**13 questions answered for kid**

1. I was born in 1975 in Bombay, India  
  
2. Growing up in a cult was very frustrating and strange. I was not  
allowed to go to school like other children because the cult leader  
convinced everyone that Jesus was coming back to earth any moment, and  
we would all be resurrected and go to heaven for eternity. The cult  
believed that education was a waste of time because no one would need an  
education in heaven. I was taught to read and write by my parents so I  
could study the bible and memorize it by writing down whole chapters of  
the bible at one time. They believed in evangelism, which meant that as  
children we had to approach people and ask if they would like to be  
“saved” and give up their religion to become Christians by praying  
to receive Jesus as their savior. The cult leader set all the rules and  
everyone was required to follow them – no matter how ridiculous. For  
example, no one was allowed to use more than 3 sheets of toilet paper  
when they went to the bathroom or to use sugar for any reason.   
  
3. My earliest memory was visiting my grandparents in Boston when I was  
3 years old. My grandparents were very kind and I remember them taking  
me to the aquarium where I saw dolphins up close.  
  
  
4. Growing up in a bi-racial family was very difficult, because every  
time we had to move to another country, people thought that my parents  
had kidnapped my younger brother and sister, who were brown skinned  
because they were half Sri-Lankan. This always made me nervous and upset  
as I thought my brother and sister would be taken away from us, and I  
loved them very much and didn’t want anything bad to happen to them  
just because they didn’t look like me or my two other brothers.  
  
5. I started to think that something was wrong when I was almost nine  
years old because the cult leader said he heard a message (prophecy)  
from god saying that the end of the world was going to be that year,  
when Haley’s comet was seen. I remember being excited by the idea of  
flying to heaven, as they said we would. Then I became angry and  
disappointed when nothing happened and my parents and everyone in the  
cult carried on life as usual as if nothing had happened. I remember  
thinking that either the cult leader was making things up, or not really  
hearing from god, or that Jesus was lame and couldn’t be bothered to  
come to earth when he was supposed to. Also, a lot of the things they  
believed were very strange and I didn’t believe that anyone should be  
forced to do things that were illegal, (like bribing officials with  
cigarettes and whisky whenever we needed to get new visas for living in  
South Asia, etc.   
  
6. I managed to keep my sanity because as I grew older, I knew that I  
would one day find a way to leave the cult and live on my own and have  
freedom. In the meantime, I kept myself amused with all of the  
ridiculous bible stories we were forced to read that didn’t make any  
sense – or to read the writings of the cult leader that were a bunch  
of rambling nonsense articles by a crazy man who thought that he had  
supernatural powers like Superman, etc.   
  
7. Some of the crazier beliefs of the cult were that no one was allowed  
to have any immediate families. They said that all the children that  
were born into the cult were “every ones children” and so any adult  
could spank any child for something they thought they were doing wrong  
and the parents couldn’t do anything about it. They also believed that  
once people joined the cult as adults, they were supposed to “forsake  
all” and give all of belongings to the cult – including money,  
luggage, clothes and jewelry and other things so that god would be happy  
with them for giving up their material possessions. The cult also  
believed that whenever we anyone moved into a new house, they had to  
walk around the whole property, into every room and bathroom and pray  
against the evil spirits that they believed lived everywhere and would  
only go away with fervent prayers to god.  
  
8. Some of the funny memories I have are things the cult decided to do  
with children when they were bad. For example, they would make us stand  
in the corner of a room with our noses against a cold wall and our  
bodies bent out until we almost fell into the wall itself. But our noses  
held us up and prevented us from falling. We had to stay in the corner  
for hours some times and if we touched the wall with our hands, we would  
have to stand there longer. One of my brothers would always get into  
mischief with me, and so we were always put in the corner of a room on  
the opposite end of each wall and we would laugh and turn our heads and  
make stupid faces at each other to keep ourselves entertained. We were  
supposed to be praying to god for forgiveness. When the adults decided  
we had “prayed” long enough, they let us come out of the corner and  
usually our feet were asleep and it was difficult to walk so we would  
laugh about that and walk all weirdly like Charlie Chaplain on purpose.  
We fooled the adults all the time. This is just one example of many.   
  
9. Moving so often sucked because we could never keep in touch with our  
friends in the cult who moved away to another city or country every 6  
months or so like we did.

10. Having to lie and constantly avoid the law was very scary, because  
my parents did it so often and made us kids a part of their deceptions.  
For example, it is illegal to tamper with or alter a US passport in any  
way, and it is a punishable offense. But my parents let my younger  
sister scribble in all of our passports so that they could go to the  
Embassy and get new ones when we had too many visa stamps in our  
passports and the Indian (and other police) would get suspicious about  
why we moved so often on tourist visas because my parents never worked.  
Another time, they had me throw all of our passports in the laundry and  
wash them so that the ink from all of the visa stamps ran together and  
were illegible. Then we all went to the US embassy to get new passports  
(again!) and they blamed it on their stupid daughter for not checking my  
dad’s jeans (which supposedly had all the passports) before washing  
them.  
  
11. I got my sense intense desire for justice and fairness and stopping  
exploitation from the way I was treated in the cult where I was not  
allowed any freedom and was always blamed for everything the younger  
children did around me. I was punished very often and even had an  
exorcism performed on me to “cast out evil spirits” from me when I  
was 15 years old. I also got my dark sense of humor, sarcasm and an  
appreciation for absurdity from growing up in the cult as people  
believed the most insane things that made no sense to me growing up. I  
learned to laugh at a lot of the craziness otherwise I would literally  
have gone insane. For example, my parents believed the bible verse that  
said, “I will supply all your needs” and so they never worked. When  
we didn’t have food they would make us all get down on the ground on  
our hands and knees with our butts sticking up in the air and pray for  
god to supply food as the younger children cried from hunger. One day we  
were praying and three coconuts fell on our tin roof and my dad said:  
“see, I told you, god would supply!” I thought god was a jerk for  
only sending three coconuts to feed 20 people. Other times random people  
would give my parents bags of rice, which they also thought was a  
“miracle of god” only to find out that the rice was infested with  
weevils (a kind of bug) and had small rocks in it that we had to clean  
out before we could eat it. I’m sure many people laughed at my parents  
for being so stupid.   
  
12. I got out of the cult when I was 21 years old – just before you  
were born, Cheryl. I taught English as a volunteer when I moved to  
Thailand so I could convince people to become Christians and pray to  
receive Christ as their savior eventually after supposedly seeing what a  
“good Christian” I was. But I secretly worked out a way to get paid  
for the teaching I was doing, and I saved almost enough money to buy a  
plane ticket to Boston to “visit my sick grandparents for 2 weeks”  
as the cult members thought it would be a good opportunity for me to  
pray for my grandparents and make them receive Christ too. What they  
didn’t know is that my grandparents secretly sent me a plane ticket to  
one of my students addresses and I left Thailand, 3 months pregnant with  
you, Cheryl, with no plans to come back. It took a few years to save  
enough money to get our own house and live alone where we could have  
total freedom and do whatever we want, which for me, was getting an  
education I had always wanted. I had to always delay things and tell  
people in the cult house that I lived in that I was coming back after I  
had my baby, and other lies like that to keep them from looking for me  
and forcing me to come back to the cult.   
  
13. Coming to America for the first time was very exciting but also very  
scary because I had never lived in big cities before. I didn’t know  
many things that people just take for granted because their parents  
teach them things as they are growing up. For example, how to drive, how  
to open a bank account, how to pay for things with a credit card (it  
seemed like play money), how to use public transportation, etc. Luckily,  
my grandparents and Aunt Marlena and Tracy helped me learn most of these  
things and they were angry at my parents for being so neglectful and not  
preparing me for life in the world. Slowly, I learned how to live in  
America, and it has gotten better and easier every year. 

**Found resources: Updated 2/28/2012**

Cult created/produced media:

Dramas and Radio shows

<http://www.nubeat.org/ABListRS.html>

Children’s songs/albums:

<http://www.nubeat.org/ABListC.html>

Heaven’s Magic Albums:

<http://www.nubeat.org/ABListHM.html>

Publications:

Beliefs:

<http://www.xfamily.org/index.php/Category:Beliefs>

The cult’s site dedicated to their “End Time/End of the World” BS:

<http://www.countdown.org/index.htm#other_sections>

<http://www.countdown.org/futureforetold/>

One of the pamphlets they mass-produced before Y2K

<http://www.countdown.org/downloads/ctd2000.pdf>

Major themes to decide on:

* **Quick & Dirty:**
* Sketch out your idea–build a model…cardboard, pen & ink, make it fast.
* Imagine someone using it. Leave it for a day or two. Look at it again.
* Are there holes? Flaws? Impossibilities? Surprises? Avenues to explore? POST TO BLOG
* **Need to Know: What’s your approach?**
* What do you need to know and how will you find out?
* What resources do you know of?
* Who should you talk to about it? What help do you need?
* In other words, start your Research Plan. POST TO BLOG

TO DO:

* Do an exhaustive search for every documentary/multi-media piece done on the CoG (esp. those on YouTube)
* Make a list of all people involved in these projects since the beginning of the CoG
* Write up comprehensive list of all work and suss out main themes of each work (e.g. CoG history, individual stories, news stories, Ricky, diff kinds of abuse
* Find out how many discuss/touch on the mental/psychological abuse of CoG
* Watch all media inventoried (count total number of hours)
* Make a list of all CoG documentation already used/referred to in various projects
* Catalogue my own personal documents (xfamily.org, google image covers, GNs, photos, family stories, sibling interviews, http://video.xfamily.org/)
* Make a list of friends to interview (Laurie, Lena, etc) and who can intro to more
* List all cult studies professors/professionals I’ve heard of/research new ones
* Call up/research Institute for Cultic Studies
* Find out who has funded/disseminated past cult materials done by SGAs
* Scrape info off movingon archives
* Timeline of who left CoG when/compare with personal timeline via xfamily.org
* Ask Dad and Aunts about being interviewed/helping with this project
* Bring in stories about P & K
* Find Serena and other adults lived with in Nepal, India, Sri-Lanka
* Get all old pix from mom/P
* Find all Victor Camp materials

**Working title:** After Effects: when kids leave cults

**Elevator statement (What is your first take on the proposal?):** This is a multi purpose short video project. It aims to shed light on this serious situation, to bear witness to the tragedies and to explain the difficulties/challenges inherent in surviving the Children of God cult.

**Brief description (briefly describe your thesis proposal):**

Thousands of children were born into the Children of God cult since its founding in 1969. They have escaped by the hundreds each year in the last decade. None have left unscathed, however. Without an education, usable work experience or family support, many suffer silently from the after effects of a life lived in the confines of the cult. They are utterly unprepared for life on the outside. As a result, mental illness is common. Suicides are often. Some simply cannot assimilate into the real world. This is a multi purpose project. It aims to shed light on this serious situation, to bear witness to the tragedies and to explain the difficulties/challenges inherent in surviving the cult.

**Why do this idea? (why did you pick this idea for your thesis?)**

The driving motivation behind this project is my relationship with my teenage daughter. Unlike me, she was not born and raised in a cult. She has had a normal childhood with every possible educational and extracurricular opportunity. I deliberately made this happen. I love her more than anything in the world and take my responsibility as her mom very seriously. Yet, she does not understand me, or what I went through to give her the life she has. I suffer psychologically to this day because of the abuse I endured at the hands of the cult until I was 20. Though I've never missed a therapy session since she was born, the residual effects of my upbringing are still overwhelming at times. My anger at the cult for what it did to me and to thousands of other victims and survivors is powerfully raw and something I am still working to understand and overcome. I don't want my daughter to grow up without understanding why I struggle like I do, or to misinterpret my journey towards healing. I want to tell my story for her. It is time.

**Research plan (see page 1)**

**What will you have done by Thesis week?**

Complete an exhaustive search for every documentary/multi-media piece done on the Children of God cult – CoG (esp. those on YouTube)

Make a list of all people involved in these projects since the beginning of the CoG

Write up comprehensive list of all work and suss out main themes of each work (e.g. CoG history, individual stories, news stories, Ricky, diff kinds of abuse

Find out how many documentaries & multimedia projects discuss/touch on the mental/psychological abuse of CoG