

## Interview with Denver, Part 1

*This is the first part of Shawn McCraney's interview of Denver Snuffer for the Heart of the Matter podcast, which was recorded on October 8th, 2019 in front of a live audience.*

**Shawn:** Denver Snuffer.

**Denver:** Shawn.

**Shawn:** It's good to meet you. I've heard many things about you. I have not followed up to confirm any of it. I've heard about you for years. I'm glad you finally agreed to come on. I've tried to get you a couple times.

**Denver:** [Laughs]

**Shawn:** You're camera shy. You prefer the radio.

**Denver:** Or writing.

**Shawn:** Or writing, yeah. But let me explain, kind of, to you and our audience if you're not familiar with the approach we take. We do this with every guest. I don't do research at all. I've just *heard* things. I don't do inquiries. People have told me things over the years, but they're not really that significant. The purpose I want people to come on the show is to have *them* tell *us* everything they want to say, and then we'll do some— I'll do some, "Stop for a second; explain that a little bit," if you want. If you say, "I don't want to," you don't have to, and it won't be an inquisition of any sort, and you're free to— And it's so that people who watch the show (many of them who have come out of Mormonism) can say, "Is this a viable alternative for me?"

**Denver:** Mmmhmm.

**Shawn:** We've had atheists; we've had transhumanists; we've had every type on the earth. But years ago—a couple years ago—we were doing a show [background rattling] (yeah, that happens sometimes), and I said on the show, "I think the only true religious leaders in the state of Utah are John Dehlin, Denver Snuffer, and myself." And the reason I said that is, John Dehlin— He is leading the "I wanna be me: free; I wanna be what I am: gay, straight, no God, any god, and I just don't even care." And John is kind of the Pied Piper of that group.

I am: Forget relig—organized material—religion altogether. I trust in the Lord Jesus Christ "with all your heart." Forget about priesthood; forget about sacrament, communion. And I base that off my eschatology.

**Denver:** Mmmhmmm.

**Shawn:** *You* are unique because you have been LDS.

**Denver:** Mmmhmmm.

**Shawn:** And you are continuing on what—the only thing I can say now, not *knowing*—is, it seems to be, a form of Mormonism. Is that proper?

**Denver:** It's fair.

**Shawn:** Fair?

**Denver:** I think— Yeah, I think I would say that.

**Shawn:** So what we try to do is—in the first part (which lasts a little less than an hour)—is we want to know all about you: Grandma and Grandpa; Mom and Dad; upbringing; education; what you were like as a kid; when you were baptized; how active were you?—siblings; thoughts. And that usually takes us, even with people who don't think they have much to say, up to the first hour. You probably will fill it easily.

**Denver:** Hmmm.

**Shawn:** After that, we'll come back, and we'll see if— I wanna go— I want you to kind of end up, if you can, Denver, with when you started to say, "Wait a second," and then, "I'm gonna to do something about my view of Mormonism myself." And we'll do Part 2 about what you've done, where you're at, what's happening. And then in Part 3, I wanna do some word association. And there's 40 words, and I'll say it, and then you respond, and we'll use that as a platform to talk back and forth. And in that one, we'll be a little bit—not combative. I could sit here and fight with you on everything you say.

**Denver:** Sure.

**Shawn:** I'm not gonna do that. I don't care. I respect your rights to believe whatever you want, teach whatever you want. I really do because I believe you're responsible for what you believe and teach, and your ways may be better than mine as far as I'm concerned. So it's not to attack. But in Part 3, I might say, "Well what about this or what about that?" And you can explain, and we'll go from there. Does that sound all right with you?

**Denver:** That sounds fine.

**Shawn:** Okay. So, Denver Snuffer: the man, the myth, the legend. Take it away—about you.

**Denver:** Well, you mentioned parents. I'm Junior. I was named after my father. My father was a twin. I'm grateful for the fact that he got the name Denver because his twin brother was named Dempsey [audience laughter]. That may have been really problematic, but Denver is okay as a name.

My father is a World War II veteran. He joined the military after Pearl Harbor. As he explained it to me, everyone was pissed off when Pearl Harbor happened, and everyone wanted to go fight the Japanese, himself included. So, he joined to go fight the Japanese, and he wound up going to fight Hitler. And at the beginning of the war, his comment was he had

no beef with Hitler. The war was fought without any appreciation for what Hitler was really up to inside the camps.

But he landed on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. He got through as a combat engineer. He was one of the first people on the beach, and his assignment was to blow up the tank traps. But as it turned out, first of all, the water was so rough that morning that none of the tanks made it to shore; and second of all, the tank traps were the only things that were keeping the bullets from killing all of them. So, when the mess unfolded, he wound up as a combat engineer, not blowing up tank traps but blowing up some of the fencing that was preventing them from getting up to combat with the pillboxes.

And he was a very modest man about all that he had been through during World War II. He was also in the Battle of the Bulge but he didn't like to talk about it, so we had to pry it out of him with questions and very often the answers would deflect, but he might give you a sentence here, and he might give you a phrase there, and it was up to you to put it all together over time.

One of the things that shocked me, and I wish he had—well, maybe it was a good thing he didn't live long enough—but one of the things that shocked me was the details of the Omaha landing in *Saving Private Ryan* because some of the things that were depicted in that Omaha Beach scene, I had heard from my father, you know, while he was still living, but they were details that I'd never heard anyone else talk about.

Turns out Spielberg had interviewed whoever he could find that had survived to get the details. There really *was* a GI on that beach whose arm had been blown off who was holding his severed arm with his other arm, and he was walking around in shock. And people saw him. Spielberg picked it up; he put it in the show.

But to me, you know, they made World War II movies (John Wayne and *The Longest Day*). They made a lot of movies in which that generation was depicted in a heroic way.

And I always respected my dad, even when we butted heads. He seemed to me to be a historic figure, larger than life—didn't mean we agreed with one another.

I recall after I had finished law school, I was kind of full of myself. I graduated from Brigham Young University's law school, J. Reuben Clark Law School. And after I graduated, I went back to my hometown to visit my parents and let them bask in the glory of their law-school-graduated son. I was sort of full of myself, as law school tends to make one. And while I was there visiting, my dad took me down to—don't remember which bar it was (I don't think it was the Rendezvous), but it was one of the bars in Mountain Home, Idaho—to visit with his friends. He wanted to show me off. And while we're there at the bar, you know, he introduced me, proud as he was, law school graduate, and I viewed them as my intellectual inferiors. You know, none of them had the equivalent of a doctor's degree.

We'd sat around and we talked, and over the course of the conversation, what dawned on me was I was talking to people who had lived through more history and had a greater grasp on life and everything that's going on here than I could hope to have because the stress of

difficulty. I mean, these people had been through the depression. They'd been through World War II. They'd been through the Korean conflict. They'd seen a popular president assassinated. They'd been through a lot.

And here I was, full of myself because I had a piece of paper. And it was one of those sobering moments that I really thank my dad for because there are people whose lives live in the trenches of this world who rise to greater levels of kindness, understanding, charity towards others, humility, than some of us who enjoy simply the benefit of the environment that they made possible by the sacrifices that they made. It sobered me. It was another one of those moments with my father that I look back on and think, you know, those few moments in a bar in downtown Mountain Home, Idaho probably were the corrective experience necessary to take a law school graduate, full of himself, and put his feet back on the ground.

My father believed in God and was a Mason and tolerated my mother's Baptist faith—even let the Baptist minister come over and eat dinner at our house, as she was wont to invite him over to do. And he was devout in his own way, but he was not churchy. My mom, on the other hand, was churchy. She taught Vacation Bible School. I was enlisted in Vacation Bible School. I got all the indoctrination that one gets as a Baptist.

We were in Idaho. Idaho has an infestation of Mormonism and, therefore, throughout my youth, I was inoculated against the cult of Mormonism. And I knew that if Jesus and Santa Claus are the good guys in the universe, the devil and Joseph Smith are the bad guys, and so I had very little respect for the idea of Mormonism.

I had one sibling, my sister. She embraced the Baptist religion. They always put that call out at the end of the service, you know, while everyone's singing *Just As I Am*. They invite you to come forward and be saved and be baptized, and I felt the tug a time or two, but I always managed successfully to resist the impulse, and I grew up without ever having joined a church. The only church I ever joined was the LDS Church. And we can talk about the process that got me there, but I was an incredibly content kid.

I had a Schwinn Stingray. I could put that thing on its back wheel, and I could ride it like a unicycle in a wheelie all through town. We were a safe community, and the kids were allowed to do what the kids wanted to do, and I spent my childhood roaming free. There were practically no violent crimes that percolated to the attention of kids in my hometown.

There was a guy, though. We were sitting in Carl Miller Park, and someone came riding their bike through the park yelling, "Tom Lynn just killed a Mexican at the Rendezvous!" Well, Rick Beck (who was my next-door neighbor and my buddy growing up)—Rick Beck's father owned the Rendezvous. The Rendezvous was a bar. Carl Miller Park is not that far from the Rendezvous bar, and someone just got killed by Tom Lynn. We knew who Tom Lynn was, too. So we hopped on our bikes, and we rode down to the Rendezvous to see what the crap's going on.

There's a crowd. There's wailing. But we're kids, you know. We don't know any better. We elbow our way to the front, and sure enough, Tom Lynn blew the head off a fellow at the Rendezvous.

My father was chosen for jury duty on the trial of Tom Lynn, and Tom Lynn was convicted, and he went off to the penitentiary. And he finally came home, and he became one of the poker players in the weekly poker game that my dad participated in. Well, so a juror who had sent the guy off to the penitentiary and the guy who had been convicted played poker every week. And one evening at the poker table, Tom Lynn leaned over and put his head on the table, and they thought he was tired, so they dealt him out. He died playing poker with my dad at the poker table.

That was the kind of thing that, oddly enough, you remember from your youth and from the things that went on. But I never felt endangered by that. We rode our bikes off in the morning. We floated canals on tubes. We had our fistfights. We had our pranks. We started fires. We escaped liability for what we'd done in Idaho at that point.

They had a law. Because there were so many kids that were helping farmers, you could get a driver's license at age 14. So at 14 years old (it was daylight only, so you'd only drive during the day), you could get a driver's license, and kids started driving at age 14. And there was no difference between a driver's license and a motorcycle license. So, if you had a driver's license, you could ride a motorcycle, and we did. But I mean, you're looking back on it, you think, no one wore helmets; we rode in shorts; we did stuff that should have killed us, and we survived; but it was, in its own way, idyllic. It was a lot of fun.

**Shawn:** Fantastic.

**Denver:** So anyway, there's that.

**Shawn:** Has anyone written *The Ballad of Old Tom Lynn*?—because that is a story!

**Denver:** No, that's a country western song.

**Shawn:** Absolutely! You've heard of old Tom Jones. Well, let's get old Tom Lynn. That is fascinating.

You're quite a storyteller. You're good at that.

**Denver:** Well, he was convicted. He got beat up by the guy he killed. He left the bar, went home and got the shotgun, came back, called the guy out. When the guy came out, he blew his head off. It was the fact that he left the bar and went home instead of responding in the moment that got him ultimately convicted for...

**Shawn:** Wow!

**Denver:** ...for what he'd done wrong.

**Shawn:** Well, Mountain Home.

**Denver:** Yes.

**Shawn:** And you were there through high school?

**Denver:** I was. Then I went in the military.

**Shawn:** What branch?

**Denver:** Air Force. They were peaceable, you know, compared to the Marines. They had a (Gibb Wheeler's older brother, and I want to say it was Tom Wheeler, but it was Gibb's older brother)— He got drafted, and he went to Nam. And he wound up Marine and in the trenches, and very often they'd encounter those tunnels; and he was a tunnel rat. He went in. He came back weirded up. He had some—well, today we'd call it PTSD. But he'd also— He had a lot of battle injuries and what have you, and he was sort of the walking example of why one in Mountain Home does not want to be a Marine and go to Vietnam. And so, he helped inspire a lot of enlistments in the Air Force.

**Shawn:** I see.

**Denver:** Myself being one of them.

**Shawn:** And where were you stationed?

**Denver:** New Hampshire.

**Shawn:** Was that eye-opening to an Idaho boy?

**Denver:** I rather liked New Hampshire. I was surprised, though, that there was a Mormon out there. That's part of the later story, but I spent two and a half years in New Hampshire and then a year and a half in Texas. And then I left and ultimately got admitted to law school shortly thereafter—never returned to Idaho although that *was* the plan. I got a job offer out of law school that kept me in Utah. I'd never planned to remain in Utah. But yeah, the Air Force and in New Hampshire was an interesting time and an interesting experience.

**Shawn:** Was that where you were introduced—because you went to law school at BYU—so, you either converted at BYU or..

**Denver:** No, it was earlier. It was actually while I was on active duty.

**Shawn:** Oh, tell us about it.

**Denver:** I was attending night classes at the University of New Hampshire, and a professor who was on loan from Brandeis University, Cal Colby (in the middle of a—it was a business management class), was talking about corporate ethics and corruption and just went off on the Mormon Church which, to the ears of someone that had grown up in Mountain Home, Idaho, and was now safely thousands of miles away from the Mormon infestation, thought the whole idea of bringing up Mormonism in a class seemed so superfluous. It was silly. I mean, okay, Cal—Professor Colby—we'll stipulate the Mormon Church is corrupt. If it

exists, it's gotta be corrupt. It was founded by, you know, the devil's best friend. So, I took no exception to the professor's position.

But there was a fellow in the class who raised his hand and took on the professor and defended the Mormon Church, and I thought that was, first of all, bizarre. I mean, what the hell? Are you kidding me? And he got the better of him. He did a fabulous job of defending the faith against the charge of corruption specifically being addressed in the management class.

I made the mistake afterwards— I didn't know the fellow from Adam at that point, but he became a good friend. I made the mistake afterwards of saying that I thought he'd done a great job and, you know, good for him because he'd had the courage to speak up. Undergraduates are very vulnerable to the predilections of your professors, so, to defend and to be contrary, that's fairly remarkable.

The fellow's name is Steve Claproth, and he and I became good friends, but he mistook that for interest, and then they sic these missionaries who pamphleteer and filmstrip you—you probably did that.

**Shawn:** I did.

**Denver:** Did you use the filmstrips and the felt board?

**Shawn:** Oh yeah.

**Denver:** Yeah, they did all that. And they mistook politeness for interest. I was not interested. If being raised by a Baptist mother and not heeding the call to come forward and be saved had been successfully resisted over the course of 18 years, pamphleteering and filmstripping was not at all likely to excite my interest in Mormonism.

But these guys were so *nice* and so *clean-cut*, unlike you now. I mean, look at you!

**Shawn:** [Laughing] Look at *you!*

**Denver:** You're a refugee from the Mormon mission. I never went on a mission.

**Shawn:** I know.

**Denver:** Okay, but you did. Anyway, you know how [audience laughter]— You know how that was.

**Shawn:** I do.

**Denver:** They were clean-cut. They wore white shirts and ties and suits. And their sincerity just— It *clung* to you; it was so earnest. I hated to break their hearts and tell 'em, "Dude, I think your faith is full of crap!" So, I refrained from that. It was at least interesting.

But I was a long, long, *looonnggg* investigator. It's because of the scarcity of interest in Mormonism in New England that the missionaries persisted for as long as they did. It was nice.

They asked me to read some Book of Mormon stuff. I did as they asked, being polite. They wanted to know the next time we got together, "What did you think? What did you think of what you'd read?" I don't think they were calling me "Brother" yet then. And my response, literally, and I meant it (it seems funny now, but I meant it at the time)— I said, "It's gotta be scripture. It's every bit as boring as the Bible." It had all that, you know, King Jamesian antiquity about it, and it did not grip me.

But by the same token, the things that had gripped me are the kinds of things that I see in here. It's the stories that are told about Daniel in the lion's den, and you've got a picture of David holding the head of Goliath, and you've got Christ with the storm. It's the Bible stories that you learn in your youth that, you know, tug at your heart. Reading the actual scriptural canon, at least at *that* point in my life, was not connecting in the same way that the stories or the interpretation based upon what the scriptures contain meant to me.

So, reading the Book of Mormon was rather the same kind of experience. It's arm's length and not appealing.

**Shawn:** I'm going to jump in real quick. How about the Gadianton robbers story, or the 2,000 stripling warriors story, or Alma the Younger story? Did they affect you the way those stories on the wall affected you?

**Denver:** They would eventually, but they didn't at the time because the problem is it's clothed in the scriptural, canonical, off-putting verbiage that, at that point, I did not relate to. I do relate to that kind of language today, but at that point, I had not acquired yet the tongue for that other language, and it is another language.

But Steve Claproth invited me to a— I don't know if it's called a young men's camp-out or called an Aaronic Priesthood camp-out. I don't know what they were calling it at the time.

But as it turns out, Joseph Smith was born in Sharon, Vermont, which is about as far away from where we are now to Nephi as where we were in New Hampshire was, away from Joseph's birthplace.

So, he invited me to camp out, and hey, camping's fun. So, I went up to the Joseph Smith [Birthplace] Memorial [in Sharon, Vermont]. They've got an obelisk there, 38½ feet tall, a foot for every year of the life of Joseph. They pointed out the obelisk and its height and the reason for its height. And I was surprised because I hadn't realized that Joseph Smith had lived so short a lifetime.

There was a— Back at that time, the stake encompassed states, so the stake president was the stake president over Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, parts of Massachusetts—*big* stake. I think the fellow was from Boston. His predecessor stake president had been L. Tom Perry. (There's a story about him, too, eventually, if we get there.)

Anyway, the stake president got up and gave a talk, and it was about David and Goliath, one of those old favorite stories from back when. And he filled in details, and he talked about things that made the story come alive even better than had Vacation Bible School. And it surprised me to have Mormons talking about that kind of content in a getaway with the—you know—the young skulls full of mush, being indoctrinated into the vagaries of the cult that I viewed them as. And the talk was actually quite good and touching and held a good moral story.

We spent the night. The next morning the visitors' center was open. As you are looking at the obelisk, it's the visitors' center on the right, not the one on the left. On that one they had a counter back in those days. (They renovate everything, so it's probably now a mega-mall of some kind, probably selling trinkets that are profitable.) But back in those days, there was a counter.

There was a couple of old people behind the counter, what I would now say is a *missionary couple*, but they were manning the desk, and they had literature and pamphlets and crap that I'd been given by missionaries as they were filmstripping and all the rest of that. And there was a red volume called the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price, and I hadn't seen that thing, and I asked them what that was. They started to tell me, and then Steve, who was—I was his golden contact. Steve elbowed his way in between, and he proceeded to talk it all up, and he dog-eared the Joseph Smith History (which I had previously gotten in a pamphlet), and he dog-eared Doctrine and Covenants section 76.

I wanted the elderly couple behind the counter to tell me how much it cost to buy one of these things, and they said it was free, and so I got out with my book before they changed their mind and wanted to charge me because I expected all religions want your money.

Anyway, it was actually after the camp-out, after we got back, and after I had taken the time to look at the book that I went to that dog-eared section 76 of the D&C, and I was struck by that. It was not the missionaries; it was not the camp-out; it was not the clean-cutness of them all. It was the *incongruence* between everything I thought I knew about Joseph Smith being raised and the content of D&C section 76 that seemed to resonate with good things, virtuous things, answering questions about the afterlife. It just seemed incongruent, and it struck me at that moment.

I'd been an investigator, probably half a year or more. I'd been through all kinds of missionary companions that had come and gone. But the actual investigation of Mormonism in a sincere way commenced then. Everything else had been wasted time. And it was a matter of overcoming a lot of presumptions and prejudice that I'd been raised with that required, you know, sober reflection and taking time, and careful, solemn thoughts which, in a 19-year-old now, was something new for me.

I have to admit that one of the barriers for me was the fact that, however unchurched my father may have been, he seemed to be aligned with my mother in the opinion about Mormonism, and so I didn't want to disappoint him or enrage my mom or piss off my sister. And growing up, my friends were universally aligned in their viewpoint about Mormonism.

And everyone looked down on the religion, although there were a handful of Mormon kids that were accepted at school. The religion itself was not well-regarded.

One of the things that Mormons tend to do is to be politically active, and Idaho is no exception. So, the legislature in Idaho, which had a very large LDS presence and, therefore, very large LDS influence, on occasion boiled up into political conflict with Mormonism being one of the issues that divided people into camps. And so, you know, the concern crossed my mind as I was investigating Mormonism that one of the things that would be lost in the transition would be all the friends I valued, family members, my past history.

I mean, Dude, I was *cool*. I was sophomore class vice-president; junior class president; I was a drummer in a rock band. I was *cool*. If you had a party in Mountain Home, you needed to invite me, or it wasn't a *thing*. I mean, and now, white-shirt-clad nerds are to become my compadres, and I'm gonna leave the cabal that I grew up with, and I'm gonna sit among the nerdy? This is the destiny that the religion brings you to? You know, I don't want to be sacrilegious, but you know, "*if it be possible, take this cup from me*"— It's not a lamentation I couldn't identify with. This seemed like a horrible, *horrible* exchange to be made.

In the context of everything in life that you like, enjoy, you find to be desirable, fun, Mormonism was a form of death to everything that had gone before. It required— The enormity of the sacrifice in the mind of a 19-year-old was practically incalculable. It was— The barrier to entry for me was like trying to leap across the Grand Canyon. *I just did not see myself doing that.*

In fact, one of the things that I concluded was that even if I were to become a Mormon, there was no way I could become a very good one. I hated the idea of being a bad one, but I didn't think I could become like them. They were better than me. They were living cleaner lives, doing cleaner things, and enjoying hokey stuff. And, you know, they hadn't been to the places I'd been; they hadn't seen the things I'd seen; they hadn't done the stuff I'd done.

And, you know, a lot of my Air Force buddies— Coming out of boot camp, it was rare. In the Army they try to keep units together. In the Air Force they just scatter you to the four winds. I got assigned in a squadron in a barracks in which another guy from my flight (that's what they called it in boot camp) was also assigned at the same time, so they made us roommates.

Well, my roommate, Mike, was a— He was a black fellow from Watts. I mean, he'd lived through the riots in Watts. One of the reasons he was in the Air Force was not because he was afraid of the draft. He was in the Air Force because he wanted to get off the streets, and his mama wanted him somewhere safe. And so, he's a refugee from Watts, and I'm from Mountain Home, Idaho, but the two of us really got along well in spite of what you would view as an insurmountable cultural gap between where we reckoned from. Hell, he was just a guy like me, and we had a lot of fun doing the same things. And some of the same things that we did are the kinds of things that they denounce in General Conference.

For some reason (I guess it was because of the streets of Watts), one of the things that Mike liked was cheap wine. You know, you can go down and get a bottle of—there was Ripple, and—

**Shawn:** Ripple [laughs]!

**Denver:** And Annie Green Springs and all that crap.

**Shawn:** Strawberry Hill.

**Denver:** Yes, Strawberry Hill. They made all that crap for kids, really, and, you know.

So, me and Mike, Jimmy Givens— Jimmy was a black kid, also, from Detroit, kind of a refugee himself. My friends, my buddies in the context, primarily were black fellows. And there was a *serious, serious* racial tension nationally and conflict—racial tension and conflict. And Martin Luther King got murdered. There was just a— There was a problem, and the Air Force was trying to address that at the time by having race relations classes. The race relation class that was being taught, in my view, only made things worse. I mean, it sort of pointed out what in everyday life could be just ignored. It pointed it out, and I thought they were doing a terrible job.

Well, the squadron had a command in the barracks, and the command in the barracks had a young—oh, he was a lieutenant of either first or second, but who was in charge of that race-relations thing—and he called me down. I was required to go down and report in to the fellow in charge of the squadron, and I thought, *What have they found? I mean, what contraband had they managed to locate up in the room during inspection? How much trouble was I in?* They called me in, shut the door, sat me down. He was very personable. He came around the desk. He sat like we were buddies. He was chatting me up. And the reason he wanted to talk to me was to find out how come I got along with the black guys in the squadron the way I did. I mean, I didn't even think about it. I mean, Summers and me played chess, and we hung out. There was no "getting along." I am; they are; it's a— I didn't know what to tell them.

I mean, here they are, dealing with this crisis. Here they are, trying to help with the crisis. Their attempts at help are only making it worse, and this guy wants me? I'm a *teenager* from Mountain Home, Idaho, hanging out with guys from Mississippi and Watts and Detroit and New York, and we're not *in* any of those places. I can't take them down to the canal and inflate a tube and hop on the tube and go down. And we're not in Mississippi. We can't go catchin', you know, catfish. And we're not in New York, so we can't, you know, run through the projects. And we're not in Watts, and we can't burn something. We're in New Hampshire, and all we're doing in New Hampshire is hanging out, doing what you do in New Hampshire when you're bored, and you're getting paid by the military, and there's time on your hands.

**Shawn:** And this was all prior to being—

**Denver:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, Jimmy Givens would subsequently become a black Muslim, and I would subsequently become a Mormon.

We used to go drink beer at the bowling alley and get pizza. The pizza was gosh-awful. It was like cardboard with cheese on it—and bad cheese at that—and drink Budweiser. So, we'd been reassigned to different places. We ran into each other after I had joined, and I said, "Well, let's go to the bowling alley," because that's what we used to do.

We went over to the bowling alley, and I was trying to warm up to the fact that I didn't drink. And as I'm about to tell him that I didn't drink beer anymore, he tells me he doesn't drink beer anymore. And I asked him what that was all about, and he said he'd become Muslim, and they don't drink. I said, "You're kidding!" I said, "I've become Mormon, and Mormons don't drink." And he said, "Well, in my religion, you're a blue-eyed devil" because I have blue eyes. And I said, "In my religion you can't hold the priesthood!" And we had a laugh about our respective religions, had a pizza, and drank a Pepsi because they only had Pepsi on base for some reason, but you know—sugar rush. Everyone liked Pepsi back then.

So, are we out of time? Is that...?

**Shawn:** Well, we're getting close.

**Denver:** Okay.

**Shawn:** But— And because we're getting close, I'm gonna jump in and move us forward. So, then what was it that got you, having hung out with some black guys and their friends, and you joined the church then, later, that *banned* the blacks from having the priesthood?

**Denver:** Yeah, that was weird. That was one of those— Again, it's just one of those—

**Shawn:** Was there any conflict there?

**Denver:** Oh, sure. There's conflict in all of this. I did not want *that* to be *my* destiny. In fact, joining Mormonism to me was a form of death. It was literally— The only thing that I consoled myself with was that I wouldn't be a very good one, and it probably wouldn't last, but I felt like I needed to join.

I happened to be alone, which was odd in a military barracks. I was alone. It was quiet, which, again, is odd in a military barracks, and I decided to pray about this whole thing. I'd been asked to do it. I'd been cajoled and harangued and pamphleteered and taught to do it, but I hadn't really taken the opportunity to do it. The story they tell about Joseph Smith praying vocally for the first time struck me as something—well, I hadn't done that yet. And so, alone in the barracks on a quiet weekend evening, I got down and prayed and asked God (over an army blanket, kneeling in the barracks) about the whole of it and whether or not there was anything to this; and if so, whether I could be excused, or I needed to, you know, to rally to the call—what ought I do; and finished praying—and nothing. There was no conduit from heaven that opened up, and there was no, you know, earthquake.

I sat on the bed and just reflected on it all, thought about what had gone on. And I thought about the reasons why Mormonism could not be true from what I knew. I came up with reasons why it could not be true, and as I thought about each reason, in turn, I got an answer to—I *thought* of an answer—to the dilemma, to the problem.

There cannot be any more scripture because whosoever adds to the book, God will add to his condemnation. Whoever takes away from the book, God will take away his part in the Book of Life, so there can't be more scripture which is what Mormonism is predicated upon—except that book happened to have been written chronologically before much of the rest of the New Testament canon. So, that's really not a barrier.

Beware of prophets, you know, false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ravening wolves. So, can't I dismiss him as a false prophet? And the solution is, well, there's no statement that there will never be another prophet. In fact, there are prophets referred to in the Book of Acts.

**Shawn:** Okay.

**Denver:** There are unnamed prophetesses in the Book of Acts, and, therefore, the end of the ministry of Christ is not the end of the presence of prophets or the gift of prophecy. In fact, the gift of prophecy is named in one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, so, you know, you can't dismiss it on that basis.

**Shawn:** But because of time, Denver, the— Doctrinally, I'm getting that in terms of prophets and added scripture and whatever. But did you have any queries and qualms about polygamy? Certainly growing up, if Mormonism was the— If Joseph Smith was the brother of the devil, or whatever that saying was...

**Denver:** Yeah, yeah.

**Shawn:** ...certainly you'd heard all the dirt. So the polygamy, the blacks and the priesthood, the misogyny that historically has been there, all of that.

**Denver:** All that stuff, yeah, all that.

**Shawn:** You had answers for that as well?

**Denver:** I didn't ask necessarily those specific questions. I asked questions on a big picture about the foundation of the possibility of a new revelation itself. And literally, I spent a couple of hours doing that—question and then thought of an answer, question and thought of an answer. After a couple of hours of that alone, meditatively, in my room, the last query that I came up with was: *Well, how do I even know there is a God? And that's the ultimate question, and how do I know that?* And the thought came in response to that, *Who do you think you've been talking to for the last two hours?* And that brought me up cold because my conclusion was: If that is how God communicates, and if God communicated with me, then I had the responsibility to respond to that communication because I would like it to continue. I would like it not to end.

But the price that would be required to have that continue seemed to be far greater than was reasonable or rational. It seemed like I was literally giving up my world in order to respond to that. But my conclusion was: If that's an answer from God, and He's made Himself known now to me in the context of this inquiry, then I need to respond favorably to that answer and go ahead and become baptized. And so, feeling like I literally was giving everything I had on the altar, I went ahead and got baptized in the Atlantic Ocean on October the 10<sup>th</sup>, 1973. Oh, excuse me, I said October—September the 10<sup>th</sup> of 1973, September 10<sup>th</sup>. We're in October now. And that is also a significant date, and we can talk about that eventually.

**Shawn:** And with that final thought from Denver, we're going to pick it up in Part 2 next week where we're going to hear about what his—briefly, what his membership and his activity and marriage and kids (I don't know if he has them; I know he has a wife)— And then we're going to see when that changed and what started happening. And so, join us then. Remember, put your comments down below. Let us know what you think, questions you might have. We'll pick them up on the phone and talk about those when you look and watch tomorrow.

[Transcript v1.1]