

Miguel Robaina



THE JOURNEY

After 10 years as a follower of Jesus, the time has now come to draw back the veil. This writing is dedicated to my friends in Skarpnäck Free Church Congregation. Join me on my spiritual journey...

*“Everything has its time, and every purpose  
under heaven has its season.”  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

# I - LIFE

On April 18, 1969, I was born at Södersjukhuset in Stockholm, and shortly thereafter, I was baptized into the Christian community. The baptism took place at the Catholic Church of the Annunciatio on Linnégatan in Stockholm, where my Spanish-born father was a non-active member. I was given the name Miguel, which in its original form is Hebrew and means "Who is like God?". According to the Bible, the name is often linked to one's identity. My father and mother did not choose the name for spiritual reasons but simply because they liked the sound of it. Spiritually speaking, I now see the question in the name as a prophecy of my own future spiritual identity in this earthly life as a constant seeker, always tinged with a hint of doubt. At the same time, the Hebrew name also contains an answer to the question of where I should direct my search—namely, to the God of the Hebrews. Incidentally, I was given only ONE first name, as if to give it proper attention.

My upbringing in the southern suburbs of Stockholm was secular, and what I recall of Christian-themed events at home during my childhood was that every Christmas, we had a beautiful nativity scene and my father's stories about his life as a student at a Catholic monastery school in Córdoba in the 1950s, as well as his ability to recite Christian songs and verses he remembered from that time.

We would go to church for baptisms, weddings, confirmations, funerals, and concerts. The latter happened with some regularity, as I often performed as a choirboy in the Stockholm Boys' Choir between 1977 and 1982. The repertoire we performed was often sacred in nature, but as far as I remember, I did not see the church as anything more spiritual than a mere concert venue.

My first homeroom teachers in the public elementary school, Dalskolan in Solberga, were two Christian teachers who, as I later understood, had the courage to let the children sing the hymn "Din klara sol går åter opp" ("Your bright sun rises again") to start the day and also led us in a shared mealtime prayer: "Good God, bless the food. Amen!" This happened daily in the classroom during the years 1976-79. Could we have been the last class in the history of Swedish public schools to experience something like that? I later noted that one of the teachers wore a cross around her neck in a school photo that I have.

From 1979 to 1982, I attended Adolf Fredrik's music classes, which at that time had an annex in Mariaskolan on Södermalm, to further develop my musical abilities. I was already singing in a choir and had also been playing the piano for several years. My Christian middle school teacher had taught one of my cousins in a previous class, and according to this cousin, the teacher was the main reason why many in her class later became Christians and started a group called "The Christian Group" in high school. The well-known Christian singer Carola was part of this group and was also in my cousin's class. However, I never felt that any of these three teachers imposed Christianity on us students. I don't even remember them talking about what they themselves believed.

Below is a poem from middle school where I apparently take God as a reality...

*Now that the snow begins to melt,  
what's underneath starts to unfold.  
Everything emerges  
from earth clods to lambs.  
The flowers shine  
and the animals shiver,  
but not too much.  
God truly has affection.  
The air is fresh,*

*but you yourself are not so fresh.  
But you have to endure a little  
when spring begins to paint.  
But, oh no. Some of the ice remains.  
You could fall with every step you take.  
But me, I sit in school  
and talk with my buddy.*

My middle school teacher I later met a couple of times at my work at Skarpnäck Church in the 2000s. She is still a very active Christian today in her old age.

My cousin and her boyfriend were "those free-church people" and a bit special, my family and relatives thought in the 1980s. She became a Christian in 1980 in connection with her confirmation. Her confirmation pastor in Botkyrka Parish was very important for her step into faith. In 1982, she and I met a few times at her parents' home in Norsborg to play music together—piano and flute.

Otherwise, I was very interested in drawing at this time, especially in comics, which I spent a lot of time on. In these contexts, I used to call myself "Miro," but in everyday life, I preferred to be called "Micke." For some reason, I spelled my nickname as "Mike." Since then, there have been several occasions where I wanted to use a different name than my baptismal name, which is interesting from a spiritual perspective when considering what I wrote about names and identity in the first paragraph of this writing. Of course, there have always been mainly rational explanations for my desire to change names, but it cannot be entirely ruled out that there was a spiritual influence in the background, even though I was not aware of it.

Another spiritual memory from my pre-adolescent years is that I was strongly influenced by the film "Jesus of Nazareth," which was shown during Easter when my family was at our summer house in Täby in the early 1980s.

During my junior high school years from 1982 to 1985, anything related to spirituality was completely absent. My homeroom teacher there was a leftist humanist, and the atmosphere at the school was very secular overall. Even the texts of the music we sang were mostly secular, in contrast to most of what was sung in the Stockholm Boys' Choir. In diary notes from a USA/Canada tour in 1981, I briefly wrote about the choir's performances...

*...then we were to sing at St. Patrick's Cathedral, a Catholic church.  
We sang Praise the Lord, Ave Maris Stella, Alleluia, etc...*

*...The next morning, after breakfast, we were to sing in a church.  
We sang Gloria, Jesu dulcis memoria, Alleluia, Praise the Lord, etc. It was a very large  
church...after the concert, we were invited to the parish hall...*

*...Then we went into the church...The altar and the altar silver were from the 18th century. When  
the church went from Swedish leadership to American, an eagle was placed holding up the Bible...*  
In other diary notes from a Germany/Austria tour a year earlier, I wrote...

*...The next day, we went to Passau and held a concert.  
We rehearsed as soon as we got there and packed our bags in the parish house. It was a small  
church...I and eight others stayed with the evangelist a few meters from the church...*

*...After lunch, we went to St. Florian, a monastery outside Linz.  
When we got back...we were to have a secular concert...*

At least here, I had an understanding of the difference between sacred and secular contexts. Otherwise, as I said, I mostly saw the church as a concert venue and didn't place much importance on the spiritual context.

The same year I started junior high, I left the boys' choir as my voice began to change. As a result, my church visits were reduced to essentially only my organ lessons, which I took once a week at the Church of the Revelation in Hägersten. However, these lessons were certainly not insignificant for my ability to feel at home in the church environment as an adult. But in 1983, when it was time for my confirmation, I was not at all interested in the church. So, nothing more came of it.

## II - DEATH

After elementary school, my family and I moved to Blekingegatan in Södermalm, central Stockholm, and I began a three-year economic high school program at Brännkyrka Gymnasium. However, I dropped out after just one semester due to burnout. From 1987 to 1989, I worked at a travel agency in central Stockholm. The company's CEO, who was from Småland and married to one of my uncle's ex-wives, had a particular respect for the Christian church, if I recall correctly. Otherwise, the atmosphere at the travel agency was as far from spiritual as one could get, which was generally true in the Swedish "Yuppie" society of the late '80s. The only hint of spirituality at that time was a trend towards new spirituality, so-called "New Age." However, many parties with a lot of alcohol were organized at the travel agency, something my family had been very restrained with at home.

In 1986, I visited Skarpnäck Church for the first time through my aforementioned cousin, who at this time had married her boyfriend and therefore changed her last name. They had recently moved to Skarpnäcksfältet, a newly built suburb in southern Stockholm. We tried to play music together again, but it only happened a few times. The same year, I was stopped on Drottninggatan in Stockholm by a member of the Church of Scientology. At that time, I was unfamiliar with this movement but followed them to their "church" to answer a questionnaire that I found interesting. Since it turned out I was too young to participate in the survey, I was instead offered to read their writings in the church's library. It was less enjoyable, so I left and never returned.

Around the same time, I started playing hard rock, which gradually sparked my interest in supernatural things. I found occultism particularly exciting and watched a lot of horror movies at that time. Parallel to this, I became increasingly depressed after some unfortunate unrequited teenage crushes, especially on a girl I fell in love with during the summer of 1986. I became more or less fixated on her and didn't completely give up hope until several years later! I had always had the unfortunate combination of high expectations and low self-esteem, making me feel inadequate and worthless. I felt bitter and began displaying self-destructive behavior. I decided to go all in on ruining my life. I started drinking large amounts of alcohol, which I obtained at my job at the travel agency before I was old enough to buy it myself. After the company's parties, there was always plenty left over. I always drank alone, mainly to escape painful emotions. This destructiveness was compounded by the growing presence of dark spirituality in my life. With a desperate feeling of being controlled and unable to influence my situation, I found positive experiences within the world of magic. I began with numerology, "tarot cards," and met so-called witches on two occasions who claimed to practice good white magic, intended to help people. The guys in my band were on the same path, even though we didn't hang out much outside of rehearsals. The rest of the time, I was

mostly alone. When I was at the family summer house, I often sought out nature, where I would, so to speak, "talk to myself," especially when I was feeling down. Since then, nature has always been a place of contemplation and recovery for me.

The guys in the hard rock group were very technically skilled musicians and interested in classical music. This helped me refocus on classical piano playing, which I had been trained in. Deep down, I had always liked Baroque music, although I lost interest when I started playing hard rock. So, in 1987, I began taking harpsichord lessons and made my first tentative attempts at composing my own music in the Baroque style. Music started to mean more and more for my soul, especially the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, whose large sacred output has earned him the title "The Fifth Evangelist."

In 1989, I also resumed my unfinished organ studies and therefore needed an organ to practice on. My cousin once again led me to Skarpnäck Church, where there was an electric organ, but I soon stopped playing the organ again. I lacked patience and proper motivation. I often fell into depression during this time, and my mental health deteriorated. Following an incident of illegal nature, I ended up in the psychiatric emergency room, where the following was noted in the journal:

*"...The patient reports that he engages in some magic.*

*He feels that he can foresee certain things and that he might even be able to influence events at times. He lives much in his fantasy world... No clear delusions, but describes experiences of almost telepathic nature with pre-psychotic overtones..."*

This incident led to me attending open psychotherapy over the next three years to address my mental health issues. However, there was no help available for the spiritual issues, at least none that I was aware of.

In 1989, I also made a few pen pals. One girl from Kungälv, with whom I was in contact, was clearly Christian and lived in a Christian family, something I only reflected on when reading her letters in recent days. She wrote that she used to go to church, sing in the church choir, and liked hymns. She and her brother are today active Christians, as I have seen on the Internet.

My self-destructive behavior had, until then, been mostly directed at myself. One example is when I became furious because my hairstyle wouldn't sit the way I wanted it to. I simply took a kitchen knife and stabbed my own leg, which resulted in a trip to the hospital for stitches. Unfortunately, my problems began to trouble others as well. At the end of 1990, I became long-term unemployed, which meant that I had a lot of time to nurture the negative outlook on life that I had developed. This eventually led to criminal activity. During this time, I strongly considered changing my name. Outwardly, it was to continue destroying my life more anonymously, but deep down, there may have been a desire to start a new life. Spiritually speaking, other forces may have been behind this idea (compare once again with what I wrote at the beginning of this text regarding names and identity).

During the initial period of unemployment, however, I had a few months of respite where I felt relatively well. I felt free and had also begun to forget my previous unhappy summer love, in favor of a new one, as it turned out a short time later. I recorded a CD with a hard rock band called Hexenhaus (The Witch House) and got my own apartment, a sublet in Blackeberg.

In October of that year, Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on my door, and two women and a child wanted to talk to me. But since I had my parents visiting, I asked them to return. We set a date, and they returned very punctually. After a three-hour conversation, they asked to leave. I remember that my primary interest in talking to them was to show them that they were wrong. However, I didn't feel they had anything to contribute to my worldview.

It was fun to live on my own and feel the freedom, but when I started feeling bad again, I became more antisocial and isolated than before. I was also no longer under the control that one inevitably has when living with one's parents. This accelerated and intensified my destructive behavior. The people I hung out with the most at this time were my friends from the hard rock group, which was now called Seventh Key after the seventh card in the Tarot deck, called Toth. Previously, we had called ourselves Tarot, after the fortune-telling cards. Toth, or Teth as it can also be spelled, was an Egyptian god and among other things, the lord of magic. We also had a song called "Rage of Teth". We were very interested in Egyptian mysticism at this time, and for a period, the band went under the name Echnaton, after the pharaoh who introduced the monotheistic worship of the sun god Aton in Egypt for a short period after the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. This pharaoh also wrote a hymn to the sun, which has considerable similarities to Psalm 104 in the Bible. At this time, I preferred to call myself "Karnak" rather than Miguel. Again, a denial of my name. Karnak was taken from the name of an Egyptian temple and means "fortified place" in Arabic, but was also the name of a pagan goddess whose symbol was the pentagram. The pentagram has since come to be inverted and associated with occult/satanic activities. During this Egyptian phase of my life, I walked around with such a pentagram on a necklace, without having the slightest idea about its spiritual connections. I just thought it was cool and looked good (again, compare this with the connection between name and identity).

I met the guys in the band a few times a week when we rehearsed. Other than that, I only saw a fifteen-year-old Ethiopian coworker I worked with as a janitor at a primary school in 1990, and he was probably the closest thing to a friend I had at that time. I also spent time with my family, but we didn't meet more than a few times a month. At the school where I worked, I met yet another one of my unrequited loves. Since I was somewhat shy, I initially pursued her anonymously with letters and gifts. Later she found out who I was, but unfortunately, the feelings were not mutual. Despite that, we kept in touch through letters for a while, but I became very depressed about her not wanting more. This led me to resume my destructive behavior. When I was most frustrated during these periods, I found a relief in scratching myself with a knife or something sharp. In one of the letters to this girl, I found the following that briefly describes my beliefs during this time...

*...On Sunday, I attended my cousin's confirmation and party.*

*I myself have not been confirmed, because I think one should only do it if one believes in everything a Christian is supposed to believe, not just to get gifts. This doesn't mean I don't believe in any god, but my belief doesn't exactly match that of Christians (or any other religion either)...*

Another girl I corresponded with between 1990-92 initially lived outside Paris in France but later moved to Sigtuna. In some letters to her written in 1990-91, there are the following interesting lines that shed light on my spirituality at that time...

*...Just before I started writing today, I watched a documentary about Nostradamus, a seer who lived in the 1500s... He made about 1000 predictions for the future, and more than half of them have come true... You don't have to believe everything he wrote, but some things seem too credible to say it's just coincidence...*

*...because of a funeral right in the middle of the week. It's a relative who recently entered another dimension and is now going to have his spent body laid to rest in consecrated ground. No, he was probably going to be cremated and spread to the wind...*

*1. Do you believe in life after death?*

*ANSWER: Yes, my belief says that all life on earth has a specific task to fulfill. We do not know what these tasks mean, but when we die, we have completed our task. Some fulfill it very easily and*

*must therefore die young, while others take longer to do so. Once one has completed one's task on earth, one moves on to the next mission, which could be on earth or in another dimension or world.*

**2. Do you believe in the supernatural/telepathy?**

*ANSWER: I don't believe there is anything that is beyond the natural; everything has a natural explanation. I just believe that humans are not knowledgeable enough to explain everything. For example, most people only use a few percent of their brain's capacity, and I think we know very little about how our brain actually works and what possibilities it has, such as telepathy. I believe that most people have experienced telepathy, but they dismiss it as coincidence. However, many do not and instead research it, and that is something that must be done to understand the brain. Who knows, if you research enough about telepathy, you might eventually learn to control it as you wish.*

**3. Do you believe in horoscopes?**

*ANSWER: When it comes to horoscopes, I do not believe in those found in weekly or evening newspapers, as they are written in a way that fits most people. However, I believe that everyone has the ability to see the future, even though very few people have researched that part of the brain and learned to master it more or less...*

*...You wrote that you get nervous thinking about such complicated things. I don't, with the exception of two things. Even though I believe in life after this, I sometimes try to think about dying and that there's nothing more, just darkness and nothingness! Have you ever thought like that? It drives you crazy!...The universe! How vast it really is and what existed before the big bang, the creation of the universe...*

*...On Sunday, I was at my cousin's place with her boyfriend and, of course, ended up in a philosophical discussion with him. He is a firm believer in Christianity... As I mentioned before, I have my own belief, but it is based on Christianity. One thing I am convinced of is that people who read and interpret the words of the Bible exactly as they are written have not understood God's words and what religions are about, and they will not find the Truth. The truth is that all religions are fundamentally similar philosophically (in terms of thinking). It is in the practical aspects that religions differ (how to live and be). And that's what people with differing opinions have argued about throughout time. A few examples of how I believe the Bible should be interpreted. People who believe in Darwin's theory claim that the earth was created over millions of years and that the first life existed in the water and then evolved, came onto land, later became apes, and eventually humans. Christians claim that God created the earth in seven days.*

*Day 1) created light and darkness*

*Day 2) created land and sea*

*Day 3) created seasons*

*Day 4) fish, animals, and birds*

*Day 5) mammals and humans*

*Day 6) God looked at what he had made and thought it was wonderful*

*Day 7) God rested*

*The Christian faith sounds a bit incredible, doesn't it? To create, for example, mammals and humans in one day... However, I believe that both Darwin's and the Christian theories speak of the same thing. A day as described in the Bible might actually consist of a million years, or a billion. That's one way to interpret the Bible. O.K. It is also stated in the Bible that a day is like 1000 years, but 1000 years is also a very short time to create everything, in my opinion. But I think that in the Bible, 1000 years is used just to describe a long time (perhaps millions of years). So one shouldn't believe that 1000 years is literally 1000 years. Do you understand? I also don't believe that God created Adam (the first human) and then took one of his ribs to form Eve??? Instead, it is just a symbol (an analogy) to show that everything was created from a single cell at the beginning. I find it interesting to ponder and reflect on. Right now, I'm going to start reading a book called "Meeting with AMBRES," which is about life philosophy...*



*...Other FILM RECOMMENDATIONS that I think are good are the OMEN trilogy, that is, OMEN 1, 2, and 3. It's a thriller about the son of the devil, who, in a human body, tries to get the people of Earth to worship Satan. You follow him from the time he is born until he becomes an adult...*

*...Just because of that, you will get several stupid questions. What do these words mean? Zombie, Exorcism, Occultism, Astral body, Clairvoyant, Poltergeist, Shaman, Telepathy, Déjà vu, Levitation, Voodoo, Chiromancy, Reincarnation, Yeti, Stigmatization. Just random stuff in the "supernatural" world...*

I wrote "God" with a lowercase letter in the letters above, which might indicate that I did not see God as a person at that time but more as a force. "Ambres," whom I mention in one of the letters, was an Egyptian person who lived three thousand years ago and now spoke through a man in Norrland. He subsequently wrote books with this spirit's (read: demon's) so-called "wisdom teachings."

Another pen pal I had sporadically between 1989 and 1995 was a girl from Gullbranna outside Halmstad. In one of her letters from 1991, she randomly asks if I like going to church, completely out of the blue. She also added in parentheses that I didn't need to answer the question. I replied to her...

*...Do I like going to church? Why do you wonder about that? I like the old type of church, older than the 1700s, which is dark, where a priest stands and preaches slowly and quietly, and the organ and classical instruments provide the music. It's a cozy and pleasant atmosphere. What I don't like is the modern, bright, fanatical churches such as Livets Ord, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Pentecostal Church, etc., where they use pianos and electric instruments for music...*

Here it shows that I place significantly more importance on the atmosphere of the church space than on its spiritual content. It also highlights the significance of music for my soul. The open psychotherapy I attended for three years, which was a personal choice, did not yield much result, largely due to my ambivalent attitude. I wanted help, but at the same time, for some reason, I identified with my depression, which naturally led me to find the therapy meaningless. While it probably prevented me from sinking deeper into the mire than I already was, my mindset resulted in me playing a double role towards my therapist as well as everyone else around me. I lived in two completely different worlds, and no one understood how badly off I was. It didn't help that I got a job at the police department, a place with a lot of negative input that I found difficult to distance myself from at that time. Eventually, my psyche became completely worn out. I was tired of both myself and humanity, which I perceived in a more or less paranoid manner as having the goal of attacking me. I didn't care about myself or about others. Several criminal acts, which unfortunately involved a number of innocent people and resulted in my dismissal from the police work, as well as a year-long stay in a treatment facility, led me to begin reflecting on my life and where I was headed. In a medical report early in my treatment, it was described as follows...

*...He has obsessive thoughts... that vary in intensity and that during psychological stress appear extremely painful and difficult to control as he cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy... Furthermore, it emerges that he easily loses touch with reality and can become psychotic if, for example, he becomes frustrated, insulted, or questioned... It cannot be definitively ruled out that the thoughts he describes actually consist of imperative hallucinations, that is, voices urging him to commit more or less brutal acts that are fundamentally alien to his personality...*

Regarding the "voices," it is interesting to compare with what I previously mentioned about walking in nature and, so to speak, talking "to myself." Who was I actually talking to? In hindsight, I can say that I know I was talking to Jesus, even though I didn't understand it then. Whether I later talked to or heard other voices during the period of my problems, I cannot answer. I found it necessary to leave everything supernatural on the shelf to instead begin examining my life scientifically and psychologically. Something that interested me was a psychological method called "Transactional Analysis" (TA), which I now set out to explore. I also returned to outpatient care for therapy, now with slightly more motivation after the confinement. This was, by the way, one of the conditions for the inpatient treatment to end, and I never wanted to go back there again. The other was that I regularly took medication that prevented the possibility of alcohol consumption, which I managed somewhat inconsistently depending on how I felt. Despite having slightly more motivation, the therapy itself didn't seem to affect me too profoundly; it was mostly like picking up where it left off. I still had a lot of inner problems, and during certain periods, I also began to drink again. However, a change gradually began to take shape, and it concerned my previously hostile view of humanity. I began to feel some empathy for the group of people known as children, which resulted in me acquiring two sponsor children that I supported financially through a child organization. One girl lived in Brazil and another in Thailand. However, after a while, my own finances became so poor that I could no longer continue contributing.

After the hospital stay, I resumed playing with my old heavy metal band, which was now called Solitaire, and where Eastern philosophy permeated the lyrics written by our guitarist. This time, I chose to maintain a distance from the spiritual and focused solely on music. However, in 1994, I left this band to instead focus on another band called Memento Mori (meaning "Remember that you are mortal"), with whom I participated in CD recordings, tours, and MTV appearances. This band played what was called "doomsday metal," with dark existential lyrics that leaned somewhat more toward the Christian worldview about the struggle between good and evil and the human condition in between. The singer called himself "Messiah" and had previously been in a similar band called Candlemass. He would wear monk robes on stage, but the band was by no means Christian. The content of the lyrics often described a great loneliness and emptiness.

One day in the mid-nineties, I invited an acquaintance over to my first own apartment in Kungsholmen that I had obtained "under the table." I had known him since his time as a janitor at the school. He was commonly known as "Korv-Kalle," was a Jehovah's Witness, and sold hot dogs outside a shopping center near my former workplace. Often when I visited my colleague who still worked at the school, I would stop and buy a hot dog from Kalle. That evening, we had an interesting discussion, but I still didn't feel that his church was for me. As usual, I mostly wanted to debate and gladly show that he was mistaken, especially now that I had put spirituality on the shelf.

Even though I was at that time after the hospital stay mostly rational, scientific, and psychological, I still felt a certain sense of spirituality in music. I missed the spiritual in some way. I felt that there was a dimension lacking in the rational. Therefore, I began to attend classical concerts, primarily baroque music concerts, which I had always loved. I had a desire to form my own baroque ensemble in the long term and started by purchasing a modern spinet by the brand Sperrhake from a private individual in Södermalm.

After that, I resumed a previous musical collaboration with an older recorder teacher whom I had met back in 1990 while working at the school. Together with her ensemble students and later also her amateur choir, we performed many concerts. Many of these performances took place in various church environments from 1993 to 2004. With the recorder ensemble, we also played at my grandmother's funeral in the summer of 1995. I also began to compose music for this ensemble, where one of the recorder players happened to be my previous

unrequited and unhappy love from my time at the school. This time, I made a more serious attempt to ask her out by talking to her privately. It felt easier because we were now interacting more naturally than before since we played together. However, the courtship did not work out much better this time, but my expectations were not as high as before, which resulted in my being able to handle the disappointment I still felt. The ensemble dissolved a while later when the recorder teacher stopped teaching, and after that, I didn't see that girl anymore.

### **III - RESURRECTION**

As part of my scientific/psychological exploration of myself, I began researching my family history during the mid-1990s to see if it could contribute further to my understanding of my identity. I also wanted to know my genetic background, where I came from. Therefore, I started to reconnect with my "half-relatives" from my earlier work at the travel agency and visited their summer home in Småland several summers in the mid-90s. I also resumed contact with my Christian cousin, who at that time had two children with her husband. I enjoyed spending time with them, feeling a positive atmosphere, and thus visited them often starting in late spring 1995. In November of the same year, she asked if I wanted to accompany her to her church to listen to her play the flute during the service. I agreed, and this marked the third time she, or God if you will, took me to this Småland Alliance Church in Skarpnäck. One could say third time's the charm. There, I was welcomed in the same positive spirit I felt at my cousin's home, and I decided to return to the church several times. I wanted to see what kind of place created such a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere. I sought the source of the spirit that permeated my cousin's family and the people in this free church, a spirit that I often felt was absent during my critical years. In this atmosphere, I felt that I could be myself without a lot of demands and problems. Additionally, I seized every opportunity to meet my cousin and her family, where I felt particularly appreciated by the children.

Another factor that I believe helped me return to a more open attitude toward spirituality in general, and the Christian spirit in particular, was that I began attending the annual performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* at Engelbrekt Church, which had been held since 1923. The first time I attended this event was on Good Friday in 1995, and the nearly three-and-a-half-hour-long work made an enormous spiritual impression on me, surely softening my heart at that time.

After nearly three years of sick leave, I was now forced back into the labor market as the doctor from the Social Insurance Agency believed I was ready to work. I disagreed, as did the psychologist I was seeing at the time. We both felt that due to my mental health issues, I could not take just any job, as I risked falling back into depression, with unpleasant consequences for myself and others. Therefore, I had to enroll in the Labor Market Institute for a special program aimed at reintegrating me into the job market. In the notes from a conversation at the Employment Service just a few days after my first visit to Skarpnäck Church, my new positive attitude toward the church was reflected as follows...

*...(Robaina) has been considering potential environments/workplaces, libraries/archives connected to the interests in history/music (baroque music, early music). Background jobs in theater, work in a church, or, for example, at Stim are other concrete ideas that Robaina presents...*

Only two months after I started attending Skarpnäck Church regularly, I left the heavy metal band Memento Mori, in which I had played for three years. It was not an easy decision, as I knew the guys would be very disappointed in me. But I felt I no longer fit in with the

atmosphere there, with all the harsh attitudes that didn't feel genuine, especially now that I had something new to compare it with in the new church community at Skarpnäck. This marked the end of my ten-year era as a heavy metal musician.

In general, I replaced my relatively small circle of acquaintances within just a few months at that time. The only ones I kept in touch with for a few more years were my recorder teacher and a custodian colleague from school. The teacher was not Christian, but she was a very positive, cheerful, and pleasant older woman. The custodian colleague was a calm, unpretentious, and reliable person. His personality reminded me of the spirit in Skarpnäck Church, which may be explained by his Orthodox Christian background, something I learned when I told him I had become a believer. Although he was not very practicing, he still had a positive view of my new faith in Jesus, which I would soon embrace.

At Skarpnäck Church, I quickly built up a new circle of acquaintances, beginning shortly after my first visit when I met the youth pastor, who was my age and had an intellectual and philosophical disposition. We began discussing life issues and, for a period, had exchange lunches where he came to my home in Kungsholmen one week and I went to his in Bagarmossen the next week to discuss faith and existential questions over a meal. The youth pastor, I, a younger Christian guy in the church, and an older searching woman with a diverse background formed a small "thinking group" that met sporadically at the church. I eagerly engaged in proving that the Christians were wrong, which was a hopeless endeavor in the intense debates with the youth pastor. Instead, it led to my participation in the church's introductory course on Christian faith for eight weeks, led by two other pastors at Skarpnäck Church. The course was called "Finding Yourself," and in addition to this course and conversations with individual congregation members to learn more about the increasingly intriguing Christian faith, I began reading non-fiction literature. I, who had never been interested in reading, began to devour literature with spiritual themes. The first gem I found was the philosophy book *Sophie's World*, which helped broaden my spiritual understanding that I had started to regain after years of scientific/psychological thinking. Later, the Christian author Stefan Gustavsson's book *Christian on Good Grounds* meant a lot for my Christian direction, and soon after, I began to call myself a Christian.

I never saw my former heavy metal colleagues again, except for the singer Messiah from Memento Mori. He asked me to play synth on a song when he took a studio technology course a year later. He then told me that Memento Mori recorded another album before the band disbanded in 1998. In one of the lyrics on this album, this singer testified that he too had become a believer in God after his father underwent a successful operation. Messiah had prayed to God and experienced an answered prayer through the successful operation.

Around the same time I started going to church, I got the idea to sing in a choir again after a ten-year hiatus after being drawn in by an advertisement in the newspaper *Metro*. The choir at Essinge Church was looking for singers and promised a trip to the USA and a CD recording. The trip later led to England instead, in 1996. This choir often participated in services and high masses, thereby giving me a relationship with the Swedish Church's regular liturgy and the routine that comes with observing the church year. Consequently, choir music was mostly sacred. The year before, I ordered a copy of a harpsichord from the 17th century from a builder in Estonia, and this year I began to play in a baroque ensemble called Musica Practica. There, I made some good friends in the form of two baroque musicians, an eccentric guy my age and a much older man who was also the leader of the ensemble.

After a long-lasting cough for ten weeks in early 1997, which wouldn't yield to either antibiotics or morphine cough medicine, I was introduced by the younger musician to a man at the Hare Krishna restaurant Govindas. He was a so-called "healer," and with a hand laying-on, he managed to instantly cure my cough, which fascinated me greatly. However, it didn't

spark my interest in the Hare Krishna movement, as I was already feeling comfortable in my new surroundings in Skarpnäck and Essinge.

This new eccentric acquaintance worked as an organist in the Liberal Catholic Church on the same island as Essinge Church. Sometimes I visited this church to play with him. The church is based on occult theosophy and is not accepted by the traditional Catholic Church headquartered in Rome. I perceived the eccentric man as somewhat Hindu-oriented, and he lived with an even more eccentric woman who was also spiritually inclined, and we often had many spiritual discussions during long phone calls in my early years as a Christian.

During this spiritually intense time as a new Christian, I also encountered a man from the sect Christ's Assembly, with whom I stood and talked on S:t Eriksgatan for nearly an hour and a half. Another man from the same congregation invited me to his apartment and their home group one time on the subway. I did not go there as I wasn't interested in this church, but I appreciated the spontaneous discussions we had on the street. Additionally, I had already started in a home group at Skarpnäck Church at this time, so it didn't feel relevant to get further involved elsewhere. I also already knew from before that Christ's Assembly had a sect-like nature, as I had had a visit from a member of this church in my home who was acquainted with my eccentric acquaintances. I learned from them that they were working on some sort of spiritual mission accord to gain better positions in the congregation. I also felt that all these "Christ's Assembly people" had uncomfortably staring eyes and an exaggerated positivity regarding their movement, which was another contributing reason I declined this home group invitation.

Another acquaintance I got to know through the older musician I met was a man my age from Estonia but living in Stockholm. He and his partner were both artists with a Buddhist life philosophy, and I often had spiritual debates with them. This man recommended that I read *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Between 1996 and 1998, I often spent time with this older baroque musician and even more with his daughter as I once again became a victim of unrequited love. Like before, I became somewhat fixated on this girl and, of course, was disappointed that she was also not interested in me in the same way. Unlike the previous fixation, I managed better this time since I had Jesus to help me. We hung out as friends, but it became increasingly burdensome over time. Not only did she and I not see each other in the same light, but her parents were also going through a divorce, which made things even more complicated. Her mother and I often sat and talked, not infrequently about spiritual matters, as she, being Russian, was an Orthodox Christian. I spent time with her mostly to make a good impression and because I never missed an opportunity for spiritual discussions. At the same time, I was troubled by the feeling that she was in love with or at least interested in me, something her husband also undoubtedly noticed. She claimed that she saw me as the son she had always wanted but never had. My musician colleague and I became increasingly at odds, and both of us fell back into our alcohol addictions, which, with Jesus's help, eventually led to all of us going our separate ways in 1999.

After not having found a girl to share my life with, I decided to consult God about what His plan was for me in this area. I didn't feel any clear answer, but for the first time, I got the idea of living in a community, perhaps living as a monk in the long run. With this, I viewed the situation with my latest unrequited love as a trial that I had navigated positively despite some setbacks along the way.

Parallel to this drama, I continued to visit the "low-church" alliance church in Skarpnäck on Sundays and occasionally the choir at the "high-church" Essinge Church, where I also began to practice as a church musician in the spring of 1997 with the help of a labor market policy initiative. I now see this contrast in Christianity as a positive experience, allowing me to witness different aspects of Christian practice early in my newfound faith in Jesus. In the

alliance church, I was also part of a house group consisting of eight members. I also started playing during services, including with my musicians from the baroque ensemble. Looking back, I believe that contributing with music in the services has greatly helped me draw closer to Jesus, as music was the most profound spiritual activity I had until then.

Thanks to my colleague, the church musician at Essinge Church, I had the opportunity during my internship to start my own baroque ensemble, Les Musiciens de l'îlot Royal, with people from Musica Practica. Over the next ten years, we held many concerts, including in various churches. Between 1997 and 1999, I composed a Christmas Oratorio in baroque style to texts from King Charles XII's Bible and the 1697 hymn book. The church musician also gave me the opportunity to have several hymn preludes and organ works published by the music publisher Trumph in Trelleborg.

From 1998 to 2002, I actively "evangelized" on chats, communities, Q&A forums, and BBSs on the Internet. In 1999, I was the initiator of the religion board on Children's Internet, and since then, I have gladly directed my attention to children around me regarding this private Christian missionary activity. Since this period, I have often found myself in religious discussions with those around me. One noteworthy example was a single mother in her thirties who had children involved in Essinge Church's children's activities. She wanted to be in a relationship with me, but I was more interested in her becoming saved. We worked on our respective missions for two years. I mentioned my thoughts about possibly becoming a monk to her, and she said it was the first time she had heard anyone with such thoughts whom she truly believed could manage such a lifestyle. Others with whom I had numerous spiritual struggles at this time were two of the youth in this church's activities. I naturally had many discussions with my family, who did not understand what I had gotten into, but they obviously noticed positive outcomes. Particularly, my brother thought what I was doing was mostly "mambo-jambo," an attitude that later became subdued when he started his own family. Regarding what I mentioned at the beginning about names and identity, my brother has often pointed out that, although he claims not to believe, he is like the doubting disciple Thomas in the Bible. During my first year as a new Christian, I experienced much more healing than in a total of five years within psychiatric care, naturally because I was healed in spirit, body, and soul when I received Jesus into my life.

In 1998, I started a Christian/cultural activity called "Open Church" at Essinge Church, and in 1999 also at Skarpnäck Church, coinciding with my work there as a musician and administrative staff. At the same time I began this project position due to my psychological work disability, I became a member of the congregation. That year, I also started singing in Engelbrekt Motet Choir in Engelbrekt Church, as Essinge Church's choir was dissolved, and my boss took the organist position in Engelbrekt. Since then, I have often performed with this choir in church contexts both in Sweden and abroad.

The first half-year in Skarpnäck Church's service was marked by trials. I often felt that my spirituality was not taken seriously and that my projects and ideas were met with skepticism. As a new Christian, I was also full of ambition and ideas that I felt the bureaucratic leadership was trying to push aside by postponing them or, as I saw it, ignoring my proposals. I felt that I often had to fight my way through to get something approved. I was often met with the attitude of, "we've never done it that way before," "but we can't do that," "there aren't resources," "maybe that's how it works in the Church of Sweden, but..." I suspect that this attitude primarily stemmed from the fact that I was a new Christian, coming mainly from the state church, and that many in the congregation still did not know me and my motivations very well. Since I associated my new Christian life in the church with a new life, I had consciously withheld my past life, my psychological problems, criminality, and other things I preferred to forget. The only deeper personal aspect I shared was the spiritual one I had previously been involved in, which may have contributed to many feeling they couldn't grasp

who I really was as a person. When I eventually started to get some congregation members to support me and defend the ideas I thought and believed in, I was probably seen as quite troublesome and perceived as manipulative by some. Some of those who supported me were participants in a new house group that I and a few others broke away to start, which some in the congregation certainly associated mainly with me. It was called Corpus Christi (Body of Christ), a name that, in this context and at this time, might seem somewhat provocative and arrogant. That it was also in Latin did not help, as it pointed to a Catholic orientation that Protestant Christianity has historically strived away from, particularly the Free Church. Some in the congregation even viewed our house group as a church within the church, which was not popular. That was not our intention but something that unfortunately arose when this problematic situation escalated into a sort of “us versus them” feeling within the congregation. This feeling obviously bonded us in the group, and even today we have a very close relationship.

When it came time to negotiate a continuation of my position, I was rejected. Initially, this led me to become disappointed in the congregation and place all the blame for the situation on them, whom I deemed narrow-minded. My previous paranoid view of my fellow humans began to resurface, further contributing to an infected relationship. What I found particularly insulting was some brothers' and sisters' negative criticism of my friend-like relating to the children in the congregation and that some, for spiritual reasons, believed my non-Christian musician friends did not belong in the services.

Regarding the first question, I have always found it easy to connect with children, and that is why it is not surprising that it was through them that I first received help in repairing my empathetic abilities. Through this breakthrough in my personal maturity a year earlier, I began to understand that not all people were necessarily hostile towards me. There was born a special desire to help children, which first expressed itself in my decision to sponsor children in the Third World, as I have mentioned before. When I became a Christian, this desire expanded to include spiritual help, and since Skarpnäck Church has always had a strong children's and youth program, I felt it very appropriate that I had this special ability to connect with the children. I began to experiment with teaching piano, organizing film screenings, and trying to seize every opportunity to witness about Jesus to the children. I developed particularly good relationships with some of the children and even visited their homes, where I had the chance to witness to their parents and siblings and talk about our congregation and its activities. When this was met with very suspicious glances from some brothers and sisters, and I understood that there was whispering behind my back, I became very upset and disappointed. My own contribution to this problem was that I still did not completely trust all adults and therefore had difficulty adapting to the established working methods already present in the church. Instead, I chose to work according to my own methods, which was perceived as somewhat provocative, especially when it became evident that I was bringing many children with me. In connection with the decision that I would not be allowed to continue my service, some children organized a petition, with around thirty of them signing in my favor.

When the project service ended, I decided to take some time to reflect on the situation that had arisen. Once the initial bitterness subsided and I became clear about my part in the conflict—namely, my eagerness, lack of consideration for this particular congregation's traditions and history, as well as my somewhat provocative attitude—I sought once again the opportunity for an extended service. Apparently, God gave me another chance when I took my share of the responsibility and learned a lesson. He dissolved our home group, advised me to keep a lower profile, and be more cooperative. With this sacrifice, I would receive the reception and response that I had previously requested. Thus, I received a wage-subsidized employment on trial, which later transformed into a permanent position at the beginning of

2003. After that, all relationships went much smoother as the congregation and I got to know each other on a deeper level at a non-pressured pace. For the first time in my life, I felt a great satisfaction in going to work, which I actually refuse to call work. The church became my home and a way of life, and in hindsight, I have understood that God wanted me to stay in the church He had led me to. He wanted me there as much as possible in my newly found faith in Jesus. God saw that I would face trials that I would not have been able to handle as a new Christian, given my background, if I spent most of my time in a workplace other than the church. Just as I had been placed for a year in a psychiatric facility by “the World” to address my mental issues, God now needed to place me in this institution to deal with my spiritual troubles.

Even though Jesus had now given me a new foundation in life, I still felt a need to resume the therapy that I had quit in 1995. A new motivation arose to tackle the psychological aftermath of my old life. However, I was still too suspicious to seek a Christian therapist, which might have been preferable. I perceived the Christian community as relatively small and did not want at that time to let my background become known to my new community. Above all, I feared possible misunderstandings that could lead to me not being able to continue working in the congregation or losing trust. I still did not feel entirely secure in my position after the previous problems that had flared up concerning my service.

In the summer of 2002, I was baptized in the Holy Spirit during a mission that God had given me regarding one of the children in the church’s activities. This girl was a frequent visitor to Skarpnäck Church, and I received the assignment in connection with her grandmother’s death. The grandmother was the only Christian among her close family and meant a lot to her. I had only known this ten-year-old superficially since 2001, but on this occasion, for some reason, she sought my support in the form of prayer. I immediately understood that it was God who brought us together for something special. It soon turned out that her family was under severe threat from her mother’s mentally ill Muslim Moroccan boyfriend, who behaved threateningly and aggressively towards them. When I entered the picture, they were in the midst of planning to go underground and move away from Skarpnäck after the boyfriend had threatened to throw their shared baby from the balcony. Both the ten-year-old and her half-sister from one of her mother’s previous relationships were afraid of this Moroccan when he had his episodes. This urgent decision to flee was very unfortunate since the ten-year-old, who had become a Christian in the church from her non-Christian background, had begun baptism discussions with her mother’s blessing. I helped with the move and tried as best as I could to be there to help the daughter enter a new Christian context in the southern Swedish town they fled to. With this assignment, the spiritual battle became a reality in my own Christian life. The adaptation in the new town did not work, and everything fell apart, especially for the ten-year-old’s older sister. After many ups and downs, the family returned to Skarpnäck a year later. However, it took a long time before they found a permanent home, as the previous one was terminated. This constant instability, insecurity, the spiritual battle, and other factors negatively impacted the earlier baptism plans and the old relationships in the church. Upon their return, the ten-year-old did not feel at home as she once had after the long absence from Skarpnäck, and eventually, the family ended up in Södertälje. Today, however, she lives with her biological father on the west coast. I have had sporadic contact with her mother, who has told me that things are going well for the daughter and assures me that the time in Skarpnäck Church has left its mark, even though she is currently not attending any church. I often pray for the family, especially for this girl, and trust that God is by her side.

Working with this family, and especially my baptism in the Holy Spirit, marked a new phase in my Christian faith that made me a more mature Christian. Since then, for some spiritual reason, I have had numerous visits from couples from the Mormon church whenever



I have made significant point interventions in God's work with someone. I have also often been served various ungodly writings in strange ways during these occasions, such as "Start Your Own Religion," "Conversations with God," and "The Da Vinci Code." But even books like "The Evil One," written by a Christian author, have at times negatively affected me in my work for God. Probably, the spiritual opposition hoped to confuse my thoughts to cause spiritual harm in my work, which was indeed close initially while working with the vulnerable family. However, with the help of Christian brothers and sisters, I emerged from this situation victorious. However, it is essential to remain vigilant. It is easy to be deceived and believe that everything that seems to come from God genuinely does.

The semester following my baptism in the Holy Spirit, I took a course called "Like a Fish in Water" and discovered several gifts, including a special calling as an evangelist with an apologetic focus. This course resulted in a role as a discussion leader for Skarpnäck Church's Alpha course, a course that even my mother participated in, hoping to better understand the positive transformation I had undergone. As the spiritual battle became increasingly burdensome, God also sent me a special spiritual mentor in the form of an older man in the congregation who had previously been the chairman of the board of Skarpnäck Church and was one of the last people I would have thought to ask for guidance. I, a long-haired "heavy metal rocker," always somewhat provocative. He, a strict, orderly, suit-wearing politician in his upper middle age with whom I had hardly exchanged a word before, and who was also one of those who was skeptical about some of my activities in the congregation at first. I also perceived this man as a Christian fundamentalist, while I had been more of a liberal Christian before my baptism in the Holy Spirit. However, in my work for God after this baptism, I opened my eyes to this charismatic Christian faction, which is represented, for example, by the congregation Word of Life in Uppsala.

Another direction that has meant a lot to me and can be seen as directly opposite is the contemplative Christianity that God introduced to me early in my Christian life. In August 2002, I visited the community at Bjärka Säby as a "trial brother" to experience this way of life. This community, located in a beautiful castle from 1796, is run by the Zion congregation in Linköping and is part of the Pentecostal movement. Plans for a life in a community have since been temporarily shelved, but since that year, I have become a regularly returning guest at the castle's retreats. There, I draw strength, and unlike earlier in life when I would walk and talk "to myself" in nature, I now speak with "the Father, through Jesus and in the Holy Spirit."

Between the years 2001 and 2005, I, along with a younger Christian brother, started and led a club in the church called Metal Vaült, aimed at teenagers interested in heavy metal music. The purpose of this club was to break the prejudices that traditionally exist between heavy metal and the Christian church. The idea was also to provide a healthy environment for young metal fans, a context where they could be themselves without a lot of attitudes. This was precisely what I experienced to be abundant in my heavy metal circles back in the day. The club focused on honest, friendly, and giving community, something I understood the importance of since the time I first came to Skarpnäckskyrkan. The club included both Christian and non-Christian teenagers. Even a girl with satanic inclinations traveled from Södertälje to participate in the club. She belonged to those lost souls who were in serious need of just such an atmosphere, something she also pointed out she experienced positively in this community. Together, Metal Vaült held regular meetings with music videos, films, food, and conversations at the church, including barbecue weekends, and on two occasions, we attended the Christian metal festival Bobfest in Linköping.

In 2003, I formed the ensemble Baroquecompagniet, which also frequently performed in churches. The following year, I started the Scharffeneck Collection of Contemporary Early Music at Skarpnäckskyrkan, a collection for newly composed music in the style of earlier

eras. The same year, I produced, as a commission from God and for Skarpnäckskyrkan, a CD of self-composed worship songs in a pop and rock style. I engaged about twenty people connected to the church to participate in this CD, the proceeds of which were entirely allocated to three of the church's mission projects for children and youth.

Today, in 2007, my main work for God is a child I met for the first time in one of the church's activities. She was born in a warmer country in 1995, the same year I became aware of the Christian church. In 2001, she came to Sweden as an asylum seeker with her mother and older brother. Through her classmate, who used to attend Skarpnäckskyrkan, this girl came to the church in November 2003. I felt called to take care of her from the very first day she arrived. I knew nothing of her situation at that time, but she immediately turned to me. I soon became her piano teacher and later her spiritual mentor. After a year, she became a Christian and was baptized along with her whole family, who then regained a renewed faith in Jesus. Then the attacks came. The family, who had waited for residence permits for three and a half years, were denied and forced to return to their homeland in March 2005. The older brother stayed behind illegally to help his loved ones financially, along with me, as I had developed a very special relationship with the family and had become like a second parent to the girl, whose real father disappeared when she was one year old. After much spiritual and practical work with authorities both in Sweden and in the homeland, to which I traveled in the summer of 2005, she and her mother were allowed to return to Sweden, and today they have permanent residency and live with me in my small two-room apartment. We live in what we have chosen to call the "Christian Collective in Tyresö," which means that we do not have a normal family relationship but live together as Christian siblings with a special goal of ensuring that the child has a good foundation to stand on in life, both socially and spiritually. We feel called to live this way for as long as God and we wish.

Since I became a Christian, I have found a new foundation in life, a solid foundation that I have experienced holds through life's harsh storms. On several occasions in recent years, my faith has been tested. Often, these trials have been intimately linked to my background as a non-Christian and my previous problems. Sometimes the tests have come from God with an attached map to help me out of the labyrinth, thereby giving me an opportunity to grow as a person. At other times, temptation has come from the opposing side or from my own flesh, but God has always been by my side, illuminating the path for me like a lamp in the darkness. Despite my desire to follow Jesus, I have fallen many times, but He has helped me to my feet again and led me further on life's path, richer in experience.

Jesus is the Lord my God, my Savior, in whom I have learned what grace, forgiveness, and restoration mean. His Holy Spirit dwells in me and shapes me like a lump of clay in the potter's hand. I now look forward with excitement to what God has planned for the continuation of my life...