

April 25, 1997

Appendix U

Affidavit

I hereby affirm to the truth of the following based upon first hand knowledge or upon information and belief as appropriate:

My father, mother, three siblings and I moved to the Community (also known as the Messianic Communities of New England) in July of 1980 (I was 7 years old). I had been living there for two years when my father, Thomas Gregoire, left the Community. Soon afterwards he took his four children out of the Community and was given full custody of us. We lived with him in South Burlington, Vermont for a short time, then in San Diego, California. I returned to the Community in 1992 (at the age of 19), as two of my siblings (Charity and Michael Gregoire) had done a year earlier.

According to transcripts of the hearing in my father's custody case, I was supposedly subjected to frequent child abuse in the Community. When I read these records a few years ago I was shocked. I have never, as a child or adult member, witnessed such abuse occurring within the Community.

I am here because I have been deeply affected by the sincere love of my friends. I not only see the parents within these communities as wholeheartedly devoted to caring for their children, but I have never seen children who are more genuinely happy.

I believe my father tried to be a loving parent to me, but I see that the environment outside the Community opposed me from finding happiness without hurting others. I was unable to be kind, open, and loving in that environment because I saw it would make me subject to the abuse of others.

Here in the Community I am able to love because our whole life is centered around building each others' character. This is a place of hope and peace, and I would not trade this life for anything this world has to offer.

Paul I. Gregoire

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Glada McClung

GLADA McCLUNG, NOTARY PUBLIC
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES 2/14/97

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Ten years after the raid



Luke Wiseman was eight years old on June 22, 1984, when State Police took him and 111 other children from the Northeast Kingdom Community Church to a court hearing in Newport. An interview with Mr. Wiseman on page thirty begins an eight-page section on the controversial Island Pond Raid and its aftermath.

Photo by Bethany M. Dunbar

A Decade After the Raid

Luke Wiseman, a child of the Island Pond raid

by Bethany M. Dunbar

ISLAND POND — Luke Wiseman had a nightmare when he was eight or nine years old.

He had the dream one night when camping with friends and family from his church and community, the Northeast Kingdom Community Church. In the dream, he and his friends and family were standing on a beach together when a huge tidal wave came crashing towards them, struck them and washed back out to sea.

When the wave receded, the Community members were still standing on the beach together, shaken but unharmed.

The boy knew the dream was a premonition, especially when another person in the group, an adult woman, had the same dream that night.

Not long after that, the state of Vermont raided the Community and gathered up its 112 children — including Luke Wiseman — from their homes in Island Pond to check them for signs of physical and emotional abuse. The raid was an attempt by social workers, police, prosecutors and other authorities to settle once and for all the question of whether all children were at risk of abuse by the very fact they lived in the Community.

Luke Wiseman is 18 now, the son of an influential member of the Community named Eddie Wiseman. Luke considers the allegations ridiculous.

As a child sitting around the courthouse waiting for the judges and lawyers to decide his fate, he wanted nothing more desperately than to get a chance to tell a judge that the prosecutors and everyone else were simply wrong about his parents.

"They barged in on my mother, and she wasn't even dressed," he said, clearly still angry when he recalls that morning. "We were facing being taken away from our parents."

He added, with a snort of contempt, that he didn't even know if a judge would believe him because he might just say he'd been brainwashed.

Luke Wiseman never did get his day in court because the raid was ruled unconstitutional, and the children were sent home without being checked for abuse.

A legal question lingers about the constitutionality of the raid. One District Court judge signed a warrant authorizing the raid, and another District Court judge sent the children home, ruling the attempt unconstitutional. But the matter was never taken to Supreme Court on appeal.

That legal loose end does not bother Mr. Wiseman, however. In his mind, Judge Frank

Mahady, who sent him and the other children home that day, has vindicated the Community once and for all.

"He's a righteous judge. We appreciate him for doing that," said Mr. Wiseman. "Judge Wolchik was misguided."

Judge Joseph Wolchik is the judge who signed the warrant authorizing the raid. Mr. Wiseman pointed out that Judge Wolchik also publicly apologized for his part in the bungled effort.

Both judges have died in the meantime, and Mr. Wiseman mentioned that the Community members had a chance to sing to Judge Mahady on his sickbed via the telephone and thank him for what he did. Also, Mr. Wiseman's mother spoke at his funeral.

"I'm glad I was born into this life....
We didn't have some oppressive, mandatory,
abusive upbringing"

"I'm glad I was born into this life," said Mr. Wiseman. "When I think back on my childhood, all I have is good memories.... We didn't have some oppressive, mandatory, abusive upbringing."

Mr. Wiseman spent his childhood climbing mountains, canoeing, sailing, playing soccer, and having "training," the Community's form of school. Children learn reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, and science, he said.

He said the biggest difference between his childhood and most kids' is television.

"We didn't want to watch TV," he said. "I don't need to be watching Bugs Bunny. Our life's so much more full than that."

He said the allegations of abuse were way overblown, partly because people who left the Community were angry, which led them to exaggerate, and partly because the public at large didn't understand the Community and was afraid and superstitious.

Once abuse allegations started, Mr. Wiseman said, it was like feathers flying out of a pillow — you couldn't put them back in. Many of the allegations were later recanted, but the media paid much more attention to the original accusations than the recantations.

He said the media and cult-breaking groups fueled the fire, and, to his mind, were largely responsible for the frenzy of allegations.

"Some people like digging up old cats," he said. "They're very narrow-minded and biased."

Mr. Wiseman acknowledges that physical discipline is used on children in the Community. But he said it is not as extreme as it has been

portrayed. For example, the wooden sticks that were picked up by police as evidence, supposedly used for discipline, were actually dowels from the wood shop used to make furniture. He said the discipline sticks are flimsy, flexible balloon sticks that don't leave a mark on the body.

If any parent was abusive, he said, they would be sent out of the Community.

"We totally disagree with child abuse," he said. "Discipline is never done out of anger. It just stings his hand and doesn't leave any marks."

He said the discipline in the Community "is far more non-abusive than a belt or something that a lot of parents use out of anger...."

"In the proverbs it says a man hates his child who doesn't discipline him," said Mr. Wiseman. "A hundred years ago everyone disciplined their children, and they respected people who were older than them."

Although he has never lived outside of the Community, Mr. Wiseman has traveled quite extensively and seen a lot of various types of people out in the world. He currently lives in Boston and has lived in California.

He said from what he's seen of the outside world, it's a lot of troubled people "breaking windows and doing drugs and sleeping around with everyone...."

"I've been out in the scene. I know what it's all about," he said. "Even the richest people on earth are miserable. What counts is having a relationship with your Creator."

In the outside world, he said, "There's no morals left in people. The more of the world I see, the more I hate it."

Mr. Wiseman said he has no need of college because he can learn anything he needs from people within the group. There are people within the Community who are architects, musicians, printers, landscapers, farmers, and candle and soap makers.

"We function on our giftings," he said. He has learned farming and building and is lately most interested in music — Irish and traditional folk music especially. He plays the piano and writes songs.

"I'd just like people to know the truth about us," he said. "I just want people to know that we weren't abused, and we lived a happy life...."

"We don't expect everyone to believe everything that we believe, but we expect men in government to acknowledge our rights as citizens of the United States to choose our religion."

These are, Mr. Wiseman noted, the rights this country was founded on.

A Decade After the Raid

Paul Gregoire — choosing a black and white life

by Bethany M. Dunbar

ISLAND POND — Custody cases sparked the whole controversy surrounding the children in the Northeast Kingdom Community Church.

Well before the state of Vermont decided to pick up 112 children in a raid on the Community (now known as the Messianic Community) ten years ago, allegations of child abuse first came to public attention from custody battles waged by parents in Superior Court.

In at least three of these, judges ruled that the children would be better off with their fathers than back in the Community with mothers where they might be at risk of physical discipline that was described as extremely severe.

Judge Frank Mahady, the judge who eventually ruled the raid unconstitutional, is the same judge who ruled in the Gregoire case in May 1983.

His ruling called the Gregoire children the victims of "some sort of holy war" between their parents, and he added that he had great reservations about granting custody to either individual.

But according to one of those children, Paul Gregoire, the children were never abused in the Community. Out of 11 children in three families, all but one, Mr. Gregoire's brother, wound up rejoining the Community later on. Mr. Gregoire is quite confident his 19-year-old brother Aaron will find his way there eventually.

"It's just an amazing place," he said. "People all working together and living together for the same purpose."

Mr. Gregoire said the children do get physically disciplined with small flexible rods, but reports of these spankings have been greatly exaggerated.

In fact, Mr. Gregoire was recently called to testify in another case in Rutland, and he was asked to read a description on the stand of beatings being regularly administered to the children. In Island Pond, Judge Mahady wrote, the Gregoire children "were subjected to frequent and methodical physical abuse by adult members of the Community, in the form of hours-long whippings with balloon sticks."

Mr. Gregoire reacted with shock at the news that these descriptions were of beatings that had supposedly been administered to him and his brothers.

"It's just barely enough to sting," said Mr. Gregoire in an interview in Island Pond recently. "It's not like abuse."

"I don't remember one single time having any discipline that I walked away feeling worthless," he added. "People explained to me what I did

wrong, and there was forgiveness."

Paul Gregoire was seven years old in 1980 when his parents first joined the Community. His parents, Tom and Eileen Gregoire, also had three other children, two boys and a girl.

About two years later, Tom Gregoire left the Community with his children. They went to South Burlington and lived for a time with Juan Mattatall, another father who got custody of his children when he left.

The Mattatalls went to Florida, and Mr. Mattatall has since died. The Gregoires ended up in San Diego, California.

Since then, Mr. Gregoire said, all five Mattatall children and two in another family, the Alexanders, have come back to the Community.

Mr. Gregoire, who is 21 years old, re-joined the Community two years ago. He had been a frequent visitor, and for a while he even lived at the Community in Boston and had a job outside it.

"When I left California and came to New England, I just came to visit my relatives," he said. "People were really hospitable."

He said he was a Christian all through the time he went to school and developed his own computer graphics business in California. He was successful but not happy.

"I used to have so much strife in my life about how to live for God," Mr. Gregoire said. He used to go to bed at night and wonder why he couldn't do things the way he wanted to. Joining the Community allowed him to leave all that stress behind.

"It's just so liberating," he said.

The Community has put his talents with the computer to work in its printing enterprises. Along with graphics, he writes articles for Community publications, including readers for the children that combine history and personal experiences.

Since he joined the Community, Mr. Gregoire has discovered talents he didn't even know he had, including cooking. He likes to cook millet and tofu with special sauces that make these healthy foods as tasty as eggs.

He also likes to take care of the children, sing with them, and teach them to sing. He got one group singing two harmonies and one melody.

Dancing and singing are a big part of the Community's celebrations, and the children are a big part of that. Mr. Gregoire said the kids love that kind of activity and even write some of the songs themselves.

In this fashion, and in other ways, creativity is encouraged in the children in the Community. But fantasies like Santa Claus are not allowed.

Mr. Gregoire said he doesn't understand why people make up a fantasy like Santa Claus, basically lying to their children when they're



Paul Gregoire in Island Pond.

little.

"We think that kind of damages the children," he said. "That's abuse."

He said they like to be real with the children and teach them how to do interesting things like making soap and candles.

"It's just such a good environment for raising your children," he said. "You don't see divorce in the Community. I know that it's black and white. It's totally black and white from what I have been in."

He said he personally feels much more confidence about his future in the Community than he would have had on the outside world. He said having lived in the outside world, he doesn't believe that Jesus Christ came to earth so that people could live the way they do there.

Joining the Community meant giving up certain material things. But Mr. Gregoire said that was of little concern to him.

"Paul the Apostle said what he had to give up was nothing compared to what he got," said Mr. Gregoire.

Reporter's note: When I set out to do interviews with grown-up children of the raid, my idea was to find one person who chose to stay in the Community, and one who left. I wanted to get the different perspectives those two people might offer.

According to people in the Community, there may not be very many people who had lived in the Community as a child at the time of the raid and then left, so I have instead written up interviews with two Community members with different perspectives of their own.

But I am still interested in talking to a grown-up child of the raid, or of the Community, who might be living in the "outside world." So if any reader knows of such a person, and if that person is willing to do an interview, I would appreciate a chance to talk with him or her.

As Loudon says, thanks for reading mine. — B.M.D.