

Me & My Cross

by Larry Flora

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Writing letters, reports, essays of any kind is not high on my priority list of things I enjoy doing. Keeping a diary would definitely be on the bottom of any list. Nevertheless, last week, on January 8th, 1993, I had an experience I felt needed to be recorded for future reference. Since I have had a number of other similar experiences worth sharing, I may have to start keeping notes. Let me start at the beginning. On June 4-7, 1992, I experienced the wonderful love of Christ in the lives of others at a Cursillo weekend.



On Sunday, June 7th I learned about “Fourth Day”. I also met my “Guardian Angel,” Jack. Jack shared with me that since his Cursillo weekend, six years before, **he had worn his Cursillo cross every day of his life (on the outside of his shirt)**. What a neat idea, I thought. The cross symbolizes the greatest possible expression of God’s love, sending His only Son to die for my sins, that I might be a part of His family forever. Wearing my cross would be such a little thing. I proudly announced to my community that, like Jack, I would wear my cross every day [every Fourth Day] for the rest of my life. Little did I realize what this might mean.

Fourth Day Number -1: Sunday, June 7th, at “Homecoming,” my associate pastor took me aside. He informed me that I needed to be informed.... The two pastors had talked.... I was not to start pushing Cursillo in our church.... I was not to start any support groups.... “Cursillo was no different than any other Christian camp weekend or weekend experience,” and I was not to create problems by even talking about it. (My wife, Bonnie, and I were the first two people to attend a Cursillo weekend from our church. We had wanted to go for five years, and when we learned that our new Associate Pastor had gone, we persuaded him to sponsor us.)

Now I am told to keep this exciting experience of sharing God’s love to myself! Well, I said nothing. Bonnie and I were already in two support groups, two choirs, and other church activities. I had no intention of creating problems, or starting new groups. I would just wear my cross.

Fourth Day Number 1: 9:00 a.m., I gave a sales presentation to a group of seven sales professionals. It was an excellent presentation. I handled every objection well to the increasing frustration of the lady sitting directly in front of me. She was also the major influencing factor of any decision to purchase our services. Finally, when she could not cause me to falter or lose the value of thy presentation in any other way, she stood up and said, “I will never trust a man who wears a cross! Goodbye.” Then she walked out of the room.

I shared this experience with my partner fifteen minutes later. He had attended a Cursillo weekend three weeks before me. His only comment was, “You could wear your cross under your shirt.”

Thirty minutes later, my church president visited me at our office. His mission was to give me the same message I had received from our associate pastor. I told him “NOT TO WORRY.” I would not create any problems. That afternoon, I made some field calls. I had poor response everywhere I went. One person, a Jew, told me it was offensive to him for me to wear a cross in his office.

That night was church council meeting. The senior pastor took me aside before the meeting to make sure that I would not be saying anything about Cursillo at council. I am the Evangelism Committee chairman.

The major thrust of our committee is the spiritual welfare of our members and the outreach of our congregation. As chairman I would never have brought anything before council that had not been discussed in committee first. I reminded pastor that this is our standard procedure. He had nothing to worry about.

It was 10:30 p.m. of Fourth Day Number 1. Nothing had gone right. I cannot say that I really enjoyed any part of that day, and this is not the way I enjoy living my life! Then the telephone rang. It was my sister in Phoenix. Her first words were, "De Colores, brother. I love you." (Please excuse me, I have to stop and wipe my eyes so I can continue.) We laughed and cried for over an hour. I knew everything was in God's hands, and in His time when that day ended.

Fourth Day Number 2: I have never been a demonstrative person in public or even among friends. I am not bashful. I do smile and speak to strangers. I was still not quite ready for what happened. I was opening the door to a store. A lady was coming out, so I held the door open for her. "God bless you," she said. "Praise the Lord." Then she gave me this great big hug. I think she was twenty feet away before I recovered, and said, "God bless you."

Fourth Day Number 5: I had just about made it through the first week. I had almost gotten so use to my cross that it was a part of me. I no longer felt that everyone was looking at it. I gave a sales presentation to one man in his office. Everything went well. I closed the sale. The check was written and laying on the table before me. My client asked me why I wore a cross. I told him it had been a meaningful gift at a wonderful retreat, and I was proud to wear it as a symbol of my Christian Faith. My client pulled the check back. He told me that he too was a Christian, but that one's faith must be personal. My wearing a cross in public was offensive to him. It placed me in the same group as religious fanatics. He tore up the check and ended our interview.

I thanked my ex-client for his time, and he walked me to the door. On the way, I stepped aside to speak to one of his employees. "Those are the most beautiful earrings you have. One is a serpent and one is an apple. Do you wear them often?" "Yes", she replied. "I love them. They remind me of how sin came into the world, and how often I need to thank my Lord for His saving love." I said, "That's great." I continued walking out.

The woman sifting at the receptionist's desk by the front door (whom I later learned was the wife of my ex-client) was wearing a lovely silver chain with a beautiful pearl cross. I said, "That is a lovely cross. Do you wear it often?" Her reply, "I am a Christian, and I wear this cross nearly every day." I said, "It looks good on you. Have a great day." I walked out the front door and was halfway to my car when my ex-client called out to me, "Larry, will you get your buff back in here!"

Every experience is not that wonderful. I have not kept track of the days or events that have taken place in my life. They just keep happening. My wife has suggested that maybe if I just did not wear my cross at church.... A grocery clerk has stopped me to talk about the wonders of God's world and the mystery of how bees can make wax for the honeycomb, and honey. A salesman has said "God bless you" to me far too many times in our short contact. I have been asked many times – as often as weekly – "Are you a priest?" Or, "Are you a Christian?"

I was told that I goofed, and I probably did. I told an ethnic joke to a group in which there were two Jews. They told me the joke would have been okay if I had not been wearing a cross. My response was: "I AM THE SAME PERSON WHETHER I WEAR A CROSS OUTSIDE MY TIE, UNDER MY SHIRT, OR NOT AT ALL!" "If my joke would not have been in poor taste were I not wearing a cross, then it should not have been in poor taste because I wear a cross. I am as proud of my cross as you are of your six-pointed star."

My joke: Two good friends, a Jew and a Chinaman sat in the park and played checkers every day. One day the Jew slapped the Chinaman across the face and sent the checkers flying. "Why did you do that my friend?" asked the Chinaman. "That was for Pearl Harbor," said the Jew. "The Chinese didn't have anything to do with Pearl Harbor," replied the Chinaman. "That was the Japanese!" "Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese," said the Jew; "They all the same." The checker game resumed. Then the Chinaman slapped the Jew across the face and sent the checkers flying. "Why did you do that my good friend?" asked the Jew. "That was for the Titanic!" replied the Chinaman. "The Titanic! The Jews didn't have anything to do with that! It was sunk by an iceberg!" said the Jew. "Yeah, I know," said the Chinaman, "Goldberg, Greenberg, Iceberg, they're all the same." (Red, yellow, black and white. They are all precious in His sight.)

Fourth Day Number 205: Bonnie and I are in a stationery store in Sidney, NE. We are picking up a couple items before visiting her brother. The owner asks, "Is that a Cursillo Cross?" It was a pleasure to visit with a fellow Cursillista, 1600 miles from home, about some of the exciting things happening in his life and in their Fourth Day Group, while my wife was shopping.

I have learned that wearing my cross opens doors and closes doors, provides challenges, and brings support from the most unlikely places. This is really no different than the life of any Christian who has allowed the Holy Spirit to live in and be an active part of their life. Galatians 2:20 has always been one of my favorite verses, partly because I believe it is very true for me.

Life continues in His time, in His way, and in His love. Every moment is a gift from Him and, like a present to be opened, can be full of surprises and joys waiting to happen. This brings me to the experience I had that pushed me over the edge, and got me to sit down and write all of these words. Fourth Day Number 214: We have a client who is not sure of her English comprehension. She had to be in Small Claims Court, and our office manager had agreed to go along for moral support. At the last minute I was asked to fill in. So there I sat in court for two hours waiting for our client's case to be called. The Judge had a rough day that afternoon. Everyone had someone there for "moral support." They interrupted proceedings, had to be asked to leave. One was told that if he uttered another word he would be held in contempt of court.

Finally, my client and I stepped forward. The judge looked at me. "You were not sworn in," he said. "Why are you here? I see you are wearing a cross. Are you a pastor or priest?" I replied, "No." He said, "Are you some religious fanatic? Why are you wearing a cross?" "Your Honor," I replied, "I am a responsible citizen of the one country in the world that announces to the world in her pledge of allegiance that she is one nation under God. I am proud to wear the symbol of that God's only Son." Dead silence existed for seconds – it seemed like minutes! The judge said, "Thank you," and continued the case.

Twice my client wanted to ask me something, but I could tell that there was nothing important she needed to have explained at the moment, so I held up my hand silently and waved off her question. We got through the entire trial without one word out of me. Just before we left, the judge said to me, "Sir, you are welcome in my court anytime."

I do not know where the words came from that I had spoken. I had not prepared them in advance. I seldom have quick comebacks to the challenges of others, but as I think back, I am pleased with what I said.

A pastor friend of mine, whose wife gave a "Rollo" at my Cursillo weekend told me that wearing a cross would always be a burden and a joy. The decision to continue wearing it should only be between me and my Lord. I know that I will just take each Fourth Day as an exciting new day in his time.

Thank you,
Larry D. Flora
Pittsburg, CA

P.S. Perhaps I should try to keep a log of events....

Fourth Day Number 225: I left an hour later for work than usual this morning. I resigned myself to driving in the morning "parking lot" so common to San Francisco East Bay freeways.

A young man pulled up on my left side and honked to get my attention. Then he showed me a fish exactly like the fish on my bumper. Seconds later, I pulled up beside the same young man and showed him my cross. A few moments later, the same man waved at me holding up his Bible. When next I caught up to him, I waved back with my Bible. Later, he pulled beside me laughing, holding up a sign that said, "Honk if you love Jesus." And, he honked and honked. My horn has not worked in over 100,000 miles, so I simply signed, "Jesus loves you." He repeated the sign to me. We waved good-bye, and were separated by traffic. What a neat way to start the day.

LDF

P.P.S. Since I wrote this article for the ULTREYA, I have been in fourteen states and in Canada. In every state and in Canada, someone has said to me: "De Colores" and/or given me a hug. A couple times they have taken hold of my cross, and turned it over to read the inscription on the back first. I love wearing my Cursillo Cross, and will never take it off.

My wife and I made our Cursillo in June of 1992. Less than 10 years later, we have sponsored 21 wonderful friends to Cursillo. We believe that this is one of the most wonderful ways we can share the love of Jesus and what it means to us. (If all of you would join us in this venture, our secretariat would have to hold 10+ Cursillo weekends a year to meet the need rather than just the two or three we now have!)

God bless you all, Larry

P.P.S. 2 4th Day 1 million: Today, 4/22/02, I left the house to do two errands. First time ever, I forgot to put on my cross. I spoke to 4 people; 3 of them asked, "Larry, where is your cross?" Forgive me, Lord.

LDF