

CONVERSATIONS with a **SCIENTIST**

ONE MAN'S
INTENSE JOURNEY TO
FIND GOD AGAIN



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& KIMBERLY SOESBEE



Conversations with a Scientist

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Kimberly Soesbee

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This book has been a labor of love for my dear friend,
John Franklin, and the many people who have prayed for me
for over 20 years.

I am specifically grateful to friends Keith Crutcher, Penny
Franklin, Mary Carr, and Kimberly Soesbee (my co-author)
for encouragement and helping to finish this project.

I also want to dedicate this small work to my family:

Kerry, Sara, Michael, and Julie.

I want to give a specific thank you and dedication to
Dr. Bernadette Grayson. She was the wonderful scientist who
refused to let me stew in my disbeliefs.

Finally, I also dedicate this story to my mom, Carol Benoit.
She exhibited a mother's love that knew no boundaries.

~ S.

David, Cooper, Ben, and Kacey: You fill my world with love
and make it a bright and wonderful place.
Thank you, Stephen, for allowing me to be a small part of your
great big journey.

~ K.

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Introduction



Stephen

You never hear the one that hits you. That's what they say. I wonder, though, if there is an enlightenment that takes place in the instant before a sudden death? Does a soul anticipate its departure from the body? Is a person's final inhale merely the preparation to expel the inner man from the flesh, forever?

December 30, 2010 was breezy in Bastrop, Texas. The morning fog had burned away, and the trio of hunters hoped that whatever had kept the deer under cover in the morning had set them free by mid-afternoon. They walked softly, but briskly, doing their best to keep the sound of crunching leaves to a minimum beneath their boots. They spoke little, and

the other two gave a nod to John as they left him at the first tree stand.

As I replay that day in my mind, I imagine John watching his friends as they continued into the woods. As their images disappear around the trail, one of his famous smiles crosses his face as he throws a prayer of thanks up to his Lord for the beautiful day. I wasn't there, but have created the entire moment in my head.

John gazes up the ladder into the tree stand. He slides his arm through his gun strap, and adjusts his bag on the other shoulder. With a firm grip on the rungs, he climbs. He is nearly all the way up the ladder, when he hears a thud on the ground below.

"Dang it," he says aloud, as he glances down. A box of ammo fell from his partly-open bag. At the same time he looks down, he notices his right boot is untied. He pauses, considering whether to finish the climb and leave his gear in the stand before tying his boot and then retrieving the ammo, or descending the ladder right then.

He moves his foot to climb higher, but realizes his unruly bootlace has snagged on a nail protruding from the ladder. His left hand tightens on the rung. He reaches down with his right to free the lace from the nail's grip. As he bends over, he smiles as he thinks that in the new year, he better try to lose a few pounds.

“Too many Christmas sweets,” he sighs, thinking fondly of his wife, Penny. He shifts his left foot and lifts his right to get a better reach. As he stretches his fingers to the lace, he feels the gun’s strap creep off of his shoulder and skid down his arm. With an awkward motion, he tries to trap it in his armpit before it falls. But he cannot.

Two hundred fifty yards away, Jeff and Josh arrive at their deer stand. As they begin their ascent, the unmistakable sound of rifle fire reverberates through the trees.

“That was fast,” Jeff said.

“Think he got something?” Josh wondered.

They climb into the stand and get settled. Jeff checks his phone, waiting for John’s text either affirming that he got one, or to let them know it got away. After a couple of minutes with no word, Jeff sends John a text message: Did you get one?

They wait a few more minutes, but no response comes.

“Dad, should I go see if everything is OK?” Josh asks.

“Let me give him a call,” Jeff replies. He dials the phone, and after several rings, John’s voicemail picks up. After the beep, Jeff says, “Hey, heard the shot, give us a call.”

A couple more minutes go by.

“Josh, why don’t you go see if John needs help. He may have taken down a buck,” Jeff suggests.

“Sure thing, Dad,” Josh says happily. The thought of helping John carry a big ‘ol buck out of the woods was exciting.

Josh leaves the stand and walks back to where they’d left their pastor just a few minutes before. As he rounds the last corner, his stomach lurches. John’s body lay at the bottom of the tree. Josh runs to him, but he can tell from the damage to John’s head that his death was instant.

“Daaaaaad!” Josh screams.

I shake my head to free it from the vision of my friend, lying in a crumpled heap in the woods, with a distorted mess where his face used to be. I learned of his death in the same way that many of my friends did—through Facebook. My friend Crystal had sent me an inbox message, and as I read the words: “Did you hear about John? He shot himself.. ” my vision clouded and the capillaries in my neck and face exploded, turning me a hot shade of red.

“Damn it!” I screamed at my computer. “Damn it! Damn it! DAMN IT!” I punctuated my final yell by hurling the Bible that was next to my computer against the wall. I crumpled to the floor and wept

loudly as I gave it a final kick.

It wasn't until years later that I learned John's death was not as gruesome as I had imagined. It was a single bullet that entered through his chin and did not leave. The sheriff's office said that he died instantly from the blast. But, none of that would have consoled me as I mourned the loss of my friend.

"Screw you, God-who-doesn't-exist," I said. "I'm done."

On December 30, 2010, I gave up all hope of believing in any God who insisted on mocking my search for truth.

Kimberly

On May 29, 1988, 621 Richland High School Graduates walked the stage at the Tarrant County Convention Center in Ft. Worth, Texas. I was one of the happy Rebels looking forward to all that life after high school had to offer. Within a couple of weeks, I would be packing up my leotards and heading to Penn State on a full gymnastics scholarship. Gymnastics was my everything. If one were to cumulate the hours I'd spent engaged in various life activities, the amount of time I spent in a gym would surpass the time I'd spent anywhere else.

My intense sports-focus kept me somewhat isolated during my childhood and high school years. I

say “somewhat,” because I did have a small handful of close friends while growing up, but precious few in that handful were not gymnasts. As I accepted my diploma that late May day, I would have never thought my path would cross with any of my classmates again. That may sound sad, but it’s true.

Stephen Benoit was outside of my circle of friends during our high school years. We left the Tarrant County Convention Center and high school in the same way we entered; as strangers. However, 20 years later, that changed.

Within a couple of months after joining Facebook in 2007, some 100+ people from Richland High School had become my “friends.” Stephen was one of them. As I explored this fascinating way in which I could immerse myself in the lives of people all over the world, Stephen became someone with whom I interacted nearly every day. I appreciated his quippy comebacks and his no-nonsense viewpoints on politics, Hollywood news, and world events.

In 2010, my first book was published. *Radical Love, Forever Changed* is a book that explores the reasons why Christians do not live with the radical, joyful love that God intends. During the writing of that book, and as the months led up to my book’s release, I began posting links to blogs, Bible verses, and other Christian content on my Facebook page. In September

2009, Stephen approached me, via Facebook, to open a dialogue about religious beliefs. At the time, he had abandoned God and Christianity. What kind of religious discussion does a science-minded apostate and a born-again Baptist Christian have? One that goes nowhere.

After our first phone conversation, I believed that Stephen was simply looking for an argument about the age of the earth and evolution. I didn't think he sought to engage in any real religious discussion. We ended up going in circles about the content in the very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis.

Stephen felt I was close-minded and could not offer any new insight into the struggles he was having. I didn't know the journey Stephen had been on in his personal life. All I knew was that this newfound friend was attacking my faith. We didn't pursue any subsequent conversations about our beliefs until December 30, 2010. That was the day our friend John accidentally shot himself while deer hunting. I'll save the details of that dialogue for later in this book, but as Stephen and I initiated new discussion on the evening of John's death, I learned at a deeper level that Stephen had been on a spiritual quest for a while. John had been an integral part of Stephen's search for truth, and now God has placed me here, too. My role is to help him tell his story. Which is what we'll do in this

book.

This book is meant to take you, dear reader, on a walk through the years of Stephen's life in which his beliefs were formed, then destroyed, and then rebuilt. Stephen is a scientist. He is also a Christian. Can the two coexist? He used to think not. Perhaps that is what you think, too.

Have you struggled with the logistics of a seven-day creation story, as provided in the book of Genesis? Has that struggle kept you from giving yourself fully to the Jesus who died for you? It kept Stephen away, too.

And finally, are you searching for a way that you can take steps of faith, knowing there is something in your life missing, but you don't know where to begin? If so, this book can help you.

Through his studies and work in different scientific disciplines, Stephen realized there were countless people out there in the same soul-state as he was. People with serious questions, that required serious, concrete answers before they could reach out to Jesus. He wants you to know that you can have peace that surpasses all understanding.

Are there things in the Bible that Stephen and I continue to interpret differently? Yes. Does it prevent us from being able to sit at the table of Christ together as brother and sister? Well, I'll let you unmask that answer for yourself through the pages of this book.