



BECOMING JERANISM | Jeran Campanella's Journey to the Flat Earth

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Catholic—*ism*

IMAGINING Jeran Campanella walking the center aisle of his local parish dressed in a white alb with a cincture tied at the waist would be incredibly difficult to do—particularly for those of us who know him *now*. The personality behind YouTube channels *Jeranism* and *Globbusters* was once a conscientious altar server too. The *boy* Jeran Campanella wouldn't be caught dead wearing anything but black slacks and black leather shoes when vested for Mass. And socks. Only black socks would do. And another thing, the Roman Catholic Church requires that a crucifix be visible during the celebration of Mass. Imagine Jeran Campanella with a *thurible*—

*a metal censer suspended from chains, filling the cathedral with the sweet aroma of incense. Or as the cross bearer, leading procession with a large crucifix in his hands. When Jeran held the crucifix high, parishioners bowed before him. Difficult to imagine indeed, considering the Jeran we know—but without which, there is little to no possibility that he could become an *ism*.*

He was born in January of 1980 in San Jose, California, and that much was by default. Gilroy offered no good hospital at the time. From the land of his upbringing, the boy Jeran Campanella could stand in the rich agricultural Salinas Valley and turn in any direction. Way off *yonder* upon the horizon, *any* given horizon, culture surrounded him. To his east lay the San Joaquin Valley and

the silhouette of the Sierra mountain range, and then a little beyond that, the almost-mystical cathedral of Yosemite, folded within its slopes and crevices as a hidden gem; none of which, astonishingly, he would ever dare to explore. To his north, the San Francisco Bay was still hammering and chiseling away at the ever-evolving golden image of the sex revolution. But far more important to the aboriginal decades of his upbringing, Silicon Valley had thrust humanity into the greatest technological revolution since the printing press. The Pacific Coast Highway, which met up with Monterey and Santa Cruz some thirty minutes to his west, could take him there. San Francisco. Silicon Valley. Or Big Sur to

his south—*if he chose*. And yet, point Jeran Campanella in a given direction. *Any* direction. They might as well have been alien landscapes. Though the towns of Salinas Valley were world renowned for their crops; Watsonville for its strawberries; Gilroy for its garlic; and Castroville for its artichokes (in 1948, Norma Jean, aka Marilyn Monroe, reigned as its first artichoke festival queen); John Steinbeck would secure their geographical reputations as a place of literary insight into the human condition. For the entirety of his upbringing, like Steinbeck eighty years earlier, *this* was Jeran Campanella's stomping grounds, surrounded by fields of garlic and artichoke.



To *say* the Campanella household was fond of Catholicism would probably be an understatement. Jeran's mother was in charge of music and liturgy at Saint Mary's

in Gilroy, and though she had endeavored to educate her children there from the moment either of them entered grade school, the costs were simply too high for a

blue-collar family income. So, public school it was. In time they were able to volunteer their services. His father was an electrician, and eventually, discounted trade work secured admissions for Jeran and his sister throughout the crucial years of their sixth, seventh, and eighth grade education. Middle school would ultimately ignite the fuse of Jeran's worldview.

Jeran's very first place of employment was at Saint Mary's too. Working as a receptionist in the office "was a pretty easy job to do. Basically, if any homeless people came to the door, we would hand out vouchers for food. Fridays was *the worst* day to work because Friday nights we'd have to fold the bulletins. We'd have like two-thousand bulletins that needed to be folded to be ready for church on the weekend." The endlessness of folding would consume hours—and at a crawling pace. "But that was my first job when I was fourteen. I was very into the church. That was my life."

Still, employment at Saint Mary's had its perks. As an altar server, it was not untypical for Jeran to be pulled out of class on a Wednesday afternoon. "There were only three or four of us," he said. "There might be a funeral Wednesday at noon. Everybody else was in school, but we'd get a word from the office. *Jeran and Adam, we need you* to go be an altar server over at this funeral mass." Duties also included weddings on the weekend. "Usually, we'd get money. It might be a twenty-dollar bill. It might be ten dollars. If a family donated to the altar servers, I might make a little money that way."

Jeran's ambitions not only secured his place as head of the altar servers, but as president of his youth group. But it was actually his duties in the rectory which ensured Jeran's intimate and inside glance into the day-to-day informalities of the Catholic

priesthood. For starters, "when they would get out of church on Sundays, they'd say *hi* to everybody outside. They'd shake their hands. And then they would go right into the rectory and watch football." *The New England Patriots*. In other words, priests acted one way in front of the congregation, and then the rest of the week, in fact for the bulk of it, they acted exactly like Jeran Campanella's dad. "So, I just learned I had a very different feeling about priests than maybe other people did. These are regular guys. They like sports. They're *just* priests."

The thing is, very little to nothing about life in the rectory, as Jeran observed it, spoke of the holiness which the church advocated weekly from the lectern. Among his many weddings, there were *some* where "the priest would give me the chalice, and he'd tell me, 'Hey, you need to drink the rest of this wine.'"

Why? Jeran would ask.

"Well, we can't pour the wine down the sink, because it's Jesus' blood at this point. It's already been changed over."

So Jeran, as a pubescent, did as he was told. He drank *the blood*.

"Everything about it seemed un-sacramental. These wafers that had become the body of Christ would just sit in the back in a big bowl. I would even go back there and eat them. Nobody cared. It wasn't a big deal. And the way the church operated; I just saw priests be *dicks*—a lot." When Gilroy's homeless population would slowly amble towards the church, one-by-one, and ask for something to eat—perhaps it was on a Thursday, seven o'clock—Jeran would typically call the priests down. "Sometimes they'd come and talk to them," he said. Then again, "other times they'd just ask, '*Can you get rid of them?*' I remember a

priest one time, coming down, just being obliterated, *drunk*—because, you have to remember, this is where they lived. That was their house. I basically worked in an office at the front of their house. So, I'd just walk down a hallway, make a right turn. I'd be in their kitchen—a *huge* community kitchen. That's where I would eat my dinner when I worked there at night. I would just open the fridge and eat what the priest ate. There would be frozen lasagna. Of course, people always gave donations to the church, so there would always be something to eat in there. I'd make a sandwich or a microwavable dinner. But I basically worked where they lived. So, at any time they could come down and be in the kitchen with me. There were times when the priest could come down, *completely drunk*, stumbling into the kitchen with a bottle of Jack Daniels."

"There's a guy at the door," Jeran.

"Tell him to get out of here! I'm busy!"

In time, Jeran was able to engage with the sort of questions which many Catholics, if not most, rarely get to ask. "I remember asking a priest, 'Do you ever actually *talk* to God? because I don't feel like He talks to me. And do you actually talk to Jesus? because I don't feel like He talks to me.' I was able to be very open with these guys. Growing up, I always had these ideas of what priests were. They're up at the altar on Sundays. They're super holy men. They're great men who are called by God to do this job. And then in talking to them, what I came to realize is that they were just men like everybody else."

Upon asking one priest if he talked with God, the priest answered: "Well, I feel His presence in everything I do."

Jeran rebutted: "Yeah, but do you *talk* to Him?"

"It's not like that. God doesn't work that way."

Jeran became disillusioned with other elements of the religion too. As an altar server, "I used to carry the cross of Jesus into the church. I used to carry this huge 8-foot cross above my head, walk in, and people would bow to it." Perhaps it was the leftovers—the thoughtless surplus of flesh and blood, abandoned in a bowl. The hand-hewn images of adoration began to wear on him too. As a teenager, "I was like, *holy smokes!* Why are we celebrating this man's death? I mean, here's Jesus on the altar of the cross with this crown of thorns. He's bleeding from his head. He's got this stab wound in his side. I didn't like any of it. And I was such a big part of it."

At funerals, he was in charge of the incense. *Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.*

Idolatry. Indifference. Informality. In short intervals, Jeran's entire spiritual worldview was shattered. He had seen the person *behind* the curtain. If a man of the cloth didn't hear from God, and far more importantly, if a priest showed little motivation in rising above the spiritual maturity of his common congregant—then, how could he?

Was it all a sham?

"I just saw a different side of them than most people probably see. That became difficult to reconcile with. I no longer had this holier-than-thou vision of priests. These were just guys who get up there on the weekend and do their thing and basically get taken care of for doing it." They even had cars. "One priest told me, 'I've sacrificed this life for my reward in heaven.' That was their idea of what they were doing. I'm not saying they were bad people. They were no different than my dad. They were no different than my uncle.

They're just regular guys. The only difference is that they're wearing a black shirt with a little white collar; and they say funeral masses; and they say wedding masses; and they say mass on Sunday and Saturday night; and they're just regular people."

"I decided I didn't want to be a priest anymore. These guys aren't special. They're not even holy in my mind. *Yeah*, they can *be* holy. They can *act* holy. They can get on the altar and certainly *come across* as holy. They can give homilies which can make you really think and go, '*Oh yeah*, that's really true. I really need to change my life and become a better person. I need to give to the poor.' But then, when every opportunity presented itself for them to give to the poor, or even give their time to come down and talk to a homeless person, they weren't always there to do that. There were times when they weren't there to do that. These weren't terrible men. They were *just men* who didn't always do their job."

"There's a guy at the door," Jeran.

"Give them a five-dollar gift card to *Jack-In-the-Box* and tell them to leave!"

There were of course other factors which crept into his decision. *Biology*. Problem was, "you couldn't get married. You couldn't have girlfriends." Also, *chemistry*. Jeran was, after all, a budding teenager. Next to the mysteries of the Creator, girls had become, quite suddenly, the greatest conundrum of all. "I was just learning about girls and getting into girls. Obviously, being a priest wasn't going to work."

He turned his focus to girls and sports and drugs.

SURE, THE CLOTH no longer fit his teenage ambitions, but that's not to say religion itself was a total loss—*for now*. And besides, Jeran Campanella did have other promising talents which might fit the mold of his Catholic upbringing. *Sports*. Mainly, basketball. As his three-year stint at Saint Mary's finally came to a close, Jeran turned his attention towards a private, all-male preparatory school in the College Park neighborhood of San Jose, California, which promised to nurture his ambitions. First built in 1851, Bellarmine was the second oldest private high school in California's history and is still regarded as one of the most competitive institutions in the state. "We would always play for the California title against Saint Francis or one of these other main high schools out of San Francisco," Jeran said. Bellarmine was prestigious, *and* expensive.

It was a dedicated daily journey too. San Jose was 45-minutes away from his parent's house in Gilroy. "I would have to wake up every morning and take the train to high school, and then wait two hours after school—either at the library or just messing around—to catch the train home." The fact that Jesuits ran the school had very little to do with his ambition to attend. And the desire to become a strong and able Catholic had already shriveled from the altar server's thinking. Great basketball players came from Bellarmine. Jeran went for the athletics. With Bellarmine, Jeran gave the Roman Catholic church, but mostly basketball, one more chance. His father was there to witness the final tryout.

"We both walked away from it and my father was like, '*Oh*, you were great. You're definitely going to make the team.' There was four or five of us trying out for center.

My dad thought, *easily*, I was top two or three.” But when Jeran didn’t make the roster, his father went to the office to complain. “We looked into *who* made the team, and a lot of players were worse than me. We were shocked. Come to find out, their dads were big-wigs, and had donated a lot to the school—*millions*. It made sense. And I remember my dad throwing a fit to the principal of the school, saying: ‘We didn’t know it was going to be so political like this.’” The Campanella’s barely had enough money to send Jeran to the school,

much less donate towards a new gymnasium. “A lot of parents of the basketball team bought new shoes or team jerseys. We didn’t do that and I didn’t make the team. Now, whether or not that’s because of my ability or whether we didn’t donate, that’s obviously up for interpretation. But I became very disillusioned with the school after that.”

Jeran’s final confrontation with Catholicism would go down in the Philippines.



At 15 years of age, and while still a freshman at Bellarmine, Campanella’s youth group flew to Manila for the 10th World Youth Day festival, held from January 10–15, 1995. In order to secure the ambitious pilgrimage, Jeran, who had served as the president of his youth group for two years, oversaw car washes and bake sales, among other

creative endeavors. The fundraising campaign was a success. For its closing Mass, an estimated 5 million youthful hopefuls descended upon Luneta Park in order to hear Pope John Paul II call for the cross to be planted more fervently in South America, an event which *The New York Times* compared to Woodstock. It was the

largest audience which John Paul II had ever seen—the second-largest papal gathering in recorded antiquity. Perhaps *alternative* history as a whole would have taken better notice of the event had Al-Qaeda's *attempt* to assassinate the Pope, and blow up 11 airliners returning from the Philippines to the United States, not been foiled—thereby serving nothing more or less than a mile marker in the road to 9/11.

Whatever impact the actual event had on *global* history—despite its rallying banners and dizzying speeches; World Youth Day did very little to inspire Jeran, much less propel him into a lifelong service to God, from whence he'd already recoiled. If anything, Catholicism had already lost its hold on him. Whether attending public school or Saint Mary's, Jeran had previously always been a grade "A" student. On an off day a "B." His gradually slump in the alphabet seemed to announce, more than anything, not only his withdrawal from Bellarmine, but organized religion.

"I stopped going to church right around that time. I obviously stopped being an altar server." Though it is true, he added, that anyone would typically stop being an altar server at 15, his decision was not simply an age issue. "I had a different opinion about people in religion. I saw a lot of rudeness. I saw priests be complete assholes. I saw them get drunk." He was unhappy with the education, as taught by the Jesuit priesthood. He was confused as to why they taught Science and the heliocentric model, and then the very next class would lean on the crutch of religious studies. And besides, athletics, he came to find, had absolutely nothing to do with how Jesus would address the topic. For starters, Jesus obviously didn't choose his disciples based on donations. Contrarily, at Bellarmine, "you donated to the school, your son gets to play

sports." He didn't like the school. He didn't like the teachers. He no longer liked Catholicism. Come to think of it, Jeran had never discovered the Jesus he'd heard so much about in the ranks of religion.

He didn't like most of his Bellarmine friends, either. Sure, he had a few. "It was all about money there. If you had money, you were in the cool club. If you had a nice car, you were in the *cool club*." His first ride at the age of sixteen "was a *shitty* little car. And people made fun of it. And I didn't like any of the rich kids at school. I didn't like any of the preppy kids at school." In his senior year, satisfactory test scores had slipped from his fingertips. "I didn't have good enough grades to get a scholarship or go to a four-year college. I certainly wouldn't have chosen a Catholic college by that point, or any sort of religious college. I was disillusioned with the whole thing. I didn't like any of the priests which were Jesuits. They were rude. They were what I considered *dumb*. They were naïve. They were strict. I didn't like how the priests taught. I didn't like how they taught religion. I didn't like the way they taught science. I didn't like how they were towards people or towards each other. So now I'm getting disillusioned with the whole school, and by time I graduated I was just *done* with Catholicism."

In 1998 he narrowly graduated from Bellarmine. And then he walked away from the religion it endorsed, vowing never to look back.

SURVIVAL—*ism*

JERAN Campanella's attempt at junior college lasted no more than three or four weeks. The resulting yearlong move to Colorado was a total bust. Upon returning

home, he met a girl. Their relationship didn't even exceed his college ambitions. They parted ways in as little as a week.

She called him up seven months later.

"I'm pregnant," she said.

Jeran shrugged, "What the hell do I care—why are you telling me?"

"Because it's yours," she said.

"I don't believe you. You were with guys *before* me. You were with guys *after* me."

Even the timeline didn't measure up. "From the date I met her to the day when my son was born was eight months *exactly*." It was April of 2000. Jeran asked the doctor at the hospital if the child was a preemie. The doctor assured him the child was full term. "So, I didn't even claim him as my son." In six months' time, the child's mother sent him *paperwork*. Jeran would need to get his cheeks swabbed. Test results denied his suspicions. The child was in fact 99.9% his son.

By the age of twenty, Jeran was a father.

He was jobless too. *Well*, technically, he had found a job before his child was born. It happened like this. His father told him to get his *shit* together. It was the final year of the Clinton administration and work was plenty. In California, a high school graduate could throw their apron down in a burst of agitation, insult their employer, and then march outside (even allowing the door to bruise their butt on the way out) to the next HELP: WANTED sign, per chance next door or across the street, and start full-time employment within the hour. It could have been *Barnes and Noble* or *In-N-Out*. Quality work was still easy to come by. His father secured Jeran an interview at *Long's Drugs*. Jeran not only secured the job, but soon thereafter stuck the landing as

assistant manager. From that moment on, Jeran devoted himself to employment. Essentially, *fatherhood*.

By the spring of 2001, while *the child* was yet one, Jeran would make the two-hour drive to pick up his son in order to watch him for the weekend. "One of the luxuries I had at that store, as a department manager, I was given every other weekend off. So, I would go pick him up every *other* Friday, keep him Saturday, drive him back on Sunday, and then I would work for the next two weeks." As the regimented routine progressed, Jeran became weary of what he was learning about his son's mothers' parental habits while he was away, laboring to provide for their son. Apparently, if rumors were to be believed, she was sitting their son in front of the television day after day—hour after hour. And besides that, when driving him back to unite them, "she was supposed to meet me at a certain time and she would never be there, and it was always stressful, and we didn't know where she was. And I remember a couple of times I had to bring him back home and have somebody babysit on the next day while I worked, and then take him back on a Monday night after work. It just got to be—she didn't seem to be doing a good job of being a mom." The neglect became so obvious that, by May of that year, her parents asked if Jeran would consider taking full custody of their grandchild.

Jeran seemed confused.

What...?

"No, really," they insisted. "You've got a good job. You do a *better* job. He comes home very happy when you take him. He seems like he's learning with you." *He's not learning with his mom, at any rate.*

"So, I started doing some research on the process, and I got a lawyer involved and had

to pay a \$5,000 retainer to basically get custody of him.” Afterwards, he called her up to ask for her address, because he was going after full custody of the child, and he didn’t even know where the child’s mother was living.

She said, “What if I just want to give him to you?”

Huh?

“Well, what if I don’t want to fight in court? I don’t think I can handle him anymore. He—he might be better off with you.”

Jeran recalled, “I never even thought a mom would ever say that. So, I’m like, ‘Okay. Well then, I guess I didn’t need to waste \$5,000 on this court shit. I’ll just get you the paperwork.’ I gave her the paperwork. She signed off and gave me a hundred percent *physical* and hundred percent *legal* custody.” By the age of 21, Jeran was a single dad. The mother of his child eventually moved back to Modesto. And in time, the two stopped talking.

While the world *turned*—supposedly, Jeran’s daily regiment, which included his peripheral vision, exclusively consisted of raising a child. Daycare alone demanded something along the lines of \$400 a week from his pocket. “All my money basically went to raising my son,” he said. The cyclic routine involved “taking him to daycare, dropping him off, going to work, working, and then having somebody pick him up from daycare if I couldn’t be there.” Cook dinner. Change diapers. Put him to bed. Rise and *repeat*. Such was the rotunda of a single parent.

Come that September, historicity itself would quake on its foundations, and in the years to follow a *select few* would begin to wake from the spell thrust upon them. But not Jeran Campanella.

For the following decade, his life “was a hellacious existence.”



IN THE SUBSEQUENT years following the full physical and legal custody of his son, Jeran Campanella found great success working for Longs Drugs. The company was founded in 1938 as Longs Self-Service Drugs by brothers Thomas and Joseph Long. Their very first store opened on Piedmont Avenue in Oakland, California. With the final Manifest Destiny blitz of post-War families, Longs arrived to Honolulu promptly on time—March 29, 1954. In the decades to follow, Longs would practically become an island staple. Expansion continued to Alaska in 1977, Arizona and Oregon in 1978, and Nevada in 1979. “Longs is a family-run company and they really enjoyed people that came up the ranks. So, when I heard that I started pulling more shifts.” Within a year of employment, Jeran became a closing manager. “So, you know, I was given keys to the store, given the safe combination, all kinds of stuff.”

Jeran was dutifully noticed. His transfer to Salinas in 2005, 28-miles south of his home in Gilroy, was another promotion in and of itself. But his newly attained title came with a catch. More-so, a hurdle. “If you’ve ever heard of Salinas, it’s the top ten worst places to live. And we’re not simply talking about California. It’s riddled with gang violence, and it’s just not a great place to raise a family or anything like that.” Crime was everywhere. And even the Alisal Street store, it seemed, was complicit.

“And right when I got there, the problem that they were having was with *shrink*. They told me that they were basically getting robbed blind at that store and they couldn’t figure out why.” One of Campanella’s first tasks as manager was to return profitability back to the store—but where to start? He needed an eyewitness. A *mole*. Someone willing to talk. He turned to security tapes.

“I knew with the amount of shrink going on that it must have been somewhat internal, because we just had so much money going out the door we couldn’t account for. And so right from the beginning, I would go through my normal day, but when I came back the next day, I would review tapes from the night before, just to watch the employees; to watch the managers; to watch everything going on; just to see if I can observe anything.” The manhunt ate away at Campanella’s week, but he found his man. There were abnormalities, all right, and they happened repeatedly about the same time, from 7 to 7:30 pm *every night*. Pay attention to register three.

Blink and you just might miss it.

On any particular busy day, even when the Alisal Street store withstood the swelling tide of rush hour, “rarely would we ever open register two or register three. “It just wasn’t something that we really did. There just weren’t enough customers to do that. But I noticed one of my managers would open up register 3 and there would only be a couple of people going through. People were going through with huge carts of merchandise, and I’m talking sometimes two *full carts* of merchandise. And then I would review the ticker tape to see what the transactions were, and they’d be five or ten-dollar transactions—twenty dollars, thirty dollars. So, I quickly realized what was happening. That manager was either having friends or family or acquaintances come in at a certain time, fill their baskets, go through a specified check-out line, and he would basically let them get a bunch of merchandise for free.”

“We ended up terminating that manager, and I think he admitted to something like eighty thousand dollars in theft, which he’d been doing for a *long* time. And this is something that any manager who realized that they weren’t being profitable should have seen. But management at the time just

didn't see it or wasn't paying attention or wasn't interested or thought that it was something else.”

With the discovery, Jeran Campanella earned Longs Drugs trust. And no surprise, the store returned to profitability. They were happy. Jeran was too. His future with the company was secured—for now. In 2003, two years *before* Campanella arrived in Salinas, Bob Long stepped down as Chairman and CEO. For the first time in nearly 70 years, a founding family member was not involved. The *family* in “family run” was technically missing from the company. Longs drugs was in imminent danger of a regime change. And yet, Jeran's biggest promotion would happen in a few years. It would take several more for the reality of Longs departure from the family sheepfold to set in.

Over THE COUNTER

THE LONGS on Fremont Street was undoubtedly Jeran Campanella's most ambitious promotion to date. Technically, it would be his *last*. The store itself, only a couple of miles west from the Monterey Bay Aquarium and Canary Row, was somewhat famous. Monterey, however, was roughly 40-miles away from Gilroy. Though Jeran was eager for the opportunity, the distance was an irreconcilable hurdle. He was *still* raising a child as a single dad. Dropping his son off at daycare and then promptly picking him up again, not to mention attending school functions, simply didn't seem plausible. So, he invested in some boxes, and they made the move.

In Seaside, a cozy suburb just north of Fremont Street, Jeran was able to accomplish all that he had in Gilroy and more. With Long's Drugs, “when you were

a store manager, you could pretty much dictate your own schedule. You have to be there to a certain time. Usually, they would want store managers in the store until at least four or five, but that was fine, because the daycare would basically open at 6 a.m. and close by 6 p.m. So, I was always able to get him off to the daycare early enough, manage the store during the day, and then pick him up after I got off.” Daycare would walk him to school across the street. The hellacious existence that he had once accepted in Gilroy had now become polished clockwork—and enjoyable. “I found a pretty good day care that would take him to school and pick him up from school. They would do some homework with him, and then I would pick him up five or six at night, and then head home, cook dinner, put him to bed, and get ready to do the whole grind again the next day. If I ever needed to work evenings or weekends, I would find a babysitter. But for the most part, I had weekends off, because I was the store manager. I was a salary employee. The store was doing well. So, I was able to do that.”

“And one of the great things about Longs Drugs, the way they told it to me was, they want *you* to run the store. When you become a store manager, they want you to run it as if it was *your own* store. So, you really get an opportunity to kind of, you know, be like a business owner.”

This essentially meant that a store in Monterey entitled Jeran, as management, to shelve products which were deemed practical by Monterey people. “If you live in Gilroy, you kind of choose what you provide. So, they need a golfing section.” Quite contrarily, Jeran added, “No CVS would have that now, because all CVS's are cookie-cutter. They're *exactly* the same. But back then Longs Drugs was very open to management doing whatever they

wanted to do, running the way they wanted. If you didn't run it well, and you didn't make good money at the end, you would get demoted or get fired. And if you *did* run the store well, you would get promoted through the ranks. So, I kind of fell in love with Longs Drugs. I fell in love with the way they treated their employees and customers. I fell in love with the way they treated their employees. I turned out to be a good manager. I think, if you were to ask any of my employees, they would all say the same thing. I always looked out for my employees, made sure they were happy. By doing *that*, I figured my customers would be happy, and it seemed to work well."

One day in 2008 a woman named Melissa Yap arrived at Fremont Street and interviewed for a job. Campanella hired her. In time, everybody would come to know her as Missa. "She came on board as my OTC manager. OTC stands for *over the counter*. It's basically like, you know, your Tylenol, your Pepto-Bismol, that kind of section, and within three or four months, we kind of realized there was a little spark going on between us."

Jeran told Missa: "You should probably quit, because I'm not allowed to date employees."

CORPORATE—*ism*

PRODDING MELISSA to quit her job was an awkward way to ask any girl out on a date, but it worked. Missa found employment at a boutique in Carmel, and within weeks they were an item. Actually, she became a big help on the home front, often alleviating Jeran of parental duties. Naturally, Jeran asked her to move into their Seaside apartment. She agreed. Little did they know, when Jeran asked Missa out near the

Advil caplets and the bottle of Pepto-Bismol, that it was the end of an era. Longs Drugs had survived for nearly seventy years on the reputation of being family owned and operated. And yet, on August 12, 2008, Longs announced that they were being acquired by CVS Health, the operator of the national pharmacy chain of drugstores.

CVS was *corporate*.

"Of course, CVS came to us and said, 'Oh, there won't be that many changes. It will be the same as it's always been.'" Empty words. Longs had gone the way of countless other *ma and pa* operations in America's Manifest Destiny war. Everyone but the corporate world was receiving a beating. Change was inevitable. Jeran however had little choice but to hope for the best and believe them. "The transition was very slow. So, it wasn't like I realized right away what was happening to my job. They *slowly* started to change things."

His next promotion involved another store, this time back in Salinas. "The only difference is that this store in Salinas was a 24-hour pharmacy and it was the only 24-hour pharmacy in that town of Salinas. It was a big store." It's ninety employees, in comparison to the seventy employees he managed in Monterey, meant *more* money. Then again, the Salinas store was in a high-risk district, as far as *shrink*, and he'd been through that before. "It looked like a good opportunity for me to grow with the new company, and at the time I was a company man. Whatever CVS wanted me to do, *I did*."

And besides, Salinas provided Jeran and Missa with the affordable option to purchase a house, should they decide to follow their inevitable course and marry. "I would have never been able to afford a house in Gilroy. I would have never been able to afford a house in Monterey. But I was able to afford a house in Salinas. And

so, I started at that store, and really that's when the truth of the CVS started to hit me. I was really a *corporation*."

Speaking of which, the store manager at the time didn't deal nearly so well with the transition from a family-owned franchise to a corporation as Jeran had. Salinas was still being run the Longs way and he needed to go.

But he wasn't the only one.

"They told me, 'Any employee that you have that's been here longer than 20 years, if they're not in management, you need to let them go.'"

Jeran's number one cashier was ten years his senior, as employment is concerned. She had been with Longs for twenty years, and therefore made fifteen dollars an hour, "but the customers loved her. She was great with customers. She would never call in sick. She was an ideal worker." Corporate shared little of Jeran's empathy. If she didn't want in management, then she was making too much money, and had therefore worn out her welcome. "They told me, 'We would rather have eight dollar an hour-employees,' which at the time was minimum wage, and I said, '*Yeah*, but I would rather have her than two eight dollar an hour-employees. She's so much better. Customers love her.'"

His protest fell on deaf ears.

Another of Campanella's employees—she worked OTC (just as Missa had in Monterey)—also received corporate's undesirable and concentrated hawk-like gaze. "She had been there twenty years, loved what she did. Customers would come in and ask for her. She knew what she needed to do. I could stay out of her hair. She'd stay out of mine. It was like perfect. But they told me, 'You need to let her go.

She doesn't want to be in management. And that's just the way CVS works.'"

With Longs, Jeran had been brought into management in order to sweep out corrupt management for the *health* of the family. But now there was a new regime, and Jeran was an enforcer. "So, I quickly realized, *man*, this is not the position I want to be in, and I was always so great at getting along with employees. Now I've got to fire employees who I don't even think deserve to be fired."

Yet another issue arose with corporate's insistence that they maintain an unhealthy dosage of minimum wage employees. Salinas still struggled with massive shrink on the graveyard shift. *Somebody* on payroll was stealing. "They wouldn't let me hire anybody at more than eight dollars an hour or more than 24-hours a week. So, what I told them is, I said, 'Do you realize that all you're going to get on a night shift is the scum-of-the-earth? If you can only hire people at eight dollars an hour and 24 hours a week, *nobody's* doing this for a full-time job. Nobody cares if they get a chance to steal. They're going to steal. This is not the kind of people that we want working here.'"

Once more, his protest fell on deaf ears.

"They didn't give me an option. They didn't even want people to think. They didn't want managers to think. They wanted us to all basically act like *monkeys*." Monkeys hurdling through space on a spinning ball. "I mean, one of the things that I thought was really indicative is, the whole idea of running the store like your own was out the window when CVS came. It was all cookie cutter." In Monterey, the writing was already on the wall. "We would get a packet of what needs to go on the end cap of every aisle. Well, I remember one of the funny things is, they sent us this whole end cap of snow shoveling merchandise. So, it'd be like

the salt that you put on your driveway. Snow shovels. Things like that. Well, it was mandatory that we put that up in Monterey, and I'm like, 'What are you guys doing? *We're a coastal city.* There is no snow here. There is no shoveling of driveways. Nobody needs a shovel and why would you ask me to put this merchandise up? It's not going to sell. It's going to sit there.'

And they would say, 'Well it doesn't matter.'

This is the way CVS is. *Join us.*

Every store is run the exact same.

We want snow shovels. *Jeran.*

Snow shovels.

Snow shovels.

The *exact* same.

You don't know the power.

And if you don't listen....

Then try not to let the door spank your butt on the way out.

SMEAR CAMPAIGN

A DAY or two before their wedding, Jeran received a call from one of his store managers, and he said: "Last night we had an overnight visit from some high-level manager."

Employees were written up—an entire handful of them.

The date had long been set. 11/11/11. They'd secured a venue. Invitations were sent. Missa decided upon a dress. And even long before that, Jeran had put in a two-week request. 'Why would CVS pull a surprise overnight visit right before his wedding day?' He thought.

Jeran told his manager not to worry about it.

"They knew I was going to be gone during those two weeks. And the entire time I was with CVS or Longs, I *never* got any kind of infractions. I never received warnings. There were no written warnings or final warnings, because I was a great employee. After my honeymoon, if you want to call it that—we stayed home and didn't go anywhere—I got back and they tried to deal with some of these issues. I guess they walked in and some of my employees were messing around and weren't really respectful to the loss prevention manager. She visited at 2 a.m. So, my stores not busy. My employees were obviously messing around. They shouldn't have been doing that, but I got the verbal warning."

His district manager sat down with Jeran and warned him.

"I don't know what to say," he shrugged. "*This is a smear campaign.* It looks like they're going after you."

The following month, Jeran received a written warning. "They did some report about how much excess merchandise was in the warehouse. *It was December.* And I said, 'What are you talking about? Christmas is four weeks away. We have *an entire month* to sell this merchandise. This is *why* the back room is so heavy. It's because it's Christmas.'" Strange behavior indeed, especially considering that Jeran's location was the number one seasonal store in the district.

"I just felt like something was up, and I refused to sign the written warning. I said, 'I'm not signing this. I won't even deal with it. You cannot write a store up for excess merchandise *in December.* Come back in January. I'm in the number one seasonal store. All this merchandise will be sold throughout Christmas. If I have excess merchandise in January, write me up then.'"

With the opening hours of 2012, Jeran received his final warning, “and for something ridiculous as well. I can’t even remember at this time what it was. I think it was like a shrink percentage or something that they usually don’t give final warnings for. And then here’s the other thing about CVS. I *knew* how they operate. If I have an employee that I don’t like, let’s say he’s messing around a lot. I don’t like him much. One thing you *couldn’t do* is just fire that employee. If you did just fire that employee, then it can look like you didn’t do it through the proper channels. You have to give a verbal warning. You have to wait a week. You have to give a written warning. You have to wait a week. You have to give a final warning, wait a week, and then you can terminate them. So, for instance, if somebody’s not doing something right, you could say, ‘You’re not showing up on time. I’m going to give you a verbal warning. Then, if they don’t show up on time again, *Okay*, now it’s a written.’ They don’t show up again, now, it’s a final, and then finally you can terminate them. That’s the way that you terminated employees.”

Jeran quickly realized—

Wait a second.

‘Within the matter of two months, I just got a *verbal*, *written*, and *final*.’

He knew what was coming *next*.

“At the time I was actually training a new store manager. When you were a store manager, occasionally, they’d give you a new employee whom they hired to be a store manager. So, this employee would be off the street and not know much about CVS, but maybe they were a store manager with Rite-Aid; maybe they were a store manager with Walgreens. But we would train them basically for the only task of becoming a store manager. They would

walk with you every day. They would work the exact same shift as you every day. So, I had somebody with me in November, December, and January whom I was training to be a store manager.”

One day Jeran asked him, “How much did they hire you at?”

He answered, “Forty-two thousand.”

“And I’m like, *holy shit*. I’m training somebody making about half as much as I am. At the time I was making about eighty-two thousand a year, and that didn’t even count the bonus. So, if my store did well, that bonus sometimes could be anywhere from \$10 to \$25,000 at the end of the year. I was making nearly 90k a year training somebody making 42k, and I could just see the writing on the wall.”

Oh my God, I’m going to get terminated.

“I’ve got my district manager telling me it’s a smear campaign. I don’t know, maybe it was like a little personal vendetta I had against CVS. I didn’t like the company. I didn’t like the way they ran things. I didn’t like the way that they were with employees. I didn’t like the way they were with customers. And so, I just started asking questions all the time; second-guessing them; trying to say my way was better. You know, looking back, it wasn’t the smartest move. It’s probably what got me kicked out of there.”

In one instance, a woman had personally complained that the CVS ad no longer arrived in her mailbox. The woman lived a block away.

She told Jeran, “I always wait for Wednesday. I get the CVS ad. I look through it and then I come shopping here and I purchase items, but I haven’t gotten the CVS ad in months.”

Jeran told her he would get to the bottom of it. He called Corporate, and do you know what Corporate said?

“*Oh*, we’re just not giving it away to that section of the city anymore.”

And then Jeran said, “This lady lives *behind* the store. I’m talking about the entire blocks behind the store—they’re no longer getting the ad. You need to bring the ad back.

Sorry, they said. “It’s a decision that’s been made by Corporate. We’re no longer providing adds to the people that live close to the store.”

Campanella’s ability as store manager to fix problems, as Longs had once allowed him, no longer applied to his job description. Previously, “if there was ever an issue with a customer or something wasn’t going right, I could make a couple of calls and clear it up. But with CVS, it didn’t matter. It couldn’t be fixed. If Corporate decided, it didn’t matter what a store manager was going to say. In fact, they took it as an insult that I would even question them. So that’s what I was doing, is questioning them constantly.”

Campanella even attended a district meeting to complain about their tactics. “All the store managers are there, and I basically gave a presentation talking about the fact that I thought our ad signs were misleading. If you go into a CVS today, all along the shelves they’ll have these ad signs. So, you’re looking at a box of Tylenol, its regular price is \$9.99. There will be an ad sign over it saying it’s on sale for \$4.99. *Okay*, so we’d have to put out all these ads signs. One particular time the ad sign said in the *tiniest little print* you can imagine—in like, 8-point font print—it said, BUY ONE GET ONE, and then in huge print it said 50% off. So, we went around putting

these on all the items. Well, every item, to any customer; to any person; they would look at that item and say that item is 50% off, because nobody’s going to read the small print. It said, BUY ONE GET ONE. This infuriated me because all day, and I mean *all day*, I would be called to the register to listen to customers complain to me, that they thought the items they were purchasing were 50% off. And I’d be like, ‘*Yeah*, well, I understand that because the sign looks like it says that.’”

“I was constantly adjusting prices and giving these people 50% off. I got the final warning because I was altering customers totals with the 50% off, which is hilarious because that’s what the sign *says*. Their argument was, ‘*No*, the sign says buy one get one 50% off.’ I’d say, ‘*Yeah*, but nobody can read where it says *buy one get one*. It just says 50% off in HUGE letters.’ So, I actually gave this presentation, basically to a district meeting, explaining why I thought that the signs need to be changed. That’s bad news with CVS. That’s like a thinking person. They don’t want that.”

Upon receiving his final warning, Jeran put in his two-week notice. “I knew I was going to get fired. I talked to my wife about it and I said, ‘You know what? I don’t want to be there anymore. I don’t want to work for this company. I don’t like the way they treat customers.’ I knew if they fired me that I wouldn’t be re-hirable. And the biggest fear I had at that time was: What if I want to get another job at Walgreens and I can’t even use my 14-year job history with CVS as my job history?”

In short, CVS let Jeran leave on good terms, and in the weeks that followed, Jeran tried his hand at unemployment.

But then *Unemployment* shrugged with indifference. It went something like this: “Sorry, you had a choice. You could have

either let them fire you, in which case you could file for unemployment and go that route. By quitting, you basically blocked yourself from getting any unemployment. You exchanged financial aid for your job history.”

Jeran realized the mistake that had been made. “I no longer wanted to work in that industry. There was no more mom and pop-run drug stores. There were only corporate run drug stores. CVS and Walgreens were taking over *every* drug store. They all operated the same way. I didn’t want to be a part of that.”

His change of conscious and ultimate departure from Corporate America couldn’t have come at a worse time. Jeran wasn’t *only* two months married.

As newlyweds, they’d signed a mortgage.

SURVIVAL—*ism*

IF HE wasn’t returning to the corporate world anytime soon, then Jeran and Missa Campanella required another flow of revenue. They needed to sell *something*—and soon. Jeran turned to a local bay area phenomenon for help. Based out of San Jose, California, *eBay* was started as a personable e-commerce bidding site during the internet’s frontier of the 1990’s. On September 3, 1995, its founder Pierre Omidyar was astonished at how easily he’d sold a broken laser pointer for \$14.83. After contacting the winning bidder to ask if he understood he was purchasing damaged goods, the buyer responded by email: “I’m a collector of broken laser pointers.” The multibillion-dollar company had already made a name for itself during the dot-com bubble, nearly fifteen years before Jeran put a book up for auction. An inevitable sale, and the idea for an online bookstore, came

due to the fact that they’d already acquired a large book collection. *Easy money.*

Jeran soon found himself scouring thrift stores, attending auctions, and rummaging through estate sales in a manic dash to acquire and sell other coveted bindings, often acquiring massive book collections in a single bid. Another bay area phenomenon aided in his quest. *Craigslist* was also begun in 1995 by Craig Newmark, initially as an email distribution list for his personal friends, which featured local events in the San Francisco area. The act of setting *free stuff* on the curb had been a distinguishing mark of San Francisco’s hospitality since the 1960’s. Newmark simply transformed the internet into that 21st-century sidewalk. Within five years, *Craigslist* had begun expanding into other U.S. cities, and by the time Jeran scoured through its listings, it had exploded into as many as 70 countries.

As a habit, Jeran would visit *Craigslist* on Friday nights, seeking the next garage sale to come along. Rather than laying each book out on the sidewalk, come Saturday morning, Jeran would make an offer for the entire collection over the phone. Often, the going rate for hundreds of books set him back a hundred dollars. The Campanella’s would pick up boxes filled with books, relieve five crisp President Jackson’s from their pocket, and then sort through the stash. “*Every* book that we bought was in bulk.” Rare literary gems were most-often acquired at the bidding auctions of repossessed storage lockers. “They’d open the doors—nobody’s allowed to go in—but you could stand at the entryway and look in. People would bid. And the highest bidder would get the storage shed.” Jeran wanted books. Most bidders, however, wanted the motorcycle or the car engine. Nobody apparently wanted the boxes labeled *books*. “I was able to bid on those and get those

sheds for \$250–\$300 bucks.” Hundreds of books would be in there. As they shuffled through them, “most of them were terrible... *crap*. But occasionally we’d find a gem. And by *gem*, I mean a book worth \$50 dollars—100 dollars.” If they paid \$250 for a storage shed, “you’re able to find in that big monstrosity of books, four or five books that you can quickly put on eBay, quickly make \$50 or \$60.” Even while buying in bulk on Craigslist, one or two, perhaps three books could be listed on eBay, thereby securing a return on the initial investment. Afterwards, they’d be left with as many as ninety-nine books and zero inventory cost. It was then a matter of listing those books on the website.

Their online bookstore was called *Unbelievable Books*, eventually UBBBK. And though showcasing the occasional gem on eBay seemed both promising and easy to do, their remaining collection, which was quickly amassing, sold no more than one or two copies per day—mostly to repeat customers. “Running an online bookstore isn’t as easy as people think. You can’t get customers there. Listing books is ridiculously tiresome. You need to know the condition. You need to know the author. You need to know how many pages. You need to know the edition. You need to know the printing—first printing, second printing, third printing. All those things have huge differences in the price of books. We were selling them very cheap. If you go to the archive and look up some of the UBBBK stuff, we called ourselves the ‘*golden rule sellers*.’ We believed in doing things like we did at Longs. We take care of our customers. We put customers first. We treated others as we wanted to be treated. That was our moniker. That is what we tried to run, because we hated what had happened to Longs. And I saw what was happening to the world. The whole world is

going corporate. They’re not going to care about customers anymore. They’re not going to care about employees. And that really is the truth of the last ten years, with all these companies. They just don’t care about employees anymore. They’re all interchangeable. They’re all replaceable.”

He once held in his possession a third edition of Charles Darwin *Origin of Species*. Rather than selling it for \$1750, its market value, Jeran sold it for \$700.

The Campanella’s didn’t have the money for advertising or affiliates, but they did have a huge book collection, and it was growing by the day. In desperation, they turned to yet another San Francisco creation. *Wanelo* was launched that very year by founder Deena Varshavskaya. It was advertised as a digital mall space for large brands and independent sellers alike. Almost immediately, ten million users wandered its cyber marketplace, often for the purposes of window shopping, and as many as 300,000 online stores lined its street. “Getting picked up by Wanelo allowed us to get by, because all of a sudden, we were getting upwards of five purchases per day—30 or 40 dollars in sales per day. So, we were able to keep our heads above water.”

Unfortunately, it wasn’t enough to keep the house.

In 2011, only one year prior, Jeran had put all of his money into their Salinas home, and at present, its mortgage was demanding nearly \$1,700 dollars every month. Hoping to stay afloat, Jeran cashed out his 401k with CVS. It helped them to get by—for a time. Still, they needed to trim down. Jeran sold his car. Missa sold hers. Together they purchased a 95 Ford truck. “We tried everything to get our bills in order. We didn’t have direct TV. We didn’t go on vacation. We didn’t even go on a honeymoon. When you cash your 401k out

early, you basically get a tiny percentage of what you have coming to you. But I needed it. I thought we could get by. I thought I could build up this bookstore, but it never really came to fruition.” Wanelo allowed them to crawl a little longer than they would have otherwise, if only to prolong the inevitable.

By 2014, they altogether stopped making payments.

ATHE—ism

RUNNING AN ONLINE bookstore allowed Jeran Campanella plenty of reading time—Missa too. But not all of their research was found in books. “When I was a store manager, I was working 70–80-hour weeks. My son and my work encompassed my entire life. That was it. I didn’t have time for anything else. When I stopped working and I had those two years of basically building the website, once the website was built and the books were up, and we were basically just sitting around the house, all of a sudden, I had a lot of time.” By 2012, his son had reached puberty, and wasn’t doing well in school. Jeran tried his hand at homeschooling. “My son was off learning his school in his bedroom. I would be in my bedroom, and I would be just searching the internet.”

UBBBK. Home school. *Research.*

This became the Campanella routine for two years. “Most of what I was reading was religious stuff. My wife was raised a Bible literalist Christian, and I was raised Catholic. When we got together, we weren’t practicing much, and so it wasn’t an issue.” Ever since graduating from Bellarmine in 1998, religion was a welcomed void in his life. “I would still go to church with my mom on Christmas—or maybe Easter. But I

certainly was not a practicing Catholic,” let alone a practicing religious person at all. That’s not to say he was an atheist either. “I still believed. I was still a believer. I was just not in the practice of being a Catholic or a Christian. I got a girl pregnant when knowing her for a week, so I obviously wasn’t following the churches standards.” But starting in 2012, they began to revisit and explore their Christian roots. “My wife and I were working from home, and we were able to spend time researching. That’s when the subject came up of our religion.”

What religion were we going to teach if we had a baby?

“We went back and forth—*her* believing in the Bible, and *me* saying, ‘I’m not so sure about the Bible. I think it’s been changed,’ because that’s the Catholic belief. It’s more important to listen to the Pope and the church fathers, who dictated what the dogma would be, and they’re not really Bible believing.” The back-and-forth discussion between them had Jeran advising Missa on why the Bible *couldn’t* be trusted “and her explaining to me why the Bible *could* be trusted. So, we had a two-year period where we explored religion. And in doing that I found so many lies about the Catholic Church, about Christianity—*lies everywhere*. The more we read, the more we came to the conclusion that we’ve been lied to about everything.” That even included the existence of a God. “At one point we said, ‘let’s read the Bible with open minds. Let’s not take anything we’ve been taught or been told from pastors, and let’s just do it ourselves and read through the Bible.’ And the more I read the Bible, the more I felt it was written by man.”

Jeran described *inspiration* like this. “Maybe I’m feeling some direction being pushed by God. Maybe I feel inspired to write something really great. Let’s say it

comes off my pen perfectly. It says great things. It's telling you to take care of each other. It's telling you to love one another. Well, I could very easily take that paragraph and say, 'This was inspired by God.' To put all those writings by people into a book and say, 'this was inspired by God,' is *incorrect*. Did God literally come down and take somebody's hand and pen it for them? No, I don't think He did. I don't even think Christians believe that. They believe it's *inspired*." For Jeran Campanella, *sure*, the Bible had inspiring moments, but taking the whole thing as true was another matter entirely.

In 2014, the very year the Campanella's ceased making payments on their mortgage, Jeran turned to atheism.

"I got to the point where I said, 'Religion's not true. God isn't true. I've been lied to by the church. The Bible was written by man. It certainly seems like it's false. I don't think Jesus came and walked on water. I don't think he rose from the dead. So, I think the correct answer is, *Atheism* and *Science*.' We went from being *very* religious, to looking into religion, to becoming disassociated with it, and finally, to becoming atheist." Jeran therefore set out to research and learn about his latest foundation—*Science*, "and the age of the earth, and carbon dating, and radioactive dating, and evolution, and how true that was, and how we all came from pond scum."

Jeran even found his new calling.

Debating Christians.

JERANISM

A CHRISTIAN and maybe fifteen atheists walked into a Facebook forum, and the Christian asked, "*How* do you guys know the age of the earth?"

He then listed numerous reasons *why* the earth is only six-thousand years old, adding: *Prove me wrong*.

From his computer screen Jeran watched the conversation unfold.

An atheist responded:

'You dip shit, we know the age of the earth because of *carbon* dating. You're an idiot! Clearly, the earth is 4.5 billion years old!'

A chorus of voices eagerly joined in on the flagellation.

Idiot.

Idiot.

Idiot.

"Yeah, but carbon dating," Jeran said to himself, "can only date 30 to 40 *thousand* years. So certainly, that's not how we know the earth is 4.5 billion years old."

Though it is true that he'd shown up to the conversation hoping to put *ignorant* Christians, such as this prime example, in their place, Jeran *knew* the first thing which needed done was to correct his fellow atheists of their error. It was the *moral* thing to do. To this effect, he wrote:

'Hey, just so you know, carbon dating is not the reason we know the earth is 4.5 billion years old. Carbon dating can only go back 30 to 40 thousand years.'

Jeran recalled, "As soon as I posted that, there became this onslaught of Science people. And here's what they didn't realize. I was on *their* side. I was just pointing out; *this* is not correct. This is *not* how we know the earth is 4.5 billion years old. It's

actually radio dating and radio-metric dating. It's not carbon dating. But I posted that and I started getting nailed." Campanella had inadvertently taken a baseball bat to a hornet's nest.

The feeding frenzy of sharks turned their gaze upon him now.

You're an idiot.

Stupid.

Retarded.

The earth is clearly old.

We know it's old because Science *says so*.

Evolution *failed* you.

Campanella sat behind his keyboard, reading their responses, and he said to himself:

"Wait a minute..."

JERAN TOSSED HIS HANDS UP.

This is bullshit, he told himself, still hung over his keyboard.

Not one of the fifteen atheists who were attempting to tar and feather the Biblical literalist knew the reason for the age of the earth.

These people are following a religion, he thought.

"Science is no different than religion. These people have been taught dogmas. These people have been taught doctrine. These people promoting the Science side have no idea why they believe what they believe. They simply like me have become disillusioned with the church and they feel Science is the way to go, but they blindly believe it. These people have read out of books. But they don't understand it. They don't *know*."

This atheism-thing simply wasn't working anymore. Truth be told, Jeran was lying to no one other than himself. "I felt like inside of me, there *was* a Creator. I have had spiritual moments in my life. Do I feel like God has talked to me?" Jeran reflected back on his rectory conversations. "Not so much." He then stopped to consider a broader expanse of his life. "Do I feel like God had led me in directions? *Absolutely*." And finally, he pondered the world around him. "Do I feel like there's things that prove God in this world? *Absolutely*."

One conclusion was now doubtlessly certain. He'd taken a jump in the *wrong* direction. And it's what *they wanted*. "I think becoming an atheist was kind of by design, almost like, this is what Science *wants* people to believe."

Missa threw her hands up too.

For months they'd volleyed the ball back and forth, but this time they were in full agreement. Religion was a lie. Science was too. They then gazed back upon their determination to uphold the official 9/11 narrative and recoiled at the very thought of it. Years earlier, a friend had told Jeran that 9/11 was an inside job. "I told him, you're crazy. Stop telling me that. I don't want to hear that shit." But now he was afforded the time to research 9/11 on his own. *Wait a minute*, if 9/11 was a lie, then what else were they lying about? The dominoes continued falling.

They researched the Apollo moon missions.

Oh, hell...

In the moments before she discovered technicolor, Dorothy had only to look outside of her window and witness everything she knew about reality, and everybody she loved, whirling around an Oz-bound tornado. And now the

Campanella's entire education likewise began spinning around in dizzying circles. The priests of Saint Mary's likely filled his peripheral vision along with the upper management of CVS and the Jesuits of Bellarmine. He could still *smell* the incense. He could dig his toes into the carpet and feel the black socks under his white alb. *Drink the blood, Jeran.* Meanwhile, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin plant the United States flag on the moon. The North Tower is *detonated*, and then the South Tower in quick succession. In Dallas, George H.W. Bush stands outside the book depository building. *Join us, Jeran.*

And then there's the matter of Christopher Columbus.

Jeran said, "Why are they teaching about Columbus when Columbus slaughtered a bunch of Indians and was a terrible man and never stepped foot in America?" *They lied to us in school.* The Catholic church seemed to be the crux of that. "I realized these guys got together in the third century and dictated which books would go into the Bible and which books wouldn't. They even dictated what order it would and what order it wouldn't go in. They removed books they didn't want—like Enoch. The more that we went on researching, the more we realized that we can't trust the past—the history that we've been told. The history that we've been told has been terribly compromised. And it's just so easy to lie to people. People are very susceptible to somebody in authority telling them they have to believe certain stuff. I don't believe in dogma."

But what if it wasn't simply *dogma*?

Like, what if everything they'd been taught was a lie?

Let's forget everything.

Jeran told Missa: "Let's start all over again with our beliefs." Theirs would be a complete reset. "Let's throw away Christianity. Let's throw away Catholicism. Let's throw away Science. Let's throw away the age of the earth. They don't know the age of the earth. None of these people know why evolution is true. They just *say it is*. They believe it because they've been taught it. Nobody understands any of it. There's no evidence of it. There's no proof of it. Evolution is a lie. So, let's start from the very beginning."

"I wanted to start all over again. I wanted to start my own belief system. Everything that man has ever touched has become corrupted. People are very easily convinced of things, and very easily taken to one side or the other, and people are indoctrinated." Therein lay another problem entirely. "I couldn't find anybody on the middle path. Online, it was either Dawkins or Ken Ham. It was either Michio Kaku or Ray Comfort. It was always one or the other. There was no middle person."

His newfound religion needed a name.

So, he made a Tumblr blog, and he called it JERANISM.

"The reason I came up with that is because I wanted to post some of these things that I was finding." Evolution is a lie. The moon landing is a lie. Columbus is a lie. Canon is a lie. Science is a lie. Religion is a lie. The Jesuits are a lie. The media is a lie. Nobody needed to inform his beliefs. "I put *ism* at the end of my name because this was my own religion. I didn't want followers. I simply wanted to build my worldview from the ground floor up. For once, this is me researching things for myself and coming to my own conclusions."

And then one day Missa looked out the window.

Jeran recalled, “We lived in a two-story house at the time. I can still see the view through the window in my head.” The view seemed to entice her observations.

She asked, “Do you think the earth could be flat?”

Jeran flipped.

“What are you talking about—the earth could be flat...”

“That’s what I said. *Could the earth be flat?*”

“What are you, *stupid?*” Jeran tightened the contortions of his face. “How could planes possibly go around it? I flew to the Philippines going west. You flew to Europe and Hungary going east.”

Missa shrugged.

“What if we’ve been lied to?”

Jeran said, “Some things are fundamentally true, and one of those things is that the earth is a sphere. It *spins*. It goes around the sun. The earth is clearly a ball.”

She said, “*Oh*, I’m sorry. I thought we were going to build our beliefs from the ground floor up.”

And then he said, “Yeah but...” Jeran closed his mouth. He opened it up to say something, and then shut it again.

Oh, boy....