



*Reflections by the New Vrindaban Telephone Man
Jyotirdhama dasa (Joseph Pollock, Jr.)*

*Now I must simply tell the truth about what happened back then.
I am going to speak the truth about how I was involved in the
Sulochan murder no matter what the consequences are.*

My Involvement in the Conspiracy to Murder Steven Bryant (Sulochan dasa)

March 21, 2019 (Gaura-Purnima)
Richland, Washington

I was right in the middle of events that happened at [New Vrindaban, West Virginia](#), in 1985 and 1986. My service to the New Vrindaban community put me squarely in the middle of everything that happened then. I managed the communications systems, the main office, mail services and sound systems. Out of all of my responsibilities, maintenance of **the community telephone system was my number one priority**. My other responsibilities evolved from the installation of the phone system.

The telephone system was an ITT STS-16; a first generation, computerized PBX (Private Branch Exchange) that was capable of generating 1,024 analog extensions. Gaura Shakti dasa, my immediate supervisor, bought the PBX used in 1983; he and I drove to Dallas, Texas; picked it up and brought it back to New Vrindaban. We installed the telephone system near the community business offices in an area known as Bahulaban; about three miles from the temple. Suddenly New Vrindaban had its very own functional, state of the art, computerized, business telephone system. [Kirtananda Swami Bhaktipada](#), the ISKCON guru who was in charge of New Vrindaban (sometimes respectively referred to as “Number One”), called me “Krishna’s telephone man.”

Gaura Shakti then purchased at auction, and oversaw the installation of, more than seven miles of copper twisted pair, direct burial telephone cable. The seven miles of cable connected most of the

community to that one big, centralized telephone system. The brick factory extension was farthest from the PBX, about five miles from Bahulaban. Directly wiring extensions five miles from a PBX is unheard of, even today; but somehow it all worked. At peak there were just over one hundred analog extensions installed.

Once the PBX was up and running I installed its Attendant Console in an office on the ground floor of the business administration building in Bahulaban. I then hired and supervised two non-devotee hourly workers, one full time and one part time, to provide centralized answering for the entire community. I was the backup. The first Attendant hired was Bonnie Carney. Bonnie was hired with the understanding that her family situation would only allow her to work from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM; Monday through Friday. Bonnie was great, she was like a rock. To this day she may still be the best live call attendant I've ever worked with. She took her job seriously; was always enthusiastic and always very professional. Bonnie made it easy for me to adjust the part time attendant's hours around seasonal workload fluctuations. Incoming calls for New Vrindaban businesses, Prabhupada's Palace, the Palace Lodge, the temple, etc., all rang in at the main console, were then answered by the attendant, and transferred to the requested extension via the main cable. The telephone office became known as the Front Office, the Attendant Console was called the "switchboard," and the attendants became known as "switchboard operators."

Next we installed a law enforcement quality Motorola UHF-FM 2-way radio system and put the base unit (central answering point) next to the switchboard. The switchboard operators became radio dispatchers too. With the hubs of both communications systems sitting side by side it was a rare day when we could not locate a specific individual anywhere within the thousands of acres that made up New Vrindaban in those days. After the telephones and radios were up and running smoothly, management saw the Front Office as an obvious location to centralize community mail services. A US Postal Service bulk mail metering machine was placed in a room behind the Front Office. Community business mail was delivered there, and we did shipping and receiving. Spring, summer, and fall, the office was abuzz with activity. Winter was normally our down time.

Although being right in the middle of the daily action at New Vrindaban, I was not a very prominent figure in the community. That was fine with me. I preferred to stay in the background, perfect my trade, and serve the devotees as best as I could. I was very happy with my service and thought I would never leave New Vrindaban. But after [Bhaktipada was assaulted and almost died](#) on October 27, 1985, everything changed at New Vrindaban. When [Steven Bryant \(Sulochan dasa\)](#), an ex-New Vrindaban resident, was killed in May of 1986 in a murder plot engineered by New Vrindaban upper management—that was the beginning of the end of the Bhaktipada and [Kuladri](#) (New Vrindaban temple president) reign. After that, I wanted out.

Bhaktipada sent me out on the "pick" (fund raising) shortly after [Sulochan was murdered](#). This came as a complete surprise to me. I didn't know exactly why Bhaktipada wanted to send "Krishna's telephone man" out on the road (I wasn't an exceptional "picker") but I gladly complied. I was happy to get away from the madness that had overtaken New Vrindaban by then, and I never asked, "Why?" I just said, "Okay."

(While writing this essay and reflecting on those days, it now becomes crystal clear to me exactly WHY I was sent out on the road. The conspirators, including Bhaktipada, all knew that **I was aware of the identities of the plotters**. I suspect that after Sulochan was murdered, [Kuladri](#) approached Bhaktipada and asked him to send me out on the road, probably to get me away from New Vrindaban, lest law enforcement or FBI investigators came to the community and interviewed me. Under questioning I might have spilled the beans, so to speak, and implicated the other conspirators. Getting sent out on the road on traveling sankirtan would make it much more difficult for the FBI to find me.)

A year later, in 1987, my wife and I moved to Minneapolis to help with the New Vrindaban satellite center there. In 1989 we moved back to [New Vrindaban](#). I left New Vrindaban (and my wife) for good in 1990. I buried the memories of 1985 and 1986 far deep in my subconscious mind and moved on with my life. Decades passed. Within a relatively short time *I had forgotten about my involvement in the assassination of my godbrother, Sulochan dasa*. Three decades passed.

Then, in March of 2018, I began reading “[Killing for Krishna](#),” a recently-published book written by Henry Doktorski (Hrishikesh dasa) chronicling the events leading up to (and after) the killing of Sulochan dasa on May 22, 1986. I was curious about what Hrishikesh had to say about events that I had lived through. As I read his book I started to remember that I had some involvement in the murder plot, but at first I could not remember what that involvement was precisely as my memories had been submerged in my subconscious mind.

I emailed Hrishikesh because I wanted to tell him that I was involved, but I could not remember how. There was something buried in the deep recesses of my mind that I could not remember, and [reading his book was jogging that memory](#). As I read the book and exchanged emails with Hrishikesh, I began experiencing deep emotional pain. The pain was so intense that I stopped reading the book and stopped sending emails to Hrishikesh, although he tried to contact me again several times. At the time, I did not know why reading his book was causing me such emotional distress.

I did not message Hrishikesh again until January of 2019. I resumed communicating with him via email because that little voice inside of me kept telling me that I had to patch things up with him. We had been friends since the 1980s, and there was no rational reason why I should have abruptly stopped messaging him. When I started writing to Hrishikesh again, I began telling him about my complicity in the murder of Sulochan dasa. Every time I wrote to Hrishikesh, more memories surfaced and when I wrote those memories down, more came out. Thirty-three year old, deeply hidden memories started coming back to me in bits and pieces; all jumbled up.

I never really forgot that I had been involved in the murder. I just buried the memories so deep in my mind that I had to work hard to remember just what I had done. Krishna says in *Bhagavad Gita*: “From Me comes knowledge, remembrance and forgetfulness.” Krishna provided the forgetfulness it took to almost totally forget; but He also, quite unexpectedly, decades later provided me with clear memories of [what happened in 1986](#). Eventually it all came back to me. Hrishikesh was the first person I ever told about my complicity in the murder; my son was the second. Now, for the first time in the thirty-three years since the murder happened, I am telling the entire story of how I participated (was implicated) in the murder of my godbrother, His Grace Sulochan dasa.

Let me first offer my obeisances to my spiritual master His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, from whom I accepted diksa initiation at New Vrindaban in 1976; as witnessed by His Grace Dharmatma dasa, my temple president at the time. What I am going to say now may be unpleasant for some of my godbrothers, the [murder conspirators](#) (we all know who they are by now, [Hrishikesh got it right in his book](#)) but I mean no harm to anyone. **Now I must simply tell the truth about what happened back then.** I am going to speak the truth about how I was involved in [the Sulochan murder](#) no matter what the consequences are. The time to speak is now.

I first became involved with [the murder plot](#) in early February of 1986. I can't remember the exact date anymore, but one overcast, chilly morning I was asked to open the Front Office about an hour before normal business hours began; which was 8:00 AM. Sometime after 7:00 AM I went to the Bahulaban office and unlocked the front door. I stepped through the doorway, but did not have a chance to turn the lights on because Gaura Shakti, a senior New Vrindaban devotee—a department head who was a fine electrician, came through the door right behind me. I moved to my left, behind the counter to make room for him, he stepped around the counter too and said that he needed to talk to me about something important. He asked me if I was aware that Sulochan dasa had recently ar-

rived in the New Vrindaban area and was making threats on the lives of Bhaktipada and Kuladri. I said, “Yes.”

Then Gaura Shakti told me that upper management wanted to keep an eye on Sulochan, so he and some other New Vrindaban devotees were following him. He said that the surveillance team was having some difficulty staying with Sulochan because of poor telephone communications (no cell phones in those days). They needed a central call-in point to be able to coordinate their movements. Gaura asked me if I would be willing to help them fix the problem. I said “Sure, I’ll help if you’re just going to follow him.” Mind you, we were standing in a dark office. Gaura Shakti hesitated for a second then someone stepped into the doorway. I remember it well.

There was early morning daylight outside so the person in the doorway was sharply silhouetted as he stepped into the dark office. I knew immediately that it was [Kuladri, the New Vrindaban temple president](#) who was known as “Number Two.” (Bhaktipada was known as “Number One.”) Kuladri’s silhouetted form appeared dramatically in the office doorway. He entered the office and stood across the counter from Gaura Shakti and I. We exchanged pleasantries, then Kuladri asked why we were standing in the dark, I said “I just haven’t had a chance to turn the lights on yet.” He said “Well you better turn them on before someone thinks we’re up to something.” I could see his crooked smirk even in the dark and heard Gaura chuckle. Gotta laugh at the boss’s joke, right?

Gaura turned the lights on. Kuladri turned to Gaura and said “Did you tell him what we’re planning?” Gaura Shakti said “some.” This “some” was my first inkling that something more than just watching Sulochan was intended. Kuladri turned to me and said “So what do you think Jyotir? Do you want to help us?” I hesitated because I sensed that I had not been told everything. Before I could respond, [Kuladri said](#), “**It’s all set. Everything’s in place.** The swamis are on board. Gaura is helping with surveillance. We just need your help with the telephones.” To me “the swamis are on board” meant that [Radhanath](#) and [Tapahpunja](#) swamis were active participants. Kuladri did not say that “the swamis” gave their blessings or condoned the plan; he said that they were “on board.” I said “I’ll do whatever I can to help.” By then I was pretty sure that I had not been told everything.

Kuladri said “Good. We just need you to keep an eye on incoming calls and be ready to man the switchboard when we need you. Gaura or I will let you know when. Okay?” I said “Okay.” Kuladri said “Anything else?” Gaura said “A couple of things” Then we talked about keeping incriminating conversations off of the incoming phone lines because we believed our telephones were being tapped by law enforcement; and keeping plot related information off of the two-way radios. Kuladri said, “Any questions should go through Gaura Shakti.” Gaura, Kuladri and I had been working on establishing effective communications at New Vrindaban as the community boomed in the early 1980s; this meeting was like the three of us were just discussing another managerial decision.

When he was satisfied that his communications problem had been solved Kuladri left the office. Gaura Shakti went around the counter towards the front door. He stopped and turned towards me. We stood eye to eye across the counter from each other and I said, “Is there something else you want to tell me?” He said, “They are going to kill him. I was supposed to tell you before Kuladri came in, but he came in too soon.” I was stunned and could only say “Really?” Gaura Shakti said, “Yes, **Radhanath Maharaja is preaching that Sulochan is a demon and needs to be transmigrated to his next body.**” I was very upset. I was visibly upset.

Gaura noticed my emotional distress, and asked “Are you okay? Do you still want to help?” I said half heartedly “Yeah, I guess so.” Gaura said “Okay. I have to get to work; we’ll let you know when we need something. Haribol.” And with that he turned and left. Needless to say, that conversation ruined my day. Just like that, without the deep reflection which should have preceded such a monumental life-changing, life-ending decision, without even thinking about the consequences, I became involved in a murder plot.

I did not want to be involved in [this murder conspiracy](#), yet I had just agreed to aid and abet “any way I can.” I remember questioning in my mind why I had said that. Was it because I wasn’t told it was a murder plot until after Kuladri left the office? Whatever my reasoning to agree to “help in whatever way I can,” there was still time for me to get out. Bonnie came in to start her shift and I left the office. I was severely conflicted about what to do. I knew that I had a very small window to get out. As the day wore on I weighed my options. If I decided not to take part in the plot. I would have to leave New Vrindaban immediately without telling anyone, even my wife. (We had been paired by Bhaktipada a year earlier, in 1985.) I knew that my wife would not go with me if I left New Vrindaban. Although she received diksa from Srila Prabhupada in 1977 in India, I believe, she (and I) took second initiation from Bhaktipada during a festival in 1986. After her brahmin initiation she became a fanatical Bhaktipada groupie and considered herself to be a Bhaktipada disciple. My primary allegiance, on the other hand, was to Srila Prabhupada. I knew she wasn’t going to believe any evidence, however convincing, that painted her beloved spiritual father in a less-than-favorable light.

If I decided to help the conspirators I would have to bury my gut instinct; I had a bad, bad feeling in the pit of my stomach about the plot. My choices were to either join the club or to make a run for it. I had to decide before I went home to my wife that night because no matter what I decided, I could not let her know what was going on in my brain, or in my gut. By the time it got dark and I went home I had decided to stay with my wife and continue my duties as Telecom Manager as though nothing had happened. I made a very bad choice.

Incoming telephone call traffic was normally very light in New Vrindaban in February. The volume of incoming calls usually did not begin to increase until around mid-March, as the tourist season neared. When Sulochan came to the Wheeling/Ohio Valley area in early February of 1986 there was a noticeable uptick in telephone traffic. After my meeting with Kuladri and Gaura Shakti, I began spending more time in the office monitoring the Attendant Console and I noted the increased traffic. To an experienced attendant an abnormal spike in incoming call volume raises a red flag; and that February of 1986 the increase in overall call traffic across the console was noticeable. Bonnie and I both noticed it.

A discernible pattern emerged; calls related to **four specific individuals** were the source of the increase. Those individuals were [Kuladri](#), [Gaura Shakti](#) (Gregory Carlson) and the swamis [Radhanath](#) and [Tapahpunja](#). The call pattern was consistent with the information I had received at our recent meeting, so I paid particular attention to their calls and tried to handle them myself whenever possible.

Gaura Shakti would come into the office regularly and give me progress reports; check on his messages, and give me special instructions as needed. Occasionally Kuladri would come in to check for mail or messages. Sometimes he would tell me that he was expecting a very important call and what extension he would be near. Garga Rishi, the editor of the *Brijabasi Spirit* and *New Vrindaban News*, sometimes would come in the office and talk about Sulochan. There was an unusual buzz of activity in the Front Office for February. One evening just after dark, about the time the switchboard was scheduled to close, Gaura Shakti came into the office. He told me that they had lost track of Sulochan and asked me to keep the switchboard open until they could find him. Our evening operator finished her shift and went home. I stayed in the office and kept the switchboard open. Gaura Shakti headed to town. A couple of calls came in from the hunters but it did not take them long to find Sulochan. Within about an hour Gaura called me and said that I could close the switchboard; I remember being relieved that I did not have to stay late.

Once Tapahpunja called in looking for another conspirator (I can’t remember who he called for). Bonnie handled the call but could not locate whoever Tapahpunja was calling for. Tapahpunja pressed her to find the person because the call was urgent and needed to be responded to immediately. I tried to get around the counter and take the call but Bonnie got a little flustered. She did

something that I would not have done, she broadcast over the radio that we were looking for so-and-so to respond to an urgent telephone call. That worked. The party was located and picked up Tapahpunja's call.

When it was over, I told Bonnie that she should have let me handle the call. She said "Why? They're going to kill him, aren't they?" I almost choked. Bonnie was shaking and her eyes were wide with fear. She knew that we had been following Sulochan and she figured out the rest. I said, not very convincingly, "I don't know Bonnie." We did not talk about the plot again until after the murder happened. Then Bonnie said to me, "[Well, they did it.](#)" I said, "[Yes, they did.](#)" We both knew who "they" were. No further discussion was necessary. Bonnie looked pained and said "[They didn't have to kill him.](#)" She was almost in tears.

Gaura Shakti continued to give me regular updates on the progress of the plot: they found Sulochan, then they lost him, they found him again; Kuladri swore out a warrant to have him arrested. Then on Thursday, February 6th, Sulochan was arrested for assault and carrying a deadly weapon in connection to threats made against New Vrindaban community members. He was arrested with a loaded gun, a partial bottle of vodka and some hashish. Very soon after he was incarcerated, police gave Gaura Shakti access to Sulochan's notes and diary. I was getting steady updates about these events as they happened. Sulochan was eventually convicted of carrying a deadly weapon and spent nearly two months in jail before he was released.

During the months that Sulochan was in jail, the call volume related to the murder plot was less than it had been during the surveillance period but it was steady, revolving around the same core of conspirators. While Sulochan was in jail, sometime in March, incoming call traffic began its normal seasonal increase. Visitors began calling in to book summer stays at the Palace Lodge, and tour bus companies began making reservations to visit Prabhupada's Palace of Gold. Calls among the murder conspirators were much harder to identify; they kept coming in at a steady pace; but by that time, Bonnie was handling almost all of them by herself. As we passed into April, Bonnie was busy with the switchboard nearly eight hours a day and there was no reason for me to be answering calls except to give her breaks.

By April, I was still getting regular progress reports on the plot from Gaura Shakti, but I was no longer actively involved. On April 11th Sulochan was released from jail, and I was told that he went back to his family in Michigan; but was still being followed. Later, I was told that he went to California and that they had lost track of him, but were trying to find him. By May, our PBX was humming with incoming calls related to the upcoming tourist season. It got to the point where I could no longer monitor calls from specific individuals and could not justify spending as much time in the office. In May, incoming call volume was probably ten times what it was in February; calls related to the murder plot were lost in the inundation of normal business calls. My involvement in the plot was about over. I remember feeling slightly guilty that I decided on my own to go back to my normal work routine. I was still willing to provide any help I could, but never got further instructions from Gaura Shakti nor Kuladri regarding telephone calls.

When Sulochan was being stalked in the Wheeling, West Virginia area, there was [like a blood lust to find him and kill him](#). Eventually the fever to eliminate Sulochan seemed to subside. Gaura Shakti told me that they were still trying to find him in California and continued to give me updates on the hunt. I do not remember the exact dates anymore but the last update I got from Gaura Shakti was that, "They are considering letting him live. He has a new girlfriend and does not seem to be very much interested in harming Bhaktipada anymore." That was a great relief to me. If the assassination plot was called off, I would be off the hook for my involvement. I unburdened my mind about the entire affair and continued on with life as normal.

Then came May 22, 1986. I went to *mangal-aroti* that morning and as I entered the temple room, before the altar doors opened, I noticed an unusual buzz of conversation. I asked someone what was

going on and **they happily told me that during the night Sulochan had been shot and killed while sitting in his van on a street near the temple in Los Angeles.** I was shocked that they had actually killed him; at that time I didn't think it was going to happen. I had that bad, bad feeling in the pit of my stomach again. I had made a very bad mistake. I don't remember the rest of that day anymore. I wanted to run away and hide.

The last thing I remember about my involvement in the murder plot was Kuladri coming into the Front Office sometime soon after the murder and encouraging me to "get rid of" telephone call records from recent months; specifically the outbound call records recorded by the STS-16. I hid them in a crawl space above the PBX. I was finished. Soon afterwards Bhaktipada sent me out on the "pick" with Ramachandra dasa, I gladly complied. The irony is that one reason I had agreed to help with the plot was that I was very attached to my service and did not want to leave New Vrindaban. If I had declined to help back in February 1986, I would have had to abandon my service and leave the community. Now I was being sent away precisely because I *had agreed* to help.

In conclusion, I want to say that this story is about my godbrother Sulochan dasa. Sulochan was martyred for trying to expose [bogus gurus in ISKCON](#). I am not the victim here nor should I be praised at all for coming out of hiding and revealing my involvement in the murder plot. I am an offender by dint of my participation in Sulochan's demise. I accept complete responsibility for my actions. I do not blame anybody else for my mistake. I was not tricked or coerced into participating in the murder plot. I followed with my eyes open. I went along for completely self-centered reasons. I did not want to leave my wife and my service, my career. That's it.

I originally went to New Vrindaban to help Bhaktipada build the community as a service to my spiritual master, Srila Prabhupada. I was not fanatically following Bhaktipada; I was not brain-washed. Not once did I ever believe that he was a pure devotee. I never bought into the madness of worshipping him as a "jagat guru." I was always skeptical. Nor did I ever believe that Sulochan's killing was somehow "authorized." In fact, **I could not understand the passion to kill him.** There was nothing spiritual about the Sulochan murder. We were not "Killing for Krishna" like Arjuna at *Kuruksetra*. **The Sulochan murder was carried out by a group of thugs who brutalized their own godbrother to protect their fake guru.** And that is all it was. I still question why I agreed to help with the plot and I still wonder how seemingly spiritually advanced devotees could decide to commit such an immoral act. I should have heeded just one of the multitude of warning signs, but I did not. I chose to ignore them for my own personal gain.

I am not inclined to get involved in politics. I have no axe to grind; no vendettas against anyone. I'm simply hoping to gain some measure of forgiveness in this lifetime. That requires the truth to be told. I cannot personally apologize to Sulochan prabhu now therefore I apologize to his son and his mother, his friends, and the woman he planned to marry. I apologize to my spiritual master His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, to my godbrothers and to all the Vaishnava devotees of the Lord. I apologize to the eternally presiding deities of New Vrindaban, Sri-Sri Gaura-Nitai; and to their Lordships Sri-Sri Radha-Vrindaban Chandra. Please forgive me for my involvement in this despicable crime against my godbrother, His Grace Sulochan dasa.

I am grateful to Hrishikesh prabhu for helping to open my eyes to reality with the torchlight of knowledge, and which subsequently released me from my self-imposed prison of denial, ignorance and forgetfulness. I can finally confront the demon in my heart, which has been buried for over thirty years, and exorcise it with an honest confession. I heartily recommend his book, "[Killing For Krishna](#)," for all those who want to understand ISKCON history and the danger of deranged devotion. For more information about his book, see <http://henrydokerski.com/Killing4Krishna.html>.

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