

*FROM
ANGER*



TO
PEACE

A Journey of Transformation in the Life of a Young Man

by Michael Grady

Dedication

To my son Joshua. May he learn from my mistakes and my victories how to overcome the anger of this world and always live in forgiveness, peace, freedom and love.

Acknowledgments

I never could have written this book without help from others, its not a big book but its way out of my ability to get this done. I can't type never mind edit.

I need to thank Meg Payeur for doing so much of the work in editing and feedback. Martha Roberts my old friend for doing the final editing. My son Joshua helped me in the beginning on how best to tell a story verses to teach at people. (he has been helping me with that for years) Its nice to have a son who is smarter than you. My mother who pressed me to finish the book. My sister Kelly who encouraged in the process. My old friend Chris Durgin who also encouraged me when this was taking way longer than I thought. My wife Kyung for being so patient with me.

Forward

From Anger to Peace is deeply personal to me, yet I believe that there are many people who, like me, grew up in angry households, or who have dealt with very hard blows in life that may have left them angry, bitter, and desperate for something different. To make the transition from anger to peace can be a difficult journey. It certainly was for me. My hope and prayer is that what I share within these pages may help others on this challenging path.

Forgiveness is the muscle essential to healing. It is the muscle that needs to be stretched, built up, nourished, developed and strengthened if we are to be successful in overcoming anger and achieving peace in our lives.

I wrote this book because I know if I can learn to forgive, anyone can. As a child I followed my father's lead: I so often saw him blow up in anger, so that's what I learned to do. I never had the blessing of seeing my father at peace with his life, but thankfully I have been able to break the anger habit in my own life.

Looking back on it, if I were graded in school on my ability to forgive and to handle my anger, my grade would have been an "F," for total failure. It begs the question: if "F" is total failure, what is an "A"? In my mind, an "A" would reflect the ability to overcome. It would reflect the ability to face difficult situations: to be wronged, hurt, abused, victimized and dealt every injustice, but yet able to rise above it all, empowered by forgiveness. With an "A" for a grade, it would mean that I had mastered the ability to learn from the tragedies of life and how to walk through them without having them take me down into a cesspool of bitterness, self-pity, apathy, rage and anger. An "A" would mean that I had achieved the ability to walk in true freedom. This is my goal and prayer for you.

Since we sometimes learn better from stories than a 'self-help' approach book, I have written my story...the story of me growing up in anger, the introduction of forgiveness in my life, and the multi-stepped process it took to change.

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Chapter 1: The Making of An Angry Boy!

I was born at Westover Air Force Base in Chicopee, Massachusetts in 1958. I like to say I was born flying! We weren't there for long; my father was soon transferred to an Air Force base in Omaha, Nebraska where we lived until I was four.

I was born into an alcoholic Irish Catholic family and for the first three or four years my life was normal. My parents married young; my mother was just 16 years old and my father only 18. Within ten years, they had seven children.

I am the second oldest of my siblings, and I have fond memories of my early childhood. Together with my older brother, I enjoyed playing in our big back yard. We spent hours making tunnels and forts. We lived on a quiet street that backed up to a drive-in movie theater, and I remember riding my tricycle to the end of the street to watch the back side of the big movie screen. It seemed enormous. We had great places to play in the area and enjoyed playing army with our plastic guns and dirt hand grenades with the neighborhood kids.

This fun didn't last long though. My father had to go to a hospital in Texas and my mother had to go with him. I didn't understand why. As a 4-year old, this wasn't something I could really comprehend. It was years later when I was in my 30's that I learned that my father was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Because we were so young, our parents decided they couldn't take us to Texas, so they made the decision to leave us with another family while my father got treatment. A mother and her two sons moved in to take care of us. The fun was over at our house once this woman and her kids arrived! I remember of this time was that she was very mean to us. Her boys were older than us. They picked on us and thought nothing of taking our toys and even breaking them at times. They made life miserable for us.

One instance stands out in my memory. For some reason, the woman wouldn't let me ride my favorite toy, a tricycle, down the street. Instead, she let her son, who was much bigger and had no business riding a little kid's trike, take it out in the street. I had to stand by and watch. He was too big for it and broke the pedal,

so after that I couldn't use it. That's the way it was. I wanted my parents to come home. I wanted things to go back to normal.

When my parents did finally get back from Texas they brought me a present; a real, cowhide cowboy hat. It was a nice one too, and I was very excited. But because I was so upset that they had left us with such mean people, I took the beautiful hat and threw it on the floor, stamping it with my foot to let out my anger. Even at such an early age the rage was manifesting in my life.

Soon after that, we moved back to Connecticut where my mother and father were from. My father was out of the Air Force. We didn't have a nice house anymore and this was just the beginning of many turbulent years. Life as we knew it had changed. My father was in and out of the hospital, and I have memories of visiting him and bringing him projects I had been doing in school. I also remember that everything seemed very white. The hospital was painted all white and everyone in it was wearing white clothes. It was a strange place to me. I learned later that it was a veteran's hospital and my dad was in the psychiatric wing. None of my siblings or I knew what was wrong with him.

When my father did come home from the hospital, things didn't go back to normal. We moved many times during this period, and there was a lot more fighting in the house. My parents weren't getting along, and my father was moving from one job to another. He was drinking a lot and became very angry the more he drank; his rage was showing. It wasn't uncommon that the police came to our house. Sometimes it was to take him away, other times it was to bring him home. We were poor and scared.

One beat up house we lived in had a dirt floor in the basement and holes in the walls between rooms. When it rained we would have to get all the pots from the kitchen and place them around the house in the different rooms to catch the leaks from the holes in the roof. I still can remember hearing the ping! ping! all over the house when the drops hit the pots. Things weren't going well for us. One Thanksgiving we didn't even have enough money for a turkey dinner. The town of Manchester supplied our Thanksgiving meal.

The first time I ran away from home I was in the first grade - about six years old. The house we were living in backed up to acres of tobacco fields. I ran and hid in an old barn at the back of the tobacco farm. My escape didn't last long; I was soon found and brought back home. That was the first of many times I would run from the fighting.

Somehow, with help from a family friend, my mother was able to buy a house. It was the most beat up house on the street, and I think we were the poorest family on the street, but it was our home: Tanner Street in Manchester, Connecticut. I lived there until I left home for good when I was 15.

It was also in the first grade that I started getting in fights. The anger and stress at home, the constant moving around, and the fact that I was so small and therefore an easy target, all likely contributed to that first fight. I was feeling angry and stressed myself.

The incidences of my father's rage continued to get worse. I remember he would light up with a rage against me; I could see it in his eyes, and he would hit me for being too loud or for something else. It's hard to put my father's anger into words. His mood could change in an instant. At one moment he was joking and being funny and somewhat calm, and the next you could see the fire building up inside him. You could see it in his eyes, and then BAM, you were going to get hit.

I think I was in the first grade when my older brother and I called the police on my father and then hid upstairs. He was very, very angry with my mother and she locked him out of the house. He smashed the front door in and started beating her. We knew we had to do something, so we called the police. They came and took him away. Right after he was taken away, my grandfather showed up. He was drunk himself, crying about my mother getting beat up. Obviously, he wasn't a lot of help. What a picture we painted. We were a full-fledged angry, Irish-Catholic, alcoholic, violent household. Unfortunately, it was soon going to get even worse.

I learned very young that there wasn't a safe place for me in my world. I was scared at times. I wanted to hide many times. I ran away many times. None of that ever made me feel safe and secure. I remember one time feeling especially vulnerable. I was very small, maybe a little more than knee-high. I went to my

mother who was standing at the stove and I pulled on her dress wanting her attention. I was hurting, feeling vulnerable, and needing someone to hold me. My mother spun towards me and reacted in anger and hit me across the face with a washcloth. That was a defining moment for me. I don't think I ever allowed myself to be vulnerable again for a long time after that. I had learned that there wasn't room for that in our house.

Looking back, it's hard to imagine what my mother's life was like. As a child, no one talked about her struggles:

- In the span of 10 years, she gave birth to seven children starting when she was just 16 years old.
- She lost one daughter.
- She had to raise 6 children essentially on her own.
- Her marriage to a violent husband was splitting up.
- She lived in fear of her husband killing his family.
- She never knew when her husband was going to have a breakdown or blowup in rage.
- She was poor and on her own with very little support.
- My paternal grandmother hated her and blamed her for my father's problems and early death.
- The Catholic Church kicked her out for divorcing my Father even though he had history of abuse and everyone knew it. The church did nothing to help and was truly cruel to her in their lack of support.

I had no idea of the stress my mother was dealing with. It was only years later that I came to realize everything she had on her plate and what a struggle it must have been for her. It's no wonder she didn't have time for hugs. But for me, as sensitive as I was, this point in time was when all my hurts and pains bottled up inside me and began to manifest as anger.

Looking back now I think of how the father in the house sets the tone and the atmosphere for his family. The atmosphere in our family was not peaceful. It was

tense and stressful due to the constant fighting that went on. I remember having a big closet off my bedroom. It was a deep closet; one that I could hang long clothes in the front of and set up a hiding place for me at the back to get away from the fighting. At least I thought I was getting away from the fighting.

With six kids in our family, there was plenty of sibling quibbling, and the fighting spilled into the neighborhood with all the other kids. Fighting was the norm for us.

At first, I did everything I could to avoid fights, but one day that changed. I remember bringing my favorite game to school for “Show and Tell.” It was a good day for me; one of those fun times at school. I felt happy leaving school. When I got to the exit though, two bullies in my class were waiting, and my happiness quickly disappeared. They began picking on me. This wasn’t unusual since I was one of the smallest in the class. I tried avoiding them by walking around them, but this time they weren’t letting me go. One of them smashed the game to the ground by punching it out of my hands. The game pieces went everywhere, and I just lost it! For the first time at school, I let my anger go. I beat the snot out of the kid and his friend couldn’t stop me! The teacher had to come and pull me off, and she wasn’t interested in any explanations. She drew her own conclusions and blamed me for starting the fight. This was the first of many fights to come.

I didn’t like to fight, and I didn’t want to fight, but for the next eight or nine years, I did a lot of it. A realization came to me. Since I was the smallest boy in the class, and the one to get picked on first, I decided to go on the offensive. If the big bullies wanted me, I wasn’t going to wait for them; I would hit them first. This probably wasn’t the smartest thing for me to do, but it was better than waiting for the bullies to take a shot at me. I still have cracked bones and aches from some of those fights, and my decision certainly brought the attention of the teachers on me.

My anger at the world and at my life expressed itself in other ways too. In the second grade a few buddies and I started a riot on the playground shouting at a certain teacher, saying that the teacher “rots.” We had about fifty kids marching around the school playground singing this chant all because she gave our baseball diamond to another grade. We didn’t think she handled the situation well and

wanted her to know it. Of course, since I was one of the few leaders of this riot, I was singled out and named the chief troublemaker. In this case, they weren't wrong, and I was kicked off the playground for a year as punishment. After that, I started a big food fight in the cafeteria and was kicked out of the cafeteria for a year.

I was just trouble wherever I went. The anger my father taught me at home, the hurt I felt from him, all the stuff at home was manifesting loud and clear at school and in the neighborhood.

It was during these years that I started to get in touch with my anger. My immediate response to being wronged was to seek revenge. This reaction became a part of my fiber at an early age. My younger brother was always getting beat up, so I felt it was my responsibility to go after whoever it was that hurt him. One day I saw a neighborhood kid throw a wooden rod at my brother Shawn, and it hit him on the head. I didn't hesitate. I chased him to his house and pinned him in the corner of his garage, punching out his tooth. It didn't matter that he was much bigger than me.

Another time, my brother was beat up by another kid in the neighborhood. This kid wasn't any bigger than me, but he was fast! I think I chased him for months. I chased him at school one time. Then my teacher chased me, and the principal chased her right down the halls and out the back entrance, down through the playground, off school grounds. We lost the principal and teacher, and I chased him through the neighborhoods, through yards, jumping over fences. He got away that time, but I did catch him soon after that and put a beating on him he wouldn't forget. Shortly after that though, his older sister who was "grown up," caught me and put a beating on me. That's the way it was.

By the time I got to the sixth grade I was a full-fledged troublemaker at school. My mother, my teachers and even the principal didn't know what to do with me. One teacher, my sixth-grade teacher Miss Tetti, seemed to like me. God only knows why; I caused plenty of trouble in her class. The list of my antics is too long to tell, but I will apologize now and ask forgiveness for the time I put thumb tacks on her chair. Understandably she nearly hit the ceiling! Despite my antics, she was nice to me and believed in me when no one else did. I certainly didn't deserve it. She was the one that negotiated an agreement, agreed to by me, my mother and the

principal, that really saved me. The deal was that if I was well behaved in school from Monday through Thursday, then I could have Fridays off, and I would not have to go to school. I was all for that. She recognized that an out-of-the-box solution was needed. Something had to be done because it was clear that I was angry and took my anger out on everyone at school. I doubt anyone has ever been offered that deal before or since, but it worked! And that's the only way I made it through the sixth grade at Bowers School in Manchester, Connecticut.

Chapter 2: Explosion of an Angry Teenager

My father came from a strict, Irish Catholic family. He grew up in Manchester, CT, my hometown, in a nice, quiet neighborhood; much nicer than anywhere that I lived. My Dad's mother was not a warm person; she was very cold and rigid. I don't remember anything loving about her. Years later my mother told me that as a baby, I would scream if she tried to hold me. I sensed her coldness even then.

On her deathbed my grandmother seemed to express some remorse for the way she treated our family. My sister's best friend, Cari, worked in the convalescent home where my grandmother spent her final days, and she confessed to Cari that she realized that she had been very mean to us Grady kids and had serious regrets about it. She never made amends with us though, and as far as we knew she held my mother and all of us kids responsible for her son's early death by suicide until the day she died. It was at her house that my father chose to end his life by putting a bullet through his head. In the Catholic faith suicide is a serious sin with a lot of guilt and shame associated with it. My guess is that my grandmother never learned how to deal with the guilt and shame, so she took it out on us.

No one knows the exact reason why my father committed suicide, but I've wondered if he really thought he was making the best choice available to him at the time. His drinking was out of control, he'd just gone through a divorce, he continued to suffer from schizophrenia, and his anger and rage grew more volatile every day. Someone even thought that he did it because he was afraid that he couldn't stop himself from killing my mother and us kids. What we do know is that he never got the help that he needed to make the changes that would have helped him cope with his life.

Junior High School was a tough time for me. The fights continued, and even before my father's suicide, I started doing serious drugs. This only intensified after my father's death. This was in the 1970's, and back then suicide was not something people talked about. There were no grief counselors available to me at school; I just went back to classes on Monday as if nothing had happened. I remember walking

down the halls and seeing kids looking the other way. They would get quiet and murmur to their friends as I walked by. I just sucked it up; I was tough and wasn't going to show any weakness. One friend, Luke, called to check on me, but like everyone else, he didn't know what to say. The guilt and shame of suicide resulted in silence. I know I felt guilty for months. I was 13 at the time of my father's death, and I was one of the last people to talk to him. The conversation hadn't gone well and that stuck with me.

At my father's funeral I remember coming close to crying, but I choked it off and wouldn't allow the tears to flow. In my family we did not cry, especially the men. It would be years later before I would learn the value of grieving, but for the time being, I would not cry, but instead would internalize the grief. This only served to cause me to turn into the angry, raging father I had just lost. Now he was gone, but his legacy of anger lived on inside of me. I can still vividly remember the look on his face and in his eyes when rage would take over him just before he would turn to hit me.

Junior High School became a time of more fights and getting mixed up with the wrong crowd and doing lots of drugs. Many of the kids I was hanging with ended up dying way too young from the drugs, drunkenness and craziness.

One friend who like me, was usually stoned at school, took a motorcycle ride through town going 100 mph. He and his passenger wiped out, and there was nothing but pieces of them left on the street. Another friend, a girl from my detention class, was swimming at a quarry in Glastonbury where we use to go cliff diving. She was on a combination of downers and alcohol, and when she took a jump off the highest cliff, she hit the water but never came up. The accident was deemed to be a drowning.

I certainly wasn't making good choices in my life. The people I was hanging out with were really bad news. One guy, Jumping Joe, was worse than me; he was constantly getting in fights, beating people up and doing serious drugs. I first connected with him because of the drugs. He ended up killing a number of different people, usually in car accidents. He would steal a car, load it up with a bunch of kids, and end up crashing into something or sometimes into innocent people. I don't

know how many kids he killed, but he caused more than one accident that resulted in the deaths of some of his passengers. The last crash was a deadly one that took his life as well.

My mother knew I was getting into the wrong crowds, and she didn't back down from some of the characters that came around the house. I can remember one drug friend coming to the house. My mother saw him coming and went out and met him on the sidewalk. She let him know very clearly that he was not welcome anywhere near our house and that she didn't want her son hanging out with any druggies. Though I feared no man, God, or the law at this time in my life; my Mother was the one person who scared the hell out of me. She was barely 5'0", but she meant business, and all my craziness couldn't stand up to her for long. That drug friend never came around our neighborhood again.

It wasn't just my friends that were succumbing to the effects of alcohol and drugs. I had a very close call myself. I was fairly new to taking chemical drugs and didn't know how strong LSD could be. I took one and a half pills of "acid" called Orange Sunshine. One hit was one quarter of a pill which was the usual dosage taken. Four people could get a nice trip from one pill. Well crazy me, I took a pill and a half, which was six quarters! Keep in mind that I was just 13 years old and weighed maybe 115 pounds. This was a recipe for disaster.

I was at the local YMCA when I started tripping and my "friends" thought it was going to be fun watching me hallucinate and decided to goof with me. After a while, one of them played a bad joke on me and told me my mother and family were looking for me. This freaked me out, so I ran home as fast as I could. As I was running full speed to get home, I looked down at my legs and instead of seeing just two of them, I saw about 100 of them running like crazy. I knew then I was in trouble. I got home only to find my brother was having a huge keg party complete with friends passed out on the front lawn. I headed into the house and went straight to the basement where some of my brother's friends were drinking tequila and smoking pot.

There was a mattress there, and I lay down just to relax after my mad dash home. The minute my body hit the mattress, I felt myself start to float. I floated up,

out of my body, up to the first floor of the house, then up to the second floor, up through the attic and finally through the roof. From there, I was floating in the sky. I remember looking down on the house. My body continued to float up further and, I could see the entire neighborhood; I kept going higher and higher into the night sky. It felt so real. I felt myself go through the ozone layer to the outer atmosphere high above the earth. Who knew where I would stop.

Then I heard this quiet whisper. It said, "Come down," but I could hardly hear it. It got a little louder, "Come down," and then a little louder, "Come down!" The voice kept getting louder and more vehement until finally I opened my eyes and looked up. My brother and two of his friends, who were all older and had more experience tripping on acid, were yelling in my face and shaking me, telling me to "Come down!! Come down!!" They could tell by looking in my eyes that I was in bad shape.

Their yelling that I first heard as a whisper brought me back to reality, back to earth, and back down into the basement. I don't know what would have happened if they weren't there, if they hadn't grabbed me from the hallucinogenic trip I was on. There's no doubt that they probably saved my life that night or at the very least, saved my mind from frying and causing me to be a vegetable. I did not relax a muscle for the rest of that night until morning. I thought that if I relaxed, I might fly away and never come back. I was on my own. I hallucinated like crazy during the night seeing many things that weren't there, but when morning came, I was very thankful to see something very real: the bright sun rising.

By the time I started High School in 10th grade, I had quite the chip on my shoulder. I smoked pot all the time and hated school. I was anti-everything, and especially against authority of any kind whether it be at school or the police or my Mother. I was even against the idea of a higher power. My perception of God was that He was no better than the devil that was out to get me. I had this picture of the devil on one side of me with a big pitchfork just looking for any opportunity to poke me. Then God was on the other side looking equally as menacing. He was very big with a commanding grey beard and he held a big hammer. Just like the devil, he was just waiting for any reason to pound me into the ground.

I didn't want anything to do with either of them. I wasn't afraid of them or anyone else. I had a fatalistic attitude. My father had given up on life, but I wasn't going to go so easily. If someone wanted to kill me well that would be just fine, but don't expect me to be afraid of anyone or back down or give up. My mother was still the exception, the only one that I feared.

This fearless, reckless, angry attitude was about to get me into some serious trouble. By now, I was in high school and my best friend, Paul, was a lot like me. We both had the same chip on our shoulder, and we shared the same outlook on the world. One night, we were both drinking and in a rowdy mood; not a good combination. We decided to break into the schoolyard and steal some school buses. We didn't just want to steal cars; we had to go big and steal school buses! The memory is still vivid in my mind.

We tried to drive the big buses but had a hard time, so we took two of the smaller ones. Getting out of the lot with the buses was tougher than getting into the locked yard with just ourselves, but that didn't stop us. We each commandeered our own bus. I pulled up to the metal gate which was locked with an angle iron going across it. Without hesitation, I put pedal to the metal on the gas and drove full speed into the gate. The bus slammed to a stop and then climbed up the gate with the front wheels off the ground until there was a huge crash and the bus broke through the big gate.

There was a loud crash and once we got over our surprise at successfully crashing the gate, we got out of there fast. We had planned to take one bus and bring it to a place out in the country. Paul and I had claimed a piece of land in the forest that was town property as our own, and that's where we were headed. With our warped thinking due to the drugs, we thought this was a sound plan. We were both drunk and high and having fun joyriding, so we took off playing bumper cars as we figured out how to drive the buses. I was 15 years old, Paul 17.

We traveled quite a distance and found ourselves in a city. Realizing this wasn't a good idea, we knew we better turn around fast and get out of the congested area. In the process, I almost caused an accident at an intersection. We tried to go back the way we came but took a wrong turn at a fork in the road. We pulled both

the buses off the road and Paul got out of his and came up to me in my bus. We were discussing the missed turn and what to do about it, when a cop came driving up to us. Paul yelled "Cop" and took off running. I slid to the passenger door, quickly got out and was on his heels in an instant. The cop jumped out of his car and by the time we were scaling the top of the hill heading into the woods, he was yelling at us and started shooting his gun in our direction, but not too close.

We flew to the top of the hill and came down fast on the other side into a sand pit there and the woods just beyond it. We felt relatively safe knowing that we were in our element. No one was going to catch us in the woods! We were both fast runners and the woods were our sanctuary. We backtracked to the fork in the road and climbed a hill to a high point overlooking where the buses were silently parked. The sight was something to behold; it was quite the scene. Police cars were everywhere, lights were flashing and cops were all over the place. We knew we had a challenge in front of us.

It was late November in Connecticut, and we were about forty miles from home. The police were out in droves looking for us, and one in particular seemed to really have it out for us. He was MAD! Looking back on it, I'd say he had an anger issue of his own. We followed the road for hours in the dark, staying in the woods. I finally got anxious and talked Paul into heading towards the road and trying to hitchhike home. We had too far to go to keep up with our current plan. I think it was the second or third car that stopped. We were stoked. The car came skidding to a stop in front of us. Our hopes shattered though; as we quickly realized it was the angry cop!

He was really pissed now. Before his car even stopped, he was sliding across the passenger side of the car to jump out. At the same time he was reaching for his gun. Paul and I were running at full speed towards a building that was between the woods and us. I headed for the right side of the building; Paul chose the left. There were piles of sheet metal and all kinds of junk scattered around the place. I was hurdling over all of it when the angry cop started shooting in my direction. This time it was different. The bullets were whizzing over my head much closer than last time.

I reached the woods again and kept running like crazy, confident that they wouldn't catch me.

There was a problem though. The wooded area was pretty small, and it wasn't long before there were plenty of sirens, lights, and cops all around. I could hear them in the distance chasing Paul down. I found out later that they chased him towards a lake and were able to corner him in a parking lot. They slammed him to the ground, beating his head to the turf and cuffed him. They then proceeded to punch him until they had beaten my name out of him.

While this was going on I found a big fallen tree and crawled under it and covered myself with leaves. I lay there watching the flashing lights in the distance and listening to the yelling and sirens of the police. I laid low for the rest of the night. Early the next morning when things had settled down, I went back to the road until it reached the highway.

With some hesitation, I took a chance and stuck out my thumb to hitch a ride back to Manchester. This time it went better than the previous attempt, and I got a ride directly to Manchester and arrived without any further incident. I made it back home to find my mother and stepfather waiting for me. I should say that by this time I was 15 years old and my mother had remarried. They were sitting at the kitchen table with the proverbial steam coming out of their ears, just waiting for me to walk in the door. They were upset and told me that the police knew who I was and were expecting me to go to the police station and turn myself in. I thought I had gotten away with our little caper, but no. Now it was my turn to take a beating from my 6'3" stepfather. He had no patience for my feeble attempt to explain our reasoning for the escapade and attempt to outrun the police. He came at me and chased me to the stairs where he started punching my head into the stairs. I got away from him and ran out of the house; I needed to blow off some steam. If I had had any place to go or any money to go with I would have left Connecticut then and there. I was a 15-year old kid though who had no place to go. When I had settled down, I returned home to face the music.

Stealing school buses was no small matter. It was all over the local newspaper, and although only Paul's name was mentioned, everyone knew that I

was the kid that got away. Manchester was a good size town with a population of about 50,000, but too many people knew me and that the police were looking for me.

Looking back at this time, getting caught was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was still alive and would get a chance to change my life. I think many people, including myself, had very low expectations of me: that I would even grow up at all; that it wasn't expected that I'd make it beyond puberty as was the case with so many of my friends. Up until now I was the product of my environment. I was following in the footsteps of my father, living out my anger; only now in addition to the drinking I had drugs and crazy thinking steering me. It's funny; I vowed not to be like my father, but I was so much like him and on a path to be much worse.

At this point I felt my world had fallen apart. I was in trouble with the law and didn't know what was going to happen to me. My family was angry with me, and I felt alone with the world against me. I hated school and quit as soon as I was 16 years old.

Fortunately, I was only 15 years old at the time of my crime, so when the court case came up I got strict probation with the notice that if I got into any trouble for even the smallest thing, I would go to jail or juvenile detention. That wasn't something I wanted. I knew though, that I had to get out of the house since my stepfather had now moved in. There wasn't room for both of us. With everything going on with him, the court situation and my probation, it was a highly stressful time for me.

The only place I found to be at peace was in the woods. At the outskirts of town there were hiking trails going into the hills and that was my sanctuary. It was the place that Paul and I had claimed for our own; a small isolated part of it anyway. We were even building a log cabin with the only tool we had; an old axe. During this probation period I split my time between home and my camp in the woods. I'd bounce back and forth between the two, trying to stay in school and out of trouble. This was no easy task. Inside I felt like I had a storm surging. I knew that if I drank or did drugs I would likely act out and that would only get me in more serious

trouble. I had no avenue to express my feelings beyond the drinking and drugs that were no longer an option for me. I had a category five storm brewing inside of me with nowhere to go. I was desperate, anxious, and angry at the world and totally disconnected: no hope, no future. I felt trapped in a world that seemed to be caving in.

During this time, I did something I never had done before. I was overwhelmed, anxious and feeling like the world was caving in on me, so for the first time in my life, I prayed. It was a simple prayer, "God, if you are real, get me the hell out of here!" I really felt that if I stayed in my hometown for another day that I was not going to live much longer. In my mind, I was in such a destructive place with what I was feeling, thinking and doing that I needed OUT. Even my sister Kelly who was mad at me for leaving home at such a young age told me much later that she realized even then that if I didn't get out of Manchester at that time I would have died. I was doing too much in the way of drugs, drinking, and fighting. I was too explosive and hanging around with the wrong people.

The next day my mother and stepfather approached me with the offer to move up to Maine and live on a farm with a relative. Without hesitation I said, "Yes! I am ready to go!" What a huge moment this was for me: it was the first answer to prayer that I had ever received! For the first time in my life I felt like I was getting a break. Someone was listening and looking out for me. It's ironic the beginning of the change for me was a desperate prayer to God; a God that I didn't believe in, who I didn't think cared for me at all. and whom, from what I knew of him, I didn't like.

Chapter 3: A Time for Change

It was February 1974 when I moved to Western Maine to the small town of North Waterford. Atop a hill overlooking a beautiful valley with views of Mt. Washington and the White Mountains of New Hampshire sat an idyllic farm; my new home. It was a peaceful, picturesque landscape like none I had ever seen before. On a clear day, from my bedroom window I could see the train chugging up Mt. Washington.

I remember vividly how cold it was and the four to six feet of snow on the ground. It was a far cry from Manchester, CT. My mother had dropped me off with virtual strangers, a middle-aged couple distantly related to my stepfather. She saw no other options for me and believed this was the best she could do for me. As things turned out, she was right.

Richard and Frances Jones, my new caretakers, were farmers. At that first meeting, Richard took one look at me and the first thing out of his mouth was, “I thought you were going to bring me a boy, not a girl?” There I was, a 16-year old, long-haired, hippy-looking kid, obviously messed up on drugs and (maybe not so obviously) messed up emotionally as well.

Richard Jones was related to my stepfather through his own stepfather. The Jones family had settled in Maine over 150 years prior and in that time cleared the land and built the 350-acre farm. He had been a farmer his entire life just like his father and grandfather before him. In addition to running the farm, Richard also owned and operated a shingle sawmill and also worked at the sawmill in town. He was a busy man.

We would eventually develop a great relationship. It took a little time, but eventually I became an accepted member of the whole community. This was a big deal because at the time, there weren’t many ‘long hairs’ up that way. Everyone wanted me to go back to school, and I did give it a try; I went one day to the local high school. I was 16 and had an appointment to talk to a teacher about enrolling. But when I got to the school and walked down the hall looking into the classrooms, I just knew that school wouldn’t work for me. I couldn’t see myself heading back to

classes without the struggles and bad behavior returning. I didn't want to revisit the struggles and poor choices I had made. That was the last time I went to school.

The time on the farm was an answer to prayer. I loved living there and learned how to work for the first time in my life. I stopped doing drugs and alcohol and as a result I wasn't getting into any trouble. It hadn't taken me long to transform into a country boy, and I loved it. There was no looking back at what I had left; for the first time in a long time, I was content with where I was.

After a bit of time, mutual trust and respect had been earned and I was accepted as family. I thoroughly enjoyed living and working on the farm. This is kind of funny looking back on it. Most of my education came from Richard Jones, the unlikeliest of teachers. He was a middle-aged farmer with hair about $\frac{1}{4}$ " long; maybe $\frac{1}{2}$ " if he really let it go wild, who never opened a book to teach me anything. There I was with hair way down past my shoulders learning more than I ever had in ten years of previous schooling. We were an odd couple indeed, but it worked out beautifully.

Richard was very disciplined: up every morning before the sun to milk cows and do the chores. I was an undisciplined rebellious teenager who had never assumed any responsibility for anything. That changed. Richard required discipline and accountability from me, and surprisingly I took to the change quickly. I soon really enjoyed working with him and looked forward to our time together. He had a great sense of humor and was fun to work with.

Richard taught me about the importance of being on time. He had gotten me a job at the local sawmill where he worked, but the farm work had to be done each morning before we left for work. This meant I needed to get up early to shovel out the cattle and get them fed, then do the other barn chores such as splitting wood for the wood stove. I would complete my chores and eat breakfast all before 7:00 am. If I was late and it was time to drive to work, Richard would just leave without me. It was then up to me to get into town on my own. In the winter, that meant I had to snowshoe. It didn't take me long to learn to be on time!

Richard was good at everything he did. He was the main man at the sawmill, and he also had his own sawmill and had close to 350 acres of land to manage.

That's a lot of trees! We would log the property at various times of the year to keep the wood lots well managed. He was so confident at cutting huge trees; he knew exactly what cut to make to get them to fall exactly where he wanted them to fall. Richard knew how to work hard, have fun and be productive, and if you worked with him he fully expected you to get into his groove.

My primary responsibility on the farm was the animals. I took care of the cattle, chickens, pigs, pony and whatever other critters made their way to the farm. I learned how to drive a tractor and how to grow food. We had huge gardens full of vegetables that Frances would process and can at the end of the growing season. In the summer it was also time to hay the fields; a job that for many farm workers was the worst possible job. Lucky for me, I liked it. Haying was physically demanding, hot and sweaty, and after a day out in the sun soaked, baking fields, I would head to one of the many lakes in the area and go swimming. What a relief it was after a sweltering day in the sun! I could swim for miles back then. The water was as clear and clean as could be. 'Refreshing' is hardly enough to describe the feeling.

After chores and work were done, I had time to explore and appreciate the beautiful area I lived in. I got into brook fishing for trout and found some great places to go to see wild meadows and cool waterfalls. I also enjoyed hiking, mountain climbing and snowshoeing. I had a routine of going snowshoeing on the weekends. One day I took off for a day of snowshoeing with just a snack for lunch. I headed to a new mountain, one I had not been to before. I was content having fun using my snowshoes as skis, climbing to steep spots on the mountain and skiing down. I also was role-playing how I would react if a bear was chasing me. One method I came up with was to climb a hemlock tree that was close to other hemlock trees, get up high and jump to the other tree and then get down from the tree before the bear caught up with me. Time was passing, and the snow that had been coming down lightly soon turned into a full-scale blizzard. I had been too distracted skiing and practicing survival strategies to see how the weather had changed. I had lost all visibility and my tracks were covered by the new snowfall. Dusk was falling quickly, and I had little time to get out of the forest before it got dark.

Later I found out that there were two towns of local people out on snowmobiles searching for me. Richard and Frances had sent out the alert, and search parties had formed. That's the way the people were in that community; they took care of each other in emergencies. They said later that they had seen my tracks all over that mountain. but they never did find me. After a bit of going in circles, I had managed to find my way out on my own. I was thankful to learn though, that had I not been so lucky, I likely would have been found anyway because of the kindness of our neighbors.

My time spent in the woods of Connecticut helped me out in this situation. I had found a swamp with a bit of running water coursing through it and followed it. It soon grew into a brook that ran close to a rock wall. I followed the rock wall to a huge field. By now it was dark, and the snow was very deep. I think I had about six inches of snow stuck to the top of my head and shoulders. I followed the field out and saw a farmhouse. I knocked on the door, and despite what must have been a scary sight with my long black hair covered with snow; the couple invited me in and called Richard and Frances. Everyone was relieved that I was safe and sound.

My brain started to heal from the drugs and my soul loved being in the country. Working hard, getting strong, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, fishing, swimming, mountain-climbing and hiking suited me. I was happy. Before the farm it seemed my life was heading toward a violent death of some kind. The seeds of anger and bitterness that had been sown in me as a young child had blossomed into a crazy teenager who was headed full speed towards a dead end. That was all changing for the better.

I'm sure the psychologists have a name for the process that I had been going through that had allowed the seeds of bitterness to germinate in me, and it occurs to me that the ISIS terrorists have identified the process as well. They recognize that they just need to appeal to disturbed youth who are hurt and angry and provide them a community of people who support and understand them as they try to figure out what to do with the hurt and anger. Unfortunately, there are people that will take advantage of this vulnerability to suit their own needs.

Thankfully for me, the process started to shift with that one prayer that interrupted everything and brought me to the farm. The farm was a time of healing for my mind, body, soul and spirit. It was a break from the life I had known which brought me such heartache. The farm was the first step; soon I would learn about a new process for healing the anger I was feeling, and it would hinge on my understanding of what it means to forgive.

Chapter 4: The Search Begins

There is a part of me that could have stayed at the farm forever. Richard had become more of a father figure to me than I had ever had. He taught me how to work, how to enjoy work, how to have fun when working, how to take pride in my work and how to do it well.

There were so many memories tied up in my time at the farm. Whistler, Richard and Frances' daughter, taught me how to butcher chickens - from the initial cut to the final cleaning. I never would have experienced that staying in Connecticut. I had arrived at the farm as an outsider, but I was leaving as a member of the family. It was time for me to move on.

I loved the farm and would miss everyone on it. For the first time in my life, I was leaving a place because I wanted to leave, not because I had to leave. I had no troubles on the farm. It was a safe place for me. I wasn't running away from something; I was headed towards something. I knew I could come back, and that made it easier for me to leave.

Looking out over the valley at the end of the day watching the sun go down and enjoying the view of the White Mountains, I could sense the restlessness growing inside me. My time on the farm had allowed me to get grounded and have a foundation that had been so sorely lacking in my life up until that point. I wanted to travel, to see the US and Canada. I was hungry to explore and needed answers to many questions about life: Why were things hard? Why did so many people die (my father, sister, uncle, grandparents, aunt, and friends)? Where did they go? Is there really a God? Who is He? Is He bad or good?

School hadn't worked for me; I hadn't fit in and all I remember of school, be it public school or even church school, was condemnation. It was time for my real education to begin. So, I packed up my backpack, said my good-byes and headed north. Hitchhiking was common at that time, especially along the Trans Canadian Highway. My plan was to start in Quebec and work my way west all the way to British Columbia. This was a time of healing and growth for me. I found that I loved

to travel, meet new people and see amazing places. I enjoyed talking to people; asking them about their lives, their work, their hometowns, and their families. This was my education, and I found people liked to tell me their stories.

At one point, not too far into my travels, I got stuck in the small town of Wawa, Ontario. It had the reputation as a hitchhiker's nightmare because people often just couldn't catch a ride out of town. Some hitchhikers actually had to stay there and get some job like pumping gas just to get by. More than one even ended up settling down there, getting married and never leaving! That was not going to happen to me! I was going to the West Coast and nothing was going to stop me.

It was at a youth hostel that I first met some other travelers talking about riding freight trains across the plains. This intrigued me, and I was in! Three of these guys were not the type of people I would normally trust, but I thought I would follow along with them to see if they knew how to get on the trains.

They knew where the train station was, and we figured out which train to get on. Heading west across Canada would be a long trip without much stopping so we each had to pack food and water for the journey. We made it onto the train with no problems and settled in for a long ride.

Coming across the Canadian plains, I saw the Rocky Mountains for the first time. Wow, what a sight! Coming from New England I had never seen mountains like that. The Appalachians just didn't compare. I loved the mountains, and when I arrived in British Columbia, I headed straight for Banff National Park. It was a beautiful place with so much wildlife and the majesty of the mountains.

While in Banff Park on my way to Lake Louise, I met up with three girls. We had lunch at the castle that looked out over the lake and the mountains at the end of the lake that were covered by a glacier. After lunch we decided to climb the trail to the base of the mountain to get a better view of the glacier. Of course, when we got close to the glacier, I wanted to go further and climb out onto it. Two of the girls were too scared to venture further, but the other one was up for the adventure.

We made it to the top of the glacier and it was wild - there were steep mountains rising up all around us with the occasional rumble of small snow avalanches. The glacier itself had crevices in it that seemed to have no bottoms. At

first, I was nervous to cross a little six-inch wide crack; being wary of what it would be like to drop into it. Of course, after a bit of time, we were jumping over wide chasms exploring the glacier. We found our way to the river that came out of the glacier and discovered a cave. Walking inside the river cave provided views I had never seen before - smooth ice walls rounded with shapes cut by the water. It was a memorable and fun day. I loved the wilderness of British Columbia. A part of me just wanted to go off into the mountains and live off the land. If it weren't for three things I probably would have: chocolate, girls, and this spiritual hunger thing inside me that I could not understand. It kept driving me.

From Banff Park, I traveled down to Southern B.C. near the border of the USA. I was running out of money, so I stopped and worked in a peach orchard. Who knew how itchy peaches were, especially when it's hot outside! I learned quickly how to pick the peaches. While there, I met an older, professorial kind of guy who was also picking. He seemed to be well-educated and was very knowledgeable when it came to the subject of evolution, the apes, and the Big Bang theory. Every day for many days, he would teach me the various aspects of evolution and how he saw it all working. By the end of all these lessons, I couldn't believe that his explanation was really the answer to all my questions. It left me with an empty feeling. Evolution just sounded like emptiness to me. I finished working in that orchard, collected my money and said good-bye to the people I met there including the evolution man.

From there I went south into Washington State, to the Okanogan Valley. I had a terrible experience being picked up by some drunken guys who were only interested in harassing and insulting me. It was a scary experience, and I was thankful to get out of the truck in one piece even if they had dropped me off in the middle of nowhere.

Some of my next rides were Christians; for some reason, this had often been the case. I specifically remember one woman. She was incredibly kind, and the inside of her car felt like a safe and very loving place. It was powerful and stunned me. When she dropped me off she gave me a tract about Jesus. After that I got a ride by another Christian, an older guy in a pickup truck. He offered me some money and genuinely just seemed to be looking out for me; a fatherly kind of guy.

The world as I was seeing it had many good people in it and many awful people as well. I was meeting both during my travels. There were many situations where I was threatened, and people wanted to do me harm, but each time I avoided it one way or another. Looking back now, I know it was because of God's mercy and a lot of my mother's prayers.

As the days and weeks passed, the evil was becoming more evil, and the good was getting better and better. On several occasions, I felt my life was in danger. One time I was with Daniel, a new Christian friend. It was when we were in the Okanogan Valley in Northern Washington state, the land of many orchards. We were picking apples during the harvest season and were hitching a ride to town to get something to eat. We got a ride in a pickup truck and jumped in back. It wasn't long before we realized that we were driving down a Northern Cascade Mountains canyon road with a couple of drunk good 'ole boys from the reservation.

They were chasing the free-ranging cows with their truck and swerving all over the narrow, two-lane canyon road. It was a deep canyon with a 500-foot drop straight down to the creek below. There wasn't any guardrail along the road and only sixteen inches of gravel for a shoulder before reaching the edge of the cliff. It wasn't likely that anyone would survive a crash. What amazed me in the situation was that Daniel was perfectly calm. He simply put his hands together and prayed. I wasn't so calm as the truck swerved off the pavement, and I watched the tire as it came inches away from tumbling into the canyon. I was panicked! Fortunately, the driver got control of the vehicle and brought it back onto the pavement, and we made it safely down the rest of the way into town. I would never forget how Daniel was able to remain so peaceful and have total faith in a God he could not even see to save his life.

Daniel was the first Christian friend I had, and he demonstrated these acts of faith on a consistent basis. It was eye opening for a 17-year-old like myself. It challenged me, troubled me, and confused me. Up until that time I had only prayed once, and I had already forgotten how it had changed my life. I still had a very negative attitude towards Christians. I thought they were all a bunch of hypocrites who condemned others but were not good themselves. They just knew how to

polish themselves up and puff themselves up, but I saw through the façade and I knew that I did not want to be a Christian.

This was a very troubling time for me. I was seeking truth, and I wanted answers in life, but I did not want the truth I sought to be found in the Bible or for my answers to come from Christians. In my travels I had met many people, both Christian and non-Christian, and heard many philosophies and explanations about life-like evolution, various religions and agnosticism. None of them made any sense to me. Even though I didn't want to admit it, it was the Christians who picked me up hitch hiking that had the biggest impact on me. They seemed to radiate peacefulness and love that other people just didn't have.

The internal turmoil continued with Daniel tipping the scales towards Christianity. I had never met anyone who trusted so much in an invisible God like Daniel did. He would literally give his shirt off his back for someone else. I could tell that he had staked his life on his faith in God and the Bible. This intrigued me, so I started reading the Bible and soaking up all the teaching that Daniel had to offer. For the first time, things started making sense to and my questions about life were finally being answered.

Up until this point I was angry at the world and had determined that the only way I was going to survive was to follow only my own rules. I didn't see a better option. Daniel encouraged me to start reading the Bible, and the gospels started to convince me that there was a better way to live and that there was someone beyond me who I could look to for guidance. I didn't have to rely on my flawed self. There was someone I could turn to for answers to so many of my questions. That someone was Jesus Christ.

Jesus was the first one to inspire me to start forgiving others. By reading his words I came to know the Truth and to be convinced that those words could set me free. So, despite the fact I did not like Christians and I did not want to be another one in the hypocrite club, as I read the Bible I was starting to see the Truth revealed.

Autumn was coming to an end and snow was falling in the higher elevations. It was time to move on, and Daniel and I went our separate ways. I headed to California and he traveled to Oregon. I will never forget the profound impact that

Daniel had on me. I am the person I am today in part because of Daniel and the Word that he spoke to me. I rode freight trains and hitch hiked to Southern California. I found some work near Indio, made a nice camp for myself and set out to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelations. Daniel inspired me to do this. He was the first person I met who truly believed that the Bible was God's word and that you could literally stake your life on it. This got my attention and I had to find out for myself if this was true. He rattled all my beliefs.

I was still bumping into wicked people, but more and more Christians started to cross my path. My worldview was starting to change. In the past I was mad at the world, confused, couldn't separate evil from good. I had a lot of hate in me. Now I was starting to separate things to see that there were many good people in the world as well as the bad ones. Reading the Bible and praying to this unseen God was starting to change me. I started to have hope. I started to trust in someone other than myself to protect me.

My adventures continued. I went mountain climbing in the Southern California desert where they had miles of sand dunes. I traveled to the Grand Canyon and camped down in the canyon for about a week. Then it was on from Arizona to New Mexico and eventually to El Paso, Texas.

In the desert of New Mexico in a desolate town, I was stranded again; no rides hitch hiking. I stopped at an old western broken down store near the railroad tracks. I got a cold drink and started to pray for a miracle to get out of what amounted to a ghost town. It wasn't long before a freight train came through and stopped. Not only was this an answer to prayer; it was also a small miracle since freight trains never even usually slowed down at ghost towns, much less stopped at them. I talked to one of the railroad guys about getting a ride. He told me that there weren't any empty boxcars, but he allowed me to ride in an open car filled with a mounded pile of metal chips. I had my own private skylight car with nothing but a sky full of stars shining down on me. Riding in an open freight car with a panoramic view of the desert hills of southern New Mexico and stars more than I ever seen back in New England was a real treat for me. It made me think back to the books I read as a kid and the stories of those not-so-common philosophers, Tom Sawyer and

Huckleberry Finn. There's no doubt that their tales of riding freight trains and traveling around the countryside influenced me in my travels.

There were a lot of wonderful things about riding a freight train. It was a carefree way to tour the countryside. It was free, and if you had a boxcar, you had a roof over your head. It was fun at times to sit in the doorway of the car hanging my feet down, holding on to the door on the side, just watching the world go by. We passed through cities with all their people and through remote mountains and beautiful wilderness areas. It was a view of our country that few people experienced.

I remember traveling the tracks that ran alongside a huge dam. I'm pretty sure it was the Hoover Dam, and I was struck by all the lights shining off the nighttime water and the dam. It was beautiful.

It was my friend, Daniel, who I must thank for most of what I learned about riding the rails. He had worked for the railroad and taught me everything he could about the trains. The more I rode them, the more I learned, but I have Daniel to thank for my basic education.

Safety is a big deal riding freight trains. It's easy to get badly hurt even when you know what you're doing. One of the most dangerous situations was getting on a train in a "hot yard." A hot yard is a yard where railroad security personnel, known as the bulls, were cracking down on riders. In those instances, we needed to have a plan if we were to jump on the train safely. The first step was to identify the train we wanted to ride, and then figure out exactly where it was going to be as it left the yard. Then we needed to be in position along the tracks, ready to jump on it while it was moving, but before it got going too fast. I would run alongside the train looking for an empty car, then throw my backpack in and finally jump in making sure not to trip on the railroad ties. Falling the wrong way while jumping on a train would easily lead to death or loss of limbs. Of course, all this had to be done without being seen.

Some yards presented different but equally dangerous challenges. In a large yard the trains were sometimes lined up ten trains wide or more. This meant walking about a mile to walk around the end of the train to get to a train on the

other side of the yard. Instead of doing that, we would cross in the middle jumping up onto a train ladder and crossing over on the coupling where the two cars joined together. As you can imagine, this was extremely dangerous. While crossing over, if an engine connected other cars to the train you were on, it would jolt the car with a powerful force which could easily knock you off balance and cause you to fall on the tracks, where you would certainly get seriously injured if not simply cut in half. This wasn't anything I wanted to have happen, so I made sure to stay focused and alert. One last hazard to watch out for was a simple one involving the door of the freight car. You wanted to be sure that no one shut it while you were in it. I heard a story of one guy who was riding the rails in the winter through the mountains, and somehow the door to the car shut on him. They found him frozen to death. There were a few other things to watch out for, but if you were careful, you could have a safe adventure.

Chapter 5: Found What I Was looking for! But not what I wanted it to be!

I got off the highway in El Paso, Texas and went to a gas station and asked the attendant if there was some kind of youth hostel around. I really needed a shower. He directed me to what he called a “Christian house” right across the street. I took that as an invitation since I had been reading the Bible and figured this was another God encounter. I went and knocked on the door. A woman answered, and she told me that she and her husband would be glad to have me stay with them. As it turned out, it was kind of like a commune, so it suited my needs at the time.

I ended up living there for a couple of weeks. The couple ran daily Bible studies which included teachings by a man named Moses David, and then we went out on the streets of El Paso talking to people about Jesus. Funny thing was I wasn’t a Christian yet, but I was into going out and preaching the good news of the Bible and Jesus.

Within a couple of days, it was clear that I didn’t have a great feeling about this living situation. Although the community preached from the Bible, the focus of their activities was more on the teachings of Moses David. I didn’t understand why they didn’t just rely on the teachings of the Bible. I also had an issue with some of the relationships I was seeing. One of the leaders of the house seemed to have his eyes on a pretty, young woman with whom I had been spending time. Evidently, he was intent on marrying her. I found out later that the group was part of “The Children of God” movement, considered by many to be a cult that was popular in California at the time. I was glad to move on.

My next move was to jump on a freight train. I got myself settled into a boxcar not knowing where I was headed. Since El Paso is right on the border of Mexico there was always someone sneaking across the border into the US. I hoped that I wasn’t headed to Mexico! While I was sitting in the boxcar, some immigration officials searched the boxcar looking for illegal immigrants. They shined a spotlight

on me and shouted something in Spanish. When I replied in English, they lost interest in me and moved on. A few minutes later a couple of illegals jumped into my boxcar. I told them that the immigration folks were searching the train and had just searched the car I was in, so they jumped out and ran away. I went to sleep in the boxcar not knowing where I would wake up, but happy to get out of the city and away from those Christians who were on a control trip. I woke up somewhere near the Northern Texas Panhandle or Oklahoma. I jumped off the train and started walking through the small town where the train had stopped. I stuck out my thumb, and the first pickup truck that came by had a wooden Jesus plaque on the dashboard. By now I wasn't surprised that he pulled over.

The driver introduced himself as Bojo. He was coming from California, heading back to his Christian family in Oklahoma. He was in his 30s, wore a cowboy hat, had an impressive handle bar mustache and spoke with a southern drawl. He had recently left LA due to some marital problems and was going back to his family to help him get good with God. We hit it off right from the start talking about what God was doing in our lives. I went with him back to his hometown in Oklahoma and met all his family. His uncle was the pastor of a very small church. The smallest I'd ever seen. They were a wonderful family and they were all Christians, from the youngest to the oldest. I had never seen anything like it.

One day we were at his uncle's house for a big family reunion. While most of the family was in the kitchen and living room talking about what it was going to be like in heaven, I had to use the bathroom. The bathroom in that house was my kind of bathroom. Next to the throne was a floor to ceiling bookshelf filled with books. I picked out a book and started reading. It appeared to be a children's book about the story of Jesus. The book told the story of how Jesus suffered, was tortured, crucified, and died for my sins. At that point I began crying; I had never been so moved. Right then and there I believed and made Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior. Wow, did I ever surprise myself! This was something I thought I would never do. In many ways I found everything I was looking for at that moment - the true understanding of why the world was such a crazy place. I understood the polarity of good and evil;

of God and the Devil. I also knew without a doubt that God was a good God who loved me. All my questions were answered in the person of Jesus Christ.

Not long after that, on a cold February day, I was baptized by that wonderful, loving family, and formally confessed Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Confessing Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior was the biggest deal in my life and maybe the hardest thing I'd ever done. Up to that point I hadn't trusted anyone. I relied on and trusted only my own instincts to survive. I thought it was my instincts and my wits that kept me alive. I had a significant issue with authority and had seen too many bad examples of Christians and authority in general. There was a part of me fighting this introduction to Jesus Christ. I had been reading the Bible for months by then and praying regularly, and I had seen answers to prayers that saved my hide more than once during my travels.

Of all the people I had met in my travels it was by far the Christians that were the best. They were the most generous, and the ones that just gave off this powerful love. They were the ones who, like Daniel, demonstrated an unshakable faith in the God above that they could not even see, but that they could trust implicitly. These people had an enormous impact on me. They got my attention and challenged me to seek for myself, to pray for myself, to read the Bible myself. I was also challenged to give up my past prejudices of Christians; my impression that all Christians were morons and hypocrites.

Since I took their invitation to seek God myself and read the Bible myself, it opened a new world to me. Reading the Bible answered all my questions, praying and seeking God and challenging God for months day in and day out proved one thing to me: that He was good, that He was Love and that Jesus Christ really had come to earth to show people how to live life full of love. I was convinced that the Bible had all the answers on how to live, to run a family, to run a business, to deal with people, and overcome conflicts. Everything.

Most of all, I had finally encountered someone who was better than I was. Up until now I had been my own Lord. I was seventeen years old. I had demonstrated to myself that I could survive in the wilderness, in the desert, traveling the country, and through the cities. I could find work as I needed it. I didn't need anyone's help

since I could rely on myself. This changed completely though once I welcomed Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ was the better “man.” He was good all the time. He was love all the time, and he was just all the time. The more I had pushed myself in the preceding months to read the Bible and find out who this Jesus Christ was, the more I saw He didn’t compare to anyone else. He was the Best! The only one in this life I could truly make my Lord!

There had been a process that brought me to the place of becoming a very angry, disturbed kid. The process continued as I became a teenager; I was a lost soul headed for destruction. With my new birth, my life was turning around and heading in a totally new and positive direction. I was starting the process that would heal my heart, take away the pain, the anger and the rage that had been a part of me for so long. The change happened quickly once it started. For me, my healing on the farm and becoming a Christian resolved a lot of my anger issues and forgiveness issues, but I still had a long way to go.

Chapter 6: Living in Freedom Can Be Harder than Finding It

After spending some wonderful quality time with Bojo and his family doing simple things like horseback riding and hanging out, it was time for me to move on. I decided to head back East to my home in Connecticut. As it came time to leave Oklahoma, I knew that I was leaving as a different person from the one I was when Bojo first picked me up. I felt lighter and freer than I ever had. I had more joy in my life; more peace, more love, and I liked people more.

Hitchhiking energized me. It was rare that I felt lonely, but to keep myself entertained, I would sing, sometimes actually singing in the Spirit. I had a new energy and told everyone I met about Jesus, and that the Bible was true. At times I didn't even need to tell people I was a Christian. I would have people just randomly come up to me and tell me that they could see it in me. This was a far cry from when I was reliant on only myself to get by in the world. Now I had the freedom that I had been seeking, both on the inside and the outside.

For the first time I had hope; a belief that everything was going to be okay. This hope included the realization that God was a good God, not someone who was out to get me, looking for a chance to pound me into the ground with a big hammer. The peacefulness that I felt gave me the hope that someday there would be justice in the world; that the suffering would end, and that God had a plan for a new Heaven and new Earth where He would rule. I had hope that the time for evil in the world was temporary, just for a season.

So, I left Oklahoma, hitchhiking and riding freight trains back to Connecticut. My plan was to visit family and friends and then travel to Israel. I arrived back in Connecticut a much different person than when I had left. The drinking and drugs were behind me, and I was reading the Bible and praying daily. I was telling everyone about this Jesus I had come to know, and the fact that the Bible I once scorned, I now believed in and took it to be truth.

I don't know what I was expecting from the folks back home, but the reaction I got from my family and friends was like I went from version of crazy to another. I was excited, but they were most definitely not. Looking back on it, I can't blame my

family for being reluctant to have anything to do with organized religion after the way in which my mother was treated by our church when we were kids. When she needed help the most, she was abandoned by the church community and left on her own to deal with her husband's suicide and raising six children. Our whole family was impacted by this abandonment, and it was one reason that I resisted Christianity for so long. It's no wonder I had trouble believing the Bible to be truth when I so clearly had seen how Church officials ignored scripture. There's no denying the effect this had on our large family. It took a journey of 10,000 miles around the North American continent for me to mitigate the effect.

The newfound freedom, peace, and joy that I had on the inside didn't find a home with my family and friends. They wanted no part of what I was trying to share with them. It didn't take me long to realize that I didn't fit in anymore. Not only was I not fitting in with my family and friends, I also couldn't seem to fit into a church community. I was a longhaired hippy dude that was not really what the church was looking for in the 70's. I was adrift again, with no one around me who shared in my excitement about the Bible and the new life I had discovered in becoming a Christian. My plan to go to Israel never materialized because of my general disdain for involvement with government agencies. I couldn't bring myself to go through the formalities of the required paperwork and obtaining a passport, so I had to rework my plan. I wasn't sure what I would do.

This peace that I had traveled so far and worked so hard to find was proving to be much more of a challenge to keep and maintain in my life than I could ever have imagined. Being a bit discouraged, I altered my Israel plans and instead focused on my plans to continue living in Connecticut where I could work hard and save money to buy land in Maine with my friend Paul. Paul and I had been best friends since high school when we had done drugs together and skirted the law. More recently though, we had worked on a dairy farm in Connecticut and saved all our money to buy the land together.

My vision was to own a small farm and fulfill my attraction for Native American women by finding a wild Indian woman to marry. I worked hard and

saved every penny I could. I continued to pray and read the Bible, but I slowed down on talking about it. It just wasn't appreciated.

The hard work and saving paid off, and Paul and I bought 32 acres of land in Maine. We split it in half so we each owned sixteen acres of Maine real estate. One part of my plan had come to fruition. I moved up to the property in 1980.

Chapter 7: Getting Connected!!!!

I moved to Bangor, Maine in 1980 and drove out to my land on the weekends to rebuild the hunters cabin and clear the land. While living in Bangor, I got a job on Indian Island which is a Penobscot Indian reservation on the Penobscot River north of Bangor.

It was on Indian Island in Old Town, Maine, that I met a Christian woman named Chris, who first brought me to Bible fellowships. Initially, things had been going well for me on Indian Island. I had a decent job and had met a nice woman, but it wasn't long before things began to change and fall apart. My relationship with the woman I had been dating started to sour, and my job situation was in trouble.

I was the driver and mechanic for a vehicle called the LARC. It was an old leftover from World War II; a 4-wheel drive, amphibious vehicle that had huge tires and could drive directly into the water. It had a huge propeller in the rear end of it that allowed it to change from a land vehicle into a boat. It was great for going up the Penobscot River and dropping off crews and supplies to the other Islands.

The Penobscot Reservation included many islands on the river. It was a beautiful place, and being on the river in summertime, going from island to island, was an ideal setting for me.

One day, I was driving the LARC up the river in a spot where the current was very strong and the engine seized on me. For those not mechanically minded, this means that the engine completely stopped working. The LARC was an essential piece of equipment for the Reservation, and it was not good that it was now out of commission. I was called back to the office to meet with the boss of the program on the reservation. We didn't have a good history; among other things, he was trying to date the young lady I was dating, and he made no effort to hide that he did not like me. I was still a bit rough around the edges and not too smooth about company politics, so I didn't handle our interaction very well. Just like that I lost my job. Things got even worse shortly after that. I had a major flashback that impacted my vision and my ability to think clearly.

I had been going to the Bible Fellowships for a while, and now as I found myself without a job and experiencing physical problems, I saw the power of a Christian community that truly cared. However, I was struggling in other ways - my vision was good, to the point that I couldn't depend on it to safely cross the street. I had no income, no insurance, and was on the brink of losing my apartment. And, on top of all that, my brain hurt.

God was watching out for me and was already working in my life to put me back together again. Chris and her roommate, Becca, started praying for me. Every time they prayed for me my vision got better. Then two other members of our Fellowship, a married couple, Frank and Phyllis, prayed for me and I saw more improvement. Then they sent me to this guy who lived in a log cabin out in the woods, Greg, and he prayed for me. When he prayed, God revealed to him things that had happened to me that only I knew about. The only other one who could have known would have been God. Each time that I was prayed for, I experienced more and more healing in my body and mind. In addition, my faith was growing stronger and stronger. I had faith once again that God was watching over me and working in my life.

Before long, I was good to go again. I was eagerly connected to a home Bible study group where we met at least once a week for Bible teaching, prayer and fellowship. I was accepted for who I was and was not condemned for my past or my long hair. I got a job working for John, a member of our Fellowship who was a carpenter. He had a building contractor business, and I became his helper/apprentice. It was a job that I enjoyed and where I was learning new skills every day.

This was a good season for me, from 1980 – 1989, with no major conflicts or troubles. I developed many friendships within this ministry that I have maintained even until today. In those nine years in which I was associated with the Ministry, I had no problems with anger, drugs, alcohol, fighting or the law. I was a changed person and my life was evidence of it. During this period of my life, I had learned enough to start my own construction business, and I continued to enjoy the Bible Fellowships immensely. I had many friends and enjoyed studying and teaching the

Bible. I ran my own home fellowships and did a lot of outreach work, including a one-year missionary trip to the mid-West. The next step for me was attending Bible College. There was no doubt that God had been watching over me and had blessed me in many ways.

Chapter 8: A Season of Conflicts

Although I noted that the first part of the decade of the 80s was a good season for me, free of the anger that had plagued my youth, it wasn't without conflict. The difference was that I was learning how to manage the conflict in new and effective ways. No doubt, there are many types of conflicts, and some really used to get under my skin and bother me big time. One type used to get its hooks into me, but I learned how to avoid the old trap altogether.

When I was a child and teenager I got in a lot of physical fights. It was how I expressed my anger. When I became a Christian, it was an area that God helped me to get a handle on. Here's an example. In the winter of 1980 or 1981, after being connected with a Fellowship in the Bangor area for a while, I was praying for work. The economy had really slowed down and work was sparse. I found an ad in the paper; a contractor looking for a carpenter to rebuild a house that had burnt down. I met with him and we agreed on my wage and when I would start. The wage was low, but he guaranteed me that as I proved myself he would raise the wage. I jumped at the opportunity and went out and bought all the tools I would need. It struck me odd that the contractor didn't have any of his own tools on the job, but I just focused on doing my job and working hard. I worked with another carpenter rebuilding this house. As time passed, the other carpenter got increasingly angry with the contractor to the point that he finally quit. He didn't like the way he was being treated or the money he was being paid. I really needed the money, so I hung on hoping that the job would work out. As more time passed though, I saw more and more how the contractor was treating people poorly. Not only was he taking advantage of the carpenters on the job; promising them higher wages and never delivering, he was also taking advantage of the homeowner.

It came time for me to talk to him. I'd worked for him long enough to prove to him what kind of worker I was, and I expected to get a raise. When I brought up the subject of him paying me more he kind of laughed. I reminded him of his promise that my wage would be increased as I proved myself, but that meant

nothing to him. He smirked and reminded me that times were tough, that there weren't many jobs out there, and that I could easily be replaced. It was clear to me that he never had any intention of paying me a fair wage. At that point my Irish steam started building, and I walked toward him as he stood on a stepladder. I confronted him at high volume; my voice getting louder and louder as I let him know how much of a scumbag and rip off artist he was. I stood my ground at the base of his ladder confronting him loud enough that the entire neighborhood could hear.

It didn't take much to see that he was trembling a bit; I had his attention. Everything in me wanted to knock his ladder down and beat him into the ground. That is everything in me except this one small voice that reminded me I was a Christian now, and I didn't need to solve conflicts by fighting anymore. So, I yielded my urge to knock the ladder down and to dismantle him bit by bit and just continued to confront him loudly so the entire neighborhood could hear what kind of contractor he was. When I was done, I loaded my tools in my truck and headed home.

Within a week, I was talking to a friend who was a carpet installer. He knew of this contractor and told me that he had recently fallen off his ladder and broken his leg. I couldn't help but think about the close call I had with him. If I had followed through on my urge to punish him by knocking him off his ladder and beating him up, I would be in jail. I hadn't let my anger get the best of me. People reap what they sow. God was teaching me. God was my protector, my sufficiency; He didn't want me fighting anymore.

Another example of conflict came up in 1982 when I did a one-year missionary stint in the Midwest. That year there was a group of us living and working in Des Moines, Iowa. We spent our time preaching the gospel to everyone we met and running Bible fellowships and classes at night.

One evening a guy came to fellowship at our house. He was quite drunk and very crude to some of the women in the group. Something had to be done, so I confronted him and told him he needed to leave. He started leaving with me following right behind him. He stopped at the front door to put his shoes on.

Something happened to him at this point, and he filled up with rage and turned back towards me. He was about a foot taller than I, and much bigger overall. Enraged as he was, he appeared even bigger. -He started yelling at me with fists clenched and then started throwing punches at my face. I just prayed, stood my ground and told him to leave. The punches he threw seemed to just pass right in front of me. As I prayed standing there, it was like he couldn't hit me; none of the punches landed. I didn't even try to block the punches. I just told him to leave. Finally he left, slamming the door behind him.

Within the hour we heard fire engines outside. We could see his car was still outside, but it was on fire with flames shooting from it that were higher than the houses in the neighborhood. It looked like the blaze started in the engine, but it wasn't long before the entire car was engulfed in flames. We never learned any details about the fire. We speculated that maybe he had trouble getting it started and had put gas in the carburetor or something thing like that. Thankfully no one was hurt. The fire burned so intensely that it left a burn mark in the street. It was visible all year and it was right next to my bus stop where I would catch the bus. For me it was a reminder: God will protect me, I don't have to fight every battle that comes my way.

A third example came about in 1989 or 1990. I was engaged to my son Joshua's mother at the time, and we had taken a train from Connecticut to New York City. Lynn wanted to get our wedding rings down in the jewelry district of the city. Her grandmother used to do some business there, so we headed to the Diamond District to do our shopping. When we finished with our shopping, we were going to take the subway back to the train station and then on to Connecticut.

Being new to the city, we weren't familiar with the subway and got off at the wrong stop. We had no idea that it was a rough part of town. Both of us needed to use a rest room, so Lynn found a ladies' room, and I walked a bit further to get to the men's' room. As I was walking past the guy selling tickets inside a heavily fortified booth with metal bars he said something to me. I didn't quite hear him, so I went back to him and asked: "What did you say?" He answered, "I wouldn't go in there!" I said: "Why not?" He went on to explain that the men's' room was a meeting place

for homosexuals who were on the violent side and enjoyed attacking and assaulting innocent men like myself. I said, "Thanks for the warning" and turned right around. I decided not to use a public restroom until we were back in Connecticut. I quickly walked back to find Lynn. She was trying to make a phone call at a pay phone. As I was walking towards her, three street thug types were closing in on her. Neither Lynn nor the thugs saw me. I came up behind them leaving a counter between the four of them and me. Lynn was cornered at the pay phone oblivious to the pending danger. I could hear the three of them muttering between themselves on how they were going to check this chick out. Two of them were about my size, and the one who appeared to be the leader was big.

I had to do something fast, it was too late to get in between Lynn and these thugs, so I just pretended I was really mad at Lynn and yelled at her "Hurry up, let's go! What's the matter? You are taking too long!" Since I barked loudly and because no one had seen me coming, it surprised everyone. The guys just froze, and the reality of the situation finally registered with Lynn. She reacted perfectly, moving swiftly past them like they weren't there and apologizing to me. Meanwhile I continued to play the mad man until she got past them and joined me, and we got out of there fast. Once again, God was watching over me and revealed to me a way to avoid a major conflict.

Whether in my contracting business, or in my street evangelism, or just dealing with people in general, I would run into conflicts. Most of them didn't really bother me for very long and would be forgotten within a brief time. With these I was able to just forgive and let go, leaving it all behind as I moved forward. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was soon to face major conflicts that I couldn't "just forgive and let it go." I was soon to be challenged with major conflicts that would get under my skin and impact me in ways that would take years for me to overcome.

It was in Bible College of all places that I began to experience conflicts that paled from those I've already described. To say they got under my skin is an understatement. When I was due to start my first year of Leadership training at a mid-Western Bible College, I began to hear that the ministry the school was

affiliated with was having problems and not doing well. There were problems with their top leadership and there was even talk that it might fall apart. I had a decision to make, but the way I saw it I was already enrolled with my first semester starting soon, and when would I ever get the chance to go and study the Bible again? I decided to stay the course and go forward with my plans. With hindsight being 20/20, I think I would have made another choice given what I know now.

For the first year and a half of the three-year program I kept busy with studying and teaching the Bible and did my best to stay out of ministry politics. There came a time though when I couldn't avoid the problems any longer.

The ministry I was associated with is going to remain unnamed for the purpose of my story. Mainly this is because it was not unlike similar ministries that also fell apart due to various forms of corruption: moral, financial and ego problems. From my experience, all religious, business and government organizations are faced with the same challenges, but it's how leadership responds to them that makes all the difference. For me personally, there was a lot of hurt associated with the breakdown of the ministry I was involved with.

I was enrolled at the main campus of the ministry which was in Ohio. Not only was the college there, but also it was also where the president lived with many other leaders and staff. Up until that winter of my second year, I had done a decent job staying out of the conflicts going on around me. I kept my head down and my nose in the Bible. For some reason the conflicts started to get to me. I began speaking up, and when I was faced with a situation that I knew was not right, I confronted the individual or individuals involved. This didn't go over too well.

Looking back on it now, I don't remember exactly what was most upsetting to me. I was seeing so many offenses with so many things wrong. I was constantly upset. There was hypocrisy all around me, and I wasn't seeing the love of God being manifested. I was ever mindful of a saying that the founder of the ministry taught us: "If we lose the love of God in this ministry we will do more harm than good." (My paraphrase.) That's what I was seeing; more harm being done than good. This was an international ministry with followers all over the world and many campuses located across the US in Ohio, Indiana, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. From

what I was seeing though, the ministry leadership had lost the love of God. It's not surprising to me that when I got to Maine, it was the love of God being manifested that stood out to me. It was the first thing I noticed, and it was a welcome sight. My new friend, Chris, brought me to a home fellowship that taught God's love and healing, and the members of that fellowship faithfully prayed for me until I was healed. I'm getting ahead of myself though...back to Ohio.

That kind of love was not seen much at the Bible College. On the contrary, it seemed to me that people were just beating each other up with the Bible in a way that reminded me of the nuns in catechism classes who would chase me around with a yard stick looking to beat me for acting up. I had had enough and didn't hesitate to call things out as bullshit when I saw things. I started challenging people in these situations, and not surprisingly, that was the beginning of the end for me.

My work coordinator at the college saw how many conflicts I was getting in, and he tried to warn me to stay out of it. I tried, but that only worked for so long. When he saw that I was over my head in conflicts, he pulled some strings and had me transferred to a quieter campus located in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. I'm truly thankful to God for this man and his wisdom. He knew that the problems that were surfacing in Ohio were much bigger than I could handle and that putting some distance between the main campus and me would be the best thing for me.

So, in the middle of winter I was put on a small jet airplane, one of 3 owned by the ministry, and flew with the pilot and the Colorado campus coordinator's wife to Gunnison, Colorado. We landed with about 6" inches of fresh snow on the runway of a small airport. From there we were picked up and driven to the Gunnison campus on the Gunnison River. It was a beautiful location; God's workmanship abounded in the surrounding mountains! All the buildings were log structures. The largest one on campus was the second largest log cabin in the state of Colorado at the time.

My job on staff there was to do finish carpentry in the main lodge. I lived next to the river in another cabin that I shared with a roommate named Mike. Mike was one of the few guys I met in the ministry who was aware of how terrible things

were. Despite all the crap, he still maintained his cool. He kept endeavoring to walk and speak the love of God while forgiving those who were not walking in the light.

It was a tough time for me. I had been ruffled by my experience at the main campus in Ohio and generally you could say that I was having my Christianity tested. I also struggled with doubts that I would graduate, or even if the ministry would last much longer. My trust in people, in Christians, was dropping fast. Mike was there for me though as I went through all that. He was the perfect roommate and friend. He knew what was going on, but he refused to get sucked into politics. He rose above it.

I started to relax and enjoy Gunnison. I enjoyed doing the finish carpentry on the huge log structure, and I enjoyed snowshoeing and snowmobiling in the Rocky Mountains. I also never tired of fishing and hiking in the area. I was getting my head back into studying the Bible. There was a good, quiet library on campus, and I thoroughly enjoyed the study time I spent there. Life was good again.

I lived in Gunnison for about a year and a half and that is where I met Joshua's mother. It was a fantastic location for me and far from the stress and problems of Ohio. It wasn't far enough away though, things caught up as things were getting much worse in the ministry with many leaders making the decision to leave. Things came to a head very shortly. We got news that the president of the ministry would be making a visit to our campus. This is a person I had faithfully prayed for during the three to four years I had spent at the college, but at this point I had little faith in him.

He came to Gunnison with an agenda. His plan was to get everyone to either totally commit to support him in his plan to lead the ministry or to just get out! I remember being in the dining room when he came up to me while I was eating. He confronted me with a great amount of anger/rage because I was talking with my hands while eating which apparently was not appropriate mealtime etiquette. I just looked at him as he went off with his rage. I thought "Wow! I've seen this before. He has really lost it!" During his visit to the campus I observed how he treated people. I saw how cruel he was to people, people that I knew and cared for. He seemed to take pleasure in yelling at us as if we were the scum of the earth. Worst

of all this was that he was doing it all in the name of Jesus Christ. At that point I had taken enough and opened my big mouth once again telling people what bullshit it all was and that I wasn't going to take it anymore and would be leaving.

Word spread fast that I was leaving, and the President wanted to know why. He sent the campus leader to talk to me. My initial thought was "Great, he really wants to understand." I proceeded to explain to the campus leader how I wasn't seeing leadership walking in love, treating people respectfully and living the principles laid out in the Bible and lived by Jesus Christ. Where was the love of God? In my ignorance, I was just getting started and ready to expound in detail on the situation when he abruptly cut me off waving his hands in front of my face and yelling "Enough! Enough! Don't say anymore!" That was it! I was done. I packed up my things, left Gunnison and hitch hiked back to Ohio. My intention was to pick up my motorcycle, which was stored on campus, and then meet up with some friends to say good-bye. As it turned out, I wasn't permitted to talk to anyone. Apparently, someone from Colorado called ahead and alerted Security that I was not to be allowed on the premises or allowed to talk to anyone. Security did let me pick up my bike, but the friends I had spent years with were off limits to me. I was escorted off the premises by security guards never having the chance to say good-bye. The ministry did end up falling apart, and years later I found out that the man who had demanded my allegiance to him ended up embroiled in lawsuits and had to get out of town in a hurry. Evidently, he now works at Home Depot.

So, I left Colorado on my motorcycle heading back to the East Coast and Connecticut. It was early spring, and I hit wintry weather and a bit of snow on the way.

My first stop after reaching the East Coast was in Delaware to visit a friend. I ended up staying and working there for a while. I also attended a home based, Bible fellowship and had the opportunity to do a few teachings. My plan was to move on to Connecticut, but before I left, I was asked to run the fellowship on a long-term basis. I said I would consider it and took off for Connecticut.

While in Connecticut, I spent time visiting family and friends and even remodeled my mother's house. I knew that wasn't where I was supposed to be

though, so after a while, I headed back down to Delaware. I decided I would stay put in Delaware, so I set myself up as a contractor and began running a home-based Bible fellowship. The coordinator of these fellowships in Delaware was from the ministry I had just separated myself from, as were most of the people in the fellowship. Like myself, they were looking for a place where the truths of the Bible were taught and lived; where people not only talked the talk but walked the walk; a place where the love of God was manifested.

People were hungry for love and hungry for the Word, as was I; so I agreed to run the fellowship with the understanding that I wouldn't be required to attend mandatory leader meetings, and I made it very clear that I had my fill of taking directives from corrupt leadership. I would agree to shepherd the fellowship if I was given the freedom to run the fellowship as I saw fit, without a control system. I was open to accountability but not open to being controlled. With that agreement in place, life went well for over a year. Work was busy, and the fellowship grew steadily. It went from once a week to twice a week to three times a week. More and more people were coming, and people were getting healed. I enjoyed teaching the Word, so much that I could have taught every night; I enjoyed it that much.

With the growth and popularity of my fellowship, problems soon followed. In the eyes of some, my fellowship was getting too popular. The coordinator I had made the original arrangement with now wanted to change our agreement and have me attend more leadership meetings. Bottom line, he saw the growth I was achieving and wanted me to send people his way and wanted me teaching less. I was making him look bad. Eventually he called a meeting for the original people who started in my fellowship. It was a set-up that I didn't see coming. When I arrived everyone was already there, and the coordinator started accusing me of starting my own ministry. He accused me of stealing funds from the fellowship. This was ironic because the woman who was treasurer for our fellowship lived in his house. I never saw a penny of the money we collected, but he did. The Treasurer brought the money collected at fellowship home and then handed it over to him.

He continued his attack against me, and I was stunned and in tears. I had poured myself into that fellowship and was not guilty of the things he was accusing.

The only thing I was guilty of was leaving myself totally vulnerable. Now I was being stabbed in the back, and it hurt. I was tired of the conflict that seemed to be inherent in this ministry.

Here I was again; in the middle of conflict, and I was at a loss. I knew the rules of conflict when it came to street survival and traveling the freight trains; hitch hiking around the country and making my way through bad areas of inner cities. I knew how to survive. But, to be a Christian I had been naïve, foolish, and gullible; thinking that if I gave my best I would be appreciated. It was foolish thinking on my part to believe that if I opened my heart, allowing myself to become vulnerable and help people, I wouldn't be stabbed in the back. That is exactly what happened. This leader chose to micromanage the fellowship I was running, and I told him it was all his. I was done.

I pushed on with life and moved to Maine where I started my own business and eventually got married. Hurt built on hurt, but I had a habit of just pushing forward in life, so I didn't realize how deeply impactful these instances with the Christians I met in the ministry had been. It would be many years, but I would eventually find out.

Chapter 9: D-day for Me/Decision Time

The next conflict I encountered changed my life. I couldn't run away from it, couldn't avoid it, couldn't go around it, and couldn't delay going through it. It was major, and it was a conflict that I didn't feel strong enough to go through, but I had no choice.

First, let me give some background. It was 1999 or so. I was about 30, was married and had started a construction business back in my old stomping grounds in Maine. I shook off the past several years and was focused on moving forward with my life. It was great to re-connect with my friends in Maine, and for two years I just was enjoying married life and being back in Maine. My wife was pregnant, and a severe recession had hit the Northeast. Maine was hit hard. Many of the big construction companies shut down, and even some banks were closing their doors. Work was a bit slow, and when Maine gets slow, it gets REALLY slow.

My wife Lynn had big concerns about staying in Maine. She had her eye on Seattle where she had friends and where the economy was doing well. Before I knew it, she had secured a job for me, a place to live, and we were packing! I had a van and a trailer that I packed with my motorcycle, our furniture, and all the rest of our gear. I built a top for the trailer, and when we pulled out of Portland, Maine it was just like the pioneers with their covered wagons. My very pregnant wife and I were headed to a new frontier.

Hindsight 20/20, I don't think either of us fully processed the losses we suffered when we severed ties with the ministry. We lost touch with many friends, and never took the time to evaluate the impact of that loss as well as the impact that the corrupt leadership had on our outlook and beliefs. At one point I realized that the impact on Lynn was that she didn't want anything to do with Christianity. She no longer trusted what she had once believed.

I took the ministry breakup another way. For me, it was a lesson in not putting too much trust in men. But instead, to place my trust in God, who would show me who to trust and who not to trust.

This all took a toll on our marriage. We were going in different directions, and eventually the marriage ended. Lynn was headed down the New Age path that was big in Seattle and opened her up to spiritual beliefs other than Christianity or anything Biblically sound. I remained committed to Christianity and the principles and truth revealed in the Bible. We could not reconcile the differences and she left me and started a long legal battle for custody of our son, Joshua. The custody battle would prove to be the most difficult, frustrating, and painful thing I had ever gone through. My anger, which had not been a problem since my teenage years, quickly surfaced. The divorce was one thing, but the thought of losing Joshua was unfathomable to me.

The custody battle lasted for over two years and it was absolutely the worst experience of my life. My frustration was off the charts and my anger was boiling over. I had to deal with emotions that had been part of my distant past, not a part of the last 12 years of my life. On top of that, I was afraid that I would not be able to see my son if my ex-wife won the legal battle. I knew that I had to fight hard to prevent this from happening. I quickly learned that the legal, court system in Seattle was ridiculous and biased towards women. Men didn't have much in the way of rights when it came to custody issues, and Lynn became very effective in using the system to her advantage.

Lynn did not want Joshua to have anything to do with me and especially did not want him around any Bible-believing Christians. At the time, she was willing to accuse me of anything to get me out of Joshua's life. The accusations against me filled two file folders. I remember showing two friends the files of accusations, and they were shocked. For many years since my teenage years I was doing well and didn't have any problems with anger because I had made so many positive changes in my life. But it wasn't enough. I wasn't enough. I wasn't going to make it through this situation without a miracle.

When I was young, I swore that when it came time to be a father I would be there for my son. Well here I was; a father for the first time and facing the strong possibility that my son would be taken away from me. How could I be there for my

son if I lost the custody battle? I was tortured by the thought and completely furious.

Lynn accused me of so many things that were incredibly hurtful to me. The custody battle was playing out in family court where the operating assumption of the court, judges and lawyers was that a man was considered guilty of all accusations made against him. There was no assumption of innocence as is mandated by our Constitution. The burden of proof was on the father to establish his innocence of the accusations if he hoped to maintain his parental rights and, in my case, see my son again.

I couldn't believe this was happening, and it was driving me crazy. One night I went to bed with all this frustration and when I fell into a deep sleep I had a very vivid dream. The dream was of me on a white horse riding down the main street of Seattle to the courthouse. I was swinging a broad axe in my right hand. I rode right into the courthouse and started lopping off the heads of the judge and the people who falsely accused me: my former wife and her lawyer. It felt like a total release to let out all the anger and frustration I was feeling.

Then I woke up and went downstairs and opened the front door. It was a sunny morning and to the side entrance to my house I expected to see a pile of heads. When the pile didn't materialize, I realized I had been dreaming an awful, wicked dream. As I started walking back up the stairs, I heard a voice in my head say, "You're going to lose your son if you don't forgive all these people who have gone against you." The message was clear and left no doubt as to what steps I needed to take.

Up to this point I had studied the topic of forgiveness in the Bible. I had come to understand a great deal about it and had even taught it to others, but what I was facing now was totally different. This wasn't an intellectual study of something that interested me; this required me to go to the depths of my soul and face forgiveness in a way that I didn't feel I could.

About the same time as this happened, my friend, Greg from Maine called me. We spoke of many things, but without me mentioning my dream and the voice I had heard, he told me that I needed to forgive Lynne. This caught my attention. Then

my friend Mike sent me a book about a man named Joseph. It's a Biblical story that many are familiar with; a story about how Joseph had come to forgive his brothers and many others for how terribly they had treated him. It became very clear to me in my thick head that God was trying to speak to me in every way He could; in this case, working through my friends to get me to see what I needed to do. The message was clear that I needed to forgive. I needed to go deeper than I had ever gone before and find the strength to forgive those who had falsely accused me and caused me such pain. I didn't really know how I was going to do it, but I knew that I needed to make the decision to do it no matter the cost.

I say I needed to make the decision, but no one was making me. I just knew that I needed to forgive if I was ever going to be able to have a relationship with my son. I needed to forgive so that my anger wouldn't rise up and consume me as it had consumed my father. I needed to forgive because I couldn't live with the consequences of not forgiving. So, I yielded and said, "Okay God, I will forgive everyone, but you will have to show me how to go about it and give me the strength to follow through with it."

Chapter 10: Learning to Yield

Looking back at it now, over twenty years later, I can see that Lynn and her friends were doing what they thought was the best for Joshua at the time. Lynn had been through a terrible experience with Christians. She saw corruption in the worst way and the result was that she wanted nothing more to do with Christianity. That meant she also wanted nothing to do with me since she knew I would always be a Christian. I saw the same corruption she had seen, but I took it another way. My view was that God is good all the time, but His followers can sometimes be the best people on earth and sometimes be the biggest morons on earth. I include myself in both groups at times.

As I look back, if I had been a mature Christian I would have done things differently dealing with the situation before Lynn and I even married. I would have addressed more of the issues of the heart. I would have asked and reflected on how my future wife was doing. I knew that she had been exposed to an awful experience. Spiritual leaders that she trusted, and who befriended her were found to be financially, sexually and emotionally abusing their power. Then when confronted with their misconduct, they became worse; lashing out at people that challenged them and using their influence to intimidate, silence and destroy anyone who confronted them.

It was irresponsible of me to not recognize the trauma this had caused Lynn and to work at discussing what she was going through. I was also dimwitted to not realize that everything that had transpired had also taken a toll on me. I didn't take the time to recognize the hurt I experienced in losing so many friends as a result of my stand to speak what I believed to be true. It was no consolation that what I spoke to eventually came to light. It was a profound loss to both of us.

I didn't notice at the time that in dealing with the situation I reverted to my old survival strategies. For me that meant I had to now process the experience, learn from it, and move on. Push forward!

Missing from that process was acknowledging that I am human; that I have a heart and that loss hurts and needs to be addressed. I needed to process the loss of

friends and the betrayals of leaders, along with so many other things. I didn't take care of me and I didn't take care of Lynn. At the time, I didn't know how. It's not that we didn't talk about what we had gone through; we did mentally process things together, but we did not heal from the heart together. The result eventually came down to our divorce and the custody battle for Joshua. I had accepted the fact that I needed to forgive everyone involved with the custody dispute, while also accepting that I would be going through a long legal battle.

Accepting that forgiveness was a necessary factor on my part did not mean that I didn't have outbursts of frustration and anger about having to go through everything that I did. It was clear to everyone from the beginning of the divorce and subsequent custody battle that I was angry. I was fighting mad and my anger was spilling over for the first time in a long time. Embracing forgiveness was not always easy. For me maybe the hardest person to forgive was myself. I did not expect to fail in marriage, and there was no way that I was going to accept the fact that someone might tell me that I couldn't be in my son's life.

It was a difficult thing to be in the custody battle fighting for the right to see my son, and at the same time working to forgive my former wife and her team helping to keep Joshua from me. And I had to forgive myself for the mistakes I had made in the marriage that had contributed to bringing us to where we were. It was not easy! Sifting through this process was too much for me at times. I would fall into self-pity asking God why I had to go through all this. I needed help to make it through this situation. This is where the lesson in yielding came in.

There was no way that I could avoid going to court if I wanted to continue to be a father to Joshua. I needed to get a good lawyer, and I had to somehow learn not to over-react listening to the crazy and untrue things that were being said about me. Then there were the counseling sessions I was required to attend, the parenting classes, the court mandated divorce groups, the men's anger management classes and finally the supervised visits with my own son. These were all required of me, and I didn't want to do any of them! I realized though, that fighting against all of it was not going to get me what I ultimately wanted. I had to yield. I did not have

control of a lot of aspects of the situation, so in those areas I needed to yield and put my energies in a positive direction.

Yielding to all these things when I felt it was so unjust drove me crazy at times. When I got to the point of thinking I was going crazy, I would drive somewhere in the mountains that surrounded Seattle. I would hike up far enough so that I knew there was no one around. Then I would vent my anger out to God, to let him know how I felt. I was angry beyond words. It seemed like my son was being taken away from me and God was doing nothing! I would yell, cuss, jump up and down, and snap trees in half. Yes, that's right; snap trees in half. I really liked snapping dead trees. I would vent my anger until I was totally spent. It's a good thing that there was no one there to see or hear me. If they had seen me, they would have thought that I was crazy. From the way I was cussing at God there's no way they would have thought I was a Christian conversing with God.

As crazy as this may have seemed, it worked for me. It's funny that I had always felt that if I ever expressed even a fraction of the frustration and anger to God in a church setting, I would be banned for life. But with God, I could totally express all my unfiltered anger, and it was okay with Him. Not so with the Church. The remarkable thing was God stayed there with me and allowed me to totally vent all I had within. Even when I cussed at Him, I felt His presence. And when I was finished venting all my anger, He would heal me. After He took all my anger, He would take all my pain. I would cry and grieve in ways that I'd not known. Then He would give me wisdom and strength to go back to face everything.

I learned a big lesson in these times. If God could be okay with me expressing all my anger to Him, listen to me vent, and then build me up again and help and heal me, then maybe I could do the same for my son. I learned that I could do better at letting Joshua express anger towards me and then build him up just as God had done for me.

The yielding process didn't come very easy to me given that I'm not necessarily a very easy-going guy. For me it was going to take a lot of trips to the mountains.

Chapter 11: The Need for Support

I yielded to the entire process of a custody battle, but initially I yielded in a way that was like a two-year-old kicking and screaming, complaining, falling into self-pity, holding strongly to the belief that I should not have to go through any of it! As time passed, I engaged more, and the process got better. I attended the divorce class that the courts mandated and was impressed by the woman who ran the group. She was very knowledgeable and did an excellent job. She didn't just put in her time. She connected with all the people in the group, and she was concerned for each of us and truly wanted to see us healing from the toll our divorces had taken on us. I saw other people just like me going through similar challenges, and I noticed them getting healed. Before too long, I started to look forward to our meetings.

Another weekly class I took was a Parenting class. For two years I had a class or meeting most weeknights; my evenings were full. At the same time, I was running a very busy construction business. Just like with the Divorce group, I came to enjoy the parenting classes, and I ended up acing all of them. Once I started to embrace the process, things were easier, but there were still challenges.

When the divorce proceedings first started, I was at odds with Lynn's counselor. I thought he was counseling her to leave me. I confronted him with more than a little bit of anger the first time I talked to him. His name was Paul, and we got past that first confrontation. Then came a little poetic justice. Not too long after that I needed counseling and guess who my friend recommended that I go see? Yup, that's right, Paul! I followed my friend's advice and went to see Paul, and that was the beginning of a two-year period in which he was my counselor. We found that we had motorcycles in common, and from there a personal friendship started to develop. Not only did I consider him my very helpful counselor, but also my friend.

Paul taught me a lot. He was from an alcoholic family and had been a hard-core alcoholic himself. He was also a Vietnam Veteran. He knew I came from an alcoholic family, and he taught me all the different dynamics of alcoholic families, its effects on children, and the co-dependency that was so prevalent. These were the things I needed to know to begin the healing process. He gave me a test to find out if

I was an alcoholic. Even though I had hit alcohol and drugs hard in my teenage years, the test revealed that I didn't really meet the criteria for being an "official" alcoholic. Thankfully, for me it was just a phase I went through and it hadn't carried over into my 20's and 30's.

One big lesson he opened me up to was regarding emotions and healing. This lesson started in a funny way, although not at all funny at the time. I went to his office one day and I was agitated and angry about how the custody battle was going. He asked me how I felt. I said, "I'm angry!" He responded with "What else?" I responded with a quick and angry, "What the hell! What do you mean what else?" He proceeded to pull out a big chart that listed dozens of all different emotions. I'm like, "What the hell! I'm Irish - I don't have all those emotions! I've got two emotions: anger or happiness!"

That was the beginning of a very important lesson for me. Paul went on to explain to me that everyone experiences these emotions at various times in their lives, and that there is power in identifying our underlying emotions. This would prove to be just one more critical piece of my education process. For me, a big part of this education was learning how to feel pain. I thought this was crazy! In my family, we never felt pain, we were tough! My father put a bullet through his head and I never even cried! I went to the funeral and almost cried, but I choked it off. I was 13 years old then and at the time I was counseling with Paul, I was in my early 30's. The only times I could remember crying from the time I was 13 until my early 30's was when I would go off by myself to pray to God. My "conversations" with him got me quite emotional at times.

I remember coming close to crying when I was in a session with Paul. I was in his office and he was challenging me with some very painful stuff. I felt the pain I was feeling leap up into my throat. It felt like the pain was pushing up to the top of my throat. Before it did though, I choked it off and swallowed it back down not allowing it to come to the surface. I knew that if I allowed it to surface, I would explode, and I didn't want to blow up in front of anyone, not even Paul. The memory is vivid in my mind. Paul saw me choke it off and said, "Wow, that's the best I have ever seen!" In his practice he dealt with tough men who were masters at avoiding

emotional pain. He knew about avoidance, recognized it in me, and taught me what it was and how to break through it. He also started teaching me the positive and powerful benefits of feeling pain, of grieving.

Another big lesson came when I was attending a men's group run by Paul. There was a man in the group who I will call Lucky. Lucky was good at expressing himself and I enjoyed hearing him speak. One day Lucky was in a lot of pain as he shared about a very difficult situation he was going through. Unlike me, Lucky was not shy about showing his grief, revealing his pain to the whole group. As he was expressing his pain and grief while crying, someone interrupted him trying to offer support to make him feel better. Wow did he get pissed! Lucky let the individual have it. "This is my pain! I own it! This is my time to let it go through grieving it!" I had never heard anything like that before. That episode stuck with me and would get me to take a deeper look into how I viewed internal pain. My eyes were being opened. So many of the things that I resisted at first, I was starting to realize were part of a necessary learning process.

Probably one of the biggest things that I was resisting was the court-mandated mediation and supervised visitation of my son. I never appreciated it or thought it was necessary, but I had to do it. Even the counselor who facilitated the visits told me she didn't think they were necessary. I was in King County, Washington, and quickly came to find out that there was an underlying premise in their family court system: if you were a man going through a custody battle, you were assumed to be guilty of anything and everything that your ex-wife had to say about you until you were able to prove you were innocent. It was completely backwards from the rest of our judicial system in which you are deemed to be innocent unless proven guilty.

God was faithfully at work in the situation, and I met some good counselors who really cared about Joshua. I ended up making friends with some of them, and as time passed, they wrote favorable reports for me which eventually allowed me to regain custody of Joshua.

The next thing I resisted on yielding to was an Anger Management course. No surprise, right? I was given a list of courses to choose from so I decided to check

some out before I committed to attending a specific class. The first one I visited was the cheapest one. It was down in a basement room of an old building in Seattle. The room was more like a dungeon; complete with iron bars on the windows and doors. All the glass was bulletproof, and you had to empty your pockets before going in. When I got to the counselor's office it was dark and he was seated in the corner. I thought maybe he was Darth Vader. After a short conversation with him, I got out of there fast. I figured anyone who went through that program was in big trouble. If they didn't start as a violent crazy person, they would end as one.

The next program I checked out was at the University of Washington - Harborview Medical Center. The psychologist running the program was also the head of the department and was an expert on road rage. He wrote the manual on it that was used by Washington State as well as several other states. He was a top-notch guy and he was expensive. Fortunately, my business was doing well, so I decided to enroll in his Men's Group program. One of the guys in the group told me that he was a good person to have as a reference. If he was a witness for you, and gave the court his favorable recommendation, the judge would just rubber-stamp it. His reputation preceded him, and he was impressive. With him on your side, your court challenges were a breeze. I was thankful that he was on my side.

The first couple of weeks, the Men's Group was uncomfortable for me, but after that I started to enjoy it. The Doc was a master at working with angry men, especially those who were avoiding conflict. I was in the right place, and I learned all kinds of valuable things from my time with the group. We had about eight men in our group; each with a variety of unique situations. A few of us were in custody battles, and a couple of the guys were violent and had gotten into trouble with the law. Another member of the group had an issue with his wife who was unstable. She had done crazy things to him like beating him over the head with a chair while he was sleeping. Circumstances were different, but the anger was the common thread that brought us together.

One older guy who had been married for over 40 years was thrown out of his house by his wife. She then gave him a list of things he needed to change before she would let him back in again. They were a Christian couple. The Doc was not a

Christian, but I used to take note of what he taught us in our weekly meetings and then go home and look up the Biblical principle he was teaching us that day. Although he didn't acknowledge he was using biblical principles in his counseling, he was, and in doing so he was able to help a lot of people.

Each of us got to share our story and challenge. Then the group, with the Doc's leadership, supported one another on how to best navigate through our challenges and how to best handle our anger regardless of the situation. I watched the Doc patiently work with the older gentleman and help him to save his marriage. He basically taught him how to envision what it would be like to love his wife, and what it would look like to not love his wife. Once he had that clarity, he was able to take the necessary steps to put his marriage back together. Most of the men in that group had victory stories to share by the time we finished our program.

The Doc had two female assistants they took care of all administrative and legal paperwork including our evaluations. They were a huge support to me, and I was surprised how many times they went out of their way to bring me paperwork at the courthouse. They really seemed to care.

This group lasted a year and at the end Doc came to me and said he would stand up for me in court and give me a very good referral. That meant I would get all my parental rights back! Everything that I did throughout the custody battle was for my son. I never would have done it for myself. Not only did Joshua benefit from all I learned, I also did; even getting to the point of enjoying my classes, programs and various groups. I went from being a man spinning with confusion and frustration from all the accusations being made against me, to someone who accepted the process and was willing to learn to forgive and seek a new way of viewing life, a new way of reacting to people, a new way of being there for my son.

As challenging as this time had been, I had more intense challenges ahead. It's hard to conceive of what would be more challenging than having lies and false accusations made against you in a court of law, or having your son taken away from you, but I came to realize that I could control my response to all of that. Although it seems only natural to me that a man shows anger when someone is trying to take his son out of his life, I had to realize that I was just playing into the opposition's

hands when I got angry. It was a valuable lesson; not an easy one, but I got through it.

The biggest challenge I would go through was coming up: it was called “Momentum.”

Chapter 12: Momentum

I had a friend in the Seattle area who was a mobile auto mechanic. He would come to my house and fix my van at times. Craig knew that I was going through a custody battle and he started talking to me about a training that he and his wife had recently taken. He said it was very intense and four days long, but he thought I would benefit from it. He explained that it was a Christian training, and though I trusted Craig and his wife, Mary, I was still hesitant to commit. I had been burned by too many Christians to get very excited about this. After spending more time with them, and receiving more information about the training, I decided to take it. My decision was based mostly on my trust of them and their enthusiastic referral.

So, I went to Momentum training with a good amount of skepticism. Just the name Momentum had me scratching my head. Day #1 was very difficult for me to sit through; a lot of talk about promises and a lot of feedback exercises. Day #2 continued with feedback exercises - we were asked to provide feedback to other participants in the training. Much of the feedback I received in those first two days was about the anger I was carrying around. Most people thought I came off as angry, and I wasn't doing much to change their perception because I was indeed angry with the main trainer and the way he asked questions. Looking back on the circumstances, it wasn't surprising that others saw me as an angry person.

Somehow, during the class I started to shift from focusing on my anger and started looking at my promises; promises to my son and promises to my soon to be ex-wife. It became quickly apparent that I had some work to do in this area. I called Lynn that weekend and asked her to forgive me for my broken promises in the marriage and for the times I failed to walk in love towards her. It was a big step for me, and she thanked me for acknowledging my shortcomings and told me that my apology and acknowledgement of things I had done removed half the weight she was feeling. My guess was that she was referring to the other half being her own shortcomings, but I wasn't expecting her to own up to them. I was responsible for only what I could do and asking for her forgiveness was a big weight off me.

It was a good conversation and I felt better. I promised to do my best to be the best father to Joshua and walk in love towards her as her ex-husband. I knew in my heart and head this would be a big challenge for me because of the opposite views on parenting which we each held, but I was committed to it. After that phone call, I jumped back into the training thinking that I had worked through the toughest part of it. I was in for a surprise! I had no idea that one of the next segments of the training was going to change my life forever.

We did an exercise where the lights were turned down and mellow music was playing in the background. The room was quiet, and everyone had their own space. The trainer asked us to look at our childhood, remembering what it was like growing up. For me this request brought up violent memories of my Father and vivid images of the rage that would build up in his eyes before he would explode and start hitting me.

With the music playing and the general mood of the room, I got caught up going back in time and being with my father on the day he committed suicide. It was like I knew he was going to do it. The location of this 'vision' was my grandmother's house where my father had grown up and the actual house where he killed himself in his old bedroom. The imagery was so real to me. I was with him outside his house trying to talk him out of killing himself. I walked next to him, desperately trying to talk him out of committing suicide. I saw the vivid images of us walking along the sidewalk into the house and up the black and white painted spiral stairs to his room, all the while trying to talk him out of doing it. He got to his room and grabbed a gun. I grabbed the gun from him to stop him. The next thing I know we are out on the sidewalk again, and I'm having the same conversation with him trying to talk him down. We went through the exact same thing again, all the way up to his room where I grabbed the gun and once again stopped him from pulling the trigger. Then it's back on the sidewalk again to go through the same cycle all the way up to his room, but this time there is one exception. This time I don't get there fast enough. I don't grab the gun before it goes off and my father kills himself.

You can imagine the intensity of this exercise. I broke down. (Fortunately, the music was now louder). I cried and grieved like I had never seen a man do. I

grieved and wept with a release of pain that had been hidden deep within me for a long time. It was so intense that I didn't know if I was going to live through it. My nose released so much that it took boxes of Kleenex to clean up. Then after all the tears and mess were past, I realized that someone was praying for me. Things were calming down. I felt this peace come over me that was beyond words. I felt very light. The core of my anger was pain, and the pain was gone. I had never felt anything like this.

The next part of the exercise was to forgive my Father for leaving; for giving up and abandoning his family and abandoning me. So, I spoke to him and forgave him. I came out of that training a different person; I would never go back to being that hurt, angry person again. Don't get me wrong, I still have one of those type "A" personalities, and I'm still Irish and can be a bit hot headed, but nothing like it had been before Momentus. Now I had all the tools needed to keep me from going back to be the angry person I was before grieving the loss and my father and forgiving him for abandoning me and the rest of the family.

One big lesson I learned from those four days of Momentus was that behind every man filled with anger is a wounded soul that God wants to heal. Find the pain, heal the pain and a person can overcome anything. The human heart can sustain unbelievable amounts of pain if it's allowed a place to grieve and heal the heart. Like a wound to the body, if its cleaned and exposed to the open air it heals very fast. I learned that my heart was similar. If I choked off my pain and swallowed it, pretending it didn't exist, then it would just stay inside me and fester and continue to rot, manifesting itself as anger. If I acknowledged my pain and brought it out in the open and dealt with it by grieving properly, the healing would start. Grieving and mourning are all a part of that.

There's an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

A right time for birth and another for death,
A right time to plant and another to reap,
A right time to kill and another time to heal,
A right time to destroy and another to construct,
A right time to cry and another to laugh,

A right time to lament and another time to cheer.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-4

God knew there would be times in our lives where we would need to lament, to grieve and mourn. Through God's love for me, through the Momentum training, and through all that I learned from Paul my counselor, my life was changed in a powerful way that weekend. So much of what I had learned contradicted everything I was taught growing up, such as 'men don't cry'! In my family, even women and children hardly ever cried - - - we were tough! I now knew that was not the way to deal with pain.

I could feel that my anger was gone, and I felt lighter and freer than I ever remember, but I still needed more understanding. I turned to the Bible and studied the life of a man named David. I knew he experienced a lot of pain. His first wife turned against him. The king he served tried to kill him. His best friend died in battle. One of his children died, and one of his sons turned against him and tried to kill him. All this even though he was a warrior, a King, and a tough guy. What's interesting about David though is that he knew the power of accepting those times in life where mourning or grieving were needed, and he didn't run away from them. He accepted the pain and felt it deeply. He also turned to God as he mourned his losses and finally became released from his pain. Then he would get up and live again; get up and dance again. He was able to do that because he gave himself the time to grieve and mourn.

I've come a long way in my ideas on grieving. I now believe that it is life giving to mourn. That strength and power is added to one's life when one can grieve. I have no doubts that a person can overcome any pain if they allow themselves to mourn and let it go.

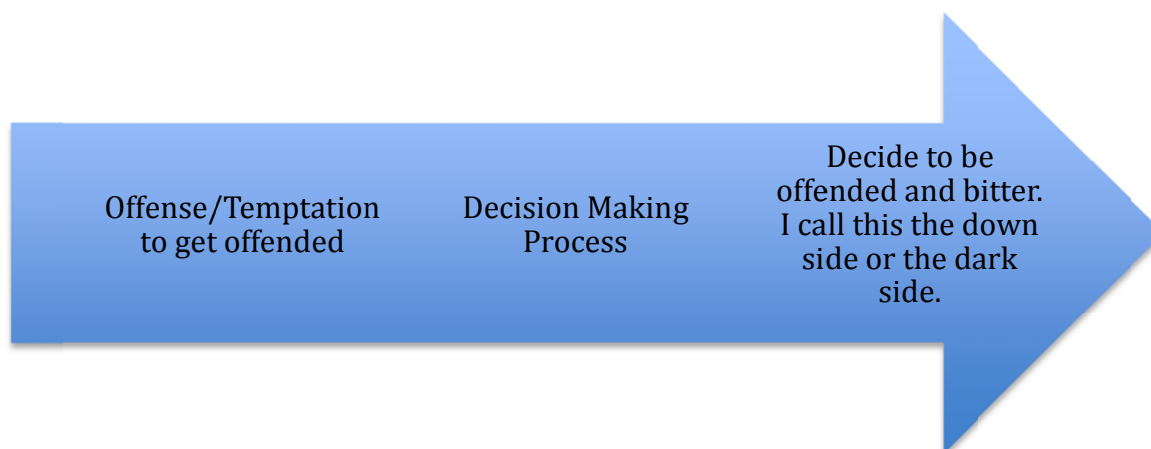
Chapter 13: Judgment and Revenge

It's funny that before taking the four-day Momentum training I had studied forgiveness and taught others on the subject many times. I had also worked on my anger, but that weekend caused me, or more accurately, invited me, into studying an entirely different level or depth of forgiveness.

From that weekend's experiences, I knew that I always had a choice to make. I didn't HAVE to forgive those I felt had wronged me. I didn't HAVE to let go of my anger, but I knew that if I didn't choose to do so, I would most likely be risking my relationship with my son. I knew that I couldn't live with myself if that happened, so my choice was clear.

The custody battle and everything connected to it was like walking into an x-ray room where my entire heart and mind were being screened for bitterness, unhealthy anger and withheld forgiveness. Once the x-ray detected the problems within me, I was invited to let them go. I also learned tools to help me do this more effectively, with less kicking and screaming in the process. The more often I did it, the easier it became for me. This resulted in a deeper understanding of how to best maintain peace inside; being aware of any anger, grudges, or offenses that were stuck in me, and then acting to calibrate my mind with my heart so that they were connected in a way that filtered out any offenses or bitterness.

I learned that it was time for me to become more acutely aware of my thought patterns and the judgments I was making about others and myself. We all make judgments every day, but I had to key in on the decision-making process that I was employing that usually resulted in my feeling offended in some way, and from there it often morphed into anger and bitterness. After taking Momentum, I no longer wanted to go to that place; that place that I called the downside or dark side of decision-making.

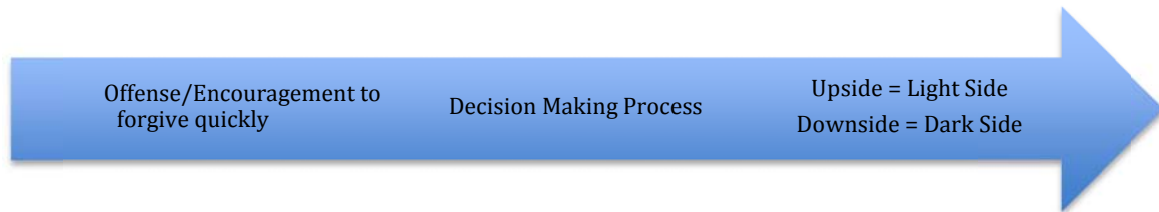


I identified that the downside of my decision-making process occurs when I get to the point where I'm offended at myself or someone else and then allow that emotion to turn into downside judgments in which I'm thinking poorly of others; allowing my mind to dwell on thinking the worst of someone. I recognized in myself that this led me to thinking of ways to seek revenge on the person who I viewed as wronging me. Revenge is a powerful emotion and can take on many forms, some of which are:

- Anger: respond with physical force; fight
- Vocal: confront with anger in an abusive way
- Non-confrontational: gossip, bad mouth behind backs
- Or the worst one - religious revenge; when someone offends another, saying "God Bless You" to their face while looking for revenge behind their backs.

The first three I've been guilty of at various times in my life. The fourth one I don't have enough patience for, and I dislike it so much that I don't even go there. My awareness of this dark side reinforced my resolve to stay clear of it. This meant that when I got to the point of being offended and quickly went to making a judgment, I had to grab my brain and change the direction of my thinking and

instead make the decision to quickly forgive. Once I did that, I was on the upside or the light side of the decision-making process.



It's clear to me now that I am the only one responsible for the decisions I make, and it's a better life for me if I stay in the light. Staying in the light for me means that when I find myself offended by someone, I step back and take a hard, responsible look at it. This gives me time to step back from the trivial things; letting them go and not allowing them to even irritate me. I proactively let it go before it becomes an issue on the "dark side." What this meant was that I had to work on breaking the mental habits that I had slipped into that allowed me to so quickly get angry and ready for a fight.

Here's an example of one habit I had to break. Traffic in the Seattle area when I lived there was awful, and I hated it when people cut me off. There were times I would yell at people and just have my blood boiling. I had decided based on their driving habits that they were the rudest, most selfish, self-centered, dangerous, crazy people on earth. So, you could say it would get me mad and planted on the dark side of the decision-making process.

To break this habit, I started doing something differently whenever I found myself bogged down in traffic. I used my imagination to pretend that I had heat-

seeking missiles mounted on the side of my van. Then, when a crazy driver cut me off, I would push a special button on my steering wheel that released one of the heat-seeking missiles. The missile weaved its way through the gridlocked traffic, seeking its target. Then when it found the offender, it would oh so gently push the car to the side of the road and blow it up; without hurting anyone else of course. This seemed to work. I would feel relieved and be able to enjoy my commute without cussing someone out. I practiced this until I became totally sure of my conviction that this new, light side decision-making pattern of mine could withstand the pressures of wicked traffic. After more time passed, I decided to unload the missiles; no more heat seeking missiles were needed. Instead of launching missiles, I would pray for each crazy driver that offended me. I prayed for many things:

- For them not to hurt anyone
- For them to be convinced to slow down
- For them and their families, in the event they were facing an emergency
- For them to consider the welfare of others
- And even that they would get stopped by the police

I learned that for me to stay in the light, I needed to pray for those drivers who were driving me crazy, and then just let it go! The proactive nature of letting go is a beautiful thing.

Another form of staying in the light when I got offended occurred during the times I couldn't let it go and it was a situation that I needed to talk with someone to settle it. That was the case with the custody battle. I was being openly attacked with untruths and out-right lies. On the one hand I needed to learn to not over-react when I heard the accusations, to not take it personally, and to not respond with hurt or anger. Instead, I needed to determine with great resolve to fight to be the best father to my son. The way to accomplish that was to be clear in my decisions and to respond to all attacks on my character with truth; in a nutshell, to stay in peace. To me that meant making the conscious decision to stay in the light side of the decision-making process, and not fall into the old traps that had me going to the dark side. That wasn't going to help with the custody battle.

Chapter 14: Expectations

The custody battle, the Momentous Training, my personal studies in forgiveness, the counseling sessions and parenting classes, my Men's' group, and the Divorce group I attended were all tools to help me change. The surprising thing to me was that they worked. I became more and more aware of the huge changes that were taking place inside of me; my mind and heart were being rewired and that was a good thing.

My initial purpose for going through everything was to be there for my son, Joshua. I wanted to be the best father that I could be and was determined to do better than my own father. I recognized that my thinking had to change, and that was being accomplished by the "rewiring" that was taking place. One major thing I learned about and that needed rewiring was my expectations.

Expectations are a big deal. Many times, I have had such lofty expectations only to have them fall apart. My marriage would be high on that list. I thought that I had gotten my life together enough by the time I got married that I would succeed. I thought I would have a successful marriage and be a great dad with 6 kids or more. When it became clear I was getting divorced, I was crushed. The day I knew it was over and divorce was coming, Lynn and Joshua met me at a mall. I was sitting on a bench and Joshua come running up to me and put his little arms around me for the biggest hug. That hug came to serve as my anchor as I met the rough waters ahead. I often would recall that moment, and it would give me the strength to forge through the painful custody battle.

That was the day all my expectations for a good marriage and family life were crushed. After that, I needed to shift my expectations of what things would look like after the divorce. It was going to take some time and effort to figure that out. It was hard for me to change my expectations because I tended to set them in stone. Then, when they didn't come to pass, it was like all that stone fell on top of my head and crushed me. A lot had to change for me regarding my view of expectations.

I had an expectation that I would marry a Christian woman, be married to her for life and would raise a large family together. Well, I did marry a Christian woman, but that was the only part of my expectations that came to pass.

The reality was, my wife had seen some bad examples of Christians abusing their place in the Church and decided she wanted nothing to do with Christianity; not for herself and not for Joshua. If I was going to continue to share a life with her, I was going to have to step away from Christianity and follow her into the New Age philosophies she was choosing to adopt. I wasn't willing to do that, so our marriage came to an end. As my marriage was falling apart, I realized that my expectations related to it were bursting all around me, just like balloons popping. Looking back, it was like there was 4 big expectations or 4 big balloons that popped:

1. My marriage/my wife
2. Myself
3. Church
4. God

The #1 expectation to pop we just covered. Next came the #2 expectation, which involved me. The expectation I had of myself was huge, and it was one in which I had a good family life and was successful in whatever I chose to do. I was determined to do so much better than my father because I had learned so much from his mistakes that I was confident I wouldn't repeat them. When my marriage ended, this expectation was shattered; just like a big balloon popping.

When the reality of the divorce hit me, I was so hard on myself for having failed. You could have accused me of anything, and I wouldn't have fought it. I was too busy beating myself up. I couldn't believe it was happening to me; I hadn't seen it coming. I was miserable and confused, not knowing how it all came to pass. If it hadn't been for Joshua, things would have been a lot worse for me. I realized that if I didn't wake up and fight for my rights as a father, I would lose my place in my son's life,

The #3 balloon of an expectation to pop for me was the Church. I guess I was expecting more help in way of support from my local church. Big pop of balloon --- I found that divorce is something many churches don't want to acknowledge. Even if

they do acknowledge it, few are equipped to help people through it. This was back in the mid-1990's so hopefully things have changed since then, but divorce was not something that the churches wanted to deal with.

It seemed like going through a divorce as a Christian was like having leprosy. Not many people wanted to be around you. Thankfully, I did have good people who helped me through this process; I wasn't totally reliant just on members of my church. My support network included both Christians and non-Christians, but this is where my expectations had to be totally adjusted. I had expected the support from the Church, but as it turned out, I never really knew where or from whom the blessings would flow. The only thing I knew is that if I were to expect all blessings to flow through one church or one group of people only exclusively, then I would be a fool and end up disappointed.

The #4 balloon of an expectation to pop was my expectation of God. My expectation of Him was that He wasn't going to let anything like this happen to me. Well, it did happen, and I was mad; so angry with God for letting me down. My anger got so intense at times that I would go into the woods where no one could hear me, and I would get very loud with God. I would say things to Him that I could not repeat to most people; especially to church people. I did things I would repent for afterwards, but I don't honestly think any of my anger that I vented and threw towards God was anything that really bothered Him. I knew He could handle it. It came down to the question of how could He allow this to happen? It was never on my radar that something like this would happen to me. It wasn't a pretty sight as I dealt with that expectation exploding.

How could God allow the divorce to happen in the first place and how could He allow things to get to the point that I was facing a custody battle to keep my son? How could He allow all this to happen to me? He knew I didn't like being falsely accused of things. Where was the justice? I couldn't believe He was allowing me to go through such a painful process. This was a huge expectation balloon to pop! It's easy to see how I was feeling totally defeated when all these expectations failed to materialize. When I finally accepted the loss and asked God questions like "Why?" and "What's next?" that the answers started coming. Concerning the first two

expectations listed above, my marriage and myself, he basically showed me that Lynn and I had jumped the gun getting married when we did. Both of us had gone through a lot in the years leading up to our marriage and, although we didn't realize it at the time, we needed healing before taking on the responsibilities of marriage. For Lynn, she needed healing from being exposed to Christian leaders that were abusing their power, and for me, I had never been totally healed from my Father's suicide and the resulting forgiveness and anger issues that were unresolved for me.

The #3 expectation was of the Church. The thing I needed to learn from that was there are good and evil people everywhere. Most churches seem to have their share of both. Just because someone says they're a Christian doesn't mean anything. I had to learn not to set my expectations based solely on whether someone said they were a Christian or not. If I managed that expectation around the Church, I would avoid the disappointments that I had so often experienced. I needed to keep my expectations rooted in truth and use discernment.

I've shared how mad I was at God for allowing me to go through the whole painful process, and the #4 expectation was difficult for me because my expectation was that God should rescue me fast and show me how to get out of the whole miserable situation, but that was not to be. What He did show me was that sometimes in life I needed to go through very painful experiences that didn't have a quick fix. This case was one of those times. God sees the beginning and the end. He knew I needed to be healed a lot. He knew I needed to learn a lot. He knew that if I didn't go through the Momentous training, I would not learn how to grieve. If I did not learn to grieve, I would not learn how to handle pain. If I did not learn how to deal with pain, I would not learn to deal with anger and life would not be enjoyed.

At the time of the custody battle, I had a successful business as a builder and remodeling contractor. I was building banks and doing residential construction, juggling ten jobs at the same time. I was on my way to being big. I was going to be a millionaire, a big shot. If I hadn't been forced by the courts to go through all the counseling, trainings, and anger management classes, I never would have taken that time. I was too busy for that. God didn't care about my plans to be a big shot; He just wanted to heal me and teach me how to be the best father to Joshua.

Chapter 15: Boundaries

The subject of boundaries was another big lesson for me to learn as the rewiring of my thinking was taking place. I needed to get strong in recognizing the need for boundaries and setting them appropriately.

Given the divorce and custody battle, I had more than a few opportunities in this regard. Once, when I was looking for legal help I met a guy who ran a group called “Fathers’ Rights.” Seattle’s court system was notorious for its bias against men, and this man had decided that fathers needed a collective voice to help fight the bias. It was common and accepted knowledge that the courts favored women and it was rare that they didn’t come out of a custody battle with all the parental rights. There were plenty of women’s support groups around that helped women to do just that.

When I was going through my divorce, the situation had risen to a crisis level in Seattle. It was common to hear of cases where a man in a domestic dispute would murder his wife and then commit suicide. When I would hear of these instances I could relate in some ways to the men. I understood the extreme frustration in having your children taken away from you. I knew what it was like to have a bunch of false accusations spoken against me and then to have my parental rights taken away based on those falsehoods. I understood the frustration with the court system that would assume a man to be guilty until he was able to prove himself innocent and a capable father. Given the way the courts operated, this took a lot of time, effort and money. The entire system was stacked against the fathers, and some fathers would just snap under the pressure and go crazy.

I don’t know how crazy some of these men were before entering the divorce process, but from my experience, I believe the process was enough to drive a person crazy if you allowed it. It was a choice; even then I understood how a person could lose all sanity in a situation like that. I made the determination that I wasn’t going to go there.

The “Fathers Rights” movement, to balance things out so that fathers had equal rights, went too far. They would get into bad-mouthing women and make the women out to always be the bad guy. It was like these men swallowed the bitter pill, and the bitterness was infecting every aspect of their lives. Even the ones that would never physically do anything to hurt the mother of their children would still be out to manipulate or just verbally beat down their wives any time they could. I knew I needed some legal support to go through my divorce, but I also knew that I needed to stay away from these guys. That was one of the first boundaries I identified for myself: stay away from bitter men clubs; they weren’t the place for me.

There was also a political issue in this. The King County Family Court system was known for being biased not only against men but also against Christians. Because of this, some fathers were taking their cases to court to fight for change and for men’s equality in child custody issues. While I was in total agreement that this was a valid and necessary effort, it was another boundary I had to set for myself. I couldn’t get involved. I needed to stay focused on my son and our situation. I realized that I didn’t have the personality type to take on all that without losing my focus. I had enough challenges to deal with without adding that to my plate. I decided early on to stay out of any groups like the Fathers’ Rights movement and just to stay focused on what I had to do to get my own parental rights back. I set that boundary for myself.

The court had taken all my rights away except for supervised visitation. I was fighting for either full custody or joint custody, so the next boundary I had to set was with lawyers. My first lawyer was a Christian. I soon recognized that he was also a wimp, not the fighter I needed on my side to go against my former wife who was a fighter. Wimp vs. Fighter was not going to work out to my advantage, and I quickly realized it. The only thing my first lawyer accomplished in court was to get me pigeonholed. That’s when a judge puts you down in a very low category that you must dig out from under. It wasn’t a great position to be in. At that point, I would have been better off with no lawyer. My boundary was to fire him, and then to tell him he should not even think about getting his final payment since he had done more harm than good. After that, I hired a female lawyer who was tough as nails.

In addition, she had extensive experience and knew the law well enough to be able to anticipate what the judge was going to do so that I would not get blindsided.

Another boundary I had to make regarded time. Running a business and having appointments most nights, meant I had no time to waste. In the initial stages of the divorce and custody battle I wasted a lot of time on self-pity and bitterness. No more. I set that boundary and didn't cross it.

I also had to address some emotional and spiritual boundaries. This was essential if I was going to take care of myself, which I knew was important.

During the custody battle Lynn and I had some hard conversations to work through, most of which were on the phone, and I had to figure out how to have them without getting upset. I realized that we had fallen into a pattern in our conversations. She would criticize or blame me for something, and then I would go off and get upset and angry and lose focus of what I was trying to accomplish in the conversation. They weren't productive conversations, and once I identified the pattern, I knew I needed to do something to stop it.

My solution was to rehearse how I wanted the phone call to go by writing it all out ahead of time. By putting myself through this exercise, to the point of writing down how I thought Lynn would respond to a point I'd make and my response to her, I would be able to avoid crossing the boundary and getting upset. The boundary I set was to recognize when I was getting angry and losing focus and call a stop to the conversation. I would tell her that we could continue another time when I was feeling up to it. I took myself out of the situation, so I didn't end up somewhere that I didn't want to be.

That was a boundary that I have continued to use for many years, in business and in my personal life. The old me used to think I had to push through a conversation to finish it, even when it wasn't going well. By setting that boundary, I had more success in discussing difficult topics.

The next boundary I needed to practice setting was around emotions. Through counseling and the Momentum training I learned I have more than two emotions. I also learned that a person could let go of pain, and that no matter how

much emotional pain one suffered, it was possible to overcome it by allowing the time and space to grieve, to feel, to weep, and to finally let go of the pain.

It's wild that anyone can go through the worst of traumas in life and then rebound if they are given the space to grieve the loss. I experienced the need to grieve more than once during the custody battle. I was experiencing a lot of pain. I remember once when I was building a bank in downtown Seattle I had a rough day, and I had to work late installing cabinets. I told the rest of the crew to leave, and then I locked the door and stuck my head into a cabinet and cried my heart out. I cried like someone had ripped off my arm. Then, after a bit, I washed up, cranked the music on and danced back to work. I set the boundary of locking people out so that I had the space to grieve. Once I was able to grieve, then I was good to go back to work and feeling good. I called those days going through the divorce and custody battle my hell days of Seattle, but the lessons I learned would be with me forever.

Chapter 16: Wrap It Up --- From Anger to Peace!

Search me, O God, and know my heart: test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalms 139:23-24

The journey from anger to peace encompassed so many things for me. When I was young, I didn't really care if I was angry or not; in fact, I was very comfortable being angry. It was only when I experienced real peace that I wanted more of it and less of the unhealthy anger I had been living and breathing for my whole life. Continuing the destructive journey of my teenage years was only going to get me killed. Everyone, including myself, knew it. God rescued me from that when I threw out that most holy of prayers, "God, if you're real get me the hell out of here!"

He kept me alive up to that point, and after that prayer, I started to see how He was working to save my life. Being as hardheaded as I am, it took some time. God is my heavenly Father; the only consistent Father I have known in my life. He has always endeavored to purge me of bitterness and anger and fill me with peace, the kind of peace that allows for true freedom within. There have been times in my life that I have totally embraced this process and there have been other times, even lasting days, when I have been totally stuck. Despite where I was in my life, my heavenly Father never changed His mind, His commitment, or His focus. I'm alive because of that.

In my younger years I found God's healing power, and I needed a lot of it. In my years in Seattle, which as I mentioned I refer to as the "Hell days of Seattle," I can now see as the years that God brought me to a deeper understanding of forgiveness. I was motivated into exploring that deeper level of forgiveness for a purpose, and that reason was my son, Joshua.

What I didn't realize at the time was that my heavenly Father had his own purpose. He wanted me to get healed in a deeper way. He wanted me to get trained and educated in a deeper way. He wanted me to learn how to stand in the face of any accusation, to learn how to stand while continuing to forgive, to stand and continue to be at peace, to walk in patience, to love and to know without any doubt

that He would take care of me. He wanted me to stand and know that I had been forgiven and that I could freely forgive others if they had wronged me.

I also think God had another purpose in allowing me to go through such intense training on the journey from anger to peace. He wanted to show that if I could make the journey from anger to peace, anyone could. Why? It's because I was the most angry and unforgiving person. If I were to look back when I was in school, there's no doubt that had we been asked to identify the angriest and most unforgiving kid in the school, the unanimous vote would have been for me.

In adulthood I was not considered the quickest learner or most flexible or easygoing person. I was not viewed to be someone who was quick to embrace change or personal growth. If anything, I was very slow to change. On top of that, I'm stubborn and the saying that the "Irish skull is one quarter inch thicker than the average human skull" has been brought to my attention more than once.

I think God has a sense of humor and likes to take the person who is weakest in a specific area of their lives, heal them and then see them go on to lead others along the healing path. I'm certain he has gotten more than a few laughs as I've made my journey from anger to peace. If I can do it, anyone can. There are no excuses. God's grace and power are available, and He can help anyone to transform himself or herself. He transformed me, and I know that He can transform anyone. I also know that I can teach anyone the process. That's God's sense of humor.

It is 2019 now, and it has been many years since those days in Seattle when I learned so many of the deeper lessons on forgiveness. I have been teaching on the subject for over 25 years, and I would be a liar if I said I never get angry or never deal with people that are hard to forgive. However, my years in Seattle and circumstances I have been in my entire life have taught me to keep going back to forgiveness to keep my heart and mind cleansed from bitterness and destructive anger. That is where I know I'll always find peace.

I'm a certified Life Coach and have taken my teaching series on forgiveness and transformed it into training on "From Anger to Peace." It's becoming clear to me that I will be spending the rest of my life helping others navigate their own

journeys. My new business and website are called “Wings of Freedom Coaching” and will be coming out soon.

As we come to the close of this book, I must confess that I’ve had a bit of stress about how to end my story. Do I have to have perfect life at this point? Am I supposed to have perfect days with no stress and perfect peace? My life is good, and in general I live in peace, but I still have challenges and still must return to the basics every day. I look at it this way; I’m no different than an acre of New England forest. If someone wanted to transform that forest into a nice green lawn, it would take some effort. First, there would be a lot of work clearing trees, rocks, and stumps. Then the ground would need to be leveled, and the grass planted. Once that was done and the grass was established, there would be the simple maintenance of the lawn; the mowing, raking and fertilizing. None of these tasks are difficult, but the work must be done if the lawn is going to thrive.

I’m like that lawn. The trees, rocks and stumps have been cleared, and a robust growth of healthy grass has been established. Now I’m in the maintenance part of my life with ambitions to keep that lawn healthy and strong. I want to continue to study and teach about my journey as I learned to forgive and to let go of the anger in my life so that I could find peace.

Presently I’m starting a study on what it looks like to express healthy, productive anger, while at the same time walking in forgiveness and staying in peace.

I’m so thankful to be married to a beautiful woman who has a special needs daughter, both of whom have taught me so much. I’m also thankful for my son who was my inspiration for the book and who has helped me edit it along the way. I’m very thankful that he is so much smarter than his father!

The adventure continues....” From Anger to Peace.”

To Learn more about Michael Grady and his Life Coaching Services,

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