

I was born in 1969. I earned a degree in Applied Science (Chemistry), Graduate Diploma in Education, and was 4 years into a part time Masters of Polymer Chemistry when I met the group known as the Twelve Tribes. I married Tysha Coyne in September 1994 and together we produced three children, Tessa born January 1996, Bryson born November 1997 and Peter born in the Twelve Tribes sect in September 1999.

Tysha's doctor, Dr Catherine Berry, who was a General Practitioner but also practised alternative therapies, introduced us to the Twelve Tribes. Dr Berry recommended that we should go to the Twelve Tribes for some respite care despite her ignorance of the group. Dr Berry sent Tysha to this highly dangerous environment despite diagnosing Tysha with postnatal depression. I was unaware that Tysha suffered with this. Tysha stayed for five days whilst I continued running my business and getting some rest as our son suffered with severe illness. By the time we first visited the Twelve Tribes both of us were severely sleep deprived due to my son's illness.

After being there for only two days Tysha believed herself a sinner and bound for hell and believed that her only salvation was to give everything up and to give her life to the Twelve Tribes. Tysha was prepared to leave me and told her family that she would live full time in the Twelve Tribes. The elders of the Twelve Tribes however told her that she would need to "leave to win me over" and started giving her advice on how to do this.

A few years previous to meeting the Twelve Tribes Tysha and I became "Christians" and regularly attended the local Sydney Anglican Church. We were initially very happy but after a few years of attending this church we started to see many things that troubled us - mainly people's lack of commitment, the hollowness of people's faith, and the meaninglessness of calling each other our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We started to visit the Twelve Tribes regularly and over a period of 5 months I discussed the Bible with them and argued over points. They however had a very good defense for most things that I came up with. I shared some of the claims with my minister but with no real answers coming forward I was left to struggle through their "apparent" doctrine on my own. Also the support I received from my church minister only helped their assertions against the Christian system.

I finally decided to join this group after they answered a few key questions.

1. I asked if a single leader was in charge.

The leaders told me that they didn't have any leaders, that everyone was equal. Truly Elbert Eugene Spriggs is their leader and holds ultimate authority. A definite hierarchy exists in every community.

2. Who writes the teachings?

The elders told me that anyone could write "teachings" and many people do, and that the "teachings" don't come from one person. Actually, Spriggs writes over 90% of the teachings and the others are based on his teachings. Spriggs must approve any other teachings to make the teachings available.

3. I asked them what they based their authority and beliefs on?

They said they only derived their authority on the Bible. In reality they believe that Spriggs is an apostle, just like Paul, and that God sends new revelation about the end of the age through him. Spriggs's teachings hold the same authority as the Bible.

4. I asked if we gave up everything that they would look after all our needs?

The Tribes supposedly never make enough money for even the basics such as food, medical and dental. Despite these economic insufficiencies, they spent approximately \$600,000 on an evangelistic event in Washington DC in 2001.

They also bought a boat for \$380,000 that they are still repairing, and they purchased a small German village for an unspecified sum. This is I believe to fulfill some pipe dream of Spriggs that they will sail around the world selling handmade shoes and candles whilst living in village settings growing food and raising sheep. In contrast, when my wife needed two root canals and 7 fillings due to poor diet they didn't have the money. I was told to ask my family to pay for it.

I finally decided to join for the following reasons:

1. I did not want to live as a hypocrite.

2. The Twelve Tribe's children appeared well behaved and happy and I believed I struggled as a father.

3. They offered me help as a father and caused me to believe that the marriages in the group were strong because of the support that they received from each other. This I found out was far from the truth. They held secret women's meetings in which the women are told to inform on their husbands, and that they needed to be loyal first to the group. The women are also taught how to manipulate their husbands to stay and believe. Interestingly, Tysha used this on me before we even joined, to "win me over."

4. I also felt that Tysha would leave me to join this group. I wanted to keep our family together. I found out after I left the Tribes that she told her sister that was exactly what she would do.

### **Early Days**

At first I really believed in the teachings, as I understood them. Their lives and beliefs possess many good points. This is why I joined. But the longer one lives in the community the more that gets "revealed" to a member. They do not tell visitors too much as "they have not received the Holy Spirit and as such can't understand the beliefs and practices."

I enjoyed working and the camaraderie, although at times I realised that I didn't have any real friends there. I didn't mind long work hours and would try to do it so I didn't need to go to the morning and evening "gatherings." However I rarely missed attending these meetings. Incredibly, one morning after working all day

Saturday, Sat night, Sunday, Sunday night, Monday morning and then driving a truck home the elders expected me to show up at the gathering after cleaning an elders car because he needed to pick somebody up. I did it obediently but was amazed at how far they would push me for a reaction.

I stayed at Picton from March 1999 till Nov. 2000. I experienced some very unsettling events with the elders at Picton and their "infallibility." Amazingly, one "teaching" talks about "the faults of the leaders bringing out the rebellion of the sheep." This teaching gives them free range to hurt people with their actions. This did not sit well with me.

During this time my parents were quite active and helped me to understand what I was involved with. They were most concerned for my three children. My father along with other concerned parents wrote to SOCOG (Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games) regarding this group's involvement with the Sydney Olympics. All these letters clearly expressed a real need for confidentiality. SOCOG handed all these letters to the group so if any media attention came as a result of it all they knew how to handle it. The catering team of SOCOG held a party at the Twelve Tribes cafe at the end of the Olympics.

As a result of SOCOG handing over the confidential letters, two families were sent overseas to escape their families concerns. I was one of them. I wanted to go to the US to see the places and to work as a chemist in their soap industry.

### **My Time in USA and Canada**

I stayed in the US for 3 months but couldn't obtain a visa to stay longer so they sent me to Winnipeg, Canada. While in Winnipeg, I worked independently on many projects and received much freedom.

I also started to see many inconsistencies in the teachings, and the hypocrisy of the whole system that rivaled Christianity. The teachings became more bizarre and many things went unanswered. I started to question many of the long held beliefs of the group. People who lived in the community for 20 years or more could not answer them; actually they all said that they found it hard to believe themselves. I didn't want to live in the community without faith and with others who did not believe either. One "elder" told me that if I did not believe then I just needed to cling onto someone else's faith.

During my time in Winnipeg they wanted me to return to the US for an evangelical event in Washington DC. They wanted me and my family to illegally cross the US border to attend this event. I refused and told them that if God wanted me in the US he would open the borders up. I believed that we needed to follow the laws of the land, particularly if I could end up in a US prison. I asked later why they needed me there so much that they were willing to get me arrested and jailed if I got caught and they told me that they just wanted to see me.

When I was in Winnipeg I made a real friend whom I could talk to about my doubts and the hypocrisy of the leadership. I then cut myself off from the group spiritually and would talk to people about my doubts. At one of the gatherings one of the elders spoke at length about how we need to be more like the terrorist who flew the planes into the twin towers. The elders also said that we should not

be affected with worldly things and that we should focus on present tasks and not get distracted. This scared the pants off me and I told my wife that this is why I was concerned about our decision to join the Twelve Tribes. I wanted us all to go away and **reevaluate our decision based on what we knew now rather than what we knew when we joined**. I also asked her not to tell anyone but to wait until we returned to Australia. She immediately went and told an elder and later that day they kicked me out.

When they told me to leave, my son Bryson looked at me and said, "I am going with you." I had stopped following the communities' rules for child raising months before and this I believe made Bryson feel secure with me. Even visiting later on he never wanted to stay, even with his mother. After they told me to leave they said I needed to ring my father to arrange a hotel for me on his credit card. I refused and they finally agreed to organise the hotel for me. I discovered that they actually planned to give me \$100 and drop me and my 3 year old son off at a hotel that sold pornography on the front counter and displayed big signs reminding customers to make sure that they double lock their doors at night. This is how they treat you after working your arse off for them for 2 years as well as giving them everything that you owned when you join. My friend was also asked/told to leave. He left with his wife (8 months pregnant) and four children. He told me earlier that he wasn't sure if his wife would leave with him. After they left she told him that she wanted to leave for years but was too scared to talk and discuss the matter.

I finally contacted my parents who wired me some money and organised tickets home for my son and me. My brother turned up 3 days later to help me. The true unconditional love of my family was very emotional versus the love of a cult that is totally dependent on submission and compliance. My wife returned to Australia a few weeks later with Tessa and Peter.

### **Back Home**

During that time I started doing some reading and my mother gave me a book on cults. At first I defended the group believing the best about them but as my head cleared I eventually realised that I was in the grip of a group that practiced mind control and could only be described as a destructive cult. Despite the obvious, it took time for me to come to that understanding and I quickly started leaving my beliefs and practices behind.

I talked my wife into meeting with me at a house on the South Coast. I picked Tessa up on a Thursday. Tysha packed all the clothes that Tessa owned to go down to the coast; obviously she did not plan on her going back to the farm with her. She arrived late on Friday and informed me that she was staying elsewhere. She turned up on Saturday morning and I got my mother to take the kids to a park while we talked. Tysha remained silent and eventually I told her that she might as well leave, as this was not achieving anything. She left. I later picked up the clothes for Peter. She was still breast-feeding him at the time. When I retrieved the baby seat from the car I saw that she had a rod to discipline him on the way down. This filled me with rage and at the same time shame for what I used to do as well.

After that I arranged for Tysha to visit with the children on three occasions. The

last time she came was mid December 2001. She stopped phoning at the beginning of March 2002. I tried to arrange many other visits for her but she never responded. We found out later that she spent 3 years living with the community in England. On her farewell evening from England she told a friend of hers in the Twelve Tribes (who subsequently left) that she was excited to return to Australia to see her children again. This person was shocked because for all the time that she spent with her she never once talked about her children. Upon her return Australia, she contacted me after some considerable time expecting me to just drop the children off for a visit. This showed an incredible ignorance into what she had put the children through and that that the people in the Twelve Tribes have no understanding of the effects of parents abandoning children. It is not a simple let's meet in a park situation. Over Fourteen years have now passed but despite my many attempts to get Tysha to see the children in an appropriate situation she still does not possess the ability to make the commitment needed nor do the work required. This is because the whole world needs to revolve around the Twelve Tribes and their (more accurately Spriggs'), wants/needs/desires. This is not an uncommon story unfortunately.

My daughter Tessa was given a phone which I deliberately left a Twelve Tribes number in. She was fifteen when she was brave enough to text the number. Tessa got a reply and was given a different number to text. Tessa got to text to her Mum. I found out and told Tessa that if she felt she was ready to see Tysha all she had to do was get Tysha to call me and we would arrange something. Tessa told her mum this and was met with silence. Tessa pleaded "please, please, please Mummy just ring Daddy so I can see you". Silence. When I rang the number Tysha's new husband answer the phone. I was told to stop harassing them and to never ring or text this number again. He told me that he did not care how much Tessa was suffering that it was none of his concern. I realized it was her husband's number that Tessa was texting. I would like to believe that Tysha never got the final few texts from Tessa, but I will probably never know.

Tessa who is now twenty last saw her mum when she started Kindergarten. Tessa is now at Uni studying second year Engineering. The Twelve Tribes turned up to her Uni markets days to sell their Mate Tea. Tessa knew who they were and avoided them. One lady chased her down. Tessa was told that Tysha loved her very much and that she needed to go and see her. The arrogance to tell a child who was abandoned that she needed to go and see her mother who had lived for the last eleven years with a one hour drive. Tessa was very upset and shaken. Tessa has since had them kicked off the Uni site for harassment.

My two boys seem very uninterested in reconnecting with their birth Mother. I'm sure they will one day but I am certainly not pushing it. They will visit when they are ready.

**Information:**

This is some of what I would like to inform the readers along with other points of interest.

Any stories that you hear from ex-members of the Twelve Tribes are probably true. It takes a lot of courage to talk about your experience in the Twelve Tribes. Talking about how you disciplined your children is a very shameful thing to admit. Not something that you make up to get back at them. The reality is most ex Twelve Tribes members will only tell you some of what happened. If you are shocked about what they have told you then what they haven't told you is likely to be way worse. It takes courage to speak out and people need to respect this.

Twelve Tribes members are victims, including my wife, of a controlling cult. Group members are genuine and nice proving very alluring. They work hard and practice "their" beliefs and certainly are not hypocrites. Only a handful of them use control and are aware of how they use and manipulate people for their own means as well as the group. Power that the elders exercise over others seduces some of them.

The children suffer psychological, emotional and spiritual abuse through the physical and mental abuse they receive.

The adults often suffer the same abuse as the children. The Twelve Tribes employ guilt, fear, peer pressure, and self doubt to control and manipulate the members.

Only those in a "position of authority" enjoy access to money. This is part of the control mechanism. Upon joining members must give up all their possessions/money/jobs and give it to the group. This makes leaving the Twelve Tribes very difficult unless you have a supportive family willing to help. Also once you leave you own nothing to start anew. This is hard as a single person but very daunting as a married man with children. Also you do not receive any education or formal qualifications and when a person reaches 30 they find it very difficult to leave. Most tribe's members cut off their friends and alienate their family as well.

All of these hindrances work to further entrap the victim in the group. I saw many families in the USA and Canada who were trapped there. Living their lives in the Twelve Tribes because they were too scared to leave and end up on the streets.

The Twelve Tribes believe that they are above the law. This is clearly shown with their teachings on lying, their work practices and even how they overload vehicles with insufficient seat belts for adults and few car seats for small children. The women give birth without any qualified midwives present or the correct procedure for notifying hospitals. They fail to follow education guidelines and child labour rules of which they received convictions in the US. Work is more important than education. They cancel "training" or education classes if the need arises and put both the teachers and older children to work. They operate many businesses such as a demolition company under the name of "Commonwealth Enterprises" which subcontracts work such as strip outs for supermarkets. I worked on several of these and the person who held the demolition license was not usually present. This contravenes work cover rules. I was also once left in charge of a demolition site with 4 others, none of whom held qualifications for the job.

Sometimes the elders required us to work 24 hours straight and then drive home. Other things, such as their "mobile cafe," are very unsafe during the construction phase. During the Olympic Games the elders told us to do particular things at night so people would not see us working without proper safety precautions. This made things more dangerous. The elders also instructed me to

drive unregistered trucks late at night to deliver supplies to the cafe as they were running out of time. Also on many occasions the elders told me to drive an unregistered truck with passengers in the back enclosure.

I am concerned how many authorities and organizations in Australia turn a blind eye to their practices such as the Picton council, SOCOG, and the RAS.

People come over on holiday or religious workers visas but work for this group performing such jobs as painting, bakery, cafe and laboring on work sites.

Discipline procedures for the children, see teachings.

Circumcision for the boys when they are 8 days old. This is done without any medical support or qualified persons. Also if a man is not circumcised and wants to get married he must undergo circumcision. Sometimes the first attempt doesn't go well and must be done a second time a few days later. A 13 year old along with his family joined the community and the child actually circumcised himself with a knife after hearing "teachings" given about the practice and its importance.

The children suffer with retarded development because of a lack of toys and play time and a lack of appropriate peer relationship/friendships. The parents and adults discipline the children for using their imagination. The elders told me that my son and daughter should not spend too much time together as this would harm their development and they may attach themselves to each other rather than just the parents. Children in the community often appear to visitors as quite mature for their ages, however they are quite retarded in their emotional and social development. Visitors quite like the children because they are quiet and obedient. But this behaviour is for 24 hours a day. It is not healthy or natural.

When my 4 week old boy was very sick and needed urgent medical attention the elders told me that I could take him to the hospital however if I wanted to put my faith in God then they would support and pray for me and my son. This seemed a test of my faith. I went to the hospital upon which he stopped breathing and required intensive care for a number of days suffering with RSV bronchiolitis. In another incident I suffered with an apparent cyst and a doctor who joined the community told me that he could lance the cyst. I refused and went to a hospital where it turned out that the "cyst" was actually a pinacyanol abscess that reached to the base of my spine. The abscess reached the size of a cricket ball and required an operation and a 3 day stay in the hospital. The doctor who lived in the community wanted to perform the operation on my bed without any painkillers or medication. He also told me that once he started he would need to finish because I could not go to the hospital case the medical authorities found out that he was practicing without a license. The only reason the community wants him to obtain his qualification is so he can then get a US license and then open up their own "medical" centre around the world.

The Twelve Tribes believe that Christianity is the Harlot of Revelation and under the control of Satan. This gives the group a feeling of superiority over the rest of the Christian society and all other religions. They believe they are the only ones living out the life described in the Bible and subsequently the only true believers.

This is quite common amongst Bible-based cults.

Nonbelievers are destined for the “Lake of Fire” (i.e. hell). When pressed they will say the righteous will inherit eternal life. What they will not tell you is that they believe that anyone who is righteous will join their group. The righteous really refers to people who lived in the past because this is the end times and the world is full of wicked people.

The education of the children is very poor (I am a qualified High School Science Teacher). The younger children seem to receive a reasonable education in math and English. The teachers all exercise the right to discipline the children with a rod for any disobedience and even hold a ceremony in the US for children entering training or school for the first time. The parents hand a rod to the teacher symbolising that they give their complete authority to their teacher to discipline their child as they deem necessary. None of the teachers in Australia hold qualifications. As the children get older they are taught less and spend more time working. The Twelve Tribes do not hold education in high esteem but is looked down in many respects. The children adopt these same attitudes and therefore have no real interest in doing well. The “curriculum” for math is repetitive and does not go much beyond 6th class level. Out of all the children I taught only one showed competency at this level. One student, age 17 demonstrated a math level less than an average year 7 student although not stupid. The classes I was present in usually focused on basic math and English.

Other subjects like science, geography, history, etc are only brushed over with incompetent instructors to satisfy the education inspectors and tried in some way to relate to the Bible. The teachers lacked resources and they never took the children to outside places such as libraries museums or theaters. Only the leader’s children at Picton could access the local library. **I believe the most damaging aspects of the children’s education are their inability to think or work independently, to rationalize, to research and to exercise critical thought.** They cannot read books except the Bible. They usually try to get out of as much schooling as possible and seek to work instead. They also receive much physical discipline during their schooling, particularly the boys. Later if they leave (about 90% of children leave in the US) they feel stupid around their peers and their general knowledge is abysmal. They earn no certificates at all and must independently educate themselves in order to achieve their potential in life.

Sadly many of them don’t possess the skills to read a novel, because they lack the ability to concentrate on books. The teachers give their students no regular homework or independent research for school projects making academic success elusive for these children. Usually the outside world like the boys because of their ability to work hard. The whole role of women in the group is subservience.

Maybe this is part of the reason? The whole focus of child raising is to develop servants.

The accommodations at the Picton farm I believe are illegal. Most people reside in a machinery shed converted into rooms which sits on a flood plain. The single men slept in one room usually 15 of them. The single women with children is similar. Families get one or two rooms for themselves. The shed goes against fire regulations because when I lived at Picton they stored flammable materials inside. Lined with black plastic, the roof would explode like a bomb if a fire broke out filling the place with poisonous smoke. The converted machinery shed contains no fire extinguishers (when I lived at Picton). An unqualified person did



the electrical wiring in the converted machinery shed and a friend with a license signed off on the work. The farm also maintains a large industry where they make pottery and candles. Council rules far exceeds the area to exist as a "cottage industry" but when inspected they turned a blind eye. This should be classed as an industry and come under the proper regulations.

\* Almost anyone at one time in their life is vulnerable to such groups. If you know anyone who is flirting with or involves themselves with a cult then get qualified professional help or seek support groups such as CIFFS. Don't pretend they are making a choice.