

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

satsvarupa dasa goswami

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The story of my life

Autobiography of satsvarupa dasa goswami

preface

I began my autobiography about a month ago and finished approximately one hundred pages. I used the old method “that starts from the cradle and drives you to the grave.” I was up to my twenty-fourth year, close to my time of meeting Srila Prabhupada and completely changing my life. What I had written so far was filled with Americana of the 1940s, 50s and 60s and the adventures of an innocent boy and a corrupted, confused young man. I told it as I experienced it without any Krishna consciousness. Then I began to feel that giving my readers two hundred pages without Krishna consciousness was not a good thing. At this time a happy coincidence occurred. My friend, Kirtana Rasa, gifted me with Volume 1 of the recently published *Autobiography of Mark Twain*. In the beginning in his own handwriting the book gives us Twain’s chosen method of writing his autobiography.

“The latest attempt

Finally, in Florence in 1904, I hit upon the right way to do an autobiography: Start it at no particular time of your life; wander in at your free will all over your life; talk only about the thing which interests you for the moment; drop it the moment its interest

threatens to pale and turn your talk upon the new and more interesting thing that has intruded itself into your mind meantime.

“Also make the narrative a combined Diary *and* Autobiography. In this way you have the vivid things from the present to make a contrast with memories of like things in the past, and these contrasts have a charm which is all their own. No talent is required to make a combined Diary and Autobiography interesting.”

I have decided to start again and use this method. It will enable me to quickly introduce Srila Prabhupada in the beginning of my spiritual life, and to also bob around in the past as it occurs to me coming up with childhood incidents and those from my youth, and telling anecdotes from my long life in ISKCON.

This volume is in no way a complete edition on its own. There are many more tales to tell in future volumes—re-examining past writing that caught my attention, digressions from free writing sessions, and shedding new lights on my internal journey with Prabhupada over the fifty years.

The little piece of paper

One day while walking home from my welfare office job on Fifth Street in Manhattan I passed Second Avenue on the way to my apartment on Suffolk Street, just south of Houston Street. At the corner of Second Avenue and First Street my eye caught the window of the storefront. The signboard said *Matchless Gifts*, and I had passed it many times. It was a curiosity shop and featured the sale of little matchboxes which had pictures on them from Hollywood movies. But now the window display was empty and the storefront vacant; they had gone out of business. There was a small piece of paper taped to the window with the following words: “Classes in *Bhagavad-gita* / Monday, Wednesday and Friday 7 p.m. / Transcendental Sound Vibration.”

I had read the *Bhagavad-gita* in the Mentor paperback edition, translated by Swami Nikhilananda and Christopher Isherwood, and I was interested in the transcendental philosophy of the “atma,” although I really couldn’t understand it clearly. I decided to attend the class. That night, wearing black chino pants, dirty white sneakers and a drab shirt, I entered the door of the storefront about five minutes to seven. There were about five men

in their twenties milling around or sitting on straw Chinese mats. A man with a ruddy colored beard and curly hair approached me with a smile and greeted me. He introduced himself as Ray, and I told him I was Steve and we shook hands. He asked me if this was the first time I had attended the class, and I said yes. I asked what to expect. He said the Swami would come out at any minute, and he would explain everything. He would lead us in chanting and then he would give a lecture. Within a couple of minutes the Swami entered through the side door. He was a short, golden-hued monk from India. He slipped out of his pointy rubber shoes and walked over to a straw mat and sat facing the front door. The boys formed an audience facing him. He greeted a few of the boys who he already knew and then handed out a few pairs of hand cymbals. The cymbals were strung together with cloth. He struck up a 1-2-3 beat and indicated that others should follow. At first they couldn't catch the beat, but he stopped and deliberately began again, saying, "One — two — *three*/ one two *three*" until everyone was playing in unison, slowly.

The Swami was wearing a saffron-skirt-like robe around his waist and a piece of saffron cloth draped over his bare chest and shoulders. His face was old, and his full mouth was turned down at the corners. His eyes were a deep mystifying brown. His long earlobes reminded me of pictures of Lord Buddha. He was an extraordinary presence for the Lower East Side. He began singing prayers in Sanskrit. After a few minutes he changed to the chant Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. He indicated that we should follow his lead in chorus. Some of the boys had been there before, and I gropingly caught on to it and began chanting in chorus Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. The Swami kept leading the chanting for a full half hour. After a while I got bored, but I kept going and eventually entered into a trancelike stage. It was far out. I went past boredom and became absorbed in the sound vibration. He sped up the tempo near the end and then stopped. He had a reel-to-reel tape recorder on his right, and he set it up for recording. Then he read a verse from the *Bhagavad-gita* and began lecturing on the topic. I found it difficult to follow his heavy Bengali accent and his insertion of Sanskrit verses. But I was fascinated with what I could pick up. He was speaking of Krishna

as the Supreme Truth and the need to become Krishna conscious. We, who are living in the material world, are all suffering from birth, death, disease and old age. The great necessity for humankind was to take up “*bhakti*, devotional service, and go back to home, back to Godhead.” Chanting the Hare Krishna mantra was the essential practice for approaching Krishna in this age.

After lecturing half an hour he asked for questions and spent fifteen minutes answering them. Then he started up the chanting again and went for another half hour. I had the mantra almost memorized, and I was mesmerized. By the time it was over I felt that I was high. I left the storefront and walked home chanting in my mind and feeling certain that I would continue to attend the meetings. I felt I wanted to change my life and become pure.

BOYHOOD IN QUEENS

I was born at 6:30 p.m. on December 6, 1939, in Queens Hospital, New York City. Astrologically I am a Sagittarius. They are supposed to have a tendency to try to outdo themselves. The birth certificate lists my mother as a housewife with the maiden name of Catherine Sullivan. Her parents were born in Ireland. My father's occupation is listed as deckhand under the name Stephen Guarino. His parents were born in Italy. They were both 29 years old when I was born, and they already had a two-year old daughter, Madeline. The Nazis had already invaded Poland when I was born.

Our family lived in a multi-ethnic neighborhood in Queens. We occupied the second story flat of a three-story apartment building. The landlords were the Campesis who lived on the first floor. Their six-year-old daughter Louise used to greet us on the steps, "You're our favorite tenants." But she tyrannized her father, He would call out to his wife, "Rose! She's going to throw a cup at me!" And then, "Rose, she threw a cup at me!" The Campesis were the object of our constant family jokes. We didn't like living in our crowded noisy block, and my father planned and dreamed of moving to the suburbs.

My first memory in this body is about the time I tried to dress myself without my mother's help. Secretly in a room, I began to put on my underwear and t-shirt. But before I had finished, my mother entered the room and caught me in the act. I became so embarrassed and angry that I burst into hysterical tears and threw myself on the bed.

I spent a lot of time playing with the kids on the street. There were lots of kids, and they were always outside. We played Ringalevio (a variation on hide-and-seek), and War. For War we drew circles and shapes in chalk on the road. Then we wrote the name of a country inside the shape, like Germany, Russia, Japan, etc. A boy (girls played separately) would say, "I declare war on — Germany!" and then throw the ball down in the circle of that country's name. A designated boy had to run after the ball and catch it. Once he caught it, everyone had to stop running. Then he would throw the ball at a boy who had been designated as Germany. Is that how it went? I don't remember now. Maybe he had to throw it at any boy he could hit. Then there would be a repeated, "I declare war on — Japan!" A ball would be thrown down on the Japan circle and everyone would run away. The homes had several steps in the front, and they would be used for another ball game, resembling baseball. A pink Spalding ball would be thrown against the steps, and it would bounce back, and the kids would try to catch it without its bouncing, and the thrower would try to make it bounce over everyone's head for a home run. In our neighborhood we played marbles a lot. One boy would shoot a marble by ejecting it between his thumb and forefinger to hit another boy's marble. If he hit it, he kept it. Some boys brought out casinos, cardboard shoeboxes with a few rectangle holes cut in them. They then let other boys shoot their marbles at the box from a designated distance. If the marble went into the hole the boy won an extra marble. If he missed, then he lost his marble. My father made me a deluxe marble box out of wood. He had a few power tools and could make things. He painted the words "Marble Heaven" on the box and smoothed the holes. It was the best box on 76th Street, but the other boys thought it was too sophisticated and big and didn't like to play with it.

There were also fights on the street, some of them spontaneous and some of them arranged. Once two grown up kids around sixteen years old said they wanted to see two of us smaller kids

fight. They were like young mobsters, and you had to do what they wanted. They picked me and another kid, both of us around seven years old to fight. I was small and skinny for my age. I had straight blond hair and big hazel eyes. Neither of us wanted to fight, but we had to. Some kids gathered to watch. We started wrestling, grabbing at each others' hands and wrists, then trying to make neck holds and pushing each other to the ground. Out of fear and fighting spirit, I put everything I had into the bout. After a few minutes I had pushed the other kid to the ground and grabbed him in a neck choke hold. He gave up. The older teenagers expressed their approval and let us go. I ran from the group and sped down the length of the street until I was home.

MY FIRST QUESTION

My first personal contact with Srila Prabhupada was in a formal setting — the question and answer period after his lecture. In the company of about fifteen people I raised my hand, and he recognized me. I asked, “Is misery eternal?” My question came from my reading of Van Gogh’s letters to his brother, *Dear Theo*. In one letter Van Gogh proposes to his brother that “misery is eternal.” I wanted to know what the Swami thought. Without hesitating he answered me, “Yes misery is eternal. You may break your arm and go to the hospital and have your arm healed. But then you may go out and break your leg. In this world there is no end to miseries. But there is another world . . .” Swamiji explained that if you develop love of God and go back to the spiritual world you will be free of miseries, because there is no misery there. I was satisfied to be recognized, and his answer was assuring, overriding Van Gogh’s dismal view.

We called him Swamiji. Two years later he admitted to us that Swamiji was a third class way to address the spiritual master. Generally a pure devotee is addressed as Guru Maharaj, Gurudeva, Vishnupada or Prabhupada. His secretary Govinda Dasi asked,

“May we call you Prabhupada?” And he said, “Yes.” But in the beginning when we were calling him Swamiji it was sweet. There was nothing third class about our affection for him. Swamiji was accessible. He sat in his room, but you could go in and see him and talk to him. On nights when there were no lectures a whole roomful might stay with him upstairs and hear him speak Krishna consciousness and about ordinary things too. We would ask him about his childhood and his life in India, and he would tell stories. He would smile and laugh. At first we didn’t have much idea that we were supposed to render service to the guru. He cooked lunch and served a dozen men and soon one girl, in his room. Then after lunch the crowd would leave, and he would be left to clean the dishes. But soon they caught on. He taught Keith how to cook, and Keith taught Chuck. The devotees cleaned up after lunch. He gave me the service of typing manuscripts because I was the only one who knew how to type or the only one who volunteered. I loved typing for him. Howard was an English professor, and he edited the Swami’s manuscripts which the Swami had typed himself in India, the Second and Third Cantos of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Then I would type the edited manuscripts.

My first private question was in his room when no one else was present. I asked him, “Is there a spiritual advancement you can make from which you don’t fall down?” “Yes,” he answered and he didn’t elaborate. Just that solemn “yes” was enough. I had been trying to stop masturbation. I’d be able to refrain for some weeks, but then I’d do it again. But from that first night I attended the first class I was able to stop that habit for good. And from the first night I was able to stop my firmly entrenched habit of smoking marijuana. It was changing my life around completely. He had stepped into my life and changed my history.

world war II

My two-year-old kiddy birthday party was interrupted by news that the Japanese had made a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. I can't remember my emotions from that day. Certainly the little celebration was stopped, and the grown-ups stayed listening to the news on the radio. The United States would enter World War II. Daddy would go to war. He left soon after Pearl Harbor and didn't return until the war was over. I am writing this autobiography at seventy-one years old in 2011, and so much of my early life is a blank to me. As I grew up I sometimes tried to speculate what it meant to be without a father for so many formative young years. Did it make me less manly, a mamma's boy? Just to give a single instance, my mother was hysterically afraid of mice. She was like Olive Oyl, Popeye's cartoon girlfriend who screeches, "EEEEK!" and jumps on a chair at the sight of a mouse. I would see her react that way. As a result, I developed mouse phobia too, and never lost it even as I grew up. I lived with a woman who was lonely for her husband, and although not suffering any horrors of war, was living during a time of war rations, constant propaganda of the vicissitudes of the battles, and always praying for the return of her

husband. I used to tag along with her, without a father. We would go shopping to the “city line,” the division between Brooklyn and Queens, and I remember going in and out of every store with her. She would go to the movies and take me and my sister with her. Sometimes the movies were scary. I would sit on her right side and with my left hand I would hold on to the fat part of her arm while with my right hand I sucked my thumb. I continued to suck my thumb past the usual age for giving it up. We saw a film called *The Snake Pit* which was about an insane asylum, and there was a scene with a pit of snakes and a scene with a woman on the roof of the asylum threatening to jump. I was so scared I tried hiding from the picture, but my mother would whisper to me, “It’s only a movie.” Another film we saw was *Gaslight*. A man tries to drive his wife insane by turning down the gas lamps at random times, and she doesn’t know what’s happening, and he says the lamps aren’t turning down. You see her fear close up — the wife was played by beautiful Ingrid Bergman — and the cracking of her sanity. The hero played by Joseph Cotten finally rescues her. “It’s only a movie.”

Christmas was particularly sad and lonely during the war. Our older cousins Ray and his wife Fay came to our apartment and my Aunt Mary, whose husband was in the Navy. The photographs of us gathered around a light-bulbed tree look more like a vigil than a party. We went to midnight mass and prayed for the victory of the Allies. Bing Crosby sang, “I’ll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams,” and the Andrews Sisters sang, “Don’t sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me, till I come marching home.”

The end of the war was a tremendous joyful celebration in our neighborhood. There were many block parties with the streets closed to traffic by police wooden horses with lanterns hanging on them. Every house distributed homemade food and delicacies, and there were barrels of beer and free soda at different locations. They were held at night, and we kids stayed up and ran wildly from home to home eating sandwiches and drinking soda. It was euphoric. Loud speakers were set up and neighbors sang with amateurish voices and records played Bing Crosby, the Andrews Sisters and other favorites. Couples danced in the streets. People kissed and embraced.

The night my father came home was blissful. In Hawaii he had made a recording in a booth and mailed it to us. He said he loved

us and would be bringing home a big bag of dirty laundry. The first night he returned, an extra bed was set up in the living room, I don't know why. Maybe my mother had no double bed. It was a bed with an iron frame and a gray blanket. My sister and I went to sleep in our separate beds, and my mother and father slept together for the first time in a long time. I looked through my father's luggage. He had conch shells from Hawaii, heavy millimeter gun shells and a photo of a naked woman with pubic hair. (I don't think he wanted me to see the picture of the woman but it was there in the suitcase.) Daddy was very handsome and strong and affectionate to each of us. He worked out with the boxing gloves and me. We went outside and had a catch with a baseball and baseball glove. At one point my father turned his head while catching the ball and knocked his smoking pipe against a telephone pole. It was embarrassing, but he was my hero.

THE EARLY YEARS

The early years with Swamiji were my favorite as ISKCON was a small movement, like a family. At first we thought that he was going to stay permanently in New York City and maintain only one temple. Here's what Brahmananda said when he heard that Swamiji was going to San Francisco to open a second temple: "But we were shocked that he was going to leave. I never thought that Krishna consciousness would go beyond the Lower East Side, what to speak of New York City. I thought that this was it, and it would stay here eternally." (*Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta, Planting the Seed*, Chapter 10) When he went to San Francisco and left us alone at Twenty-six Second Avenue, he wrote us a very touching and illuminating letter explaining that were serving him in separation. Serving in separation was even higher than serving the spiritual master in his personal presence. Besides, he returned to New York in three months. A few new temples opened but it was still like a family, and you could expect to see him regularly. The Swami had said "the hippies are our best customers," and this was another feature of the movement in the beginning. The hippy movement was widespread, and they were favorable to to the Hare Krishna

people. In 1969, ten thousand people, mostly hippies, attended the Ratha-yatra festival at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Many marched with the carts for five miles and others were waiting at the Family Dog Auditorium. The hippies dressed up especially for the occasion and took part with Swamiji in chanting Hare Krishna and feasting on Krishna *prasadam*. We were beloved to the counter-culture. That changed when the hippy movement died out, and ISKCON also became more of an institution.

In 1967 the Swami suffered a stroke and returned to India for six months to recover. When he came back to America he was more delicate and not so hearty. He stopped playing the *mrdanga* drum because it was too strenuous for him. Physically he remained beautiful in his features, but he was weakened. We realized it was our duty to protect him from overworking, which included informal talks with his disciples. He continued his scheduled pace of writing the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in the early hours, and at the doctor's advice took a daily walk in the morning and received a full massage before lunch. I shouldn't exaggerate the reduction of his working capacity. He continued and expanded his world travels, entered into managerial stress to construct three big temples in India and lectured daily and met with disciples and guests daily. But when he first arrived among us, he would chant three hours outdoors on Sundays in Tompkins Square Park. He was virile and almost didn't seem to be an old old man. But these things gradually changed. He never stopped giving his full, available energy to Krishna's service and the expansion of a world religious movement.

Swamiji appointed Brahmananda as temple president, Gargamuni as treasurer and me as secretary. I had to witness and approve of all the requests for expenditures before Gargamuni could release any money. The Swami saw my files and asked me to improve them. Just before he left for San Francisco we started negotiations for the purchase of a new building. A friend of the movement had donated five thousand dollars, and we had banked it. The Swami gave Brahmananda the power to withdraw the money. Brahmananda met a real estate man, Mr. Paine, who said he would help us to get a nice building which the Swami had seen. But complications arose. Mr. Paine said if we gave him the five thousand dollars he could get us ownership and entrance to the building. Brahmananda was very impressed with Mr. Paine and so

was Kirtanananda (who had been called Keith before initiation). Brahmananda phoned Swamiji in San Francisco for permission to take out the money. Swamiji, in consultation with devotees in San Francisco, said a formal contract would have to be arranged first. Mr. Paine said that sort of contract “went out with hoop skirts” and it wasn’t necessary. Swamiji wrote a personal letter to me, Satsvarupa Dasa, and said he had given Brahmananda permission to spend the money on the condition that everything be done rightly. I was one of the signers on the checks, and I should see that not a farthing was spent or given to Mr. Paine unless we had the contract. Communications were going back and forth erratically between Brahmananda and Swamiji and Mr. Paine and Brahmananda. Brahmananda and Kirtanananda convinced me that Swamiji had approved the spending, and I signed the check. We were immediately in trouble because Mr. Paine said the owner would not sell the house, and we couldn’t get our money back.

Swamiji wrote me a letter and said we were all foolish boys and had been tricked by the clever agents of Maya. Our fault was that we had disobeyed his order. If I had not signed the check and if Brahmananda had not given the money to Mr. Paine we would have been obedient to our spiritual master and not lost our money. He said that we must not stay idle but get a lawyer and sue Mr. Paine and the owner of the building in this clear conspiracy case. Soon after this, the Swami himself returned to New York City and personally confronted Mr. Paine and threatened him with legal action. Mr. Paine caved in and returned our money, but we lost a thousand dollars to a lawyer. The Swami bore no grudge against us but told us to be very careful in the future since we were innocent boys and the world was full of cheaters. We were relieved to get most of the money back — we never got the house — and that the Swami was not angry with US.

p.s. 8 GREAT KILLS

With the aid of the GI Bill of Rights my father got money to buy a plot of land on Staten Island and start building a house. He hired a construction crew but worked along with them when he had time off from the fire house. After some months I went out and visited the place. It was near the house of Grandma Doty, the mother-in-law of my mother's sister. Grandma Doty was very old and sat in a rocking chair in a quiet house with a loud ticking clock. She didn't make much contact. She had bad body odor and to me she smelled of death. But the neighborhood she lived in was very nice. It was in the town of Great Kills, Staten Island, which was a borough of New York City but at that time was countrified. There were plenty of fields of weeds and blackberry bushes. There were a few houses on each block, but it wasn't a crowded population. During my one day visit I found just one boy to play with. He wore no shirt and had a wooden knife in his belt. I fashioned a wooden knife for myself, and we ran through the fields making believe we were cowboys and Indians. The house they were building was a Cape Cod white house with an unfinished second floor. It didn't have much land surrounding it, but in the front yard there were two tall

oak trees and a big rock like the rock of Gibraltar. My father worked hard to make it nice. In 1948 it cost only \$3,000.00.

I remember the day we left 76th Street and Atlantic Avenue in Queens. I spent the morning with a group of boys sitting on some front house steps and reading comic books. We had a big collection among us and silently read them and then traded with a boy for another. One of the boys casually remarked, "You're moving away today?" And I said yes. Not much else was said.

I entered the fourth grade at P.S. 8 in mid-term. For the fourth grade there was one teacher for all the subjects. Miss Williams, a pleasant woman, made me stand up in front of the class and she introduced me. I was the second shortest kid in the class, taller than Charlie Joseph who became a class friend. I was a little embarrassed by my hard-to-pronounce Italian last name. But there was an assortment of nationalistic European names, and there was no prejudice against me for being Italian. There was a tall good-looking boy named Donald McCleary who was not a good scholar, but I looked up to him and sought his friendship. The best athlete was Stevie Rogers, but he was humble and quiet. From the beginning my tendency was to hang out with the kids who were not good scholars and who were even disobedient. I did not like being seen as a "brown-nose" or one who is always trying to play the goody-goody. This hurt my academic career all through until the third year in high school. There were some pretty girls in the fourth grade class, but I was too shy to consider any relationship with them. Besides, I was so short.

The first thing I remember learning in class was that all human beings need food, clothing and shelter. Miss Williams wrote the words on the blackboard with chalk. One day she also wrote the word FORGET in big letters and then drew many arrows pointing at it. She was annoyed with us for forgetting our assignments. After writing the word, she later pulled a world map over that section of the blackboard. Only on the last day of the year did she lift up the world map and the word FORGET with all the arrows was still there. We all had a laugh at that. I remember the first day of school. It was raining when school let out. My mother was waiting for me with a raincoat and two umbrellas. I didn't know the way home by myself, and she barely knew it herself. She walked me home and continued to meet me after school for a few

days until my sister and I both knew the way. Soon I knew all the parts of Great Kills and could get there by myself.

There were new games to learn in Great Kills. One was with chestnuts. There were many chestnut trees, and in the fall their handsome shiny nuts fell to the ground. A boy would pick a shiny-looking chestnut and bore a hole down the center of it. Then he threaded a string through the hole and tied a big knot at the other end. A boy would hold out his chestnut on a long string and another boy would grip his own chestnut and swing it hard at the other chestnut trying to smash it. Whichever chestnut broke was the loser. Some boys had chestnuts that smashed six other chestnuts. They were called "Six Killers." Stevie Rogers had a "Ten Killer." I refined my chestnut skills with the help of my father. He would make the hole in the chestnut with a hand drill. After fixing the string, I would soak the chestnut in oil for a whole year before bringing it out for battle. The stronger chestnut was capable of cracking new season's nuts. Some of the boys thought my nuts were "loaded" and that I was cheating, but others played with me and I had a higher rate of killers, but I could never beat Stevie Rogers because a lot of the game was in the skill of how you actually swung your nut at the other one.

Another game was flipping baseball cards. This was real gambling. Baseball cards, with pictures of players on them, were in bubble gum packs that you bought. A boy's collection was precious to him. But we gambled with each other by flipping the cards and trying to match the other boys' cards either heads up or heads down. In low stakes games a boy would flip just one of his cards, and you flipped your card in an over and over motion trying to match his card whether it was heads up or heads down. Some boys dared high stakes games where they would flip six cards down and the challenger had to exactly match them or he would lose all his cards. Another bubble gum company ran a series of "The Red Menace — The Children's Crusade Against Communism." These pictures were anti-Communist propaganda showing labor camps in Siberia, pictures of MIG jets, etc. with written propaganda on the back side. Boys collected these cards, but they didn't engender enough interest for flip card gambling. Baseball heroes were the real currency.

Every morning before class began the boys would play a kind of baseball game on a patch of asphalt that was just outside "the old

building.” (P.S. 8 consisted of a conglomeration of brick buildings and one old building made of wood which was still in use and where Miss Williams had her class.) The ball game was played on a baseball diamond with three bases and a home plate. A pink Spalding ball was thrown up by the batter, and he used his fist like a baseball bat to punch the ball. Most of the rules were like a baseball game. If someone could hit the ball over the roof of the old building, it was a home run. If he hit the old building and someone caught it before it hit the ground, that was an out. Stevie Rogers was the only one who could consistently hit home runs over the roof of the old building. I was a pretty good fielder. I could catch and hold on to a ball hit my way at a fast speed. I could field ground balls and catch rebounds off the old building and throw runners out before they reached first base. I was respected for this. I was not such a good hitter. I never hit a home run. I often hit the building or hit a ground ball. It was a great sport, and we all enjoyed it very much.

Sometimes during the game a quarrel would start. The boys would declare that the two boys would have to meet in the woods after school and have a fight. Once the judgment was made they couldn't get out of it. After school most of the boys would gather in the nearby woods to watch the fight. It was usually a wrestling match, and one boy would get another in a painful hold and make him give up. One time Donald McCleary had a quarrel with Buddy Johnson. Buddy kept to himself whereas Donald McCleary was a kind of show-off. But the fight was a shocking surprise. Instead of wrestling, Buddy started fisted punches at Donald's face. Donald was soon bleeding from the nose, and all the boys stopped the fight. The outcome took the wind out of McCleary's sails. He was not looked up to as much after that, and everyone kept a respectful distance from Buddy Johnson. One day they rigged a fight between me, and George Kochmann, even though we hadn't quarreled. They just wanted to see us fight, and we had to do it. Neither of us were very strong so it was a fair match. All day George and I waited nervously for the fight. As with the fight when I was a little boy in Queens, I threw myself into it wholeheartedly. After a few minutes I pushed George Kochmann to the ground and put him in a neck hold that made him give up. I was no Buddy Johnson, but at least I had beat up George Kochmann.

One day a neighborhood friend named Phil asked me if I ever did shooting. I didn't know what he meant until he explained masturbation. I was thirteen years old and had not reached puberty. I became worried that something was wrong with me. That night at the dinner table I asked my father if I could speak to him after the meal. He had finished off the two unfinished upper rooms into bedrooms for my sister and me, and we talked in my bedroom. I put on a pair of dark glasses and asked him how come I couldn't shoot. He thought I was talking of guns and said I was too young. I explained to him what Phil meant by shooting, and my father was surprised. He assured me that this would come to me in time and that when it did come I should not go crazy with it. He also told me not to tell my mother that we had had this conversation. A few months later I reached puberty, and I did not go crazy with it.

My friend Charlie Joseph was two train stops away from Great Kills in the town called New Dorp. He knew two girls our age who were willing to have sex. They were not only willing but they were aggressive about it. One of them was his girlfriend, and she resented the fact that he had not had sexual intercourse with her. She thought it showed that he did not love her. One day he brought these two girls to Great Kills. Some of us boys were having a casual game of baseball at the Little League Field nearby P.S. 8. The girls sat in the dugout and watched us. The pitcher threw me a soft pitch, and I hit a line drive over the fence which was the regulated Little League distance for home runs. I had hit my first home run! I trotted around the bases proud to have done it in front of these two girls. After the game Charlie asked me if I wanted to go to New Dorp with him and the girls. Out of moral considerations I said no. Because of my Catholic upbringing I did not want to indulge in sex.

I remember the swami

I remember the Swami. I remember entering his room and being the only one present and making full five-pointed *dandavats* before him — head (nose and chin), shoulders, outstretched arms, hands on the floor, stomach and hips on the floor, knees and shins and toes on the floor. That is full *dandavats*, and it is more than five points of the body touching the floor. And the mind is the important thing. I would focus my mind on, “I surrender to you, I give my life to you, I will do whatever you order. I love you.” I would sincerely think like that. Those were good days. I should hope that if I can meet Prabhupada again, I will be able to surrender to him like that.

He never gave me orders that were repugnant to me. He never told me to become temple president of New Delhi or to go to West Africa. He knew my limits. The one disagreement we had was that he wanted me to remain as his personal traveling secretary and servant in 1974, and I wanted to go out preaching independently with my own party. That got resolved when he himself got to talking about the need for a party to go out and distribute his books to college libraries. I was present in his room

and I said “I’ll go,” and he immediately said “Then go.” He was aware it meant leaving my post as his servant and secretary. A few days later — maybe the next day — he asked me at the beginning of the message if Rupanuga Prabhu could take charge of the library party. I honestly said no, he couldn’t do it. He wouldn’t be inclined to travel all over the United States living in vans with *brahmacaris* and distributing books. But the fact that he suggested Rupanuga shows that he was thinking if there was a way he could have the library party, but I could stay as his servant that would be good. I couldn’t lie to him about Rupanuga, and I didn’t know of anyone else who could do the job. After all, the main distributors who were already doing this work were *my* team. Even Hridayananda Maharaj who was with them then, was too whimsical to methodically go throughout the United States and stop at every college and university. Besides I *wanted* to do it so I think I stuck with his verbal permission for me to go. I was stubborn and self-serving, but for a good cause. Prabhupada didn’t live to regret it. He got a dedicated library party with sober leadership, and Brahmananda Swami was easily able to leave Africa and join him as a competent secretary. Of Brahmananda Swami he said, “He likes my company.”

I was glad to get out of visiting India for long periods, where there was no good yogurt and no cottage cheese. I was glad to be in the company of “my” *brahmacaris*. I was relieved to be free of the menial role of following Prabhupada into the temple holding his *karatalas* and eye glasses and handing them to him and sitting to hear all his lectures. I wanted to be able to report to him, like his other *sannyasis*, of preaching adventures done in his name.

We worked for him, distributing his books, getting professors to write favorable reviews, and reporting this to Prabhupada for his pleasure. We served him in separation and lived on his letters expressing his satisfaction.

Does this mean that I didn’t like living with Srila Prabhupada? No. I saw him every year at the Mayapur Gaura Purmima festival, and I traveled to temples he visited such as Denver and Los Angeles and New York. I traveled to India and England for a month in 1973 and again in 1977 to be his temporary secretary. I lasted six months as his servant and secretary when he called me to be with him in 1974. And I visited him three times during his final illness and disappearance in 1977. I couldn’t live with him

permanently and continuously, but I always engaged in his service full time.

tottenville high school

I graduated from P.S. 8 without honors and entered Tottenville High School which was a fifteen minute walk plus a half hour bus ride away. It was at the southern tip of Staten Island. The freshman classes were divided into 57-1 through 57-4, 57 being our graduating year and 57-1 being the class for the brightest students and 57-4 for the slowest students. I was placed in the brightest group, 57-1. But there were naughty kids even in 57-1, and I sought them out rather than the company of the honor roll goody-goodies. The most naughty boy in 57-1 was Ned Finley. But he was the most popular and secretly looked up to by almost everyone. Even the teachers liked him and sympathized with him. He didn't have a father. One of the teachers, Miss Eagen, once went to dine at his house to talk to Ned and his mother and try to reform him. But he didn't reform. When we were seniors, Ned was voted the most popular and the best dancer of the senior class. I tried to be his friend. He accepted my good-natured joking with him and appreciated if I did something naughty in the classroom. He was good-looking and strong and wore his black hair in a slick "duck's ass" style. Once when I was playfully sparring with him he slapped

me real hard on the cheek. I was physically pained and emotionally shocked. I realized that I couldn't assume to spar with Ned Finley without getting a possible violent reaction. With that punch he showed me that he was a real fighter and didn't have to tolerate little kid's stuff. I was hurt in my friendship with him and kept more distant. He was the tough guy of 57-1.

One day before the class began I heard the boy behind me singing a song from Alan Freed's rock and roll radio show, "I just want a little girl to love." I turned with surprise and started singing along with the boy. This was my introduction to John Young who became one of my closest friends. He was a shy, cynical person with a high IQ who used to make mocking sounds during the class session and annoy the teachers. But he always got high grades on his exams. He lived in Tottenville so it was inconvenient to meet with him after school when I had to travel home, but we started meeting on weekends, either Friday or Saturday nights at his house or my house. His house was better because the delicatessen would sell us a six-pack of beer even though we were under age, and we would sit in the suburban woods and drink beer and sing songs from Alan Freed and talk freely about our lives. We sang sincerely, "Why don't you write me baby, send me a letter. I love you, and it's you I adore . . ." We talked about the good-looking girls at school although we lacked the courage to ask them for dates. We talked about whether God existed and how He could be known. We talked about everything and anything until about 11 o'clock, and then I would catch the train back to Great Kills. Sometimes we were joined by Wyn Burgraff, another 57-1 boy, who was the adopted son of a Dutch reformed minister. He was like-minded and joined in all the topics and songs with verve and open-mindedness. We regularly stood and peed and returned to drinking beer. I didn't like the taste of beer and would sneakily pour some of it on the leaves of the forest floor. But I drank enough to get drunk.

I took five subjects the first term. I did all right in all of them except algebra. I couldn't catch on to the formulas. I asked my father to help me with the homework, but he didn't have time or he couldn't do algebra himself. In a pitiful gesture I went up to Dr. Carrol the algebra teacher and posed my plight to him. I said, "I'm doing all right in all my subjects but algebra. Can you help me?" Dr. Carrol was a sarcastic man. He said, "What do you have to do

in your other subjects? They are all easy. What do you do in English? Spell cat ... c-a-t? Algebra requires some brains." I realized I was making a lame proposal to him by saying algebra was difficult. He just wanted me to work harder. But I thought I couldn't do it. You were allowed to carry only four subjects a semester so I decided to drop algebra, which I was failing anyway. It was a humbling experience for a 57-1 kid to drop a subject, but I thought it was realistic.

Spanish was a little difficult but I was managing, and Mr. Mattei was a good teacher. He spoke Castilian Spanish, not South American. When it came to exercises where he read Spanish out loud and we had to write it down, he spoke with such exaggerated clarity of pronunciation that it was easy to write it correctly. Mr. Mattei walked with a mincing effeminate gait. He had a little trouble disciplining his class. If he left the room for a minute all hell would break loose. The kids would shout and scream at the top of their lungs until he had to come running back red-faced and angry. There was a friendly girl in his class named Kathy Swanson. She liked to play around as "one of the boys." She was well-built and would wear sweaters that emphasized her shapely breasts. One day John Young asked Mr. Mattei, "What is the Spanish word for *built*, as in well built?" Mr. Mattei said "*belta*." From then on Kathy Swanson was called Belta and the boys would sometimes call it out in class, "Belta! Belta!"

Miss Egan controlled her class in discipline and taught French with lots of emphasis on grammar. Once she was in charge of a large group of kids who were in the auditorium rehearsing some program. I was clowning around in the back of the hall, and she caught me. She called my name and made me walk the whole distance of the auditorium to come down to where she was in the front. She called my name, "Mr. Guarino!" When I reached her she said sternly, "Do your parents allow you to behave this way at home?" I flushed and became humiliated. It was an indirect criticism of my parents, or it could be taken that way. I said, "No they don't." "Then don't act that way here," she said. It somehow had a devastating effect on me, one of the most expert jabs I ever received from a teacher. I managed to pass two terms of French and two of Spanish. In English I was put in with slower kids, maybe as a punishment for dropping algebra. I have very little memory of what went on in that class. After two years of wasting

my time academically in high school, I woke up. I heard the bright kids talking about what college they wanted to go to and realized I couldn't get into college with my poor grades. My parents could not afford to send me to college so my only alternative was the city college system, CCNY or Brooklyn College. But you needed good grades to get into them. So in my last two years at Tottenville, I started to get good grades. I wasn't doing well in geometry, but I bought a book with examples of New York Regent's exams and studied it intensely. I saw Mr. Walman in the hallway a day after the exam and he said, "A beautiful exam Stephen." I scored 94% and that boosted my yearly grade to a B. In American history, I truly liked the subject and got high grades all year. After the Regent's exam Mr. Speranza announced to the class that for the first time in his experience a student had scored 100% on the Regent's exam. He said it was my paper, and he asked me to read it to the class. I happily read my short answers and essays. Then he asked me to read a six-point essay that I had not read yet. I looked frantically through my exam but I couldn't find it. It was an easy question, but I had left it out. I almost wanted to ask him if I could answer it orally on the spot. But he reduced my grade to 94% and lowered my yearly grade to 90%. The other kids were probably glad, but I was devastated. When they gave out awards at graduation, they said they considering giving me an award for social studies for the good work I did the last two years, but they decided Mary Jane Connor's grades were higher and they gave her the award.

At the last minute I got a date for the senior prom. The school had a newspaper, and they ran a comic quiz each week. They made a comment and the answer to it was the title of a Hollywood movie. They had the statement "doesn't have a date for the senior prom," and the movie was "An American Tragedy." This jibe made me determined. I phoned a cute freshman girl named Linda Grant and asked her if she would go to the prom with me. I had an advantage; I was a senior and she was a freshman. She accepted my offer. Her sister Elaine was a fellow basketball cheerleader with my sister. I didn't drive a car and wasn't old enough so my father drove me to her house and took us to the country club. I wore the typical white tux jacket and black pants, and she was dressed nicely in a formal way. I was not a good dancer, but I had practiced with my sister, and I managed not to step too much on Linda's toes.

After the dance we went with Stevie Rogers and his date to a corny place in Greenwich Village called “The Village Barn” where they played country music. We all managed to get served liquor, and I had a few Seagrams 7’s and 7-Ups while the girls had drinks called Pink Ladies. On the Staten Island ferry on the way home I managed to kiss her clumsily, but she wasn’t much interested and didn’t give me a goodnight kiss. I avoided the American Tragedy, but it was pretty much a bust. A week later I phoned Linda for a date, but she said she had a prior commitment. I handled that poorly, and she indicated that she didn’t want to see me again.

My much aspired for application to Brooklyn College was turned down for insufficient grades. What to do now? I resented the fact that my parents couldn’t afford the tuition to a few colleges that did accept me. Then my parents saw a notice in the Staten Island Advance that a free two-year “community college” was opening on Staten Island in the fall. It would award an associate degree which would automatically allow you to enter into Brooklyn College or CCNY. It felt like a real letdown, but I had no alternative. For some reason John Young had decided to go there, although he had been offered a Fulbright scholarship, so I would have some companionship. A local boy named Phil Backoff was also attending as a technology student.

The wallflower

I'm going to elaborate on my shyness. I have already told of my last-ditch attempt to get a date for the senior prom. But that was in my final semester as a senior. It took me four years to get up the bravery to do it and the desire to avoid the stigma of being the American tragedy. I'm going to break the chronology regularly as I have promised in my plan for this autobiography so I'll now speak of being a wallflower in high school. I have promised B. to tell this and he keeps asking me "have you told about being a wallflower yet?" So I shall get to it without further delay.

I would attend the October dance, the Christmas dance and the spring dance, but I wouldn't ask a girl for a single dance. I stood at the fringe of the dance floor or against the wall. I made exchanges of a little talk with other wallflowers. I would go for a soda. I would stand near the band and listen to the music. But I didn't ask anyone for a dance. I would go downstairs several times a night and use the toilet. I would watch the time hands pass on the big clock hoping they would go faster. I didn't leave the dance early, but stayed the whole tortuous time until it was about 11 o'clock. Then I would leave, mingling with the other kids and go to the bus

stop. I would engage in conversations. But I was a flat wallflower afraid of stepping on girls' shoes. Going to basketball games was easier. You sat in the bleachers and cheered when 6'2" Barry Johnson sunk a shot off the backboard. There was no dancing, and you might exchange a little conversation with a girl. You weren't alone, not with a date. After the game you went to the cafeteria with the other kids and had a hamburger and a Coca-Cola and then you went home. Going to a baseball game was even easier. It was in the afternoon, and you sat on a bench and cheered. At Brooklyn College there were no varsity sports at all, and I don't even know if there were dances, but I felt no pressure to attend any of it. I just left class and commuted one and a half hours to Great Kills. I didn't go to the cafeteria where boys and girls mixed. I just stopped at the *Landscapes* office and read some submissions and talked casually with some of the other editors, including girls. So it was easier to be a non-mixer at college.

Later in this narrative I shall be able to tell of an exception to my shyness. But I have made the confessions of a wallflower. John Young was smarter and more realistic than I was. He was even shyer, but he just stayed at home and didn't feel any pressure to attend the dances. I should have done that and not put myself through so much torture, pretending to be attending the dance when in my heart I didn't want to be there at all.

understanding krishna

This Autobiography is not a Prabhupada memoir per se. I have written many volumes of memories of Prabhupada, and I am not going to deliberately research them and use them again. I want to use Mark Twain's method of writing down what is presently occupying my thoughts when I go to write and follow the trail where it leads me. I am committed to Krishna consciousness, however, and so I will steer to Krishna and steer to Prabhupada.

Presently at lunchtime B. is reading *Srimad-Bhagavatam* First Canto, Eleventh Chapter, "Lord Krishna's Entrance to Dvaraka." We are near the end of the chapter. Sukadeva Goswami has been speaking about the fact that Krishna had 16,108 wives. They were all very beautiful but their alluring charms did not disturb Krishna's senses. He is *atmarama*, self-satisfied or complete in Himself. Then why did He take on so many wives and live with them like a submissive, loving husband? Because He was reciprocating with their desire to render Him service. It was an exchange of pure devotional service. The queens were always thinking of Krishna and worshiping His lotus feet. He was always satisfying their desires. But everything in their relationship was

transcendental and not tinged with mundane sexology. Those who are philosophical impersonalists or lusty materialists cannot understand the relationship of Krishna and His queens in Dvaraka or the *gopis* of Vraja. We are asked to accept Krishna's inconceivable potency and His inconceivable nature in order to appreciate His *madhurya-lila* pastimes with the queens and *gopis*. It may take one millions of lifetimes before he becomes purified to understand the *rasas* with Krishna. If, however, one contacts a pure devotee and renders him service, starting with hearing and chanting Krishna's names, qualities and pastimes, he can quickly make advancement and come to understand and serve the Lord and His consorts.

THE FOUR GUARINOS

My father read the newspaper or a magazine and sat in an upholstered green rocking chair smoking a Dutch Master cigar which sent circles of smoke around his head. Dinner was around 6 p.m., and we all sat together for a typical American meal with spaghetti and meatballs on Wednesday. When I was twelve I discovered disc jockey Alan Freed who invented the words “Rock and Roll” and played rhythm and blues and banged along on a telephone book to the top 25 rock and roll hits. I listened on the radio in my room. The ballad “Earth Angel” by the Penguins was #1 for three months. Then Elvis Presley entered this scene, and I bought all his records on my allowance money.

At first we had no TV, and we used to go and watch it at our next door neighbor’s house, the Johnsons’. Ray Johnson was a tugboat captain, and he hunted with a bow and arrow for a hobby. We watched *The Milton Berle Show* which began with a chorus line of male gas station attendants who sang, “We’re the men of Texaco, we work from Maine to Mexico . . . Tonight we might be showmen, tomorrow we’ll be servicing your car. And now, here’s Milty!” And wacky Milton Berle would enter, with buck teeth and

absurd costume and an opening musical skit. Grave Walter Cronkite with the news. Deadpan cop Jack Webb in *Dragnet*. Lucy and Desi in *I Love Lucy*. There was limited fare. Eventually we got our own 12-inch television, and I sneaked in some time on Channel 9 watching the Brooklyn Dodgers games. A Sunday night favorite was *The Colgate Comedy Hour* which often featured Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. The four Guarinos sat on a “loveseat” eating snacks and watching about two hours of television a night. Then I kissed my mother who smelled of cold cream and shook my father’s hand and said goodnight. Goodnight to Madeline too.

Our dog Mickie had moved with us to Staten Island. He lived next to the gas burner on the first floor. We allowed him to go out of the house without a leash, and he wandered far. He trotted to the village, and the butcher would feed him scraps of meat from the back of his store. He was not a big dog but mingled with dogs his size. He stayed away from big dogs. He was full of pep and enthusiasm. If he was left in the house alone for the day, he would go wild with the joy of reunion when a family member returned, barking and jumping and begging for a dog biscuit.

going out with the swami

Sometimes we went out to programs with Swamiji. Once in the late summer of 1966 we were invited to take part in a prayer meeting, along with other religious groups, at the United Nations building uptown. The Swami looked beautiful in his full *sannyasi* outfit and about ten of us went with him, dressed in casual civilian clothes and unshaved heads. A director of the prayer meeting showed us where to gather outside the U.N. building and asked us to commence praying. But first Swamiji gave a nice lecture in the pleasant morning atmosphere. He spoke on the “peace formula” and said humanity cannot find peace until people recognize and surrender to God. It was a strong message, denouncing humanistic attempts to find peace without Krishna. Then we grasped a few pairs of hand cymbals and began clashing them and singing Hare Krishna. At once, the prayer director rushed up to us and said the prayer vigil had to be *quiet*. We were stunned and disappointed. Why do you invite the Hare Krishna chanters to pray unless you let them chant their famous mantra? Swamiji took it in a cool-headed way and asked us all to sit in a semi circle. By this time we had all strung *japa* beads, mostly red wooden ones bought at

Tandy's bead store. Under our guru's instruction we sat and put our hands into our bead bags. The Swami asked everyone to keep their hands in their bead bags and chant softly. We chanted *japa* for about half an hour and then left the U.N. On the way downtown in a borrowed car, Swamiji said, "They will never have peace unless they chant and give up their sinful activities."

On another occasion our group was invited to the Village Theatre to take part in a political rally for a man named Louis Abolafia who was running for U.S. President on the "peace and love" ticket. He was a young hippy who wore stars stuck to his face and who had rented the Village Theatre for free attendance and entertainment. Rock groups would play, poets would recite poems — and he invited Swami Bhaktivedanta and his followers to chant a *kirtana* for five minutes. When Swamiji entered the Theatre his face became very grave. There was a rock group playing and some people dressed as bananas were dancing on stage. There was a popular myth that if you smoked the inside shards of a banana skin it would get you high like marijuana and these banana-dressed dancers were celebrating this. I had never seen Swamiji's face become so stern as when he witnessed this scene. Soon afterward Louis Abolafia introduced us and the Swami and his group went on stage and chanted the Hare Krishna mantra for about five minutes. The people in the crowded theater applauded, and Swamiji left the hall. As he walked the few blocks from the Village Theatre to Twenty-six Second Avenue he looked up at the theatre billboard, it advertised that "The Fugs" would appear and play.

"What is this Fugs?" Swamiji asked.

"It's just a rock group," one of the boys said and Swamiji was silent. When we returned to Second Avenue he went up to his apartment, and we gathered with him. One of the boys mentioned that Louis Abolafia wasn't even eligible for election because he wasn't thirty-five years old. Swamiji lowered his head and covered his face with his hand. He began laughing to himself. He laughed so hard his body shook. But he considered it worthwhile to be able to chant before so many people.

THE LARGER FAMILY

There was only one person in my family who was an actual Irishman. He was the most colorful individual of all the members of both sides of the family. Since he is single and the Italian-American side is many, I will give you a rundown of the Italian side before speaking of Jimmy Duncan.

I knew my Grandpa briefly. He died when I was about five years old. I remember my Uncle Mickey (the youngest brother) coming down the stairs in Grandpa's house and saying, "Pop is dead." I ran under the dining table and began eating nuts. There was a photo of him carrying me in his arms. I am a two-year-old white-haired boy, and he is a stout white-haired man with a big white mustache and a big belly and a big buckled belt. He spoke only Italian and coddled me as a tot, but we had no deeper relationship. His wife had died fairly young. I never knew her. She had five sons and two daughters, all of whom grew up strong and healthy. The oldest was Uncle Ralph. He was on the wild side. He used to speak about "flying the coop," and he was known for leaving his wife and going on a spree. He wanted his freedom. My father used to say that if Ralph had only been a responsible leader, the five

brothers could have organized themselves into a business, like a trucking business or something. But Ralph didn't provide leadership for the younger brothers. The next oldest was Johnny. He was what we call in Krishna consciousness, "a *sudra*." He was an uneducated laborer who drove a truck and had no talents except to do as he was told by a boss. He was married to a greasy-type Italian-American named Grace, who was a kind of slob, and they had three children. The next oldest was my father. He was a sane, responsible son. When there were fights between Guarino boys and other boys, he did the fighting. He tried to keep the other brothers in line. He and Mickey were the only ones to enter the armed services during the war, and he had the steadiest job, in the New York Fire Department. The next youngest was Mickey, who became a sailor, but then drifted after the war until he finally married and got an office job. He used to entertain at gatherings, stripping down to a hula skirt and imitating a Hawaiian female dancer and standing on a table and imitating Hitler giving a speech. Uncle Jimmy was the youngest. They called him an "anarchist" because he wore his black curly hair long (like Trotsky), and he had unusual interests like opera records and books. He used to play with the nephews and nieces and was affectionate with a corny sense of humor. On the women's side there was Aunt Mary, who was a close friend of my mother's during the war years. She was pretty in an Italian way. She was married to a man named Sal Sessa who was a presser, and they had three children. Finally there was Aunt Josephine, who had two fingers missing from a factory accident. She was stoical and serious. She was married to an Italian-American man and had two daughters. Her husband Joseph, had an Uncle Vincent who spoke only Italian.

On my mother's side, her mother had passed away as well as her father, before I ever met them. She told stories of her mother coming as an immigrant to New York City and working as a laborer washing the steps of office buildings. She had sayings from her mother like "it will be done by God and the strength of my right arm." And "be sure you eat before you go out." All I know of her father was a photo of an effeminate-looking man with a mustache and a fiddle. They had four children. My mother Catherine, her sister Madeline and an older sister Nancy. A boy had been born named Jackie, but he died young. Aunt Madeline was a weak-willed kind of woman who married an unfaithful

husband, my notorious Uncle Irv who my father called “shithead.” Aunt Nancy was the oldest daughter. She was a chain smoker and drank liquor and often hung her mouth open as if she were on a drug. I didn’t like being around Aunt Nancy or having to kiss her.

And then there was Jimmy Duncan. He was not a blood relative but was just introduced to us as “a friend of our mother’s.” He was a fiercely shy, anti-social kind of man. But he flourished in the little circle of my mother and her sisters. My father was friendly to him, and he looked up to my father. He had a red nose and was an alcoholic. He spoke with a strong Irish brogue, and it was the only Irish brogue I heard as I grew up. He worked as a janitor in the toilets on the subway system in New York City and lived by himself. He used the word “friggin” frequently and would exclaim “Can you beat that boy?” He was a gambler on the horses at the race track. He would visit our family around three times a year. When he came he dragged at least two enormous cardboard cartons with him. These were gifts for our family. The cartons were tied in cords, and you could see him struggling down the street dragging them at his side.

He said he used to buy gifts and store them in his locker until it was time to pay us a visit. “God damn! Can you beat that boy?”

He would enter the front door and my father would help him with the cartons. Sometimes Jimmy would spit on the rug. Then with my sister and I in wide-eyed anticipation my father would cut the ropes and open the first box. Mostly they were cheap toys. Trucks, dolls, balls, games, a bottle of sour balls, candy. There were a few bottles of good liquor also. Toy pistols, flags of Ireland, “Erin Go Bragh,” scarves, shirts, ties, sneakers, most of the gifts were for Madeline and me. But the whiskey was for the grown-ups and in the course of the day and evening Jimmy would hand out a couple of hundred dollars to my father. Sometimes Uncle Sal and Aunt Mary were there, and he gave them money also. He complimented Aunt Mary’s good looks and said, “She looks like a two-year-old filly.”

“Those friggin bastards!” He suspected someone had stolen something from the cartons, but it was highly unlikely. There were just so many items that it was hard to keep track of them all. My mother usually fed him eggs that were turned over lightly because that was what he liked to eat. And he drank. And my father and mother drank along with him. He didn’t treat us intimately, he

mainly strew the gifts before us and left it at that. He would say a few things, that my sister was a pretty colleen and I was growing up to be a fine lad, "Can you beat that boy?" But we mostly humored him because there wasn't much you could communicate to him with his brogue and his profanities. We all just made him feel at home and relaxed. His voice would get shrill with expletives as he drank more, but he seemed happy and at home with our family.

And that's the portrait of Jimmy Duncan. He wore green suits and a green hat. He was larger than life. He represented Ireland to us, and he was all that we knew of the Irish. Just one shy, lonely man who worked in the toilets and sometimes hit it big at the track and had a soft spot for my mother who was his connection to her mother, his old friend. "Jeesus Christ! Can you beat that boy?"

ananda ashram

Swamiji took his first group of New York City disciples to Dr. Mishra's New York country place, Ananda Ashram, in 1966. He had been there in 1965 when he was a guest of Dr. Mishra's and had no disciples of his own. There is film footage of him sitting on the floor wearing a short winter jacket about to take *prasadam*. He used to live at Dr. Mishra's ashram on 70th Street in New York City. Now he has his own followers based at 26 Second Avenue, and they were visiting Dr. Mishra at Ananda Ashram. I missed the first ride with Swamiji and came in a second car with Brahmananda. When I arrived Swamiji and some of the boys were sitting at a picnic table having lunch. Swamiji motioned to me. He placed crushed sugar in a *chapati* and handed it to me. I ate it and liked the taste, despite the sugar. We had a wild *kirtana* in the big yoga studio. Swamiji let a black man play a big double bass, swinging it in rhythm like a jazz beat. We danced around in a big circle. The ISKCON people mixed with the Ananda Ashram people. Round and round we danced in ecstasy for an hour. Then we had some *prasadam*. We stayed overnight. The stars were out. Hayagriva, Kirtanananda, myself and a few others stood around

the pond and discussed Swamiji. “Who was he?” Hayagriva asked. “Was he a mystical identity? Did he have contact with Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati? What did he know?” There was speculating, but I didn’t want to do it. Don’t speculate.

During the day he sat by the pond. A girl from Ananda Ashram dressed in a sari came up to him. Other girls were dressed in jeans. He said, “This sari makes a girl very feminine.” The next day we drove back to the city. He sat in his room. He said, “Our chanting has heart and soul,” in contrast to the chanting of Ananda Ashramites. Usually Dr. Mishra didn’t let Swamiji lecture. But now he had his own place, and he could lecture as much as he liked.

ISKCON ROCK and ROLL

Narayana K. has gone to attend a GBC meeting in Mayapur. There are now two GBC meetings year. They are compulsory for GBC members, although some don't attend when they have ill health, and at least one member didn't attend one year because he was absorbed in writing a book. There is usually no punishment when a member has an excuse and doesn't attend. NK had heard from me that the old GBC meetings were rowdy and unruly. He says this is no longer true. They have rules for behavior, and for example, Vaishnavas are not to be blasphemed. No shouting out, no forcefully "grabbing the floor" for an unrecognized speech. Everything is conducted with decorum and parliamentary procedure.

It wasn't always that way. Some persons used to dominate the meetings forcing their opinions on the others and cutting in on the middle of someone else's speech to make vitriolic speeches of their own. One of the hottest topics was ownership or possession of GBC zones. Someone would claim a zone was his because he visited it. The other man would say no, that place has been assigned to me as part of my territory. The other would say, "But

you never go there or do anything.” “That is not true,” the other would say, “I am going there this year, and you can’t simply move in and kick me out of my zone.” One year when we had desks and chairs, a big-bodied *sannyasi* leaped over his desk and landed in the middle of the room loudly contesting that he was by rights the GBC of the Canary Islands although he had no other territory near the Canary Islands. Atreya Rsi used to sit back and bait the impassioned debaters, calling them by legal names, “Go get him, Harry!” At least in the years from 1972 to 1977 Srila Prabhupada was present. We read our resolutions to him, and some he vetoed. Hamsaduta pushed through a resolution forbidding women to live in the temple. “No,” said Prabhupada, “this is no good.” But he revoked the GBCs forbidding devotees to dress as Santa Claus while collecting donations. He thought it was harmless. I was the secretary for the first three years and got to type the minutes and read the resolutions out loud to Prabhupada. After his disappearance it got wilder. A “Mad Dog Award” was made, an actual toy dog, and it was handed to the most unruly devotee who had to keep it until someone else became more outrageous — and was handed the dog. Kirtanananda Swami would walk out of the meetings when he felt like it and come back forty-five minutes later. He was disobedient. Jagadisha and I were silent. Sometimes they would prod us, “Why don’t you say something?” We were too intimidated by the level of rancor. We were disgusted. Then eleven men were voted to be the only gurus, and there were guru GBCs and non-guru GBCs. Gurus conflicted with non-guru zonal GBCs. Scandals and falldowns of top leaders. Jayatirtha went and joined Sridhar Maharaj. I was the main scribe for a paper which was taken as offensive by Sridhar Maharaj’s men. They came to heavy me out. A commando committee was made up to rush to England to persuade Jayatirtha’s disciples to stay in ISKCON. They holed themselves in a building, and ISKCON cut the telephone wires. Twelve big *vyasanas* in the temple room in Mayapur floating above the ground. All these things have been told before, I don’t want to add to the list and name my own shame. The ISKCON boat rocked and rolled and big schisms formed. It has been reformed and floats on. Good things are happening.

BOSTON

There was an anti-Vietnam War “Be-In” in Franklin Park Zoo, Boston in 1967. A handful of Swamiji’s men, including Rayarama, attended and by chanting “Hare Krishna” got the crowd to participate, and a picture was printed in the newspaper of the devotees and the crowd. Rayarama proposed to Swamiji that Boston was a good place to open an ISKCON center, with its large student population. Swamiji was in the midst of his plans to go open the second ISKCON center in San Francisco (on the invitation of Mukunda who had already rented a storefront) and in the mood of expansion, he liked the idea of sending someone to Boston. It would be the first time that Swamiji would send a disciple to open a center rather than do it himself. Somehow, I was chosen to go alone. I went to Boston and in one visit to the welfare office managed to get transferred from the New York office and become a case worker in Boston. I could fund a storefront and support myself with my job. When I boasted that I had got it done all in one day, Swamiji said, “By Krishna’s grace.”

I sat with Swamiji discussing it, and he told me to go there and “sound off this big cannon, Hare Krishna.” I met with him for the

last time just before I went to Boston. We talked briefly, and then I bowed down before him. While I was bowing I felt his hand rubbing my back. This rubbing made me feel ecstatic. I have recalled in my memoirs about my almost five years in Boston that Prabhupada's rubbing my back gave me the strength and encouragement to endure all the difficulties I had to go through there. It was a wonderful moment.

I took a bus to Boston and immediately bought a newspaper and looked for available apartments. I found furnished rooms in Central Square, Cambridge and took them on my first night. I had two weeks before my job started. I went to the Widener Library at Harvard University and found Professor Sanyal's big book *Sri Krishna Caitanya* and borrowed it without a library card. I read that book scrupulously during my two weeks of waiting for my job. I was shy about preaching on my own, but I went out on the street with some *Back to Godhead* magazines. I used the "hawking" method we used in New York City. That is, I went to busy Harvard Square and started shouting out loud, "Back to Godhead magazine! Transcendental chanting of Hare Krishna! Essay by Allen Ginsberg! Essay by Swami Bhaktivedanta! Chanting brings spiritual high!" A "Black Panther" was also out hawking a magazine and denouncing America. When I got too close to him he warned me to "get away with your Hare Krishna bullshit," and I moved to the other corner of the square. I sold a few magazines and placed some for sale on commission in a few psychedelic "head" shops. One night I attended a rock and roll dance, but I got too intimidated to do anything. I needed some devotee association. After a few days Gaurasundara das from San Francisco came to visit me, and we had nice talks about the Sanyal book and Swamiji's teachings.

Within a few days the New York temple sent me some reinforcements. Damodara Dasa and Jadurani Dasi came to join the Boston project, sent by Brahmananda. Brahmananda sent orders that Damodara should be the temple president of Boston. This slighted me a bit, but I accepted it. Then in an independent move, Hamsaduta and his wife Himavati came to Boston. My job began, and I had to take the train and bus to get there. While I was at work Hamsaduta found a larger apartment in a rough neighborhood on South Boston, and we all moved there. It was planned as a temporary place until Damodara could find a

storefront like Twenty-six Second Avenue. We all got along fairly well in our apartment, Jadurani full-time painting and Hamsaduta cooking. One night Hamsaduta proposed that we go out on the street and hold *harinama sankirtana*. We attracted a small crowd, mixed black and whites. After a set of *kirtanas* I was talking to one black boy, and I told him “somebody thinks he’s black and somebody thinks he’s white, but this is all skin disease.” My analogy, taken from Swamiji, was too subtle for him and he became insulted and angry. “Whaddya mean *skin disease*?” I took the analogy apart and explained it to him and said that it was no insult to his blackness. He remained sore but stopped short of a fight. The crowd was rowdy and calling out to us so we did another *kirtana* and then went back into our house. We decided the neighborhood was not a good place for *sankirtana*. On Sunday afternoon we all went to the Boston Commons which at that time was filled with hippies sitting all over the green acres. Our *kirtana* was better received there, and we gave short speeches in between *kirtanas* and distributed *Back to Godhead* magazines.

After about two weeks Damodara found a storefront in the student section of Boston University in Allston, Massachusetts. It was almost identical to Twenty-six Second Avenue. But it had no apartment for living quarters. We had to sleep in the basement, with a separate place for Jadurani. We had a tub set up on cinder blocks for bathing. We had a partition on the temple floor and on the other side of it we installed a stove with burners and a refrigerator. We put a sign in the window advertising classes in *bhakti-yoga*, and we were in business. The first night three girls came dressed in black leotards expecting hatha-yoga. We did Swamiji’s program, *kirtana*, lecture, *kirtana* and a little *prasadam*. The girls never came back, and few people attended.

The first time I entered the Allston storefront I found an aerogram from India on the floor. It was from Swamiji. It had floated in through the slot in the door where the mailman placed it. It was addressed to me. He said he was feeling better in India. He encouraged me in Boston and said it would probably be good there because of the large number of students. It seemed like a kind of magic that this aerogram had come all the way from India and floated the last few feet through the mail slot to surprise me when I entered the door.

After a couple of weeks Damodara approached me and said he wanted to return to New York City to live with his wife. Hamsaduta and Himavati moved to join the devotees in Montreal. For a long time it was just me, Jadurani and Pradyumna who had come from Montreal. Not many people came to the storefront except on Sundays when we had a feast. But we booked engagements at the various universities, and they were well attended. The Boston temple had a modest beginning. We corresponded regularly with Swamiji, and in May of 1968 he came for a month's visit.

swamiji's first visit to boston may 1968

Swamiji's May 1968 visit to Boston was a high point for that little temple community. He stayed a full month. We had so few devotees that I could not welcome him at the airport. Jadurani welcomed him while I stayed back cooking his lunch. I made two preparations, *halava* and sweet rice, because that was all I knew how to make. We had posted two kinds of hand bills on walls and poles all over the Boston area. One said, "The Spiritual Master of the Holy Names is Coming to Boston" and had our address and times of evening programs. A bigger cardboard poster had all the college engagements we had lined up. When he entered the kitchen of the house we had rented for him (a ten-minute walk from the temple) he saw the big poster and said, "You have made a full month's engagement for me." He went to his room, and I served him his lunch. After lunch Jadurani asked, "Do you want to sleep now Swamiji?" He replied, "I am not meant for sleeping," and stayed up talking.

For the first temple engagement I was very anxious. I was praying that people would come in response to our ubiquitous posters. We were in a remote location. By the time the Swami

arrived — his secretaries Govinda Dasi and Gaurasundara brought him in a taxi from the house — the little temple room was filled to capacity. We had a great *kirtana* and Swamiji lectured. It was a strong lecture in which he condemned material life. At one point he almost shouted, “There is no happiness in material life!” I think the audience was a little put off by his blasting material illusions. But it was a great success in terms of attendance. After that first meeting, attendance dropped off sharply for the remainder of his stay.

We had more success with the outside engagements. The first one was at Northeastern University, and a full classroom attended. In the course of his lecture he mentioned the sun god and said there *is* a sun god, you can’t disbelieve it. The professor who had arranged the engagement was charmed by Swamiji, and she followed him to his car after the class, thanking him effusively and smiling and shaking his hand. She seemed honored to meet him. They also gave an honorarium of one hundred dollars. The next engagement was at Marsh Chapel Boston University, and it was a big flop. I had scheduled it during final exams and only about ten people came to the large chapel. Swamiji sat on a shaky table and led a stroug *kirtana* and lectured. A *mayavadi* boy asked a question in favor of impersonalism, and Swamiji smashed him. Brahmananda who had come from New York, criticized me for the poor attendance, and I felt bad. Swamiji didn’t complain. We had good attendance at Boston College, although a boy there confronted me and said, “Maybe the Swamiji has just buffaloed you,” I answered him back sharply. M.I.T. was a big success as we filled a big hall. Afterwards Swamiji got into a sharp, personal argument with some *mayavadi* Indians. Swamiji grabbed the man’s shirt collar and said, “If everything is one why don’t you wear a cotton ball instead of a shirt?” Govinda Dasi anxiously tried to break up the fight, and she said, “Swarniji, the taxi is waiting!” and she extricated him from the Indians. Since Boston University was such a flop Swamiji, decided he wouldn’t attend the engagement we had for him at Harvard University. But when it was time for him to speak the classroom was filled with scholars and students. I phoned him at the house and asked him to come right away. A favorable professor, Mr. O’Connell, who was a scholar in Gaudiya Vaisnavism, gave an introductory talk while the audience waited

for Swamiji. He soon arrived and sat on the front desk and delivered an excellent, uncompromising lecture.

While he was at Boston, Swamiji gave out *gayatri* mantras and brahminical threads for the first time in ISKCON. He said it was for men only. Govinda Dasi became very upset and cried before him. In protest, she decided not to attend the ceremony. But after he left the house, she changed her mind and panicked. She wanted to be with Swamiji! She ran the ten minutes to the temple and burst into the room. "Ah, she has come," Swamiji said. Then he changed his mind and gave the *gayatri* mantras to the women, although no threads. It was in Boston that Swamiji agreed to accept the new name "Prabhupada."

The woman who lived next door was crazy. She used to shout expletives at the devotees when she saw us in the street. We hoped she would not do anything while the Swami was there. But one night in the middle of his lecture to a small audience, she opened the door and shouted, "God damn this house!" Swamiji looked up innocently and said, "What did she say? God bless this house?"

On the whole it was a wonderful month, and Swamiji seemed satisfied with our efforts. He encouraged us to go on preaching. We felt enthusiastic and satisfied, and we were sad when he had to leave.

staten island community college

Staten Island Community College occupied two office buildings in St. George, at the northern tip of Staten Island near the ferry boat for Manhattan. The students, mostly the technology students, were lowbrow and not even well-behaved. I was embarrassed to be a member of the student body. It didn't seem like being in college. The teachers seemed embarrassed too, and resentful to have to deal with discipline in the classroom. But I had two teachers who *were* so good, they made up for all the discrepancies. Dr. Ed Pessen taught history, and Dr. Doris Alexander taught English and world literature. They were both genuine intellectuals, and their intense presence automatically banished the problem of disciplining students. They overpowered any nonsense with their dedication to the subject matter, and they simply didn't tolerate any fooling around in class. Dr. Pessen had a soft round face and feminine gestures, but he wasn't a wimp. He simply assumed and demanded good behavior, and those students who may have been inclined to fool around never overwhelmed him. One time he made a gesture with a limp right wrist and a curly-haired boy in the back row made a faint imitation of Dr. Pessen who caught it with his sharp

eye. "Mr. Silverberg," he said to the boy, "leave the classroom. And after the class is over I want to see you in my office." Slowly dragging his chair-desk, Silverberg exited the room. When he came from Dr. Pessen's office a gathering of students surrounded him. Silverberg looked scared. He said, "If I ever try anything like that again, he'd drop me from the course."

"Can he do that?" a boy asked.

"He sure damn sounded like he could," said Silverberg. There were no more imitations or making fun of Dr. Pessen or distracting fooling around during his lectures. And his lectures were delightful. They were witty and sarcastic, left wing and critical of stupidity in general by the government and by the people in general. I loved them, and I wanted to please him. He awakened something new in me: a desire to be an intellectual. It seemed like such an exciting point of view and way to live. It changed me completely around from an Alan Freed rock and roller to a seeker of higher knowledge. Even my attitude toward my mother and father changed. I saw my father as an anti-intellectual and a generation gap opened between us.

Dr. Alexander was even more radical. She wore sandals with high straps, her hair in braids, straight skirts and sometimes sweaters. The kids dubbed her "the Bohemian." She showed outright disgust for uncollegiate, rowdy behavior and general dumbness. On the first exam she gave every one of us an "F" for our essays. I was outraged. I thought I was a better writer than that. I had written a patriotic essay and referred to the Russians as "mustached." In the column she wrote, "Are all Russians mustached?" I wrote that when I grew up I wanted to be a "three-buttoned-suited advertising writer," and she wrote "God help us!" She wrote, "You will probably be a good writer when you clean up the clichés and trite expressions from your writing." She was openly sarcastic and mocking at stupid remarks. Sometimes she would make an incredulous face at someone who said something completely foolish. I liked her very much right from the beginning. She was about thirty-five years old and "*belta*." At first she drilled us in grammar, and it was boring. I finally went up to her one day after class and said, "Are we going to read literature and write essays?" She smiled and said yes, we would soon be doing that. And then we began. We read samples of the Romantic poets, Blake, Shelley (she particularly liked him because he was a Socialist

as well as a Romantic), Byron, Keats, Wordsworth. She made all of it ravishingly exciting. She put her whole soul into it when she read and explained the poems. When a student said something dumb about these poets whom she loved she gave them her incredulous stare, or a blank or disgusting look. She was not indifferent to the material she was teaching but passionately in love with it. She read Blake's *Tyger*: "Tyger! Tyger! burning bright, In the forests of the night, What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" She read Shelley's *Skylark*: "Hail to thee, blithe spirit! Bird thou never wert!" She recited John Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*: "Sometimes I have been half in love with easeful Death," and Wordsworth's *Ode to Immortality*: "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream, The earth, and every common sight, To me did seem / Apparel'd in celestial light, The glory and the freshness of a dream."

I drew mustaches over my photos of Alan Freed and Fats Domino. I couldn't take them seriously any more.

In Pessen and Alexander I thought I had found college professors who were as good as any I could have found at a highly rated university. They had been lured there by the fairly high pay of a city college, and I was the benefactor. I later went on to Brooklyn College, and I never found teachers as dynamic as these. They came at the right time of my life and set my flame for knowledge burning brightly.

One night John Young and I went to Greenwich Village in the evening, shopping in the bookstores. On the streets we met Dr. Pessen and his wife. He asked to see the books I had picked out, and one was *Childhood* by Maxim Gorky. He laughed to see this. I said, "No, it's good. It's an autobiography." He laughed again almost in warning to tell me not to get into trouble with leftist ideas. The book was actually quite good. Its main interesting character to me was Maxim Gorky's grandmother. He told how she used to pray to God at night in a very specific way praying for different members of the family and asking for different favors. Gorky portrayed her as naïve but at the same time sincere. She was an appealing figure. I liked her prayers.

Dr. Alexander recommended I read a book called *Stepperrwolf* by Hermann Hesse. It featured a character named Harry who was a loner who lived in the world in an anti-social kind of way. It appealed to my teenage angst, my own increasing feelings of

loneness in searching for the truth. It had a dream sequence in it where Harry meets Mozart and other figures from the past. It was very surreal and haunting. It was a good recommendation for me at that time in my life. On my own I had sought out other books, *Look Homeward, Angel* by Thomas Wolfe and *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger. These also featured lonely individuals who were non-conformists and trying to find their place in life.

At the end of my first semester I had an A in all my classes except chemistry in which I got a D, and math in which I got a C.

Doris Alexander was a very encouraging influence in my life. One day I was sitting on the steps of the public library, and she came up to me and told me what a first-class student I was.

“Oh shucks,” I said, “you can say that because I’m in this little community college.”

“Oh no!” she said emphatically, “I’ve taught at N.Y.U. and Columbia University, and you’re first class by those standards.”

She made me blossom into a budding intellectual, a literary man. Because of her I changed my major from history to English. When she read my essays, she said I had real writing talent. Then I began to show her my short stories. She didn’t hide the fact that I was a beginner and immature, but she said she saw a sign of greatness in me, and if I worked at my writing, “I could go all the way.” I become something like a disciple of hers and wanted to please her very much. Our relationship was strictly platonic, but after I graduated from the junior college and transferred to Brooklyn College, I continued my relationship with her and she continued guiding me. She advised me that after getting my Bachelor’s degree, I shouldn’t go on to get a Master’s degree or a Ph.D. She said the academic world was deadening to creativity, and I should devotee my life to writing and support myself by some other means of work. She had written a biography of the playwright Eugene O’Neill, and it was published by Macmillan Press. She gave me the name of her literary agent, and I sent her my manuscript of a novella. I received a rejection slip but some some encouraging words and an invitation to send her more of my work. By the time I met Swamiji, my relationship with Doris was waning. I felt I knew as much as she did and couldn’t remain her disciple. But her belief in me as a writer nourished me, and I felt always indebted to her. I didn’t her tell directly that I entered the Hare Krishna movement but that I was seriously practicing meditation.

She thought that was a good thing. Then she left the United States and spent the rest of her life in Italy, writing and teaching. Through a disciple of mine in Italy, I learned of her whereabouts and wrote her a couple of e-mails with no reply. Then suddenly my disciple sent me a letter from Doris which was written in a hospital where she was dying. She apologized for not answering my e-mails and said she had been in too much pain. She said that this letter was dictated to nuns in the hospital and that her days were numbered. She said she was glad I was practicing meditation and she just wanted to let me know that the years she spent with me were the happiest years in her life. Needless to say, I was very touched and felt I lost a dear friend, an inspiring influencing my life.

prabhupada calls me to be his servant in 1974

In December of 1973 I was going out daily to chant and distribute magazines with my loyal group of *brahmacaris*, Ghanasyama, Mahabuddhi, etc., at the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. It was easygoing preaching. We had rented an apartment, and a few new boys were interested. We had no telephone, and one day we received a telegram that I should phone Karandhara in Los Angeles. I went to a public phone and reached him. He said Srutakirti had been recently married and was leaving Prabhupada's service as personal servant. Prabhupada had personally asked that I come and take over the service. He said he had discussed it with Prabhupada, and Prabhupada said I could already type his letters. I could learn how to give the massage and how to cook lunch from Srutakirti. I told Karandhara that I had no experience in cooking and didn't think I could do what Srutakirti did — cook the lunch in the three-tiered cooker while he was simultaneously massaging Prabhupada. Karandhara said Prabhupada said anyone can learn cooking. I had my doubts but didn't want to turn down this astonishing offer from my spiritual master. How touching, that out of all his disciples he had thought of me and wanted me to live

with him as secretary and servant. I said yes I could come, and I could turn my *brahmachari* party over to someone else, most likely Hridayananda Maharaj. Karandhara said I should come at once but “don’t break your neck in getting here.” I assured him that I would be there on an early plane. I then went back to the house and informed the men. They were surprised and genuinely happy for me. They were disappointed that our well-bonded group would break up, but they liked the idea of Hridayananda Maharaj coming to take charge of them. I knew it would change the party, Hridayananda Maharaj was more passionate and impulsive than I, but it had to be. After all, it was an order from Srila Prabhupada.

I was excited and delighted at the prospect of the assignment. Getting to live with the spiritual master and serve him personally was the perfection of a disciple’s life. I took an early evening flight and arrived in Los Angeles in the middle of the night. I greeted Srila Prabhupada as he went to the bathroom after his morning dictation work. He had a comfortable suite on the second floor of the temple with several rooms. The walls were painted a muted blue, and it had burnt orange curtains, designed by Bhavananda.

I met with Srutakirti, and he told me some of the duties I would be doing. “Whenever I go into Prabhupada’s room I try to do as many things as possible,” he said. “I always think why should Prabhupada have to see a horrible creature like me? So I try not to go before him unnecessarily.” This advice revealed his humble, reverent attitude towards Prabhupada which I hoped to maintain. I was being brought close to Srila Prabhupada not for my personal sense gratification but to perform service.

I learned how to do the massaging by watching Srutakirti. It was a kind of initiation to do it. Prabhupada said, “harder” when I began massaging him, and it took all of my strength to keep it up for forty-five minutes. I seemed to be a passable masseur and was happy with that. Cooking was a harder test. I had to cook rice, *dal* and vegetables at the same time in different compartments of the triple boiler. Furthermore, I had to turn on the flame just before going to massage Srila Prabhupada and when I returned after the massage *presto* . . . everything was supposed to be perfectly cooked.

Whenever Prabhupada ate I would simply hang on his every word or gesture to see whether he appreciated what I had done. It was no casual matter to wonder and anticipate, “How does he like it?” I was so tensed up I was ready to cry or laugh. If he said a

chapati was not cooked, I would run back and try to make the next one come out right. I would be sometimes panting in a breathless state, sweating and nervous. Only a devotee of Prabhupada could appreciate that all these symptoms were transcendental. It was no ordinary exchange, because Srila Prabhupada was no ordinary master but a pure devotee of Krishna.

I was also charged with typing Srila Prabhupada's *Bhagavatam* dictation and editing the English manuscript. And I was still the GBC secretary of temples in the Midwest. Whenever I found time I would run down to the main office and speak on the phone to one of the temple presidents in my zone. In addition, I was also editor-in-chief of *Back to Godhead* magazine and had to read all the incoming manuscripts and try to write articles myself. It was all a bit too much.

The sweetest part was having philosophical exchanges with Prabhupada at odd moments. I would sometimes take the challenging position of the atheist, and he would defeat me. I inquired whether we could expect to go back to Godhead in this lifetime, and he said that it is expected that the preacher is going also. "Just like with our books, our students are very expert at selling them but not at reading them. That is not very good. They should read the books also." It occurred to me that of all the special privileges afforded the servant these extra opportunities to inquire from Srila Prabhupada would have the most lasting and significant benefit.

Two weeks went by, and I began to learn the daily routine. My cooking became acceptable. Along with Prabhupada I began to look forward to his upcoming tour that would take us to Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong and to India. One of the devotees who worked at the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust gave me a camera and asked that I take pictures of Srila Prabhupada wherever we went. At my request, they also gave me a new portable typewriter. The manager of Prabhupada's tape ministry gave me charge of a heavy Uher tape recorder and showed me how to use it to record Prabhupada's lectures and talks. So I was well-equipped for world travel as the secretary-servant. All I needed was faith and devotion — the kind that could overcome obstacles — and I hoped to gain that by staying with Srila Prabhupada.

eugene gant and holden caulfield

When I was seventeen years old I started keeping a diary, writing in blue ink with an Esterbrook pen in a loose leaf binder notebook. I came home from beer-drinking and sat up in bed writing before going to sleep. As I spoke in my diary to Holden Caulfield, the protagonist in *The Catcher in the Rye*, I also entered the name of Eugene Gant. That is the name Thomas Wolfe gave to his character in *Look Homeward, Angel*.

THE DELIVERANCE OF JARASANDHA

Lord Krishna descends to the earth to protect the devotees and vanquish the demons. One of the prominent demons of His time was Jarasandha. Krishna's advisor Uddhava suggested a way to kill Jarasandha. Krishna, Bhimasena and Arjuna would go to Jarasandha and beg charity of him in the disguise of *brahmanas*. The charity they would beg would be a fight with Jarasandha. Jarasandha had imprisoned twenty thousand princes in a cave like a concentration camp where they were suffering and starving. Krishna wanted to free them. When the three went to Jarasandha's palace and begged as *brahmanas*, Jarasandha noted features of their bodies that indicated they were not *brahmanas*. They had lines on their shoulders which were the marks of bow strings and their bodies were strong and beautiful. But Jarasandha thought even if these men were *ksatriyas*, they were diminishing themselves by coming to him for begging, and he would grant their wishes and treat them as *brahmanas*. When Krishna asked for charity, Jarasandha said he would give them anything they wanted, even his life. Krishna asked that Jarasandha fight with one of them. He then introduced Himself as Jarasandha's old enemy Krishna, and He

introduced Bhimasena and Arjuna. When Jarasandha heard of the proposed fight he laughed loudly. He said that he would not fight Krishna because Krishna was a coward who had constructed a city in the sea just to avoid fighting Jarasandha, and he would not fight Arjuna because Arjuna was junior to him and not so skilled in fighting. But he would fight with Bhimasena whom he considered an equal. Jarasandha then handed a heavy club to Bhimasena, and the two of them went outside the city and began fighting. They struck each other with heavy blows and the colliding clubs sounded like the tusks of elephants fighting or thunder in the sky. Neither man could gain an advantage even as they began to strike each other's bodies and finally break all the clubs and resort to fighting with fists. After twenty-seven days Bhimasena went to Krishna and said he didn't think he could defeat Jarasandha. Krishna then gave a hint to Bhimasena regarding the origin of Jarasandha. Jarasandha was born from two mothers, and he was born in two pieces. When the King saw the pieces of the baby he was disgusted and threw them in the forest. A witch named Jara who knew the black arts picked up the pieces of the baby and joined them to make one whole person. So Krishna hinted to Bhimasena by breaking a twig in its "wishbone" part how Jarasandha could be broken. On that day Bhimasena then threw Jarasandha to the ground, held his leg there and pulled his other leg ripping the demon apart. He split him in half, so that there was one leg, half a testicle, half a chest and half a head.

Jarasandha was dead and his supporters lamented while Krishna congratulated Bhimasena. Krishna then released all the imprisoned princes who were very emaciated looking and weak. On seeing Krishna they became happy and bowed before Him and touched His lotus feet and made prayers. Krishna put the kingdom of Jarasandha in the charge of his son and returned to Dvaraka.

Sacisuta read this story to me this morning during breakfast, and I was pleased to hear the adventurous fight, the secret joining of Jarasandha and how Bhima split him apart on Krishna's hints. On one hand it is an horrific story, but because it involves Krishna liberating a demon, it is valorous and decent. Even envisioning Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima entering Jarasandha's palace is a beautiful sight and a daring military proposal. His freeing of the twenty thousand princes from the death camp is a heroic rescue story.

MY FIRST VISIT TO INDIA

I first traveled to India in 1973, seven years after I joined ISKCON. One devotee asked me why I waited so long. It seems I had so much of Prabhupada's association and so much dutiful service in America, that I never felt the need to go. But I went in 1973 as part of a program where Prabhupada had a GBC man visit him and stay with him for a month at a time. We would rotate, and it was my time. I relieved Jagadisha Prabhu in Mayapur. I traveled alone to India carrying a long bright pink *danda*. On the plane I sat next to an Indian man who took me in his car to the Calcutta temple. I arrived there late at night and lay down on the floor next to Pancadravida Maharaj. In the morning I got directions and took the train to Navadvipa and a boat to Mayapur. I was happy to come into Prabhupada's presence, and he seemed happy to see me. He said, "Now we have five *sannyasis* here." (Jayapataka Maharaj, Bhavananda Maharaj, Hrisikesa Maharaj, Devananda Maharaj and I.) I took a room next to his, and he engaged me in helping him with his mail. He would dictate a reply to me after I read the letter to him. I would write his reply down and then go to my room and type it up. While I was there he decided to write a commentary on

Rupa Goswami's *Upadesamrta*, and he dictated his purports to me, and I wrote them down and typed them up. The weather was uncomfortably warm. We ate a delicious combination of mango and yogurt and puffed rice.

Once he called me into his room and asked if I knew a place that had waters that were a cure for digestion. He was having trouble with that. I felt stupid and useless because I was unable to supply him any information.

When he was in Mayapur he decided to pay a visit to his godbrother Sridhara Maharaj in Navadvipa. He took with him his *sannyasis* and Pradyumna Prabhu. We took a car and got on board a metal ferry to cross the Ganges. It lay low in the water. We saw a porpoise surface right by our ferry. The visit with Sridhara Maharaj was very pleasant. They spoke together in Bengali about fine points in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* section on Ajamila. Jayapataka Maharaj later translated it for us. At one point Prabhupada invited Sridhara Maharaj to come live with him at ISKCON Mayapur. His godbrother said he would consider it. We stayed overnight and came back the next day. After two weeks in Mayapur Prabhupada moved to ISKCON Calcutta. He got sick there, eating heavy food cooked by his sister. It got so bad that he was moaning, and he asked the devotees to put a statue of Nrsimhadeva on the altar. Then a telegram arrived from Shyamasundara inviting Srila Prabhupada to come to London. He promised a helicopter ride to Bhaktivedanta Manor, a meeting with George Harrison, a meeting with British dignitaries, and most of all, a spectacular London Ratha-yatra which would go down to Trafalgar Square. Prabhupada was interested in going, but he was seriously ill. He called his *sannyasis* into his room to confer with them. We advised him not to go, and he heard us out. The next thing we knew Prabhupada was preparing to go to England. He was demonstrating miraculous curing power by wanting to go and preach.

My ticket didn't allow me to leave from Calcutta. So I could not go with him. I had to stay behind and go to Bombay. There I met my godbrothers TKG and Giriraj who treated me hospitably. I arrived in England the day after the Ratha-yatra. I heard that Prabhupada had walked the whole way of the parade route, and he had even danced. It was hard to believe he had actually done that after being so ill. I stayed with him for two weeks at Bhaktivedanta

Manor and sat in on many meetings with dignitaries. I asked Prabhupada if I had to stay in Dallas or if I could sometimes travel out for preaching. He said I could sometimes go out and sometimes spend time at the school. When my month with Prabhupada was used up, I felt very refreshed by his association and bonded with him faithfully.

navy induction

When I was sixteen my father told me that I should seriously consider signing up for military service. There was not a compulsory draft at this time, but he said there probably would be one soon and it would be better if I entered as an officer rather than as an enlisted man. He himself was an officer in the naval reserve, and he knew all the intricacies of the different programs and also how people were avoiding service. He wanted me to enter a program called ROC, Reserve Officer Candidate. By this program one spent two summers of six weeks each during one's college years and at the end of college one would enter the service as a commissioned officer for something like four years of active service. I didn't like the idea of any kind of military service, but I was very malleable to the wishes of my father. He had a strict influence over me, and I did what he said. Based on his advice about the upcoming inevitable draft and the superiority of serving as an officer, I signed up for the ROC program. This meant I had to start to attend weekly meetings in the evening as an enlisted man, and then by next summer I would have to do my first six weeks service at Newport, Rhode Island. I signed my contract

when I was seventeen years old. On the way home in the car my father asked me, "Do you really want to do this?"

I thought to myself that no I didn't want to do it, but he wanted me to do it, and so I had to do it. I had that much lack of personal conviction and lack of my own spine to refuse his offer. The actual facts were that if I had stayed in college I would not have had to enter the military service. A compulsory draft for college students was suspended, and I would have been free of the obligation if I had just not voluntarily entered it, but I did not know that at the time. My father did know that a college student would not have to enter the military service, but he did not guide me in that way. As this gradually dawned on me it created a great resentment on my part toward my father. He had bamboozled me into being what he wanted me to be, a military officer.

As part of my obligation to the Navel Reserve I had to go on a two-week cruise on a destroyer escort. It was a miserable time for me. Now that I was a sensitive, growing intellectual, the company of the enlisted men was obnoxious to me. They would use swear words all the time, and there was no possibility of talking with them the way I talked with John Young about literary ideas and jazz. I was assigned to the radar room on the ship. Since I didn't know anything about it, all I did was hang out in the radar room and occasionally learn something about radar from watching the screen. When I wasn't on duty I would go down to my bunk and lie in bed. The radar man asked me, "What are you a bartender?" He was jabbing me over the fact that I was always sleeping during the day like a bartender. During that cruise they broadcast on radio the return boxing match between Floyd Patterson, the dethroned champ, and the Swedish boxer, Ingemar Johansson. Patterson knocked out Johansson in the fourth round and the radar man, who was an Afro-American, shouted and cheered as did other shipmates.

I read *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* by Rainer Maria Rilke during the cruise. The book was an existential journal of another lone figure searching for truth in the world. It had a surreal dreamlike quality to it and was an unhappy book. So I was either reading the unhappy existentialism or living the unhappy life on the boat which was always rocking back and forth at sea in the company of the low-class sailors. The ship stopped in port in

Canada, and I spent the day writing a nature poem and feeling lonely.

memories of srila prabhupada in india

In Vrindavan he would take a walk every morning on Chhatikara Road (now Bhaktivedanta Swami Marg) and walk in the direction toward New Delhi. He would be accompanied by ten to twenty devotees, and he would speak philosophy freely. When he returned to the temple, he would sit on the *vyasasana* and receive *guru-puja* and then give a morning *Srimad-Bhagavatam* lecture. The *kirtana* hall is an open space, and it gets cold in the winter. He would mostly stay indoors for the rest of the day. He would talk with devotees and give them service instructions. He would push Surabhi to get the temple construction done faster. Surabhi would explain about a shortage of cement or some other reason for the delay, but Prabhupada would stay on his case. When the temple was finished he said, “Everyone praises Surabhi for such a nice job he has done but I just criticize. Because that is my position, as spiritual master.” Once when he arrived at New Delhi airport he got into the car with Guru das and the first words he uttered were “see-ment.” It was hard getting enough cement in India, and Prabhupada wanted as much as he could get as soon as he could get it.

In Bhubaneswar in January 1977 he stayed in a small tent-cottage which had no full wall. The walls didn't go up to the ceiling, but there was a small space and connected to this room was another shack where his secretary stayed. One night we saw a big rat walking on the beam between the two shacks. In the early morning we heard Prabhupada dictating the beginning of the Tenth Canto. He began with a short summary of all the chapters in the Tenth Canto. It was a thrill to be witnessing the historical beginning of the Tenth Canto. On the walk we told him we had heard him beginning the Tenth Canto. "Oh," he said with surprise, "you heard me?" "Yes, Prabhupada, we heard you, and you mentioned that Krishna was dancing with the *gopis*, but He left the *rasa* dance to seek Radharani."

At Tirupati we got up before 1 a.m. and went to the temple of Balaji for a special early *darshan*. We were all able to go to the front of the line. Prabhupada chanted *govindam adi-purusam tam abam bhajami* as he approached the Deity. Then he left his cane on the railing in front of the Deities, and I had to go back and get it. On the train from Bhubaneswar to Calcutta we were disturbed by the loud voices in the compartment ahead of us. They were loud and drunk. They called each other by their names Mr. Bhattacharya and Mr. Chakravarti which Srila Prabhupada said were aristocratic *brahmana* names, but now they had fallen.

You bargained with a rickshaw *walla* for the price from the temple to Loi Bazaar. You asked for two rupees, but he wanted three. You refused to pay his price and started walking ahead on foot. You walked for about a hundred feet and then the *walla* drove up in front of you and said he would take your price. One time on a walk you stopped a man carrying vegetables in a basket on his head. You bargained with him and bought the whole basketful. It was delightful watching you deal with him in a down-home way.

On a walk you went all the way to the Yamuna with the devotees in Vrindavan. You told the men to go in bathing, but you would just stay on the shore and touch it with your head. You sat on the shore watching, and then you hesitated and decided to go in yourself in your *gamcha*. You went in and the devotees held your hands. You dunked yourself under the water, and everyone was thrilled. In Jagannatha Puri you did something similar. We were staying at a beach hotel. You went down to the ocean front and

stood in the water. You let the devotees splash water on you, and it was like an *abbiseka* of the Deity. They sang *govindam adi-purusam* and splashed water on your face and body. At one point you grabbed a mouthful of water from the ocean and spit it out, and Gurukripa Maharaja was fast enough to catch it.

Toward the end of your life you retired from writing the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. You lay in your bed in your last days. But then you said you wanted to continue writing, and Jayadvaita Maharaja and Pradyumna knelt at your side and read you the Sanskrit and the English and you dictated purports to the thirteenth chapter of the Tenth Canto. You did it in a voice that could barely be heard, but Jayadvaita Maharaja caught it on the microphone placed by your lips. In one of your purports you made a joke and compared four-headed Brahma to “four-headed scientists.”

Your pastimes in India are so numerous they cannot be captured by Ananta Sesa reciting them for thousands of years from his thousands of mouths.

After S.I.C.C.

Graduation from Staten Island Community College was followed by six weeks of military training. It was a combination of boot camp and academic scholarship. We had to assemble and call out our names early in the morning standing in formation and then begin attending a series of classes. We learned navigation, engineering, communications, handling of firearms, simulation of putting out a fire on a ship and sinking on a ship, learning the etiquette-discipline “yes sir,” “I don’t know sir, I’ll find out sir”, keeping your locker clean, obeying commands, being at the right place at the right time (“failure to get the word”), leading a group of men in military marching, right face, left face right. After five weeks we got a weekend off at Newport, Rhode Island. Regular enlisted men, seeing the ROC patch on our uniforms would taunt us with remarks like, “You like the Navy? Then why don’t you join?” Bars and girls. Back after the weekend. Exams. Final exams. Printing of results, you scan the list to find out your name and grade. Well, what do you know? You passed. You’re invited to come back for another six weeks next summer. But you decide that you will not come back for another summer.

“I’m not coming back. I don’t want this. I don’t want to bear another six weeks of military imprisonment. I’m not coming back. I don’t want to be a Navy officer.”

“You know what this means don’t you? You’ll have to enter as an enlisted man for two years active service on a ship.”

“Yes, I know, that’s OK. I’d rather do that than come back for six more weeks of this crap and then play at being a Navy officer for four years.”

prabhupada's bhagavatam

“Little drops of water wear away the stone. In this way I have written all my books.” He got up from bed at 1 a.m. every night and worked for a few hours. Rarely skipped a day. He took from the *acaryas* and wrote his own insights, his experience of worldwide preaching. You have to read it carefully to absorb what he has to say. I have read everything several times, not so much very recently. Read and write in *Every Day, Just Write*. Paraphrase, take off on the purport. One year I read the whole *Bhagavatam* carefully. Read *Caitanya-caritamṛta* — made a book, *C. Asraya*, keeping a diary while reading *Caitanya-caritamṛta*, mostly the Antya-lila. The thrill of the books being published, reading them for the first time. Distributing the full sets. Giving classes. Memorizing verses, gradually forgetting all the verses. Reading on airplanes, waiting rooms. How to read a book. How to retain what you read.

Prabhupada said he didn't write the books, Krishna wrote them. Now devotees have recorded the books, and you can listen to them. Keep reading them. “Divinity and Divine Service.” “Pure Devotional Service: The Change of Heart.” “*Purusa Sukta* Confirmed.” “Answers by Citing the Lord's Version.” “The

Pregnancy of Diti in the Evening.” “Lord Kapila’s Teachings.” “The Sacrifice Performed by Daksa.” “Prthu Maharaj’s Meeting with the Four Kumaras.” “Chanting the Song Sung by Lord Shiva.” “Lord Rsabhadeva’s Teachings to His Sons.” “Studying the Structure of the Universe.” “The History of the Life of Ajamila.” “Vritrasura’s Glorious Death.” “King Citraketu’s Lamentation.” “Hiranyakashipu’s Plan to Become Immortal.” “The Pastimes of the Supreme Lord, Ramacandra.” “The Advent of Lord Krishna.” “The Atrocities of King Kamsa.” “The Killing of the Demon Putana.” “The Killing of Vatsasura and Bakasura.” “The Killing of the Demon Aghasura.” “The Vision of the Universal Form.” “Subduing Kaliya.” “Worshiping Govardhana Hill.” “Lord Krishna Lifts Govardhana Hill.” “The Prayers of Indra, the King of Heaven.” “Krishna Steals the Garments of the Unmarried *Gopis*.” “The *Gopis* Attracted by the Flute.” “The *Rasa* Dance.” “The *Gopis* Search for Krishna.” “The Reunion.”

taking sannyasa

When I asked Srila Prabhupada if I could take *sannyasa*, I had already been living separately from my wife for over a year. When ISKCON Press decided to move from Boston to New York, my wife chose to leave me and go with the Press. She (and they) said she needed the association of the other artists. They worked together as a tight team. It would not be good for her service to live with me in the Boston temple and try to paint on her own. Going to New York was service, staying with her husband was almost like *maya*. That's how she saw it. I went to New York to visit her a few times, but it wasn't like a real marriage. Then I moved to Dallas to work with the *gurukula*, and we were really apart.

Then came the flurry of taking *sannyasa* by the GBC men. TKG took rather early. Then Sudama took. Then a secretary's newsletter came from Shyamasundara saying Prabhupada wanted the GBC to get out from behind their desks and go out and preach. Prabhupada was coming to Los Angeles, and a number of men asked him to take *sannyasa*. Rupanuga, a solid householder with a wife and child, was volunteering to take. Bali Maharaj, a *brahmacari*

GBC of New York, would take. A surprisingly young man, Hridayananda, asked to take although he had recently been married, and Prabhupada said yes. So from Dallas I wrote to Prabhupada and asked if I could take. He wrote back simply and briefly, and said yes I should come to L.A. and get initiated with the rest. There would be four men taking *sannyasa* together. Karandhara couldn't take because he was too much committed to management in LA.

I wrote my wife a letter, not asking her permission, but telling her Prabhupada had accepted me. I complimented her, and said she was a better devotee than these men with their *dandas*. And I flew to Los Angeles. Prabhupada didn't give us any cross-examination or tests. There was a *sannyasi* there visiting (I don't remember who), and he was to get us ready with *sannyasa* clothes. I think Vishnujana Maharaj helped with the *dandas*. Prabhupada accepted us, trusting we were serious. The ceremony was held on Lord Nrsimha's Appearance Day in 1972. The temple room was crowded, and there was a fire ceremony.

Prabhupada lectured about Prahlada and Hiranyakashipu. After his lecture we four men took our clothes and left the room to put them on. A *sannyasi* helped us. We came back into the temple room. I walked up to Srila Prabhupada on the *vyasasana*, and he handed me a *danda*. He said, "Preach, preach, preach." Three times like that, emphasizing what the purpose of *sannyasa* was in his eyes.

The next morning the new *sannyasis* walked with him on the beach. It was chilly, and we were freshly shaved. It felt like *tapasya*. I asked him if it was true that a *sannyasi* offers his food to the *danda*. He laughed and said, "No." We spent the day going door-to-door collecting money for guru *daksina*. I went with Hridayananda Maharaj. We didn't collect much. We went and gave it to Prabhupada. He said some things I wrote down in a notebook that I included in my book *ISKCON in the 70s*. I got an assistant, Janmanjaya, and a car, and we went to San Francisco. I lectured in the temple, then we traveled south and stopped in places and talked to people about Krishna consciousness. It wasn't very productive. At the Janmastami festival in New Vrindavan, I decided to team up with Hridayananda Maharaja and make a tour of colleges. We did that for a while. We broke up. I traveled to temples in my GBC zone. I was an ISKCON *sannyasi*.

manjari bhava

A disciple of mine has written to me asking my blessings on his desire to worship the Divine Couple in the mood of a *gopi manjari*. He states: “I am inspired to tell you, bashful and a little shameful, of a desire that has been in my heart for about twenty-five years. When I read the *Krishna* book for the first time, His amusements with the *gopis*, the first thing which impressed me and remained deeply imprinted in my heart was the natural purity of the *manjari gopis* who could, because of their innocence, participate in the Divine love pastimes. This wonderful feeling has been dormant deeply in my heart, never spoken of, but along with the desire to develop their innocence and their natural purity in the service to Radha and Krishna.

“Is the desire of mine legitimate? Or is it presumptuous? I would like to state beforehand that I am considering the inevitable event of my passing, which according to an expert astrologer in Vrindavan should happen at the age of 82, therefore towards the end of this year.”

He goes on to say he considers it his duty to ask for my strong approval. He also states “this will warrant me a long journey, life

after life, until the Divine Couple will be satisfied by my purity and innocence.”

What can I say to him? Shall I tell him not to inspire for *manjari bhava*? It is such a personal thing. I have quoted somewhere Gaurakishora das Babaji saying not to aspire for this until your heart is pure in love of Godhead. Can you aspire to reach the *adbikara* required? He taught us to serve for Krishna’s pleasure, and pray at the time of death, “How may I serve You?” Yes, pray to become a *gopi manjari*, but accept whatever Krishna offers you. Should he pray to be a *gopi manjari* or pray to be a blade of grass in Vraja or just pray to hang on to Prabhupada’s cloth and beg him to take you in the back door of Goloka with his special key — for any service?

What if he is determined to be *gopi manjari* and wants to keep coming back until he is pure and innocent enough? Should you discourage him? Should you tell him he’s just dreaming?

What about yourself? What do you aspire for? Do you want to go serve Prabhupada wherever he is? Do you want to serve him in Krishnaloka, or if he desires on a mission in this material world? Give me a little time, and I will tell you.

brooklyn college career

By the time I transferred to Brooklyn College, most of my courses were in my major, English Literature. I took a course in American Literature with the department chairman, Professor Louis Solomon. He was a very proper person with gray suits, a dignified mustache and a deep voice with careful diction. One day he asked the class for our impressions of Walt Whitman. I raised my hand and said, "He's more than a poet, he's like a prophet." This was the side of Whitman that I was attracted to. I was posing as someone who had something interesting to say about poets and prophets. I always had mixed motives when I spoke in class.

Professor Solomon's class was interesting, but I got the impression that he had done this year after year, the same syllabus, the same authors, in the same way. Although he had an interest in the literature, he wasn't blazing away. Dr. Alexander and Dr. Pessen had more spontaneity. Solomon seemed as if he was listening to the sound of his own voice because it was such a deep perfectly modulated voice. But it was good and new to me; it wasn't the hundredth time I was hearing. I wanted to get a

scholarly understanding of these American writers, so I was interested.

I once went to see Professor Solomon in his office. He had been discussing two schools of literature — Naturalism and Realism. I couldn't quite understand the difference. I decided to go to him and ask him this question. He gave me an appointment. It must have been a botheration because he was such a busy person as the Chairman of the English Department. He explained to me that in Realism the writers tried to describe daily life exactly as it is as far as they can do. Naturalism, however, is a school in which they don't just take life as it is, but focus on the sores and the gutter and the suffering. It is more of a turning of the camera to focus on the "human condition" up close. After he explained it I said thank you. It was such a small exchange and filled with so much ambivalence — perhaps my question was not intelligent, maybe I was bothering him, or maybe he thought I was just posing as a dedicated student. It was hardly like going to see a guru and walking away with your life changed; it was just a small scholarly point that had to be clarified.

It could be said without much exaggeration that most authors are ruined for students when read within the college course. It is a terrible setting for actual learning. For myself, whatever juice I got from books was mostly done in extracurricular reading, without the pressure of exams and grades and without having to memorize and submit to an "authorized" version of the poet's worth and meaning.

Coming from Staten Island, I wanted to prove myself worthy in the academic big leagues, and so I became a dancing dog. I strived to get all A's. "Walt Whitman, are you going to stand in the way of my getting an A, or will I be able to claim you for my purposes? Emily Dickinson, please don't hide your inner life from me, because I have to make clear sense out of you for my final exam." I don't have much live remembrance of these authors probably because I've studied them within the syllabus of American Literature 101. I know that Emily Dickinson is *supposed* to be brilliant, transcendental, one of the greatest poets of all time — and I know Whitman has been a direct inspiration for generations of American poets. But for me they remain mangled as school subjects.

Professor Grebanier was completely different from Louis Solomon, whose name describes him. Solomon was a solemn man, whereas Dr. Grebanier was obese and gushing. He reminded me of pictures you see of Dr. Samuel Johnson from the 18th century. Grebanier was always saying “brilliant,” witty things or being insulting. He presented himself as thoroughly realized in all literature, and he pontificated on everything. When I told my Staten Island friend Tommy Oakland about Grebanier, Tommy wanted to come and sit in on one of the classes. Tommy was so outgoing that you could hear him laughing and appreciating in the back seat where he was auditing the class. He was practically jumping up in his seat. Grebanier gave quite an electric session. I took two courses from him, one on poetry and one on Shakespeare. The Shakespeare was very popular and was held in a large hall that slanted downwards. There were over a hundred students in that class. We used Grebanier’s own book, *The Heart of Hamlet*. In this book he blasted all critics of Hamlet. Every scholar had some interpretation of Hamlet, but he said that they had all completely confused the play. Grebanier’s interpretation was Hamlet as it is. The trouble with everyone else is that they put their own speculation and try to teach their philosophies. They thought that Shakespeare did not even know what he was doing. But actually the play is very clear. All you have to do is study the texts, and you can understand the motivations of Hamlet, why he hesitated to kill his father’s murderer, and what he really meant when he said “To be or not to be.” On each and every point there is no need for speculation.

Grebanier’s book was like he himself, filled with witty footnotes and digressions. He caricatured and made fun of all the other scholars. He was convinced of all his own eccentricities and excesses. He was right. What he was saying made the play understandable, so he taught from that book and it took a long time going carefully over each line. One day we came to class, the morning after the presidential election of 1960, President Kennedy had won over Nixon in a very close vote. Almost everyone at Brooklyn College was happy about the result. The day after the election Eleanor Roosevelt spoke in our Walt Whitman auditorium and received wild applause, but in Grebanier’s class he was unhappy. He mumbled and muttered, “If that’s what the American people want, they are going to be be sorry. They think he’s good,

but he's not." What I didn't know about Grebanier at that time was that during the McCarthy era, he was a witness who turned in professors as having some alleged connection with the Communist party. This was known to faculty members, and there were professors who would not talk to him or who would leave the room when he entered. I only found out about that later.

As far as being able to teach literature, he was expert. He told us that he also taught poetry in his home for a fee. I never went, but I imagined he had a formal large apartment with nice furniture. His students would come and sit in chairs, and he would be witty, more relaxed. Maybe wearing different clothes, but still as big as a house, and making that funny sound when he laughed. A Brooklyn friend of mine wrote a poem about Grebanier calling him "a ridiculous goose stuffed with opinions." People hearing him had the impression that he was very much impressed with his own sparkling remarks, as if he thought they should be remembered for all time, like the aphorisms or witticisms of Samuel Johnson. Grebanier was also the editor of a line of student notes, like CliffsNotes or Student Aids, which gave a rundown of books so that students didn't have to read them. I showed one of these books to my former professor, Dr. Alexander, and she said, "He's just an entrepreneur."

As I look back, Professor Grebanier's portly form stands in the way of Shakespeare and Hamlet. I remember my professor and not the Bard. How little we remember and how strangely it gets filtered down to us! And what does it matter now? As I begin to speak of Grebanier, I am enlivened and amused, but then . . . I have also heard that he has since died. The whole corpulent show is over. No more snickering by him as he puts down the other scholars, and I doubt that his book is used any more. New "Grebaniers" have come forward, no doubt to put down his *Heart of Hamlet*.

I do not want to tackle with a sacred cultural monument like Hamlet or its creator. But neither do I want to be sentimental about all this, nor should I simply avoid it. As the saying goes, "If a girl has decided to dance, why is she covering her face with a veil?" Ok, I will tell you what I now think about Hamlet.

When I studied it with Grebanier the big question — which he said puzzled all the inferior scholars is why did Hamlet hesitate to kill his father's murderer? Everyone had their own opinion about

it. Some said that Hamlet was wishy-washy, some said that he did not have sufficient criminal evidence, or that he was too philosophical, and so on. Well it no longer seems to me to be a deep issue. Even if we get the right answers, whose life will be improved? The questions in the bona fide scriptures, by comparison, are crucial and relevant for everyone's welfare. In the Vedic literature Maharaj Pariksit's dilemma was, "What is the duty of one who is about to die?" And the question asked by Maharaj Yudisthira (and at another time by Maharaj Prithu) was, "How can we, who are householders and involved in worldly duties, come out of the entanglement of birth and death and achieve spiritual perfection?"

Hamlet asks the question, "To be or not to be?" But he never asked, "Who am I?" He saw the ghost of his father, but he never consulted with a bona fide saintly person who could have raised the issues to the transcendental platform for everyone's benefit, including those who watched the play. Hamlet is tragic, as is all material life. And certainly Shakespeare spoke like an empowered demigod with abilities for poetic philosophical expression that have rarely been equaled. When all is said and done, in Act V we get a heavy bed load of the dead, but what wisdom? Where is that Hamlet where the hero — like Arjuna of the *Bhagavad-gita* is told that he is considering everything on the bodily platform and that there is a higher truth? Where is that Shakespeare masterpiece where the spirit soul inquires from the guru, "What is my duty?" We want to see that play. That is our demand. Hamlet is not transcendental.

When we look at Hamlet from the spiritual perspective (just as when we look at Holden Caulfield), he appears to be a very likely candidate for spiritual knowledge. Consider his famous speech in which he agonized about the temporality of human life.

I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'er hanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in

apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me; no, nor women neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so. (*Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2).

Brooklyn College had nice lawns and handsome brick architecture. Prestigious guests visited and spoke in the Walt Whitman auditorium. Eleanor Roosevelt received a standing ovation for her victory speech the day after John F. Kennedy was elected President. Allen Ginsburg came and read his poetry. It was well received, despite his homosexual cheerleading. The Zen scholar and meditator Allen Watts came and spoke about the ease of meditation and liberation. From the audience I asked him if the same stage he was describing as liberation could be reached by drugs or alcohol. It was a silly question because I knew alcohol couldn't produce any state of transcendental high. And he told me so. But he said psychedelic drugs could produce a state like satori, and I was surprised that he said it. It seemed too easy that something the monks could achieve only by years of austere practices could be achieved by taking a pill.

READING SRILA PRABHUPADA'S BOOKS

I am slowing down in my reading of Srila Prabhupada's books. I confine myself to hearing my assistants read out loud to me three times a day during meal times. I used to read more. I would read all of his books every year. Finish *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, then turn to *Caitanya-caritamṛta*, then *Bhagavad-gīta*, then *The Nectar of Devotion*. I would read a chapter and then write a summary of it. I called it "reading and writing," and I would mix it with insights and descriptions of my little life. Sometimes I would read without writing. I would go to college libraries and sit in the corrals and read. I would grow sleepy and my head would hit the desk. But I would revive, pull out of the drowse and continue.

I would also read in preparation for *Srimad-Bhagavatam* classes, read in the section where the verses I had to speak on occurred. Now that I am writing my Autobiography, I have less time to read. But I hear alertly three times a day for about twenty minutes per session. That's one hour a day. Just now I am hearing Prabhupada's biographical sketch of Lord Caitanya in the beginning of volume one of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. I may possibly use some for a lecture on Gaura Purnima. I am also hearing

progressively in the First Canto (in the facsimile edition to Prabhupada's *Bhagavatam* published in India in the early 1960s.) I am also hearing the *Krishna* book, second volume, Krishna in Dvaraka. I don't feel a need for outside reading (outside Srila Prabhupada's books), although I read Aindra Prabhu's book, and I will occasionally read a godbrother's book. I also read the four volumes of songs by Bhaktivinoda Thakura. It is tasty to occasionally read this "outside" literature, but I like to keep steadily hearing Srila Prabhupada's literary voice.

I read a poet's poem in the morning before I write my own poem to be posted on the web. Right now I read two poems daily from the collection of complete poems by E. E. Cummings, and they help me get into the mood for poetry writing. I am also dipping into the autobiography of Mark Twain because it helps me with my Autobiography.

The three hearings from Prabhupada's books are the most important. My ears are clear and attentive as I honor *prasadam*. My friends read clearly and with devotion. We don't interrupt to make comments. I don't retain so thoroughly, but I pay attention while the reading is going on. I think I *do* have a general long-term memory, which I can call upon if required. For example, we are reading the life of Lord Caitanya in biographical sketch. So I retained the story of the *brahmana* who comes to Jagannatha Mishra's house and how the child Vishvambhara spoiled his offering three times. I can recite it before an audience. I retain the Lord's spoiling of the young girls' offerings to Shiva and Durga as they pray for a good husband. He interfered and told them to make the offering to Him instead. He cursed them that if they did not give the offerings to Him they would get old husbands who had seven children by a previous marriage. But if they made their offerings to Him they would get a beautiful young husband. The girls were inwardly pleased with the Lord's threats and teasings, but they complained to their elders. I will not forget that. I will remember the Lord's disturbing the *brahmanas* while they tried to say *gayatri* mantras standing in the Ganges. He would dive under the water and catch them by the legs and knock them over. That is not an exaggeration of the text. I will always remember that some students came upon the Lord while He was chanting the names of the *gopis* (because He was always in *gopi bhava*). The students were stupid and accused the Lord of misbehavior for chanting the *gopis'*

names. They said He should chant Krishna's name instead. He chased after the students, but they gathered in another place and made angry plans to strike the Lord if He ever attacked them again. The Lord was affected by rumors and criticisms that resulted as a cause of this incident. He decided to take *sannyasa* in order to get respect from all persons and better preach the *sankirtana* movement. He approached Kesava Bharati Maharaj and asked him to grant Him *sannyasa*. I remember a lot of details although I may forget them with time unless I hear them again.

I just now heard of the surrender of Sarvabhauma Bhattacharya to the Lord. The scholar was so impressed with the Lord Caitanya's analysis of the *Vedanta Sutra* and the *atmarama* verse that he concluded the Lord could not be a mere mortal being. He composed a hundred verses in honor of the Lord, two of which are most important. One says that Lord Caitanya has descended to this earth to teach detachment and devotion to Himself. I offer my humble obeisances unto Him.

I must keep hearing so I will keep remembering. Of all the rules and regulations in the Vedas the most important is to hear and remember Krishna always.

entering the navy

For the graduation ceremony I decided not to attend. I didn't want to parade in robes and have to listen to speeches. I came the day after the ceremony and picked up my diploma, which said I received a Bachelor of Arts cum laude in English and Philosophy. The next program for me would be my mandatory call to two years active military service. I graduated in June and had to enter the Navy in January. In the meantime, I wrote seriously at short stories and a novella.

Life aboard the saratoga

I dreaded entering the Navy, and I resented my father and my mother for what I saw as manipulating me into something I really didn't have to do if I had played my cards better. On a cold day in mid January, I assembled with another group of sailors and took a bus to the Brooklyn Navy Yard where we would wait to get our assignments. These were sailors who had completed their boot camp. My six weeks of Reserve Officer training was counted as boot camp, so I was in the same category. I was assigned to an aircraft carrier — a super carrier named the USS Saratoga CVA 60. It seemed very arbitrary as to what department I would be assigned to. A young secretary-type sailor said he would put me in the gunnery department. I told him, "I hate guns." And I told him that I had graduated from college with an English major. He gave me a funny look and assigned me to something called the PIO — the public information office. Its function was to give out press kits with public information about the ship to dignitaries in foreign ports and to produce a shipwide newspaper when the ship was at sea and had no regular newspapers. Considering the various assignments I might have gotten, such as working in the boiler

room or the gunnery department, I felt I had lucked out and gotten something easy. But it was still prison, and I was full of resentment. The thought of two full years on this ship made me very sad.

The sailors who worked in the rough divisions referred to the secretarial people as “Pussy Divisions.” But they did this privately and didn’t make antagonism against the secretaries. With the help of the secretary you could get your records handled quickly and be given special treatment. A ship like the *Saratoga* had two thousand men on it and to be given preference with your papers was a big boon. You could get a discharge early; you could get a raise in your rank and all kinds of perks if you had favorable handling of your records by the typists and secretaries. Typists weren’t the only ones who could render special services. The photography department could get officers photographs of flight operations and ships which the officers considered treasures; in return, they could get special liberty and leave benefits and get out of trouble.

The jets are shot off the front (bow) of the ship by steam propulsion and when they land they are caught by a cable that hooks on to part of the plane.

All the pilots are commissioned officers. The flight crews who work on the decks are mostly enlisted men who wear ear guards over their ears to prevent themselves from going deaf from the great roar of the engines which went on throughout the day and night. Our office was located several decks below the flight deck and consisted mostly of typewriters. I sailed from 1961 until 1963, and there were no computers, just manual typewriters. The ship I was assigned to, the *Saratoga*, was in Naples, Italy, and we sailed there on an old aircraft carrier called the *Shangri-La*. It took us about five days to get there, and since I had served in the PIO on the *Shangri-La* it was an easy thing for me to get assigned to the PIO, on the *Saratoga*. I was immediately engaged in typing up the nightly newspaper, called the *Sara News*, that came out when we were at sea. We got our information from the UPS wires and then selected news items, edited them, laid them out on stencils and produced a stenciled newspaper. We had to write in our own language the material that was on the wires. I got into trouble for a news article I wrote. I wrote something to the effect that American news services were mostly right-winged. A criticism came from the captain’s office that this kind of thing should not appear in the

newspaper. The officer in charge of the PIO chastised me, and I took it very seriously. From then on I didn't put any of my college left-wing viewpoints into my newspaper articles.

The sailors in the PIO office were a cut above other sailors on the ship. The young man in charge, named Corky, was a mid-westerner from Elkhart, Indiana, and was a pleasant gentleman. He wasn't hip like the Brooklyn College writers I knew from New York, but he was not vulgar or violent like some sailors. I lent him a copy of a book of mine *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin. I found that Corky kept a diary, and he wrote in it that he appreciated Baldwin's writing as lucid. Corky was a little bit of a square, but I appreciated his decency, and I could hold a conversation with him, which I couldn't do with many other sailors.

As I have said, I definitely didn't like being in the Navy. I was there because of my father's manipulation. My values were anti-Navy. I didn't want to be on a gun ship, a jet ship with potentiality for tremendous destruction. I was something like a pacifist, not a warrior. But here I was stuck for two years on a warship. I had a post in which we really didn't have to do much at all. There were things called "Press Kits" that we had to keep up-to-date. They contained a picture of the Admiral, the Operations Officer, the ship itself, the planes and facts and figures about the planes. They were to be given out to press reporters and dignitaries in different ports that we went to so they could write stories about us. We just had to keep a stock of them so that they didn't run out. That we would do by going to the press department and making sure that they were printed up in a good number. Aside from that we had to print the newspaper while we were at sea. That was a little laborious because we had to take the stories off the press wires and write them up into little vignettes of headlines from the news so that it would look like headlines from the newspapers—the actual big stories of the day. And we had to stay up at night and mimeograph them on an old-fashioned mimeograph machine cranking it with a hand crank. None of us were expert typists, and if we made a mistake on the stencil, we had to go back and do it over again. We would get the last news stories in from the lines at about ten o'clock and then take about an hour to mimeograph the newspaper and then say at eleven o'clock we would go around and deliver the newspapers to all the different departments on the ship.

We had a right to go even up to the ship's bridge where the Admiral was and deliver a few copies to him. And then we went to bed. We did the newspaper in shifts or rotations so that when you did the newspaper you didn't have to get up early the next morning for roll call. Rotating turns each man got to do the newspaper a few nights a week. But when we were in ports, we didn't do the newspaper so that was less to do.

The officer in charge of the PIO was Lieutenant Richardson. He didn't fly the modern jets, he was a little too old for that. He flew the propeller plane that brought the mail to the ship. He was a sarcastic man, and yet, he treated us in a friendly way also. There was a junior officer, a lieutenant J.G. who was also assigned to the PIO and did artwork, drawing pictures of the planes for example, to be included in the year book that was published every year to go along with the Mediterranean cruise. And he drew pictures of the planes to go with a monthly magazine that we published. The monthly magazine featured news about the different departments on the ship and for a while it even had a book review section. I did that using my knowledge from English literature. I did book reviews on James Joyce and William Falkner and even did one on Henry Miller. After a while the officers stopped the book reviews because he said sailors didn't read books and so it was a waste of time. That was too bad because it was one thing I enjoyed doing.

There were about four or five sailors in the PIO office. None of them were enthusiastic and all of them were lazy. After a few months Corky was discharged from the Navy, and I became the senior enlisted man in the PIO. I had to try to motivate the sailors to do their work, and it was a hard job, like being a high school teacher. Often we sailors would be left alone in the office for hours, and Lieutenant Richardson wouldn't show up. We just sat around talking and fooling around, mock wrestling or going for a walk around the ship. We would spend time shining our shoes and pressing our uniforms for when we would go on shore. When we were on the ship we would wear dungarees and dungaree shirts and blue caps.

Once a year the ship took a Mediterranean cruise. For five days or more we crossed the ocean, and the jets took many drills of which we took no part in except to sometimes watch them from the observation deck. When the ship reached the Mediterranean it would stop in ports for a few days each like Barcelona in Spain,

and Cannes and Nice in France, and all the way into Greece and Cyprus. One year we went to Lebanon. A year book, like a college year book, was kept for each Mediterranean cruise. It included many photographs and articles on the different departments of the ship. It was expected to have a certain flair to it and humor. I thought I would be picked as the editor of the magazine because of my English background, but because I was a bit of a rebel and didn't work as well with the officers as another boy, an artist was picked who could draw jets and who worked well with the junior artist who was also in charge of the year book. I was a little disappointed by that.

There was time for reading books on your own. In France I picked up some books that were not available in America at that time, such as all the books of Henry Miller, books by Céline, and I had books mailed to me from America such as the latest poetry and novels.

In each Mediterranean port we were free to visit the local tourist spots. The PIO office made up a pamphlet indicating where the cultural places were and giving information such as how we should be courteous to the local people of each country and respect their manners and respect their currency. But in addition to the museums and churches, inevitably the sailors were corralled into bars that were set up just for catching the crew of a large ship. They would be run by countrymen of that particular country, but otherwise they would be similar in each country. Their only customers would be sailors from our ship, and there would be girls there to mingle with the sailors and induce them to drink. And if they were so inclined, to induce them to go upstairs to a bedroom. Beer was almost the only liquor served, and each sailor was guaranteed to get a beer-drunk within a few hours. We were let off from our ship to the local port in early evening and were taken by whaleboat to the shore. We had to be back on the wharf to catch our last whaleboat back to the ship by eleven o'clock or we would be AWOL. The last whaleboats back to the ship would be filled with rowdy drunken sailors boasting of their night's exploits.

From Barcelona I brought back a leather wine pouch — filled with wine. The officers were in such a rush to get us all on board, off the ladders and into our beds, that they did not inspect my wine bag. I kept it in the PIO's luggage room and would occasionally visit it for a nip. Once I drank so much in the luggage

room that when I came out my eyes were red. I stopped in on one of the “pussy division” offices to talk with one of the boys who was interested in jazz and especially liked Max Roach. He got excited about my looks and said, “Look at you! Your eyes are red. You’re high!” I quickly exited from the office without another word.

I regularly had my friends from Brooklyn College send me “nickel bags” of marijuana in the mail. I would walk out on a “catwalk” known as the Admiral’s Catwalk and lock the door behind me. From out there I would be dangling over the lower decks, and no one could see me. I had a cigarette lighter which stayed lit in the wind, and I took a few drags on a joint. Then I would come back into the ship. It was an extremely risky business because if one got caught with marijuana he could have his rank demoted or even worse he could be put in the brig or given dishonorable discharge. During the time I was in the Navy I was never caught, but I knew of people who were and who received those punishments. But I was so depressed that I had to do it to keep my spirits up. With a little marijuana high I felt that I was in a different world and could endure the sad reality of my two-year imprisonment. Sometimes there would be an announcement over the loud speaker for an immediate report to our lockers for inspection. I would run to my locker and put everything contraband into my pockets. They searched your lockers but they didn’t pat you down and search your body. So I was never caught.

I don’t know of any other men who took to taking smuggled drugs in the mail, but I knew that many were very unhappy. Those who were not career sailors were referred to as “short-timers,” and they would invariably count the days left before they would get out. Nobody liked being there, and they spoke openly about it. I used to “horse around” with an uneducated boy in the PIO office who came from Chattanooga, Tennessee. He was bitter about his enforced service in the military. He would say with his southern accent, “Where’s the goddamn freedom? They say this is a land of freedom, but you have to spend four years in the Armed Services or else they put you in jail. Where’s the goddamn freedom?”

There were beautiful moments, like seeing flying fish jumping off the bow and porpoises leaping high beside the ship. Standing on the stern to throw garbage and seeing the propellers churning and the sky and the distant water. And you forget for a while that

you still have one and a half years left, and you just see the powerful ship cutting through the water. The super carrier is so strong that it remains steady. No matter how rough the weather gets it keeps its balance. Standing on the chow line on the deck below the flight deck there are big openings where the planes sit about to be carried up to the flight deck or about to be lowered down to the next deck. There is no fence between you and the water — just distance. One time in two years I heard “Man overboard!” and they tried to stop the ship and turn it around and sent up copters but they couldn’t find him. Sometimes they stopped the ship at sea and had sunbathing and for the daring, diving off the ship into an area that was covered with nets.

He writes of his years in
the Navy and the “X” Division,
the whaleboat coming underneath the aircraft carrier with a
feeling of coming home to your mamma, your
big gray mamma with
the white letters “CVA-60”
they ain’t going to sink this baby too many escorts and ship
gunnery you don’t sink an aircraft carrier.
The whaleboat sunk though and three hundred lads went down
they wore pea coats in Naples but no life jackets
see Naples and die drunk
they didn’t reach Mamma’s
big gray breast protection the water was too rough for the
whaleboat
and it capsized.

For weeks afterward the ship was gloomy. Eventually they put up pictures of the men who were lost. You noticed who was missing. We lost a man from the PIO. One of the men who used to give out bread was gone, a short Italian man, and a big marine who fought in the boxing competition. Three hundred men gone down and irretrievable. It was sad for everyone. We had a non-denominational religious service and the chaplain spoke, and we were all silent and reverent and felt the loss of our brothers.

A huge fuel tanker pulls up close alongside the Saratoga. She shoots a line to our ship, and we knot it and shoot it back with a heavy rope, and then they shoot it back with a heavier rope, and

then we shoot it back with the fuel line. They start pumping fuel into our ship. A Scottish pipe band comes out on the deck of the fueler and starts playing music while the two ships move closely together and fuel is pumped into the *Saratoga*. It takes a long time. The navigation is done carefully.

In the early evening I get the rolls of newspaper and cut it into headlines and stories and type it on to the stencil and make a newspaper with lead stories and minor stories. By ten o'clock I've got the stencils made, and I go into a private room where the hand stenciler is. I play John Coltrane on a little phonograph and crank out the pages. Several hundred copies. I stencil them. Then it's eleven o'clock, and I start my rounds of delivering the newspaper. I go to all the designated spots and drop off little piles of newspapers where men are sleeping. All the lights are out on the ship except the low red ones that guide your feet to the passageways. I go to the navigation deck where everyone is awake and deliver the papers there. I come and go like a cat or a shadow saying nothing. By twelve o'clock I reach my bunk and pull the curtain aside for privacy. I affix a sign to the curtain "Night Duty Do Not Disturb," so they will leave me alone in the morning.

The next day an emergency landing is made on our deck by a plane from another ship. It's announced on the loud speaker, and we run up to the observation deck. The plane is caught in a net and dragged to a quick stop. The pilot gets out and slowly walks away from his plane. The announcer from our ship says, "Welcome aboard the U.S. *Saratoga*. You are safe." The photographer gets a picture for our magazine.

Two Mediterranean cruises. The monotony of standing on the chow line for inferior food. I chose out the bread and butter and milk. I wrote a story at sea about our family dog Mickie and sent it to my sister and to Dr. Alexander. They both liked it very much and said that they could see I was destined to be a writer.

The sarcasm from Lieutenant Commander Richardson. The dull companionship of my shipmates. The luxury of six hours solitude alone in bed with no officers or anyone to talk to, but the rude waking and getting up to the mechanical trumpet for Reveille. Sharing the shower with other men. Anticipation of getting mail and actually getting a letter from a college friend. The always thrilling sight of porpoises jumping near the bow. The ship going three months for dry dock into Norfolk, Virginia. We rented an

apartment near the ship and drank rum and coke. During that time I had no duties and went to the office and typed a novella of my college years.

Ours was the first ship to enter Guantanamo Bay after the Cuban missile crisis. The jets constantly in practice. Many calls to “general quarters” where you run to your station in case of battle. My battle station was just to crouch down in a hallway and wait until it was over. No real duty. One time we had to load on ammunition, and everyone had to take part in it. I climbed down a narrow passage and passed the shells hand-by-hand up the chain of men. Finally it became too exhaustive for me to handle the shells, and I just climbed up by myself and quit and went back to the PIO office. No one reprimanded me.

Lonely in a Naples café playing Tony Bennett singing “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.” My mother remarks, “Your letter seems so lonely.” I get a sailor’s suit tailored by a professional tailor in Norfolk. The Admiral has an inspection of the whole crew. He comes to me and looks me up and down and says, “Did you get this tailored in a store?”

“Yes sir.”

He makes no comment.

I mock fight in the office with Gerry Adams, giving each other imitation kicks to the groin, terrific smashes to the head and falling down to the floor. Playing to pass the time. A new man joins us. He’s from the Midwest, the son of a cafeteria owner. He’s homely. He looks up to me for coming from New York City and having hip tastes in music and literature. Another new man joins us transferring from the Air Department for an easier berth. He tells us how on the ship’s vacation trip to Switzerland he half forced his way into a woman’s cabin and seduced her. He’s a braggart, and I don’t like him. Lazy in the office and doesn’t obey my commands. I have been promoted to third-class journalist and am senior man now in the office. I’m responsible for motivating the other men.

See a whale surface and spouting water high into the air — the best moment at sea.

more on the siddhasvarupa

B. reminded me that Prabhupada said our eternal *rasa* is fixed and will be revealed to us. It is not chosen by us or by culturing it or by associating with a person of a particular *rasa*. But Srila Narayana Maharaj seems to say that all Hare Krishna devotees of Lord Caitanya are *madhurya-rasa* or specifically *gopi manjaris*. Or they can develop it. The evidence is that all the *acaryas* from Lord Caitanya, such as the six Goswamis, Visvanatha Cakravarti, etc., are revealed as *gopi manjaris*. But in Sanatana Goswami's *Bṛhad-Bhagavatamṛta*, the leading character, Gopakumara, goes to Goloka Vrindavan and becomes a cowherd boy by the name of Svarupa. And in the last days before he passed away, Bhaktitirtha Swami told me he had strong intimations he was going to become a cowherd boy. The larger question is whether one is going to join Krishna in the spiritual world to live eternally, or whether he has to return to the material world. In *Bhagavad-gita* 4.9, Krishna says if one knows the nature of His appearance and activities, then he does not, at death, return to this world, but he goes to Krishna. And in the opening verses of the Eight Chapter, Krishna says whatever one thinks of at the time of death, that determines his destination. If one thinks

of Krishna, he goes to Him. When my godsister Lalitamrta was just hours away from leaving her body, she became afraid of her destination after death. They called me on the phone, and I spoke to Kaulini Mataji who conveyed my words to Lalitamrta. I told her, according to Srila Prabhupada, she would either go straight to Goloka Vrindavan or she would take birth in a family of advanced Vaishnavas. It gave her some comfort to hear these conclusions.

After the NAVY

Then suddenly, while the *Saratoga* was moored at her home base in Mayport, Florida, I was informed that within two weeks I would be permanently discharged from the Navy. It was a logistical detail because they didn't want to send me back to start another Mediterranean cruise, and so were letting me go early. When I heard the news I was blissful. They were giving me some extra money on discharge also. The last two weeks I could hardly contain myself I was so happy. But I acted with a cool head and let the days go by as if they were ordinary days. In my mind I decided that I would move right away into an apartment on the Lower East Side and not go back to my parents' home on Staten Island. Over the last few days there was a flurry of discharge activity including a physical examination. I received the inoculation with joy, and papers from the secretarial office. I was given an honorable discharge and a chance to re-enlist if I wanted. For a moment I thought about it. Would I like to stay in the Navy with its protective security of regular meals, chance for further promotions and trips to the Mediterranean? Was there anything about it that made we want to stay? Just for a second I might have thought of

staying, but then of course I dismissed it from my mind and said that I did not want to re-enlist. I didn't even get a chance to say good-bye to Lieutenant Commander Richardson. He was off on leave. I barely had time for quick good-byes to my shipmates in the PIO. I got my discharge papers and walked down the gang plank saluting for the last time. I was a free man.

The fight for the Bombay temple

Prabhupada's fight with Mr. Nair was epic. It cost him gallons of blood and years of worry. He gave the man ISKCON's hard-earned cash, and they wrote a contract, but Mr. Nair refused to give the land. Prabhupada had a lawyer, but Mr. Nair was a man of worldly influence, and he even hired *gundas* to scare the devotees, and he turned off the water. The devotees lived there but could not build a temple. When Prabhupada was out of town the devotees caved in, and told Mr. Nair they would give up the land if he would give the money back. Prabhupada was disappointed. He said, "I'll be the last one to give up." He built a makeshift temple and installed Radha Rasabihari there, thinking that once the Deities were there, they cannot dare to drive us away. But they were so ruthless, they called out the police squad and began tearing down the makeshift temple and almost took the Deities, but help arrived just in time to stop them. In one day the devotees rebuilt the makeshift temple and went on worshipping Radha Rasabihari.

Mr. Nair came to see Srila Prabhupada and threatened him. "Don't bluff," said Prabhupada, "either give us the deed to build on the land or give us back the money, and you can take your land

back.” Mr. Nair cursed him and departed. Soon after he had a heart attack and died. His wife fought on.

Eventually things went ISKCON’s way. Mrs. Nair cried, and Prabhupada consoled her. We got the land. Prabhupada had a little feast. “It was a good fight,” he said. Then the next obstacle: the police commissioner would not grant a “No Objection” certificate to build. He put in writing “the *kirtana* is a nuisance,” and Prabhupada was infuriated. More lawyers, more visits to the police. Finally they relented. To call India’s ancient spiritual culture “a nuisance” was a great offense. Whoever said it should be fired.

Now we had to build a beautiful model temple. It went up, with three gorgeous towers and three beautiful altars and a gazebo-like *vyasasana*. Prabhupada had special quarters on the fifth floor of the luxurious ISKCON hotel, a first-class restaurant. Since the initial construction much has been added. The devotees took over all the rooms that the tenants had occupied on the land, and auditoriums and conference halls and a deluxe restaurant has been added. Thousands of people visit every day. And the spirit of Srila Prabhupada walks on Juhu Beach early in the morning. It is one of his great triumphs in India, in Mumbai, the wealthiest city.

arriving in new york

With my extra money I booked a plane to New York City and arrived at JFK without an idea of where I would stay. It was snowy in New York, and I went to a realtor and consulted about apartments on the Lower East Side. He showed me something that was pretty far east, a little out of the usual boundaries where the hippies lived and more into the Puerto Rican section. It was on Suffolk Street, one block south of Houston Street and in between First and Second Avenues. I picked out a humble two-room apartment and took it right away without having to stay overnight anywhere else. It had heat but no hot water. It was inexpensive. It needed a paint job, but I was ready to do that. I bought new casual clothes and wore my Navy pea coat for the winter cold. For the next few days I fully occupied myself with fixing up the apartment. I painted the walls white, got a new mattress and a little writing table. I placed on it a big thick writing notebook I had purchased in Italy. I got red curtains and curtain rods and the place looked neat and comfortable and simple.

I conceived myself as living without a girlfriend, just a monk. It was a room for one, but I had a chair for friends. For two years I

had yearned to move back to the Lower East Side and have my own apartment, and now it was fulfilled. The first night I savored my new freedom in New York but also thought of myself as something like an artist living in Paris.

I made many trips out into the snowy streets to buy items for my apartment as they occurred to me and as I wrote them down in my notebook, such as Chinese straw mats, a Chinese cover for my naked lamp bulb, thief-prevention bars for my windows and a thief-prevention device for my door which slanted diagonally into the floor. Living in a Lower East Side apartment was not as safe as living on the Saratoga, but the Saratoga safety was the security of a prison. Within a few days I went and visited my friends Steve Kowitz and Murray Mednick, and it was ecstatic for me to be with them again. I bought some marijuana and Zig-Zag cigarette papers and started writing high in my new home. I had no plot for a story but just wrote of my life as it was happening with a dash of artistry. I had several hundred dollars discharge money from the Navy, and I decided to live off that savings rather than to get a job. I wanted my uninhibited freedom for as long as it could last.

After two weeks I phoned my parents and told them I had been discharged from the Navy and that I had taken an apartment in Manhattan. They were shocked and disappointed with me for not coming home first. I immediately visited them, and they greeted me with negative emotions. They said at least I should have come home first and then talked over with them what I would do next. But I told them that I had been contemplating this for years while I was in the Navy, and it was my adult decision as to what I wanted to do with my life. Begrudgingly they accepted that I done it and would not be living at home with them. I told them that I would keep in touch regularly and would visit them and would visit my sister in Westchester. I took some of my clothes with me and went back to Manhattan. I had stood up to them, and it had not been hard for me to do. They would just have to accept it and live with the fact that I was a grown up independent man. I had all intentions of keeping regular relations with them.

I picked up a friendship with a couple who I had just begun to know before I entered the Navy. His name was Eliot, and his girlfriend was Anna. Eliot was a Jewish hipster who had affected mannerisms such as sniffing in his breath and standing and walking around a room rather than sitting down. He was ironic

and had a kind of satanic grin. Behind their backs he made fun of people who he thought were square, and sometimes he indirectly did it even to their faces. He liked to give the impression that he was living on the edge, and he actually was. He didn't have a steady job but worked sometimes as a waiter in the Catskills hotels and did other hustling things to get money here and there. He smoked marijuana when he could get hold of it, and it affected his behavior. His passion was painting. He painted on plywood or boards or anything he could get because he couldn't afford canvas. He was an abstract painter and had a good sense of design. His girlfriend, Anna, was born in Italy and was still there as a young child during the war. She managed to get out and immigrate to America where she lived with her father. Now she lived with Eliot in his apartment. Anna was attractive but a little tough-faced. She wore her hair short, wore a trench coat and smoked cigarettes. She wore dark glasses and looked like she was in a foreign movie playing the part of a gangster's girlfriend. When I met them they were about my age, twenty-four, and I started hanging out with them. I would go visit them at their apartment, and we would get high together. Eliot would even invite us to take part in painting his pictures with him. Sometimes he would take a raw egg and throw it against the piece of wood. Sometimes he drew pictures of broken hearts and border designs with interesting obscure patterns to them. Sometimes the three of us would take long bus rides together or go walking in the streets or go visit a friend. In a subtle way I grew attracted to Anna, but it was mostly just a friendship. I showed them my writing which was autobiographical and surreal. I wrote vignettes which were like Picasso's pink period where he drew clowns and melancholic acrobatics. I tried to strike that mood. But it was mostly autobiographic/poetic. Anna and Eliot appeared in the writings, and I would tell of the times we sat and talked together and painted together. Anna said she thought I was a "genius." Steve Kowitz thought my writing was too much just a first draft and needed to be polished into a story, but Eliot defended it and said it was good as it was — spontaneous. And so I lived my life and wrote about it. Mostly I stayed alone. Most of my friends had girlfriends, but I was too shy to acquaint myself with one and that made me sad. I was a loner. But I liked my artist's life and my little hermitage apartment. I liked living the

hippy lifestyle, and the marijuana high which enabled me to write freely.

Once Eliot said to me, “Do you know I could corrupt you if I wanted?” I said, “No, I don’t think you could.” He was often saying strange off-beat things like that. Things that were challenging and would hurt. I wondered what he meant. How could he corrupt me?

There was a circle of acquaintances on the Lower East Side all around the same age many of them graduates from Brooklyn College. One young man was Matty Paris, who lived with a girlfriend. He met Eliot and Anna and told me he thought they were unintelligent. Matty thought my own writing was like a newspaper. Matty’s writing attempted to be classical. If he wrote about a lampshade he made it seem “immortal,” and his characters spoke to each other in very high tones about intellectual subjects. But he was a decent fellow, and I liked talking with him. After talking with me for a while one day while sitting in the park he gave me a little analysis of myself. He said he thought I was an existentialist-humanist like the writer Gogol. He said I seemed to be looking for an American religion. That analysis fascinated me. It seemed to be accurate. When you visited him he frequently gave you a joint of marijuana.

I thought Murray Mednick, whom I worked with on the *Landscapes* magazine at Brooklyn College, was in the mode of goodness. He seemed very decent and fair. I thought he was an excellent poet. I loved to read his poems, and I was happy when he liked my own. I once told him, “the real power is in prose,” and he seemed impressed and said, “yes, you’re right.” But he preferred to write poetry. He was married to a girl named Amy who was a high school teacher. She taught and he stayed at home. I once wrote about that fact in my book — my one book of my life — and he read it and said to me on the phone, “You’re going to get chastised young man.” Did he mean that he was going to chastise me for saying that he lived at home while his wife worked? I wasn’t sure what the remark meant. But he was always kind to me.

Steve Kowitz was playful and very humorous and comic. He said he wanted to work in the carnival, but I think he was just joking. He wrote funny polished poems and was very dedicated to doing it. He had a string of girlfriends. He was also always kind to me and would encourage me in my writing. He said he thought I

would be published by the time I was thirty years old. (That happened, but in a way none of us ever guessed at the time.)

Another acquaintance was Richie, who lived with his girlfriend. They were both quiet and seemed like lost children. I liked them because they were very unassuming and open. The funny thing about him was that although he was so short and thin and non-aggressive, he owned a big motorcycle. I think he got an ego boost from roaring around on his motorcycle. (Months later when I had moved up to the George Washington Bridge, which is way way uptown, I bought a forty dollar bag of unrefined marijuana from him — which is a big bag — and he drove me all the way up Westside Drive to the apartment I was sharing. It was a daring drive hanging on to the back of the motorcycle with a bag of pot out in the open.

My relationship with Eliot and Anna began to cool. Eliot engaged in criminal activities. He shoplifted. He took taxis and directed them to his apartment then said he was going inside to get money, but he would run upstairs to his roof and jump across to the roofs of the connecting buildings until the taxi driver gave up chase. He would steal from the hotels he worked in the Catskills. I didn't do any of these things myself, but I hung out with him. I was becoming infatuated with Anna, and I felt it would lead to trouble so I detached myself from Eliot and Anna and stopped seeing them. I remembered back to Eliot's words to me at the beginning of our friendship. He had said, "You know, I could corrupt you." At the time I had said, "No, you can't." But now I felt I had been corrupted by my association with them. I felt guilty about it, as if I had done a great wrong. And I feared that they would both continue to enter my life. Fortunately they did not. Once after I had joined the Swami, Eliot came by and sat in the *kirtana*. But when the devotees bowed down afterward and began making obeisances to Swamiji, Eliot began crawling around on his hands and knees mocking us. I know his nihilistic ways, and I asked him to leave the temple which he did. A few days later, during the morning program, I saw his face at the front door, about to enter. I went to the door and told him he couldn't come in. He sniffed, feigned a punch at me, and walked away. When I turned back into the temple, Swamiji asked me, "Who was the man at the door?" I told him, "He's a trouble maker," and Swamiji accepted my words. I never saw him again. Later Anna came by

the storefront with a new young man. At the time, I was leading a *kirtana* and playing the harmonium in a drone sound, with its strap around my neck. Anna pressed her body against the harmonium and looked at me flirtatiously. I told her to leave the storefront, and I never saw her again. I felt proud that I had protected the Swami and the temple—and myself—from the influence of Eliot and Anna.

ISKCON and sri la prabhupada

I was very resigned that Prabhupada was going to leave us in his last days. Some devotees maintained hope that he would revive by diet or regimen. The majority knew that he wanted us to preach after his departure. So much trouble came about the last instructions he gave. But it was worth it. It was clear what he wanted: "If you love me show it by working together to preserve this institution." New gurus. But they began to fall down. Schisms formed. The main body of ISKCON remained as an institution, governed by the GBC. It looks as if it will survive. In many places, in the American temples, it has diminished. In India and Russia it has increased. It has gained influence in the yoga movements. There is a committee to keep Prabhupada in the center, to maintain his legacy. More Indians are joining and Indian immigrants. Small numbers of nationals in the individual countries are joining. No sense in being afraid. It will revive. Krishna will protect us.

We don't want a strict, dictatorial, militaristic rules and regulations movement. No one will follow that. It has to be a loving, compassionate body. Welcoming people, *kirtana* and dancing,

prasadam and a modest, self-realized Krishna conscious lecture. Keep Prabhupada in the center, his books, his pictures, his *bhajans*, his lectures, memories of him. ISKCON has over four hundred centers and preaching outposts. Visit them and maintain them, they are beacon lights in the darkness of Kali-yuga.

He took a morning walk, do as he did. Walking rapidly to keep up to him and Krishna conscious talk. On the beach or in the park, remembering Krishna. Sing his *guru-puja* song, bow down to his *murti*, offer him flowers. Put a blanket on that *murti* at night and wake him in the morning and change his dress. Sit beside him and chant your mantras. Hear his voice blend with yours.

Lower East Side

I changed apartments frequently. The best was the first one with the white walls and the red curtains and the fresh dream of leaving the Navy to come and live on the Lower East Side. After three months there a man knocked on my door and told me that they were tearing the building down and that I would have to leave. He gave me the address of another apartment I could take. I was disappointed to lose my cozy nest. The apartment he gave me was not level with the street but half a flight down, and it went from one end of the building to the other with a low ceiling. There was no natural light, and it was dark there except for the electric bulbs. There was no cooking facility either. It was on a noisy street. I submitted to it because I thought this was all I could get, and I didn't have much money. As soon as I moved in there I started eating poorly, not cooking for myself, and I even painted pictures of fruits on the walls. After a few months I decided I didn't like it there, and I found another place, this time in the heart of the Lower East Side on Eleventh Street and Avenue A. I didn't know it when I got the place but it was a dangerous apartment — a target of thieves. I didn't have metal bars that fit on the windows,

and I think even if I did they would have broken in during the day time when I was away. As my money was going low I got a part time job typing. I bought a cheap phonograph in Times Square and bought the Beatles' record "We Can Work It Out." My first day away from the apartment the phonograph and record were stolen. I immediately bought another phonograph. The next day that one was stolen. There was actually nothing at all left in the apartment except my suit. When I wasn't out wearing my suit I folded it under my mattress, and the thieves somehow didn't find it there. The only other object in my possession was a bottle of diet pills which I kept high on a shelf and which they didn't notice or didn't want. I hit a low point in my romance for the mystical Mecca of the Lower East Side. I decided I needed to live in a peaceful quiet place. And I needed a steady job. Wearing my suit so that it wouldn't get stolen, I went and applied for a job as a caseworker for the New York Department of Welfare. This was a popular position for college graduates. The pay wasn't great, but it was easy to get the job, and if you could take it, the work wasn't so hard. The work consisted of maintaining a caseload, that is a number of families or individuals who were receiving welfare and including people who were newly applying for welfare. We had to go to their homes and examine their situation, ask them questions and see if they qualified. If they had requests for a refrigerator or something essential, we would write it down for them and give them a check. We worked in their favor not against them. The supervisors in the Welfare Department were also sympathetic to the welfare clients. We would punch in on a time clock at nine o'clock, and after doing paperwork from our last visits we would punch out, and go out in the field to visit clients. Then we would come back and dictate on to a dictating machine the results of our visits. These got typed up and put in a file. I quickly learned the ropes of the job and was satisfying my supervisor.

For a new apartment I made a radical change and moved to the northern tip of Staten Island near the Staten Island ferry. That meant that it would take me about forty-five minutes to commute to work. But I chose an apartment complex, which was in a quiet neighborhood, and it was free of thieves. But I almost lost my life there. I was reading the Mentor paperback of the *Upanishads* and trying to understand the difficult concept of the *atma*, the self that is not the body the self that is eternal — the self that is reached by

liberated souls in meditation. That night I took LSD. It was a warm summer night, and I stripped down to my underpants. I became confused in my mind and was thinking of many things from my recent past on the Lower East Side. I felt haunted by my relationship with Eliot and Anna and thought I had done something very wrong in living with them. I regretted my friendship with them and thought I would have to be punished for it. They had somehow tainted me, and I was unclean. I felt very bad about that but didn't know what to do. Then my thoughts swam to the concepts of the eternal self. The eternal self was not the body, and it was not restricted to the properties of the body. It was free and could do anything it wanted. I wandered to the window of my third floor apartment and stood looking down. A voice deep within uttered my surname and told me to jump. With no clear idea in mind I jumped out my window and in an instant landed on both my heels. I felt a terrible pain in my feet, which was only exacerbated when I tried to walk. Crazy thoughts went through my mind. I thought I was a cave man. Then I thought that all the people on the earth had left the planet, and I was left behind. But then I realized that I was simply in an emergency condition and needed to go to the hospital. I sat on the grass and saw a passing person and asked him to get me an ambulance.

The next thing I remember was that it was morning of the next day and nurses in old-fashioned white uniforms were walking around an open area with many beds. I was in bed. A doctor came to me with a very concerned look on his face and told me I had broken both my heels. I had not passed out when I entered the hospital, but I was in a kind of other-worldly consciousness. I did not want them to detect that I was on LSD. I answered all their questions properly as to name and address except when they asked me my religion I said "Tao." The doctor looked at me not just out of concern for my feet, but he seemed to think I was deranged or something. What would make a person jump out of his window? My story was just that I was standing by the window and got dizzy. In fact it was printed on the first page of the *Staten Island Advance* that a young man had been standing by his window and got dizzy and fell out three floors. Soon my mother and father were by my bedside. They too looked very concerned. They had already been to my apartment and had cleared it out of anything they could find there. My father read my writings. I had been writing as usual, this

time about the Welfare Department and of my fondness for my supervisor. My supervisor was half black and half Japanese. My father said, "Do you like this guy — Kashimoto?" I said, "Yes, he's a good boss."

The doctor decided that I had to go into casts up to my knees on both feet and stay in them for six weeks. My father and mother said that they would take me home, and I could stay in my old bed in my old room. I was glad to have this shelter for the six week period and to be taken care of when I was crippled. My father carried me piggyback down to his car and into the house and placed me in the bed where I would have to sit for six weeks. I was temporarily discharged from my job.

With nothing else to do I took to reading a good deal, especially religious books. I tackled the Bible. Much of the Old Testament was incomprehensible to me, but I was touched by the New Testament and thought deeply about my own nominal Catholicism and my relationship to Jesus. But I didn't stop there. Through the mail I sent away for books of Eastern religion. I read the *Bhagavad-gita*, the works of Lao Tzu, the writings of Confucius, and the *Upanishads*. Seeing me immersed in Eastern religions my mother asked me, "You don't really believe in this, do you?"

"No," I said offhand. But it wasn't true. I was seriously interested in the East — in the mystics and their transcendental philosophy. At night I listened to music on the radio or listened to the baseball games. I also tried to write a piece about my state of being that led up to jumping from the window. I tried to understand it and put it into poetic prose. I called it "Unattached Notes." The title indicated that the writing had no strict form but also that my life was growing unattached from material pursuits.

During the time I was in my casts the most popular songs were "Downtown," "Up On The Roof," and Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man." The Mets repeatedly beat Sandy Koufax. Dad made me a desk with wheels on it so that I could just slide out of bed on to a chair and be sitting at a desk. The chair has wheels too, and I can roll into the other room where it's cooler and sit up and write. My parents are being very kind to me during this period of convalescence. But my father told me I would have to donate some money to things, now that they're building another house.

After six weeks the casts came off. I was given a pair of crutches to use. The first moment I stood in them I felt the most incredible

pain I had ever felt in my life. It was from atrophy of the muscles not being used. It took weeks of working and walking with the crutches before I could do it without great pain. Finally I was able to go outside and take short walks, but I had to lean entirely on the crutches.

I phoned Murray Mednick up and told him about my accident. He hadn't been in communication with me the whole time. He expressed sympathy and welcomed me to visit him. I hobbled down the street, took the Staten Island rapid transit, then the ferry and a taxi to his Manhattan Island apartment. We walked together down to the East River, and he said some day we would both be old men both wearing crutches, and we would walk down here and sit and talk.

After a few more weeks I was recovered enough to move back to my apartment in St. George Staten Island and to go back to work in the welfare office on the Lower East Side. I wore sturdy work boots and had to walk slowly, but the pain gradually diminished. I took long walks by the seashore in St. George to strengthen my ankles. My left ankle never completely recovered, and I walked with a stretched tendon and a pain that didn't go away.

boston second visit

Prabhupada visited Boston for a second time in 1969. We were still in the first storefront, and we found him an apartment right across the street. He carried small Radha Krishna Deities with him. Himavati made him a set of clothes for Them. Radharani's skirt was a little short. "That is all right," he wrote, "It affords us a look at Her lotus feet." He arrived from a visit to Buffalo. We sat in his room, and he played us the recording of the last lecture he gave there, at the student hall. A boy had raised his hand for a question. "What happens when you go inside and you look further and further and further and further and Further!?" He was crazy. Prabhupada replied, "That I do not know. You know." That boy chanted Hare Krishna and became an initiated disciple in time, named Kusakratha. He became a great Sanskrit scholar.

Prabhupada stayed two weeks in Boston. He was accessible to devotees, and he gave college lectures. Just before he came, the newspapers did a feature story on us for the colored section of the Sunday paper. A lot of it was favorable. They said we were American transcendentalists, like Thoreau. He called me the "lean chieftain" of the temple. But at the end of the article he hit a sour

note. He brought a friend to our Sunday feast. His friend said, "There but for the grace of God I could wind up or one of my kids." I was upset by that part and showed it to Prabhupada. He said I should write a letter of complaint to the newspaper, and I did.

By now I was married and lived in an apartment across the street from the temple. My wife and I stayed in one room, and three girls painted in another room, under Jadurani's direction. There was a big, rough, black guy who lived with his girlfriend on the floor below us. As soon as we moved in he came storming upstairs and pounded on our door. He threatened us and said he didn't want to hear any cymbals chanting or he would come up with a shotgun. Jadurani had answered the door. She had a way of trying to laugh people off when they confronted her. She did it to this guy, and he imitated her sound and threatened her more. I came to the door and assured him we were not going to have *kirtanas* in our apartment. That was saved for the temple. "You better not or I'll kick your block off," he said to me. I asked him to calm down and not be so angry. He calmed down a little but left us with a threat. He had a double standard. He could make noise if he wanted. He would stand in the street and shout up three floors to his white girlfriend, "Hey Red!" One time Prabhupada was coming back from his walk with Devananda, and as he stepped up on the curb from the road, the big, black guy crossed right in front of him, coming close to bumping him. He didn't do it maliciously, but he was just treating Prabhupada like a nonentity, not giving him the royal right-of-way as he deserved. I saw it from the window and became angry. He was such a jerk, such a boor. Just to finish the incident I saw this guy a few years later after we had moved. I bumped into him on a subway platform. He was completely different. He greeted me in a friendly way and asked, "Where have you been?" I told him we had moved. He said it was nice to see me again, and he hoped I was doing all right. I played along with his mood, and we even shook hands. He smiled and was a gentleman. I don't know what changed him. He was entirely different after living for two weeks on the same street as Prabhupada.

The biggest event of Prabhupada's visit was that he conducted a triple wedding. Some of the girls had minor illnesses, and Prabhupada said it was because they weren't married. As soon as

the word got around that he said this, Saradiya, who was about seventeen years old and very beautiful, went to Prabhupada like a trusting daughter and frankly told him that she wanted to marry a boy named Vaikunthanatha who had come to Boston to help us prepare for Prabhupada's visit. He was a good handyman and very worshipful towards Prabhupada. Prabhupada assured Saradiya that he would make arrangements with Vaikunthanatha. He then called Vaikunthanatha and told him that Saradiya wanted to marry him. Vaikunthanatha was agreeable to the suggestion, and it was settled. Then there was talking, confiding and gossiping among the women. Rukmini, who was eighteen years old and had joined the temple to learn painting from Jadurani, was also a beautiful girl and serious about Krishna consciousness. She confessed to her friends that she wanted to marry Baradraja, an artist who was visiting Boston from Montreal. Baradraja was very aesthetic, and when he gave class he spoke often of lotus flowers and lotus feet. He was an independent kind of spirit. He agreed to marry Rukmini and Prabhupada approved. That left one unmarried girl, pretty Jahnavi, who was a painter who knew the philosophy well. Behind the scenes, as these things are done (without Prabhupada's matchmaking), Nanda Kishora and Janavi agreed to marry. Nanda Kishora was visiting Boston for Prabhupada's visit. He was a likeable fellow who used to inquire from Srila Prabhupada about aspects of Krishna conscious philosophy. So it was arranged, a temple wedding. One day Rukmini stopped me in the hall of the apartment building and thanked me for taking care of her, which I thought was sweet. The ceremony was held in the storefront with a fire built of orange crate wood. There were no interruptions, and it went smoothly, with all the couples taking vows of obedience in marriage. The girls wore new saris and the boys wore clean *kurtas* and *dhobis*. Prabhupada presided and made a speech about ideal marriage. I was proud that Boston, like the first time Prabhupada came and held the first *brahmana* initiations, was pulling off the first triple wedding under his own direction. Unfortunately, at first, the married couples did not plan to stay in Boston, so that was a disappointment. But it turned out differently so they all stayed. That's a different story. In fact, at first it seemed that everyone was going to leave when Prabhupada left. I went to him, and asked if he could give me some manpower. He sympathized and asked Devananda, who was planning to leave, to stay with us.

During this day a wonderful new boy became interested. At an engagement at Brandeis University, a young man named Glen walked into the auditorium after the lecture was over and I was leading the second *kirtana*. He started talking with the devotees and became interested. They invited him to come in the car to the temple with them. He had his own mixed up philosophy in which he thought he was God, and the devotees engaged in friendly debate and preaching with him. He liked their points very much. The next night he attended the temple program where Prabhupada gave the lecture. He raised his hand and engaged in questions and answers with Prabhupada. By force of logic and spiritual presence, Prabhupada got Glen to admit he was not God. Glen submitted and bowed down before Prabhupada. Glen attended a few more meetings and talked with Prabhupada, and by the time Prabhupada was leaving, he had a serious new candidate for Krishna consciousness. Glen was dark-haired, gentle and sweet-tempered, and all the devotees liked him and encouraged him. After Prabhupada left Glen moved into the little storefront to live. And after a few months Prabhupada sent him his name in a letter. He was Giriraja Dasa Brahmachari.

parents disown me

I waited about a month before I told my parents that I was going to see the Swami. After about two weeks of attending his classes I went for a weekend visit to my parents' summer bungalow in Avalon, New Jersey. Their house faced the ocean beach on one side and a canal in their back yard. As soon as I arrived I went for a swim in the canal. I floated and looked up at the stars. Within myself I could hear the voice of the Swami. I heard snatches from his lectures and his voice in *kirtana*. I thought to myself, "Wow, the Swami has gone deep into my life! This is a powerful thing." I was impressed with how he lived within me. The next morning, in the sunshine, I ran on the margin of the beach and the ocean and exclaimed "I'm free!" thinking how I had broken my habit of taking marijuana. I didn't need it any more. But I didn't tell my parents about this new influence in my life. I kept it mum.

Then Hayagriva wrote and printed a pamphlet which the Swami approved. It was a short introduction to ISKCON. It was ecumenical, referring to the universality of Krishna consciousness and not dogmatic. It was literary, like Hayagriva. But it came right out with the Hare Krishna mantra and a brief sketch of the Swami

and *Bhagavad-gita*. I thought this might be a good way to introduce my parents to Krishna consciousness, so I mailed them a copy of the pamphlet. When I next spoke to my mother on the phone she was very upset about the ISKCON pamphlet. I was surprised that she was so much worked up about it. She asked me why I was involved with this. She didn't like it because it wasn't the Catholic church. I told her it was not against the Catholic church, but I was interested in the Swami's classes. She said she and my father and my sister were disturbed that I should be hearing about religion from an Indian man. I should be attending a Catholic church. I said to her that my father never attended the Catholic church, so why should she be disturbed? Besides, I was learning pure habits and meditating on God. There was no difference between this and the Catholic meditation on God. There *is* a difference, she said, and it was sacrilegious of me to be hearing from the Swami. I should stop it. I wanted to defend my new faith and impress on my mother how I was changing my life for the better, but there was no chance of reasoning with her. She quoted my father as saying "these Indian swamis are just phonies" and that hurt me. I didn't want to hear blasphemy against a person I had accepted as a pure devotee. I told her I couldn't tolerate hearing talk against the Swami, and I was going to hang up but she should reconsider what she was saying and not condemn me. I told her I would call her again. I had some more phone calls with her and with my father, but they were all negative. Once I was talking to my father, and I told him about our vegetarian diet. I said it was very healthy and delicious and every Sunday, we had a big feast to which the public came. "A big feast?" he said sarcastically, "What do you have? Three peas and half a carrot?" About the Swami he said, "This guy is just a beggar. The Indians are starving in their own country and they have come here looking for a handout and calling it yoga." I wanted to plug my ears when he talked like that. He said, "Your mother wants to give up on you, but I am keeping my anchor in." But the relationship grew worse. I visited my sister to preach to her but that went nowhere. I'll tell you about that now.

The Swami had an idea for fund raising. We were desperately poor. We collected about six dollars in the basket in the weekly meetings, and we hadn't developed the determination or art of selling books or magazines in the streets. So he thought of something he called "making trustees." He said we should go to

the homes of respectable people we knew and ask them to become a trustee of ISKCON. A number of newspaper clippings had accumulated on ISKCON, including one from the *National Enquirer*: “New Indian Religion Gets You Higher Than LSD” and a cover story in a Lower East Side newspaper, *The Other Eye*, called “Save Earth Now,” which was a favorable description of the temple activities at Twenty-six Second Avenue and the philosophy of Krishna Consciousness. There was also a picture and write-up in the *New York Times* about our Sunday afternoon *kirtana* in Tompkins Square Park: “Swami’s Flock Chants to Find Ecstasy in Park.” The Swami wanted us to gather copies of these write-ups and to visit houses, on appointment, and ask them to become trustees by paying forty dollars. We should emphasize how the movement was reforming hippies of bad habits and how it was a genuine form of meditation. The problem was hardly any one of us knew respectable people. I thought of my sister and her husband Tommy. He was a successful stock analyst on Wall Street, and they lived in a house on Westchester, New York. I arranged for a visit when everyone was home including their young daughter. Unfortunately I was so new in preaching and so fired up that my approach was fanatical. I went in with my guns blazing, denouncing material life with its threefold miseries and praising the easy practice of chanting Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare which was the only method of God consciousness recommended for the Age of Quarrel. I spoke against sex outside of raising children in Krishna consciousness and condemned the slaughterhouses and meat-eating, and the slaughterhouses of modern education which taught Darwin’s theory. I dominated the conversation and was strident. I directly asked Tommy for a forty-dollar donation. When he said he wouldn’t make any donation I fell silent. I felt that my mission to their house had failed, and there was no more reason to stay. My sister said, “Well, you’ve done your preaching Stevie, but don’t just leave now. Let’s talk about other things.” I said there was nothing else to talk about, and I got up and prepared to leave. As her husband drove me to the train station I told him, “Don’t think this is sectarian. It is transcendental philosophy.” “Yah,” he said, “I know.” That was my disastrous attempt at making a trustee of responsible persons. I

returned to Swamiji's room on the Lower East Side, and he gave me solace. You can't expect everyone to take to this.

Finally relationships broke down completely. Despite my father saying he would keep his anchor in, my mother delivered this ultimatum: "As long as you are with them, we don't want anything to do with you." I was flabbergasted. They had been willing to put up with me when I moved away from home and took my own place on the Lower East Side. They had been willing to keep ties with me when I grew a beard — although my mother demanded I shave it off. They continued calling me their son when I grew long hair and when I imitated Eliot and stopped wearing underwear. They had been willing to give me shelter when I jumped out a window and stayed with them for six weeks as a helpless patient. But just because I "changed my religion" and followed an Indian swami they were prepared to cut off ties for life and make me an orphan to them.

I cried tears. When I composed myself I went to the Swami and told him that my parents told me they didn't want to see me any more as long as I was a Hare Krishna person. My eyes filled with tears as I spoke to him. He said nothing but there was a sparkle in his eye, a faint look of amusement. He was aware that a devotee might have to pay this price to practice Krishna consciousness — and he didn't think the price was unreasonable. Finally he said a few words to me, but not much.

I went on with my practices as a devotee. I accepted that I was disowned. I thought of the example of Narada Muni who was orphaned with no one in the world he could turn to — when he was five years old. I felt closer to Swamiji and the family of devotees.

Some months later when I was in Boston I wrote Swamiji a letter asking him if he was my real father. He wrote back, "Yes, I am your real, eternal father. Your family father is immaterial. The relationship with the guru and disciple is the real father and son."

Some twenty years later I phoned my mother again. I said, "This is your son, Stevie." She said, "Where have you been?" I pulled no punches. I said, "I have been traveling all over the world with Hare Krishna movement." She repeated her ultimatum verbatim from 1966, "As long as you are with them we don't want anything to do with you." I imagined by now she had heard anti-cult propaganda against us and was solidified in her position, feeling justified in

disowning me. I spoke a few moments with her trying to say we could have a relationship still, but she didn't want it. I said "God bless you" and hung up.

god the ax

“A Love Supreme”

“I will do all I can to be worthy of Thee

O Lord. It all has to do with it.

Thank You God.

Peace.

There is none other.

God is. It is so beautiful. Thank You God. God is all.

Help us to resolve our fears and weaknesses. Thank You God.

In You all things are possible.

We know. God made us so.

Keep your eye on God.

God is. He always was. He always will be.

No matter what . . . It is God.

He is gracious and merciful.

It is most important that I know Thee.

Words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts, fears and emotions — time — all related . . .

And made from one ... all made in one.

Blessed be His name.

Thought waves — heat waves — all vibrations —
All paths lead to God — thank You God.

His way . . . it is so lovely., it is gracious.

It is merciful — thank You God.

One thought can produce millions of vibrations
and they all go back to God . . . everything does.

Thank You God.

Have no fear . . . believe . . . thank You God.

The universe has many wonders. God is all.

His way . . . it is so wonderful.

Thoughts — deeds — vibrations, etc.

They all go back to God and He cleanses all.

He is gracious and merciful . . . thank You God.

Glory to God . . . God is so alive.

God is.

God loves.

May I be acceptable in Thy sight.

We are all one in His grace.

The fact that we do exist is acknowledgment Of Thee O Lord.

Thank You God.

God will wash away all our tears . . . He always has

He always will.

Seek Him every day. And in all ways seek God every day.

Let us sing all songs to God

To Whom all praise is due . . . praise God.

No road is an easy one, but they all go back to God.

With all we share God.

It is all with God.

It is all with Thee.

Obey the Lord.

Blessed is He.

We are from one thing . . . the will of God . . .

Thank You God.

I have seen God. I have seen ungodly — none can be
greater — none can compare to God.

Thank You God.

He will remake us . . . He always has and He always will.

It is true — blessed be His name — thank You God.

God breathes through us so completely . . .

So gently we hardly feel it . . . yet,
It is our everything.
Thank You God.
ELATION — ELEGANCE — EXALTATION —
All from God.
Thank You God. Amen.”

I won't try to duplicate “God The Ax.”
I couldn't do it if I tried.
I was crying, I was lonely,
I had no girl, no God, no prayer
except the one I was listening to,
the rough man with the wild
notes, the music sublime.
I was in the room alone
the phonograph played the 33 1/3 LP spinning around to the
needle, through the speaker
Better mind the preacher!
a love supreme, a love supreme
a love supreme, a love supreme
the long bass solo dum de dum dum de dum, dum de dum.
then he blasts out and then
he fades out and lets McCoy Tyner take over.
Better mind the preacher.
tinkle barn, scales and more play it brilliantly,
growl and smash a
love supreme the chords are heavy and relaxed
yes I was lonely warming up beside the fireplace
of this music
better mind the preacher! call for the Lord
call 911, call for the blood is running, the man has a
headache, and he is holding it in.
please call for the Lord
He is the one who will come
to help you
wake up the drums. In
a year from now you
will meet your spiritual master and even now he has come.

prose

Looking up to God. I tell my sister on the phone, “It’s as if the toughest guy on the block is saying ‘I believe in God.’” She said, “Oh Stevie, you get so much into something when you get into it.” “But this is real,” I said, “he is really playing ‘a love supreme’ and he has written a prayer for it on the liner notes.”

He is going out on his ax.
God the ax who cuts off all attachments.
He calls and cries and you cry with him.
He is senior and you are junior, he is the boss,
he is a clergyman, a blues-shouter, a black
gospel man from North Carolina.

They are rushing to the end. Thrumming
Jimmy Garrison brings a piece into
play slow and tense, piccato
leading us into silence except
for the bass.
The last part is called psalm.

You play it again. It's slow
and holy, religious music now.
He's calling on God. God is all.
All comes from Him.
Thank You God.
We are from one thing the will of God. Thank You God.

I listened alone in my room and believed in God and got ready
for the coming of the spiritual master.

LSD experiences

I took LSD about fifteen times. I can't remember what it was like the first time separated from the second time or the third. As I am writing this in my seventy-first year I have only a vague recollection of what it did to me. But I note that it changed my consciousness, expanded my consciousness. That's a vague and abstract expression, but it was very meaningful to me at the time. I saw the air broken down into tiny infinitesimal dots of color, and I thought this was the absolute reality. I felt myself almost out of control and grew afraid that I would not be able to function. I went into a graveyard and whispered the word "shhh." I was able to somersault over the stars and feel that I was liberated from death. The next day I wondered what I should do now that I was liberated. I rode the Staten Island ferry and looked at the sky and heard John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" and saw the Mobil flying horse leaping in the air. I got into a taxi and didn't know how much money I gave to the driver as a fee or how much I gave to him as a tip. At my parents' home in Avalon I saw the symbol of our family's dynasty which was the human fist. I realized this was my father's secret of success. The next morning when I saw him I

thought of telling him, but I didn't think he could understand. I saw skulls and crossbones. And then again I saw the air broken down into infinitesimal Technicolor color and thought it was the absolute reality.

changes in ISKCON

In the beginning to be a genuine devotee you had to live in the temple. Those who lived outside and had jobs were called “fringies.” But eventually, as more and more devotees got married and had children, the temple couldn’t afford to let them live in the temples, and they were forced to live outside. The movement started *gurukulas*, and Prabhupada wanted the children to be sent there as to boarding school and the parents could remain in the temple. But widespread cases of sexual abuse of children in the *gurukulas* shut them down. A few existed, but the parents didn’t trust them and sent their children to public schools. As the movement grew the GBC took more control of people’s lives passing resolutions and laws. A devotee had to follow them or be excluded. Prabhupada wanted a movement based on love and trust, but things began to change into a movement of “follow or else.” It grew overbearing, and the devotees stopped paying strict attention to the GBC rules. They lived as they chose and lived outside the temples. They lost trust in the ISKCON authorities. A questionnaire taken by a Professor Rochford of ISKCON devotees in the 1990s showed that devotees living on the outside

were just as good in following the basic codes and practices of Vaishnava behavior as devotees living inside the temple. There was no longer a stigma in living outside. And the temple devotees took to cultivating the outside devotees as their “congregation.”

At least two big schisms developed in ISKCON, the “ritvik” followers and the newly initiated followers of Srila Narayana Maharaj. And there were smaller schisms following other gurus. But ISKCON grew in countries like India and Russia and countries in mid-eastern Europe.

Within ISKCON a movement catering to yoga groups grew up and ISKCON *yogis* and *kirtanias* became respected by the general yoga societies. Internally, ISKCON developed educational programs and many of the members attended classes in the *sastras* and went to *japa* retreats. This was a healthy sign. A GBC committee was formed for a “Prabhupada succession” developing methods and means to keep Prabhupada prominent in the center of ISKCON. Book distribution remained slumped.

As they grew older, a good number of devotees took responsibility for their own spiritual lives and matured, refrained from blaspheming other devotees, and led lives of serious spiritual cultivation. Some changes are good and some are bad. ISKCON is like the Ganges, sometimes it is flowing thin and somewhere it is roaring wide, but it is always flowing.

Marriage

Jadurani and I associated closely during the opening years of the Boston temple. Sometimes it was just the two of us plus another man, Pradyumna or Devananda. There was nothing romantic in our camaraderie, but we were close friends. She did her painting, and I went to work all day at the welfare office. We would sometimes go out to college programs and take turns giving the lecture. On Sundays we would go on *harinama* at Boston Commons, weather permitting. I would sometimes try to control her schedule, and she would resist. For example, she would stay up late past bedtime and on occasions I would physically drag her away from the canvas at a late hour. Nothing romantic ever occurred, but sometimes I wondered who would take care of her. She had frequent illnesses and didn't observe regular health habits. She was very loose and talkative with men who visited the temple, and I would get jealous or protective or something and think she wasn't acting chastely. I thought of myself as a *brahmacari* and didn't think of marriage. But on one occasion when I was out shopping in the neighborhood my mind wandered to thoughts of

marriage. When I caught myself thinking of it, I thought “it’s already too late. A *brahmacari* wouldn’t be deliberating on this.”

And so we lived together, like brother and sister, sometimes quarreling as I tried to control her strongly independent nature. Then an occasion came when Prabhupada visited the New York temple, and we decided to close up our temple and go visit him. I nailed boards to the back door, put an extra lock on the front door and left the Jagannatha Deities behind. Three of us took a bus to New York and joined the devotees there hearing from Srila Prabhupada. This was the fall of 1968. One day Prabhupada’s secretary told Jadurani and I that he wanted to see us. We entered his room not knowing what to expect. Right away he told us that he wanted us to get married. We both replied that we did not want to get married. It is better to stay single, to remain *brahmacari* or *brahmacarini*, we told him. Our initial responses were clear and firm. But he insisted, “You’re living together; you should get married.” I was very submissive to Prabhupada when he repeated his wish, and I began to think, “This is his desire. This is his order.” But Jadurani stayed firm that she did not want to get married. I was not in the mood of the four Kumaras who remained firm in their renunciation even when their father, Lord Brahma, told them to get married. They were so committed to renunciation that they were willing to defy their father. I wasn’t.

I turned to Prabhupada and looked into his eyes. “Do you really want us to get married?” I asked.

His eyes twinkled. He gave a very slight, gentle smile. “Yes, this is what I want,” he said.

Jadurani protested. To me, she seemed on the edge of disobedience. I turned to her and said, “Jadurani, Prabhupada wants us to get married.”

She begrudgingly gave up. If this was his order, she would do it. He told us we should get a civil marriage right away and on an auspicious day, he would perform a Vedic ceremony. He said Bhaktivinoda Thakura’s Appearance Day was coming in a few days and that would be a fit occasion. While we were there in his room he asked us why we closed the temple and came to New York. Why did we leave Jagannatha, B. and Subhadra locked up? “If you left me locked up in a room how would I eat?” he asked. He told us not to do that again. Then he let us go to get married.

Jadurani walked out, went downstairs and started walking up the front hall. I called to her, “Jadurani!” She turned and looked at me with rebellion and disgust. I said, “We have to get a marriage license.” She relented but resented my giving her orders. I could see this wasn’t going to be easy. She wasn’t going to be a submissive wife. I told the men what Prabhupada had said and they congratulated me good-naturedly. Then I took Jadurani in tow and went to the City Hall. We passed all the formalities of blood tests, birth certificates, etc., and got an official marriage certificate. Then Trivikrama Swami accompanied us to the Salvation Army where a minister performed a marriage ceremony. On Bhaktivinoda Thakura’s Appearance Day, Srila Prabhupada performed a fire *yajna* at Twenty-six Second Avenue and a devotee from New Vrindavan was also given first initiation. The devotees tied the edges of Jadurani’s *sari* to the edge of my *dhoti*, and we were dispatched to Boston.

At the bus terminal a policeman called out a friendly “Hare Krishna!” We arrived at the Boston temple only to find the front plate glass window had been broken by a rock. We left it for the night and went downstairs and went to sleep on a blanket, still tied to each other.

The accident

The day after our wedding we untied our clothing knots and changed our clothes. I removed the rock from the temple floor and went outside and looked up at the plate glass window. It had a big hole in the center, but large pieces of glass remained hanging in place. Unaware that this was a job that required special skill, I reached up and tried to remove a big piece of plate glass. The whole top section came crashing down, hitting me on the forehead and arm. I was stunned and started bleeding profusely. Jadurani was near by and phoned for an ambulance. I staggered into the temple and lay down on my back. My vision was blurred by all the blood. I started chanting the Nrsimha mantra. Jadurani and Devananda didn't try stopping the blood but waited for the ambulance. When it arrived I heard a man enter the room and say "Jesus Christ!" Then they took me in the ambulance and sped me to the hospital. The medics began removing pieces of glass from my body and mopping the blood. When we arrived at the hospital, a doctor took me to the emergency room and along with nurses he began stitching up my arm and forehead. I talked with them and told them what happened and began to speak Krishna conscious

philosophy. They put sixteen stitches in my forearm and more than that in my forehead. (To this day those scars are still prominently visible on my body.) Luckily it had not hit my eyes. Jadurani and Devananda were in the waiting room, and I told the nurse to tell them to go home and do their duties. It looked as if they had the bleeding under control. The doctor was surprised that I had the presence of mind to chat about Krishna consciousness in this condition. I told him the *Bhagavad-gita* tells us that the body is just a covering of the real self, the soul, and the real self can't be cut. As long as we have material bodies we are prone to accidents, and we have to tolerate them and pray to Krishna. After a couple of hours they had my head and arm in bandages and said I was free to go home but I should rest. I should come back in a few days to check on my condition.

When I left the hospital Jadurani and Devananda were gone. I took a taxi and arrived at the temple and went to bed. Later I brought Jadurani into bed with me and tried making love to her, but my head pain was so severe (and I had lost so much blood) that I almost passed out. That was the last time we tried making love. Jadurani soon got a prolonged illness, and Prabhupada forbid her to even paint. You should become children of Krishna yourselves and not have children as long as she has an illness, he said. If a sick mother has children, the children will be sick also. So we abstained from that.

first actions of the gbc

When Pradyumna Dasa had a hernia and had to go to the hospital for an operation, the Boston temple had no money to pay for it and Pradyumna's parents were unwilling. I wrote to Prabhupada and asked him for the money. He got it (if I remember correctly) from the San Francisco temple. But in his letter to me he said our society would have to have a managerial committee to handle these things, not that he should be asked for money. This was the first hint of the forming of the Governing Body Commission. Later he asked that a few temple presidents on the east coast have a meeting and discuss some management of temple affairs. One thing led to another, and I can't recall the details, but at one point he appointed ten devotees to be the GBC (Governing Body Commission) and I was one of them. Rupanuga, who was also appointed, told me it was a great honor to be selected to this board. We first came into action when we debated the errant *sannyasis* who were preaching *maya* at the Janmastami ceremony in New Vrindavan. As Brahmananda Swami explains it, he had been guilty of underestimating Srila Prabhupada and had been chastised by him. As a reaction he "overestimated" Srila Prabhupada and

said he was actually God. He convinced the other *sannyasis* to join him in preaching that Srila Prabhupada was dissatisfied with all his disciples for misunderstanding him and that he had withdrawn his mercy from us. There was no way that we could get it back. We had failed to realize that Prabhupada was one with Krishna and this was a great insult to him. The five *sannyasis* spread this poison vigorously at the Janmastami festival, and a heavy gloom came down upon us all. Prabhupada had dismissed us. Prabhupada, at the time, was in Japan with Kirtanananda Swami and TKG. Someone in New Vrindavan, maybe Hayagriva, phoned Prabhupada's secretaries and told them what the *sannyasis* were preaching. Prabhupada said it was all bogus. He was not God. He was the servant of God, and he was not displeased with his disciples. But the *sannyasis* must leave the movement for preaching this Mayavadi nonsense.

Armed with this information from Prabhupada, the newly-formed members of the GBC met in an A-framed house and found references in Prabhupada's books to support what he had said on the phone. Then they held a debate with the *sannyasis* in the temple —packed with devotees — and defeated their notions. It was the first combined action of the GBC and it was a good one. The *sannyasis* were temporarily expelled from the society. They went out on their own and did preaching in cities in the south and later were reinstated. The mood of the festival turned around when the devotees realized Prabhupada had not rejected them. A letter from him arrived and was read aloud and everyone cheered at the good news and the correct understanding of the *parampara*.

I had a GBC zone, which included the cities where the *sannyasis* were preaching, Gainesville, Tallahassee and San Antonio. I traveled to see them, and they were still preaching remnants of their distorted philosophy. They were powerful preachers, and I became a little contaminated and influenced by what they said. I came back to Boston, and presented it to the devotees. But my GBC godbrothers straightened me out, and I threw off the misunderstanding. Those were heavy times.

One by one the *sannyasis* gave up their concoctions and were permitted back into the society and their few followers along with them. ISKCON had survived its first schism, and the GBC played a good part in restoring order. Prabhupada welcomed back his *sannyasi* disciples and held no grudge.

prabhupada angry and forgiving

Prabhupada was angry with Kirtanananda Swami for not stopping off in London as he was ordered to do by Prabhupada when he left Vrindavan. Kirtanananda then left ISKCON along with Hayagriva and preached against it, saying it was really “the Society for Swami Consciousness.” Later they relented and Prabhupada brought them back into his good graces and was pleased with Kirtanananda at New Vrindavan.

Prabhupada was angry with Harikesa for not going to Germany as he requested. Harikesa was typing for Prabhupada in Vrindavan. Prabhupada finally said to him, “I fire you!” Harikesa replied, “You can’t fire me. I quit!” Harikesa then demanded fare to go to Germany and at first Prabhupada withheld it. But later in Vrindavan Prabhupada was so pleased with Harikesa for the work he did in printing books in many languages that he embraced him and said, “You did not understand why I sent you there.”

Prabhupada asked Bhagavata Dasa to stay in Bhubaneswar and help Gour Govinda Maharaj manage. Bhagavata said he couldn’t stay in India because he got sick there. Prabhupada insisted. Bhagavata said he couldn’t chant his rounds in India. Prabhupada

insisted. Bhagavata said there was better preaching in the West. Prabhupada insisted. Bhagavata finally ran out of excuses when he saw Prabhupada became angry. As a result Prabhupada was very pleased with him for sticking it out in difficult Bhubaneswar.

Prabhupada was angry when he initially heard the news that Krishna Dasi was divorcing her husband. He said I didn't come to America to get involved in this. I will go back to Vrindavan. But later he accepted Krishna Dasi back as a dear daughter.

Prabhupada was angry with the GBC for having an unauthorized meeting in New York without having all the members present. He sent a letter to the rest of the Society telling them not to obey the GBC but just listen to his commands. He then sent a letter to each of the GBC men who were present at the meeting asking them to explain themselves. He was angry, but he forgave them when they explained themselves as best as they could and said they would be good servants and not have unauthorized meetings. He reinstated their authority.

A disciple who was known to have engaged in homosexual activities came to Mayapur festival asking Prabhupada for forgiveness. He was wearing a big turban on his head. Prabhupada said, "I can't forgive you. You have shamed me too many times before my Guru Maharaja." He asked him to take off his turban. Eventually he forgave him and engaged him in intimate service at the end of his life.

Two *sannyasis* were associating with Radha-kunda *babajis*. Prabhupada became red hot in anger. It was just after his massage in Vrindavan. He stood in his *gamcha* and chewed them out in a loud voice, "Don't become monkeys!" "But they are giving us time for *bhajan*." "I will give you time for *bhajan*, but don't go jumping over like monkeys." By jumping over he meant they were going over their spiritual master's orders to associate with "higher *sanga*." He was infuriated. They relented and came back to Krishna-Balarama Mandir. He forgave them.

Prabhupada was upset with TKG for disturbing the Society by preaching that *brahmacaris* should leave their temples and join the Radha-Damodara travelling party. TKG and his men were saying that the temple presidents, who were householders, could not give superior association to the *brahmacaris*. Prabhupada called him to his room and told him something and TKG defied him. Prabhupada's lip trembled in anger. He said, "I take away all your

service!” “What am I supposed to do?” said TKG exasperated, “Go to the moon? Go to China?” Prabhupada dismissed him. TKG went to his room. Later Prabhupada called him back. As he went to Prabhupada’s room TKG had an intuition that he had said fatal words. When he entered Prabhupada’s room, Prabhupada said, “I want you to go to China.” T.K.G prepared to go to China with Drishtaketu Maharaja disguised as businessmen, but Prabhupada reconsidered it and considered it too dangerous and unfruitful. TKG took back the Radha-Damodara party. Then in the last year of Prabhupada’s life he served as his most intimate secretary, nursing his terminal illness and taking him for a last visit to London. “I have to thank you,” Prabhupada said when they returned to Vrindavan from London. “You have taken a bag of bones” (and taken good care of me on this difficult journey).

Gurukripa Maharaj came back from his collecting party in Japan and delivered Srila Prabhupada a hundred thousand dollars. Two minutes later Prabhupada saw him on a veranda in Mayapur and chastised him for the color of his *sannyasa* cloth which he said was inappropriate. He changed his cloth.

Prabhupada was angry with Jayatirtha for working with a lawyer and planning to place ISKCON legally under one “umbrella corporation.” Prabhupada could not change Jayatirtha’s mind so he called the whole GBC to join him in Los Angeles and get the required strength to refute Jayatirtha’s stubbornness. Jayatirtha finally relented in a defeated spirit. He asked to resign, but Prabhupada told him to stay in office.

Prabhupada got angry with the BBT manager Radha-vallabha. When Prabhupada told him to print twenty volumes of *Caitanya-caritamṛta* in two months and Radha-vallabha said, “it is impossible,” Prabhupada poked his cane down in the sand on the beach where they were walking and said, “Impossible is a word in the fool’s dictionary.” Radha-vallabha conferred with Ramesvara Maharaja, and they came back to Prabhupada and promised him they would do it. In an unprecedented marathon of editors and painters, the BBT produced the twenty volumes in two months.

Prabhupada got angry with Hrisikesananda for going over to Bon Maharaj but forgave him when he rejoined.

Prabhupada got angry with some of his lady disciples when, with good intentions, they put him on a strict diet. He said, “To hell with the Starvation Committee!”

Prabhupada got angry with Advaita, the manager of the Press, for not attending *mangala-arati*. He told him to shut down the Press if he couldn't attend.

Prabhupada could get angry with his disciples, as is fit for a spiritual father (spiritual master), but he was always ready to reinstate a devotee when he was repentant and sincere and ready to follow Prabhupada's will.

Prabhupada got angry with me for allowing the devotees to repaint the Kalachandji Deity when He arrived in Dallas. During the same visit he got angry with me for giving orders that a tree which had fallen down in a windstorm and was leaning against a building should be chopped up into small pieces. He proved that the stump of the tree was still alive by showing a small sprig growing and said it should not have been chopped down. I asked Prabhupada if I was a demon for doing this; he said, "Not a demon, just ignorant."

HONORING PRASADAM

Prabhupada always ate by himself, breakfast, lunch and evening snack. I have cooked for him and served him, and we have seen films of his eating. It is notable that he *honored* his *prasadam* in a way that is delightful to watch. He took the *prasadam* in his fingers and popped it into his mouth and chewed it vigorously without showing his teeth. He really seemed to enjoy every morsel. He didn't wolf down his food but ground it in his mouth with vigorous movements. He took time and did not eat in a hurry. He would mix the *dal* and the rice with his delicate fingers until it became consistent. He would pop the *prasadam* into his mouth and work on the inside of his mouth chewing it.

On the few occasions when he would eat in public with a large number of guests he would eat in the same way. He liked his *chapatis* brought to him fresh and hot, just after they had been puffed on the burner. If there were other people present he didn't engage in conversation. He would tear his *chapatis* with his fingers and mix it into the *dal* and rice, scooping them up in the *chapati* and putting them into his mouth. When he put food into his mouth he didn't touch his mouth with his fingers but popped the food in.

Prabhupada ate a simple meal. In the West he would have his cook make him oatmeal, and he would have some fruit. In India, where the fruit was better, he would have mostly pieces of fruit with maybe puffed rice. For lunch he would have rice, *dal*, *chapatis* and a *sabji* vegetable, or maybe two vegetables. I cooked for Prabhupada and after several training lessons by his sister Bhavatrini I was able to cook *sak*, a bitter spinach preparation which Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya liked very much. He really didn't like flat *chapatis* and so to be a cook for Prabhupada you had to make them puff up like footballs, or get an assistant who could do it.

Once, we were in Hawaii in an apartment where there were only electric burners. It is very hard to puff up *chapatis* on an electric burner. But Pradyumna devised an implement out of a metal coat hanger, and we placed the *chapati* on that and they puffed up nicely. Sometimes he had *puris*, also puffed up. Rice, *dal*, *chapatis* and *sabji* — that was his staple diet, and he didn't require fancy dishes. Sometimes a good cook would make him *samosas* or *kechoris*, and he would accept them, but he didn't demand them. He liked a sweet after lunch, preferably a *sandesh* or a *rasgulla*. In the evening he might have fried peanuts or eggplant, or for a treat, a *samosa*. Once I was preparing eggplant and small peanuts at his request, and he came into the kitchen to see how I was doing. He said, "I don't ask for this because I want it. I just want to train you in how to cook it." He liked a cup of warm milk with sugar in the evening also.

Prabhupada was a thin person. His arms were very thin with little muscle substance to them and his legs were also thin. He was a sedentary person, and except for his morning walk, he sat all day on his cushion or on the *vyasasana*. He had a potbelly, which was unusual with his all-around thinness. His face was filled out and noble but not fat. He was short and with a delicate appearance. As for eating, he didn't eat too much or too little, as recommended in the *Bhagavad-gita*. He ate at regular times and had a hearty appetite. He ate in a kind of meditation, as a principle of devotional service, honoring the remnants of food offered to Krishna.

prabhupada's winter visit to boston

Prabhupada's third visit to Boston was the shortest. He came at the end of December in 1969 and only stayed a few days. He came direct from his triumphant stay at London where he opened a temple at Bury Place and installed Radha-Krishna Deities. Boston was the most populated temple with sixty devotees and many of them working on ISKCON Press. About all the devotees from Boston and a large contingent of devotees from New York gathered at Logan Airport in the early evening to meet him. The devotees were in a very excited mood. They had *karatalas* and *mrdangas* and a big banner. The *Boston Globe* newspaper covered the event and reported that the devotees were exhibiting ecstatic symptoms. Jahnvi Dasi was leaping in the air and trembling and crying. Men were crying too, and they had a rousing *kirtana* going. A policeman appeared on the scene and shouted, "Cool it!" and the *karatalas* and drums stopped, but the chanting and ecstatic symptoms were unchecked. Prabhupada was on the other side of a glass pane where people were being checked through immigration. The panel was painted black up to about five and a half feet. Prabhupada, standing in line, held his arm up with his passport on

the other side of the black panel, and the devotees could see it and they cheered wildly.

Finally he came into their midst, and they swarmed around him. He walked to a sitting area and sat on a chair and about a hundred beaming faces surrounded him closely. The police just stood back helplessly. Prabhupada spoke some words of greeting. Nandini Dasi held her infant child forward for a blessing. The admiration and love flowed unabashed from the devotees, and Prabhupada grinned widely. Shortly he got up and headed for the exit door where a limousine was waiting. There was a fresh coating of snow on the ground, and snowflakes flew in the air. A few devotees got into the limousine with Prabhupada, while the others ran wildly to their cars and vans. The car passed a night club, and Prabhupada misread the sign, "What is that? Cintamani?" It was wonderful riding with him in the dark plush car over the snow tracks. He spoke briefly of how nice it was in London, and he asked what books ISKCON Press was printing.

When he arrived at the old mansion, which was the temple, many devotees were already there waiting and they mobbed around him. It was a disorderly reception, like teenagers surrounding a rock star. Devotees pressed forward to get as close to Prabhupada as possible. No one was in charge. The temple room was on the second floor, and Prabhupada walked up the stairs delicately holding his cane and his secretary Purusottama trailed behind him, dressed in a suit and tie and carrying an umbrella. The small Radha-Krishna Deities were beautifully set in a red velvet altar built by Nara-Narayana with white wooden pillars. The mass of devotees crowded into the long temple room and awaited Prabhupada's words. He sang *Jaya Radha Madhava* for a few minutes and then began a lecture. He said he had looked into the rooms on the second floor, and they were not all in order. (There were many household couples in Boston and they lived in rooms that were divided up with only curtains.) He said the devotees might not be living so opulently, but they were richer than the richest people in Boston because they had Krishna. He must have heard something about Saradiya quarreling with her husband Vaikunthanatha because he mentioned it and told her that she should not fight with her husband. Saradiya, who was very fair-skinned, turned a bright red in her face. Prabhupada then launched into what became a long lecture about Maharaja Pariksit giving up

his kingdom to spend the last seven days of his life listening to *Srimad-Bhagavatam* from Sukadeva Goswami. I took close notes on a pad. When his lecture was over Prabhupada said he would like to see the rest of the house.

Again there was great disorder as so many people squeezed to stay close to him as he walked downstairs and into the big hall that housed the printing press and equipment. The manager of the press, red-haired Advaita das, wearing his green shirt and work pants explained some of the mechanism of the press to Prabhupada and showed some recent paperback books they had printed. Prabhupada looked very pleased.

“Would you like to give the press a name?” said Advaita.

“ISKCON Press,” said Prabhupada matter-of-factly. He then went down to the basement where the devotees collated pages of books waiting to be bound. He made inquiries and had small exchanges with various devotees. Then he went through the large kitchen and appreciated that grains were stored in extra large bags. Finally he went out the front door, with all the devotees close behind him, and he got into the limousine.

Bhavananda had found a house for Prabhupada to stay in Needham, Massachusetts, one half hour from the temple. As we drove there Prabhupada looked out at the snow-covered fields and said, “This is Krishna’s picture.” It was really too far for a drive, but it was a snug house with a fireplace. Prabhupada had held a milk sweet in his hand the whole time of the ride. He gave it to a devotee. Prabhupada talked to the devotees, but then he let Bhavananda tuck him into bed and he pulled up the covers and fell back to sleep like a child. The next day was icy and snowy, and he couldn’t even take a walk outside around the house. That night he had a meeting of the ISKCON Press devotees who came out to his house in Needham. Hayagriva, Pradyumna, Jayadvaita and myself were there. We talked about editing standards, and he said the pronouns for Krishna and Radha should be capitalized as His and Her. We spoke of the contents of the monthly magazine. He said, “Actually I write all the articles but we put different names on them.” I asked him about printing articles of Radha and Krishna’s conjugal pastimes. He said it was all right. I pressed him, “What about descriptions of Their kissing and embracing?”

“No, that we shall not do. But it is not that we have taken a vow to boycott the *gopis*. They are our worshipable deities.” Many editorial standards were discussed and decided on.

The weather got worse, and Prabhupada said he would cut short his visit and go back to Los Angeles at once. So he didn't make a second visit to the temple. The devotees were satisfied however with that one mob scene and long lecture that he delivered. They were happy that he set foot in the temple and liked the sight of Radha-Krishna. But they wished he could have stayed longer. Damn that Boston weather!

prabhupada and autobiography

In an autobiography you write about yourself, your life story. But I am trying to recall episodes and characteristics of Srila Prabhupada. That is autobiography proper because he is so much my life. He transformed my life. He is the main character. Boswell wrote about Samuel Johnson and himself, but Johnson was the greater personality and Boswell was the scribe. I can write about myself in Prabhupada's institution, ISKCON. I can write about myself as a lone figure, but it will lead to discussion of my being a *bhakta* and a disciple of Prabhupada.

I went to different places on his behalf, to render service. I am his servant. I went on many of his morning walks. I would hang back a little and walk within listening distance, but hanging in the rear rather than abreast of him as some did. I rendered him his full massage for six months. I am not a strong man, but I was able to render him a sufficient massage by rubbing (especially his back) with full force. I was young enough and fit to do it. He never complained that it was too weak, and he wasn't shy about saying something like that. I used the sandalwood oil or mustard oil and rubbed it in deeply with my hands and arms. I could hold a

conversation with him, but if I were alone with him I would be quiet. I didn't want to be chatty or disturb his mind with philosophical questions. I loved talking with him but didn't want to be a chatterbox. When he instigated talk that was fine. Sometimes he would put me in the position of a nondevotee and say, "What do they say? What do the scientists say?" I tried to play the foil by bringing up what I had heard the opposition say, or by revealing my own doubts. Sometimes it would get touchy because you would be actually talking like a demon. You were partly a demon, but you didn't want to be. You submitted to his logic before the argument got too far. He argued on the basis of *brahma sabda*, the authority of the scriptures. He made straight logical arguments, but ultimately they were backed by what the scriptures said. He was right because he was speaking on scriptural authority.

I drove with him in the car to and from his walks, and that was a good time for questions and conversation because you knew it wouldn't be too long. Once I asked him a question about going back to Godhead. He said we are not preaching like an export business. It is expected that we will go back to Godhead too. I said that I didn't have absolute confidence that I was going back to Godhead after this life. He said it is not a question of whether I am going, but there is the process. Chant and hear and you will go. Perfect answers.

Sometimes on a walk someone would step on the back of his heel. He would get annoyed. He didn't like people creeping up on him. You had to be careful how you did it. There was an art to walking closely but not too closely. One BBT photographer used to snap many pictures of Prabhupada, especially if he could capture him with an ecstatic mood on his face. One time Prabhupada got very annoyed and said, "You're *always* taking pictures and ruining moments!" The boy was hurt and shocked. He got up and left the room and left the temple. He started walking away a great distance. A devotee caught up with him and gave him solace and told him not to be so upset and not to leave. The photographer calmed down but stopped taking intimate photos of Prabhupada. It was a sensitive issue because the intimate photos were so nice, but Prabhupada didn't like to be "trapped" and "captured" particularly when he showed some emotional feeling. It was a thankless task for the photographers. Prabhupada

wanted to serve his spiritual master and deliver Krishna consciousness, not pose for priceless moments.

KETU

I am going to follow the policy of writing what immediately interests me in the autobiography, regardless of chronology or context. I have been advised by a renowned astrologer that I am under a three-pronged attack upon my longevity for the upcoming years beginning one year and a half from now. The first danger is from Ketu. I am not sure what Ketu is but it is “restrictive by nature.” At the same time Saturn is crossing over my moon sign. Also Saturn will go twelfth (the house of the end of life) from my sun planet (indicator of the body) starting at Thanksgiving of this year and running for two and a half years. For all these things there are remedial recommendations. Saturn crossing over the moon sign can be removed or greatly reduced in impact by doing *puja* to Sri Hanuman, who is one of the nine examples of perfect *bhakti*. Within a few days I am going to receive a brass *murti* of Hanuman, and I will do simple *puja* and make self-expressed prayers to him. Saturn is strengthened by renunciation, which I am doing. There are a few other things that I consider too confidential to set down here which are also recommendations, but “getting fresh air and good air supply to the head are absolutely necessary.”

The first day I received this news I sat bundled up on the front porch for over an hour, and it was very pleasant. But the second day it was raining and there was a breeze, and I didn't enjoy it out there. I came in after five minutes. B. has just advised me to sit now in the inside porch with the door open, but I feel so cozy I don't feel like putting on extra clothes and going downstairs. He raised his eyebrows and said, "What about Ketu?" I said, "I have been thinking of waiting for a change of weather." This may seem like torpidity or laziness, and I suppose it is, but I have to put on another pair of pants over the ones I am wearing and put on a heavy coat. It is no big deal to do that so I think after I write this I will go down and sit on the porch and get some fresh air.

I wonder what Prabhupada and ISKCON in general would think of this. Astrology is not considered an absolute authority. I do want longevity, however, and one reason is I would like to make this autobiography as long as possible. Astrology correctly predicted the coming and passing away of my pneumonia attack. So taking it with a little grain of salt I will go ahead and do the proactive recommendations, but I will not cease my worship of Radha-Krishna, Prabhupada and Gaura-Nitai. They are even more important than Hanuman. Getting fresh air is just good common sense, as long as I don't catch a cold.

I spent a very pleasant hour on the front porch dressed in my three pairs of pants, Narayana's boots and knit cap and my big coat. My chair was facing the side yard which is a lovely sight. Snow covered the bushes, and little birds hopped around. They weren't going over to our bird feeder, and they weren't eating at all but were just hopping around on the branches. I have a book of New York State birds, but I haven't studied it. These birds were small and had delightful white and brown markings on them in lovely patterns. They hopped about as if it were springtime, and they had no interest but to sport themselves in the branches. The snow was pure and clean. I read from Mark Twain's autobiography and had a lot of fun. When I looked at my watch I saw that it was time to go in for lunch. I achieved the purpose of getting fresh air on my head which was the real purpose in going out on the porch. I shall try my best to go out there every day and combat Ketu, unless the weather is too dreary and I lack the spirit for it.

prabhupada's last visit to boston

Prabhupada's fourth and last visit to Boston was in June of 1972. The weather was just the opposite of his winter 1969 visit. It was hot and sticky, and we had to use electric fans in the temple and a big peacock fan on Prabhupada. I rented the V.I.P. suite at the Boston Sheraton Hotel for his stay. They didn't have cooking facilities but we snuck in two electric burners. The women gave me a long-stemmed rose and asked why, if Swami was so renounced, were we renting the V.I.P. suite for him? I said it was to honor a great person. Material things can be used in the service of Krishna and that is the higher form of renunciation. When he arrived he went first to the temple building. He noted that the front yard grass was yellow and that a first story window was broken. (Someone had thrown a stone through it just a day ago.) He sat and talked with the devotees in an empty room. Then I told him we had secured the V.I.P. room for him at the Sheraton. He said, "I am not going to stay in a hotel. A hotel is a brothel. I will stay in the temple?" We hadn't prepared any room for him so he stayed in the empty room near the bathroom. We brought in a bed and a rocking chair. He said it was sufficient. We gave him the exclusive

use of the bathroom, and the men and women had to share the other bathroom by using it at different times.

He had come at my repeated requests, to install the larger brass Deities now known as Radha-Gopivallabha. We also had about fifteen new devotees ready for initiation. This was after ISKCON Press had left, and there were fewer devotees, but devotees from other temples came to see Prabhupada. He was traveling with his servant Aravinda and his secretary Shyamasundara. They had been in India, and they talked of the lifestyle there, how they took their baths in the river by wearing a *gamcha* and then changed into *kaupins*. They were world travelers, and we were American (Boston) devotees.

Prabhupada held two fire sacrifices. In one he installed the Deities, and in the other he initiated the devotees. For the initiation he had Karandhara light the fire and do the priestly functions. There were a group of Indians in the audience, and Prabhupada lectured that “this boy” (Karandhara) was a qualified *brahmana* according to Rupa Goswami and entitled to do the fire *yajna*, even though he wasn’t born in the *brahmana* caste. He seemed to say this to set the Indians straight. He gave out lots of initiation names beginning with the letter “S,” Somadasa, Suhotra Dasa, etc. I was proud that the devotees to be initiated were all from Boston. It was a sign of good preaching and a live temple, even though we had been deserted by ISKCON Press. My wife visited Boston just to see Srila Prabhupada.

There was a little trouble with the Deities’ clothes. Wonderful Gauri Dasi (who has since passed away) had made green velvet outfits, but they proved to be a little too tight. Right under Prabhupada’s eyes, in the middle of the installation, she took out the stitches and re-stitched them. It didn’t take too long and she kept a cool head, and Prabhupada was patient without scolding her. When They were ready I took Krishna and carried Him to the altar. My knee buckled for a moment under His weight, but I made it smoothly to the altar and placed Him beside Radharani. Prabhupada conducted the ceremony, and I assisted him by pouring liquids on Them as They stood in stainless steel bowls. He read from the *Brahma-sambhita*. The windows were open, and the fan was blowing to make it comfortable in the warm room. It was a triumphant occasion with Prabhupada in the center and the two new beautiful Deities assuming the altar beside the little Radha-

Krishna. The next night when Prabhupada came into the temple to lecture, he bowed before the Deities and turned to me and asked, "What are they saying about the Deities?" I said, "Everyone says They are very beautiful." Prabhupada stayed about a week. When he left the devotees all sat beside him at Logan airport. Suhotra started a *kirtana* and everyone joined. Then the call came for his flight. Without stopping the *kirtana*, everyone strolled with him down the terminal passage to his exit gate. There were about thirty devotees with arms raised dancing on either side of him as he strode upright and happy down the middle. No one stopped us from this celebrative send-off. We got down to the final gate and sat again with him. He was going to New York to visit the temple there and some of the leaders like Rupanuga, Karandhara, Shyamasundara and others were going with him.

My wife got me aside and said, "Why don't you go to New York with Prabhupada? It's rare to get his association. You should take every chance you can get to be with him." But I felt drawn to stay in Boston. I was the temple president, and we had fifteen new initiates and new Radha-Krishna Deities. I felt my responsibility was to serve Prabhupada in separation by staying in Boston. So I saw him off.

After Prabhupada left Boston I wrote him a letter apologizing for the inadequate facilities we offered him. After all, he had to leave his room and walk down the hall past devotees in order to get to his bathroom. They would shout "Jaya Prabhupada!" on those occasions, and it must have been embarrassing to him wearing only a *gamcha* and carrying his *lota*. He wrote me back and said that the facilities in Boston were all right. In my mind I was comparing them to New York which I know were more luxurious, with several private rooms and decorations done by the designer Bhavananda. Prabhupada wrote back that it was all right in Boston, but the principle was we should offer everything that is first class to the spiritual master. So on the one hand he was assuring me that I hadn't blundered but hinting that the best thing should be offered, and that what we had offered him in Boston was not the greatest. At least we hadn't put him in a brothel. I only got back partial refund on the hotel.

real autobiography

As I have said, my autobiography should contain a good deal of Srila Prabhupada because he is so much in my life. I do not remember him all the time, I am sad to say. But when I get on a roll of reminiscences and memories I can go on for a good while, trading with others. It just requires the right company. I can trade stories with a good godbrother or godsister, or better yet, several of them, by the hour. The stories don't have to be what I personally took part in as long as a trustworthy party breathes life into the story. They should, of course, be accurate histories. I have heard that people tell many anecdotes about Honest Abe that are pure fabrication. They are just good stories with old Abe's name put to them to give them authority. I don't want to tell "Prabhupada stories." When my team was assembling anecdotes for the volumes of *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, we always tried to get two or three people to confirm an incident or saying before we accepted it as trustworthy. In Mark Twain's autobiography he seems to stretch some stories for comic effect, but they are in the true mood of Samuel Clemens, and you delight in them and fervently hope they pass the lie detector test. There is a story that

Mukunda says Prabhupada told him. Prabhupada went to get his phone installed at Twenty-six Second Avenue by going to the Con Edison office. They required a sizable down payment and security money. But by his charm in telling them that he was a penniless monk on a mission for God, they suspended his payment. It seems unlikely that the cold corporation people at Con Ed would have let him have his phone free, but knowing Swamiji, you can be inclined to believe he talked them out of it. Besides, Prabhupada said he did it, and he wasn't one to lie. Prabhupada sometimes did stretch something to make a gain for Lord Caitanya's movement. When he saw how beautiful the Londonisvara Deities were, he insisted on taking them from the would-be donor even though there was a crack on the Deity's finger and the man said They couldn't be installed in that condition. Prabhupada overlooked the technicality and forcibly took the Deities. There are a number of little infringements that Prabhupada indulged in, but they are all transcendental and done in pure service to Krishna.

As for the stories being true, I am mostly setting down accounts that I personally took part in or read in reliable memoirs, often witnessed by several different parties. Prabhupada is bigger than life, and sometimes someone saw him or heard him do something in one way and someone else heard it in another way. Fortunately many many of his sayings and activities are recorded on the Vedabase and typewriting records, and they are verifiable based on more than fallible memories. The *way* a person tells a story about himself or Prabhupada is a matter of personal style and flourish and there will be as many innuendoes as there are people telling the story. Mark Twain writes: "Somebody trod on a dog, and the dog let out a howl that could be heard beyond the frontier." Beyond the frontier? We are glad he perceived it that way because the world would be a little duller if he didn't. I will try to tell true stories only and tell them as they actually happened, although it is inevitable that an occasional howl may go beyond the frontier.

shovelling snow

The Reddy family, Sacisuta, his wife Keli-lalita and their three children have been spending a week in Costa Rica. I hear the daily temperature there is about ninety-five degrees. Here in Stuyvesant Falls, New York, where Saci's family lives and where I live across the street, it has been constantly snowing. B. has shoveled Saci's large driveway area three times today. He doesn't want there to be snow in the driveway when Saci comes home, and he's even more afraid that ice may come over the snow. So every day it snows, B. removes it. One day it snowed heavily all day, and B. shoveled three times. He wears a back brace when he shovels, but he is still getting stiff and sore. Last night it snowed again and he was going to shovel a fourth time. He planned to do it after lunch, but almost miraculously, the sun came out, the temperature climbed and all the snow in the driveway melted away.

Saci and his family are due back late tomorrow night. So we have to make it through one more day without snow, or a day with snow and shoveling, and then we will be able to present him his house with a clean driveway. B. has been shoveling our own little driveway every time he does Saci's. I am too old and feeble to help.

Even as I am writing this piece I am getting a headache and will presently take Excedrin. I used to shovel our sidewalk in Great Kills, Staten Island, when I was a boy. Sometimes a snowstorm would drop two feet of snow and I would shoulder it out. I would stop shoveling at the border of our neighbor's property because we weren't friendly with them. Our neighbors were my Aunt Madeline (my mother's sister) and her husband Irv. It was well-known that Uncle Irv was unfaithful to his wife and was seeing another woman. One night in summer that other woman came prowling around Irv and Madeline's house, drunk and shouting out epithets to them. "Irv! Why don't you come out?" she shouted. And, "Madeline, Irv is my man now. Irv, why don't you have the guts to leave Madeline?" Except for her shouts our suburban street was completely quiet. Soon a police car came cruising down the street, apparently in answer to someone's complaint. The other woman hid in the bushes, and when the police car left she came out and started shouting again. I had my bedroom right next to their house, and she was prowling right below my window. My father came up to my bedroom with a bucket of water. He opened my window silently and poured the whole bucket of water out. It landed right on the other woman's head. She cursed my father. But she was soaked and defeated. She walked off into the night, away from our houses.

But because Irv was unfaithful my father called him "Shithead" and told me not to shovel in front of his house. Aunt Madeline was pitiful. She was so shamed by his adultery and by his girlfriend's coming around at night and shouting. My father was proud of what he had done with the bucket of water, and he used to tell the story when we had guests over at the house and they started drinking. These events go back to the 1950s before I met Srila Prabhupada. Since I was thinking of Baladeva's shoveling snow for Sacisuta, it reminded me of my own shoveling and how I would stop short and not shovel "Shithead's" sidewalk.

My headache has set in, and I can't write more to change this into a Krishna conscious piece. Prema Bhakti Marga is here, and she is polishing Radha and Govinda and changing Them into new clothes. Kirtana Rasa was here for lunch, and he brought me a *murti* of Hanuman to counteract the bad effects of Ketu. Prema is giving Hanuman his first polishing. I pray to him in my own words, asking for protection. In praying for longevity the

Bhagavatam also recommends prayers to the celestial physicians, the Ashvini Kumaras.

BEING MANAGER

Prabhupada said I wasn't a good manager. He said it on at least two occasions, and he said it mixed with praise. What is a manager, and what is a good manager? In ISKCON it means someone like a temple president or governing body commissioner who keeps good financial records, who keeps the temple in good condition, who distributes lots of books and doesn't waste any money. He is good in controlling the personnel. He is efficient, economical and doesn't get cheated by contractors, real estate men, the banks and other potential cheaters and *karmis* who he deals with on behalf of Krishna. Sometimes, however, good managers are not first-class devotees. They may be manipulative toward the devotee manpower promising someone a trip to India and then not coming through on it. He may be competitive with the managers of other temples and not act fairly. He may be abusive. He may not be strong in following his own devotional principles.

A good manager is something like a *kshatriya* or administrative class, and to be truly Krishna conscious the *kshatriyas* have to be submissive to the *brahmanas* and brahminical culture. If they are arrogant toward the *brahmanas* and mistreat them, they will fall.

The first time Prabhupada mentioned I wasn't a good manager, it came up during the big scandal with Bali Mardana and his oriental wife in the New York temple. The woman told Bali Mardana she was the heiress to the Toyota fortune and she had a letter from "Papa Toyota" to prove it. He believed her and began courting her, although he was a *sannyasi*. He told Prabhupada she was the Toyota heiress, and he wanted to give up *sannyasa* and marry her. She was middle-aged and homely. After they got married they built a suite in the temple and lived together. The Toyota lady started treating the women as her servants. Things got worse. The devotees found remnants of meat on a plate outside their room. No extra money came in as a result of the "Toyota" connection. I wasn't living there, and I don't know the details of the corruption, but those who lived in the temple there saw it. To make a long story short, Prabhupada appointed an investigative committee to look into it, and it was exposed that the woman was not the Toyota heiress but a low-class cleaning lady who duped everyone. She and Bali were asked to leave the temple. Many years later Gopal Krishna Maharaja told me that he recommended me to Prabhupada to go to New York and take over. Supposedly Prabhupada said to him, "Satsvarupa is a perfect gentleman, but he is not a good manager." When Gopal Krishna Maharaja told me this I was pleased. I suppose I was a little disappointed that Prabhupada said I wasn't a good manager, but I already knew that. That he thought I was a perfect gentleman was an honor.

Sometime in the 1970s Prabhupada wrote me a letter in which he said, "You are not a good manager, but I keep you on the GBC because you do what I say." This was also a mixed remark. Prabhupada had trouble with some of his leaders (managers) because they acted independently and were disobedient. This disturbed him. Someone once criticized me in front of other GBC men and referred to this letter. They said, "Prabhupada says you are not a good manager." "Yah," said Kirtanananda Maharaja, "but what did he say in the other half of the letter?" So I was kept on the supreme managerial body because in me Prabhupada had a man he could trust to do what he said. I felt mixed emotions again, but mostly good feelings for the personal trust he expressed.

Now I am out of management. I resigned from the GBC in 1986 because of migraine headaches. Then because of personal misbehavior the GBC said I should not have a position of

management and I cannot attend the GBC meetings. I am relieved not to be in management because it is too much pressure, and I can't keep complicated bank records, deal with lawyers, and I dislike being manipulative with devotees to get them to do some service. TKG admitted to me that it took a lot of managerial skill to write the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*. I managed by writing and making a book or poem come out nicely. If I can be a gentleman in Prabhupada's eyes and do what he wanted, I will be satisfied.

The Lowest Thing I've said

The lowest thing I said to Prabhupada was on a long flight with just he and I from Germany to Australia. He had already granted me permission to give up my service as his servant and secretary and to go and start a traveling library party in the U.S.A. I had informed the *brahmacaris* that I was coming. Prabhupada, in consultation with some of the GBC men, had decided that Brahmananda Swami could leave Africa and come and join him as his permanent traveling secretary. We had sent express communication to Brahmananda but so far we hadn't received his reply. I was a little anxious about that. What if he said he couldn't come? My mind was filled with my transference. So I said something to Prabhupada which I shouldn't have said. I don't remember the exact words but it was something like, "Prabhupada, you promised I could leave and start the library party and Brahmananda Swami would take my place. If something happens and he can't come, we will have to get someone else — because you promised." The nagging, demanding tone of my words were certainly out of place and not the words of a surrendered disciple. He had already said I could go, there was no need to remind him,

“You promised.” Prabhupada took my outrageous words like a gentleman. He just said something like, “Yes, I know,” and left it at that. He didn’t chastise me although I deserved it. After this exchange he didn’t change his attitude toward me. We still had considerable time together in Australia, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles where I would be his servant and do my duties as usual. He continued to deal with me as his permanent secretary-servant, and he never brought up the low words I uttered on the plane.

When we arrived in Australia I was delayed in customs (where they completely unwound my *danda*) and missed the car rides to the temple. I was left at the airport with all our luggage; the devotees had all gone with Prabhupada. Luckily there was one householder in a car who hadn’t left. He put me in his car sitting on all our luggage, and we arrived late at the temple. It caused no inconvenience to Prabhupada because he held a long reception *kirtana* and lecture. He greeted me warmly in his quarters, and I told him all the trouble I had had at customs as I unpacked his luggage.

We had a busy week in Melbourne, with an exciting visit to a Franciscan monastery, a visit with the Archbishop of Melbourne, wonderful *kirtanas* led by Madhudvisa and lectures and room talks by Srila Prabhupada. I settled down and did my duties without much distraction. It was a privilege to be with Srila Prabhupada and interact with the other devotees as his secretary-servant. I may write about our visits to Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles at another time. When we arrived in Los Angeles Brahmananda Swami was already there, eager to take on his new position. Someone gave a present of two, buttoned, white wool sweaters. One went to Prabhupada and the other went to Brahmananda Swami rather than me.

I met with the *brahmacaris* of the library party, and we started organizing right away. They bought suits and wigs, and I got an outfit too. (I had asked Srila Prabhupada if it was all right for me as a *sannyasi* to wear a civilian disguise. He replied that we are not interested in dress, we are interested in service.) Brahmananda took my place, and we went on our first day to U.C.L.A. and placed several standing orders of Prabhupada’s books. Prabhupada did a sweet thing the last three days we were in Los Angeles together. He called for me to come to his room at 10 p.m. and

asked me to close the curtains to the windows before he went to bed. Then he asked me for a personal report on our party, how it was doing. I felt he was seeing how I felt now that I was no longer his servant-secretary. Was I taking it all right? There was definitely a sweet personal concern in those late night calls to his room to close the curtains. I felt very indebted to him and assured him I was well-situated. I was still his servant, and now I was going to distribute his books. I don't think he even kept in his mind my low demanding words on the airplane to Australia. But I will never forget them and pray for his forgiveness that I spoke out in such a spoiled brat way.

LIBRARY PARTY

The library party was a wonderful part of my life. It was a preaching success and was pleasing to Prabhupada. He even wrote about it in one of his books: “I request my disciples who are determined to help me in this work to continue their cooperation fully, so that philosophers, scholars, religionists and people in general all over the world will benefit by reading our transcendental literatures such as *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and *Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta*.”

I have already mentioned in the autobiography the technique we used. I used the road atlas and planned out our route throughout the States, being careful not to miss a college. It was hard work, going to the professors and convincing them that their library needed a full set of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and *Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta*. Our party consisted of about six men, but two men did the real bulk of the work, that is, Ghanasyama (later Bhaktitirtha Swami) and Mahabuddhi. I wasn't a good salesman. Ghanasyama said I was too honest. I couldn't close a big sale. My service to the party was to give counsel and settle quarrels among the men. Ghanasyama and Mahabuddhi were the main competitors. At each

college town there were professors who were the most likely to sign for the standing order for their college library. They would be teaching in the field of Eastern or Indian religion or something that seemed to make them inclined towards Prabhupada's books. I had to play the referee. I had to also convince the other men that they shouldn't go. I gave Mahabuddhi and Ghanasyama turns at going to see the most likely professors because they were pretty much the best salesmen. The other devotees were not as good, and so it was easy to convince them that Mahabuddhi and Ghanasyama should go. Subhananda was a good scholar in the field, and he knew the names of the professors in the other colleges so he was pretty insistent that he should be given a chance to do the standing orders. But he wasn't a good salesman, so I had to convince him not to go. First you had to get past the professor's suspicion that this was a religious group proselytizing. They couldn't figure out if you were wearing a wig. But one time a professor asked Mahabuddhi if he was wearing a wig, and he dismissed it with a laugh, "Sure! Everyone in California wears one!" Ghanasyama had a way of double-talking himself out of any situation. He got the recommendations of the professors and then it was just a matter of getting the librarian to sign the paper to order the books. I used to get caught at almost everything, wearing a wig, being a member of the Hare Krishna movement and being a disciple of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. But as long as I could go see a professor teaching English or Sociology I could sell a few books.

It was a free-wheeling life, traveling in the afternoon to the next college town and settling down at a campground or inexpensive motel. We talked and sang and read and laughed about the day's adventures, and we drove on. I had preliminary copies of the new *Caitanya-caritamrta* manuscripts before they were published, and I read them to the group. Mahabuddhi especially liked to hear of the battles between the demons and the devotees. We would wash and iron our shirts and press our suits and shine our shoes and take rest in our sleeping bags. For breakfast we might have granola and milk and fruit, and we would make sandwiches for lunch. I would write letters to Prabhupada on behalf of the party, and he would write back with statements like "you are doing the most important work" and "your preaching in the colleges is a great pleasure to me; I am most pleased with the standing orders."

What Prabhupada liked as much as the sales was the favorable letters that the professors wrote. We would ask them to write a letter after reading the book, and surprisingly they waxed eloquent about the virtues of Prabhupada's books.

“It has been my great pleasure recently to have read the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in this superb edition authorized by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. I am sure this monumental work will go far to bring the sublime message of the *Bhagavatam* to numerous Westerners who would otherwise miss this opportunity.”

—Dr. Alex Wayman,
Professor of Sanskrit,
Columbia University

“The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust editions of famous religious classics of India with new translations and commentaries are an important addition to our expanding knowledge of spiritual India. The new edition of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is particularly welcome.”

—Dr. John L. Mish, Chief,
Oriental Division,
New York Public Library

“*Srimad-Bhagavatam* is a valuable source material for several categories of readers with its exhaustive plan of providing the original Sanskrit texts, its Roman transliteration, English synonyms, English translation and elaborate commentary by a scholar and practitioner of philosophy, it cannot but be attractive to serious students and scholars of religion and philosophy. I recommend the series to anyone as an important and useful reference work.”

—Professor C. P. Agrawal, Chairman,
Department of Humanities,
University of Michigan

We assembled many quotes and put them into a book called *The Krishna Consciousness Movement is Authorized* and distributed it widely. We were always on the move. Moving into a college town in the early morning and leaving in the late afternoon with a handful of sales. It was a most happy life, footloose and productive at the same time. On Friday night we would stop at the nearest ISKCON center and join with the devotees in a rousing *kirtana*. On

Saturdays we would go on *barinama* with the devotees, and I would spend time talking to each of our party members, counseling them on their complaints and troubles, and hearing their enthusiasm. It took two years of constant travel to cover the colleges in the United States, and then we reported to Prabhupada and asked him if we could expand to Europe. He opened his eyes wide and said “Yes!” and the party split up into different groups to northern and southern Europe with the use of translators from local temples. In Europe, using the strong recommendations from the professors in the U.S., it was easy to place the orders. Ghanasyama had an automobile accident and hit a European civilian and was put in jail for several months. But when he came out he crossed the Iron Curtain (those were Cold War days) and managed to tell fantastic stories to professors to get them to take the books. Prabhupada heard of Ghanasyama’s exploits, and at the end of his life when he went to England, he met with Ghanasyama and gave him a pat on the back. I never regretted leaving Prabhupada’s service as a servant-secretary and joining the library party. For me to be part of the taste and privilege of book distribution was a great honor.

Thoughts on Autobiography

Mark Twain began his autobiography at seventy-one years old and wrote three long volumes before his death. I may live a long time and produce a long manuscript. “Too long?” I say no, because I will keep it sufficiently interesting. It is a challenge.

Just go on writing and remembering and diarying with no end in sight. For example, I painted for ten years at a feverish pace, mostly in Wicklow, Ireland. Remember the visionary garden in the backyard? You had totem poles tied to trees and painted them with different faces. You made people with rainproof clothes; you made many canvasses, dripping with paint spilled from bottles, decorated with Celtic and Krishna conscious symbols. You had figures styled after Jean Basquiat and Juan Miro. You could remember that again in detail and revive your painting life. There are so many avenues you could take.

prabhupada experiences all weather

I went to sit on the porch to get cool air on my head, but it was too cold out there and I had to come back into the house. I intended to write on the autobiography, but no ideas came to my head. Maybe I will write about Prabhupada in cold weather. He had first experience of it in the winter of 1965–66 in New York. One morning he woke up and saw the whole side of the building was white. He thought it was whitewash, he was so unaccustomed with snow. And he had to go out in this snow to do grocery shopping. There is one early picture of him walking the streets of New York wearing a fairly big coat, so somehow he got that. He was living in Dr. Mishra’s yoga studio, and I suppose it had central heating, but anytime he went out into the snow — and there was plenty of snow that winter — it must have been an ordeal. He mentions the hardship of the snow in at least one letter — to Rupanuga. He said it was inconvenient. “Then why are you here?” Because he has a mission to execute for his Spiritual Master to spread Krishna Consciousness in the West. He would be much more at ease in Vrindavan where it also becomes cold with no central heating or big coats — but not like Manhattan. After

suffering a stroke in May of 1967, he went to San Francisco, but it was too cold, and he returned to the heat of Vrindavan, India, to recover. He continued big travels in cold places for the rest of his life. He didn't travel with plans to live in temperate weather; his plans were all according to preaching opportunities. He often visited London, which he said was "like hell" for weather. He went to Scandinavia and Moscow, not for weather but for spreading Krishna's message. He traveled like Narada Muni. As he grew older, he spent more time in India with side trips to Los Angeles.

In 1977 when he was feeling ill, he went to Hrishikesh in the mountains and had a breakdown. He decided his end had come so he went to Vrindavan to spend his last days. He went there to pass his last months, but he became restless with the desire to preach in the West and he went again to London. But it didn't work out there, and he came back to Vrindavan to spend the last weeks up through November 14th in Karttika in the holy *dhama*. There he experienced temperate weather (despite an invitation to go on an oxcart ride around Govardhana). He passed away in warm weather in Vrindavan after seeing ice and snow for preaching.

prabhupada-isms

Method: Dictating, walking back and forth, he goes on talking episodes, incidents, reflections. Talking for the transcriber to hear. This was the method Mark Twain used in his autobiography. I cannot do that. I can only get a small morsel at a time. The story of a devotee stealing Prabhupada's shoes. The devotee filched them from where they sat outside Prabhupada's room. He immediately replaced them with an identical pair, and now had a precious pair of shoes worn by His Divine Grace. Somehow Prabhupada knew of the ruse (I don't know how) and sent a note to the devotee "don't steal the spiritual master's shoes." I don't know how he did it, but it was a good tale because (1) the devotee was such a determined thief, and (2) he was outsmarted by Prabhupada who reprimanded him.

In general Prabhupada preferred Indian confections (sweets) over Western things like donuts, eclairs, cookies, etc. He much preferred a *sandesh* or a *rasgulla* well-made.

Prabhupada did not prepare for his lectures. He merely lectured on *slokas* from the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* or *Bhagavad-gita*. He would read the verse aloud or have his secretary read it and then begin

speaking on the topic. He wouldn't stick strictly to the topic, but would digress to other subjects. But then usually at the end of the lecture, he would return to the subject of the *sloka*. He would usually speak about forty-five minutes. Sometimes he would speak without a *sloka* on a general subject like Bhagavat dharma or transmigration, and insert verses in talk. It is remarkable that he gave so many lectures without outlines, study or other preparations.

Prabhupada seriously criticized a disciple for a period of time. For example, he criticized Pradyumna for going to one of Prabhupada's godbrothers for advice on Sanskrit. This godbrother had turned down an invitation of Prabhupada's to attend a function. So after an insult like that, for Pradyumna to go to him for assistance was bad etiquette. He scorched Pradyumna for a while, then let it go.

Prabhupada wore different colored sweaters and turtle-neck jerseys. He didn't stick to strict saffron, but wore orange, rust, red, yellow, brown and other shades. Sometimes he wore sweaters with buttons and collars. He wore gray *chadars* most of the time rather than saffron ones. The gray ones were good quality.

Prabhupada mostly wore canvas pull-on shoes of a saffron color. He didn't wear flip-flop sandals. He didn't wear Western shoes with laces.

He used a brand of snuff to help him keep awake all night when he woke up at twelve and kept working until five o'clock when he took his walk. His main nap was after lunch for maybe two hours and then from ten to one in the morning. That meant about five hours out of twenty-four.

Prabhupada brushed his teeth with a *neem* twig or eucalyptus twig in the West. He shaved his face about every other day, sometimes a little longer. But sometimes he would shave his face every single day. He never grew a beard. He shaved his head once a month, sometimes every two weeks. He was well-groomed.

He walked at a rapid pace. Sometimes the young men had to hurry up to keep up with him. He used a cane in his right hand, poking it into the ground with a rhythmic pace. He would swing his left arm delicately extending the fingers at the end of his hand on the back swing. He wore several rings and occasionally would give them away to devotees. The rings were gifts from disciples. He was about five feet four in height and maybe a hundred and

fifty pounds. His nostrils flared and he had a bold “Roman” nose. His lips were full and the bottom of his mouth turned down at the corners, giving a grave look. But he sometimes smiled full of sunshine. His eyes were one of the most mystical things about him. They penetrated you and “saw through” you. They were soul eyes. They simultaneously hid and revealed the deep secrets of his self-realization. They were hazel in color. He had a manly chest, thin arms and a protruding belly.

He had a compassionate gaze. He was merry with children and sometimes teased them. He liked to hand out cookies to them, and he did it in a careful way.

srila prabhupada in the next world

Srila Prabhupada, where are you? Your sacred body lies in the *samadhi mandir* in the Krishna-Balarama Mandir in Vrindavan, India, but where are you actively as spirit soul? Have you gone to join the residents of Vrindavan in a suitable body for serving Radha-Krishna in Goloka Vrindavan? Are you a *gopi-manjari*? Or have you gone to the pastimes of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in Navadvipa with Nityananda Prabhu, Advaita Acarya, Gadadhara Pandit, Srinivasa Thakura, Sacimata and all those blissful residents? And can I join you in some capacity for service as I served you when you were in this world? Soon I will get to know the answers to these questions. It may be that you see me as not pure enough to join you in the spiritual world. What about meeting you for further service in this material world? Please don't say I have no continued connection with you. Am I not your eternal servant? You have said there is an ISKCON in the spiritual world. We must be free of the imperfections of the ISKCON in the material world. It must be a perfect ISKCON, with you at the head. We have to be perfect to serve you there.

Some of this will be revealed to me in a few years. In the meantime, I will chant and hear to understand you better and develop taste. I want to serve you here so I can serve you there. I feel confident that if I meet with you again, you will remember me and take me in your service. You will be affectionate to me despite my failures and falldown. Because you are so compassionate you will accept the legacy that I have left in written books, and they will help people coming to Krishna Consciousness. Please accept me as a particle of dust at your lotus feet.

Prabhupada, please notice me in the crowd. Please don't neglect me but pick me up and place me at your feet. I have been crippled in this material body for many years. Give me a new, fresh body, not for sense gratification, but for the ability to serve you strongly. Give me eternal life of reverence to you with no "familiarity breeds contempt." Let me consider it the greatest honor to serve you and give me menial services in joy. Let me work to bring the fallen souls back to Godhead as Lord Caitanya did and as you did in His service.

Let me be sincere and humble and true to you.

krishna-ism

It has been thirty-four years since Prabhupada's disappearance. It has been forty-five years since I have been initiated. A long time without his guidance. Srila Narayana Maharaj has been initiating some devotees originally from ISKCON for over twelve years. The Ritviks have been active for over ten years. Disappointment with ISKCON gurus and GBC for more than fifteen years. The ISKCON boat stays afloat for forty-five years despite disruption. It goes through changes and reform. Prabhupada is leading his flock for forty-five years. Biography, films, memoirs, new temples, new devotees, old devotees passing away. His image and legacy preserved. Srila Prabhupada lives!

BOOK DISTRIBUTION

Book distribution is low. Street *kirtana* is once a week. Active presence on the internet. Mayapur planetarium being built. *Gurukulas* mainly in India. Radhanatha Swami guru of the yogis, influential book. Sacinandana Swami leader of seminars. Presence in Oxford University. BBT growing in Africa. Academic diplomas (Masters) available at Lampeter, University of Wales, through taking courses at Bhaktivedanta College, Radhadesh, devotees lecturing at many colleges worldwide. Twenty-four hour *kirtana* and *japa* retreats popular. In America temples are manned more by eastern Europeans and Indians than Americans. Recruiting low. Russia and India booming in membership, book distribution.

prayer

You, as *sisya* of Prabhupada, can pray to Krishna for specific requests. The first intercessionary prayer I remember Srila Prabhupada giving us was a prayer for his own health when he was enduring a stroke in 1967. Lord Nrsimhadeva came into the conversation, and Prabhupada said we could pray to him that our spiritual master has “not finished his work.” Of course, we asked that Nrsimhadeva act by His own free will, but this was our prayer. Prabhupada didn’t immediately recover, but after going to India and imbibing the seasonal heat, he got better. At the end of Srila Prabhupada’s life when there seemed little hope that his body could endure, we asked Prabhupada if we could pray for him. He had an itinerary of what he wanted to do, especially complete the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. With the library party making standing orders in the libraries he desired to finish his herculean work, and he was only up to the Thirteenth Chapter of the Tenth Canto. So he said that we could pray “Dear Krishna-Balarama, if You desire, please cure Srila Prabhupada.” Prabhupada made the prayer in the form of allowing Krishna to do what He wanted, but allowing us to make our plea. In this case, it was not to be. Krishna wanted

Prabhupada to come to Him and not finish the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Krishna had already inspired Srila Prabhupada to write a summary study of the Tenth Canto in 1969, in case he did not live long enough to finish in the methodical method of Sanskrit transliterations and word-by-word synonyms. After he passed away his scholarly disciples finished the Eleventh and Twelve Cantos. He had also said that our love for him would be shown by how we cooperated to maintain the institution of ISKCON. That is a kind of prayer also.

Krishna is always at His free will to respond to our prayers or not. “Pray and endeavor,” he told us in Boston, when we were looking for a temple beyond the storefront variety. Pray and endeavor. Krishna has His reasons for wanting things to turn out in certain ways, and we can’t dictate to Him. He is not our order-supplier. We have to have faith that His providential dealings with us our best for us.

It is good to pray to Krishna, to recognize His supremacy and to develop a confidential relationship. Man proposes and God disposes. But He wants to hear our voices. The Hare Krishna mantra is a prayer, and the homey adage “the family that prays together stays together” is not mere sentimentality. If a family gathers for *japa* and *kirtana* they will gain strength to endure trials together and to be protected by Krishna.

deities for longevity and sac-cidananda vigraha

Hanuman worship counteracts the shortening of longevity by Ketu. Hanuman is a great warrior and a servant of Lord Rama. His *murti* is shiny bell metal. His clothes are not from fabric, but the natural metal on his body. He carries a big club by his side. His long tail sticks out between his legs. He has on bangles, a garland, a metal belt with a long piece that drapes in his front. He wears a hard helmet. He is humble. Sometimes when we think of a humble person we think of a quiet and almost timid person, like a humble librarian or schoolteacher. Hanuman is humble, but he is a fierce fighter. When he saw Ravana, he shouted to him, “I am the servant of Rama! Come out and fight with me!” He dared to challenge the mightiest Raksasa of his time. He beat on the warrior companions of Ravana and killed some of them. He even engaged in combat with Ravana. But they managed to tie him up with a noose. Then they set fire to his tail. He jumped free and went around Sri Lanka with his flaming tail, setting on fire the palatial buildings and the military outposts. He burned down a large portion of Sri Lanka all by himself. And he put out the fire on his

tail. Then he leaped across the ocean and reported everything to his master. He had found the *ashok* grove where Sita was held captive. He gave Rama all the necessary information He needed to attack Sri Lanka with His armies. Rama built a bridge of floating stones from India to Sri Lanka with the help of Hanuman and the other monkeys. With Their elephants, infantry, chariots, etc., they crossed and battled with Ravana's army. Hanuman killed many *asuras*. Rama shot the death arrows into Ravana's chest.

I look at Hanuman and pray to him for longevity. Above his altar stand Sri Sri Radha and Govinda, smartly dressed in white and violet outfits. They have flower patterns on Their dresses. Their brass is shiny and effulgent. They are happily dancing. He is Govinda Adi Purusam, the Original Enjoyer and Creator. Radha is His consort and the most beautiful *gopi* in all the worlds. Her beauty conquers even Krishna. These Deities may extend my mortal life so I can write books, including a wide-ranging autobiography, and after life I may go to the land of Goloka with Radha and Krishna and play and live with Them with no fear of death.

portraits of prabhupada

Devotees have painted and drawn hundreds of pictures of Prabhupada. It started out with Jadurani's crude paintings and has evolved into more accurate and artistic renderings of his face. There is a Russian woman living in Vrindavan, and she does excellent charcoal paintings that look just like photographs, and Bhaktisiddhanta Prabhu has done larger than life bronze statues of Prabhupada for the *samadhi mandirs* at Vrindavan and Mayapur. All these renderings are realistic; none are abstract. The artists and the audience think it would be sacrilegious to do nonrepresentational art of Srila Prabhupada. But I think it could be done by a very good artist. He or she would probably also have to be good at rendering very realistic art that makes you think, "When is he going to speak?" Picasso did abstract paintings of people of his time, like the famous portrait of Gertrude Stein. It looks like her but it also has more than photographic reproduction. Miro's paintings of contemporaries are also recognizable but distortions in caricature of the person. They capture the spirit of the person more than a Polaroid image.

I can't do them myself, but I would like to see accomplished artists attempt it. They will look more haunting in "spiritual" than the exact realistic images. There could be collages of Prabhupada walking, sitting and talking on the *vyasasana*, and sleeping in bed. There could be studies of his "soul eyes," even flashes of his anger and studies of his compassion.

As yet no one has done abstract paintings of Srila Prabhupada. But in the future, they will be done, and I hope they will not be misused or done for the wrong reasons. It might be received with initial shock, or even laughter or condemnation, but eventually there can be a place for abstract renditions of Srila Prabhupada.

Picasso is the great master of "distorting faces" but not making them ugly. He breaks them up into pieces, and it has a startling effect. There is a painting of his called something like "A Man in a Straw Hat" which is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and I really love it. He often draws picture of women with their eyes at an odd angle and even the ears and nose at odd angles. The experimental paintings of Prabhupada could be done if somebody had the great skill to do it so that it wouldn't look as if it was mocking him, but it would look like known modern art.

P.S.: Picasso's technique is to combine a profile with a full face.

childhood

When Prabhupada was a baby boy, he used to run through the house and pick up mangoes. They weren't a rich family, but they had mangoes in abundance. When he wanted to go to the bathroom he used to grab his mother's hand. "What do you want?" she would say. "You know how to go by yourself." He wanted a toy gun. When his father took him to the store he said, "I want two guns." "Why two?" "Because I have two hands." He told his father he wanted to hold a Ratha-yatra procession. His father, Gaura Mohan De, built him a beautiful decorated cart with horses and wheels. He made him Jagannatha, Subhadra and Balarama deities. Prabhupada asked the neighbors to make *prasadam*, and he invited his friends. They pulled the cart around the neighborhood, and they distributed *prasadam*. They performed it seriously, just as he had seen the priests do at the big Ratha-yatra festival in the temple. His father gave him Radha-Krishna *murtis* for his childhood play. He kept Them in a box and took Them out for worship. When he grew up and went to school, he put the Deities in a box and didn't worship Them any more. But then he regretted it and took Them out and resumed the regular *puja*. His father

hired a man to give him *mrdanga* lessons. His mother objected and said he's not going to become a *mrdanga* player, what's the sense of giving him *mrdanga* lessons? But his father said he wanted him to be a devotee of Radharani and a player of the *mrdanga*. The boy was not interested in becoming a lawyer and going to England. He used to go to the Radha-Krishna Mandir at the neighboring Mulliks and stand and watch the *pujari* dress the Deities. "They were so beautiful with Their slanty eyes. I would stand and watch Them for hours." He was especially fond of *kachoris*. His mother would make him some, and he would beg some from the neighboring ladies. He kept them in his vest pockets and ate them. They called him "Kachori Mukhi" — Kachori Face for this attachment. When his mother died, he was very sad. His father explained to him about the transmigration of the soul and how the soul never dies and how his mother had gone to a good place. This gave him solace. He used to play with his sister Bhavatarini. They would run and play with kites. He found good relationships with the Christian teachers at Scottish Church College, but he told his friend he didn't like the subject matter they taught. A professor rejected the teachings of transmigration because he said for a person to be punished there has to be witnesses. Who is the witness of our sins? Prabhupada said he didn't know at the time, but later he learned that the Supersoul is the witness of our sins. When it was time to get his diploma, he had been converted to a Gandhian advocate. Gandhians didn't support anything made in Britain. So he refused to accept his graduation diploma. Through his father's influence he got a prestigious position and management job in Bose's Laboratory. He married his wife who was twelve years old.

criticism

I am writing this sitting on the porch where the temperature has gone up to over 40° F (5° C). It is raining hard but not falling where I am sitting. There is still dirty snow sticking on the ground. B. and Mukta Vandy have just returned from shopping. Sacisuta has just passed by en route on a twenty mile run he's taking this morning. Not many birds are out picking the seeds. I pray I can keep writing the autobiography by telling of the things that are currently on my mind. In our journey through life it is the stopping for side issues, which is of the most interest rather than the strict chronological account.

I received a letter from an ex-disciple criticizing me for my misbehavior of years ago. It seems to me that should be a dead issue and not brought up accusatively as if it just happened yesterday. Besides, she was criticizing me for my present behavior also. The present criticism was for not associating enough with my senior godbrothers and an implication that I am associating with irresponsible people who are over-medicating me.

Since coming to New York State I have been socializing quite a lot, with nice people, responsible devotees who live here and those

who visit me. Most of them are not senior godbrothers, but I don't think I should be blamed for that. Devotees are devotees, and many of the people I associate with are mature human beings who have been devotees for many years. They are not all my disciples, and some of them are Prabhupada's disciples. Why the criticism? As for over-medication, it is a false charge. It is based on rumor that I take medication prescribed by a few of my disciples. It is not true. For thirty years I have been taking medication prescribed by Dr. Ravi Singh, an M.D. psychiatrist who knows my history of chronic daily headaches better than anyone. He is on the cutting edge of treating anxiety conditions and regularly attends conferences to keep abreast in his field.

And I am not the only one who is criticized. Our movement is filled with faultfinders who are always writing letters to people they think are out of line. Just now a prominent godbrother who is preaching with great influence both within ISKCON and in the yoga field gave a very widely seen TV show for the general public. He geared his talk for the wider audience. As a result, he received many letters of criticism from the conservative element of ISKCON scolding him for not using the word "Krishna" enough times. He appeared fully dressed and identified as a Krishna conscious member, and this show will do much good for our movement. Counting the number of times that he says Krishna seems petty.

I was hurt by the letter I received but wrote back with no defense on my part. I wrote to the person and said I was glad she was taking more shelter in Prabhupada and living in an ISKCON community. I did tell her that I was repenting and trying to reform from the issues she addressed.

Forgiveness is a major quality of a Vaishnava. This is stated in all the *sastras* and by the *acaryas*. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." If I want to be forgiven I should be liberal in my own forgiveness.

A MAN WHO CAME OUT OF THE CROWD

Kaulini Mataji came for lunch at our home today at 2 p.m. Keli Lalita and Sacisuta had been to lunch at 12:30. We served them all ravioli. We had much conversation. Saci and Keli told us about Costa Rica and the movie they saw last night. The movie was *Black Swan*, which sounded very strange. It was based on the musical composition "Swan Lake." Saci didn't know which parts of the movie to take as imaginative and which were realistic. The ballerina gets an itching sensation on her back and eventually picks a feather off. Then at the end, her feet become webbed. Saci couldn't make his proposed twenty mile run this morning. He ran fifteen miles in the rain, and then he felt too cold and had to stop. Kaulini Mataji was enthusiastic about her hospice work in Vrindavan. She said the director, Sangita, went to Vrindavan for the first time. She has done her hospice work according to Western hospital standards. It was quite a shock for her to encounter the lifestyle of the Vrajavasis. Hospice is for patients with terminal diseases. They have ten people in the hospital and sixty living at home in the Vraja villages. It was like culture shock for Sangita because the Vrajavasis are so simple, they do things their own way. They refuse

to wear cover sheets. They completely neglected to keep up their health charts, which is an important part of the hospice regimen. There was no privacy in the hospital. Four women would share a room and when another visitor came to see one of them, a doctor, a nurse, or a family man, all the others would herd around out of curiosity. No privacy! Gradually over the week Sangita and Kaulini Mataji and the Vrajavasi patients began to reach compromises and learn how to live with one another. The Vrindavan municipality is widening the main road and causing a great deal of trouble for the land owners along the road. They are taking ten feet off everyone's land, tearing down walls, tearing up pipes ... and it all has to be repaired at the cost of the owner. ISKCON and some other land owners have staged a protest and gone to court. As a result, a big man dressed in saffron came out to the women's hospice and sat in front of their door all day making speeches in Hindi against ISKCON and Prabhupada regarding the court action. He gathered crowds and the crowds of men threatened the women when they came out of the hospice. This lasted for some weeks, but a settlement was finally made out of court and the big man in saffron went *away*. "Oh!" said Kaulini, "I haven't told you the biggest hair-raising story of all! Or are you too tired?" I admitted to her that I was too tired. She said she would tell the story to B. and he would tell it to me. What happened was that Sangita obtained Krishna and Balarama *silas* from Govardhana, and she was carrying them in her luggage. She and Kaulini had gone to Jaipur, and their plane landed in Delhi late. They were being rushed through security, but the guard found the two *silas* and said they could not be taken on board because they could be used as weapons. To demonstrate, he even took one of them and knocked it against his head. The crowd waiting in the security line grew restless, but Sangita argued with the guard and tried to explain to him what the *silas* were and how carrying them on board was harmless. The guard was stubborn and wouldn't let them go. He said he would confiscate them. Sangita panicked. Then a man came out of the crowd and talked to the guard in Hindi. He managed to explain to him that the rocks were sacred. The guard was still hesitant. Sangita asked the man who had come out of the crowd what she should do. He said, "Balarama is stronger than Krishna, you should pray to Him to let you pass." Sangita prayed and thirty seconds later the guard changed his mind and said it was all right,

they could take the rocks with them. It's always a pleasure talking to Kaulini. She says her desire is to spend four months a year doing hospice work in Vrindavan. I'm glad when she spends time here, and we can get her association.

intimacy

Kaulini Mataji told us that Abhirama Prabhu gave two classes in Vrindavan in which he described nursing Prabhupada in his last days. She said Abhirama told things she had never heard before. I was not part of that most intimate care team — corresponding to what we would call a hospice team — for Prabhupada in his last days. The team consisted of TKG, Upendra, Abhirama, Bhakti Charu Swami and sometimes Bhavananda. I thought there were enough intimate servants and didn't want to push myself in where I wasn't invited or needed. Partly, I didn't break through because I maintained a mood of awe and reverence toward Prabhupada. And to do that service you had to go past awe and enter complete intimacy. They would carry Prabhupada to the toilet, give him a sponge bath, massage, talk to him encouragingly and tenderly in a way that went beyond the usual conversation of a disciple and his spiritual master. I wasn't able to do all that. I did stay in his quarters downstairs and kept myself abreast of his condition by talking with TKG. I cared totally for his well being, and my mind was all rapt in praying for his recovery, or accepting the fact that he would not recover. I sometimes went with a small group of

men and one pair of small *karatalas* and sat on the floor by him singing the Hare Krishna mantra in soft *kirtana*. We would do this for an hour until he wanted to take rest or do something else, or a new *kirtana* team would replace us. I took part in an all-night schedule of single men going inside Prabhupada's mosquito net and sitting on his bed and rubbing his body. I would take the ten to midnight or midnight to 2 a.m. time. That was very intimate, and you had to use all your strength to keep rubbing him and stay awake. I managed to do this, and it was a great thrill of loving exchange towards him. It was hard to keep awake, and I did it by thinking who Prabhupada was, *siksa* guru for anyone who had the sense to come to him, and *diksa* guru for anyone who had vowed to be his eternal servant. "I am so fallen, Prabhupada," I thought, "I want to fall asleep. I must stay awake and massage you for your comfort." I managed to stay awake, and when my shift was over I looked forward to doing it again. I also had a chance to pat down his body with baby talcum powder for his skin relief. One time while patting his feet I intentionally said farewell to him because I was sure he was not going to recover, even though devotees were caring for him and praying for him to recover. I knew he would not recover, and I made a sad and tender farewell.

So while I did get some service, I was not in the inner circle of those who treated him like a baby and who spoke to him with encouraging, close words, spoken into his ear because he could not hear unless you bent over and whispered into his ear drum. I did not have that ultimate physical intimacy that a few had.

My final exchange with him was when I was leading the singing and he was listening. We had finished the Hare Krishna *kirtana*, and I was singing the Nrsimha prayers. He motioned for TKG to come over to him and he whispered something in his ear and TKG whispered back. Later TKG told me Prabhupada had asked who was that singing? He was blind by now. TKG said it was me. Prabhupada responded by making a sound, "Mmm." I said to TKG that that wasn't much of a response. He said, "In the condition Prabhupada is in, that's a great response." And I certainly became very grateful for it. Previously he had made a little nod of recognition to me while we were waiting in the airport in New Delhi when he was going for his final trip to London. I did not go on that trip to London, but I was in Vrindavan when he returned and passed away. It was just a couple of days before he

passed away that he asked who was singing the Nrsimhadeva prayers and had said “Mmm” when he heard it was me. I was with him at the foot of his bed all day on November 14th when he passed away, but he was internal and not communicating with anyone. In the last hours the doors were open and all the men and women at Krishna-Balarama Mandir were allowed to enter and stand around him and chant. Devotees cried to Prabhupada and watched as he finally gasped a last breath, and we all knew he had passed away.

babies

Today a baby is going to have his first grains and choose whether he wants the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* or money. I am avoiding the event, but not because I don't like babies. I like babies, I like to hold them (if they don't cry), and I like the hope they signify if they are born into a Krishna conscious family. But this ceremony today is being performed by a Ph.D. *brahmana* who knows all the mantras and rituals which could turn the event into something too long and complicated for me. B. has made lasagna for the affair, and that is our contribution. Prabhupada liked babies. When they were infants there wasn't much he could do with them except touch their heads and give them benediction. When they grew up to be toddlers he could play with them, take their hand and not let it go, give them cookies, and play other games with them. On one famous occasion a mother approached Prabhupada with her baby and he asked her, "Who do you love more, Krishna or your baby?" I don't remember the mother's reply, but she was very flustered. When Malati's daughter Sarasvati was a little child she had a Deity of Krishna. Prabhupada took it and held it behind his back. Sarasvati was puzzled and upset looking for her Krishna Deity. Her mother

kept saying to her, “Sarasvati, who has Krishna?” The question finally got through to Sarasvati and she realized that Srila Prabhupada, the pure devotee spiritual master, was in possession of Krishna. She looked behind his back and was delighted to find and get back her Krishna.

Another neighborhood baby girl, Tulasi Dasi, is going to receive her first grains in a few weeks. I plan to attend that event ceremony because I am friends with her parents and the ceremony is going to be performed by Dhanudhara Swami who should make it interesting.

Prabhupada used the example of a baby in describing how to chant. To describe how we should cry out when we chant the holy name of God. The disciple should cry out “Hare Krishna” and fix his mind in that prayer. Prabhupada also gave the example that when a baby cries no one can give it relief but its mother. Similarly, out of all the distresses which can occur to a child it is hard to find out what is actually troubling him. The only one who knows is the mother, and she can give relief. Otherwise, oftentimes a baby’s cries are difficult to diagnose, and it may be hard for anyone to stop him or her from crying. She may have a diaper pin stuck in her flesh, or she may have indigestion; she may be hungry for her mother’s breast. The expert mother will quickly find out the cause of the baby’s grief and give relief. Krishna knows the cause of our sorrow and only in His “bosom” can we find happiness. As the gospel song goes, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows my sorrow. Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows but Jesus.”

Babies are beautiful, babies are cute; babies poop and need their diapers changed. Babies vomit on their mother’s new sweater. Babies keep their mummy and daddy awake most of the night at a certain stage of their life. They are lovely, and they are harassing. Babies are different from one another. Some are very peaceful and some others are often crying. All babies are spirit souls, and it is a great responsibility to bring one into the world. In the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Fifth Canto Lord Rsabhadeva teaches his sons that no one should become a mother or father unless they can make their offspring free from repeated birth and death. The British poet William Wordsworth wrote, “Babies come into this world trailing clouds of glory from God Who is their home.” Babies also come into this world trailing a chain of karma from previous lives, some

good and some bad tendencies. By proper training a baby can grow up shedding its bad karma and becoming Krishna conscious, building his good karma and reaching the transcendental stage. A *yogi* or transcendental person who makes progress in *bhakti* but doesn't reach perfection is born into a family of good Vaishnavas where he has every chance to complete his progress in Krishna consciousness and go back to Godhead. All glories to babies who are born somewhat like blank slates, and all glories to the Krishna conscious parents who fill that slate with the names of God. Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare.

tulasi devi

B. has been growing a Norfolk pine (Christmas tree) in our house since December, and she has been flourishing nicely. But he thought, “Why not worship Tulasi?” At his request Kaulini Mataji brought him back Tulasi seeds from Vrinda Kunda (the resident pond of the *gopi* Tulasi devi in Vrindavan). She also has a book on how to take care of Tulasi, and she assured him that he has devotion and that Tulasi will grow nicely here. Worshiping Tulasi is a part of Baladeva’s larger desire to live in Vrindavan. When he was last there for six months, Mahanidhi Swami told him on leaving that you cannot join the *lila* of Krishna without worshiping Tulasi and the residents of Goloka.

Srila Prabhupada writes in the purport of his *Srimad-Bhagavatam* that he sorely regretted not being able to grow Tulasi in the West. But then his disciple Govinda Dasi cultivated them in the West, and he was very happy. This is an extremely rare instance of Prabhupada mentioning a disciple by name in his books. In Hawaii they have been able to grow Tulasi as large bushes and keep them outdoors. In Vancouver, Canada, the ISKCON temple also cultivates many large healthy bushes in pots.

Prabhupada approved the formal worship of Tulasi as part of the daily “morning program” by offering an *arati* and singing the “Tulasi Kirtana” song after the *mangala arati* in the temple. The Gaudiya Math devotees criticize ISKCON for singing this song and then reciting the English translation because they say it contains a line that is too *rasika* for general worship. The line states that my only wish is to become a maidservant of the *gopis* in Vrindavan. Prabhupada has approved this song, and the devotees recite it with simple and innocent devotion.

To worship Tulasi in temples and homes is common in India. Now it is widespread all over the world in all the towns and villages. Worshipping Tulasi is a very “Vrindavan” type of *bhajan*, and it is possible to perform in the West. Haridas Thakura used to sit in front of a Tulasi plant and chant his numerous number of *japa* rounds. Narada Muni converted a hunter to become a Vaishnava, and he told him to build a simple cabin and to live there chastely with his wife and worship the Tulasi plant and chant the *maha-mantra*. That ex-hunter gained fame as a first-class Vaishnava, and people used to bring him enough food to eat, so he didn’t have to endeavor to gather food.

jumble

Sometimes I deliberately write in a jumble. My book *Under Dark Stars*, leaps from topic to topic and uses poems that are somewhat incomprehensible. I do this in following the technique of “free writing” or “writing exercise” taught by writing instructors like Natalie Goldberg (*Writing Down the Bones*) and Peter Elbow (*Writing With Power*). Natalie Goldberg has rules for writing practice. They are as follows:

Keep your hand moving.
Be specific.
Don't think.

She elaborates. Keep the hand moving means don't let the editor catch up with you and stop your creative flow. *Lose control*. Don't worry if it's correct, polite or appropriate. Just let it rip. She tells her students, “OK, say what you want. Go for it.” And their writing takes a substantial turn toward authenticity. Don't think allows you to contact with the first flash. Writing practice will help you contact your first thoughts. Just practice and forget everything

else. *Go for the jugular.* If something scary comes up, go for it. That's where the energy is, don't avoid it.

Sometimes when I'm in bed and drifting in and out of sleep, my mind presents me with a jumble of disconnected, dream-like pictures. I think "this would be good to write about," but they slip away as soon as they come, to be replaced with new thoughts.

To induce the free association form of consciousness is explorative and fun. But it sometimes leads to something you can't get a hold of to make substantial sense or meaning. I am going to do some writing practice here and see if it produces something worthy. In terms of autobiography, much of my conscious-unconscious existence is made up of this kind of flow so it is as true a story of my life as a careful description of what I did as given to me by the carefully controlled history of my day, my week, my year:

It's all right. You are flying in a plane like the "Spirit of St. Louis," wearing an old-fashioned aviator's cap. The part of Charles Lindbergh was played by Jimmy Stewart in the movie. At one point he fell asleep and almost crashed into the sea. You have to be careful with writing practice or you'll crash? No. There is a net under you. It's "only writing." You are not going to jump out the window as if you were on LSD and thought you were the "*atma*" and don't have a natural material body. You have a fragile material covering. It's real. But in writing if you say the wrong thing it won't kill you. But I am a devotee so I try to steer the plane toward Krishna. We heard of Romaharshana who disrespected Balarama, and Balarama killed him with a blade of *kusa* grass. The sages present honored Balarama as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but they thought the killing of Romaharshana was an irreligious act. They asked Balarama to atone for it. He put Romaharshana's son on the *vyasana*, and then He killed the demon Balavala who had been harassing the sages and then He went on a twelve-month tour of the holy places.

I am content to stay here at 909 Albany Avenue and write my life story. I tell about Prabhupada too. He went to the tea stalls and tried selling his *Back to Godhead* tabloid. One time he collapsed in the heat of New Delhi. Keep the hand moving. The dog of our family was Mickey, and he lived fourteen years. He was a combination of fox terrier and mongrel with a curly tail. I wrote a story about him, and it was one of the best pieces of writing I ever

did. I did it in the Navy while high on marijuana. I have written some short stories since I've been a devotee, but maybe not as good as "Mickey." Krishna is a beautiful cowherd boy. He can't be mocked on "Family Guy." I wouldn't tolerate it. Krishna should be approached with the utmost care and devotion. His friends in Goloka Vrindavan don't treat him with formal respect because they have gone beyond that to intimate relationships of servant, friend, parent and conjugal lover. I have lost my practice of lecturing, and I'm afraid I can't do it well for a sustained period of time. I probably could do it if I just relaxed and let my memory roam in Prabhupada's books. But it is true I have forgotten all the Sanskrit *slokas* and some of the intricate *tattva* or philosophy. I will just have to try if I am asked. I will try to speak with devotion and not be self-conscious about the performance. Just make a simple speech. So that is an example of writing exercise. I'll do more of them as the story of my life.

stream of consciousness ISKCON scenes

A photo: Prabhupada, Devananda Swami and I disembarking from the ferry and walking uphill at the Navadvipa Ghat on the Mayapur side after returning from the overnight stay at Srila Sridhara Swami's ashram. Prabhupada is wearing a wrinkled saffron outfit, *kurta*, *sannyasa* top piece and bottom piece. He is silent, his head looking down, but beautiful in the countryside. I am not wearing my *kurta* (rare for me), but *sannyasa* top and bottom pieces. I am carrying a big cloth bag and looking downward and sober. Devananda Swami is dressed like me but with a wild smile, a little insane, carrying something on top of his head.

Prithu Prabhu and his *brahmacharis* in a scuffle with police on the streets of Dublin. The police make a rip in his *kurta*. One of the *brahmacharis* retaliates. For this they had to go to court; I forget the outcome.

I am talking to some tough guys from South Boston in the parking lot near the Boston Commons. They tell me never to go to South Boston *or else* ... All the devotees have squeezed into Giriraj's car. It looks like there's no room for me. But at the last minute I

open the door and hop in, landing on a *mataji's* lap. My wife later criticizes me for this.

Our *barinama sankirtana* on the grass at the Boston Commons is broken up by a group of Hells Angels. They grab at our *karatalas* and drum and rough us up. We stop singing and prepare to go. I look back and see Pradyumna speaking effusively friendly to one of them. Another Hells Angel gets down on his hands and knees behind Pradyumna and the one talking to Pradyumna pushes him over the kneeling man. Pradyumna sprawls awkwardly on his back and gets up sheepishly. We communicate by mail and tell Brahmananda what happened, and he writes us a letter back chastising us for not engaging in fisticuffs with the Hells Angels. The next Sunday we go out again, and I carry two big metal bars which I bang on to keep time and which I am determined to swing at the Hells Angels if they attack. They show up and stand around our *barinama*. Someone in the crowd throws a bottle, and it hits me on the head but doesn't break. We go on singing, and the Hells Angels leave.

I accompanied Swamiji to the Chamber Street office of his immigration lawyer Mr. Ypsilanti. While in the waiting room Swamiji spins the propeller on the model of a ship. While walking through the streets on the way back to the temple, Swamiji says the city is like a jungle. I say, "But there are no snakes." He replies, "What about Mr. Payne?" I pull the buzzer on the bus a block too early, and Swamiji corrects me. He knows the right stop. Standing on the curb of Second Avenue and ready to jaywalk, I ask Swamiji how come organizations like the Rama-Krishna Mission are better organized than ours. He looked straight ahead and doesn't answer me, then he darts ahead and crosses and I follow behind. I become troubled as to why he ignored my question, but I don't bring it up again.

In 1976 I'm in Brooklyn with the library party. I enter his room, which is filled with guests. When he sees me, he motions that I should come up to the front and he gives me a little cushion. A philosophical question is asked, and he turns to me to answer it. He is satisfied with my answer. I'm in bliss with the special attention.

In 1974 while I was his servant in Bombay, I follow him after his lecture and notice that his eye glasses are missing. I excuse myself from his room and go downstairs to look for them. I find them

(the glasses are in a tan case with Jagannatha figures embroidered on the outside), but by the time I return to his room I discover that they are missing again. He is talking to some devotees so I excuse myself (in a panic) and go back to the yard. I find the glasses again and carry them upstairs and put them on his desk.

Prabhupada discusses how Calcutta is a dangerous place. He says you could go out into the street and a group of young boys could surround you and attack you. He said he saw a *gunda* stab a man on the street. In the 1990s the women in ISKCON began to protest that the *sannyasis* hogged the *dandavat darshan* of the Deities during “Greeting of the Deities.” They physically organized themselves and pushed their way in front of Radha-Shyamasundara. Some of the *sannyasis* pushed the women back. After that the controversy grew stronger. Finally it was arranged that *darshan dandavats* of Radha-Shyamasundara should be the exclusive privilege of the women.

During the early phases of the movement, there is evidence that Prabhupada allowed the women more access to him and allowed them to lecture and have other privileges. There is a video of a woman fanning Prabhupada as he sits on the *vyasana* in the midst of many devotees. But as ISKCON became more of an institution, the senior men began to bar women from their previous access and privileges to be with Srila Prabhupada.

surrender to prabhupada

I could have been initiated at Swamiji's first initiation on Janmastami of 1966. He was very liberal and anyone who had been regularly attending his classes and rendering service was acceptable. All you had to do is show up and take the oath that he was your spiritual master. Many who took initiation did not have a full idea of the commitment. He just took you on your word that guaranteed you to be his disciple and be a devotee in Krishna consciousness. Many in that first group left after a short while. I remember walking to my apartment on that day, after taking part for hours fasting and hearing Swamiji read from his manuscript of *Bhagavad-gita*. I felt myself forming a resistance to taking the vows of initiation for the reason that I wanted to keep my independence. For two years in the Navy I had my independence taken away, and I didn't like it. I had looked forward to getting out of the Navy and living a free bohemian life in the Lower East Side of New York. I wanted to be a writer. That was my vocation. I had had my ups and downs in my free life, but I still had my independence. Of course, since meeting the Swami my life had changed completely. I had given up my deep habits of taking marijuana and LSD. And I

gave up my habit of illicit sex. I was already a practicing devotee. Even if I did not go to the initiation that night I would stay home and do typing for the Swami and bring it to him the next day. I had no intentions of quitting being his follower but the initiation ... I hesitated.

When I saw the initiates with their red beads and their new Sanskrit spiritual names, I immediately regretted that I didn't get initiated. The next day, Swamiji, seeing through my hesitation, had said, "Doing this typing service isn't mechanical. If you love me, then I will love you." Those words had cracked through my external shell and made me give up my hesitation in loving him as a person and surrendering to be his disciple. So two weeks later, at the second ISKCON initiation, I took the vows. I would obey him; I would serve him.

Now I want to ask the question, over forty years later, Do I regret it? The immediate answer, without hesitation, is "No." He has given me the keys to ultimate freedom in spiritual life. I still stand up to be counted as his disciple. I've had troubles in following the rules, and I have had trouble accepting the rule of the institution over my life, but I have overcome these troubles and I am at peace with the rules and with the institution. ISKCON has accepted me back from my troubles, and I am rendering service mainly by writing and posting a daily website. I maintain a number of disciples who haven't rejected me, and I write to them and occasionally meet with them. I am something of a loner among my senior godbrothers, but I keep regular association in a community in which a number of devotees live. I chant sixteen rounds daily, follow all the rules and read my master's books. In writing my autobiography I am appreciating his influence in my life. I am grateful that I am formed by him and identify myself as a Hare Krishna (ISKCON) member.

I do keep a certain independence, but I don't think it's illegal. But I want to be included in the roster. I'm not the young man who decided he wasn't ready to surrender. I've surrendered. I am no longer the GBC man traveling to several continents and many cities and fulfilling the responsibility of overseeing management of the temples (which I never did well, as even Prabhupada acknowledged). I've surrendered in a personal sense. This Krishna consciousness is my path, and Prabhupada is my spiritual master. I belong to the worldwide community of devotees in my own quiet

way. I believe Prabhupada accepts me and watches over me. I pray to him to keep me and help me to improve.

MARCH 10, 2011

It's hailing and the snow is on the ground. The big branches and trunks of trees still lie scattered in our yard from last week's snow and ice storm. T.J. tells me, "We still have to get through March." In April we expect some relief in the weather. T.J. has been giving me Thai yoga massage once a week for a month, and next week I'm going to start hatha-yoga. Srila Prabhupada used to mock hatha-yoga as a spiritual practice. He said people take to it mainly for the *asanas*, or sitting postures, so they can reduce fat and become physically fit for sex life. He called it acrobatics. He said it was for those who are on the bodily platform of life. Real life is *bhakti-yoga*, devotional service to Krishna performed in the nine processes of *bhakti*: hearing, chanting, remembering the Lord, worshipping the lotus feet of Vishnu, *arcanam* or Deity worship, making prayers, becoming a servant of the Lord, becoming a friend of the Lord and offering all that one has to the Lord. Prabhupada mocked "pressing the nose" (*pranayama*). He saw these all as bodily gymnastics. But when properly practiced they go on to the stages of *dhyana*, meditation on Krishna, and finally *samadhi*, fixed in trance on the Lord. They are bona fide spiritual practices.

But he said no one in this age can start with *asana* and wind up in *samadhi*. Krishna teaches the yoga system in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad-gita*, but Arjuna says to Krishna, I don't think I can practice this. Arjuna was a military man and preoccupied with fighting. He lived in an age when yoga practice was more possible because the life duration was longer and people were more in the mode of goodness. Still, he denied his ability to practice yoga. Krishna assured him that if he was determined, he could do it, but there is no record of Arjuna practicing yoga. Krishna concludes His chapter on yoga by telling Arjuna: "And of all *yogis*, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself, and renders transcendental loving service to Me — he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion." Thus Krishna declares that a *bhakti-yogi* needn't practice all the *asanas*, but just has to be a loving servant of the Lord and the pure devotee spiritual master. Nevertheless, yoga is very popular in the West and Hare Krishna devotees are mixing in the yoga world, teaching yoga and "Krishna-izing" it by adding the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra to the yoga regimen.

As for myself; I am entering it to gain physical flexibility. I am seventy-two years old and partly arthritic. Yoga stretching and bending is very good for regaining flexibility and that is the only reason I am planning to practice it. I am not planning to incorporate *kirtana* with my practice, but it will be *bhakti* because, if it works, it will make this would-be *bhakta* healthier and more limber — better for rendering service. I lead a very sedentary life and that is not conducive to good muscle toning and de-atrophying of the limbs. I want to be less stiff, "younger" in my movements, and stronger, and I think yoga *asanas* can help in this. I don't think Prabhupada would mock me for this exercise.

I have been sitting on the porch with the front door open for about an hour, and I am beginning to feel chilled. The rain is falling, and the starlings are in the water of the driveway picking at seeds that we have placed there. It is past 11:30 a.m., and I just said a hasty set of *gayatri*. I will go into the house now and get warm.

MARK TWAIN'S ACCOUNT
of the survivors of The Hornet

He arrived at the hospital in Honolulu just as the survivors came in. They had been sailing on a ship *The Hornet*, when it caught fire and sank somewhere in the Pacific. The Captain Josiah Mitchell managed to salvage only ten days ration of food. They lived in a longboat and sailed four thousand miles in forty-three days. They caught a few fish and birds, but literally starved for most of the forty days on the high seas. They all survived. Diaries were kept and Twain quotes from them. He gives most credit to the Captain who kept discipline in rationing out the food and kept the men's spirits up with his fortitude. Twain says the diaries are "literary gold," how they speak of the misery of being lost and soaked in storms and confined in the space of the boat and how they all end with a burst of joy "Land in sight! Merciful God!"

Prabhupada is the captain of the Hare Krishna ISKCON boat. We somehow jumped out of the burning ship of material life and came under his command on the lifeboat. He tightened our belts and rationed out the food. Sometimes some survivors complained a little, but everyone who remains in his lifeboat manages to

survive the storms and doldrums and equatorial heat blasts. Captain Mitchell in the head longboat was towing two leaky boats with survivors in them, but at one point he had to cut them off and each boat had to go on its own. The two leaky boats were never heard from again. You have to stay on Prabhupada's boat, if you are lucky enough, in order to survive. He inspired the men to go on rowing, and he kept discipline and some kind of survivor's hope. Only because he was there to lead them could they stay alive and keep surviving. Finally one day they saw, for the first time, a rainbow in the sky. "It is a good prophesy!" the Captain said. And as they passed under the arch of many colors, they saw land ahead and they all wrote it down in their diaries. Two men swam out to the longboat and maneuvered it to the land where there were two white men living and many natives who all treated the survivors kindly and fed them and gave them tea and let them rest. At first the survivors couldn't sleep, they had delusions that they were back in the boat. But gradually they recovered.

Similarly, Prabhupada is taking us to a paradise island named Krishna Loka where the natives will treat us kindly and introduce us to their blissful abode and their loveable association. Times may seem desperate in the longboat at sea while we are still waiting to be saved, but we should just trust in the care of our spiritual master, and we will survive and reach the Pure Land.

GBC DAYS

It is 11:05 a.m., and I am sitting on the porch with the front door open in rather mild winter weather. There are some noises coming from the street, cars, Kaulini dragging a cart, and bird calls from the trees. I am trying to think of something to write for the autobiography. I spoke with Narayana Kavaca this morning about some of his adventures at the GBC meeting in India. He said his own presentation — limited to seven minutes (there were seventeen such presentations) went over well and at least twenty-five people came up to him later and told him so. He is presenting ideas and programs for keeping Prabhupada in the center of things in ISKCON. He is suggesting ways this can be done so that even the devotees who never met or heard Srila Prabhupada will be able to lecture on his life. Apparently he makes humorous remarks in his delivery, and the audience is given relief from the straight boring presentations. He spoke with the Chairman of the “New Guru” committee who proposes there should be thousands of gurus with just a few disciples, instead of a few gurus with thousands of disciples.

Many of my senior disciples are eligible to become initiating gurus, and I look forward to this trend. There was a big commotion at the meetings this year as the group that represents India GBC secretaries, which is very right-wing conservative, demanded a number of its proposals be passed on threat of their seceding from ISKCON and taking the properties with them. I don't know how that turned out.

That sounds to me like the old GBC meetings when I was a member, when behavior was so volatile and there were always big controversies. One of the big controversies was whether to increase the number of initiating gurus. Year after year the existing *diksa* gurus vetoed adding to the number of gurus, to the dissatisfaction of the greater society. The GBC had such power that it was able to hold off the growing grassroots of dissatisfaction for nine years. Then Ravindra Svarupa and a number of other devotees wrote papers and spoke in separate meetings voicing their dislike of the existing system of zonal gurus, big *vyasanas* to be used only by the small select number of gurus, and other abuses. It resulted in big changes in 1986 when a number of new men joined the GBC and zonal guruship and exclusive *vyasanas* were abolished. That was the year that I resigned from the GBC because of migraine headaches and to show support of the new changes.

By all reports the GBC meetings are now an orderly, if boring, set of meetings lasting two weeks and resulting in many proposals and some new resolutions. Much of my life was spent in the GBC meeting room (for a period of seventeen years.) They were extremely draining and stressful. They were filled with disagreement and filibustering by some of the outstanding verbose members. We quiet members suffered in silence. The year I was elected Chairman (1978), someone remarked that I seemed to have aged years in the two-week period of trying to maintain law and order among the membership. I recall at one point I took out a knife and plunged it into the table. This met with cheers of approval as some took it as a sign that I had guts and wasn't going to take any nonsense. (How? By stabbing someone?) It was a foolhardy act and didn't bring peace to the parliamentary body. In the GBC meeting room there was a larger-than-life portrait of Prabhupada staring down upon us all. He had a very stern countenance and didn't seem to approve of the goes-on. For

many years going to India meant simply attending the GBC meetings. There were all sorts of political plotting and attempts to persuade members on resolutions before the meetings. This took place weeks before the meetings by phone and at personal private meetings, by captive talks on the airplane, and by meeting in the private rooms of the GBC men at Mayapur. It continued after the meetings, but the saner section tried to flee the politics by going to Vrindavan. Failing to escape embroilment, even in Vrindavan, we would flee India, without the benefit of *parikramas* or periods of concentrated chanting and hearing. Certain sections of the GBC had an insatiable appetite for politics, and so it is good to hear that this has been controlled and a more restrained type of meeting takes place.

prabhupada stories

Prabhupada used to ride horses in Darjeeling, race them to the edge of cliffs. The older men of Bose's Laboratory were envious when Abhay Charan was appointed manager at such a young age. Dr. Bose explained, "For this position I need someone I can trust as family." (He had that close a relationship with Abhay's father, Gour Mohan De.) Abhay wasn't satisfied with his first wife and told his father he wanted another. His father told him that the fact that you are not attached to your wife is a great fortune for you. It will help you to be unattached to family life. When Abhay got initiated he wanted to have *Bhagavad-gita* classes at his home. But his wife wasn't interested and didn't cooperate. Abhay traveled widely on the India railroad system to conduct sales as an agent for Bose's Laboratory. The movie, *Abhay Charan*, shows Abhay trying to collect a bill from a customer, and the man says he has no money. Abhay tells him he has a special gift that he knows when the man is lying to him, and that this man is lying. The man becomes afraid and reaches into his drawer and pays Abhay the money he owes him.

In the film, when Abhay's mother dies, his father tells him the story from the *Bhagavatam* about Citraketu. Citraketu had a son by one of his several wives, and he was very joyful. The other wives conspired to poison the baby to death. Citraketu and his household were grief-stricken. In a miracle, the soul of the body returned to life and spoke. He said, "For so long I was destined to live, but by karma I had to leave this body and take another life." Citraketu was astonished and pacified by the higher knowledge. The wives confessed their crime and were repentant. Abhay was consoled by the wisdom of the *Bhagavatam*. One time Abhay rented a large house at a cheap price because people said it was haunted by a ghost. When Abhay was alone in the house the ghost appeared, making noises. Abhay chanted the Hare Krishna mantra, and the ghost went away. Many years later Prabhupada saw a ghost in a house of John Lennon's where the devotees were living. Again Prabhupada chased the ghost away by a Hare Krishna *kirtana*.

Prabhupada dedicated the *Krishna* book to his father: "To My Father, Gour Mohan De (1849–1930) A pure devotee of Krishna, who raised me as a Krishna conscious child from the beginning of my life. In my boyhood ages he instructed me how to play the *mrdanga*. He gave me Radha-Krishna Vighraha to worship, and he gave me a Jagannatha-Ratha to duly observe the festival as my childhood play. He was kind to me, and I imbibed from him the ideas later on solidified by my spiritual master, the eternal father." So Prabhupada felt his father gave him roots in Krishna consciousness and his *bhakti-lata-bija* was nourished and solidified by the teachings of his spiritual master, his eternal father, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. He didn't meet his spiritual master many many times, but he had complete faith in him as a representative of Krishna. In the last month of his spiritual master's life, Abhay wrote him a letter asking him what he should do to serve him. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati wrote back that Abhay should preach in the Western-speaking medium. Prabhupada began his magazine *Back to Godhead* in the 1940s and personally distributed copies on the streets and in the tea stalls of New Delhi. He wrote topical news stories based on current events in a transcendental journalistic style. The articles showed his ability to deal with worldly problems and solve them with the message of the *Bhagavatam*.

Prabhupada told stories from his life in informal gatherings of his disciples in his room. He said his mother would be glad simply to know that he was alive. She used to make prayers and chant mantras for his well-being. He said his father would be glad to see that he had become a devotee of Radharani, because he used to pray for that. He would be very happy to see Prabhupada's success as founder-*acarya* of the worldwide ISKCON. His father wanted him to be a preacher and a pure devotee and he gave him *mrdanga* lessons so he could hold *kirtana*.

He left his wife and family when he was fifty-two years old. His wife was not interested in his preaching and simply wanted him to do business. But his business ventures kept failing, whereas opportunities for preaching increased. He moved to Jhansi and started the League of Devotees, a spiritual organization with ambitions for international outreach. He began to focus on writing and publishing and let his business dwindle. He lived at a godbrother's *matha* in Mathura and gradually took *sannyasa*. He had no income, but he wrote and begged for donations. Almost unasked for, the opportunity came to go to America, and then he worked very hard to make it become a reality.

miracle on second avenue

Mukunda Maharaja's book *Miracle on Second Avenue* tells new things from his angle of vision. He met Swami's follower Carl on the Bowery. Carl always had a good supply of Moroccan hashish. One day he was sharing some with Michael Grant, and Michael asked him what the Swami thought of drugs. He said I think he disapproves, but he told me that when he was a young man he used to deal in drugs. Michael is skeptical to think that the Swami was a drug dealer. But later he finds out that the Swami was a pharmacist with Bose's Laboratory, not a drug dealer. He laughed all the way home in the car when he heard that. He went to visit the Swami in his little office in the Bowery loft. Michael's first question was: *If a man in goodness sees a man being beaten in the street, would he interfere?* At first the Swami answered equivocally. He said it depended if the man was acting on the spiritual plane of consciousness. Michael felt the answer was evasive. Later in the same night he raised his hand and repeated his question. This time the Swami replied, "He would interfere." Michael bought the three volumes of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and read them constantly. He overlooked the printing errors and accepted the philosophy as

profound. He got into trouble with the police and had to spend five days in jail in a case of misidentification. His girlfriend got him good lawyers, and the case was dismissed on “insufficient evidence.” After this traumatic experience, he became much more serious about spiritual life. He attended the Swami’s classes and chanted Hare Krishna. He tells some of the events that I lived through with slightly different details, like the overnight visit to Dr. Mishra’s Ananda Ashram and the wild *keirtana* where the Swami and his group danced in a big circle (with no one else participating) and backed by a jazz musician playing a stand-up string bass. He tells of the peace prayer vigil at the U.N. where the devotees had to stop *keirtana* and pray silently, but their photograph was published in the *New York Post*. Swamiji passed out copies of the “peace formula” and gave a short lecture saying we could not have peace until we surrender to God and acknowledge His supremacy over all. Michael said he wasn’t one of the insiders who hung out at the Swami’s apartment all day long asking questions. He thought that was kind of pointless; he had a job playing music and a girlfriend, whereas the others were all single. So when long-haired, bearded Ray asked him if he wanted to get initiated, he didn’t know what to think at first. He asked what initiation was. Ray said you accept the Swami as your spiritual master and you accept him as God. Ray was buying beads at the bead shop, and he could buy some for Mike and Jan. Mike thought he had nothing to lose and liked the idea. So he accepted initiation and took the name Mukunda, and his wife took the name Janaki. Then he asked the Swami if he could marry him and his girlfriend. The Swami agreed and said the bride should wear a red *sari*. I’m glad Mukunda Maharaj has written his book even though some of the details are different than *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*. I hope I can keep reading it, although I’ll skip some parts. His portrait of the Swami is endearing. He discovers Prabhupada as a fighter as he argues in debate with a follower of Dr. Mishra on personalism vs. impersonalism. He’s drawn to Prabhupada’s warmth and accessibility. In the introduction, Shyamasundara, his lifelong friend, says this book is the best description of the early days and that as a musician Mukunda has a special knack for characterization through dialogue. His memory is accurate and fine on details.

The description of the love feast on the Bowery, and Mukunda’s reaction is unique and exclusive — no one else has done it. His

descriptions of the loft and Mr. Paul are original and historical. His revelation of his doubts and his overcoming the obstacles to intimacy with the Swami give a sense of authenticity. One likes Michael Grant. He's a cool guy and an increasingly righteous follower of the Swami in Krishna consciousness. He's one of the first genuine whole persons to come to ISKCON, so it is fitting that he and his girlfriend became signers on the papers of the Corporation for the new organization. Michael feels it may be a little overdone to get federal papers of incorporation for a society when there is only the Swami and a few "alternatives" in a tiny storefront, but even Michael didn't know the full extent of Prabhupada's vision. *Miracle on Second Avenue* is a good read.

mukunda in san francisco

Mukunda gets out of being drafted by the army. He chants Hare Krishna at the induction center. He gets classified 1Y. Then he and Janaki tell the Swami they are going to India. He gives them the name of a contact there, Sharma. As they are leaving the room he says, "If you can start a center in California, it will be a great service." They drive across the U.S. to meet their friends, Dustin and Melody. Dustin and Melody live at a forest lookout station in Oregon. Mukunda and Janaki excitedly tell them about the Swami and the New York Temple. Their friends are excited to hear about it. When they hear the Swami wants a temple in California they suggest teaming up with Mukunda and Janaki to do it. "But we're going to India," says Mukunda. He notices that he's been repeating that sentence again and again. Mukunda drives down to meet his parents in Oregon near Klamath Falls. He spends six hours drifting in a rowboat thinking over whether he should go to India or go to San Francisco to open a center. He had received a letter from the Swami at his parents' home. It contained an article from the *New York Times*, "Swami's Flock Chants in Park to Find Ecstasy." Mukunda has two dreams in the rowboat. As a result he

decides to stay in San Francisco and open a temple. He calls Dustin, who joins him in San Francisco. They meet and discuss how to raise a lot of money to bring the Swami there and start a temple. They think of a “Mantra Rock Dance.” Mukunda goes around making contacts. The manager of The Grateful Dead band agrees to play for charity. They meet with the manager of the Avalon Ballroom and agree to do it there. They get commitments from other bands and a commitment from Allen Ginsberg. They want the Swami to appear at the Mantra Rock Dance and lead the chanting. They get a leading light show arranger to stage lighting effects.

Things go smoothly. Mukunda finds a storefront, just like Twenty-six Second Avenue, at 512 Frederick Street. He finds two apartments in the building. He keeps hearing all these rental figures, and you wonder where he’s going to get the money to pay for these things. No furniture in the apartments. They phone the Swami. Mukunda has a good memory of exactly how the phone call took place, how the Swami agreed quickly to coming there by January 17th. Just as they are about to be cut off the phone the Swami asks how he’s going to get there. They put four quarters in the telephone and keep talking. Dustin is acting blissed out as he overhears the phone conversation. They tell the Swami they will pay for his plane ticket, and they go over the details of how he can pick it up at United Airlines as a prepaid ticket by showing his passport. That’s it. He agrees to come. But you still don’t know how they will get the money for all these bills. But there’s a feeling that in San Francisco everything is possible, and Krishna is behind this.

Fifty people gather at the airport, colorfully dressed hippies, to greet the Swami. Allen Ginsberg shows up with a huge bouquet of yellow flowers. The Swami comes off the plane and makes eye contact with everyone who has come there to greet him. Welcome to San Francisco.

HARIDAS DAS

Haridas and I sat in the big comfortable chairs downstairs. He brought up many topics. He is now a full professor at his college with no raise in pay. To his class, he played a video of Martin Luther King speaking “I Had a Dream” and recommended it to me. I told him how I read E. E. Cummings’ poems in the morning before I start my own and how they are incomprehensible. “But,” he said, “his character, his person comes through.” “Yes,” I said, realizing it for the first time. “He’s very graceful and poetic with his use of words, and when I finish reading what he’s saying, then I go to my own which are not at all like his, but with a little spark of writing that I pick up from him.” We spoke of a CD by Charles Bukowski and agreed he had a good reading voice. So does Jack Kerouac. Haridas began telling me his experience of hearing Prabhupada’s recorded lectures. “They’re timeless,” he said. He pointed out different things Prabhupada had said in a lecture, clever and amusing things. I can’t remember any of the examples, but I plan to spend some time listening to his lectures again. He told me that seventy-six year old Hemagaura has been giving some lectures on Krishna consciousness at colleges lately. His story is

that his son started dating a Hare Krishna girl. He heard we worship a half-lion half-man who tears apart a demon with his fingernails. He became a little alarmed that Hare Krishna was a weird cult and went to the Potomac temple to check it out for himself. As soon as he entered the temple he saw a large painting of Prabhupada and thought, “I know him.” He had seen him on TV. He became interested in Krishna consciousness and kept coming to the temple without telling his wife. Then one day she served him sausages, and he said he’d become a vegetarian. That was the straw that broke her back. She moved out of the house and took a motel room. He went after her and explained everything — and now she’s the secretary of Gita Nagari farm. She’s also the president of the Lions Club in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. They are a mainstream elderly couple but up-front Hare Krishnas.

Haridas asked if everything was being taken care of for me in this house. I showed him the “lifeline” button I wear around my neck. If I have an accident and fall down, I can press the button and get a live connection to St. Peter’s Hospital in Albany. I could tell them what’s wrong with me, and they could phone B. at his cell phone and if he isn’t in, they can try Saci Suta on his phone. Depending on what’s happened to me, if they can’t reach my contacts, they can call 911. Haridas approved of this “just in case” safety measure. We agreed that I am not a hermit here; I have a constant stream of guests and visitors and I attend programs like the one I am going to today, the first grain-eating ceremony of T.J.’s child at the Reddy’s yoga studio.

Haridas asked about my Brooklyn College writing friends Steve Kowit and Murray Mednick, who like myself, have kept lifelong dedication to writing, and he spoke of childhood friends of his. He asked me about my early morning hours, and I told him I get up around 3:30 a.m. and I chant all my rounds. I often wake with a headache and have to take medicine. Because I am so prone to headaches I have to chant my *japa* silently or it quickly brings on pressure in my head. I told him he could go to the back room and have a chat with Narayana Kavaca who is probably lying in traction on his back in bed. He said he was eager to do that. Our conversation becomes strained as an hour goes by, and we grope for subjects to talk about. He said he’s here to help with anything that has to be done, but I don’t think there are any chores for him.

I excuse myself to go on the porch and get fresh air and to write, and I left him to Baladeva. Nobody knows much about the autobiography because the typists are very slow in typing anything up and I haven't shown it around.

A Life

Someone played identity theft on D. Maharaj and started posting false messages in his name on the internet. He got a lawyer to chase the guy down, and it stopped. But then it started again. D. Maharaj has started his own posting of excerpts from lectures as a counteraction to the false “D. Maharaj.” I have my own identity, and no one has attempted to steal it. I have my own autobiography of anecdotes and memoirs taken from many authentic parts of my life and Prabhupada’s life and stories of ISKCON. Another thing that happened to D. Maharaj, he told me. He got into a funk where he felt he was a failure. He consulted an astrologer who confirmed he was going through a debilitating phase. Then he began to see it in a positive way. He thought that what happens to a Vaishnava is perceived by him unlike the way the same thing is perceived by a nondevotee. A nondevotee wants wealth and acclaim. But a devotee wants only loving service to Krishna. He takes feelings of unworthiness as *dainya*, a symptom of surrender to Krishna, whereby one feels unqualified and lowly. That is not a bad thing. So what the astrologer sees as a debilitating phase may actually be a good period for humility, “humbler than a blade of

grass, more tolerant than a tree and ready to offer all respects to others without expecting respect for oneself.” In such a state of mind one can chant the holy name of the Lord constantly.

I know D. Swami well enough to predict he’s not going to stay in his room. He wants programs set up for him, and he wants to go out and lecture, even though he told me yesterday he doesn’t want to do it. I am the only one I know who actually is satisfied staying at home, as long as I have inspiration to write. I may think I have to go out in order to have inspiration, adventure anecdotes, but if I can capture them by staying at home that’s just as well. They say Emily Dickinson had as many life adventures as a sea captain, just by staying at home. She was like a spider who set up webs and caught bugs right in her attic without having to go hunt. She wrote poems and sewed them up into little packs to be used in the future. Henry Thoreau stayed in Concord, Mass., and made a big pine box to keep his journals in. They began being published in different excerpt formats soon after his death and eventually all got published. Emily’s little sewn packets also eventually all got published and are considered the greatest poems in the world. My life has been very active in Prabhupada’s mission, and I can mine it in stories that come to my mind now in these last years.

Like Mukunda, I can tell of adventures with Prabhupada. He gave wide-eyed smiling approval to the suggestion that the library party go on to Europe. We split the party up, and I stayed behind to lecture in the U.S. colleges. I wrote the book for use in the colleges, *Readings in Vedic Literature* and he said, “He has quoted the rascals without becoming contaminated.” I returned to editing *Back to Godhead* and lived in Los Angeles to do it. That was his last year. And three times I’ve traveled to India to see him in Vrindavan, finally there for his passing away on November 14th. Then, talks of initiating gurus, who is qualified? The list of eleven names, the GBC meetings to authorize them as “regular gurus.” Soon there was shaking in the foundation. Put one’s individual faith in Prabhupada and stay solid.

A Dream poem

I dreamt of ten little boys playing with a football.
It wasn't an organized game,
just throwing and catching until
a bigger boy came, grabbed
the football and claimed it was
his. That lasted for a while
until they pinned him to a tree and released the ball from his
grip. Then a lion appeared
and they all ran afraid, but
he was a friendly lion and just wanted to play football.
The bigger boy came back and turned into a tiger
and stole the ball again by
grabbing it from the lion. The boys decided to
kill the tiger, so they
mounted the friendly lion
with sticks bars and stones
and attacked the tiger and struck him many
times till he fell and rolled over and appeared
to be dead.

They grabbed the ball and ran home
to where a boy was still bragging
to Moley's little sister about
his heroics in the war.
The boys chased him away and began to play football
with real teams
and rules, and the lion's team won
as it turned into dusk and the boys' mothers called to them to
come
home. They brought the friendly lion to an abandoned big
doghouse and fixed it up and invited him to stay to
play with them.
But in the morning he was gone
so they went to school,
and those boys who hadn't been there
didn't believe
so they took the
to the place where the tiger's corpse was,
and they almost fainted and believed.

Things ain't like they used to be

I used to have many hundreds of disciples. And although their priorities were decided on by their temple presidents, I could always get typists. There were people eager to do it as service to their spiritual master, Srila Gurupada or even Guru Maharaj. Once I stayed up all night typing a manuscript for Prabhupada on a manual typewriter. When I gave it to him in the morning he gave me a few grapes. My first reaction was to think, “This is all I get for staying up all night, a few grapes?” But then I calmed my mind and was grateful to have been given the service, the moment of intimacy, and ready for more typing. My typists didn't get much in the way of compensation. I didn't pay them anything and sometimes I didn't give them a special meeting — but just more typing. In the sacred bond of guru and disciple, they were honored to get the assignments and some of them worked long hours. Some of them not only typed, but also edited the manuscripts.

And I had willing cooks to choose from. Many wanted a chance to cook for their guru, and they would make it a feast with many preparations. And among the many disciples wherever I traveled, someone was eager to wash my clothes *and* iron them. Things ain't

like they used to be. I just lost a typist for my daily internet typing. The man has to spend more time with his children and can't do the *three* days a week he was doing. I am looking for a replacement. B. asked me if I have spoken to this man on the telephone to encourage him along all these months. I admitted "no," but said, "I've written letters." "How many letters have you written?" he asked. "Not enough," I said. "*They want love,*" he said. And it struck me that I expect my typists to keep working studiously and in gratitude to the guru. But things ain't like they used to be. I have only one servant who's willing to stay with me, who is willing to give up his desire to render service in Vrindavan, who is willing to stay on a short leash.

I will call my lost typist and thank him for being willing to continue until I get a replacement.

yasya prasadat bhagavat prasado

yasya aprasadan na gatih kuto 'pi

I have typing service to give out. Those who will take it will be blessed. I must encourage them with sweet words. If this union does not take place it is sterile.

gaura purnima talk

In four days it will be Gaura Purnima, and we have invited people to our house for *kirtana* and a feast, and a talk on Lord Caitanya. I will announce that I will give a collage of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's pastimes without exact chronology. First I can say that Lord Krishna appeared five thousand years ago and announced "*sarva-dharman parityajya . . .* Give up all forms of religion and just surrender to Me. Do not be afraid of sinful reactions. I will protect you." Lord Krishna ordered surrender to Him, but He did not say how to do it. He came again five hundred years ago in the form of a pure devotee of Krishna and taught how to surrender to Krishna. That is Lord Caitanya, and the method He taught is the *sankirtana* movement of chanting Hare Krishna. For twenty-four years He lived in Navadvipa, Bengal, and began teaching the chanting of the Holy Names with His associates. There were some obstacles and once the local *brahmanas* complained to the Muslim governor, Nawab Hussain Shah, about the loud chanting. The governor sent police and they broke some *mrdangas*. In response Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, then known as Nimai Pandit or Visvambhara, staged a huge nonviolent protest.

On His word, hundreds of thousands of persons marched to the Kazi's palace carrying torches and chanting the Holy Name. The Kazi was frightened and went upstairs. Lord Caitanya politely spoke to the Kazi, and they had philosophical talks on the Hindu scriptures and the Koran. Nimai proved that cow killing is forbidden in the confidential portions of the Koran, and the Kazi conceded the point. But the Kazi challenged Nimai, "Why do the Hindus sacrifice a cow in a *yajna*?" Nimai said that was not cow killing — the *brahmanas* were able to revive an old cow and bring it back to life. Since there were no such *brahmanas* in the age of Kali, cow sacrifice was forbidden. The only sacrifice is the congregational chanting of the holy name of the Lord.

Longevity
March 16, 2012

My life is balanced on a tightrope wire. It is hanging by a thin thread. It depends on continuous breathing and pumping of the heart and no interruption to this. I am approaching the completion of the average longevity of a male human being. My father lived seventy-eight years. I have a gut intuition that I have some years left to go. I am performing *puja* to Hanuman and the Asvini Kumaras for longevity. As long as I live I wish to continue the autobiography. A disciple of mine who is fifty-six years old is asking me for permission to change into saffron cloth. He has many good tendencies in his *sadbana* and preaching and writing and attraction for living in the holy *dhamas*. But he has a gross side to his nature. I think I will warn him, but give him the benefit of the doubt and give him permission to wear saffron.

I spoke with Kirtana Rasa, who is considerably younger than I, but who is also concerned with his longevity. He has a four-year-old son, a twelve-year-old girl and a fourteen-year-old boy. He said his greatest concern is that he remains alive to guide these children until they are grown up and ready to face the world. That is why he

doesn't want to die prematurely. For me, I want to make a long autobiography that will be entertaining and helpful to others. I have not been inspired to write past episodes of ISKCON because I have already written much of this in books like *Letters from Prabhupada (The Boston Years)*, *ISKCON in the 70s*, *Early Years as Guru* and *Prabhupada Meditations (Incidents and Sketches of Prabhupada)*. I can repeat some of that material and also write what is happening now. Just be relaxed and come to the page with the things that are on your mind. That is your autobiography. Write of relationships and of different people in your life. I'm writing this entry at 6:30 in the morning, and I'm too tired to continue it. I need a nap.

Lectures and free writings

Today the subscribers to the autobiography received in the mail a box of colored drawings. I dreamt that; it's not a fact. Since my getting out of the hospital in December I haven't gone to the basement to paint. I have transferred the inspiration to writing. But this morning I took rest rather than sit on the porch and watch it raining and try to write. *Every Day Just Write* was a disciplined writing every day about the world around me in the quiet solitude living in Ireland. Every day at several times you found something to say. Soon spring will come to Stuyvesant Falls. If it doesn't rain you can go out and feel the pleasant, not frigid, breeze. Remember the *Cat in the Hat*? So many cult favorites in films and cartoon books. The autobiography can become a cult thing too. Twain wrote lots about times he went out on lecture tours. He wrote a big essay about a man who cheated him into investing for a typesetting machine. Twain ends by saying his relationship with that man was always effusively pleasant, but the man knew that if Twain ever had his nuts in a steel trap Twain would give him no human succor but would let him die. Why don't I have memories like that of ISKCON? I lectured in many

Spanish, French and Italian temples and the translator would repeat my English sentence in the foreign tongue. It was fun because it gave me a few seconds before thinking of the next thing I had to say and that was much less pressure on my brain. I hope the translators were accurate. Travel in a van that you slept in through European countries and chant and lecture at the temples. I grew afraid that I would forget the words to “*samsara davanala*” and didn’t like to lead. Nor could I lead the prayer to Tulasi Devi unless I read it from the book, which was embarrassing. After a season of visiting European temples and initiating disciples in some of them, I decided it wasn’t worth the endeavor to go out and lecture. I preferred taking writing retreats and writing free-write books. I was able to do that with no plan to publish them, just the pleasure of writing exercise. Books like *Progresso*, *The End of the Year* (written with great energy on a typewriter in an Irish farmhouse), *Castle Gregory*, voluminous notes which my editor whittled down to a small prose-poem-chap book with photographs of the locale. But what about all those notes? I had a passion for private writing. I could always think of something to say because I would write without a plot or subject. *Ballyferriter Stories* told of the people who lived on the great Dingle Peninsula and my regimen of reading Prabhupada’s books and about chanting.

We have all those books printed, and we post excerpts of them in my daily internet. People can read my vintage books and a daily new poem.

Traveling to countries in the van couldn’t be done in winter. It grew too cold to sleep in the van, and you went to America to stay at Samika Rsi’s house and write a book or prepare a seminar to give in Vrindavan VIHE. Vyasa-puja celebrations in Samika Rsi’s big cellar, a hundred people would come. You were a stainless *sannyasi* with faithful disciples. More writing retreats and books out of the mind. A ten year intense period of painting. A one-man show at Govinda’s gallery got a favorable review in the Washington Post. We had a color catalog. Headaches, but you managed to paint, sometimes had to quit and lie down. Then you got in trouble by making a confession of your past indiscretion. It flared up again and got out of hand. You were punished and then four years later another letter sent to the GBC. I worked it out with the Committee. Wrote a transparent letter and survived.

Trouble on sankirtana

While I was going door-to-door in Dallas, the man answered with a rifle pointed at me and cursing me to get away. I ran. On the street distributing magazines in Tucson, Arizona, I loitered in front of a store with an open door. The proprietor ran out to me calling me a commie and a faggot. I was dressed in my *sannyasa* uniform and carrying my *danda*. This time I didn't *run*, foolishly. The man grabbed my *danda* and began beating me over the head and shoulders with it. He managed to break the *danda* in pieces. I was more shocked than physically hurt. I felt humiliated and angry. I stopped a policeman on the street and told him what had happened. He asked me to get on the back of his motorcycle. We drove a few blocks, and he let me off at another store. He said he'd be back, and he drove off. I stayed in the store for five minutes and then I realized he wasn't coming back. I found another of our *sankirtana* men and told him what had happened. He commiserated with me. I phoned Karandhara Prabhu in Los Angeles. He was like our commander. I told him what had happened — that a store owner had broken my *danda* over my back. “Are you hurt much?” “Not so bad, but I am disturbed.” We

talked some more and agreed that I should come back to Los Angeles.

Going door-to-door in an apartment complex with some *gurukula* boys from Dallas, we were stopped by police who had responded to a complaint. They took our ID and told us to wait in our car. A half hour later they hadn't come back. It was about eight o'clock, time for us to be back at the temple and putting the boys to bed. I went to the police car and told them it was late for us, and we had to go home. He told me to go back to my car and wait. About forty-five minutes later he came to us and told us never to come out and go door-to-door again. He gave us back our ID and let us go. We were all upset. It seemed he was saying we couldn't go out again anywhere in Dallas. We didn't go out at all for a while, but then we started going out, avoiding big apartment buildings. We met more homeowners who told us to get the hell out. But one night we met a friendly couple who invited us into their house and were fascinated by the *Krishna* books. They took a set and had nice talks with us.

In Dallas the police once picked up a couple of book distributors and put them into jail. We got a lawyer who turned out to be hip and on our side. He went to the police station, talked with the police, and our men were released with no charge. The lawyer then came with us to the temple, along with his wife, and talked at length about Krishna consciousness. He took a cup of hot milk along with some *prasadam*. They both left after an hour, and we had found new friends.

In Boston some *sankirtana* devotees were arrested and put in jail. I went down in my suit and tie and talked with the police captain. I told him I worked for the welfare department. While we spoke, crime calls came over the radio calling for police to go to a certain place to stop trouble. I told the captain that stopping trouble and crime was also the mission of the Hare Krishna movement. We were trying to bring peace to the world. He listened to me talking and then let the devotees out of their cells and released them with no fine.

We were arrested in Boston for selling books and storing the books in the front of a closed store. We had to go to day court, which was held by an infamous judge who heard cases and then gave out stiff jail fines. The man before us was sentenced to thirty days for stealing a check from a mail box. The policeman who

arrested us went up to the judge before he heard our case and showed him a quote by Prabhupada in *Back to Godhead* magazine. Prabhupada was saying that Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati said couples could have sex a hundred times if they could produce Krishna conscious children. I was angry because he was showing this quote out of context. The judge sentenced the devotees to thirty days jail or to pay a certain fine. Devotees with me didn't want to pay the fine. They wanted to hire a lawyer and appeal the case. But I just wanted to get the boys out of the cells, so I paid the money. The judge forbids us from going out on the Boston Commons, but we got permission from the police to be there and went on with our *sankirtana*.

subject matter for the autobiography

I would like to write about the people I've met in my life, as Mark Twain has done, but so far I find myself unable to do it. I am a professed Vaishnava. We do not like to see the faults in others. I am sure if I wrote about people I have known in ISKCON, I could find blots in their characters and recall actions of theirs that were devious. But there were so many good qualities in the men (and women) that I met because they all were disciples of Prabhupada and sacrificed and served him. In some cases their service to Prabhupada was not pure, but had ulterior motives. Nevertheless they worked hard to carry out his mission. The good they did is more significant than the bad, and so I fail to see the benefit of writing exposés or attacks on their characters. The same can be said of me, that I am a mixture of pure intentions and mixed motives in service to Prabhupada. Why should I attack others when I am also guilty of a flawed character and a subject matter for sarcastic deprecations, bad stories and scandals? This keeps me from widening my palette to include satirical, critical portraits of people I've known in ISKCON. As for people outside of ISKCON, I haven't dealt with any since my twenty-fifth year.

Extraordinary as it is, I have not had significant relationships with people other than devotees of Krishna for the major part of my life.

To write about my early youth, my mother, father, sister and friends seems like an unnecessary endeavor. All these relationships are finished, and I would rather not dig them up again and express them. They feature me in a totally different lifetime, when I thought my body was myself, when I had no spiritual master, and I did not live for the work of the spirit soul. I have already written in this autobiography about those people and times before I was a devotee, and I don't see the profit in going back to dwell on the same things. As I have stated, I want to steer to Krishna and my spiritual master. That means writing about my early, middle and later years in ISKCON. And it also means, as I have stated above, not telling of devotees whom I disliked and who disliked me. That is all relative information, and if I started telling of people I don't like, it will not be a pleasant or profitable task.

Having just decided not to write of the years before meeting the Swami, or about people I dislike in this movement, I eliminate a lot of possible material for autobiographical notes. I hope it will not leave me short. I have my daily mental life, which can take me anywhere in the universe, and it may lead me occasionally even into these "forbidden" areas of early life and unlikeable acquaintances. It's possible. As I write freely, some surprises may come up, and I may not wish to censor them. My ultimate aim is to serve Krishna and Prabhupada by direct and indirect methods in an autobiography. My prayer life and my devotion to Krishna should find a way into words. So should actual memories and praises of Prabhupada and his devotees. Looking at myself, noting my shortcomings and stating my aspirations should definitely form a substance in telling. So let me go forward, confident there is much to say and worth saving.

prabhupada's special powers

Some people saw a golden aura surrounding Prabhupada. They saw a rosy glow around him. They saw him walking above the ground. Suresvara said when Prabhupada entered the Detroit air terminal coming off the plane *everyone* bowed down and he, Suresvara, — seeing Prabhupada for the first time — was forced to bow to his knees. People say he was very strong and lifted up a fifty pound book in one hand. I used to say his smile was “oceanic” but a Ph.D. student at Harvard checked me, “I don’t know about oceanic.” I hadn’t realized how it literally sounded to him. A smile as big as an ocean? But it seemed all right to me. I thought in the beginning that he could read minds, but then in a lecture he said “I cannot read your mind,” and that brought me ease because I thought he was seeing the filthy things that arose in my mind in his presence. They say he knew all the verses of the *Bhagavad-gita* by heart. A strange boy came up to Prabhupada when he was finished cutting an apple with a knife and distributing pieces. The boy took the knife, and the devotees tensed up. The boy cut another piece with the knife and handed the knife back to Prabhupada. A drunken Bowery bum came tottering into the

temple at Twenty-six Second Avenue. He reeked of liquor. He walked around unsteady and then took a seat. Then he got up and began walking toward Prabhupada. Devotees got ready. The man reached in his jacket and took out a toilet roll and gave it to Prabhupada. Another man walked into the storefront and made his way straight up to Prabhupada on the dais. In a loud commanding voice Hayagriva said, "Take off your boots." The man challenged, "*You* take them off." Brahmananda walked over and knelt at the man's feet and took off his boots — and diffused any angry intentions he had. He sat for a while and then left.

Prabhupada had two heart attacks on two consecutive nights at sea on the Jaladuta. He thought, "If it comes again I shall die." The next night he had a vision that Krishna in His many forms was rowing the boat. He had another stroke in New York City in 1967, on Memorial Day. Devotees in San Francisco stayed up all night praying for him. Some devotees did the same in New York. Yamuna Dasi in San Francisco said she grew very tired, but around 1 a.m. she felt a change in the atmosphere and had new energy to go on chanting all night. Prabhupada wrote to the devotees in San Francisco that their prayers had saved his life. He recovered from the worst of his stroke.

Devotees had and still have many dreams of Prabhupada coming to them and speaking to them, encouraging them. He has told them many specific things. Prabhupada has said the picture of the pure devotee is not an ordinary picture; he is present in his picture.

At the end of a lecture a boy asked Prabhupada, "What pleases you the most?" There were many book distributors in the audience, and they anticipated he would say that distributing books pleased him the most, but Prabhupada answered, "That you love Krishna."

providence and free will

Mark Twain mentions the series of earthquakes and a tsunami, which occurred in Lisbon in 1755 and killed sixty thousand people and an unknown number of animals. “The event became a focal point for debate on the nature of Divine Providence.” (Editors of Twain’s *Autobiography*) What is the nature of those debates? Have I lived through serious occasions of Divine Providence? What is Divine Providence? Divine Providence means an act of God. The agnostic or atheist writer Voltaire wrote about it in his novel *Candide*. At the time he wrote his book there was a spectacular earthquake in Lisbon, and it formed a background to his writing in *Candide*. Voltaire was lampooning the vision of the philosopher Leibniz who said that we live in “the best of all possible worlds” and that we should be optimistic that we are under the protection of Providence. But Voltaire thought it was ignorance to say sufferings and disasters were “the best of all possible worlds.” He thought that this was a foolish philosophy and that it was more apparent that we live at the whim of an uncontrolled nature that is not blessed with Divine or protective guidance behind us. Things happened more by chance than randomly, rather than by an

authored plan. We should live as manly and charitably as possible, but not expect to appease a Divinity by our prayers to get relief from the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”

In Krishna consciousness we believe in the will of God and the saying “not a blade of grass moves but by the will of God.” But God’s ways are inscrutable. This is described in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* Canto 1, Chapter 9, where Emperor Yudhishthira goes to Bhismadeva and inquires from him as to the cause of the slaughter of sixty-four million men in the Kurukshetra War. Bhismadeva replies to King Yudhishthira, “O King. No one can know the plan of the Lord (Sri Krishna). Even though great philosophers inquire exhaustively, they are bewildered.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.9.16) Yudhishthira thought that the killing was due to his own bad karma or a reaction to sinful activities, but Bhisma says this is not so. The sufferings are due to *kala* or time, which is a form of the will of the Lord. “Bhisma wanted to impress upon King Yudhishthira that since time immemorial no one, including demigods such as Shiva or Brahma could ascertain the plan of the Lord. It is useless also to inquire about it . . . the best policy is to abide by the orders of the Lord without argument” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.9.16, purport)

In the case of my own life I have made stupid blunders, and I may ask if I am responsible for them, or are they just an inexplicable plan of the Lord? I think I have to take the burden on my shoulders for misuse of free will. I have sometimes acted wrongly, being swayed by the bad association of other men who were more persuasive than I. This occurred in some of the policies I participated in regarding guruship in ISKCON. Then, out of lust, I misbehaved and committed adultery. It took me several years to candidly admit the full extent of my falldawn and that was another fault, of dishonesty. These wrongs did not happen by chance or by Providence, as far as I can tell. I have been held responsible and punished by the GBC — not allowed to initiate, not allowed to take part in the forefront of the preaching. Unlike Yudhishthira, my act is not considered inexplicable and due to *kala*. But I can be forgiven by repentance and re-engagement in the pure principles of *sadhana*. I am even allowed to remain a guru for those who maintain faith in me, despite my slip.

Providence has had a hand in undoing some of the plans for ISKCON that Prabhupada proposed. The combined forces of all

the devotees was not enough to prevent blunders and schisms and going astray from some of Prabhupada's visions for ISKCON's continuance after his disappearance. We are surviving as an institution, but not without mistakes. Some of it is due to *kala* or time; some of it is simply our foolishness and not being able to "work together to protect the institution."

There is an old popular song with the lyrics, "Will you remember the famous men who have to fall and then rise again? So take a deep breath, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again." That should be our attitude when facing a lamentable situation, whether considering it done by our own wrong acts, by mischief created by others toward us, or by the inexplicable will of Providence. We should continue fighting the good fight to become humble followers of Prabhupada and righteous Vaishnavas and well-behaved devotees. Admitting our wrongs with a straw in our mouth, in the mood of *dainya* (humility) we should appear again on the battlefield, or *kirtana* hall, and prosecute our duties.

spring bug

Two men were sitting on a bus stop bench. It was spring, and they were thinking of leaving the temple. I was the temple president, so I thought it was my duty to stop them. I went out and sat on the bench beside them.

I said, “This is crazy. Just because it’s spring you’re thinking of giving up your life, your chance to get out of the miseries of life.”

One of them was very fat and tall, he said, “How do you know for sure that what it says in the Vedic books is true?”

“It’s true, it’s the *sastras*. Prabhupada brought them here. They make sense. We’re spirit souls in perishable bodies. When this body dies, the soul takes another body. If you’re not in Krishna consciousness, you could become an animal. If you leave the temple you’ll soon be doing things that will lead you to a lower life form.”

The second boy was short with glasses, and his teeth were yellowish. He said, “It’s just so enchanting with the change of weather. It makes us want to leave — the building and the practice and the rules. We’d like to go somewhere, like maybe south where the beaches are.”

“You’re dreaming,” I said. “You have no money, and you’ll have to get jobs. You’ll be all caught up in a job and not at the beach. And what’s at the beach? What will you do there? You think you’re going to meet beautiful women who want to have sex with you? It won’t happen like that. Stay here and keep your sanity. Keep chanting Hare Krishna and control your mind and senses. Make progress in spiritual life.”

“We don’t feel like we’re making any progress,” said the fat one. “It’s just rituals and repression. Krishna even says, ‘What good will repression do?’”

I said, “He meant you should be active and Krishna conscious. He was speaking about *yogis* who just sit in meditation. We have plenty of engagements for the mind and senses in *bhakti*. You are fortunate that you have come here after many lifetimes wandering in the material world.”

“We just want to take a vacation,” said the short one. “It’s been a long bitter winter, and now it’s nice. The road is calling us, and we want to seek out some adventures and not stay like temple mice in that building.”

“You’re just restless,” I said. “You’re making a big mistake. With the nice weather we’ll be going out to chant Hare Krishna in public. That’s a blissful engagement, and we bring Krishna to people.”

“People will make fun of us. They think we’re freaks,” said the fat one.

“That’s not true,” I said. “You know you actually like it once you are out there on *sankirtana*.”

“Ya, it’s all right,” said the short one. “But we want a break from identifying as devotees. We want to be regular people and just enjoy the spring.”

“Come on. You sound sick. You both got initiated a few months ago. You’ve got an obligation as a disciple of Srila Prabhupada. He’s taken your karma. You’re going back to Godhead. Don’t ruin it just because the weather has changed. Enjoy spring in Krishna consciousness. Plant flowers in the front yard. Take the extra hours of daylight for reading Prabhupada’s books.”

“We’ve been talking about this all day. We don’t want to be celibate monks. We want to meet girls. We want to go where

they're having parties at spring break. What's wrong with getting a little high? We want to have fun while we're young."

"That stuff is all illusion," I said, getting annoyed with their nonsense. "If you wander off, you're going to get into trouble and you will get miserable. You have no money, you have no plans. Live in Krishna's temple, and be devotees and gentleman."

"No, we've made up our minds."

The downtown bus came into view. They stood up and flagged the driver down. "We'll let you know how we're doing," the fat one smiled. They both got on the bus carrying small gym bags.

I stayed on the bench for a minute thinking how foolish and whimsical they were. I regretted that we had lost two temple devotees. Then I went back to the temple and up to my room. "Where are they going?" Madhavananda das asked me.

"They're in *maya*," I said. "They just left Krishna consciousness. They're looking for girls and getting high. I can't understand it. It was like talking to two crazy men. I wish I could have convinced them to stay. They're going to get kicked by *maya*. Seeing them go and hearing their talk, I feel more convinced to keep trying to be a devotee."

THE SWAMI AND THE END OF KALI-YUGA

Three fighter planes broke out of formation and headed for the Swami. He set up his anti-aircraft gun and shot the three planes out of the sky. They crashed on to the roof of the building where the Swami was running to the exit door. Before he reached the door three more planes peeled out of formation and headed for him. He set up his anti-aircraft gun again and shot the three single prop fighter planes out of the sky. Then he reached the exit door and headed down the stairs of the building. His *dhoti* hampered his movements, but he reached the ground floor in a couple of minutes. When he opened the door he faced an enemy jeep bearing down on him with two men shooting machine guns in his direction. The Swami threw a hand grenade into the back seat of the jeep and before the men could reach it, it exploded, killing all the passengers. A Krishna conscious helicopter hovered above and lowered a ladder to him. The Swami grabbed it and was hoisted up and helped into the chopper. It flew up out of the range of the enemy jeeps with their gunmen. The chopper flew off in a southerly direction and entered an opening in a cave on a mountain which closed behind him once he was in. No one had

seen him enter. The copter landed and turned off its engine. The Swami was helped by two young men, and he alighted and entered an armored structure. The devotees in the structure smiled at the Swami and bowed at his feet.

“That was too much close,” said the Swami. And he sat down against a bolster in front of a low desk.

“No one knows about this mountain,” said one of the young men.

“But we will have to leave here tonight and make a run for the aircraft carrier in the harbor.”

“I don’t want to give Krishna so much work to save me,” the Swami said.

“But you’re his pure devotee,” the young man said. “He knows we need you, for direction.”

“I may have to leave at any moment,” said the Swami. “It’s my message — Krishna’s message — in my books that you must follow.”

Each young man was wearing a machine gun with loaded ammunition and grenades and rockets and dressed in military gear, helmeted and ready to do what must come next. They looked to the Swami for direction.

“So, this is the end of the Kali age?” someone asked. “We are not expecting any more of the Golden Age? Where is Kalki? When is He going to come?”

“He is already here,” said the Swami. “Don’t you see their strength? That means He has come to oppose them with His sword.”

“What is our mission?” a man asked.

“You should try to help Krishna in Kalki. But we are attempting to maintain. Just go on chanting Hare Krishna. We will meet in the spiritual world.”

That night they opened the hole in the mountain and escalated. After fifty minutes of clear flying, they were spotted by demonic helicopters that gave them chase. But the copter had mighty cannons, and they blew off their pursuers. Within minutes they reached the harbor and landed on the flight deck of the super carrier. Soon the fleet was headed for the sea. The carrier was shielded by a squadron of jets.

In the morning as the sun rose, they saw the appearance of Kalki avatar. He landed on the flight deck, riding on a white horse,

armed and wielding a gigantic razor-sharp sword. Accepting an *arati* from the crew, He took off into the sky and on transcendental technology which defies demoniac attempts to protect themselves, He approached any carrier and foot soldier and beheaded them all with the dramatic swings of His mighty sword. The demons were devastated, fleeing in chaos but tracked down at every point and beheaded. In this way the *asuras* received personal liberation. The age of Kali would soon end, and a new round of Satya-yuga would soon begin. The Swami and his men were there on hand to usher it in.

chanting in my life

Go ask Krishna to let you cry that you can't cry tears of devotion. Ask Krishna to let you laugh until you cry over your lack of devotion. Or never mind, laugh or cry, just chant the Holy Names. Your town may never cry or laugh, it may be dry, but just go on pecking like a bird pecking at the seeds we put out for them. Be confident that the beads will produce Hare Krishna.

Just one Hare Krishna. Go on chanting. It becomes a noise in your head. First we'll make sure we've got a hundred and eight red beads and chant sixteen Names. Prabhupada took the beads in his hands and says, "Chant one round." He used to do that in the morning, and we would chant along with him. I made a bead bag out of a green aqua shirt and sewed it. He saw it and said, "Get a proper bead bag." The paint on the red wooden beads begins to wear thin, but the beads don't crack. You don't use them any more. You keep them as relics on the altar and chant with a metal clicker. That's not proper, but you are down to that. You hope you're not doing wrong using the clicker. The numbers appear. Four, three, two is four rounds. You stop at that and move it back to 0000 and start another set of four rounds. You count four of

them by checking with the pen every time you say four. You say them silently in your mind. I don't know if that is very wrong. Yes, like a bird pecking seeds, you go on pecking, chanting, clicking. You try to pay attention to the Names, and it would be better to think of Krishna, but at least you think of nothing and hear the Names with attention. "Just hear," he said. "Sit properly."

When Prabhupada chanted you couldn't hear him very clearly. He was not practicing at enunciation school. He was chanting from the heart. I believe he chanted attentively, hearing the names Hare, Krishna and Rama again and again. He told us to chant at least sixteen rounds a day, and maybe he chanted sixteen rounds. We are all following his example. We try to sit properly. We have faith that the names of Krishna and Radha are not different than Radha and Krishna Themselves. They are present dancing on our tongues when we chant. When we chant They are like tropical fish in a tank. They swim by quickly and wriggle Their tails. Another analogy is that the chanting is like the cry of the child for his mother. Mother Hara hears the cries of the chanter and rewards him by Her grace. He can attain pure love of God by chanting continually, humbler than a blade of grass, more tolerant than a tree, ready to offer respect to others and not expecting respect for oneself.

The Swami did his best to plant seeds of devotion in our hearts. He gave us the watering process which is chanting and hearing. He chanted with us, and we heard him chant as we chanted along. We grew in devotion for the Names.

He led us in *kirtana*, singing with instruments, chant and response. Later when he was fragile, he didn't lead the chant. In the beginning he chanted three hours steadily in Tompkins Square Park. Then he had a stroke. But we had learned it from him, and we can lead that chanting ourselves. I chant *kirtana* without changing the tune. I keep a steady slow rhythm. I have trust in the Names. I don't worry that the audience will get bored. I sing like waves in the ocean, one after another, a simple tune. I can go on like that for an hour. Then I sing "Jaya Gaura Nitai" and "Jaya Prabhupada" two times each. We sing together in prayer. Today we sang on Gaura Purnima. I watched into the kitchen. They were loading the plates as I led the singing. When all the plates were filled he came into the room and told me I could stop chanting and they would distribute the *prasadam*.

prabhupada's happiness

Srila Prabhupada said if you are morose you are not Krishna conscious. A Krishna conscious person is always jolly. This means that Prabhupada was always happy. But he did not show a giggly nature like Maharishi. He often looked grave, and the corners of his mouth turned down. His satisfaction was a deep inner thing, and it often flashed in smiles and good humor.

He was humble but took great pride in the fabulous success of the ISKCON movement. He knew he was living proof of having received the blessings of Lord Caitanya. He was grateful to his disciples for working so hard to distribute books and construct big temples, especially in Vrindavan, Mumbai and Mayapur. By the time he passed away, his movement was strong and healthy. He just wished his students studied his books more.

ISKCON did not mix with the Gaudiya Math. He built a large wall around his disciples and liked it that way. They should be faithful to him and not out shopping for *siksa* from his godbrothers. He said, "They cannot do us any good, but they can bring us great harm." He was very protective of his disciples' loyalty. They should live in ISKCON and preach to the whole

world. He was satisfied they were doing so in most of the countries of the world. He was very happy that he had a disciple preaching in a Muslim country and preaching in black Africa. He was proud that professors were taking standing orders for his books and writing favorable reviews. He was proud that he had disciples who were scientists and that they were writing books and speaking against atheistic scientism. His book distributors, men and women, going into airports and parking lots, were in his heart, and he loved them for their sacrifice. The reports of the book sales made him happy. Translation of his books into many languages made him blissful. He adored the Deity worship of Gaura-Nitai and Radha-Krishna being carried on in temples at a high standard. He told the devotees not to change or concoct anything and not to let their worship become a burden. Everything should be done with *utsaha* — enthusiasm.

These were the things that made him happy, the fact that he had one hundred per cent faith in his spiritual master's orders and that he was carrying them out and getting such good results. He said his disciples, dressed in *dhotis*, with neck beads, *tilaka* and *sikha*, and the ladies in *saris*, looked like angels from Vaikuntha. It did not matter that they were born outside the Vedic *varnasrama* society; they were *brahmanas*, Vaishnavas and worthy of respect. It did not matter that some temples in India regarded them as non-Hindus and did not allow them to enter the temples. He would build his own temples and hold his own Ratha-yatra processions. To those who opposed him, he said, "I kick on their faces."

Prabhupada was a humble man, but he thought his disciples were as good as any *brahmanas* or priests or yogis. They were better. They followed the four rules prohibiting sinful activities, and they chanted Hare Krishna. They were not perfect, but they were following the path of perfection.

Prabhupada would have liked "cooperation" and recognition by the governments of the world, but he didn't expect it and he didn't do anything to compromise his principles to win favor with the elite or the masses. He went his own way and achieved success. ISKCON influenced the world to a life of spirituality, to stop meat-eating and intoxication. His students worshiped Radha and Krishna and distributed books in the science of love of God. Prabhupada was very satisfied with what he and his disciples had established in eleven short years. He felt confident it would

continue on after his disappearance. He was regal and distinguished and very dear to Krishna in this world for having taken shelter at the lotus feet of the transcendental Lord. He lived in *ananda*, on the spiritual platform; he was above the modes of material nature. He went back to Godhead, to Radha and Krishna, to Lord Caitanya and to his spiritual master.

fight

A young man with a sculpted muscular body which he showed off by wearing no shirt and was eccentric, half sorry he moved into our temple on Turtle Creek Boulevard. And definitely sorry when he shaved up and wore a *sikha*, was serving out *prasadam* when he said something to ex-U.S. marine Sacisuta that he took as an insult. And Saci jumped to his feet ready to fight the guy . . . The same Sacisuta in the front hallway of the Boston temple where all the men had gathered to make a show of force against a gang of teenagers across the street, a scuffle among our own men, and it's Sacisuta and Vaikunthanath grabbing at each other. I went in between them and broke up the fight. "We're supposed to be ready to fight *those* guys, not among ourselves!" And another fight I remember, but just forgot now, what kind of company of Vaishnavas is this? Then violence against us: A man comes up to Baradraja making a speech in between *kirtanas* at the Boston Commons and punches him in the stomach. Baradraja sucks in air, says, "Hare Krishna!" And some of the men grab the guy and take him to the police. In court he pleads that Baradraja made an "inflammatory" speech. The judge decides, "I don't think this man

is capable of an inflammatory speech,” and the puncher is sentenced to thirty days. The biggest fight ever I have already described, the breaking into the house by a gang of Boston toughs, Uddhava knifes one, Murari throws one out the window and it goes to court, and the judge closes the case but says if there’s ever another incident at that house he’ll open it again. We get threatened by them, they break windows, throw a Molotov cocktail against the side of the building.

A guy refuses to leave the temple, a big devotee drags him down the front hall. He rips the devotee’s *kurta*. The devotee throws him out. In Dallas temple a madman acts abusive, Mohanananda uses mace on him, and Jnanagamyia beats him up and Mohanananda hits him on the head with a chair. He goes to get the police, but they side with us. Vamana das is sleeping in the front office of the temple, and a man starts climbing in the window. Vamana grabs a pistol and rushes him. The man backs off. Vamana goes to the window, and the man lurches forward, but Vamana fires the pistol at him and he runs away — was he hit? The Hells Angels disrupt us and stop our *harinama* on the Boston Commons. Brahmananda says we should have fought back and tells a story of he and Gargamuni punching it out with two Puerto Ricans in front of Twenty-six Second Avenue where one of them says, “Hey, these guys are religious, let’s leave them alone.” A teenage hoodlum named Panther and a big white guy challenged me and Devananda to a fight. I say, “We don’t want to fight.” When I’m away in New York getting married, they throw a rock through the front window. Rather than put the glass back up, we board up the front. Then they come by and bang on the boards. I run out and write down their license number and call it to the police. Then I’m walking in a different part of town, and the big white guy comes walking toward me. He’s does nothing, and we just pass each other. I figure my call to the police did some good.

Now we’re living in a peaceful neighborhood. But you never know if you go somewhere something might happen. In this material world there is danger at every step, but for one who takes shelter of Krishna, the ocean of danger shrinks up to the size of a calf’s hoof. Krishna will give you protection. Maybe Brahmananda was right, you should fight back. But I’m not a *kshatriya*, and I’m old. Depend on Krishna and take what’s coming.

bird feeding

The birds are picking at the seeds we put out for them every day. It's B. who tends to it. He knows the names of all the species, and there are quite a few of them. I know the mourning doves, starlings, blue jays, woodpeckers, robins, all big and medium-sized birds. He knows the smaller birds: sparrows, finches, titmice and many other varieties. He has a system where he tries to allow the small birds to get their share of the seeds and not be bullied out by the bigger birds. He has a feeder that only the small birds can get into, and the big birds eat more seeds that he places on the ground. There are also male and female cardinals and both sexes of red-winged blackbirds, all with different colored stripes. We take care of our birds and they have come all through the winter even during the snowstorms. He was trying to eat the seeds before serving them and offering them to Gaura-Nitai, but I noticed it said on the packaging, "Not for Human Consumption," although the feed is carefully made up as a nutritious balanced diet for the various birds. If he wants to offer them *prasadam*, he could offer them to the Deities and then straight to the birds, but I don't

know if that's right. Now he offers raw seeds from the health food store to the Deities and mixes them in the bird food.

Prabhupada didn't make an effort to feed edibles to animals. There is the story of Lord Caitanya throwing a sweet to a dog who went back to Godhead, and Prabhupada threw a piece of *prasadam* to a dog in the mango grove between Calcutta and Mayapur. But he didn't encourage animals to come around and beg. He was not like one of those Hindus, some of whom worked in the kitchen at Krishna-Balarama Mandir, who deliberately fed monkeys. He didn't like the monkeys coming around and said to adopt a neutral attitude toward them and ignore them. Or once in Jaipur he said, "If you want to get rid of an infestation of monkeys, kill one and hang him on a branch as an example to others. The monkeys can become pestiferous and bold and that's when they make mischief. When they are uncontrolled they attack devotees and steal off their plates and steal food from the kitchen and bite people, including children." I am definitely in favor of making monkey proof caging on roofs and monkey proof bars, and locking doors when you are in your room. Dogs also shouldn't become objects of mercy for handouts, or you'll always have them hanging around. Devotees take care of cows at the *goshala* and feed them grass, or give them pasturing grounds in a regular way. Kitchens should be kept cleaned, and food should be stored in a way that rodents like mice and rats don't come around. They can become a serious problem to the process of offering pure food to the Deity. When they come they have to be caught and removed.

Our bird feeding seems to be a delightful *sattvic* charity. We get to see the many splendid varieties of birds, and we supply them with food when there is scarcity in winter. They are God's creatures, and sadhus enjoy making a free food kitchen for our feathered friends.

not a grandpa

Prabhupada was old enough to be a grandfather to almost all his disciples. We were in our twenties, and he was in his seventies. But we didn't think of him as a grandpa. A grandfather has something feeble about him, and he's old-fashioned. Prabhupada was sharp and fluent, and he was up-to-date. He walked fast even though with a cane. He sat up with a straight back. He had never smoked. You looked up to him and inquired from him about the philosophical pursuit of truth. He was a sage, not an old man. You don't go to your grandpa to solve the problems of your life, but you went to Prabhupada. A *cela* (a disciple) inquired from him about the soul and Supersoul. Sometimes we went to him for silly foolish questions, and he didn't waste his time. "Read my books, don't ask this kind of question." "Why did Kripa Muni fall into a well?"

"What does it mean that the moon nourishes vegetables?" "Why don't you go there and ask him?" "Why did Krishna marry sixteen thousand wives?" "He is in the heart of everyone. If He comes out of the heart of sixteen thousand or sixteen million women and marries them, what is the difficulty for Him?"

He was noble in his face, there was nothing senile about him. He was transcendental. Once he asked a householder couple to adopt him so he could get permanent residency. He asked Tripurari Maharaj to go to the owner of Chicago's O'Hare Airport and ask them to change the name to Hari Airport. He inquired for a while how to get named for the Nobel Prize, then he dropped it as not important. Yet he liked it when important people of the world appreciated him; it meant they appreciated Krishna.

NAVY LEAVE

The early morning ceremonies are over. Prabhupada would begin his at 1 a.m. with work on the Dictaphone on *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Then chant *japa*. Then by 5 a.m. he would be ready for an outdoor morning walk, talking philosophy. Then back to the temple for *guru-puja* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* lecture. Then it was over. He went to his room for breakfast and maybe a few minutes of snoozing upright against his bolster. I have a different schedule. Rise at 12:30 a.m., chant *japa* until after five, then write a poem for today's postings, then selections from my vintage books; then a nap with breakfast at 7:30 a.m. Then breakfast; then I face the morning remainder. Can you bounce back and write something heartfelt from your life?

Did you yearn for stripes on your sleeve and stars on your *epaulettes*? Not at the cost of eating the feces of military discipline. Wear your sailor uniform, black silk scarf and jarhead hat, bell-bottoms, all neatly ironed. Those were the years of humiliation. He parked his car in the cafeteria lot and came in for hush puppies and a coke. Shy sailor boy. Down the boardwalk all the way to the end with his sleeves rolled down so he's not caught by the military

police for being out of uniform. Walk to the left of the boardwalk and into the post office. Mail a letter to a friend in New York with ten dollars so he mails back some grass. Oh look at that super carrier tied to the pier. A majority of the men are on shore leave while they repair the ship.

When do I get to go home for a month? That will be nice, sleeping in bed with no naval duties. But I haven't met the Swami yet so my life is a void. I don't know how to spend my time. I go to the city on a train and the ferry boat. Buy some books or records, visit a friend and get high and talk. Exchange your writing. You are not writing free yet. Excuse yourself because he is with his girlfriend. Talk with her about writing and books. But you haven't met the Swami yet so you don't know the meaning of Krishna *katha*. Your life has not begun. But the flame of duration is burning, and you're reading Hermann Hesse. Go back to Staten Island and watch TV with your folks. Smoke a joint. Go visit John Young and drink beer while he smokes cigarettes and listen to Thelonious Monk and J. S. Bach and talk for hours, lament about the Navy. But you haven't met the Swami yet so you don't read *Srimad-Bhagavatam* or tell it to others. You are stuck in the Navy, and you don't know who you are.

Now I know, and I struggle to chant. I serve my spiritual master and have served in separation for many years. I am in the last years of my life writing what I remember. I am much better off than when I was young and didn't know the purpose of life. I know now that service to Krishna and service to guru is my vocation. I used to do it full on living in the temple and managing. Now I've laid back, living with a few buddies and taking it easy on myself in my invalid condition. I'm relaxing with no Navy, college or ISKCON pressure. I come to the page and serve up old times. How many times did I ride that ferry? Krishna let me survive through the Navy and at home and living on the Lower East Side. I was in a dangerous place to live but the best place to be situated for meeting him. His temple was on the way on my walk between my job and my apartment. I saw the sign in his window, and that changed everything.

Everything became different because of that, because I went in there and became attracted to him and drawn to him. I learned about avocados, you could eat them with salt. You can eat them in guacamole and offer them first to the Lord and honor them as

prasadam. I guess the Brooklyn Bridge could be broken down to make lots of bullets. Soon I won't be here. I'll leave my legacy. My service will be counted in my favor, the rest is a waste.

uniforms

I have found something uncomfortable about all the uniforms I've had to wear, except a baseball uniform, and I only got to wear that once. I'll tell about that first. I tried out for a police athletic team when I was about ten years old, years before the formation of official Little Leagues (played second base). After watching me field ground balls and turn my face away from some of them so they went through my legs, and after watching my weak and erratic arm throwing the ball to first base, and after watching me strike out at bat and hit a few grounders, the coach called me over to talk to him. He told me he would take me on the team but that I wouldn't play regularly; I would have to sit on the bench. That was a forthright proposal, and I was willing to accept it as long as I was on the team and got a uniform. I loved the look of the socks with the white sock underneath and the colored red stirrup sock on top of it. And I loved the knickers and the whole rest of the uniform, including the cap. The day came when our uniforms arrived, and we all assembled in the sport shop to receive them. Each boy excitedly received his spotless new uniform — but there was none for me. I couldn't understand it. I was heartbroken. How could I

be a member of the team without a uniform? The coach then went in the back of the room and came out with an old gray baseball suit, not in the colors of the team and quite used. He gave this to me. With great shame I took it home and had my mother bleach it, but it remained gray and old. I wore it to the first game and didn't get to play. Then in the second game the coach had me pinch hit in the late innings and I struck out. The other boys didn't make fun of me in my baseball suit, but it made me feel inferior and miserable. Then one Saturday I learned that one of the regular players was sick and was not going to be able to play. I asked him if I could wear his uniform and he said yes. With great pride I dressed up in the regular uniform and reported to the game. I got to play second base for an inning, and I made an error. Our pitcher got angry and yelled at me. I also failed to get a hit on my one turn at bat. But I was nevertheless proud to wear the uniform and walk the blocks home hoping that someone would see me. The next week I had to give the uniform back and for the rest of the year I wore my gray, misfit suit. In the last game of the year we played a very inferior team and everyone on our side was getting hits and runs. I hit a double myself. And then on the last play of the game I leaped in the air to catch a wild throw and tagged out a runner at second base. The coach smiled and embraced me, and I had a moment of triumph. That was my only season of organized baseball.

The next uniform I remember was the Cub Scout uniform. They are blue with yellow scarves, and I got the same one that everyone had. I had a pretty good time as a Cub Scout because to get advanced in the ranks you just needed your mother to sign your book that you had accomplished a certain task. The "Den" was run by a Den Mother. I remember I got my first eyeful of breast cleavage when my Den Mother, Mrs. Bernice Jennings, bent over and offered me cookies on a plate. One day just before our meeting I received a note from my Den Mother that I was to bring my drawings of forty nations which my mother had signed in my book as a task I had completed. But I had not done them. The Den Mother signed her note, "In haste, Bernice Jennings." Well, it was in haste that I sat down with our family dictionary which fortunately had a page with the flags of the nations, and scrawled forty drawings of forty nations in color I received the top honor in Cub Scouts which was to become a "Webelos" (Indian name), and

I dressed in an American Indian attire and danced at a Cub Scout show held at Public School 8.

My Boy Scout career was less successful. I didn't enjoy the quasi military meetings that were held in the Moravian church basement, and I didn't like an overnight camping event which meant sleeping in the freezing cold and in the morning being sent to get a "skyhook" for the tent and a "left-handed smoke shifter" for the fires. These were nonexistent items that the Tenderfeet were told to search for just to humiliate them. I went away from home to live for two weeks at a Boy Scout camp and didn't like that. I tried to get the senior authorities to sign my book to prove I had completed all the tasks to graduate from Tenderfoot to third class scout, but there was too much red tape, and I couldn't get it accomplished. On their own, my parents came to pick me up and take me out of the camp early, so I didn't stay for the last night. That last night was the time when the Tenderfeet would be razzed by the older boys. By skipping it, the authorities said that when I came back to camp next year I would have to wear my shorts unrolled — proving me a neophyte — and not be allowed to roll them up. But I had no intentions of going back another year to Camp Aquehonga. One night, instead of attending a Boy Scout meeting, a boy named Mickey Kelly, and I played hooky and after that I dropped out of the Boy Scouts, still a Tenderfoot.

I disliked having to put on the uniform of a Navy enlisted man with the jarhead cap and bell-bottom trousers. I felt awkward in public, especially since I had such a low rank, two stripes for a seaman apprentice. Gradually I got promoted to seaman and then third class petty officer. But around my college friends or girls, I felt embarrassed to be seen as a sailor, and it was the symbol of my two-year imprisonment in military service, so I didn't wear it proudly or happily.

I like wearing the uniform of a Hare Krishna devotee, even though it is so foreign to Westerners that it draws remarks and stares. It is my religion and along with my shaved head and *sikha* I am proud, although sometimes bashful to wear it in certain places. It is not a comfortable uniform, however. The cloth is tied tightly at the waist, like a skirt, and it makes walking upstairs awkward. Also, sometimes it slips down and has to be adjusted. I wear my *sannyasa dhoti* in an unorthodox way by tying a knot on the side because to just leave it rolled without a knot seems too precarious

to me, but the knot produces its own difficulties. On the whole I find the *sannyasa* uniform uncomfortable and prefer to wear *yogi* pants, which I sometimes do when I'm just staying indoors.

At the Airports

Someone has offered me another book about free writing, but I pretty much know what it is. Can I use it to write of my life? Yes, in part, but you don't want to leave your readers bewildered. They have to be hip and willing to take the journey. ISKCON newsletters used to list the top distributors and the top temples in distributing books. There was tight competition at Christmas time. Prabhupada even encouraged "transcendental competition." It took the form of who could send the most money to the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. Some sold Korean paintings and sent the profits to the BBT. In the last days of the competition a zone tried to get a big donation from an Indian congregational member and then subsidized the free distribution of books with money to the BBT. In Philadelphia Subhananda spoke out in a class and said it was a false ego trip to send all the money to the BBT just to look good in the competition. The women's quarters in the temple were in dire need of repair, squirrels were coming in the attic. Money should be used to fix the temple, not falsely squandered to the BBT. But I and the temple president sent a large sum to the BBT. Our contribution was in the six figures, and we were praised by the

big shots on the GBC. There was a Millionaires' Club, the few top zones that sent in a million dollars to the BBT. Did Los Angeles beat the Radha-Damodara party? How much did India send in? From the BBT collection, some percentage went to the construction of the temples in India and the rest went to print more books. It was hard to sell a volume from the Fifth Canto, but its distributors were slick talkers and managed to do it. They convinced a person to take a book by the high pressure of their sales techniques. Sometimes a customer came back and said he wanted to return the book and get his money back. "Sorry, sales are final." A US marine beat up T. Swami over this. Some people threw the books in the trash. Devotees fished them out and resold them. Some sold a hundred books a day with lines like "this book addresses the energy issue." The picture on the cover shows Lord Vishnu surfing on the ocean. Girls used their charm to stop a soldier and order him to take a book. The "slows" were the best targets. You told them what to do, how much money to give. If they gave a ten-dollar bill, the distributor said he had no change and could they leave it at that? Or he asked for a big bill so he could get rid of his small bills, but then asked the contributor to leave it at that. It was called "the change-up" and became exposed on television news. I was ashamed and embarrassed for the movement. The Hare Krishnas were scamming people at the airport, not giving them the proper change. Airport employees got into altercations with the book distributors. A policeman's pistol slid across the floor. Devotees got arrested and released. A friend said, "Do yourself a favor and get out of the airports. You're ruining your reputation." Some devotees were more mellow and expert and kept working away. The girls were less aggressive and got less flak, but just as much money. Prabhupada wanted the books distributed, and the airports were legally opened by lawyers winning First Amendment cases in courts. It was a golden egg, too good to give up.

Until, after years, the airports won legal cases restricting the devotees from selling in the airports. Eventually all the airports closed down. It lasted a longtime and many books went out and much money was collected, but it was an era, and it ended. They stopped going to the airports. With time, the reputation of the devotees as hustlers at the airport went away. It was a relief. A new generation forgot we ever did it.

free write

I just received a Thai yoga massage from T.J., and it was stimulating. I don't know if I am any better for having it, but it was pleasurable and healthful-feeling while it lasted. Now I am on the porch at Baladeva's insistence. I am supposed to have fresh air every day even if I have to bundle up to endure it. I am looking outdoors at a big thick tree in the neighbor's backyard. We are having Dhanurdhara Swami join us for lunch today, and I will ask him about Vrindavan. These are the little events of the day. I have already written about book distribution at the airport, which began with the mention of free writing. There is a book about it that I am going to look at on the computer. Free writing means writing what comes to mind without thinking about it. I have just read NK's summation of the duties of the Prabhupada Succession Committee, and I haven't any strong opinion about it. The activity is good, to prevent the fading of Prabhupada's presence as *sikṣa* guru and founder-*acarya* of ISKCON, and the methods to see that that doesn't happen by the distribution of literature and other proactive campaigns. I am in favor of it, and I am publishing a book called *Prabhupada Smaranam*, plus I want to remember how he

is my best well-wisher and follow his order and associate with his followers and carry out his mission. So NK's paper and proposals are important. I hope they get carried out.

It is a disappointment that it is still so cold in upstate New York, late into the month of March, but that is no surprise. It may be cold even through April. T.J. said there would be no reason to live here except there is such a nice community of devotees. Somehow we have gathered here, residing here, despite the long cold winter, and there is nothing you can do about it except dress warmly and endure it.

I can continue writing in the cold on the porch because it is supposed to be good for my longevity. I somehow feel like an American colonist or a citizen of the New Nation after 1776, maybe because of the British coat I am wearing and the soft padded boots and the old house here in New York State. There is an old-style broom out here, and a pot and a big wooden spoon. There is also Mark Twain's autobiography which I am reading through a second time. He is writing about the Morris incident which held the attention of all the American people, but Twain says in a few years everyone will have forgotten it and not even remember what it was. Then he describes it. When Mrs. Morris went to the White House and asked President Roosevelt's secretary for an interview with the President, the Secretary, Mr. Barnes, denied her request. That was common enough. What was uncommon was that she persisted in waiting until Mr. Barnes had men come and physically remove her, carrying her by the hands and legs out of the White House while she screamed and dropped her keys. She entered the hospital in a state of shock. People expected the President to make some statement about Mr. Barnes' behavior, but he didn't, and he drew some criticism for this. A man in Congress even stood up and made a speech against the President.

So Twain says all the things that are going on in the world are actually of little consequence, like the Morris affair, but they take the world's attention for a while and everyone considers them very important. But years later they are forgotten.

I suppose the incidents I am writing of from my life are like that. The games I played in my boyhood, my growing to be an intellectual of sorts at college, my unhappy years in the Navy, my dissolute years on the Lower East Side, and even my activities in

ISKCON have no lasting importance. But my relationship with Prabhupada is important because he is so very important a person, a transcendental pure devotee of Krishna. He is of great importance, although the world doesn't consider him so. That is their ignorance. He offers liberated consciousness, pure devotion to God. Following him frees us from the shackles of material nature and brings us to the spiritual world, but most people don't believe in this and that is their folly. Krishna calls them *mudhas*, asses, the ones who don't accept Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. When I write of my connection with Krishna and my service to Him, it is of lasting significance and so I will continue to do it. My autobiography is important because I am a devotee of the Lord. I am speaking the absolute truth in disciplic succession, and it is more important than any current historical news records or books. Therefore I will keep on writing humbly, but with vigor.

MŪ NATURE

The house I live in is cozy and likeable. It has two floors and a small basement which is set up with an easel for drawing or painting but which I haven't used much. I stay mostly on the second floor in a comfortable chair with my feet stretched out on an ottoman. I go downstairs for lunch in the company of my two sadhu companions. At 4 p.m. I go out for a walk. Otherwise I am in my chair in my second-floor room. The room has ample bookcases, a desk and a television-DVD player, and Deities of Radha-Govinda, Hanuman and Prabhupada. I am planning to live in this house for the rest of my life and not do much traveling away from here. The house is over a hundred years old but will certainly last another twenty years, which is the utmost I could use it. It will need new shingling on the roof but not much else in the way of upkeep.

We recently held a Gaura Purnima festival here and fit approximately thirty adults and children without overcrowding (we removed the furniture from the main downstairs room). I am content to write a poem a day and episodes of my life and hear from Prabhupada at meal times and read a little at other times.

I do yoga and massage once a week and that helps to keep me limber. T.J. says I am “a limber dude.” (Although I am overweight by ten pounds. I am obese in tummy and chest.) I wrote yesterday that my life was important, although humble because I am a devotee of the Lord. How exactly important? I am chanting sixteen rounds early in the morning. I have survived a falldown, and I’m keeping good spiritual health in renunciation and devotion. So I am a quiet treasure in Prabhupada’s movement, causing no harm by doing good in preaching and publishing. These lines reek of self-satisfaction. A devotee should not feel satisfied? I keep a presence of *dainya*, or feelings of unworthiness, as recommended by Bhaktivinoda Thakura as a symptom of *saranagati* (surrender). I take my *japa* seriously, and I realize I do not chant in the perfect stage. I do not experience symptoms of ecstasy when I chant, and this is a sign of my lack of taste, due to offenses in chanting the Holy Names. I lament over this and try to improve, but I stay in the same faulty position. I do have a desire to share my realizations and to teach Krishna consciousness, to speak Krishna *katha* among devotees, but I do it almost exclusively through writing and no longer give lectures. This is a lacking. I make excuses why it’s not important, but it’s a lacking.

And I don’t seek out the association of senior godbrothers. This is pointed out to me as a fault. If a godbrother happens to pass through this neighborhood I will meet with him, but I don’t go to festivals where I will find them, and I don’t chant and hear with them. I somehow don’t feel guilty about this loneliness and introversion in my character, but I accept it as part of my nature. I am satisfied to spend the day mostly alone, writing, reading and chanting, and I don’t feel a need for more. I pray to Krishna to protect His devotees, and I pray to become a better devotee myself, but I don’t feel a drive to socialize. I socialize through writing and reach out to friends in that way. I also presume to teach Vaishnava behavior through writing, and I love to keep in touch with as many people as possible. So that’s a little write-up of my nature, and I think I need improvement in a number of ways. But I seek to improve in my own school of self-improvement through self-expression and a life of prayer.

Lecturing

I was not afraid to speak. I gave many lectures. Sometimes I would visit a temple and give five *Srimad-Bhagavatam* classes in a row. I was always reading the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* so I could draw on what I had been reading. I would prepare for the particular class I had to give by studying the verse and purport and making an outline for the lecture. I would put the points down on a “sticky pad” and insert it into the book where I could see it and the audience could not. Sometimes I would be so confident I would come somewhere and lecture on a verse without studying it beforehand. I would make a quick outline in my head, or invent one as I went along. And I had my one hundred *Gita* and *Bhagavatam* verses that I had memorized and could call on when I needed them and when they were appropriate. Once I lectured in Chicago and the temple president, Sri Govinda, came up to me afterward and said, “Maharaj you spoke like the blowing wind.” I could get on a roll of analogies and examples and just keep going, picking up an incident from *Caitanya-caritamṛta* that came to mind or something I had experienced with Prabhupada.

My lectures were simple, but interesting and *parampara*; like Prabhupada's, because I listened a lot to his lectures. I was sometimes shy and afraid to speak, but once I began it would come and it would flow.

I really liked to be prepared. That meant taking a half hour to study the verse, purport and chapter and forming an outline. Give me an intense half hour of preparatory study, and I'll be ready. You just drop in anywhere in the philosophy, in a pastime or *tattva* and form a speech.

Sometimes I would be given a hard verse to speak on, something abstract, or something I couldn't get a handle on about *varnashrama* dharma or Srimati Laksmidevi or a *Mahabharata* story. I would somehow find a way to speak on something I knew even if not exactly on the subject, remembering that Prabhupada often did that, just preach something substantial even if it isn't exactly relevant to the purport. That takes courage and bluffing and boldness and simple faith. What did Prabhupada teach us in 1966? Question: What is a worldly topic that can apply to Krishna consciousness and which addresses the subject at hand?

I've gotten lost but found my way to a Krishna conscious story. Sometimes the cowherd boys didn't know what to make of a certain demon. They thought Aghasura was a giant statue, then they decided he was an actual serpent lying in the road with his mouth open ready to swallow them all. They decided to march into his mouth because even if he were a demon, Krishna would kill him as He had killed the giant duck. Just go ahead and tell how wonderful Krishna is and how ordinary people are always mistaking Him for an ordinary man like themselves, or maybe a little more powerful. But actually He is omnipotent and no one can defeat Him.

I feel less flexible now. I need to prepare in advance, not like in the early days when I would give several "*darshans*" and lectures in a single day and just push on until something came and let it remind you of something else and something else. Bring it to a conclusion. Sometimes just tell about how winter is hanging on but you just have to endure it and spring will finally come. Tell what Krishna says in verses from the *Bhagavad-gita* about bowing to Him and becoming His devotee. Tell what He says about who is very dear to Him and who is the best *yogi* and the dearest person of all — the one who speaks the message of Krishna to others.

Tell what He says in the second chapter of the *Gita* about the transmigration of the soul. Tell about karma and *bhakti*. Tell about the *sankirtana yajna*, *harer nama harer namaiva kevalam*. Keep thinking of things to say and say them and you'll be all right.

prabhupada buying properties

I don't want to get in touch with those people who are trying to find out things to say about Krishna. They gave me their phone number, but I didn't write it down. And they don't really want to get in touch with me because they don't think I can help them. They are on their own with their memories and stories and dogmas. If he was with a very inimical person, he asked him to leave and on occasions his secretary escorted people out of his room for being too obnoxious. But that hardly happened. What happened was that people were disagreeable to what he was saying, and they excused themselves. He might call them fools, and they didn't like it and so they left. But rarely did they stay and threaten him. Brahmananda escorted a man out of the room. But Prabhupada was rarely the object of a stream of abuse. Some psychologists in Caracas were so disturbed by his telling of the driver in the car, making the analogy that the conditioned soul is the machine of the material body, that they arranged with the government that he not be allowed to enter the country again. They were nasty and thought he was pathological to be forcefully repeating that analogy. Prabhupada hardly knew what had

happened, and he didn't care for them, just took it that they were dull and stubborn. He didn't know of the action they took against him, and the devotees didn't tell him.

He was mostly eager to see people in positions of authority, and he tried to convince them to take to Krishna consciousness as the antidote to their complex problems. He asked a police officer in Evanston, Illinois, to donate a building to ISKCON for use in reforming criminals through a program of living as devotees and chanting and hearing. He was convinced it would be efficacious, and the police officer heard him out and said he would talk to his superiors about it. After this talk he expected that some of his followers would keep in touch with the man and see if the plan could be realized. Prabhupada was shown the Fisher mansion in Detroit and at first he asked the owner to donate it to us gratis as charity. The man said the property represented a major source of his wealth, and he would sell it for over three hundred thousand dollars. Prabhupada told him he wanted it. The man showed him around the building and property. It was located in a terrible neighborhood of drug dealers and thieves, and that was the reason the owner was willing to let it go at a relatively low price. Prabhupada asked his disciples Alfred Ford, the grandson of Henry Ford, and Walter Reuther's daughter, Lekhasravanti, to donate for the purchase. They did and the sale was made. On the same North American tour Prabhupada went to Toronto, Canada, and was shown a big Christian church that was for sale. At first he told the devotees it would be purchasing too much trouble to try and raise the money for the purchase. But the next day he told the temple president that a devotee should be willing to take on anxiety for Krishna and they should try to raise the money to make the down payment. They did.

The devotees didn't always know where the money was coming from to purchase the fine buildings he asked them to get, but they risked and trusted that they could increase their income by selling more books and getting more donations. They did purchase anxiety, but Prabhupada wanted it for buildings for honoring the Deities and attracting the public to come to the Sunday feast. Prabhupada said that if he advertised that A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami was giving a lecture under a certain tree, no one would come. But if he invited people to come into a cathedral with chandeliers, walls and stained glass windows, they would be

inclined to come. That was his strategy, acquiring beautiful buildings for temples.

prabhupada murti

When Prabhupada left us in New York City to go to San Francisco, he said, “If you are missing me, you can put my pictures on my sitting places.” That was the start of worshiping his form. Much later, he approved the making of a marble *murti* in Vrindavan. And when I began the writing of *Prabhupada-lilamrta*, I obtained the first twelve-inch *murti* made by Locana das. I massaged and bathed that Deity daily at noon, changed his clothes to fresh pressed ones, and bowed down before him to offer the *prasadam*. In the evening I laid him down to rest in blankets. It was a new relationship I kept up, even while living and traveling in the van. Massaging his head and back and shoulders I sometimes talked to him, or was just silent and did the work, of worshiping Prabhupada. And I wrote a poem:

Srila Prabhupada

Because the *murti* is somehow him,
therefore it is absolutely him.
And any worshiper has the right
to dress, garland and feed him.
All are chosen servants now—
if you will receive him with care,
he will stay in your home,
giving purpose to a life.

Some nights I surrender,
and he knows, smiles.
I can touch him
and bow down.

One brother said, “I realized
Prabhupada was my only friend.”
I lectured to him, “No, appreciate others
you are not alone with only him.”
Now I realize he was right:
when all else fails, Prabhupada doesn’t.

When I was tired of the world,
and no one understood,
I appealed to co-workers,
“Let us always stay together.”
But they joked in reply:
“Is there a threat if we don’t?”
“How about a two-year contract?”
Both are true in Prabhupada —
he’s keeping us together,
and he’s keeping me together.
This *murti* is nice.

Now I am keeping the deity, but service is reduced. I don’t daily
massage and bathe him, although I put him to rest. He looks at me
and chants on his beads. Too many chores? Not enough devotion?
He wears his knit cap because the weather is so cold; in the

summer he will go without it. I don't point my feet at him. He is still real to me and if I do something offensive to him I lie awake in bed disturbed until I get up and offer him some milk. I don't feel peace. What did I do? Ignore his presence? Take a sweet from his plate and eat it myself? There are so many ways you can misbehave in your relationship with the *murti*, and you have to pay for it. A coin he gave you is lying in his pond. You haven't changed his clothes in months? Be careful or he may be taken away by a trick of the mind or a turn of fate. Be true to your *murti*. Worship, even if it's reduced. Keep him close to you and watch him and give him rest. Soon that day will come when he will be in your room with you and stay with you in your last days. He doesn't have to dance or talk to me or move his last glance. He's already done everything for me. He even asked who was the one singing the Nṛsimha prayers at the end, and he watches me as I write. Next to him I keep my red Tandy beads that he chanted on in 1966. These are reminders of his presence. He's the worshipable deity.

KAMYAVAN

Kamyavan is a village outside Vrindavan, a long taxi ride over rutted roads where there are Shiva deities and a famous deity of Vrnda Devi, Tulasi Devi. *Kamya* means desires and pilgrims go to Kamyavan to the Tulasi Devi deity and express their wishes before her. I went with Bhurijana Prabhu and his family and wrote my request on a piece of paper and inserted it into Tulasi Devi's altar along with some money. The Deity is red-faced with black braids. And Jagattarini Mataji has been making luxurious dresses for her. I forget what I prayed for. Maybe I prayed for sincere inner life of prayer, something like that.

One time when I was in Vrindavan I was brainstorming with B. to come up with a long-time opus-like writing project. We talked aloud but couldn't arrive at a conclusion. I wanted something Krishna conscious with the personal freedom of free-writing in it. I sent B. to Kamyavan with my written request. He traveled with Rupa Raghunatha and placed my note in Vrnda Devi's altar. Then he went to bathe at Radha Kunda and while there he received an idea for a kind of book I might write. He came back and told me about. I tweaked his idea and came up with *A Poor Man Reads the*

Bhagavatam. I would start with the first verse of the *Bhagavatam* and write a short commentary expressing Prabhupada's purport in my own voice. Then I would take off in free writing, whatever came to my mind. Then I would stop and go on to the next verse in the *Bhagavatam*. The book would include drawings.

In the Prologue I wrote: "I'll start with the first verse of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, begin reading Srila Prabhupada's translation and purport, then stop and free write, then back to reading, then back to writing. No other structure. Everything is allowed. The plan satisfies many goals. The writer is anchored to Prabhupada's and Lord Krishna's book. The free writer can express his Self in heart. And the hankering for a long project is satisfied because the *Bhagavatam* has eighteen thousand verses." I left Vrindavan and went to live in a heated shack in the winter at Saranagati, Canada. I quickly finished the first volume covering three chapters of the first canto. We sent the manuscript to Professor Klaus Klostermaier and were surprised and happy when he wrote, "Satsvarupa das Goswami writes beautifully, poetically, spiritually." He mentioned that it saw the *Bhagavatam* through a Westerner's eyes.

The work grew more difficult. I solicited a devotee's help in supplying me with questions to answer from the purports. I felt I needed that preparation. But it slowed down the writing. I traveled out of Canada but continued *A Poor Man* and wrote a second and third volume. I was coming to the eighth chapter, "The Prayers of Queen Kunti." I engaged a half dozen devotees in supplying me with questions. Actually five years passed between the completion of the third volume and the beginning of the fourth. I had found it too difficult to field all the questions and I quit. But then I started it again after a five-year hiatus in Mexico. In the beginning of the fourth volume I found myself unable to do free writing and just wrote straight scriptural commentary. The GBC had censored one of my books, and I grew gun shy to write personally. But halfway through the book I broke free and wrote "personal comments" about what was happening in my life while I wrote the book. It was during a difficult time in my life when I was writing a public transparent letter about the mistakes I had committed in a falldown. I wrote about it only indirectly in *A Poor Man*. I began the book in Mexico and finished it in Delaware. I think it will be the last volume of *A Poor Man* that I will attempt. What began as a

prayer in Kamyavan, was answered by Vrnda Devi and lasted me four volumes of solid writing on the *Bhagavatam*. Praying in Kamyavan works. You get an answer from Vrnda Devi, and you begin your work. I so much considered it a direct gift from Vrnda Devi. They are nice books in SdG style, with plenty of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and plenty of free writing. I'm glad I went to Kamyavan and prayed to her and considered the gift a permanent part of my literary legacy.

Don't make a mockery of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* scholarship by adding your name to the list. You don't dare. I'll explain, "This is not intended as a joke or serious attempt at *Bhagavatam* commentary. It's not a take-off, at burlesque or minimization of what the great commentators have done."

Then why have you dared? Because He sent it to me in my room in Vrindavan when I prayed and I submitted to

Vrnda Devi and Kamyavan. I asked Srila Prabhupada, "Tell me what to do, although you know I'm a madman," and I got this quick response.

(from A Poor Man Reads the Bhagavatam, Vol. 1, Text 1)

pictures in the book

*my letters from srila prabhupada vol. 1,
with srila prabhupada in the early days*

A twelve-page insert of pictures from the early days shows a collage of activities from 1966–1967. The first picture shows two panels from a comic strip series which appeared in *Back to Godhead*. Jadurani drew the pictures, and I wrote the text. They were modeled after typical comic books. The dialogue was captured in a collection of complex balloons over the characters' heads. The costumes were serious renditions of sages, emperors and divine personages as described in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, and with *dhotis* as worn by Srila Prabhupada's disciples. This one featured Bali Maharaja offering everything he owns in charity to Vamanadeva who comes as the dwarf *brahmana* incarnation of Krishna. Below that on the same page, a colored painting by Jadurani of Mother Yasoda holding baby Krishna in her arms, for the *Krishna* book. The paintings were somewhat primitive but had a certain devotional charm which makes them appealing, even today. The second series of pictures shows Srila Prabhupada bowing down

before his altar and sitting sternly at his dais in the temple. He looks very striking and about to take up his *karatalas* and start a *kirtana*. The next picture shows the motley group of youngsters in the audience at Twenty-six Second Avenue jammed into the narrow confines of the storefront. Then there is a picture of me, shaven-headed, sipping from a bowl of *dal* in the temple room at lunch time, beside Jayadvaita brahmacari. The next shows the cover of the first issue of *Back to Godhead* magazine, concentric circles drawn with a compass around a central drawing of Radha-Krishna. Then there is the cover of the Happening record album featuring Radha and Krishna, looking like marionettes in an enchanted forest. Next is a photo of Swamiji sitting in front of a snare drum and cymbals with a few of his disciples on stage at the Village Theatre for the “Cosmic Love-in.” On the right-hand page is the cover of the *East Village Other* with a picture of Prabhupada standing in front of the oak tree addressing the crowd at Tompkins Square Park, and the headline “Save Earth Now!!” The next page has four action pictures of Swamiji sitting playing the drum and the boys doing the Swami step with upraised arms in the park. Next is a picture of the storefront, “Matchless Gifts.” Finally, an androgynous picture of Lord Vishnu with four arms as “Sri Janardana.”

These pictures are scrapbook history of a burgeoning time in early ISKCON. They show the Swami when he was strong before his stroke of 1967. The devotees are still long-haired and somewhat grungy, but glued to Prabhupada. “Save Earth Now!!” A *New York Times* photo of Swamiji with the boys in the park (“Swami Chants with Flock in Park to Find Ecstasy”). What prophetic impressions of the arrival of *harinama sankirtana* in the West. These images are as precious as the tomb of King Tut, looked back on now after forty-five years. Who knew what was happening, who knew what had come? It is all treasure of the first opening moments of the tender age of Lord Caitanya’s golden ten thousand years.

DREAMS

For a period in my life ten or fifteen years ago, I developed the habit of remembering my dreams and writing them down. I read about a half a dozen books on dreams, and some of them proposed how you could get at the meaning of your dream. One used a method he called the “aha” moment. You think of your dream and suddenly it strikes you what its significance was and you say to yourself “Aha!” and that’s it. I wrote them down because I was a writer and a diarist, and they seem to supply good narrations. I collected a number of them, but then I decided it was a profitless pursuit and I gave it up. I no longer pay much attention to my dreams. Freud thought dreams were important, and he called them “the royal road to the unconscious.” In his own way Carl Jung thought dreams were important. But the interpretation of dreams is a speculative art, and it is not a Krishna conscious practice. That is the main reason I gave up collecting and noticing my dreams or considering them fascinating or interesting. They simply didn’t awaken my spiritual life. They were mostly mundane, and the director of the dreams made whimsical tales that mostly made no sense.

We spend a good portion of our life dreaming in sleeping, during the period REM, rapid eye movements, but I don't find it conclusive or instructive. I used to be interested, but I no longer am. Someone might say this makes me less adventurous or introspective, but at present I simply don't take dreams as important, so when I wait for one, I erase it and go on with my conscious thoughts. This is my autobiographical report: Not interested in dreams.

There may come a rare dream about Srila Prabhupada or Krishna consciousness that captures my attention, and I can't ignore it or don't want to. These dreams I may occasionally write down. But they are the exception to the rule. I mostly find dreams untrustworthy stories although they may be intriguing. This is my position on dreams.

DHRTARAstra QUITS HOME

Narayana Kavaca has been reading to me from the thirteenth chapter of the First Canto. Vidura has returned to the palace at Hastinapur after hearing sufficiently from the sage Maitreya about the Absolute Truth. He has come back to rescue his younger brother Dhrtarastra and his wife Gandhari. They lost all their sons in the Battle of Kurukshetra, and they are living on the charity of King Yudhisthira. Vidura tells Dhrtarastra that he should quit his dependence on Yudhisthira; he should leave home and live as a *dhira* without anyone knowing where he is. Vidura speaks very sharp words to bring his brother to detach him from his situation of living shamelessly accepting physical comforts from the Pandavas. Dhrtarastra obeys and fearlessly leaves home, and his chaste wife follows him. Yudhisthira discovers his uncles have left him, and he's full of worry for them. But Narada comes and tells him the actual situation; that Dhrtarastra is living under the protection of the Almighty. Narada explains the law of the strong living by eating the weak and one being the food of another. As a human being, Dhrtarastra can find his eatables in vegetables in the jungle, and Yudhisthira can't do anything to help him. Dhrtarastra

is actually cheerful and is making the best of the bad bargain by living in an unknown place under the sky without knowledge or support of his relatives who were recently his enemies. Vidura has done his brother a great service by detaching him from family comforts and teaching him to depend completely on Krishna. The purports are very stark about the Kala Sarpa or Snake of Time. No one can be spared from the bite of the snake as everyone will be cut down in his plans to live and will have to die.

prabhupada — legends and secret things

There are some people who say things about Prabhupada that aren't true. Someone said he was dictating *Srimad-Bhagavatam* purports just moments before he passed away. Actually he stopped dictating days before his disappearance. In the last twenty-four hours he didn't communicate, but kept within himself. Some people say that at the last instant he raised himself and said, "Hare Kris" and then passed away. I was standing posted at the foot of the bed and didn't see or hear such a thing. He made a last gasp, and everyone knew he had passed away. About an hour and a half before the end his body did a little involuntary dance on the bed. Some people said he walked off the ground and that his body gave off an illuminating aura and that is their subjective experience. But he did many things which we were not aware of. Sometimes he stood before the installed Deity in the temple and addressed his mind to Him, and he has described some of these occasions. In a poem he wrote on the Jaladuta he said he had a vision of Krishna sporting with His friends in the fields of Vraja and that it was a very nice experience. When he spoke to Krishna in private and what Krishna said to him, we do not know. But he said Krishna

talks to his men, not to rascals, but to His confidential servants. So he must have had exchanges with the Lord.

When he stood before Rukmini-Dvarakadhisa in Los Angeles, he expressed his reluctance to leave Them and travel to the East, to India. But Krishna assured him that if he went He would give him grander temples than the one he had at Watseka Avenue. He later revealed that this exchange took place. How many nights and mornings did he express his anxieties over the obstacles he faced in managing the Hare Krishna movement? And how did his dearest friend give him consolation and courage to go on? Prabhupada and Krishna were intimate and in constant communication, just as Krishna sent messages to Devaki when she was pregnant with Krishna in her womb. Prabhupada said his Bhaktivedanta purports, his “personal ecstasies,” were not his own words but the words of Krishna coming through him. Krishna actually wrote the books in words accessible to the common man. Whoever looked carefully into Prabhupada’s eyes saw that he was not of this world but was absorbed in Krishna. His eyes were like a barrier that prevented an intruder from looking further into his soul, but they simultaneously revealed the inconceivable depth of his being, his intimacy with Krishna. Prabhupada’s deliberate and gentle movements showed him in *samadhi*, guided from within. He didn’t move under the influence of the three modes of nature, but gracefully, under the Divine Energy. As it is said in the scriptures, the pure devotee’s movements in this world cannot actually be discerned, and no one can know the mind of the Vaishnava. To be with Prabhupada was to be with a mystery; you could not get too close to him and sometimes he would warn you when you had trod too intimately, as when devotees awkwardly stepped on his heel on a morning walk.

Humility

Sometimes someone would address Lord Caitanya as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Lord would block His ears and say, “Vishnu! Vishnu! I am just an ordinary living entity. Do not address me as God.” He did not like the implication when Mayavadi *sannyasis* addressed each other as Narayana. Similarly, Srila Prabhupada did not like being addressed as a pure devotee. How do you know I am a pure devotee? He did not like sentimental assertions. He always described himself as a humble servant of his spiritual master Om Vishnupada Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami Maharaj. His claim was that he had one hundred per cent faith in his spiritual master as the representative of Krishna. He even said in my hearing, “I do not know Krishna. I only know my Guru Maharaj.” So he was very humble. But he defended himself in comparison to other swamis, yogis and impersonalists. Once when another swami’s name was mentioned, Prabhupada said, “But what is his realization?” As a humble servant of his Guru Maharaj, he was better than all the imitators, professional holy men and those who didn’t accept the supremacy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That much he would

boldly declare. “I kick on their faces with boots.” He was humble like Hanuman, depicted as kneeling on one knee before his Lord Rama, but ready to fiercely attack the *raksasas* or nonbelievers.

Other spiritual movements are known primarily by the name of their founder, such as the Rama-Krishna Mission, but Prabhupada kept himself in the background and propagated the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. When challenged as to his miraculous powers, he said he had none. He said his only power was the chanting of Hare Krishna and speaking *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* by which he was converting *mlecchas* (uncivilized men) into Vaishnavas.

A tall claim but not one that he personally took credit for. “Who knew that you would come to me? Who knew that I would come to you? It is all Krishna’s arrangement.” The Hare Krishna movement grew by Lord Caitanya’s blessings, not by any personal magic of Prabhupada, he said. After the disappearance of his spiritual master and the demise of the Gaudiya Math, his godbrothers had become entangled in a fight for possession of the temples. But Prabhupada, without any support, had preached sincerely, and he saw the results as the mercy of Lord Caitanya.

He said he was not a great scholar or a great devotee. He wrote that he was crippled in so many ways that he didn’t have a hope for going back to Godhead but if one of his disciples could become a pure devotee, then he could carry Prabhupada back to Godhead, just as Dhruva Maharaja carried his mother back to the spiritual world. That was his humble estimation of his standing before the Lord. Prabhupada wrote in a Vyasa-puja offering, that he had no hope of direct service to the Lord for many *crores* of births, but that he aspired for the service of his Guru Maharaja. That is his glory and his qualification as direct servant of the Lord. He worked tirelessly to spread Krishna consciousness throughout the world, and he allowed his disciples to address him in his *pranam* mantra as “being very dear to Krishna in this world, having taken shelter of the lotus feet of the transcendental Lord.” He places himself at the lotus feet of the Lord and tells his disciples they may take shelter of him although he sees himself as “an insignificant beggar, Abhay Charanaravinda Das.”

of human bondage

When I was young I was very much a part of our nuclear family, with father at the head, mother, sister and me. We lived in our house, and we were apart from all other families. We ate our main meal together and watched television together, and I had to keep my room clean and mow the lawn as family service. I acted on permission of my mother and father regarding what clothes I wore, how late I stayed out and what I did. I received a small allowance, but in high school I started a part time job as a bag packer at the supermarket Food Farm, for seventy-five cents an hour. I lived in a very strong bond of allegiance to my family, and only with the start of college did it start to break up as my values changed and I aspired to be an intellectual. Then I no longer looked up to my mother and father who were anti-intellectuals. I wasn't strongly identified with my earlier schools either. I was definitely not a part of the Navy, but a silent resistor to all it stood for. I identified with my generation living on the Lower East Side of New York, the hip in mind-expanding generation, although after a few years I felt isolated and mainly alone in the neighborhood. In ISKCON I completely identified and joined. I

did so mainly because it was the Swami's movement, and he wanted us to be attached to it as a community, a society and an organization. I kept this up, living in the temples for many years and later as a traveling *sannyasi* with a GBC zone.

Now I live in a house with a few companions and stay more to myself. But I am still part of the worldwide community of ISKCON and write a daily website on the internet. I live in a neighborhood of devotee families, and we sometimes gather for *kirtana* and *prasadam*, and I receive a regular stream of visitors. I just sent out my Vyasa-puja homage to be published in two different books honoring Srila Prabhupada along with my godbrothers and godsisters. Although I don't socialize intensely, I attend some festivals and local gatherings. I read almost all the books published by ISKCON devotees and stay linked with them in that way. I read the Internet blogs of various devotees and keep in touch with them in virtual cyberspace. In these ways I feel the pulse of worldwide ISKCON and keep my membership.

at the dinner table

It was a strange thing that happened at our dinner table every night at 125 Katan Avenue. No one would speak until my father spoke first, and until he spoke there was an anxious sense of unreality or no identification. I know I achingly waited for his first words so that the silence could be broken and life could begin. He would usually say something about what happened at the firehouse that day. It was a relief. His familiar speech about his world created our sense of security and solidity. One night he told how a young fireman had thrown a cherry bomb at another young fireman and how the explosion had hurt him and he had become angry. Another time he told how they responded to a fire and when they entered the building my father had seen an attractive clock and decided to pick it up on his way out. But when they had put out the fire and were leaving, he noticed that someone else had already taken the clock. Sometimes he talked of politics in the news and gave his right-wing Republican *New York Daily News* opinion as the truth. My mother, sister and I never challenged him, at least not until we entered college. In the early years we just played roles as supporting actors, agreeing to whatever he said and keeping the

peace. Light family joking was allowed. We were permitted to call dad “Garbage Belly” because he was always willing to eat the leftovers from what my sister or I couldn’t finish. But in the early years he kept a chart called “The Clean Plate Club” with our names written and the date. If we ate everything on our plates we were given a star. This was begun mainly for my benefit because I was notorious for not finishing everything on my plate. My sister was a better eater than I and was in favor with my father. He particularly liked the fact that she was fond of olives, and he criticized me because I found them odious. This was an aspect of sibling rivalry between my sister and I. I was criticized for “playing” with my food and not eating seriously. My mother told me about the starving children in India who didn’t get enough to eat, and I should be grateful that I had the privilege of a full meal. But I just couldn’t make the Clean Plate Club despite the pressure to perform. I was good at eating extra pieces of white bread and butter and was given credit for this. My undereating habits continued for years despite my mother’s nagging and my father’s disapproval. I just didn’t like the taste of the food.

When I was younger and used to go to the movies with my mother, we would sometimes eat out. I would eat a big hamburger, and the waiters started calling me “Wimpy” after the character in the Popeye comics who eats many hamburgers. That was a food I could like and eat. But my mother’s cooking was not to my taste. I was underweight, and there wasn’t anything my parents could do about it. Now that I am seventy-one years old I am overweight, and I am not happy about it. I have a fat belly, and my chest is fat. B. cooks so much and serves out big portions, with dessert, and I am not able to lose weight. My long life of undereating is over. I am trying to keep from adding pounds, but it is a struggle. If I could only remember my old habits of “playing” with my food and not eating big portions, I would reduce my weight to my satisfaction.

news and history

Mark Twain often writes about the process of his autobiography. For example, he discusses news versus history. He says news is fresh and interesting, but history is old and boring. When he sits down to dictate his autobiography he speaks what is fresh in his mind, either something he read in the infernal newspaper or something somebody just told him. He starts his autobiography with diary. I have been trying to do like that too, but something Krishna conscious. For news I can tell you something that I just heard today in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, or maybe something Narayana K. said about his assignment on the Prabhupada Succession Committee. I'd like to dip into ISKCON history too. I could get on to something that interests me and might interest you. The idea of starting with what's on your mind is interesting. B. and I just came back from our 4 p.m. walk. He was talking about penetrating into our next door neighbors on the left. There is a woman who has five grown up children in their twenties and thirties, and they are often around her house and park their cars there. She herself looks about thirty years old. B. saw her yesterday, and she was jumping up and down happy about the progress her brother is

making on a backyard porch. He asked her, with so many people in the house, why is there no drinking and loud music? She said they are Jehovah Witnesses, and their music addiction is to Frank Sinatra. B. wants to start distributing chocolate chip cookies to them like he does to the neighbors on the right side. The cookies he gives to our right side neighbors are called “hush puppies” because he gives them as bribery so they will keep their dog indoors instead of tying him up in the back yard where he barks all day wanting to be let in and annoying Baladeva’s “father” who is a writer. Also on our walk in Saci’s back yard we came upon four men and a woman who were gathered outside Saci’s neighbor’s house. One of the men said, “Son of a bitch,” and the woman said, “Watch your language. There are gentlemen passing by.” She then came over and introduced herself. She said she was Phyllis, Bob’s wife, and she shook our hands. She asked me my name and I said, “Satsvarupa.” She repeated it just right. She said if I had said “John” it would have gone over her head. B. knows the man from previous conversations with him. He paid Bob to fix Muktavandya’s car. So we are gradually getting to know all our neighbors, and B. is distributing *prasadam* to them. The men by Saci’s house asked why weren’t we running in the yard, why were we only walking. I said, “Walking is all. I can do.” B. said to one of the men, “You can be the lead car for us.” But the man said, “No, I’m through.” Later I thought I might have told him I’m seventy-one years old and my left foot is bad and hurts when I walk — but I didn’t say it. I was tired after two laps, and we came back to the house.

Now that’s pure *gramya-katha* or village talk, and I haven’t written anything Krishna conscious. At lunch time Narayana started reading from the fourteenth chapter of the First Canto. Narada has told King Yudhishthira that Dhrtarastra has entered a self-created fire and his wife Gandhari has entered with him so he should not go and attempt their funeral rites because their bodies are ashes. Then Arjuna goes to Dvaraka to see Lord Krishna and receive his next program of work. But he is gone for seven months, and Yudhishthira doesn’t hear from him. Maharaja Yudhishthira is noticing discrepancies in human behavior which indicate that the age of Kali is approaching. He worries that maybe Krishna has left the earth. It is an ominous section of the *Bhagavatam*.

My life is wrapped up in fishing for autobiographical episodes of what's on my mind. I wrote two today, about eating habits and about "human bondage" as I've experienced it. I'm not much bound up to people nowadays except T.J. is coming tomorrow for a yoga lesson and Sacisuta comes every morning to read to me from the *Krishna* book during breakfast. At night I watch a movie for half an hour with Baladeva, and at four in the morning I meet with Narayana when he comes up to wake the Deities.

gita nagari dhama

Gita Nagari had golden years when I was the zonal *acarya* and GBC there, but there were basic discrepancies also. The temple president, Paramananda, spent too much money. Narayana Kavaca, the *sankirtana* leader, sent in fifty thousand dollars a month, but he never received any accounting of how the money was spent. Paramananda emphasized cow protection and agriculture. They had many cows and oxen and big agricultural tractors and many acres of corn and wheat and a vegetable garden. There were about forty to fifty devotees there in the 1980s. Bhurijana and Haridas ran the *gurukula*. Almost all the devotees were my disciples except for Prabhupada's disciples, and they also bowed down to me on my *vyasasana*. There was an enthusiastic spirit of guru worship. There was a *yogi* bar candy factory that was prosperous and growing for a while. After the morning program I would take a walk with my disciples, answering questions and visiting the cow barn. We had big festivals on Vaishnava holidays. The women's traveling painting sales party worked under great pressure and austerities, selling Korean paintings at jacked up prices, sleeping out in the RV and communicating by shortwave to

the farm. I would meet with them when they came back to the farm. They knocked on doors, and some women collected hundreds of dollars a day. They needed lots of encouragement and preaching to keep going. Paramananda ruled the farm with an iron fist, in charge of all departments and allotments of money. When I came back from travels, there would be a welcoming committee and a *kirtana* at the *brahmachari* ashram. I did most of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* lecturing, but others also took turns. Pretty much everyone attended the morning program. There were sufficient *pujaris* for the many Deities, and cooks in the kitchen.

Sometimes Bhurijana and Jagattarini put on puppet shows poking fun at different personalities on the farm. Dramatic skits featured the ebullient Gaura Hari. My Vyasa-pujas were sometimes held on the farm, and I received many homages and gave away remnants of my clothes. Gita Nagari was the base for me to do the writing of the *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta*, and typists and editors lived there.

Once I spent a whole year there trying to recover from migraine headaches. I mostly stayed in bed, didn't take allopathic medicine, but followed the diet and exercise regimen of a naturopathic doctor who lived at the farm to take care of me. I didn't recover and gradually took to allopathic medicine and a more regular diet. But the period of convalescence was sweet while living in the cabin in the woods, hearing the many birds sing in three seasons, and taking alone walks on the trail beside the Tuscarora Creek that led to the dense forest hill.

Once before going on my morning walk I went into Gaura Hari's householder room to put on my long underwear. I apologized to him for barging into his private quarters. He said it was no bother, that this was his desire to live in a community like this. We were like a big family, gathered at the feet of Prabhupada and Radha-Damodara. When I resigned from the GBC, Paramananda lamented, knowing it meant I would spend less time at Gita Nagari. When it was no longer my home base, my disciples gradually moved away, and it became much diminished until Bhakti Tirtha Maharaj proposed to take charge of it. It is still a very special place, a holy *dhama* in the woods of Pennsylvania with agricultural land and cows.

transforming to the spiritual energy

Lord Krishna and Balarama went to see Bali Maharaj to get back the six sons that had been born to Devaki and then killed by King Kamsa. Bali Maharaj was ecstatic to see the Lord and made prayers in a voice which was choked up intermittently. He prayed that he was very fortunate, even though born as a demon, to be able to see Lord Krishna and render Him pure devotional service. Most people cannot see Krishna who is omnipotent and inconceivable. I am just a tiny conditioned soul, and whatever I write of my life is insignificant and under the modes of material nature. By my connection with Srila Prabhupada, however, I have been able to act on the transcendental platform. Prabhupada was a *paramahamsa*. Bali Maharaj prays that he may live alone, just like the *paramahamsas*, traveling, alone here and there in great piece of mind, depending solely on Krishna's lotus feet. The word *paramahamsa* means the Supreme Swan. It is said that the swan can draw milk out of a reservoir of water, it can take only the milk portion and reject the watery portion. Similarly, a person who can draw out the spiritual portion from this material world and who can live alone, depending only on the Supreme Personality of

Godhead, not on the material world, is called a *paramahansa*. I have written of the games I played in the streets of Queens, and the schoolyard of P.S. 8, and my years in college and in the Navy and on the Lower East Side.. Those years were not affected by the *paramahansa* because I had not yet met Srila Prabhupada. But beginning with the summer of 1966, I associated with the pure devotee, the Swami, and my character of life changed radically. He engaged me in chanting the transcendental mantra Hare Krishna and typing his manuscript and donating money. These were all acts of pure devotional service, performed without full knowledge but nevertheless under the protection of Yogamaya. They were not like my previous acts of karma. With his expert guidance the Swami molded me into his disciple, a devotee of Lord Krishna. When I wrote of activities rendered in his service they are significant spiritual acts and form a spiritual autobiography. Sitting on the floor and typing his manuscripts or notes from one of his lectures was outwardly the same as typing one of my novellas, but it was different in quality. It was transcendental service, it was purifying to my body and mind. I was transformed and acting within a bubble of purity and love of God. Narada Muni has proven that only a little service rendered to the Bhaktivedantas, transforms his entire nature, even though he was just a young boy. The same thing happened to me by serving at Twenty-six Second Avenue. By service to the *paramahansa* I developed the qualities of a swanlike man, capable of subduing the poisonous snakes of the neighborhood.

By writing of all my life activities, I have written of some times when I was contaminated. I did not hide these things because I wanted realistically to show what I was and what I became, changed by the Swami. It is a gradual process and some material taints still remain. Even while I worked beside him and changed the announcement board which we placed in the window of the temple, I had errant thoughts. And even now I sometimes engage in frivolous activities. For the most part I have been engaged in pure devotional service ever since I met him, and so my chronicle is solid and valuable. What is dross can be taken as the poison that arose during the churning of the milk ocean by the demons and the devotees in which nectar and poison were simultaneously produced. The poison was drunk by Lord Shiva, and the nectar was distributed to the demigods.

Thinking of Krishna on April 1st

It is April 1st — April Fool’s Day — and we are being played the fool by Mother Nature as it is snowing, white upon all the lawns and laying in the boughs of the evergreens and on the roofs and windshields of cars. The people are mostly also fools because they do not worship Sri Krishna. They think Him to be one of the Hindu gods and mythological at that. It will take a good deal of convincing before that opinion can be changed, since it is so widely held. His Divine Grace Srila Prabhupada does an admirable job of presenting Lord Krishna as He is in the *Bhagavad-gita*, and a number of people have read his book and been convinced of it but not many. I have been convinced of it, in Krishna’s words and Prabhupada’s words, and I should witness more to this effect. As Lord Caitanya says, “Whoever you meet tell them about Krishna — and in this way you will always be with Me.” I have witnessed profusely in the past, but I have somewhat retired from it.

I lectured in many colleges and turned to Krishna’s first instructions to Arjuna about the immortality of the soul in the second chapter. Then I would turn to verses where Krishna speaks

of Himself and declares that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Whoever knows the nature of Krishna's appearance and activities in this world, does not have to come back at the time of death, but goes to His eternal abode. Just worship Me, bow down to Me, and make your homage to Me, He says, and you will attain the supreme destination. Krishna is the God of all Gods, the origin of time and creation. He has no cause and He is independent. He is very inclined to His devotees. If they will just read *Bhagavad-gita* submissively and under the direction of a spiritual master in disciplic succession, they will know the truth.

We have to keep campaigning for Him and gradually gaining members to His *sanga*. It is good for us to preach of Him. He says it makes us very dear to Him, and there will never be one more dear to Him than he who speaks the message of Krishna.

My autobiography should be filled with my life in Krishna consciousness. Tell of the Lord and my service to Him. That is the life worth telling. The Christians say, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" We don't say that. We say, "Were you there when Krishna spoke the *Bhagavad-gita* to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kuruksheta? Were you there when Krishna played in the house of Maharaj Nanda and Mother Yasoda? Were you there when He killed the demons in His childhood? Did you hear of His pastimes with the *gopis*?" That is what we should be doing, Krishna *keatha*. Remembering Krishna by discussing His transcendental acts. By remembering Him we become attracted to Him and desire to join His company in the spiritual world.

I am regularly hearing about Krishna in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and the *Bhagavad-gita*. This is transforming me into a Krishna conscious person. I want to tell you about Krishna and discharge my duties as a preacher. That should be my autobiography. How I was a transparent medium for Krishna, how I approached devotees and innocent people and told them about my Lord. That is what I am doing here. Krishna told Arjuna, "Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings and men, nor in the future shall any of us cease to exist." As a boy changes to a youth and then to an old man, so at the time of death he takes another body. Those who are sober are not bewildered by this fact. And He says, "I am telling you this because you are My friend . . . Just give up all forms of religion and surrender unto Me. Do not be afraid of sinful reactions. I will protect you." These are the most

important words from the most important life. This is my life story, to tell about the Lord and what He said to Arjuna and what He does with the *gopīs*. This is the purpose of my writing.

gramya-katha and krishna-katha

In his autobiography, Mark Twain writes at length about the phenomena of dueling which had become a fad in his time. He himself was challenged to duels, but he managed to get out of them before actually facing any combatant. He writes of this in his modus operandi of telling whatever comes to his mind when he sits down to write. I want to follow his spontaneous composition method but not write of mundane affairs like dueling. I come to this session with several things on my mind this morning. As I told Sacisuta, when I watch the Yankees' Opening Day game on March 31st, they announced that as of April 1st no more Yankee games would be broadcast over YES (Yankees Entertainment and Sports) television station due to contractual disagreement. This is a disappointment, since previously YES broadcast all the Yankee games. Saci said he would investigate the matter more on the internet. The Yankee announcer asked the viewers to use a telephone number and call in and say they want YES to continue playing the Yankees games. But that is not of spiritual significance.

Saci read to me this morning from the *Krishna* book about Lord Krishna's visiting the pure devotees, Bahulasva and Srutadeva, in

the city of Mathila. Lord Krishna was on a tour with many sages, and He visited these devotees just to please them. Bahulasva was the king of Mathila, and he gave Krishna and the sages a grand reception in his palace. Sri Krishna expanded Himself into two forms and visited Bahulasva and Srutadeva at the same time without the other one knowing that Krishna was anywhere but in his own place. This is called *vaibhava-prakash* and is similar to what Krishna did when He expanded to live with His 16,108 wives and when He expanded into all the cowherd boys, cows and calves when Lord Brahma had kidnapped them. Srutadeva was a poor *brahmana* who just survived every day on what the Lord provided him, and he lived in a poor and humble state. When Srutadeva received Lord Krishna and the sages, he could not offer them comfortable seats or very palatable dishes and the only entertainment he could offer was that he and his wife danced before the honorable guests. But because his offering was full of devotion, Srutadeva satisfied Lord Krishna and the sages as much as they were satisfied by the opulent presentations of King Bahulasva.

The news from *Krishna* book is more valuable and nourishing to me than the disruption about television network YES, but I have mentioned the latter because it occurs in my life. I would have watched the games broadcast today and tomorrow if they were on. The baseball season is just beginning, and I have a commitment to watch the games if they are on in the daytime before my bedtime. This does not speak highly of my state of consciousness. Hearing the statistics of the ball players' performance and their teams' standing brings no benefit to my effort to become a pure devotee of Krishna. It is just a distraction. I would do better to increase my hearing of Prabhupada's lectures or reading of his books. I will try to do something about that increase in my *sadhana* and let you know how it transpires.

wild sankirtana days

Our zone used to raise money by selling candles, until we switched to selling paintings. Yesterday Narayana K. was talking of the candle-selling days. He said it was a simple, straightforward affair. We made the candles by melting down wax and mixing colors. Then the men and women went out door to-door without much of a story and tried to sell the candles. Narayana said he himself could do four hundred dollars a day, but others did less. Titiksa Dasi presented herself as an artist and pushed her way into the household — and was very good at convincing people to buy. Narayana said they made so many candles that, at first, there was little room to sleep in the van. They built a platform over the candles and slept on that. The painting sales were not much different. They tried to mark up the prices but not to some extraordinary degree. He said he once went to a healer's convention and watched from the audience. People were laying hands on people and people were exclaiming, "I'm cured! I can seer' He thought it was all staged and fraudulent and that the people who were saved were planted in the audience by the healers. They would all get in the van and travel to another town

and do the show again. When Narayana, was at the healers' convention, they were giving out free liquor drinks and they insisted that he take them. He accepted the drinks and shoved them down into his candle box. When he got back to the van his *sankirtana* driver reprimanded him for carrying liquor. The *sankirtana* driver arranged for their meals, and they were very austere. For breakfast they would have dry oatmeal and a banana. If a devotee did particularly well in his collection, he would get some dates with butter in them and this was considered a great luxury.

There are so many wild stories about these early collecting parties. Often some of the devotees would get arrested and put in jail. Narayana would pay the fine to get them out, and they would go on selling as before.

One year the men's and women's party was finishing up a Christmas marathon, and it was to end in a festival at the Boston temple. But the temple had no room for the devotees to sleep in so they stayed at a Holiday Inn. So as not to pass through the lobby they pushed their sleeping bags through the first floor windows and climbed in, about fourteen women and fourteen men in the other room. They were on the last day of the marathon, and Rupa Raghunatha was staying out late because he wanted to win the first prize for collecting the most. Gopamatrika Dasi was his big competition. In the middle of the night Narayana was in his sleeping bag, and the beds were pushed against the walls with all the men lying on the floor. There was a knock on the door which Narayana thought was Rupa. He opened the door just wearing his kaupin, and there was a policeman, the hotel manager and Rupa Raghunatha. Narayana slammed the door, but they pounded on it even heavier than before. He let them in and the hotel manager was surprised that so many bodies were in the room. It had been registered for one. The men were sitting up and rubbing their eyes and asking what happened. The hotel manager said, "Merry Christmas! You can stay here but don't break anything!" Then he went to see the other room that Narayana had rented. They knocked on the door and the women's leader, Svarga Dasi, answered. The manager saw fourteen women in the room, but he let it go. Then they told Narayana that they had picked up Rupa at a restaurant near by connected to the Holiday Inn. He had gone there and told the manager that he was the nephew of the hotel

owner who said it was all right if he worked in the restaurant and tried to sell candles. The manager let him do it, but phoned to check up on the validity of the story and found out that Rupa was lying and then he called the police. Narayana then went into a routine where he got very angry with Rupa and told the police that Rupa had done this kind of thing before and should be punished. The policeman satisfied himself by scolding Rupa, and they left all the devotees alone.

The next day the devotees all came to the Boston temple for the marathon celebration. I was there, and I gave out prizes to the top collectors. Rupa Raghunatha won first prize. He had had an impish smile on his face the whole time the policeman was scolding him, and he was smiling broadly at the *sankirtana* party. Those were wild and wooly days, and it's a wonder the devotees didn't get into more trouble for their crowding into hotel rooms and telling fibs to distribute the candles. The same devotees have grown up and matured and would never take such risks today.

autobiography update

It should be a long autobiography because I am keeping the method of starting anywhere in my life and talking first what is on my mind in diary fashion, because I have a long career in ISKCON. In my first year I lived in the association of the early devotees in NYC and learned the basics of Krishna consciousness firsthand from the Swami. Then for four years I was president of Boston and suffered with a wife and took responsibility of guiding the sixty devotees who lived there at its peak. Beantown (Boston) provided rough opposition, and it required determination and Prabhupada's encouragement to stay there through the winters and the hoodlum opponents. We made some inroads and maintained the ISKCON Press. Then I went to Dallas to start the *gurukula* and then took *sannyasa* and traveled to the U.S. temples in my zone. I served as Prabhupada's personal servant and did the library party work and after Prabhupada's disappearance I became guru with an expanded international GBC zone. Harikesa Maharaj remarked that my management skills were like a devotee who can't keep expert rhythm on the *mrdanga* but manages to fill the position and somehow leads the *kirtana*. I retired from the GBC due to migraine

headaches and took to traveling first in the USA in an RV writing *Lessons from the Road*, seeing the good, and then traveling in a van throughout Europe. We began stopping at rented cottages for writing retreats and completed volumes of *Writing Sessions* written in the style of Natalie Goldberg, “Keep the Hand Moving.” I experienced an explosion of introverted prayer meditation and ecumenical reading, *Entering the Life of Prayer*. Then for five years I lived in Ireland and did painting and wrote *Every Day, Just Write* and lectured to the devotees. I left there in shame and went to California and Mexico with Aghari Prabhu. In Mexico I was headache-free and resumed writing *A Poor Man Reads the Bhagavatam*.

Community life in Mexico failed, and I moved with Sastra in Delaware. I began posting a daily journal on the internet and compiling books on prayer and *japa*. Finally, in my seventh year, I made what I decided was my last move to New York State with Sacisuta, I am continuing my daily website, and I’ve started the autobiography. There are devotees here, and I meet with them, but mostly I keep to myself with my roommates and live in the quiet routine. Prayers to Prabhupada and Radha-Govinda and poems from the improvised morning, after *japa*.

This morning I woke late but caught up to my *japa* quota, and now I’ve written a summation of my life. There are many side issues, and I hope to remember them and go back and forth in the memoir form. This one is a summation in skeletal form of all the years up until now. I want to continue writing from where I am at in this relaxed life at Stuyvesant Falls.

burning the candle at both ends

The writer for the *Boston Globe* described me as “the lean chieftain” of the temple. My wife told me I was underweight and that to be the leader I should be physically more substantial. The author of *The Strange World of the Hare Krishnas* lived with us for a while, and she confided to me that I was too thin. She was concerned that I was “burning the candle at both ends” and would foreshorten my life by overwork. I thought I was being surrendered to my duty and should keep up my pace of little sleep and little eating and intense, anxiety-filled work, both at the welfare office and then back at the temple and maintaining a cantankerous wife who would throw things at me and punch me in the face and rip up my files. There *is* a point where one’s surrender is beyond one’s capacity and to keep it up is sentimental and will result in burnout or break down. I may have done this and brought about my migraine crisis from which I am still not recovered.

My disciple Gurudas is now offering a complete surrender and proposing that he type my internet posting seven days a week. We have had three typists, but one of them has said he has to quit to pay more attention to his family, and the other is preparing to give

up his two days in a week. B. suggested that for several days a week I could do shorter entries, and I am willing to go with this. But Gurudas is insisting that he can do the full load, even though he has a regular job as a college instructor. B. thinks Gurudas's offer is sentimental, beyond his capacity, and that he won't be able to keep it up. I'd be willing to let him try it and see if he can maintain his stamina and health.

For years I burnt the candle at both ends, and now I am no longer doing it. I would rise at midnight for about ten years and begin my writing and chanting. I traveled around the world to visit my guru and GBC zone. I started getting headaches, and I kept up my travels. Other leaders in ISKCON did the same and some of them have suffered strokes and heart attacks or died. We must keep sane in judging our capacity to surrender and in pushing our bodies without regard to health. Keeping good health is higher in priority, even over preaching, because without health we cannot preach.

Some might say that Prabhupada pushed himself beyond his physical capacity by his widespread travels and that he shortened his life, although he lived until eighty-two. But as a *maha Bhagavata goshtyanandi* he is in a unique position, and we cannot imitate his action. Whatever he did was right and in Krishna's interest, His sacrifice was productive and auspicious. If we try to duplicate his mileage in old age, or assume the burdens that he carried, we will be imitating. We should follow but not imitate.

In a given session in this autobiography I try to write as much as I can. But sometimes I come to a point where I have nothing more to say. It is better to quit than to pad the essay just to make it fatter. There will be no gain, only loss, if I try to push beyond my allotted expression.

only he could lead us

Saci read in the *Krishna* book that some people criticize Krishna, and they never get to see Him. He also read that worship of Krishna's pure devotees is even higher than worship of Krishna Himself. That is why I worship Prabhupada. I do not consider him an ordinary person. Just see what he did. He created many Vaishnavas out of the uncultured youth of the Western countries. He did not collect as many as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi who sold a mantra for thirty-five dollars and did not demand that his followers follow any rules, but he created committed disciples who were enthusiastic and opened centers around the world. Sometimes a husband and wife would go to a city and rent a house or a storefront and begin preaching there. *Brahmacaris* would do the same. They practiced going into the streets and chanting *harinama* and gradually learned how to sell magazines and books to support the temple. To convince these people, many of whom were hippies, to give up illicit sex, intoxication, meat-eating and gambling was a great, miraculous achievement. And he did it by his personal example and forceful persuasion, by logic, argument and

charisma. All his followers loved the Swami and wanted to please him.

We realized the statement that he was a direct representative of Lord Hari and so he should be treated as good as God. By pleasing him we would please Krishna and if we displeased him our whereabouts were unknown. But he was easy to please. Just do as he said. He traveled around to all the temples just to keep them alive. His presence in your temple for a few days endeared him to you, and you wanted to follow his orders. Make programs to give people Krishna consciousness by feasting and chanting and speaking about Krishna. His students did it and became empowered to make devotees from their own generation. Rupanuga got a good group at the University in Buffalo and recruited Bhagavan and Bhurijana and Kusakratha and Gunagrahi and Krishnabamini and Trivikrama and many many more. I went to Boston and started slowly but gradually drew Giriraj and Mathuresa and Suhotra and Satadhanya and many more. It was actually the Swami who was drawing them by his *Bhagavad-gita* and his *prasadam* and his society of devotees. So you sang “Jaya Prabhupada” and you opened the door to Krishna, Radha-Krishna and Lord Caitanya and the Panca Tattva and Jaya Jagannatha. How could these Christians and Jews and atheists take to Krishna at Vrindavan? It was from Prabhupada who wrote the *Krishna* book and said Krishna was “very nice.” We just accepted his authority as coming in *parampara* and the Vedic knowledge which explains everything wonderfully as the highest knowledge that comes down as revelation, not as the speculative science which keeps on making mistakes and changes them for new theories.

The Swami carried it all on his person and when he initiated you, you became a student of *bhakti yoga* and obliged to teach it to others. Chanting on the beads and singing together in Krishna *kirtana* brought the life blood of experience in the ecstasy of Krishna consciousness. They were bleary-eyed and had no knowledge; by chanting we had experience and were happy. It was no hoax. We were touchstones like the Swami, and we could stand up to professors and philosophers. We had transcendental knowledge as long as we followed it exclusively and witnessed it to others.

We were humbled, but proud of our position as the topmost yogis. The Swami raised us up and held us up. We were his

students and we confidently told others, “There is a pure devotee living in the world.” This is why we worship and serve the pure devotees. This is why we say to serve the pure devotee is more important than serving Krishna directly. It makes Krishna accessible; it is His authorized way. His devotees are very dear to Him, and He wants you to follow them. When you do, He becomes inclined to you. He is *bhakta vatsala*, inclined to His pure devotees.

HIS PASSING AWAY

Because my parents disowned me when I was twenty-five, and I lost all contact with them, I had no news of their deaths until years after they occurred. I learned through a lawyer who got the death certificate of my father, and then later in a similar way, the news of my mother. The only death that I have personally lived through and experienced was Srila Prabhupada's. I saw him several times in his last days, throughout the long year of 1977, and then I was present at his bedside all day when he passed away. So we knew that he was dying, and that it was only a matter of time. In February of '77 at the Mayapur Gaura Purnima festival, he was present in Mayapur but very ill. Even then it seemed his days were limited, and we took on some of the grief. Then in the spring, around April, he had a relapse and he called all the GBC men to come to Vrindavan to see him and settle last affairs. He said to me, "These are my last days." He seemed to be bent on leaving his body at that time. He spoke of dying, and he gave up eating. In an emotional scene, in the presence of his disciples who implored him to use his will to live, Prabhupada agreed and began eating again although he really didn't recover. He stayed on languishing in

Vrindavan. Then he got the inspiration to make one last visit to the West, to London, in hopes it would pick up his spirits to see his disciples. In the spring crisis, when the GBC was gathered, I took it for granted that Prabhupada would not recover. One time while I was massaging his legs and feet with talcum powder, I said my farewell to him. He survived the trip to England, but had to come back to Vrindavan because of weakened health. Now it was just a matter of time. His nurses measured his urine outtake and his food intake, and he continued to diminish. In November the doctors said he had only a few weeks to live. There was a last minute drama when he said he wanted to be taken on an oxcart ride and stay out for days circumambulating Govardhana Hill. Some of his disciples supported his desire to go. But his doctor said his body would not survive the bumpy road and some of his intimate caretaker disciples pleaded with him not to go. "See how they love me," he said to his godbrother Krishnadasa Babaji. And when they said he was driving them crazy out of their love for him, he said, "That is my djuty (duty)." I was not one of the intimate bodily caretakers, but I did get to massage him under the mosquito net in his bed from the hours of midnight to 2 a.m. And I was constantly present hearing the latest news on his diminishing strength. On the last day he was completely internal and not communicating with anyone. He lay in his bed in the main room, and his disciples surrounded the bed. I stood all day at the foot of the bed watching him and chanting. I had become numb in my feelings and was just keeping the vigil to be with him until the end. He didn't talk or make any sounds. In the late morning the doctor told us he had several hours to live. He asked us if we wanted to try any emergency measures by bringing Prabhupada to the hospital. But he had told us that he didn't want to go to the hospital and be maintained by "wires and tubes." At about six o'clock his body did a little involuntary dance on the bed. At seven o'clock they opened the doors to his room and all the devotees, women included, were allowed to come in and take part in an emotional loud singing of the Hare Krishna mantra. At approximately seven thirty he gasped his last breath, and the doctor declared that he had passed away. Then arrangements were made to prepare his body for burial. I went to my room in the guesthouse and made a few notes in my diary. Some devotees were weeping, but I was drained of emotions and like one dumb. I took

part in the ceremonies of offering his body an *arati* and then following a procession with his body on a palanquin to the main temples of Vrindavan. The next morning they buried him in the *samadhi* place where the *mandir* was to be built. I finally broke down and cried in grief. Then we faced the new world of service in separation to Srila Prabhupada.

coming to Krishna

I used to play by myself in the back yard of our house at 125 Katan Avenue, Great Kills. There was a long patch of earth that was not our property, but it had joined the creek in the woods, so daddy cleared it for our use. He built a vegetable garden on one side and kept grass on the other side. Where it was grass he had set up two iron posts at a distance for the game of horseshoes. I used to go on the grass portion and throw my pink Spalding ball against the back wall of our house and catch it on the fly. I would throw the ball up and punch it and hit it high on the shingled roof of the house, and sometimes it would go right over the roof of the house for a home run, and I had to run to the front of the house to find the ball bouncing in the street. I would keep up this play for an hour and then lie on the grass on my back and relax looking up at the blue sky. Sometimes I played horseshoes and got expert enough so I could fling them into the air turning them over once and sliding them into the pole stand for a ringer or at least touching the pole. The man up the hill had a basketball backboard, and he gave it to me and my father set it up against the garage. I would shoot hoops in the backyard and dribble the basketball on

the hard earth, imagining games and scores in my mind. Sometimes I played at these things with a friend, but it was better when I was alone with my imagination. I also used to stand in the driveway and hit pebbles with a baseball bat deep into the woods.

I didn't know Hare Krishna then and did not chant or link with Krishna. Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like if had Krishna in my younger years and could chant throughout the day in my play, or if had known Krishna in the Navy. If I had insisted on chanting sixteen rounds on beads I might have got into trouble and been discharged from military service. I know a devotee who was attending the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado when he met the devotees and took up chanting. When he should have been marching he sat down and chanted on his beads and when they interrogated him they discharged him from the Air Force. I was taken off an airplane bound from New Delhi to Calcutta by the police, because we used overcharged credit cards to buy our tickets. The police held us in confinement all day and interrogated us separately. Finally when we were together we began chanting the Hare Krishna mantra and that softened the police's attitudes towards us. Eventually by the end of the day we got a statement from the credit card company and they let us free. It is always good to live with the chanting and to bring it out in a time of difficulty. It may seem odd to the people who are confining you, but it will always work in your favor. They will know you are religious and serious. If I had chanted while living in my parents' home they would have thought me crazy, but if I persisted, they would have had to deal with it — and allow me to chant. Devotees have gone to military inductions during the time of the compulsory draft into the army and chanted during the interview, and been released from military service. "I have to chant two hours a day on beads, and I'm a vegetarian."

I'm glad I met Prabhupada and the chanting when I did, at age twenty-five in the summer of 1966, and I guess I wasn't ready to receive it earlier. But I think if I had had it while I was living on the Lower East Side, I would have been relieved of my sorrows. Better late than never. And when I found it I took to it wholeheartedly. I was like a man who came in from out of the rain, or a man who escaped being lost in the desert. Hare Krishna entered my life and picked me up and made me sane and whole. Once finding it, I treasured it, strung my red beads and began my

career of chanting sixteen rounds a day and following the regulative principles. Now I want to help others and convince them to take it up in their lives. If they do so they will be relieved of a great burden of anxiety. It will fill their lives with what they have been missing and looking for. It will make them purified and happy. It will fill up the void and what is absent in the life of a person who does not render devotional service to Krishna.

new york city

Once I was somehow up late in the worship room with him when everyone else had left. I think it was because I was doing typing of his manuscripts in his apartment. I was sitting on the floor beside him as he ate a bowl of puffed rice as his evening snack before sleep. He looked to me out of the side of his eyes as if to say, "What are you doing here sharing an intimate moment with me?" I didn't say anything, but I was delighted and hurried up and removed myself from his presence.

Brahmananda opened the windows to the Swami's apartment when we had come back from Ananda Ashram, letting the cool summer air come in. He was always on hand doing practical chores for the Swami, when he wasn't at work as a substitute high school teacher. Prabhupada liked his natural leadership abilities, and he made Brahmananda his first temple president of New York ISKCON. Brahmananda took the task of bringing the Swamiji's manuscript of *Bhagavad-gita* to Macmillan Publishers and fortunately found an interested editor who wanted to publish an abridged edition of the book. After many meetings they closed the deal and a small purple edition of A. C. Bhaktivedanta's *Bhagavad-*

gita was published. It sold so well that a few years later Macmillan published the fully unabridged version.

Rayarama, with experience in comic book publishing, became the first editor of the new *Back to Godhead* magazine. ISKCON rented an office for him which Rayarama said was warm in the summer and cold in the winter but was private and serviceable for his purposes. He guided the editorial policy of the magazine for a couple of years until he went astray.

During the first year at Twenty-six Second Avenue we thought Swamiji would always stay with us, and we were upset when Mukunda found a place for him in San Francisco. Considering his health and old age we thought it was unwise that he go to San Francisco where they were planning a “mantra rock dance” for him with hippies. He seemed so right in his apartment on the Lower East Side, and with newspaper coverage and the making of a record we were just beginning to get popular. He had a broader vision than just one center in New York, and he left us.

The Swami had begun his movement in New York, and he had a special fondness for it. When he came back in the summer of 1976 for a grand Ratha-yatra down Fifth Avenue, he expressed his special feeling for New York and the skyscraper temple at Fifty-fifth Street. He tried to come back again in the last months of his life in the autumn of 1977, but his weak health did not allow him. At that time he spoke of his attachment to America where the government had always been favorable to him. He said he would be willing to go there and die preaching in New York and be buried on the roof of the temple.

His fondness for New York was founded on his years in 1966 when he opened his storefront and performed his first initiation of disciples. “Those were happy days,” he recalled, when he sat in his kitchen and looked out the window at First Street and thought how his mission had successfully begun. Allen Ginsberg had said, “He and his children sang the first summer through in Tompkins Square Park . . . To choose to attend to the Lower East Side, what kindness and humility and intelligence!”

And I was there among the first. I feel he will always remember me as “Satsvarupa” from my typing and donations and giving him a daily mango. He picked me up as a sad lonely hippie and made me a happy and responsible son. I will never forget those days or fail to treasure them.

MORE 1966

When I stood on the curb with the Swami waiting to cross Second Avenue and enter his apartment, I asked that question, “Why is the Rama-Krishna Mission more organized than we are?— And he chose not to answer it. I was hurt and disturbed in my mind that he had ignored me, as he dashed across the Avenue ahead of me. He never picked it up later, and I was left with thinking I had made a breach in the etiquette, or I had just asked a question so foolish it didn’t deserve an answer. But why didn’t he consider my feelings and at least acknowledge me? But then I got that special reward when I asked him in the company of some other disciples, “I feel I have many different selves. I can act in different ways. What kind of person does Krishna want me to be?” It was a complicated “mental” question typical of a young New Yorker. To answer, he addressed the audience, “This boy Steve is nice. He does typing and gives donations. You should all do like that.” What a way to *not* answer my question but to say something very sweet! I was stunned, embarrassed and speechless. Shortly afterward I went downstairs to the temple room and picked up my

stringed double bass, which I had donated to the temple, and strummed it happily thinking that I was the “Swami’s boy.”

At the welfare office I chanted Hare Krishna mantras silently in my mind. The Swami had approved the practice. I had told him my co-workers engaged in talking nonsense. He said, “Even the greatest philosophers are talking nonsense. Go on chanting Hare Krishna in your mind.” Once, while waiting on the telephone for a co-worker to look something up for me, I started chanting out loud. I was irrepressible. “What the hell are you doing?” he said to me, and he burst my bubble. I quickly shut up. I wrote a few poems at my desk, on the Vishnu who was in my heart, and one about child Prahlad Maharaj that Swamiji had mentioned in his classes. We published one of them in *Back to Godhead* magazine. And I wrote an essay called “Karma Yoga” in which I explained my welfare office work as a form of yoga and my movements as *asanas* or sitting postures offered to the Lord. Because I gave my paycheck to the Swami I understood that whatever I did at the office was an offering to Krishna. I was liberated through my work and didn’t find it burdensome.

Then one day early in my Krishna conscious career, my supervisor Mr. Rice said I’d have to stay in and not take lunch at twelve because I had work to do and I could not go out until one. That meant I would miss the live lunch with the Swami and the boys. I went to the pay phone booth in the office and phoned the temple. The Swami answered. “Hello,” I said, “this is Steve. Do you remember me? I can’t come to lunch today, I have to stay in the office until one o’clock. Could you please save some lunch for me?” “Yes,” the Swami said. And I hung up glad that I had become bold enough to ask. When I went to his apartment at one, everyone was gone except the Swami. He ushered me into his worship room where the rug was rolled back exposing the floor. He set a full plate of *prasadam* — rice, *dal*, *subji* and *chapatis* — on the floor in front of me. In a very deliberate move I bowed down at his feet as he stood before me. It was the first time I did that. “Thank you very much,” he said. And he left me to eat alone. Later I washed my hands, thanked him and left the apartment. I was so happy not to have missed the lunch and to have had a little exchange with Swamiji. Those were precious moments and sometimes you had to ask for them.

In an off night meeting in his room, he had just shaved his head and he sat on the small rug before his silver trunk looking like a genie that had just come out of a bottle. I thought of yogis who could fly in the air on Oriental rugs. He seemed so otherworldly. He said to an Indian guest, “Mr. Patel, which would you rather be, four-handed or two-handed?” And he laughed. The possibility of being four-handed seemed real, but he had already told us it was preferable to be two-handed. I have already told, but I’ll tell it again — that I met Swamiji when I was walking uptown toward the welfare office. I was wearing my Jagannatha Deity around my neck, and my hair was shaved with *sikha*. I was a little tense because the caseworkers were on strike, and I would have to pass through their picket lines to enter the building. I learned that they had already yelled at the Swami when he had passed them on the opposite side of the street. They sang the Hare Krishna tune mockingly with the words, “Money! Money! Money! Money!” Criticizing the fact that I was earning for the Swami rather than striking for higher wages. But I needed the paycheck and didn’t want to lose money by going on strike to get a little more money. I crashed through their unfriendly barriers and entered the office unscathed. Oh — but I forgot to say — when I met the Swami. I bowed before him on the sidewalk and when I stood up he smiled at me and touched me with his hand. It was ecstatic!

So many ecstatic moments he gave us in his apartment in the temple and in the streets of New York. On Sundays he walked with us through the streets over to Tompkins Square Park and some hecklers shouted to us from the apartment steps. In the park we unrolled the rug, and Swamiji sat down and pounded the drum and sang for three hours breaking the American silence.

Always open

Krishna-kripa asked me what part I was up to in the autobiography. I explained to him that each day I write from different aspects in my life and Prabhupada's life, but I wasn't writing chronologically. Yesterday I wrote two memories from 1966, but I may next turn to *any* time that comes to my mind. Narayana asked me if I was up to the present time, 2012, and whether there was anything left to write about. I told him the same thing, that I may write of 2012 but then I may go to 1990 or 1970. It's not like a jigsaw puzzle that has a set number of pieces and when I've put them all together it will be finished. It is always open for something new. I've also resigned myself to sometimes repeating something I've already written but telling it from a slightly different perspective with new details. For example, I could write again about my relationship with Anna and Eliot but bring new light on it. Memories of Prabhupada can be re-entered.

During his 1971 summer visit to Boston, when he stayed in the temple building, he called me into his room. It was raining heavily outside, and he wanted to bring my attention to something in the backyard. He pointed to a paint can that was overflowing with

water and he told me not to waste paint. I told him that there was no waste of paint, that the can was empty and that it was just water overflowing. “All right,” he conceded, “it may be just water, but I’m telling you not to waste paint.” “All right,” I said, accepting the lesson but wanting him to be convinced that there hadn’t been any waste of paint. He repeated that he accepted that the can held only water, but in any case you should not waste Krishna’s paint. I was thankful that he called me in for a little meeting and reminded me to be responsible about our property and belongings. He didn’t have anything else to say, and he let me go. I told the other devotees what Prabhupada had said. It was more nectar, anything he did. I like to think of him looking out the window and seeing the paint can overflowing and deciding to call me in and tell me not to waste.

He had come to install the Radha-Krishna Deities. The night after he did it we were kneeling side-by-side and he turned his head to me and asked me, “What are they saying about the Deities?” It was such a nice question. I told him, “Everyone thinks they are beautiful,” and he was satisfied.

During that visit an Indian man who had been inimical to us visited him. He had a young wife who came to the temple against his will and associated with the women in the art department. She said her husband used to beat her for coming to Krishna. Once he came looking for his wife and I told him she wasn’t there, but then he saw her raincoat hanging on the wardrobe rack. He called me a liar and a cheat and said I wasn’t a *brabmana*. I was hesitant to let him have a *darshan* with Prabhupada, but he was insistent. When he came into Prabhupada’s presence he didn’t speak anything about his wife but just asked a few formal philosophical questions and gave Prabhupada a small check. Prabhupada said that by his last name he could tell he was a *vaisya* and *vaisyas* were stingy. I then told Prabhupada about his wife coming to the temple against his will. He made no comment. Later the man divorced his wife, and she moved to the New York temple and became a wonderful devotee named Sunita.

When Prabhupada used the bathroom he had to go out of his main room and walk down the busy hallway to reach the bathroom. One time petite Patita Pavana, who was eccentric, was standing outside the bathroom with Soma das. They both raised their arms and shouted “Prabhupada *ki jaya!*” And he smiled in

return. When he came out of the bathroom, dressed in a *gamcha* and holding a *lota*, they shouted again “Prabhupada *ki jaya!*” In his memoirs of that moment Soma das says he was impressed by how simple and gracious — and pleased — Prabhupada was with their behavior.

Prabhupada went out of his way to have little exchanges with everyone he met — like a loving father. He asked the mothers how they were doing and he asked the men how they liked their service. By these little conversations he endeared the devotees to him and cemented their bond with him.

HIS LAST VISIT TO ENGLAND

It was close to a tragedy, but turned out to be a triumphant last visit to England. Tamal Krishna Goswami deserves the credit for keeping it controlled and not overexertion for Prabhupada, and Prabhupada deserves the credit for carrying himself through it dignified and a survivor, although he looked shockingly gaunt and ill in his dark glasses and confined to always sitting. They took him in the car to Bhaktivedanta Manor, and the devotees were shocked at how he was just a shell in physique yet, he wanted to see them and stay with them. He was in a *mahabagavata* mood, always crying tears from his eyes and expressing gratitude to the disciples who came before him in his room and in the temple. He met with *sankirtana* parties from Germany in his room and the International Library Party featuring Ghanasyarna. They carried him down on a palanquin to the temple room where he did not lecture, but sat and encouraged the enthusiastic *kirtana* dancers in front of him. TKG gave a speech on the life of Prabhupada, and he listened and made a few corrections and additions. He prayed that the temple construction could be completed in Bombay, and he could live to see the grand opening. He visited the Bury Street temple and took

off his dark glasses and streamed tears standing before Sri Sri Radha-Londonisvara. He couldn't pass urine and had to go to the emergency room of the hospital where they released urine in a rush. He spoke of going to America, to New York City and the Pennsylvania farm, but his health did not allow it. He had to fly back to Bombay, India. It is a wonder that they allowed him on the plane, since he looked so ill and confined to a wheelchair. In Bombay they carried him up to his suite in the ISKCON hotel building, and he stayed some days there, but the workmen were chopping at the marble, and he decided in consultation with his disciples to return to Vrindavan. Gopal Krishna Maharaj wanted Prabhupada to stay in Bombay until the opening, but with the construction noise and the doubt about how long it would take to open the temple— they decided against it. He rode by car to Vrindavan and was placed in his last bed. He lay on his back and folded his hands over his chest. He thanked TKG for bringing “this bag of bones” to England and back, it was a credit to him. Now he was home, and he would not move again. The slow Vrindavan routine recommenced, and Prabhupada hung on fragilely at the lotus feet of Krishna, waiting to be released.

changing mystiques

My life was a mystique of being a literary artist on the Lower East Side and the mind-expanding drug taker. The Swami's mystique was to be the confidential representative of Krishna, empowered to confer Krishna consciousness on others. At first he tried to get a Radha-Krishna temple uptown, but then he intelligently moved downtown to the Lower East Side and attended the youth who were seeking alternative "high" states of consciousness and were attracted to the East and ready to give up Western success in consumerism. The Swami didn't change when he met me. He remained the immovable touchstone of Krishna consciousness. But I changed completely. That is why I say he lifted me out of my history. He picked me off the railroad tracks I was riding on and set me on a completely different path. I stopped drugs and sex and even writing and became his student, a *cela* (disciple) in the *guru-sisya* relationship.

I didn't want him to change. I wanted to change and become an American follower of the Swami in Krishna consciousness. I chanted with a small band of followers at Dr. Mishra's Ananda Ashram and felt myself aligned with the Swami and apart from the

impersonalist, gymnastic *yogis*. He said we chanted “heart and soul,” not like the *yogis*. Two of them had taken it like a ballroom dance, but we danced singly, around the room, in ecstasy.

He didn’t change for me but he made gestures in my direction, to draw me in. He gave me a *chapati* with crushed sugar at Ananda Ashram. He gave me his manuscripts to type. He invited me to the Sunday feast and to Mukunda’s wedding. These were personalized inducements. He said, “This typing service isn’t mechanical. If you love me then I will love you.” That remark changed everything. It broke down the last barriers in my reaching out to him, overcame foolish prejudices that he was an Indian and an old man. He wasn’t! He was a transcendental spirit soul, he was not his body. I could love him. As he said to Yogi Denkar when Denkar said, “I love you,” “I love you too, but not this skin love.”

I changed to become his responsible son and render him practical service. Gave him my money. Shaved my head and put the *tilaka* markings on my body. Changed the sign that went into the temple window, by pressing in the plastic letters with the times of the classes, the Hare Krishna mantra, and the titles of the upcoming lectures, just as he told me.

I was a changed identity, and my old friends couldn’t even recognize me. I invited them to join, but when they didn’t want to come, they ceased to be my friends. Our relationships had been based on flimsy exchanges, buying marijuana and smoking it with them, showing them my writings for their approval. For the time being that didn’t matter as I considered my writings to be false ego. Until I followed Hayagriva and wrote “about Krishna!” On a last date with my former friend, Murray Mednick, I found myself singing the line from the *West Side Story* which the Puerto Ricans sing to Maria, “Stick to your own kind / one of your own kind” and he snapped back, “Then why don’t you stick to them?” And we parted forever in the street when he went into the hip hangout, the Cedar Bar, and I went home for a glass of sweet warm milk.

I changed radically, uprooted and left some things which I later found were false renunciation and a part of my self I still wanted, like my love of privacy and self-expression and writing. But in the basic things I changed forever. No intoxication, no illicit sex, no gambling or frivolous sports. Associate only with the devotees of Krishna. Chant sixteen rounds of *japa* daily. In the meeting of Prabhupada and myself, he remained unchanged and I changed,

dropped all my dross and came out a new being, a *bhakta* of Radha-Krishna and Lord Caitanya and an active servant of the Swami.

free writing in the autobiography

Narayana K. asked me if I was allowing myself to do creative writing in the autobiography, letting myself have freedom of spirit. I said yes because I seem to remember one entry was called “creative” but which I suppose I meant “fictive.” But mostly the writing is strictly historical. I would like to make some creative entries, but I’m not sure how I could do it. Mark Twain admits he’s not a good historian, and his recollections have embellishments in them. He is not certain whether an ancestor of his was known for having shot a governor in the hind leg or whether his relative had been shot by the governor, but he says, “in either case, it’s a good tale.” I do not want to make up tales about Prabhupada or myself— unless perhaps they were obviously offered up as fiction. Tell of a meeting Prabhupada had with the Pope or President Nixon? Tell of yourself as being there with him?

The meeting with the Pope would be confined with formality. Actually Prabhupada wrote a letter to the Pope in 1968 asking for a meeting to “chalk out” plans for world peace, but the Pope never answered. He would be expected to keep his speech confined to ecumenical platitudes and to not take too much time. But if

Prabhupada were allowed to talk he would not be afraid to bring up the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” and ask why the Roman Catholic church was supporting the slaughter of cows. He did that when he had an opportunity to speak to a bishop in Italy. He challenged the man, and it did not come off harmoniously. With the Pope also, it would be like talking to a brick wall. St. Augustine said that animals have no souls and killing them is permissible.

For creative writing I could stage a conversation where I discuss personal writing with Srila Prabhupada. I would tell how it can be seen as service to Krishna and a kind of indirect preaching, which would be of interest to people who are tired of too much proselytizing. I would love for Prabhupada to give his approval for this kind of writing and be sympathetic to how honesty and candid expressions disarm readers and make them able to receive the message of Lord Caitanya as coming from a writing friend. I think as long as he was assured I was doing it in *parampara*, he would approve. I have invested so much time and energy in this writing it would be good to have a conversation with Prabhupada about it. But what could I tell him? I describe the free writing process to him he might say it is nonsense to just let the hand move and say what comes into your mind. I would have to convince him of the liberating effect of bypassing the editorial censor and just writing from your heart. I would have to show him a piece of directed free writing that was Krishna conscious but very free and honest. Maybe he would be able to appreciate the end result. I am making these sentences from a free writing mindset and trying to introduce it into the autobiography. I’ve spent weeks at writing retreats where I wrote energetically in writing sessions and spoke of whatever came to mind, including *Srimad-Bhagavatam* paraphrases and things that were happening around me at the retreat.

Historically speaking, my autobiography does contain periods of free writing so it is not fabricated to tell about it — or to do fresh sessions of it. Yesterday Tripurari Swami said he was asked a question by a fellow, “Is Prabhupada present in his *murti*?” He said it was like a trap question, that if you answer “yes,” then the person can say, “then can’t Prabhupada give initiation?” Tripurari Swami said it was a Ritvik “got-you” question. He said Prabhupada was present but as a previous *acarya*. He believes the disciplic succession continues after Srila Prabhupada. In my case, I can act

as a *siksa* guru for many persons, but I can't initiate new disciples. This is creative personal writing in the diary style telling the news of what happened yesterday.

I can continue to write like this expressing my mind about the writing process and singing like the birds in the yard. Now I have raised the question of whether Prabhupada approves of it, and I have to say that I believe he does. He was a broadminded spirit and accepted anything that could be dovetailed in Krishna's service. To reject the art of free expression is a false or immature renunciation. To use it in Krishna's service is a higher form of renunciation called *yukta vairagya* by Rupa Goswami. I will continue with historical memoir, but I hope to be opened up to free writing also. This way I can increase the volume of the writing and indulge in one of my favorite passions — in the service of Krishna. Flow gently, sweet Afton, as I continue my praise and description of self and guru and Radha-Krishna.

spring growing

Srila Prabhupada is present in his *murti* form. He authorized this worship starting in Vrindavan where he ordered small *murtis* of himself along with Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Maharaj. They were lifelike resemblances. After he disappeared into his *nitya lila*, ISKCON made lifesize *murtis* of Srila Prabhupada and placed them on the *vyasanas* in the temples. They were so expertly made by Locana das that people mistakenly took it that a real person was sitting on the *vyasana*, and they awaited him to speak. Devotees gather daily for Prabhupada *arati* and sing a *bhajana* to the spiritual master. Prabhupada said it was important. In ways like this his presence is alive, and we do not let him slip into the past as a “previous *acarya*.” “He lives forever by his divine instructions and his disciple lives with him.” By simultaneously, new gurus arrive and accept disciples in *parampara*. The new gurus do not teach independently of Srila Prabhupada but humbly link their disciples to Prabhupada and Krishna, while taking responsibility to guide their disciples in practical ways, while overcoming the obstacles in devotional service. They are worshiped as regular gurus while worship of Prabhupada continues for all devotees in ISKCON as

he is considered the primary *sikṣā* guru out of all the previous *acaryas*.

Our Tulasi seeds have still not broken through the earth to appear as plants. B. is growing frustrated. He considers himself a plant cultivator and has had success with a number of non-Tulasi plants and flowers in our house. We have a grow-light focused on Tulasi, and I have watered her sufficiently, but still no seedling has appeared above the earth. We have heard that Tulasi grows as a barometer of your devotion and so we are worried that she has not yet favored us. We are trying to show our devotion by applying the various plant instructions, but direct devotional care may be required.

I heard Hridayananda Maharaj say that applying the devotional service activities in the mechanics does not guarantee reciprocation from Krishna. It must be done from a sincere heart in order to bring results. It's almost like karma from the past. Some people plant Tulasi seeds and within three to five days they see the plant growing, but others get no result. Is it sinful actions from the past that are hampering us? You still have some other seeds we can use for another planting.

The crocuses and daffodils are poking up in Sacisuta's property across the street. They are healthy and sturdy although they stay outdoors in the cool evenings. We are incubating our Tulasi's indoors in protective environments and artificial lights. She is part of my autobiography from 2011 spring as we try to coax her to live with us as a barometer of our devotion. B. is cultivating our yard, starting with clearing it of all debris, branches and metal and bamboo. He eventually wants to sow new grass and flowers. Our neighbors already appreciate his efforts to change the yard from an eyesore to a clean spot. His has many birds coming to the bird feeders with accommodations including seeds just for the golden finches. A feeder for bigger birds like starlings, so they leave the other feeders for the smaller birds, and plans to put out nectar for the humming birds in the summer. All this is overshadowed by our failure to grow the Tulasi Devis.

krishna in spring

The woodpecker is drilling on a tree trunk. A robin is hopping in the yard. It is spring, April 9. Krishna says, "Of seasons I am flower bearing spring." He identifies with the spring season as an indication of His opulence and presence in the material world. He says He is spring in answer to Arjuna's question, "How may I see You in the material world?" Spring is one of the *vibhūti*s or empowered, wonderful appearances which anyone can see and know as an incarnation of Krishna. T. S. Eliot says April is the cruelest month, "mixing memory with desire."

I don't see it that way because my life is not involved with romantic intrigues. I see it as the happy relief of the end of winter; the celebration of warmer weather and the first beginning of buds and flowers. I don't live in a memory of past springs; I embrace this present spring in all its glory.

Krishna cavorts with the *gopis* in spring, and He has his spring *rāsa* dance. All the flowers blossom with their aroma. He has nothing to do but swing in His hammock and play with the cowherd boys and *gopis* as He desires. Sometimes a demon comes, and He or Balarama finishes them off and returns to Their play.

A little later they perform *jhulan yatra*, and all the Deities in the temples are taken out and swung in flower-decorated swings.

The woodpecker rapidly raps the tree searching for bugs. They are in there, and so he searches and gets his share.

Krishna-kripa quoted Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati as saying *harinama sankirtana* was the emperor of *all sadhanas*. Every form of *sadhana* must have its connection with *harinama sankirtana* in order to have its meaning. He said this was the best quote he had ever found, and Agnideva said, “Wow!” I hope I connected to *harinama sankirtana* while describing the spring, otherwise it’s useless. We chant while we work, singing the Lord’s Names.

Also we should hear about Krishna and the devotees, *sraavanam kirtanam*. What did Rupa and Sanatana do after they met Lord Caitanya? They retired from their service to the Muslims and went to see Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Sanatana was detained in prison, but then he met the Lord at Benares. Rupa met Him at Dasavamedha Ghat and learned the confidential meaning of Krishna consciousness. Rupa and Sanatana were present when Vallabha Bhatta came to see the Lord. The two brothers ran away from Vallabha. Bhatta said, “Do not touch us, we are of a lower caste.” Sri Caitanya said, “Yes, don’t touch them. You are a great scholar of a higher caste, and they have associated with Muslims.” But He was indirectly hinting that Rupa and Sanatana were above caste considerations and Vallabha Bhatta should know it. Caitanya saw that Rupa and Sanatana were highly advanced devotees because they were chanting the Hare Krishna mantra, and Vallabha Bhatta should appreciate them. The two brothers acted very humbly, and Vallabha Bhatta acted very nicely with them taking the hint from Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Lord Caitanya also accepted Haridas Thakura, although he was born in a Muslim family. Such were the dealings of the transcendental Lord.

These are all part of my autobiography because I live with the devotees of Lord Caitanya. I try to hear His pastimes regularly and submissively, and that way I can be eligible to enter the *sanga* of Lord Caitanya.

I am writing on the porch, and it is still cool outside. But it is definitely early spring. It is Krishna wearing a coat and moving among the raked up leaves. It is Krishna gradually getting warmer, and the woodpecker is drilling the tree.

responding to challengers

Swamiji was speaking to a group of people from the Middlebrook community of New York State, where they took LSD under the guidance of Timothy Leary. Swamiji was saying LSD was not required for mind expansion; it could be attained by chanting Hare Krishna. One of the men asked the Swami if he had ever taken LSD. He said no, he never took any intoxicants, not even tea. There aren't many societies like that in India, he said. But the man thought he had "checkmated" Swamiji. How could he speak against LSD if he never experienced it? Swamiji said that of his own disciples many of them had taken LSD but now they had stopped. He called on Hayagriva to give a testimony. Hayagriva cleared his throat and spoke in loud Centurion tones. He said taking LSD was like taking off in a rocket — you experienced many wonderful things but then you had to land somewhere when you ran out of fuel. You had to come back to the material world and land in the ocean. Through Hayagriva, Swami checkmated the Middlebrook crowd. He went on to say that by chanting Hare Krishna you could reach the transcendental stage and not come down again. You could "stay high forever." The debate *was*

diffused. The Hare Krishna chanters go *Back to Godhead* and do not have to come back to this world. This was stated in the Vedic scriptures. The Middlebrook crowd was quieted and joined the chanting of Hare Krishna.

Prabhupada faced many challenges, and he was expert in his replies. At Harvard University a student asked him, "Are you happy?" And Prabhupada replied, "If I say yes will you believe me?" The student replied, "No." Prabhupada said, "Then why do you ask this question?" Another time Prabhupada was asked the same question and he replied, "Yes, I have many levels of happiness. For example, when I was a married man I had several sons, but I was not happy. Now that I have left my family life I have many many spiritual sons, and I am very happy." The Naxalites, a political anarchist group, challenged him with a death threat in Calcutta. They sent him a message: "Fly or Die." Prabhupada was holding a week-long *pandal* preaching event in the city. One day some Naxalite students showed up at the tent, and Prabhupada invited them to talk with him privately. He preached to them in a friendly, fatherly way and disarmed their hostility. He went on with his *pandal* program, and the Naxalites did not interfere. In England, at a lecture in the hall, a man asked Prabhupada why didn't he preach in India to the Indian politicians instead of coming to England? Prabhupada replied, "You are a big politician so I am speaking to you." The man was silent and sat down. Once a Western hippie showed up at a *pandal* program in Bombay and came on stage and engaged with Prabhupada in a debate of impersonalism versus personalism. Prabhupada became angry with the boy and began shouting at him. Some men in the audience became upset to see a *sadhu* turn angry and they left the Hall; Prabhupada didn't care for them.

Prabhupada met challenges in different ways. Sometimes he gave lengthy replies and sometimes he dismissed them with one-liners or completely ignored them. He was always ready to defend Krishna's honor, and he had a sharp reply ready for each occasion. Prabhupada could not bear to hear the impersonalists say that Krishna was not a person and He had no hands, or face or feet. As a representative of Krishna he took such remarks as personal insults and could not tolerate them. He defied the Mayavadis and atheists with logic and argument, delivered with passion.

In *Bhagavad-gita* Krishna calls such people *mudhas*, or asses and fools. Prabhupada used Krishna's own words to denounce His detractors. He said that some of His godbrothers had been critical of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati's "chopping technique" against such rascal challengers. But Prabhupada approved of his Guru Maharaj's mood and followed it himself "I have to do it," Prabhupada said, like a policeman who captures the thief. No one should feel offended by Prabhupada's attacking challenges. He did it innocently and purely and often demonlike persons accepted Prabhupada's chastisements and felt themselves corrected.

coming to prabhupada

I don't have to fabricate my coming to Prabhupada. The actual history is ideal. As soon as I met him I moved my apartment — for something suitable for a fresh start in life. My former apartment was so rundown my former landlord was not even collecting rent on it. I had painted a picture on the wall and had added a boy in the sea after I first met Swamiji. But it was a noisy Puerto Rican section. I moved to a quieter cleaner place near the Swami on First Street, just around the corner from the storefront. I left all my long playing record albums, and I released my cats in the building. I left my bed behind and brought a new sleeping bag which I slept in on the floor. I chained my manual typewriter to a radiator and brought a pot for warming milk and a pan for making stiff *chapatis*. I was a new man in that apartment. I had met the landlady in the street and made a favorable impression on her in my summer suit jacket and presenting myself as a case worker in the Welfare Department. I loved the convenience of just walking around the block and arriving at Twenty-six Second Avenue and then walking five blocks to get to my workplace.

The Mott Street boys had joined in the group, but I was a lone person and at first I lived alone. Later I allowed Rayarama to move in with me, and I let the others use my bathroom to take a morning shower. Going to meet the Swami was the nectar of life, and I did it every morning for *Caitanya-caritamrta* class and every evening for kirtana and his *Bhagavad-gita* class. He was so kind and inviting, accepting me as I was, and giving me typing tasks. I gave him my money and that solidified my relationship. He called me “Sat-svaroop.” I don’t have to make up the early days. I just have to remember them as they were. Gradually more intimacy developed and a sense of belonging to his group. I was learning the philosophy of Krishna and eating lunch with him daily and taking “heavenly porridge” with the boys in the morning. It was a favorable burgeoning time. I remember leaving the storefront in the morning and walking to my workplace, feeling that I was a cowherd boy with my necktie in my back pocket. I had friendly talks with Rayarama and the others and felt they were my brotherhood of friends. I had moments alone with the Swami when I asked him questions about the philosophy and commented on how I was feeling. I was no longer intimidated by the city buildings in the concrete jungle. I saw them as material energy, and now they were temporary and in a sense unreal. Real was Krishna in the spiritual world. We had pictures of Radha and Krishna in Goloka Vrindavan. Gradually we were setting the foundation for lifelong commitment starting with the summer of 1966. We kind of knew what we were getting into.

I knew the Swami as my spiritual master, the guru of my soul. He was guiding me into my relationship with Krishna through him. We needed him to be there, and we wanted him and he was there. We knew where to find him, in his apartment, in his temple. He started a Sunday Love Feast and chanting in Tompkins Square Park. He was like putting milk in a bowl, and we were like cats lapping it up. Everything was auspicious; even as the season changed. So life revolved around the activities with the Swami and the future seemed eternal. We didn’t think of it ending. This was just fine, getting up at 1 a.m. and chanting *japa* on the red beads, sitting on the floor. Then dressing and leaving the apartment, entering the streets and passing people on your way to the storefront. As dependable as the Big Ben clock in London, the Swami would enter the storefront and step out of his shoes and sit

and lead us in the morning tune chant for twenty minutes. Then he set up his reel-to-reel tape recorder and started lecturing about Sanatana Swami's getting out of jail and going to meet Lord Caitanya in Benares. A cliff hanger lecture every morning. I can keep going back and remembering, and it's always there. I don't have to make it up. It all actually happened, and it was wonderful as he took me up and molded me into a devotee of Krishna consciousness. He is my Swami, and I hope to remember him now and at the hour of my death and to somehow go to him in that same mood as when I first joined him.

creative productivity

A particularly productive period was just at the beginning of the twenty-first century when I was living in Ireland and painting and writing. I used to do five canvasses in a day. I had all the equipment; stretched canvasses, paint, brushes, oil sticks and spray bottles. I worked freely covering a canvas with color and shapes. I did many portraits of Prabhupada and myself with him; on Radha-Krishna and wildly dancing *sadbhus* and sitting *japa babajis*. I included Celtic symbols and dripping columns and spotty spray bottle effects. Silavati used to bring me things for my visionary garden like spare tires, a washing machine, ropes from the sea. I assembled them in the back yard in an organic, living collection. I hoped to get *Raw Vision* magazine to come out and photograph it as outsider art. It was good stuff.

I didn't worry whether it was Krishna conscious. Most of the figures wore Gaudiya Vaishnava *tilaka*. They were recognizable as devotees engaged in celebrative Krishna consciousness. The rain fell on my visionary garden, but I dressed the figures in raincoats and put protective veneer on the wooden faces. The garden was a grand period of free expression, and it was sad when it had to

come down. We moved it to California, but it was never the same. The paintings grew into a gallery of Krishna conscious figures and demoniac faces, some done very quickly from a rich, mixed palette. The man from Govinda's Gallery, Chris Murray, in Washington, D.C., came and made a selection for a one man show in D.C. We made a color catalog of the exhibit and got a favorable review in the *Washington Post*. I tailed off on my painting career and concentrated on writing and reading. I don't find the extra strength, inspiration and confidence to go down into the basement and work on art.

Another period of creative productivity was the writing of books in writing retreats, often in Europe. We would rent a house in the country for a month, and I would do marathon writing sessions on no particular subject but the raw energy of self-expression. The books I wrote have titles like *Progresso*, *Last Days of the Year* and *Lough Derg Diary*. They are free writing accounts of the writing process and a diary of the retreat setting. Some of them are written with great energy, like *Last Days of the Year* produced in a farmhouse in Collnacopague, Ireland, typing feverishly on a rented typewriter several times a day just pounding out what came to mind. We have assembled them as homemade books but not published them. Perhaps some day they can have readers.

More formal taped books were also written in writing retreats and edited for publication. *Vaishnava Compassion*, some books on Prabhupada, and collections of poetry came out like that. Thus I produced a writing career, which resulted in over one hundred books of full size. I leave them in print as a legacy and print excerpts of them daily in my Internet website. It is a virtual life dedicated to the writing process and something I am proud of. It is my legacy, and I hope my disciples will maintain it after I'm gone. It is a form of autobiography aside from this deliberate project produced late in my life.

invalidism

Last December I overstressed myself traveling to Philadelphia and giving several lectures on my Vyasa-puja celebration and then traveling back to New York. The night after I returned I collapsed and fell to the floor in the bathroom where B. discovered me. I was taken in an emergency condition to the hospital where I was diagnosed as having pneumonia and confined to bed. I had a difficult experience in the hospital with an IV needle in one arm and a blood needle in the other and having to pass stool in bed and be cleaned by the nurses — so difficult that I rebelled and tried to get myself discharged before the doctors gave permission. I spoke to the hospital psychiatrist who warned me of the dire consequences of discharging myself without the doctor's permission and waited three days until they would let me out I am still recovering from the incident and now I wear a "life-line," a button I can press in case of an emergency and I get in immediate touch with the hospital. I am recovered from the pneumonia, but feel fragile, so much so that I can't add drawing and painting to my daily activities.

Tripurari Maharaj reminded me yesterday that I have been ill for many years, with headaches. I remember spending my Vyasa-puja in 1983 in bed with a headache in Trinidad, and some years later having a headache during an aborted Vyasa-puja event in Philadelphia. So I have been what they said of Voltaire, “a fabulous invalid” for many years. That is a prominent feature of my life story. My invalidism is “fabulous” because I have managed to write so many books despite my headaches and until recently I also kept up my travels. Tripurari Swami has not been in touch with me so I gave him a brief summary of my struggles, saying that I have tried every kind of regimen, naturopathic, Ayurvedic, homeopathic, etc., until settling for allopathic medicine. I can manage my headaches fairly well now. They tend to come every day, but by taking preventative medicine and over-the-counter pain killers, I can subdue the headaches within an hour and return to normal functioning. The fact that the headaches come frequently restricts me from traveling, which seems to exacerbate my condition. I mostly stay at home now in my new house in upstate New York.

I do some exercise, a daily walk, yoga once a week and Thai yoga massage once a week. But otherwise I am sedentary. I sit in my chair and write my autobiographical episodes. I am satisfied with this output, and I am compiling a large book. I don't see many people although we regularly have guests at our house. I chant my *japa* rounds early in the morning and write a daily poem and select excerpts from my past writing from my daily Internet website. Mine is a virtual life with contacts mainly through cyberspace. I associate with my roommates in my house and my neighbors in the neighborhood such as Sacisuta, T.J. and the flow of preachers who pass through the region. Currently Tripurari Swami and his followers are living here. So this is a health report by way of reporting my autobiographical data on my life as lived for thirty years or so. I am an invalid, but making a contribution by writing books and daily web postings and living among devotees in Stuyvesant Falls.

miscellaneous

Yesterday slipped by, and I wrote two episodes: 1) Productive Eras, and 2) Invalidism. Today I am writing things that come to my mind. Prahupada's own logo for *Back to Godhead* magazine in India was Lord Caitanya giving off effulgence of light to the people in darkness.

His spiritual master is the connection to Lord Caitanya: Godhead is light; Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience. So you did not get out of *maya* by your own reading of books and chanting. It was the mercy of the spiritual master, freely given. He is the light at the end of the tunnel, the only way out.

Servant of ISKCON. What is ISKCON? Working with a kennel of unruly men? "Satsvarupa always agrees with the last person he spoke to." Parties trying to get what they want. Sincerely serving Srila Prabhupada and catching his attention. There were many doing that. Who is regarded as a slouch and who is a dynamic favorite with lots of money and men for a while? Do you serve because you must, or from your heart? Breathe deeply and take cold showers, Prabhupada said so. Then he said we should go out

with the *sankirtana* party and sing in the streets. Devotees should sell magazines and books. For some years I worked on the magazine, *Back to Godhead*. Wrote articles taken from the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and written in my own words. Take pictures of the devotees on *sankirtana*. Then the BBT leader, Ramesvara Maharaj, wanted to kill *Back to Godhead* because it didn't make enough profit. We started printing six issues a year, then I dropped out. The magazine began to cater exclusively to members of the movement with no outreach. Book distribution was the golden way back to Godhead. Sell the book, by hook or by crook. By scam methods of salesmanship, the movement got a black eye as the "beggars at the airport." People hated us. We went on selling. Finally court cases shut down the airports, book distribution went down.

Devotees began selling Korean paintings at mark-up prices. Scandals of women's parties led by a man. A man and his harem of women sellers. It lasted a while making big profits, before it was exposed, and they all closed down. Painting sales continued without the hanky-panky. But the devotees had no spiritual *sadhana*, just sell paintings, under dubious conditions. Big temples were bought and anxiety was purchased in the form of high mortgages. Bad days for spiritual life. Now in many places in the USA., temples are understaffed, with devotees imported from Russia and Eastern Europe. The congregations are mostly of Indian origin, with not many native Americans attending. Educational courses in Prabhupada's books are taught in Vrindavan and Mayapur for *Bhakti-sastri* and *Bhaktivaibhava* degrees. Interest in *japa* retreats and long *kirtana* sessions. Rathayatras throughout the summer. Devotees teaching yoga. Internet schisms attacking ISKCON, politics of the GBC. Loyal devotees working at jobs and raising families, somehow seeking *sanga*. Prabhupada worshiped as founder-*acarya*. ISKCON very strong in certain places of the world where guru leaders have big communities, elsewhere it is weakening. Keep it in your own heart as you grow old.

prabhupada and the vrhad-mrdanga

In compiling *Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta* I very much liked the section where he was living in the Radha-Damodara temple as a *sannyasi* and writing *Srīmad-Bhagavatam* and maintaining an office in Old Delhi at Chippiwada and raising money to print his books. I wasn't there but the letters and documents and interviews reveal a poignant story. He kept a record of his expenditures, and he was very frugal and poor. He was a mendicant with no salary income from business. He collected donations from prominent members of society like Hanuman Prasad Poddar, the publisher, and Sumati Morarji, head of Scindia Steamship Lines. He would write day and night at his Radha-Damodara room, studying the previous *acaryas* and making an English translation and purport. English was not his mother tongue, but he quoted from the *Bhagavatam* itself that transcendental literature, even if imperfectly composed, would create a revolution in society. He then took his typed pages and carried them to Delhi or Bombay where he showed them to his patrons. When they approved and gave him sizable donations, he personally bought the paper and had it carried by rickshaw to the printers. There they printed a galley proof and he took it to

Chippiwada and made proofreading corrections and returned it to the printer. They printed the first hardbound copy of First Canto, Volume 1, in 1961 and kept half the copies until he could sell them. He went around to libraries and bookstores and sold the books for seven rupees a copy. He then went back to writing and produced a second volume and a third volume and completed the First Canto. He had three volumes ready to take to America to make a presentation of Bhagavat dharma. The charm of his simple life in Vrindavan absorbed in literary labors, and his work in Delhi and elsewhere to raise money and print the manuscripts is a poignant and single-minded story of a mendicant who knew the value of playing on the *brhad-mrdanga* or the printing press. His spiritual master had told him “if you ever get money, print books” and that printing books was more important than opening temples. He had followed that instruction with blind faith and it came out successful. When he went to America he found college-trained editors who helped him make new editions with corrections in the English grammar and spelling. The books were now ready to pass the scrutiny of professors and librarians and his growing number of students read the flood of Prabhupada *Bhaganatam* production throughout the next ten years, publishing over sixty books, including *Caitanya-caritamrta*, *The Nectar of Devotion*, and three volumes of the *Krishna* book. His dedication to the *brhad-mrdanga* is awesome. He kept it up while managing a worldwide religious movement (including travels all around the world). He did it all through bouts of illness. Every night he would rise from sleep at 1 a.m. and open his book of nine commentaries by the previous acaryas. He dictated a translation of word-to-word Sanskrit into English. Then he wrote a “purport” to each verse incorporating the *tikas* (commentaries) of the previous *acaryas* as well as his own insights and experiences from leading the Hare Krishna movement all over the world.

“Little drops of water wear away the stone. In this way I have written all my books,” he said. His commitment to constant writing would convert into a library of transcendental volumes admired by professors in the field who wrote favorable reviews of his books. I will always worship his act of dedication to writing and will read his books in gratitude for his magnanimous gift. He said his books will be the law books for the next ten thousand years and I believe it.

The human story of his labors is inspiring, but Prabhupada also said that he did not write his books personally but that they were being written by Krishna. All glories to the Bhaktivedanta purports.

