

Thriving In Monastic Training

Don, I gave you every opportunity to earn a personal merit badge for your magnanimous - albeit rhetorical - handshake of gratitude with the mysterious and phantom religious superiors who rejected your monastic vocation but you chose instead the high road of full disclosure: a swift kick to their collective privates.

It is true: I profited immensely from those seven years of intense monastic programming – in fact, I thrived. Every minute of every day laid out, nothing left to chance, no decisions to make because there were no choices. Even a military regimen could not be as demanding, I think. Take our summer time prescribed novel reading for example: even though the novels had to be pre-approved, setting aside 90 minutes each afternoon, six days-a-week for required novel reading covered a lot of books.

My leaving monastic religious life was different from yours in at least one respect: I made the decision to leave for the sake of undertaking a new calling. I rejected one calling for the sake of another. In your case, you were, for all intents and purposes, dropped off at a street corner with instructions to find your way forward.

You will recall that other classmates of ours were simply driven to the Napa Greyhound bus depot and given a ticket home. Not even a good-bye, good luck farewell – more like a good riddance.

Not that I could have lifted a finger of protest, or did. I was always disturbed about how the religious order could dismiss candidates out-of-hand with no thought given, let alone any assistance, to their transition, and even worse, forbidding those who remained behind – God's chosen ones - from even discussing the departure of their soon-to-be-forgotten friend and colleague. An amazing display of the institutional privilege associated the Catholic religious-caste system during the 1950's.

Years later, long after I had left religious life, I often viewed myself as some how privileged and set apart from others – that I was owed some special respect. Complete nonsense, of course, but it was one of those cultural relics left over from the religious caste system.

