

July 2023 Update to Gold, Guns and God, Vol. 3: Prabhupada's Palace of God

Revision No. 1

(The following appears at the end of Chapter 26: Our Men Should Be Trained to Kill)

I am happy to report that two mysteries of the “Shooting Affair” have been solved. Today, fifty years after the June 5, 1973 “Motorcycle Gang Attack,” we have new and important testimony which answers the questions: “How many men attacked the New Vrindaban Community,” and “Was the runaway girl at New Vrindaban or not?”

I think it was around 2003 or 2004 when I found Kenneth Elmore's phone number, called him up, and introduced myself. He responded, “I don't talk about that anymore,” and hung up. He died in an auto wreck in December 2004.

Fast forward twenty years after my brief telephone conversation with Kenneth Elmore: I became the source of some controversy amongst some former New Vrindaban residents who were present during the June 5, 1973 “Shooting Affair.” On June 5, 2023, I created a rather long post on Facebook:

June 5, 1973: On this date in history 50 years ago, two men (some say there were 4 men, some say there were 7 men, and some say there were 12 men) from Louisville, Kentucky, threaten Kirtanananda Swami and the New Vrindaban devotees with a shotgun. One of the men, 34-year-old Kenneth Elmore, is looking for his runaway 15-year-old daughter who had joined the Krishnas. He claims she had called her father on

the phone and said she was running away from home to join the West Virginia Hare Krishnas.

When Kirtanananda and others claim the girl is not there, and had never come there, the men become belligerent and demand they return Elmore's daughter. The men brandish a shotgun, and terrorize the devotees in the temple. When the devotees attempt to take the gun away, it accidentally discharges and wounds four people.

Elmore forces Kirtanananda and one other to begin climbing the hill where the men had observed a cornerstone laying ceremony a couple days earlier. They think Elmore's daughter might have been sacrificed and buried in the ground. Elmore tells Kirtanananda he will dig his own grave.

Elmore's partner, back at the temple, orders devotees to knock over the large, heavy, solid-marble deities of Radha and Krishna. When Radha hits the floor (also made of marble), the deity cracks with a great sound. Elmore, on the hill, thinks the sound is gunfire, and runs back down the hill. The two men leave in their gold Cadillac immediately and drive back to Louisville.

When law enforcement arrives, Kirtanananda and others tell the officer they were attacked by a motorcycle gang, a dozen men attacked them with machine guns. The police are confused, because it seems all the witnesses have a different story. Some say there were two men, others say a dozen.

When Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada hears about the attack, he declares, "Our men should have guns and be trained to kill!"

Later, an anonymous devotee calls the sheriff's office on the phone, and says, "Yes, the girl was here, but we hid her out in the woods when her father came looking for her." If this fact had been

revealed, Elmore would have been within his rights, according to Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, to use force to retrieve his minor-age daughter.

Elmore and his assistant are apprehended by police the next day after the raid and extradited to West Virginia. They are in jail FIVE MONTHS awaiting their trial. They could not afford bail. When police come to New Vrindaban to subpoena witnesses from the attack, they CANNOT FIND ANYONE who will testify. Because there are no witnesses, the charges are dropped and the men released.

Kirtanananda couldn't allow the men to go to court, because the fact that Elmore's daughter was in fact at New Vrindaban might be revealed. She might herself testify on her father's behalf. Then the devotees would be the demons, and Elmore and his assistant the guardians of dharma.

Therefore Kirtanananda branded it as an attack by the demons against the devotees. He lied when he told everyone that the government dropped the charges because they want to destroy the Krishnas. Kirtanananda had created his own fake reality at New Vrindaban.

The day after the raid, New Vrindaban residents purchase guns and ammo at the local Moundsville gun shop. So much, that when regular customers come in to purchase ammo, they have to wait for another shipment to come in from the manufacturer.

Many commented on this post, some favorably and others unfavorably. Garga Rishi (David Waterman) commented, "A lot of errors in this story. I was there and to begin with, there were more than just two men. I was hit in the mouth by one biker while at least two others were in the temple, and one outside.

Strange that the author can't really quote anyone who was actually there during the attack. The girl was never at New Vrindaban. A lot of fabrication and a grasping at straws to make up a story. So far, about fifty percent of what I just heard, is correct.”¹

I began to wonder: is there anyway we can absolutely ascertain the answers to two questions: “How many men attacked the New Vrindaban temple,” and “Was the girl there or not?” I thought “Is it possible that the girl is alive and well and willing to talk to me about that chapter of her life?”

I asked one of my friends—a godbrother and amateur historian who has spent many hours researching the history of New Vrindaban²—to see if he could find her. First we found Kenneth W. Elmore’s obituary. He passed away in December 2004 at the University of Louisville Hospital at the age of 66. The obituary explained that Kenneth Elmore was survived by his wife, four daughters and two sons. We discovered that his wife, Evelyn Shaw Elmore passed away at the age of 79 in November 2019.

After searching for the four daughters, we found the one daughter who was the correct age (65), as she was reported to be fifteen at the time of the “Shooting Affair.” My friend discovered that her husband Thomas owns a house in a rural area of Kentucky about 65 miles from Louisville. Could this be where she lives? Elmore’s daughter has no Facebook page, but her husband has, so on June 16th, I sent Thomas a Facebook message.

Dear Sir,

Would you be so kind to ask your wife Victoria a question for me?

I'm writing a book about the West Virginia Hare Krishna people and heard that Victoria, around age 15, ran away from home and possibly came to West Virginia for a short time.

Her father, Kenneth Elmore, got some guys together and drove from Louisville to West Virginia and tried to rescue her, but they couldn't find her, and Mr. Elmore and a friend, Joseph Clemons, wound up in jail for 5 months in West Virginia, until they were released.

Victoria's memories will be very important to help us get the facts straight about what really happened. I just want to know if Victoria actually went to West Virginia or not.

I understand if Victoria does not want to talk about this, but I hope she will. I think there may be an important lesson for everyone regarding this incident.

Thanks so much.
Henry Doktorski

I never received a reply. Two days later, on Sunday June 18th, by coincidence or Krishna's arrangement, I discovered that I was scheduled to speak about my *Gold, Guns and God* decalogy on Thursday, June 29th at the annual conference for the International Cultic Studies Association in Louisville, Kentucky.³

I thought to myself, "When I'm in Louisville next week, perhaps I can take a chance, rent a car, and drive to the address of the house Elmore's son-in-law owns, and see if he or his wife will talk with me." Only one day during my Louisville trip, Wednesday June 28th, worked for me. As I couldn't find a car rental dealership that had any cars available (the July Fourth weekend was approaching) I hired a cab.⁴

The drive took almost an hour and a half, mostly through leafy green deciduous forests and green farm fields and meadows. Finally, we arrived at the address: a small house on a macadam road a little ways off the two-lane state highway. To the left was a house trailer and behind was a barn or two. The area was mostly mowed grass and in the distance we could see the forest tree line.

Two men were working on a farm tractor/lawn mower a few dozen yards ahead, so I walked over and asked the gentlemen if they knew where Victoria (Elmore's daughter) and Thomas (her husband) lived. They pointed to another home, a trailer home, not far away. The trailer/home was old, but well maintained. The lawn was mowed recently. A grey SUV was parked on the front yard near the front door. The side door was open, revealing a child car seat.

I walked over, stepped up three wood steps on the small wooden front porch, rang the doorbell button and waited. I waited more. And then I waited some more. I thought perhaps the bell was not working, so I knocked. And knocked. And waited and waited.

Then I noticed a sticker on the door, "ATTENTION. THE OWNER OF THIS PROPERTY IS ARMED AND PREPARED TO PROTECT LIFE AND PROPERTY FROM CRIMINAL OFFENSE. THERE IS NOTHING INSIDE WORTH RISKING YOUR LIFE FOR!" I knocked again. No response.

At that time, I got a call on my cell phone, stepped off the porch, and answered the call. Eventually, maybe five minutes after my first knock, the door opened and a man came out onto the porch. He wore jeans and a flannel shirt (if I remember

correctly), and had grey/white hair and a fairly-long bushy beard. His blue eyes appeared attentive and kind. I think his height was a few inches less than six feet, and he was neither thin nor heavy. I guess he was in his mid-60s. He looked like a strong man with big hands. He later told me he's a retired professional truck driver.

I introduced myself, and we stood and chatted on his front porch for about 45 minutes. There were two chairs on the porch. About two or three times, the front door cracked open and a little boy about three years old tried to come out on to the porch. Each time he was pulled back into the trailer by Victoria, who remained mostly hidden, although one time I caught a glimpse of her. Thomas told me, "That's my great grandson. He loves being outside. He'd spend his entire life outdoors if he could."

Thomas knew who I was and what I wanted, as he had read the Facebook message I had sent a week or so earlier. I liked him immediately. Our conversation was fascinating. As I remember it, he began:

I got your Facebook message. I only log in a few times a year, but when I logged in about a week ago, there was your message. My wife, Victoria, doesn't want to talk to you, but I will.

Yes, she ran away from home fifty years ago, and her father, Ken, went to West Virginia with a few guys to find her and bring her home. He figured she went to the West Virginia Krishna commune because a Krishna bus had been parked on the street for about a month by their home near Preston Highway, and his daughter had become friendly with them. When the bus disappeared, Ken heard they went to the West Virginia Krishna commune, and he figured his daughter had run away with them. I know this

because I heard about it from Victoria and her father.

Six men traveled to West Virginia: Kenneth Elmore, Joseph Earl Clemons, and four members of the Sons of Silence motorcycle club who used to hang out at Ken's tavern on Poplar Level Road, Louisville. His tavern was called "Kenny's Tavern." The biker men thought of themselves as "tough guys," and went by the names: Bear, Possum, Wolf and Tex. They never got caught by law enforcement because Ken and Clemons didn't know their legal names.

I knew Clemons pretty well. We called him "Buddy." He liked to hang out with the motorcycle guys and he went by the name "Kickstand." He claimed that he got into a motorcycle crash and his kickstand went right through his foot. However, I don't think he ever rode a motorcycle, I think he made up the story.

I met Tex once. He was a big, big guy, maybe six foot six, and wide as a bull. He was a strong man. Funny that such a big guy drove around in a Volkswagen Beetle. Once I tried to find a parking place for my car on the street, and I asked him to move his car slightly so I could fit my car in a space. He laughed, squatted down, lifted his car's bumper, and spun that Beetle around so that I could park my car.

Ken and Buddy got arrested and spent a few months in jail. He thought his daughter went to West Virginia, but actually she was hiding out at her girlfriend's house only two blocks away. She stayed there about a week, and I think her girlfriend's parents told her to go back home. That's when Victoria found out her father had gone to West Virginia looking for her and had gotten arrested.

Victoria's mother, Evelyn (I called her Eve), asked Victoria to testify on her father's behalf. Eve asked her daughter to tell the court, "Yes, I was at the Krishna commune in West Virginia, but they hid me in the woods when my father came looking for me." This might have helped her father.

But Victoria refused to lie. That was just too much to ask her. This caused bad feelings between Victoria and her mother, but eventually Eve got over it.

I first met Victoria on June 20, 1973. We met in a cemetery where I was working at the time. I saw her, and thought, "This is the woman I want to marry." We did get married two years later, although when I asked Ken for permission to marry his daughter, his first response was "No." Sometimes I used to borrow Ken's car, a 1965 Pontiac Tempest, to take Victoria out on dates.

I remember when Victoria's father came back to Louisville from West Virginia. He just showed up, like nothing had happened. Life went back to normal. Sometimes he and I went deer hunting together in the woods. He was a kind and gentle man. I find it hard to believe he went to West Virginia with a bunch of bikers and shot up the Krishna temple in search of his daughter. The man I knew was not violent; he would have simply filed a missing person report with the police and let law enforcement take care of it. I think he was influenced by those bikers who wanted a chance to raise some hell and show how tough they were.

Ken died in a car crash in 2005. He was driving his pickup truck home one night (at this time they lived in Shively, a suburb of Louisville), when a soldier—from Fort Knox, I think—driving a Honda Civic, plowed into him. The soldier died instantly; he was decapitated. Ken's truck rolled

over maybe five times before it stopped. He was not wearing his seatbelt, so he got really banged up. He never wore a seatbelt. He was stubborn about that.

Once he was pulled over by a cop and the cop gave him a ticket for not wearing a seatbelt. Ken told the cop, "I'm going to the corner store, and I'll be coming back this way in a while. If you pull me over again, you can give me another ticket for not wearing a seatbelt."

Ken was in a coma in the hospital for nine days, then he died. I think if he was wearing his seatbelt, he might be still around.

Buddy (Joseph Clemons) died a couple years later. He was a diabetic. I went to visit him in the hospital. He was unconscious and the doctors and nurses were unable to wake him. They said, "Joseph, Joseph! Can you hear me?" but he wouldn't respond. When I came in, I stood next to him and called out, "Hey, Buddy! How you doing?" He immediately opened his eyes, recognized me, and started talking. But he died soon after.⁵

I am very happy that I was able to locate Victoria's husband, and that he very kindly agreed to talk with me. Two important questions about the June 5, 1973 "Shooting Affair" have been definitively answered. Thomas asked me not to reveal his and his wife's actual names. He said, "I don't want any fanatical Krishnas harassing me and my wife." Therefore, I have used pseudonyms in this book to respect their privacy.

Revision No. 2

(The following appears in Chapter 32: The Palace Marathon. It replaces two sections: “Quaalude manufacturing laboratory established,” and “Tirtha guaranteed entrance to Spiritual World”)

Quaalude manufacturing laboratory established

In 1979, in Athens, Ohio, Tirtha set up a laboratory, with the help of a chemist (Tom Mustric) and funding from his employer,⁶ to manufacture methaqualone (a sedative and hypnotic agent commonly known as Quaalude). It seems Tirtha thought he could follow in the footsteps of Shyamakunda and Advaita and continue providing New Vrindaban with much-needed funding for construction projects.

However, before Tirtha’s laboratory had begun to manufacture methaqualone, he was arrested and convicted for “manufacturing and distributing” the illegal drug when the chemist got cold feet, turned snitch, and reported the operation to law enforcement authorities. Tirtha was pronounced guilty in court and was sentenced to two years and eight months in a federal penitentiary in Ohio.⁷ A Columbus devotee, Rsabhadeva dasa (Severino Pelino)⁸ was also arrested as a co-conspirator and spent sixty days in jail.⁹ Swarupa remembered Tirtha’s laboratory:

November of 1979: I drove my wife, Kanka, and our three young children, to New Vrindaban. She wanted to live there because she got it in her head that Kirtanananda Swami was a pure devotee. I remained in Los Angeles with my other wife (yeah—I was a [polygamous] two-wifer at the time). Anyway, to make a short story longer, I began visiting New Vrindaban every few months for the next year-and-a-half. That’s when I became friends with some of the folks there, like Shyamakunda [Gregory Detamore], Tirtha

[Thomas Drescher], Kuladri [Arthur Villa], et al. . .

During one visit, Tirtha told me about some crazy plan he had to manufacture Quaaludes. He said he knew a chemist in Columbus and had a house available in some suburb there. [According to Rsabhadeva, the house was in Athens, Ohio.] I told him that if he actually got it done, I could sell a shitload in Los Angeles. I came back around two months later and rented a car at the Pittsburgh Airport. Tirtha gave me an address to come see him and check out his operation at that house. The lab was just getting set up. I got there on a Saturday afternoon and stayed over until Sunday night.

Early Monday morning they were raided. Apparently the chemist got cold feet and went to the DEA and he was wired. They staked the house out for three days and even saw me come and go (and asked Tirtha who the guy was with the rented red Cutlass). I think he [the chemist] ended up getting probation on the whole deal.¹⁰

Tirtha guaranteed entrance to Spiritual World

During Tirtha's trial, Bhaktipada promised, "If Tirtha takes the whole thing and no other boys get caught, then he'll go back to Godhead at the end of this lifetime."¹¹ Bhaktipada made sure that Tirtha's wife, Purvachitti (Patty) heard about this, so she would share the good news with her husband when she visited him in jail. This promise would undoubtedly inspire Tirtha to keep quiet about New Vrindaban's support of the venture during interrogation.

Bhaktipada's statement promising Tirtha's promotion to Krishna's abode (if he didn't implicate his accomplices) suggests that (1) Bhaktipada was

privy to Tirtha's plan to manufacture methaqualone in Ohio, (2) he knew others at New Vrindaban were somehow involved, and (3) he wanted Tirtha not to incriminate the community or the "spiritual master" in the undertaking.

Perhaps due to Bhaktipada's promise that he would go back to Godhead "if no other boys got caught," Tirtha honored his name "servant of the holy place of pilgrimage." He didn't snitch on his accomplices, and took the entire rap himself. Years later, in a letter to me Tirtha confirmed, "I did 'take the rap.' I'm from the old school. You don't rat on your friends or accomplices."¹²

Tirtha served fifteen months in prison and was released on probation. After the big bust in Ohio, Bhaktipada began promoting "picking"—panhandling at sporting events, concerts and shopping malls, sometimes known as "Scam Kirtan"—as the next major source of income for the community.

Tirtha admitted, "Among some of the more serious illegal activities, drug dealing certainly ranked near the top. Kirtanananda wasn't directly involved, but he was more than willing to look the other way and accept the cash from people who had somehow plugged themselves into the trade. . . . It created a very bad precedent for devotees to follow. People began to think they could practically do anything for Krishna, so long as Gurudeva said it was all right. It conjured up scenes of the Wild West, where anything goes. In time, several devotees made considerable profit in this manner, but most were eventually victims of their own greed. Krishna ultimately revealed that he wouldn't accept such burnt offerings."¹³

On national television, Bhaktipada denied that New Vrindaban devotees bought and sold recreational drugs for Krishna. Following is a transcript of an excerpt from an interview with Bhaktipada by CBS correspondent Jane Wallace which was broadcast on *West 57th*, a New York television show:

Wallace: What do you say to the allegation that the Krishnas have funded themselves with drug money?

Bhaktipada: I don't believe it.

Wallace: Do you know it cannot be true?

Bhaktipada: I know on the West Coast they had one isolated incident [at Laguna Beach ISKCON in 1979], but as a general rule, I'm positive it's not true.

Wallace: Are you saying you've never had any drug running take place in the Krishnas to your knowledge?

Bhaktipada: No. Never.¹⁴

Would Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, if he were alive at the time, have encouraged or permitted his disciples to buy and sell illegal recreational drugs to build his Palace of Gold or support ISKCON temples? Is money really the honey, even when it is used in Krishna's service?

¹ David Waterman (Garga Rishi), Facebook comment (June 6, 2023).

² Chaitanya Mangala.

³ The ICSA sent me a "Welcome Guest Speaker" email in January, but the email address was misspelled, so I never received it.

⁴ The taxi bill came to \$398.00. I gave the driver a \$40 tip.

⁵ Thomas, conversation with the author (June 28, 2023).

⁶ Rsabhadeva claimed that Tirtha made money at the time by selling firewood for a “Fat Man” who also invested in illegal enterprises, such as Tirtha’s methaqualone laboratory. Severino Pelino (Rsabhadeva), telephone conversation with the author (July 17, 2023).

⁷ “Report of Criminal Investigation,” 12.

⁸ While a freshman student philosophy major at Ohio State University, on May 12, 1969, Severino Pelino heard Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and Allen Ginsberg speak on campus at Hitchcock Hall. He attended subsequent events at Columbus ISKCON and was initiated as Rsabhadeva dasa during Prabhupada’s 1971 visit to Detroit (July 16-18).

⁹ Tirtha had, more or less, “invited” himself to live at Rsabhadeva’s Columbus apartment. Rsabhadeva couldn’t get rid of him. Even Tirtha’s wife, Purvacitti, came to live in Rsabhadeva’s apartment. After that, Rsabhadeva moved into the Columbus ISKCON temple. That is the reason Rsabha spent time in prison: Tirtha ordered 55-gallon drums of chemicals used to manufacture methaqualone and had them shipped to Rsabha’s apartment addressed to Severino Pelino. Rsabhadeva told me this during a telephone conversation (July 17, 2023).

One of my godbrothers at New Vrindaban noted, “Rsabha did time for that Columbus bust, as I remember him telling me he had to use his allotment of food to bribe the black guys in prison who wanted to take him in the ass.” Anonymous New Vrindaban resident, email to the author (January 29, 2018).

¹⁰ Steven Hebel (Swarupa), email to the author (February 10, 2010).

¹¹ Keith Gordon Ham (Kirtanananda Swami), cited by Patty (Purvachitti), letter to David Shenk (Gadai) in Buffalo (January 10, 1980).

¹² Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), letter to the author (July 4, 2017).

¹³ Thomas A. Drescher (Tirtha), unpublished manuscript (1994).

¹⁴ *West* 57th.