

The Jesus Guy

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The Director's Take on Shooting a Documentary

I first learned about him in an article in TIME, dated February 2000. The article was titled, "Appalachian Apostle." People who had heard of him or met him called him everything from Jesus, to the Jesus guy, to the anti-Christ. He called himself, "What's Your Name?" He said it referred to the mystery and the meaning of our names, how they often are too important, and to our relationship with God. He talked of the story in the Old Testament where Moses stood in front of the Burning Bush and asked God, "What's Your Name?" TIME said his name had been Carl Joseph.

Many months went by as I tried to salvage what was left of my once thriving commercial production business. Ever since I worked with Albert Maysles at Maysles Films' penthouse offices at 54th and Broadway in NYC, I always wanted to make a documentary film, or so I thought. I also always used the excuse that I didn't have the time, I was making too much money and had too much career momentum in commercials, and that I hadn't found the right subject. None of these excuses worked any more.

It seemed the further I buried the little one-page article about the "Appalachian Apostle," the more it reappeared at the top of my pile of "things to do." Finally, I set an intern to finding the man. He started by trying to contact the writer of the TIME article. That proved to be a task unto itself. The magazine, it seems, didn't know where to find its own correspondent, or they weren't fond of giving out info about their writers.

Three months later, I had an email address for the writer, Fred Mogul. A month after that, we spoke on the phone. He gave me the names of a couple of people who knew "What's Your Name?" better, Father Angelo and a guy named Sam Lesante. The writer didn't say much when asked point blank whether he thought What's Your Name? was a charlatan. He did say he felt badly about besmirching him with what he called "journalistic distancing" when he said toward the conclusion of his article that "an air of disingenuousness hung about him." He apologized to me for this comment (why me?) and said he really didn't feel that way, but that it's what his editors would like to read to prove that he (the writer) was objective and not a religious fanatic himself.

More available upon request...