

a chapter from:

## ***Gold, Guns and God: Swami Bhaktipada and the West Virginia Hare Krishnas***

by Henry Doktorski.

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### **Chapter 1: This child is going to be a great preacher.**

Swami Bhaktipada was born on September 6, 1937; the fifth child of Reverend Francis Gordon Ham (1903-1979) and his wife Marjorie Grace Clark (1905-1988). The infant was christened “Keith Gordon Ham.”

#### **Genealogy.**

Reverend Ham was the first preacher in his family, at least as far back as the genealogy has been traced. Keith’s great-great-great-grandfather William Ham (b. 1781) lived in Cornwall, England and worked in the copper mines. He and his sons, including Keith’s great-great-grandfather Joseph (1821-1882), were illiterate. Keith’s brother Gerald, who researched the family tree, wrote, “Both father and son were illiterate copper miners from Kenwyn Parish in County Cornwall.”<sup>1</sup>

Keith’s great grandfather, Francis Jenkins Ham (1851-1920) was the first in his family to learn to read and write, but he was unhappy in England. Gerald wrote, “With a growing family and an increasingly depressed Cornish economy, for the mines had begun to play out by the 1860s, Francis Sr. looked for greener pastures—or rather more productive mines.”<sup>2</sup>

After a brief stint in 1882 working in the diamond fields of South Africa, Francis Jenkins immigrated to the United States on May 1, 1883, and settled in the mining town of Peckville, Pennsylvania, a few miles north of Scranton. He worked in and for the coal mines and four members of his family soon followed him from England. The Hams attended the First Baptist Church of Peckville, where Francis Jenkins’ son, Francis Jr. (1874-1955) served as deacon.

Gerald explained, “While earlier generations of Hams (William and Joseph) were illiterate, my grandfather, Francis Jr. had some modest schooling for the 1881 census listed him as age 7 and occupation as ‘scholar.’ . . . Family lore has it that he worked around the mines, as a 9-year old breaker boy picking coal from the slag. On October 1, 1894, twenty-year-old Francis Jr. became a naturalized [U.S.] citizen.”<sup>3</sup>

For a time Francis Jr. worked as a blacksmith and machinist at the Carbondale Machine Company in Simpson, Pennsylvania. Around 1910 he moved back to Peckville and purchased a grocery store where he sold meats, groceries, dairy products and dry goods, such as sneakers, sewing materials and household items. Keith’s father Gordon worked in the store as a boy.

Keith and his siblings enjoyed visiting their grandparents' store in Peckville. Gerald remembered, "for us grandchildren, the most wonderful feature of the store was the penny candy case, which was our first stop on our visits."<sup>4</sup>

The Ham children also enjoyed their annual excursions to their grandparents' home during school vacations. Gerald wrote, "One of my fondest memories is holiday time, particularly Thanksgiving and Christmas when the Francis Ham clan would gather. In addition to the turkey, there were such English and Cornish delights such as suet pudding (a sort of dressing) and steamed pudding with hard sauce. In addition Grandma, who was a great cook, usually had on hand saffron bread, Welsh cookies and maybe even a pasty pie. My Dad saw to it that these favorite recipes were passed on to my mother."<sup>5</sup>

Keith's grandfather was a successful businessman. With the profits generated from his general store he purchased real estate and in time amassed a total of nine buildings which provided yet more income: rent from tenants. Gerald mused, "Was grandfather wealthy? We children thought so. . . he was very comfortably off for the time."<sup>6</sup>

The family prospered and proliferated. In 1912, to strengthen the ties of a large clan, Francis Sr. initiated the first Ham reunion at the Rocky Glen Amusement Park about six miles south of Scranton. A 1925 account of the reunion noted that the family had "been industrious, thrifty and progressive," and from the five immigrants who arrived in 1883 had grown to fifty-four members.<sup>7</sup>

Francis Jr.'s eldest son Gordon was the first Ham to receive a college degree; he graduated from Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, during June 1927. He was ordained a minister in the Peckville First Baptist Church on June 30 and later became affiliated with the Conservative Baptist Association of America.

In December he got his first preaching job: as a temporary supply minister for the First Baptist Church of Toms River, New Jersey. He made a good impression on the staff and congregation and was offered a fulltime job. His installation service was held on April 2, 1928. Gordon married his sweetheart Marjorie on May 30, 1928 and the couple took up residence at 32 Broad Street in Toms River.

Reverend Ham and his wife had four children in succession: Roberta Louise (1929), Joan and Francis Gerald (twins born in 1930), and Shirley Marie (1931). In December 1936, Rev. Ham accepted a position as Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Peekskill, New York and the family moved to 940 Orchard Street. He also preached at the nearby Yorktown Community Church on Sunday afternoons.

Gerald remembered, "My father was highly dedicated if not obsessed with his 'calling.' He literally could not get sated on preaching the 'word.' Certainly one pastorate was not enough. . . At Peekskill, he also ministered to the folks at the colonial era Yorktown Community Church, some seven miles from town. His stipend was seven dollars a week, but he was able to integrate somewhat pastoral duties and sermons for the two churches."<sup>8</sup>

## **Keith Gordon Ham.**

The fifth and final child in Reverend Ham's family was born on September 6, 1937 and given the name "Keith Gordon." Marjorie Ham hoped the boy would grow up to become a preacher like his father. At the time of the child's conception she "prayed to God to have a preacher as a son."<sup>9</sup>

During pregnancy her mother admonished her, "Why another child?" Marjorie Ham is said to have prophesied in reply, "This child is going to be a great preacher."<sup>10</sup>

Young Keith was precocious; even brilliant according to some. Stanley Sterling, Roberta's husband, believed that his young nephew was a genius:<sup>11</sup>

When Keith was a small boy, probably about four or five years old, his parents happened to look out the window and saw that their car was going up and down the driveway. They ran out and found little Keith in the driver's seat. He had started the car by himself and apparently had learned how to shift the gears by watching his father. From an early age, it was obvious that Keith was a genius.

He was also extremely talented, musically and artistically. He made some beautiful artwork with various colors of ground glass which had a very contemporary feeling. It reminded me of sand paintings by Native American Indians.

Keith's mother claimed that her son was "always advanced for his age." She said, "I took him to New York; he was only about six years old. He was talking with somebody on the train. This person said, 'Well, what grade are you in school?' He said, 'I'm in college.' He was quite advanced for six years old. He was always advanced for his age."<sup>12</sup>

Although Keith was intelligent, he had a temper and sometimes became angry and violent. Gerald spoke about Keith's intelligence and irascibility:<sup>13</sup>

Keith was able to accomplish things, to get things done. He was a clever guy and could usually get people to do what he wanted. But sometimes, when he couldn't get his way, he would throw a tantrum.

I remember once, when I was leaving our house and going out on a date with a girlfriend, my little brother, who was probably about ten years old, asked to join us. When I refused to bring him along, he instantly became angry, picked up a glass milk bottle on the porch and threw it, smashing it into many pieces on the sidewalk. One lady passing by remarked, "My, oh my! Little boy! What a terrible temper you have!"

## **Living on a preacher's salary.**

The Ham family lived simply without convenience or luxury. Keith reminisced: "When I was a child, every day I walked two miles each way to school, and I walked home for lunch and back. . . We had, many times, twenty-four inches of snow . . . Not only that, but we did not heat our house. My father was a minister; he made fifty dollars a week and on that he put five children through college; four at the same time."<sup>14</sup>

Gerald confirmed, "Dad's salary in 1936 was \$1500 [about \$29.00 per week] plus parsonage for the first year. With such a big family and so many children so close together . . . Mrs. Ham was a wonder at keeping the children fed and clothed. . . The Baptist congregation were largely working class and were quite stingy . . . in providing raises, etc. The family social rank was definitely middle-class, but the salary was meager."<sup>15</sup>

Gerald remembered his mother's talent for pinching pennies: <sup>16</sup>

Pennies had to be pinched and, thank God, mother was one who could pinch them. She was an excellent seamstress and made much of her own and the girls' clothing. One time for Easter she even made me a dress suit. . . . Easter was her busiest time as she burned the midnight oil to finish outfits for the three girls for proud display the next day.

Harvest time was canning time. Peaches, pears, apple sauce, tomatoes, string beans, sweet corn, and jams and jellies were all prepared for canning, stuffed into Mason jars, cooked in a large pressure cooker and stored in the preserve food cabinets and shelves in the basement. One of my vivid memories is Mother sitting cross-legged on the kitchen floor snapping string beans prior to canning.

If we were never hungry, the larder got low at times. I remember the night we had a visiting religious dignitary and Mother served a dinner of shredded wheat on her finest china. I felt embarrassed. And there was a Thanksgiving without a turkey.

About 1940 we almost had a Christmas without a tree. After supper on December 24, Dad gave us a quarter to go get a tree. We got to a small picked over lot and the seller thought we were the poorest of the poor and gave us a tree and told us to buy our parents a gift with the money.

While we were adequately clothed and sheltered, we knew those who were not. I remember men coming to the back door for something to eat. I never saw mother turn a soul away from her kitchen. She might also provide them with some clothing such as a pair of Dad's old pants. In return these men might mow the lawn or perform some other menial task.

During World War II the family began receiving ration coupons and Reverend Ham started a side business raising chickens. Gerald remembered: <sup>17</sup>

We soon had rationing of such items as meat, sugar, shoes, and gasoline. To prevent hoarding, I remember Mother had to declare how much sugar she had on hand before she could get our "war coupons" books. Mother had a lot of sugar that she needed for canning. To circumvent the letter if not the spirit of the declaration, she spiked the sugar with cinnamon.

With a family as large as ours saving enough ration stamps was not a real problem. Gasoline, of which there was plenty, we rationed to save rubber, especially tires, of which there was little. Because my father used his car for church affairs he had a C gasoline sticker for his windshield which in effect allowed him all the gasoline he needed while the average car owner had an A sticker and coupons good for just 4 gallons a week. Our shortages were cash not coupons.

About 1942 or 43 my father got us into the chicken raising and egg business. Dad brought young chicks and we raised them briefly in the warm kitchen until they were ready to go outside. With lumber from a church member's saw mill we retrofitted the horse stable and my "shop" into rooms for laying hens and the upstairs garage now was for younger chickens. . . .

Dad might have upwards of 100 chickens at peak time. Not only did we have poultry and eggs for our table but also we sold fresh chickens and eggs. The downside was the roosts and floors and nests to clean but it was good for the garden. I remember running eggs around the corner to a local bar and grill and getting \$1 a dozen!

Keith's well-to-do grandfather, Francis Jr., thought that his eldest son Gordon should have pursued a more lucrative career. Gerald wrote, "[Grandfather] was often a lender of last if not first resort. His 'loans' to my father helped to put me through Wheaton College. . . . He did, however, let me know later that he thought our poor family would have been better off if Gordon had been a schoolteacher like his brother Rendal." <sup>18</sup>

## **Strict Baptist upbringing.**

Although Reverend Ham may have lacked material abundance, he appeared to compensate with a wealth in spirit. He undoubtedly found comfort in the the words of the evangelist Matthew: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Rev. Ham taught his children the precepts of Christianity from the Protestant perspective and hoped that they would follow in his footsteps. Of all the Ham children, it was little Keith who, more than any other sibling, imbibed his father’s missionary spirit. He used to bring his little playmates into his house and preach to them, attempting to convert them to his faith.

Keith claimed, “I was a very devout child, and I used to gather my friends together and preach to them. My father was such a conservative minister that he even considered all other Christian denominations to be somewhat pagan. In any case, as a child, I used to try to convert my friends to the Baptist church.”<sup>19</sup>

Gerald elaborated about his family’s religious upbringing:<sup>20</sup>

Our parents were very devout Baptists; they took a literal interpretation of the Bible. We grew up in a strict, conservative Christian home and religion permeated every aspect of our life. For example, we always prayed together. My Dad would read a religious tract or something from the Bible after dinner. Mother would read a book of Bible stories at bedtime. . .

Our parents emphasized that a Godly life and a worldly life could not mix. We were not allowed to go to movies or dances, ever. We couldn’t go swimming on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, like other kids. We never touched alcohol. My parents told us, “The wine mentioned in the Bible wasn’t like the wine we have today; it was more like grape juice.”

Neither were we to enjoy the myth of Santa Clause for while all our young friends believed it, we were constantly reminded that it was a lie.<sup>21</sup>

Sundays were busy. It started with Sunday school, then the regular worship service at church. Once we got older, around twelve or thirteen years of age, we also went to church for the service on Sunday nights. We attended Wednesday night prayer meetings and Friday night meetings for the youth of the congregation.

Before we went on a trip, we would pray and ask the Lord to give us traveling mercy. During the summer we went to Bible camp. Our parents made sure that God was never far from our minds.

Keith later explained why he had been born into a pious family: because he had been a yogi in his previous life. He said, “If you look at my life, you see this substantiated by the Bhagavad-gita (sixth chapter), where it refers to the man who practices this yoga, but doesn’t make it all the way. Krishna says that in one’s next life he immediately takes life in a very pious family or a very rich family. I took birth in a very pious family. We pick up in this life where we left off in our last life.”<sup>22</sup>

## **Keith is “born again.”**

While still a pre-teenager, Keith had a “born again” personal encounter with Christ. He said, “When I was about twelve years old—at that time I was always attending church—I had a real religious experience.”<sup>23</sup>

Keith was a good student and received high grades. He took piano lessons and performed in student recitals at the *Studios of Musical Art for Serious Study* in Crompond, New York. He graduated from Drum Hill Junior High School (ninth grade) in Peekskill on June 23, 1952.

Music was very important in the Ham household. Gerald remembered: <sup>24</sup>

In our home, music had both a cultural and spiritual value. In our family the assumption was—that regardless of talent—no member should be musically challenged regardless of a lack of talent and aptitude. This notion was an inherited one from my mother and from her parents and siblings, all of whom played an instrument and, in effect, was a family ensemble. Even her grandfather, Ira Clark was a choirmaster.

Mother played the cello. Roberta was the first to have piano lessons. Then Joan and I took up the violin. . . Joan became modestly proficient with the violin, Shirley moderately able with the piano and organ, and Keith the best of the lot on the same instruments, often playing the organ for church services.

For the first half of tenth grade, Keith attended the Bob Jones Academy in Greenville, South Carolina, the High School of Bob Jones University, a liberal arts, fundamentalist, and nondenominational Christian university which stands “without apology for the old-time religion and the absolute authority of the Bible.” Keith’s classes included English, Chemistry, Latin, Bible, Physical Education, Piano, Advanced Chorus and Music Appreciation.

Keith wrote, “I think I went to Bob Jones University mainly at my parents’ urging. They were very staunch fundamentalists—so was BJU. At BJU they had an epidemic of infectious hepatitis, which I got and was in the infirmary there for a couple of months and then left to go home and recuperate. I thought I was well enough to go back to school in January or February, and so enrolled in Stony Brook for the spring of 1953 semester.” <sup>25</sup>

### **Stony Brook School.**

Stony Brook School on Long Island was an independent college preparatory school founded in 1922 with the motto “Character before career.” The school prospectus claimed that it “exists to challenge young men and women to know Jesus Christ as Lord, to love others as themselves, and to grow in knowledge and skill, in order that they may serve the world through their character and leadership.” Keith’s older brother Gerald attended Stony Brook about nine years earlier.

Sixteen-year-old Keith described his first days at Stony Brook, the rigorous academic discipline, a request for prayers to “fire him up,” his conviction that God will help him, his appreciation for the Bible class, and a suggestion by one of his teachers to study the organ, in a letter to his parents dated February 4, 1953: <sup>26</sup>

Dear Mother & Dad,

I guess you’d like to have a line and see how I’m getting along. I’ve now been through two full days of classes. I find a different type discipline here than at BJ. You really have [to have] mental discipline—of course it’s doubly hard for me—being out all that time [sick last autumn].

I trust you will fire me up in prayer—as I’ll need much of it—however I feel confident that if I do my part—He will help me.

I’m meeting one of my masters this afternoon at 5:30 and make up my last semester History. I’m sure I will be able to do it. I enjoy the Bible class here much more than at BJ. The teacher is very good.

Doctor Gaebelein invited me over to play for him (piano). Then we went over to the chapel and I played the organ. *He* said I should take lessons as I have talent and there is a very good organist here—(mind you this is not my idea). He said he could get a cheap rate—\$2 a lesson. However I don't think we should do it this semester. He certainly is a fine musician, and has a very lovely piano (Steinway). Well I guess I better close and get some work done—(I study about 4 or 5 hours a day)—(2 at BJ). My box is 323.

Love,

Keith

Four days later, Keith wrote again to his parents and described his progress at Stony Brook, his longing for the spiritual life of Bob Jones Academy, the demanding academic life, the “pathetic” meals, a new friend, meeting Christ, the “wicked” laundry service, his appreciation for the religious service at Stony Brook, and his preference for his father's preaching style:

Dear Mom & Dad,

One week of school is now over and I am certainly glad. I am making up much of my work in World History. I've covered about 8 chapters and 22 more to go. Just think in 33 more days I'll be home for spring vacation. Not bad. It's almost time to go to class now.

I've met a very nice boy who is a fine Christian—He's from Colorado. He might come home with me for spring vacation.

I certainly miss the spiritual life of BJ. Here you have to really get your own from your own contacts with Christ. I must confess I've met Christ here in a way I never knew Him, to be real. BJ certainly has the spiritual life that Stony Brook hasn't. I'm glad I came here, but in many ways wish I was at BJ. Well the bell has rung and I must go to church. . . .

2:30 p.m. . . . The work here is very difficult—I've read about 400 pages this week—(fine print and big pages). I've been studying about 6 hours a day so you can see I've had no time to fool around. I'd like to send my laundry home as the laundry here is wicked. Maybe I can get a regular box to send it home in and you can get a laundry box to send it back in. I think that will work out better.

If for any reason you don't want me to bring a boy home for vacation write and tell me. I'm sure you'd like the fellow—he's really swell.

We had a pretty good meal today for a change. The meals really stink. Their cook left two weeks ago and the janitor is doing the cooking. It's really pathetic.

I'm enjoying my history course very much—wish I had more such courses. We just got through studying the Reformation—(I'm also studying the fall of Roman civilization).

I'm now listening to WOR opera—It's very good of course. I don't want to take music lessons as I don't think the teacher is so “hot” & I wouldn't have time. I'm devoting this semester to real mental discipline (school work).

How's [our dog] little Bunny?

I certainly appreciate all you're doing for me and I'm trying to make it up to you through service to Christ. I'm sure you will be happy with that.

The service this morning was good. I still like the way my father preaches. Dr. Gaebelein didn't speak. Well I guess I've written plenty so will close —

Love,

Keith

Keith was a serious student who attempted to dedicate his life to Christ, and he exhibited his belief through his self-discipline and devotion. He said, “From age thirteen to eighteen I thought constantly about God.”<sup>27</sup>

Keith stayed at Stony Brook for only ten days; he had a relapse of hepatitis and had to return home to recover. He wrote, “At Stony Brook I had a relapse of the hepatitis [which I had caught earlier at Bob Jones Academy] and left there after only ten days or so and went back home. That late summer (1953) I got polio and was hospitalized at Grasslands Hospital all autumn.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Polio.**

During the late summer of 1953, around his seventeenth birthday before beginning his junior year of high school, Keith contracted poliomyelitis, an acute infectious disease especially common in children, caused by a virus inflammation of the gray matter of the spinal cord. It is accompanied by paralysis, the muscles often atrophy, and it often results in permanent deformities. It gave Keith weak abdominal muscles and a limp for the rest of his life.<sup>29</sup>

I had polio in 1953, and it affected me very severely. At one point I couldn't even turn myself over in bed. I was in the Grasslands Hospital at Valhalla, New York. It's the county hospital of Westchester County, then the richest county in the United States. At first they thought I had a brain tumor, which was causing the paralysis, due to the very high pressure visible in the retina of my eyes (glaucoma). They did a craniotomy and found no brain tumor. It was “only” polio!

In time I regained much of my movement, but remained permanently paralyzed in my right leg, abdominal muscles, etc. I had a muscle transplant in my right leg a year or two later, which helped considerably, allowing me to ambulate first on crutches, and finally with just a cane.

Although Keith missed months of school while recuperating, he nevertheless graduated with high honors from Peekskill High School. Despite hepatitis and polio, Keith was able to make up his missed school work and graduate on time with his class. He wrote, “After missing a half-year of school from my bout with polio, I went back to Peekskill High School after Christmas (1953) for the second semester and made everything up in summer school . . . and graduated with ‘my class,’ despite all the time missed.”<sup>30</sup>

His friends remembered his courage while recovering from the dreaded disease; he had to hobble from classroom to classroom with the aid of crutches. Upon graduation, classmates wrote to Keith:<sup>31</sup>

Lots of luck and success to one of the bravest guys I ever met.

May the future bring you all the good things it should. It's great to know a guy like you because of the great things you've overcome yet you're always smiling. It makes a guy think!

Good luck and health to a real courageous guy, and a good friend.

One appreciative classmate wrote a poem, “To Keith and his crutches, which will never hinder him a muchis?”

## High School graduation.

Keith was a scholar. During the second half of his senior year, he was elected to the Peekskill High School Honor Society and his photograph, along with nineteen other honor students, appeared in the February 19, 1955 issue of the *Peekskill Evening Star*, “Seventeen seniors and eight juniors were elected to the Peekskill High School Honor Society this week. The students were chosen by the faculty for outstanding scholarship, leadership, service and character. The purpose of the society is ‘to create an enthusiasm for scholarship, to stimulate a desire to render service, to promote worthy leadership and to encourage the development of character.’”

During his senior year, Keith was a member of the school debating team as well as the student council. His brother Gerald, remarked, “Keith was quite a debater.” He was especially honored by being chosen to be one of six high school panelists to appear on the New York Youth Forum which was sponsored by the New York Times and telecast over WQXR on February 26, 1955. The topic of the forum was “The Meaning of Brotherhood” and some questions considered by the panel were “What does brotherhood mean to you?” “What destroys the ideals of brotherhood?” “How do prejudices affect the people who have them?” and “How can youth strengthen the ideals of brotherhood?” The distinguished composer, Gian-Carlo Menotti, whose opera, *The Saint of Bleeker Street*, was being performed on Broadway, served as the guest panelist.

## “The life of the party” “who always keeps the beer bottles empty.”

Keith became lax in following the strict discipline of his Baptist parents; during his senior year at Peekskill High School he apparently developed a reputation as a boozier. His classmates wrote: <sup>32</sup>

To a guy who’ll go far in the future if he stays s - - - - [sober]. Good luck always to a real swell guy.

Luck always to a fellow drinker?? Never forget “Skippers” and the terrific Christmas dance. We sure had fun.

To a great guy and a lot of fun, who always keeps the beer bottles empty.

I know you will be a success at whatever you do. Stay sober.

Always remember the fun we had in Jr. High School. I’ll always remember you as the perfect angel. (ha-ha)

Best of luck to a true Drinking Partner. Just as soon as you get that stone [cast] off your leg, we will have to make the rounds again.

To a real grand guy who is the life of the party. Don’t worry, a barfly’s not too bad; you just don’t have any feelings. All the luck life has to offer. Don’t booze it up too much.

Good luck to a great guy and please for my sake, stay sober!

Keith explained, “In our culture, when one becomes a teenager, it is fashionable to reject everything. Of course, this is very gradual. Being subjected to these cultural influences, I began to question my religion, and I was unable to get satisfactory answers. I wanted to know who I was and why I was here. I wanted to know why I should believe in God. I began asking questions like ‘What is God?’ ‘What is the relevance of God to modern man?’ When I did not get satisfactory answers, I rejected my religion.” <sup>33</sup>

Keith continued, “The Baptist Church is a church without a rationale. It told me not to smoke and drink and have premarital sex, but it didn’t tell me why.”<sup>34</sup>

### **College.**

During the summer of 1955, Reverend Ham accepted a position with a salary increase as Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Merrick, Long Island.<sup>35</sup>

Gerald reported, “The Hams lived in a small parsonage at first and later when the new church was built, they had a larger house. . . The new church was very nice and Rev. Ham was very proud of it as was the congregation.”<sup>36</sup>

That autumn, Keith began studies at Maryville College near Knoxville, Tennessee, a liberal arts college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). The college is noted for its liberality: “Maryville College is located near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee. Founded in 1819, it is the 12<sup>th</sup> oldest institution of higher learning in the South and maintains an affiliation with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Known for its academic rigor and its focus on the liberal arts, Maryville College was the first college in Tennessee to enroll minority students and also the first college in Tennessee to award a bachelor’s degree to a woman, in 1875.”<sup>37</sup>

Keith joined the debate society and displayed a talent for putting forth logical arguments. He was a four year member of the varsity debate squad; he served as president of the Tennessee Alpha chapter of Pi Kappa Delta, a national debating fraternity, from which he received a rating of “Special Distinction.” He decided to major in Political Science and pursue a career in law.

At Maryville, Keith became interested in Neo-Orthodoxy, a modern school of Protestant theology which is largely derived from the work of the American and Swiss theologians, H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) and Karl Barth (1886-1968)—especially the latter’s arguments that knowledge of God can only be obtained through revelation, not natural reason. Neo-Orthodoxy attempted to recover some essential elements of Reformation theology, notably emphasis on the sovereignty and grace of God, human sinfulness, and the primacy of revelation through scripture.

Keith studied organ with Dr. James Bloy and served as the organist for the Highland Presbyterian Church. He heard the great American organist Virgil Fox present a recital on February 21, 1956, at the First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. Keith also served as the president of the Tennessee Epsilon chapter of Pi Gamma Mu, a national honorary social science fraternity.

During summer vacations, Keith served as a counselor at Camp Bouman in Freeport, New York. He wrote, “Camp Bouman was the summer camp I worked at to make money for college. It was just a couple of miles from my parents’ home in Merrick. (Merrick is the next town out of New York City on the railroad.) I believe they were mainly Jewish kids, but it was not at all religious. Just a place for parents to park their kids in the summer. I believe it was only a day camp!”<sup>38</sup>

After four years of consistently high scholastic achievements, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Maryville College on May 20, 1959 and graduated *magna cum laude*: first in his class of 117.<sup>39</sup>

### **Keith's annunciation of independence.**

Although Keith was a model student in academics, he also developed a rebellious independent streak; in high school he began drinking, and during his sophomore year at college, at the age of nineteen, he was caught smoking cigarettes in the dormitory and his parents were notified. Naturally, being strict Baptists, they were not pleased, to put it mildly. There had already been friction between Keith and his father during the previous summer when he lived at home after his freshman year. After the incident of smoking in the dormitory, Reverend Ham frankly explained to his son that he did not want another summer like the last.

Keith wrote to his parents and to his older brother in Madison, Wisconsin, and explained that it was time that he became independent. He had his own life to lead and would not submit to his parents' authority anymore; he had to find his own way. He inquired from Gerald if he could live with him in Madison during the summer in case he was not welcome to live at home. In his letter to Gerald, Keith explained, "After careful consideration, I tried to explain [to Mom and Dad] that, while I was sorry for the way I had conducted myself, I could not arbitrarily accept any standard, even if they were my parents'. I told him [Dad] that I thought it was basic to our faith that each individual had to examine the evidence and arrive at his own values."<sup>40</sup>

Keith had led a fairly sheltered life under the supervision of his conservative Baptist parents and the restricted environments of the Christian schools he had attended, but when he made friends with more worldly peers in public high school he began drinking alcohol and in college he began smoking cigarettes, in direct defiance of his parents' religious moral codes. Keith was undoubtedly aware of this rebellious change in the direction of his life, but it was unlikely that even he could foresee the disappointment and embarrassment his parents would endure after he went off to graduate school and discovered the pleasures of the flesh.

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- <sup>1</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>2</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>3</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>4</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>5</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>6</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>7</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>8</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "Growing Up Born Again," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>9</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, quoted by Brahma dasa, "On Tour With Srila Bhaktipada, Part 2: Yams and the Joy of No Sex," *Brijabasi Spirit* (October 21, 1987), 4.
- <sup>10</sup> This story was told by Ganendra dasa in "Vyasa-puja Homage," *Sri Vyasa Puja* (September 3, 1979), 14.
- <sup>11</sup> Stanley Sterling, telephone conversation with the author (August 8, 2003).
- <sup>12</sup> Marjorie Ham, quoted in "Gurumata," *New Vrindaban News* (December 17, 1985), 7.
- <sup>13</sup> F. Gerald Ham, telephone conversation with the author (May 25, 2003).
- <sup>14</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, cited in "Excerpts from a Darshan with Srila Bhaktipada Concerning Gurukula," *New Vrindaban News* (October 21, 1986), 5-6.
- <sup>15</sup> Gerald Ham, e-mail letter to the author (January 6, 2012).
- <sup>16</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "The Great Depression," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>17</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "World War II," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>18</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "My Ancestral Lines," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>19</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, quoted in "Talks About Christianity," *Brijabasi Spirit*, vol. 10, no. 1 (April 1983), 6.
- <sup>20</sup> F. Gerald Ham, telephone conversation with the author (July 9, 2003).
- <sup>21</sup> This paragraph from Francis Gerald Ham, "Growing Up Born Again," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>22</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, quoted by Francine Jeanne Daner, *The American Children of Krishna*, 80.
- <sup>23</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, quoted in "Srila Bhaktipada Talks Back," *New Vrindaban News* (December 12, 1986), 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, "Growing Up Born Again," unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>25</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, letter to the author (July 20, 2003).
- <sup>26</sup> Keith Ham, letters to "Dear Mother & Dad" (February 4 and February 8, 1953), from the Ham Family Archive.
- <sup>27</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, quoted by Francine Jeanne Daner, *The American Children of Krishna: A Study of the Hare Krishna Movement* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York: 1976), 79.
- <sup>28</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, letter to the author (July 20, 2003).
- <sup>29</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, letter to the author (May 11, 2003).
- <sup>30</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, letter to the author (July 20, 2003).
- <sup>31</sup> Comments written by graduating classmates at Peekskill High School (class of 1955): John E. Lynch, Donald S. Straub, Joel (Duke) H. Garson, James (Jaime) A. Hynes.
- <sup>32</sup> Comments written by graduating classmates at Peekskill High School (class of 1955): John R. Pulice, Barbara T. Catalina, Chris Gamwell, Robert Cole, Lois Ann Bogardus, A. Gordon Hennessy, Andrew Antunes, Donald S. Straub.
- <sup>33</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, quoted in "Talks About Christianity," *Brijabasi Spirit*, vol. 10, no. 1 (April 1983), 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, quoted by Dave Peyton in "Spreading the Word: Krishnas Move From Airports To Palaces To Tell Their Story," *Huntington Herald-Dispatch* (February 17, 1980), F1.
- <sup>35</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, e-mail to the author (January 22, 2013).
- <sup>36</sup> Francis Gerald Ham, e-mail to the author (February 5, 2013).
- <sup>37</sup> "Welcome to Maryville College," <http://archive.org/details/maryvillecollege>, accessed February 5, 2013.
- <sup>38</sup> Kirtanananda Swami, letter to the author (July 20, 2003).
- <sup>39</sup> Keith's picture appears four times in the 1959 Maryville College Yearbook, *The Chilhowean*, on page 22 with white suit and black bowtie (graduating seniors) and on page 85 with suit and necktie (Debate Team, Pi Kappa Delta and Pi Gamma Mu).
- <sup>40</sup> Keith Ham, quoted by F. Gerald Ham in a telephone conversation with the author (August 18, 2003).