that he had no friends. It was true, when the neighborhood drug buddies heard about his overdose they stopped calling him and would have nothing to do with him for some time. Unfortunately, he would not participate in youth activities and he simply did not feel comfortable with most of the active members of his priesthood quorum. He was sure his reputation had been completely destroyed and that the entire community had written him off as a hopeless druggie. Ben Ellison was the one person who made a serious effort to friendship Steve. Ben has a mentally challenged sister. He probably understood Steve

better than young people. Ben visited and really encouraged Steve.

Jeff W., the Young Men's president, called Steve on his eighteenth birthday not realizing that Steve had relapsed and taken acid again that afternoon. Steve thanked Jeff for calling and told him that he was having problems. Anna Marie had brought him home earlier in the evening. Jeff asked Steve if he wanted a priesthood blessing. Steve said he did so Jeff stopped by a little later and gave him a blessing. Jeff, a lawyer, tried to explain the legal implications of turning eighteen to Steve. Steve's cousin Nicole also called that night. She was successful in talking him down for the effects of the acid. He was disgusted with himself and his own stupidity and was desperately trying to gain control. His parents were frustrated and frightened but supportive of Steve that night.

By this time, Ben E. was the only straight kid in Steve's ward who wanted anything to do with him, yet Steve really needed friends as his drug buddies had abandoned him. Steve's mother had refused to allow the boys to have dogs after the experience with the neighbor and Bear 1. But Steve had talked so much about dogs at Western Institute, that his mother finally relented. Tom and Diane took Steve and Neil to see a litter of Chow-Australian Shepherd mix puppies. After playing with them for some time Steve chose a docile golden puppy to bring home. He named the dog Bear. Stephen had one friend.

The Stokoe had acquired a pool table after Steve overdosed on Marazine. Dean set it up in the game room. Steve learned to play pool at Wasatch Canyon. He was an excellent player and the game seemed to relax him. He quit taking Prozac because he said it made him feel "too mellow." However, he continued taking retalin.

After the acid poisoning Steve lost quick reflex action and some of his fine motor skills. Before the incident, he had spoken quite fast. Now he spoke very slowly. He had been a very fast walker before the acid trip and now he plodded along slowly. He also had difficulty doing up buttons on his shirt and interlocking and pulling up a zipper. Before his first encounter with drugs Steve's family did not even realize he suffered from learning disabilities. After his first experience with Marazine all Steve's learning problems seemed to intensify. Steve always had problems with judgment but it seemed that the acid overdoes impaired his thinking even more. It made everything worse.

Through training and night classes at Western Institute, Steve's parents learned to praise him and say positive things as he tried to improve. However, Steve's hot temper often made it difficult for his family to remain positive and upbeat.

When Matt graduated from the University of Utah and Steve graduated from Granite High School in June of 1994, Diane threw a double graduation party. She was proud of Matt, who, after ten years, finally earned a double B.A. at the University of Utah in Russian and Communication. She was also proud of Steve who had an equally difficult time graduating from high school.

When Steve's evaluation was done at Wasatch Canyon at the end of his sophomore year, his parents were told that he might not be able to graduate from high school. For Tom and Diane, it was like being told their son was retarded. However when Diane became discouraged, she had the feeling that Steve had everything he needed to complete his mission in life successfully. She believed that with the love and support Steve would be to find a measure of success in life. Early in March, 1994, Steve's mom scheduled photo appointments for her two sons so their pictures could be included in their graduation announcements. Then as an afterthought, she decided to have a formal family portrait taken at the same time. At least we are all here, she reasoned. Steve died a year after the photo was taken.



Stokoe family assembled to honor Matt and Steve who both graduated in June, 1995

***Back row: David with brothers, Dean, Brian, Matt Belov, and Steve
Seated: Diane Neil and Tom***