



A Monologue of Life

The Search for Meaning and Love

John H. King

A Monologue of Life: A Search for Love and Meaning

by John H. King

"We're on this planet for too short a time. And at the end of the day, what's more important? Knowing that a few meaningless figures balanced—or knowing that you were the person you wanted to be?" — Sophie Kinsella

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

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17,300 words

Dedicated To
The person I finally found myself to be

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Introduction

A movie can be made out of the most ordinary life without dramatization, without padding the record with the miraculous and the mysterious because each of us has a story to share that comes with its own adventures and cliffhangers.

It is the story of how each one found his or her self seeking to discover their own *raison d'être*,

It is a story about a quest for being, for finding happiness, not as a thing in itself, but the peaceful reward for finding one's self. It is finding family, belonging, and not things. It is finding meaning without possessions. It is discovering that neither poverty nor wealth can deny us true worth. Status and station cannot prevent us from finding love.

This is the story of learning what makes *me* a person. This is not self-reliance but self-discovery.

And it is exciting. It is exciting to tell and exciting to hear. It is exciting because it is unique and yet common. It is filled with humor and sorrow, laughter and tears. We can relate to another's story and at the same time thank God it wasn't us. And we can burn with jealousy and at the same time contentment as we hear the places another has gone and the things they have experienced.

Charlotte Eriksson,¹ Songwriter. Recording Artist.
Writer & Author, says it for me:²

"Don't try to present your art by making other people read or hear or see or touch it; make them feel it. Wear your art like your heart on your sleeve and keep it alive by making people feel a little better. Feel a little lighter. Create art in order for yourself to become yourself and let your very existence be your song, your poem, your story. Let your very identity be your book. Let the way people say your name sound like the sweetest melody."

I love to picture myself visiting a nursing home, sitting next to some sweet, forgotten octogenarian and letting them tell me their story.

"... a story comes alive when it's being told.... It might not always be easy, but it will always be beautiful." — Charlotte Eriksson

I, then, imagine myself writing it down for the world to read. Their lives are the lost histories. Theirs is the link in the chain of generations of relationships that would not have held together and carried any significance without them.

Even a president has had a supporting cast of forgotten extras who collectively held his or her world together to lift them to that pinnacle of success. As I said in another place:

We praise the leaders, the few who speak of adventure and success. But it is the unspoken masses in audience who are the real achievers. No president stands unless there is a nation behind him. We are the little people. We are the oysters that turn sand to pearl for important others to wear in pompous

display.

This is the *real* story, the story of anyone's life—Ansel Adams' *black-and-white*'s in words.

And, in particular, this is my quest for love and meaning. This is my story told with brevity but with all the heart I can write it in.

John

BEFORE THERE WERE GIRLS

A SEARCH FOR LOVE

"But behind all your stories is always your mother's story,
because hers is where yours begins." — Mitch Albom, *For One
More Day*

MOST of my childhood was lived outside her oversight. Playing near the corner, a half of a city block away out of line of sight or in school each week day, she didn't know exactly what was happening and probably didn't give any thought to her little boy's exact whereabouts.

A few times at home when mom was around, she wielded a belt or was yelling or in military fashion overseeing some cleanup I had to do. Once she threatened to call the police on me if I didn't obey. Her patience often ran thin when I was recovering from some lung infection or asthma and I wouldn't lie still for just one more week of recovery. Or she reminded me of how terrible a hospital visit would be if I didn't take my meds.

And yet, I knew she loved me. And how is that? I took no college course in domestic relationships or the psychology of motherhood. I attended no seminar on 'parental missteps and the hidden qualities of love' nor a course on the new science of the bio-genetics of parental behavior. The subject of 'mom' never came up in college nor do I recall any classmate particularly interested in talking about what their mother did or didn't do to give them a sense of her love—or lack of it.

She made us, my two sisters, my brother and me, go to church. She made us clean the house. She made us get to bed on time and get up for school. She made us do a lot of stuff. That's what mothers do and that's what most kids resist. She took the fall in the imagined injustices of childhood when we needed to blame a parent for being cruel. In good-parent-bad-parent, dad was seldom around to scold anyone.

The point might be made by the average observer that when the facts are in, mom showed some lack of love. When dad died, the

neighbors took up a collection for his funeral while no sympathy was offered mom. She was thought to be domineering and inconsiderate of his interests. But they were simply wrong about her. They didn't know my mother.

But I knew mom loved me. How did I know? After 20 years living at home under her roof, I just knew. Notwithstanding it is possible to nitpick those pieces of her life that might allegedly contradict this conviction, I knew her and I knew her as mom. And I knew her as a mother who loved...me!

There are courses in theology, metaphysics, philosophy, psychology and the natural sciences that allege what God is all about in religion and what makes a good mother good. (Understand that for a child the two are inseparable parts of his or her reality.) But make no mistake about it: determining the depth of a relationship or the level of another's love is always and only a matter of trust (faith), hope(anticipation) and love(affection)—not science.

It is as true about God as it was about mom. [I Corinthians 13:12].³

A MOTHER'S FAITH

Trust love!

As a child I would have been incapable of distinguishing between my mother's faith and mine. In spiritual matters I remained unweaned still in need of the nourishment of her convictions. My earliest understanding of who God is came from her. My picture of mother looked inspiringly a lot like God in those first years—mom equals God, as it is with everyone for good or bad.

Dr Seaman's tells us: "A child, even an infant, learns a language of relationships long before it learns to speak a language, a language of trust or mistrust, fear or trustfulness, reliability or unpredictability, a sense of being able to count on their significant others or they can't count on anyone".⁴

Mom's unconditional love suggested the same of God. I watched her one winter give away one of my snowsuits with leggings and boots to a lad of similar age and size as I. He was walking by our home in the cold of a Buffalo, New York winter wearing only a light fall jacket. He was underdressed for the weather until he met mom... Until he met God!? [Matthew 25:40;⁵ Luke 14:13;⁶ James 1:27]⁷

I am recalling also when mom and dad co-signed so an elderly couple could afford a new car. (I knew no more about the arrangement.) The old folk defaulted on the loan. So, my parents' concept of grace and mercy needed to mix in a little judgment and wisdom but in its purest form it represented a world of caring about others that taught me volumes about the preacher's talk on divine grace.

Then there was the time my parents invited little Johnny (I was big Johnny because I was a bit taller) and his mom and younger brother to live with us until old doc Quinn discovered they were Tuberculosis carriers and we had to say good-bye.

How many people went through our kitchen through the years!
Our front door was never locked. [2 Corinthians 4:6]⁸

But home, family, and parents do not raise wonderful memories and warm fuzzy feelings for everyone. One sister to this day refers to herself as the black sheep of the family even though she has inherited mom's gift for giving. Sadly, some, like my sister, have been misinformed about who they are because they have been misinformed about who God is. For some, the filter of the heart has had to process pain along with the hugs and it emotionally represented a fusion of matter and antimatter (what should and should not matter) that shattered their understanding of who God is.

But my problems were physical, asthma primarily, and grandma joined mom in representing a love that stretched natural affection to the limit of caring. Mom and grandma took turns around the clock at my bedside changing the warmed diapers on my Vicks-greased chest and observing the slow up and down of my breathing through each prayerful watch. How like God was that!

I awoke from a comatose sleep to breathe in deeply the peace of another sunny day for play. Mom's answered prayer was teaching me not only about faith but now something about hope.

A MOTHER'S HOPES

The expectations of love are endless.

MOM's favorite verse was Psalms 138:8: The LORD will perfect that which concerns me. She didn't know the Psalmist meant something else: that God would be on retainer for him, a legal defender, in the court of public opinion to vindicate [Ps 57:2 NIV] his honor and protect him from plotting tongues and the real dangers that ensue.⁹

She was like the preacher who had the right idea but the wrong text. [Genesis 31:49]¹⁰ To her it meant God would watch over her children when she no longer could and He had designs upon their lives. It was her hope. Nothing that ever happened—and on the West Side of Buffalo NY a lot happened—could contradict this great dream. Nothing ever dimmed her expectations regarding my siblings and me.

Great expectations are reasonable when a relationship is built on trust. A parent's faith in God translates into all the possibilities for a child's future. A child can trust herself or himself to their future because they trust a parent. They can step boldly out of their dreams with an anticipation of greater things that can be. I think the modern phrase is: Good Job! We start while our little ones are too young to have any notion of all the potential we see in them.

A mother's hope for good things that lay ahead for her children is more than crossed fingers. (And crossing the fingers is not the Biblical idea, either.) It is not the voice of the cowardly lion: I do believe, I do, I do, I do. Hope is the ability of a parent's heart to see something in a child's play that is a promise of life-fulfilling things to come.

The darker the night of hope, the brighter shines the stars of promise. Even in an emotionally crippling poverty there is the hope of finding a shining nugget of a golden tomorrow as our children's inheritance. In the din of a thousand complaints, hope

shall never be muffled into silence.

Simply said: The more we need to hope, the brighter it shines, the more it is valued and the more we invest of our feelings and thoughts in its promise.

"Only in the darkness can you see the stars" - Martin Luther King, Jr..

I am so glad mom never lost her trust in God. And she never lost her faith in us. Both she and dad lived for us. They exercised an excited anticipation that praised the simplest of our achievements. They bragged on us, as the saying goes. They made me believe in myself which was no small task since I am prone to pessimism and low self-esteem thanks to childhood asthma. They, like God did to Abraham, made me look up into the night sky of my life and count the stars if I dared. As Sarah Williams said it:

"I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night".¹¹

And like my brother after me, I stepped out into the unknown. I took a chance on tomorrow because mom and dad believed in me.

We might say that trust (faith) and expectation (hope) are two sides to the same coin. These are inseparable parts of a growing closeness that inevitably redefines affection in terms of a love reaching for the divine.

And hope does not put us to shame,
because God's love has been poured out
into our hearts through the Holy Spirit,
who has been given to us..¹²

A MOTHER'S SMILE

There is nothing as emotionally healing as a mother's smile.

THE story of a mother's love is summed up in that first smile welcoming a newborn into the world. It is captured in the memories of countless husbands who have been privileged to watch her while she tenderly cradled a new life in her arms.

"This same unchanging smile had melted men's hearts for countless generations. The first time a man sees a woman look at his child in exactly that way something trembles inside him. Men have seen it from piled pillows in rooms smelling faintly of perfume, in night nurseries, in many a comfortable nest which they have fought to build to shield their own"- Jennifer Worth.¹³

My introduction to—that first meeting with—my sons are three secrets I could never tell because the words are not there. What I felt, how I felt, or the experience of being reminded that fatherhood is for real is unexplainable to the non-initiate. But I remember my wife's smile: tired, relaxed, and finally restful after the exertion of those unending hours before—of which no man knows.

Her smile was the reward of her love and I have observed this even through the years, and through her tears, as our sons learned the more painful lessons of life. The faint impression of that smile could always be seen as a promise of better times to come.

There is nothing as emotionally healing as a mother's smile.

Nothing, too, may seem more puzzling, like seeing the sun shining during a rainstorm, as a mother's smile during those painful times when it seemed so out of place—and yet so inevitable. For the children—and note this indelibly—her smile reveals something of her character that says that her love is unconditional, non-negotiable, and forever.

I remember mom's smile. I remember her laughter, how temporary her anger but how lasting her warmth. Discipline was a

fleeting thing but her care went on and on even after I took my own family and left for parts unknown.

But you see: trust and hope are what hold up the two corners of that smile.

This might sound like a piece of psychological craziness but give it a moment to register if you must. What kind of mother's love is it that does not hope for the best for her children? That does not accept suffering on behalf of their best interests? That does not love them through the childish pranks and misdemeanors with a forgiving embrace? That does not trust her children—trust God[?]¹⁴—and believe in their ultimate success in life? How else shall I say it?

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.¹⁴

But there are other signs of a mother's love. There is more to this story: if this kind-of love is real, how can God, the author of all love, be far off.

I AM MY MOTHER

Like mother...like son.

In a souvenir shop in romantic Vermont while strolling through time with my wife, I came across a simple mirror for sale. The plaque affixed at the bottom caught my eye:

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, I am My Mother after all.

It is unfortunate that mothers are such ordinary people—easily ignored, seldom sought after for their wisdom (except in our pain), left to work behind the scenes of life doing whatever it is they do that makes it possible for us to live another day in as much comfort as we do. Things get cleaned and a lot of messes disappear unobserved by the coincidence of her present.

She is the bell that we ring by our sick bed. We take no measure of the night vigils when she watches over us, kids, who know how to be sick.

She is the forgotten contributor to our achievements. In the company of our ancestors, she is, more likely than not, the sole remaining voice of our heritage.

The Story of my mom, her influence and her faith is the story of lifetimes... mine and the generations to follow.

And although we, as children, probably didn't even think it important to listen because of a thousand other competing and demanding voices in our heads, we still follow her unawares. Still she speaks to us—though we are elsewhere... though she is gone. It is her lessons, her life and instruction, we cannot ignore. We didn't know then what we would eventually discover that: who she was is who in a real way we would become. After all, she taught us how to love.

We were children whose world could dissolved like cotton candy in a sprinkling rain of imagined disaster. These became

teachable moments. Emotional boo-boos were kissed. (Like the time I thought I got this girl pregnant because I bumped into her in a crowd of students. True story!)

A child's world is cluttered with these moments—mom's opportunities to bandage anxieties and supposed hurts with a hug and a kind thought. And even though most of these are incidental blips of experience long forgotten, the thought behind them has nourished the soul. Mom's kindness has been transformed into the principles and values we now live by.

It is her faith that I cherish most. In today's terms she would seem archaic and superstitious. Perhaps. But to me her explanations of God and His oversight seemed to work. Like the time she lost a hairpin. (Don't ask.) She searched Sherlock Holmes style about the dining room floor while praying... and then she found it! She gave God credit for answered prayer.

In the final week of the college year while studying for a degree in computer science, I went to the lab for one last look at our project (my partner and I worked on: A circuit that represented Booth's algorithm). My partner had rearranged the wiring to look neater and ...It didn't work!

I lost my hairpin!

I begged God for help. Then looking closely I [?] decided to check the voltage across a two inch orange wire: zero volts. That was it... fixed, thank God....

I am my mother after all.

"No man is poor who has a Godly mother" - Abraham Lincoln.

And I shouldn't forget to mention dad.

MY DAD

How sad, and yet, how pleasantly surprising and meaningful, to find out after many years of passing in the night that someone built a life around you.

SOMETIMES an insignificant event becomes the focus of a memory. Two parallel lives will never cross until someone moves closer. Until then, people living even in the same house remain a mystery to one another and may never know that all along they were loved.

Children for the most part may grow up seemingly unattended like a Charles Schultz storyline where the distant complaint of an adult is nothing but the indistinct, muffled sound of a discarded thought.

But then there is that moment—perhaps only one—when dad or mom becomes a revelation of love.

In the same way my memories of dad are few. His schedule was work, sleep, and potato soup.. or rarely would I help him pile strapped newspapers for the junk yard to make a few extra nickels. Dad's focus, and all his energy, seemed to be invested in meeting budget. When he worked his last day due to a bad heart in 1966 he was making 95 cents an hour. But this is the story of discovery not of woe. It wasn't until that year, the last year of his life, that I discovered in the smallest act, the whisper of a thought unseen, that he loved me.

Until then my diary was a record of the occasional complaint coming from the bedroom, heard and unheeded, while we children were begging our mother for something that cost money. We were real consumers.

We played, dad slept. And life went on.

How sad, and yet, how pleasantly surprising and meaningful, to find out after many years of passing in the night that someone

built a life around you.

Here's what happened.

In 1965 I left for college living in a small picturesque town nestled in the Pennsylvania hills some 20 miles west of Philadelphia. I was a city boy from Buffalo, New York planning to spend the next four years under the stars, which one would not know were there in the city smog. It was a different world, a different addiction for that night sky and the fresh air, that would never release me to return to the city, except for a visit.

I wonder now if dad knew. Mom reminded me that he always wanted me to travel with my round trip ticket purchased.

It was my first scheduled vacation around the Thanksgiving weekend when I made a return trip by Trailway bus from Philadelphia... or was it the Christmas trip out of Easton PA. when I had to spend the night in a local motel before my bus left. I lay there listening to the dripping of a leaking faucet in this minus-half-star accommodation (a money problem) looking forward to my ride north. It is the thought of seeing family that consoled me as I went comatose into blankness waiting for the sun.

Trailway took me home. When we pulled into the station in Buffalo, the breaks hissed to a stop and the driver opened the door, I stood there anxious to get number 13, the Utica Street NFT city bus for home. I was in a hurry not to miss the next one and have to wait outside in the cold.

There stood dad waiting for me.

Sometimes it is that one memory that says it all.

For now, I shall wipe a tear and wait for tomorrow to continue my story.

UNCLE AL

"The drive for intimacy with another person is powerful – so powerful that most people call it love" —Joe Griffin.

My uncle lived with my grandma, his mom. (Years ago after the love of his life, the woman he would have wed, lost her battle with cancer my uncle decided never to marry.) His relationship with grandma was—as all wholesome relationships are—symbiotic. They needed each other now to make life work. She did things women do in the comfort of motherhood: timely meals, clean laundry, and all the unnoticed pillow fluffing that made her world our home. For a living, uncle made metal cabinets for —what was then—some sophisticated electrical equipment. But the newer technologies brought his career to an end sometime in his late fifties.

When grandma died in 1962, I was all he had left to keep the meaning in his day. I say this not being presumptuous but because my Uncle maintained rather emotionally with my mom, his sister, that he had raised me.

When I wasn't visiting my own house where I lived with mom and dad, a half dozen houses up the block, I was at home with him. Uncle Al was my second dad. With the exception of his work, we did everything together, went everywhere together, worked projects together, built things together. If it was in his world, it was in mine.

He introduced me to everything from working a budget to horticulture. We studied books and worked puzzles and solved problems and enjoyed music together. We sawed and hammered and dug and piled things. We took walks together and studied the night sky while enjoying an evening snack.

Uncle Al and I used to play chess together—we were evenly matched each winning every other game in turn. We played other games as well more times than I could remember:

Parcheesi, Chinese Checkers among them—over and over and over again. Today, when the family gets together around holidays and plays board games, I am not into it. It's not my thing. It's not the same anymore—I guess.

Then in 1965 I announced an interest in going away to college. Uncle asked me to reconsider but I wanted this. I just wanted to get on with life and explore some adventurous future somewhere beyond the end of Herkimer Street.

Two weeks before leaving Buffalo, my uncle Al went to sleep on his couch and couldn't be awakened.

"... psychologists throughout the ages have ... determined that there are ... needs, emotional rather than physical, which are crucial for our wellbeing – and, sometimes, even for survival too. ... [an] emotional connection to other people – friendship, loving relationships, intimacy.... The drive for intimacy with another person is powerful – so powerful that most people call it love".¹⁵

What does a child know about anything?! I little realized then that time would be unable to separate us. In my fondest memory of our journey together there is an ever lingering ache that never ceases to remind me that he loved me as a son.

"How we need another soul to cling to"¹⁶ - Sylvia Plath.

Old Doc Quinn said my uncle Al died of sugar diabetes. He passed the baton to me and then exited the race. And this became the final lesson—and of all lessons he taught me the most profound—that love is not a misguided, second-hand emotion—No! Tina Turner—but the bond of relationship, the sacrificial gift of another's life, and the purest expression of a heart that has been given a glimpse of the divine. [Exodus 33:23;¹⁷ Matthew 5:8]¹⁸

... I miss him....

THE CHALLENGE

Life is a movie we are cast in and the rehearsal of childhood should have told us that nothing comes easy. Failure and suffering are written into the script.

No storytelling is ever pure action whether it is the gallant hero saving the day, the young dreamer in a quest for meaning, the old man with shaking hand scribbling out a tearful goodbye. True love winning out over villainy, or a thousand other dramatic plots for a brief hour or two in a good movie causes us to forget ourselves and jump into the fantasy as witnesses to someone else snatching justice out of violence, victory over conflict or finding their soulmate in a sea of hurt—like that final kiss in *The Princess Bride*.

We enjoy the drama, the action, the kung foo and race scenes so much we tend to value less the dry conversations in between that give the characters personality and purpose and that ultimately explain where they came from, their journey through pain, why they did what they did, and how they finally got to this point.

Life is this way: lots of banal nothingness stretched between moments of pure panic or peaks of excitement, a few good screaming matches and a lot of *I-don't-have-a-clue-what-just-happened!*

Take the ongoing movie of my own life. I need to know my own motives, what beliefs and principles drive me. Ultimately all I want by story's end is acceptance and friendship... to know love, to fulfill some purpose in life I felt 'called' to. And that will make it worth it all. Suffering and setback and failure will suddenly all be important links in the chain of events. John 16:21¹⁹

I have those moments when I try to reason out causes for things that have happened to me. I might see my life as a movie with a defined plot, a script written to fit who I am. Learning my part in

the movie of my life, though, sometimes feels like I am being asked to assume the personality of the villain when I want to be the hero.

Bear in mind as well that there is no movie without a cast. Each one's '*meaning*' and '*fulfillment*' are linked in the script. My life involves other people. No man is an ... (how does that saying go?) My part in the play of life is linked to theirs. We need each other.

Oh, to effortlessly find our part in life by simply tripping over it or falling into it. But the rehearsal of childhood should have told us that nothing comes easy. Failure and suffering are written into the script.

Friendships are not incidental accidents but essential parts to life's story. And we need to commit to learning our own part. Their part in the play helps accent yours and mine, if we can lay aside the need to have top billing. If I can see myself in a supportive role I might discover the meaning to my life that I have been seeking.

As Nietzsche so admirably worded this:

"Live for love!
Do it for friendship's sake.
The how of it would become clear.
He who has a Why to live for
can bear almost any How."

CHILDHOOD

A child denied adventures into self is denied life itself.

CHILDHOOD is a time of discovery. This means much more than learning that mud wasps are friendly and hornets are not. It is not only taking things apart to see how they work or appreciating the value of empty boxes or a yard full of junk. Childhood is a time to be alive, a time of new feelings beckoning us in the course of wandering through play to experience new adventures.

But the real lessons are learned with others: learning to share, learning what is acceptable for exploration and what is not. These are the first steps into an adult world where responsibility and duty limits where we can go and what we can do. My time with little miss prim and proper in the school yard alone was not wise when inhibition was weaker than the demands of a throbbing curiosity... and if our sisters had not wandered by, God knows.... Or my apparent need to be macho around other boys for reasons still unknown. These may be forbidden feelings because the urges, though completely natural, are out of context for a child who hasn't learned context yet.

These may be 'mistakes' of childhood but innocence advises against using the word. The early years are selfish years and the self is worth discovering. Play is a time to experience fun and to learn what happiness feels like.

A child denied adventures into self is denied life itself.

Childhood is not a time to act grownup. Some guardians fail to see the beauty in a child's world. Like a baby bird children are learning to break out of a shell of self-absorption—a shell they will discard as adults if they are loved.

"Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life....: in work (doing something significant), in love

(caring for another person), and in courage during difficult times".²⁰

Oh if we could learn at a young age that happiness is not a goal in itself. Temptation lied to us. And as much as we need to feel significant, an achiever worth medals and first place rewards, the value of a mantle full of trophies in time and in life is a fleeting and incidental record of accomplishment.

"...success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself".²¹

The real value of childhood is social. It is learning to give, to help, to share life, to discover that someone else worth knowing has come to play with me.

THE ECONOMICS OF MEANING

I have also found love of family to be the trade currency into which it is worth converting all other investments of time and space.

If materialism has shown me anything it is that my possessions are my toys. They occupy my play but add little value, if any, to my life. My favorite fire truck has been replaced now by a hundred other interests. I have discovered the new toy store of electronic tablets, smart phones, and all things wifi. But the value I place on my things, I noticed, depreciates with time—as does my interest in them.

If I keep a favorite book around, it's only because I am a pack-rat and most likely I have no plan to reread it. I have an entire shelf of books on computer programming I once found important as a programmer/analyst at an investment firm but now they occupy space. I guess because they cost money, I would like to give them a good home, but if you know anything about technical literature, it is outdated the day it is sold.

My youngest son requested to use my 16 hundred dollar treadmill. I gave it to him. I told him take anything you want—and that rule of thumb applies to your brothers as well. (what's mine is my sons')—but leave your mother. I was beginning to make sense to me.

I didn't reach this conclusion early enough in life. Possessions occupied time as well as space. Growing free from a child's frame of reference, that toys are primary, takes not just time but those hardships that must take some of those toys away.

"A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of

man is through love and in love".²²

Poverty of things may become the means to true wealth. When the room is finally filled with family, it is at last filled with love.

"The idea that property has overcome our personalities is the single reason we will miss the best part of our lives. It's people, not possessions that make our lives worth living".²³

She's not my firetruck; she's my wife!

When I was too young to pursue girls, love was an innocent friendship, hand holding and conversation. Then I did not objectify girls in romantic fantasy. They were real people, real personalities and I didn't realize then that this would become the high watermark of romance. The beauty 'in' her eyes was more important than the beauty 'of' her eyes, her soul lovelier to look upon than her form—even though her form was in every way beautiful.

When a woman becomes a man's toy, she is valued no more than a child's fire truck. But I have discovered, now in old age and 47 years married, that the long ago conversation with her would never depreciate with time. I have also found love of family to be the trade currency into which it is worth converting all our investments of time and space.

AFTER THERE WERE GIRLS

THE SILENT HEART

Romance is the silent voice that in a moment of unselfish resignation says 'I love you' without words.

WHEN it comes to matters of the heart, we are only children aware of how we feel but not capable of saying. We see ourselves as adults, though, and refuse to admit that our affections and desires are mysterious to us. We are prone, therefore, to partial truths and false conclusions. We are incapable of self-examination on such an intimate level because language is a surface dweller.

Deep in the caverns of the mind live the thoughts words cannot find. Deep in the soul dwells the mysteries of the human heart. Yet, here is where my story of romance begins, in childish recollections and mother's hugs, in that first kiss in the coal shed with the prettiest fifth grader ever.

And from the recesses of these memory I fear I shall never find my way out again to tell of it.

I am only rambling on, sadly, about a past shrouded in forgotten details. And what I tell will only be filtered, anyways, by the reader until the emotions which drove me to do, whatever in the name of romance I did, will not be part of the tale. Dare I share those private moments behind closed doors and in secret meeting places!?

Romance is not the physiological response of a hormonal cocktail—how crude... how rude.

"It would be possible to describe everything scientifically", Einstein reminds us, "but it would make no sense; it would be without meaning, as if you described a Beethoven symphony as a variation of wave pressure."²⁴

Romance is the longing which alone can no longer search for the meaning of life. It needs another to search with it. It is sometimes the aching cry of the soul unanswered.

"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame".²⁵

Romance is that flutter felt when she said that she liked me. Romance is an unexplainable attraction that chooses one person over another. Romance can envision beauty where others do not see it.

Romance may not give a man the means to lasso the moon but it may encourage him to try anyways.

Coquettish is the term used of a woman in love—at least her initial reaction when she is around him. Whatever does this word feel like! The Classical Hebrew dictionary suggests: a dainty, exquisite and delightful pampering; acting in a sporting, fun-filled and entertaining way. Is that what my wife did when we first met and while I nursed a headache, eyes closed and head resting on the back of the couch, she tickled my nose with a feather? (I liked it and she never did it again.)

Women express their feelings more readily than men, I am told. This is irrelevant because in spite of her efforts a man will still spend his lifetime trying to decipher her meaning and die in old age having been all his life in love with a mystery. And a woman, in spite of her intuition and innate wisdom, does not know a man's heart. Romance is better understood as a submission to closeness where words are no longer important.

And when things need be said, it should be a conversation between two listeners. No one is trying to figure things out logically. There are no words. Seek instead to say in a moment of unselfish resignation: *I love you*. [I Peter 3:1 — *without words*]

THIS ISN'T HAPPENING

Some tragedies in life are villains of time threatening to undo us
if we tell anybody they were there.

SLIM was a businessman and a friend. I met him while we lived at the Jersey Shore in the early 70's. Before I knew him he would drink on occasion and his wife leaving him providing him with the biggest reason to get re-acquainted with the bottle. It was during the Spring—I do not remember which year—that the perfect storm hit the Wildwoods where Slim was building his motel in anticipation of a promising tourist season.

The perfect storm, as Southern New Jersey people know, is an East wind, high tide, and a low pressure system coming together. Streets become swollen streams overflowing their banks. Everything from porch steps to personal belongings—whatever the storm can get its waves around—race along like empty dories bouncing down the rapids. A wayward teen of Mother nature's incorrigibles is with sadistic excitement robbing the town blind.

The Wildwoods are communities built on low ground that you couldn't get to without crossing bridges. The homes in North Wildwood were built on stilts for reasons no one need tell you. West Wildwood was an island with only one egress. So, storms of this magnitude have this advantage that we were in their world—not them in ours.

Slim was drunk and confused as he sauntered along with heavy foot in hopeful expectation envisioning his motel still standing. He weaved his way down through empty streets as if crowds of tourists blocked his way until he came to the curb across the street from his financial masterpiece.

There he sat down watching his pride and joy implode as if some demolition expert had just pressed the plunger on it.

Slim told me later that he sat in total disbelief, reassuring himself that it wasn't really happening. He witnessed his future hopes

like cotton candy dissolving in the rain while convincing himself: **It isn't really happening; I'm drunk!**

Denial is understandable when the horror exceeds our comprehension of it. I, for one, will not argue this with a friend who needs to find his or her way through painful emotions to acceptance and peace.

And I cannot say anything this terrifyingly real ever happened to me, but we cannot inventory someone's pain or make comparisons of our levels of tolerance. It's unfair and—I say—inhumane. "On a scale of 1 to 10", the nurse asked me, "how painful is it?" But she was not making any reference to anyone but me. My 2 might be someone else's 8 or 9 and vis-a-vis.

The year of my perfect storm was 1967: unpaid tuition without which I could not remain in college; dad died, sister ran away, there was no money to pay utility bills, mom needed a major operation—and there was no insurance. None of these hurt as much as when Patricia said "No" to me when I asked for her hand in marriage.

This isn't happening!

All those kisses... I even met her parents! I didn't love her when we first met but she sort-of grew on me. How could romance have turned into rejection for her... and for me: despair, desperation, depression, and denial.

An ironic detail of this is the last gift Pat gave me: an album on Sword records of Ronnie Avalone singing what the title says are *Thundertones of Praise*. One of the songs is "He Whispered, Peace, Be Still" I lived in that song all summer.

I was too young to realize then what I would discover in time that this was the best thing that could have happened to me.

ROMANCE

Romance is a gift from the God who made us in His image.

It is difficult to explain *how* I felt when Patty ended the relationship. I had thought that all the holding and kissing was, by definition, *romance*. We must, though, have had something only physical (but not intimate) like Scotchgard for the soul never allowing any real affection to penetrate the fabric of a personal fetish for being held and kissed. If romance is poetry what we had was disconnected phrases on a single page of our lives soon to be torn, crinkled and tossed. We held hands but were never holding hearts. We were together but not together.

Reliving that time, I can see why she said "No" to my proposal. Romance merges 2 into 1, hearts throb in sync, one moment becomes a lifetime of beautiful memories. Pat and I didn't have this. I cannot remember even how I felt kissing her.. and kissing is my thing. Well, if I am to be honest not with you as much as with myself, what we had was merely physical... and this must have been embarrassingly obvious to everyone but me at the time. I did in words throw her a parting —for me—painful kiss:

Dear Patty, let this solely be
My answer to thy company.
For never will you cease to be
Engraved in my memory.
So Patty, this I only say:
For thy eternal bliss I pray
'Til heaven hears my lonely sigh
And answers me for thee... Goodbye.

No wonder a woman does not know a man's heart when he finally finds love. We have spent too many relationships on trying to figure ourselves out, trying to learn what this attraction means. But eventually I would discover some secrets about love and romance that my Orphan Annie Decoder Ring couldn't

decipher. I was still too young to appreciate something that is more adult than most adults.

Romance has nothing to do with time or space and science cannot predict when two hearts will join. Perfumes and flowers are not always good catalysts. When I met my wife, almost now a half century ago, I could afford no perfumes or flowers and my lifestyle born out of poverty held no promise of a white horse to carry her away. When we were engaged the ring was second hand—literally. I bought it used from a fellow student whose girl turned down his proposal after he bought it. Now Joyce wears it.

Romance is not chemical or animalistic; it is not driven by pheromones; for, it is not an addiction as if all humanity were being abused and raped by Aphrodite. Romance essentially satisfies a human need—some driven hunger of the soul. Two people cuddling in a frozen bleacher or covered in 100 degree sand, midnight or midday, it is not connected to time or space. It can be two persons strolling hand in hand through the market place or in a garden where fragrances secure undying memories of a personal Eden.

Romance is a gift from the God who made us in His image.

SOLILOQUY OF HURT

Girls make great sisters but a tighter friendship just isn't possible.

I don't understand women and yet the torturous truth is that I cannot live without her. I am beginning to wonder if *romance* is even a real word. Girls make great sisters but a tighter friendship just isn't possible—it isn't natural. Beside, she isn't *that* pretty!

[If only I believed this.]

I never knew I could feel this way. When you experience some emotion for the first time, how do you know what to call it? How does a child know the color *red* until someone, who may not know themselves, tells them that it *is* red? We showed our boy—our oldest son who was around 3 at the time—something colored *yellow* and asked him what color it was. He said *orange*, because oranges are a shade of yellow and we didn't realize he would make that association.

How do I know what you call *jealousy* or *depression* is what I am feeling! Dare any one label my angst as if they have figured out what I am going through! How can I even be sure that this throbbing in my brain, this ache in my gut is even connected to Pat's *Goodbye*?

[And yet, somehow, I knew it was.]

I am now in my second college year and students are arriving to continue their own dramas. I find myself watching from my dorm window toward the main administration building while car after car pulls up.

Lord, please don't let Pat be in one of them!

[She wasn't. Pat skipped this year and I never associated her absence with me—never, that is, until now. Now, I wonder.]

I miss her. I don't want to see her. I recall something my second son used to confess when he was small and couldn't answer for

his behavior: *I can't know....* I am desperate to change her mind!

[She did visit one Friday evening. I found her under the stars of a country night sky after a gentle rain had refreshed the air with the promise of a clean start. I pleaded with her to reconsider. She was unbending.]

They say that the problem has always been that two people must have common interests. Maybe we had too few to make it work. Did we come from two different cultures? We spoke different languages—or at least what I meant by *love* was not what she meant. She was all fun, I was as serious as a fatal disease.

Part of me wants to admit that I don't deserve someone as sweet and innocent as she. But at the same time I am not interested in someone who is less.

Dear Lord, what does any of this mean!?

I miss Carol, my first girlfriend through most of my early years. Why did I ever grow up? Or maybe that's my problem... I hadn't. Some call me *dysfunctional*. Someone said I depend too much on my mother for what I should do. Not true! Mom never even met Pat.

[It didn't take motherhood to figure out that my tears were somehow my attempt to wash away the pain of her, Patricia's, memory.]

Wandering aimlessly, I found myself in the cafeteria afterwards and there I met up with Laura. We had an old piano in one corner of that large space and Laura was a pianist. She sat playing some classical piece when I surprised her. Ours was a simple friendship... no, more like a long acquaintance because we knew each other from our freshman year when we sang a duet in a chapel service. We sat and talked.

[I should have thanked her for listening. I actually felt a little better.]

WHAT'S PAST IS

"The past is never where you think you left it." — Katherine
Anne Porter
(Lost Friendships, left behind.)

Is it possible to be in love with the past? There is this quaint little town in the South Dennis township in Southern New Jersey called *Goshen* about 20 miles up from the coast. It has a biblical ring to it—don't you think? Every Monday, during our first years of marriage, my wife and I with our one year old drove through Goshen going to and coming from her parent's place on my day off.

And I recall thinking how nice it would be to retire here in the serenity of this sunlit community far enough from the ocean to provide protection from the violence of an angry Atlantic and far from the big city with its own brand of danger. The town was dotted with small churches that—one might guess— had been transplanted from the old village from yesteryear—the look and feel of 19th century New England. It was a Christmas card scene in the winter. It was the land of forever for me. It would be a writer's paradise. I still romanticize about spending my final days there. I like the scriptural reference:

But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land.²⁶

I attended college in a small school one mile up hill from the village of Greenland—I don't believe it was on the map in those days, lost in the surrounding trees of a picturesque Pennsylvanian landscape. For three years this became home, replacing 20 years of memories in the city. (I was married in my senior year and living off campus.)

The college was nestled along the Gravel Pike in Montgomery County, P.A. It consisted of only a few major buildings when I

first enrolled in 1965. The lower dorm resembled a child's over-size play house made of old creaking boards. The outside steps looked more like a fire-scape leading to the second story where I lived for the first two years.

Although this sounds depressingly in disrepair, it was home for me—someone who was more at home with poor than with rich. I dreamt once about walking the campus, greeting many who have since left us altogether. I miss it all. That's why I ask: is it possible to be in love with the past?

Some people need to be reconciled with a past highlighted by tragedy or riddled with nightmares of abuse but my recollection is a ghostly interest in revisiting a place and time I recall with fondness.

Had I left something behind? Do I need to go back and get it? Perhaps, just perhaps, it was *me*.

My wife finds this all amusingly enough an exercise in nothing. I cannot go back. The school relocated and the state bought the property as a nature preserve. Mom and dad are gone. Knowing life is not relivable, still, what was it about those places and those times that are now speaking to me. And what are they saying to me in my dreams and pondering?

UNSPOKEN

"We are products of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it." — Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here for?*

I am angry with you.

I wanted so much to learn Sankrit or Coptic or Arabic or something but instead I became a preacher, and preaching was such a hard life. I might have found a more proper education and been an archeologist.

Maybe.

I'm not mad at God but why did He let me live with such untapped desire to be what I could never be? To want what I would never have.

Why did He allow me to find the better path so unappealing? Why did He make me so susceptible to temptation, so weak, so easily led by the nose off cliffs.

I am angry with you because you never revealed a dark side. You glowed with an innocence I had never known or seen before. You stood there always just listening to me talk, never interrupting, only listening. Why? Tell me there is a dark side. Tell me, everyone has a dark side!

I have done bad things in life—perhaps not so terrible as it sounds. But for me, things regrettable, things I know I would not have done had I you to talk to. So, it's on you.

I am not what I wanted to become when I began. Although, honestly? I didn't know what I wanted to become. But education-wise life has been a disappointment and I have rambled out platitudes about the Will of God trying to assuage the pain but it hasn't really helped.

You know: my Greek professor even forgot my name! I am nobody who has gone nowhere.

I have been plagued by the constant memory of you and that's

on you, too. I thought I saw you in a restaurant—or at least someone who looked like you—and I went back for another cup of coffee, but you were gone. Why? And if you were just an angel whom God brought into my life for one brief moment to cheer me... well, that would have been cruel. Cruel Grace. Tell me there's no such thing!

I never wanted to be a fireman when I grew up. From a very young age, as long as I can remember, I wanted to learn the Bible, to live in its pages, to study the mystery of its message and its God. That's all I ever wanted to do. That's all I ever wanted to be. Could that have happened had I you to talk to?! I don't know. But that's why I am so angry. That's why I am brought to tears.

No one must ever know I said any of this! I must never again say these things—things too dark to say—even though my anguish scorches my soul with unspoken sorrows.

I need you as a dear friend, my unspoken friend, if for no other reason than to hold your hand once again in the annals of sweetest memories while I sigh my regrets and spend my remaining days in the comfort of just knowing that we met.

[A Self-soliloquy. Unspoken friendships]

HER STORY

Her mannerism: sticking her tongue out when I complimented her beauty ... smiling mischievously daring me to explore the mystery that was she drew me in like a moth to her flame.

SHE spent most of her childhood in this quaint looking country house, hidden from the road by uneven rows of trees, planted undeniably by God. The old homestead was a blessing to find after the last house the family lived in. This one had a toilet.

There was a full porch running the length of the house but no neighbors to watch. The forest that encircled her was her play world, climbing trees or investigating the locals under rocks or on branches, collecting leaves or sifting through Jersey silt. Grammar school was a short walk through the woods.

She was not alone, though. Poverty was her constant companion while she fell comfortably resigned to the rustic life.

Vineland, the town of her birth, remains the largest city in Southern Jersey: homes were acres apart, streets without sidewalks ran for miles between stop signs. so, it wasn't strange to find the girl I would someday wed living in the woods.

She grew up in this out-of-the-way world. Between school and then eventually church, she negotiated the rough teen years until she was old enough and on her own enough to check out the possibilities in Greenlane where we met.

To tell her story in 500 words or less leaves out so much. But the painful parts, not even she will retell.

When we began to see more of each other than we could explain away in the world of campus gossip, I turned my thoughts toward her mom. Working on the hypothesis *like-mother-like-daughter* I needed to meet the lady who at least in theory had born a singular influence on her.

Her mom was a quiet lady. I have come to believe that she had been silenced by the haunts of years of depression and poverty

beyond what I might have ever imagined: five children and one bedroom; 14 people in one house all sharing a single outhouse—before moving into the woods.

Her dad drank a lot. That's all I'll say about it.

Her bicycle, one of the few presents she can recall, was a gift from her brothers, one of whom was already sending money home to mom. A dozen years her senior, he enlisted young and was making a paycheck serving his country in the Mediterranean. I got the impression that he like her couldn't wait to be out on his own.

I have worn out my welcome when it comes to her story—at least her telling it. I keep quizzing her, wanting her to help me understand what I cannot compare to any personal memory and what I, therefore, so easily seem to forget. There were too many moves from uncle's house to uncle's house, too many debts, too many bad times, too many evictions and party-less birthdays to ask her to say once again where and when was this or that.

Her mannerism: sticking her tongue out when I complimented her beauty; dressing in long cape and knee-high boots in a time when bobby socks were popular; smiling mischievously daring me to explore the mystery that was she—all—drew me in like a moth to her flame.

DESTINED

"Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone – we find it with another." - Thomas Merton.

It was a tale of two people. To paraphrase Dickens: *it was the best of times* because I was in love, but it was also *the worst of times* because I found no practical way to express my love to address her insecurities. I was the court jester not the knight. *It was the age of wisdom*—book knowledge—what college is all about, but in matters of the heart, I knew nothing. *It was the epoch of belief*. Faith was the one thing I had going for me, but when I announced a wedding in three months with no foresight as to the *how*, it was the *epoch of incredulity*.

"A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other" says Dickens.²⁷

We were different in so many ways. I roller skated. She liked ice-skating. I played chess with my favorite uncle while she had learned strategy from a game of checkers. I knew city streets; she knew trees. I loved the water having grown up on Lake Erie. I found fascinating two seagulls wrestling over a piece of someone's discarded lunch. She found the ocean frightening because there was so much of it—more than the eye could see. She was a mountain girl who enjoyed walking forest paths while I was most at peace strolling through an incoming tide.

And before I met her, she was already a working girl. I continued to have my laundry done for me, my meals cooked for me and my day planned for me. She was already a self-made and independent woman. I was still *'hatching'* a plan to break out of my shell. She drove everywhere in a 1964 Chevy Nova, she bought with her own money; I walked.

She was withdrawn, an introvert, a woman of few words; I was quick to speak on any subject. A preacher's mouth is his gift. She

was respected for her quietness; I was recklessly talkative.

But these were surface differences. Deep inside, where passions boil, personalities are forged in the furnace of experience. Here each of us hides behind castle walls of self-justification from damaging reputations. Here wounded egos shelter in place. Here lives the real me... the real her. Here is where we must look for similarity and distinction.

We would not have found each other on eHarmony dot com. Perhaps, with a longer engagement, we would have discovered for ourselves areas of incompatibility that could have driven us apart. But she was staying only the semester and spatial distant means emotional distance—a thought I found more painful than the nostalgia that was almost unbearable when I left Buffalo for school two years earlier. Besides, I would be graduating after next year and I was told: preachers should be married.

Then again, when we are starting out so far apart, there is no direction to go in but closer. Oh, and we did have a couple things in common. We both knew poverty, a familiar companion, and we both loved the Lord whose gift of faith gave us—what was in our lives—unprecedented courage to go the distance. Said simply:

"Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone – we find it with le

A MIND OF ITS OWN

In our minds we pluck at clover leaves, blade by blade, to see if
we are loved.

Is it possible for a thought to have a mind of its own? We have other things to think about but one thought, one perception, one explanation that doesn't follow the rules pushes itself to the head of the line—it survives on constant attention. It monopolizes our life. It possesses us.

It may be a lingering feeling of being unloved; a plaguing mistrust; a sublimated grief; a repressed hurt; an undying hate, a haunting revenge; an unforgivable regret; or a sense of inadequacy and failure; or maybe something else just as infectious. Some ideas endure a lifetime despite all attempts at rationalizing them away.

Such thoughts interrupt our day with the constant urge to talk to us—private conversations, heart to heart, as if promising somehow that we together could resolve the unresolvable.

In our minds we pluck at clover leaves, blade by blade, to see if we are loved. We read tea leaves to learn if happiness is in our future. We may try to deal with it all by finding someone who would understand, who would support our right to think this way and then just accept it as life. Nothing helps. And we keep thinking....

We keep reliving something said to us—or we thought was said—perhaps, so long ago that no one could remember even if it were true. And we keep reevaluating its meaning. We relive details of our past hoping to recall that one missing link that proves everything we want proven, that makes sense out of senselessness, that finally tells us where we went right ... and wrong.

Sadly, these are not public thoughts. I know personally. This is an emotional virus that would die in the sunlight of love and acceptance. These are thoughts that fear the day. They thrive in

depressing darkness, the nights of unexplainable sorrow.

I don't like being asked but would I miss such thoughts if they were gone!? [John 5:6 - *Do you want to get well?*] Some thoughts can become too much a part of our lives and we cannot imagine being without them! Restoring friendships or marriages or family is paying too high a price. It is as if we rather treasure instead the feelings of decades of a personal anguish—as little sense as that makes.

I have come to believe in silent grace, the unanticipated friendship of someone who cares but does not force his or her way in to fix things. Time does not heal; it only seems so when, unseen, by a divine providence our cries are heard. We manage to survive the din of a nagging memory, the ringing in our minds that we thought would never go away. Like the miracle it is, we awake one morning with its voice no longer in our head.

For me: something happens, something is said, something read, something written that reveals to me that I am loved, wanted, needed, significant. Something brings a cleansing tear that releases my grief and fills my heart with hope. Somehow I manage the strength to apply forgiveness to my hurt... and it brings a peace to my soul.

It is as though somehow in the menagerie of confusing and contradictory helps I finally hear the still, small voice of God.

HER EYES

"The soul, fortunately, has an interpreter - often an unconscious but still a faithful interpreter - in the eye." — Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

WHEN it comes to girls, I have always been an 'eye' man. To me her eyes are first and foremost the most appealing aspect of a woman's looks. All the changes that happen, the eyes never change, never get larger, never change color. They tell the same story when she was ten as when she turns one hundred.

My wife's eyes are brown, soft, calming, with a welcoming quality that makes it impossible for me to look away. But more than highlighting her physical beauty, they are the vista that surveys her past, that tells the story of where she came from and who she has become. It is the story of her passions and ambitions, her fears and insecurities and her hopes. Her eyes are the lenses, like a telescope, allowing me to gaze up into her soul, to search the mysteries of her movements, to appreciate more the orbit of life she runs in and to get a clearer conviction through her love that there is indeed a God.

And until now, I had not looked there as long and as entranced as I should have.

Looking back now after near fifty years, I see those early days of marriage more clearly. The effect of all this retrospection is that—for want of a better way to say it—looking more deeply into her eyes, I see her in a different light. I am envisioning maybe for the first time in recollection the woman I married then in her pristine innocence and the excitement of early passions.

One morning early in our life together I returned from working the night shift, tired, exhausted. I fell asleep in her arms. When I awoke, I was still there because she was still there. This is the real story of her love for me—not the incidental misunderstandings that over time are a devil's means of confusing two disoriented people, trying to pull them apart.

Until reliving this fondest of memories I didn't see this for what it really was—love—because my vision of her was blurred by hard times. Knowing that she loved me then is knowing that she loves me now. Her eyes tell me this. And this is a priceless discovery some people go a lifetime without finding.

The years have brought other discoveries, as well, some of which were difficult to accept without some reasoning tool not then yet part of my mental kit. Arguments over things, over people, over career interests seemed unreasonable discussions—wives meddling where their advice was not warranted, a freeze put on romance in an effort to pull me to the bargaining table and compromise away a piece of my future. Or so it seemed then.

But now writing this, reliving and rethinking some of the misplaced moments, I see it differently. I married her back then when I, in my emotional childhood and ignorance, was still wondering if all this was a mistake but at the same time looking into her eyes and sensing that she held my heart in trust.

It is as if we were married just days ago. I am falling in love with her all over again.

THE END OF THE DAY

WHO KNEW

Pastoring was full of surprises for me... and not all of them
good.

I attended Bible College—if we can say, 'college'—back in the 60's when the classical pentecostal movement, which I was in, was just becoming aware of academic excellence and the benefit of true intellectual pursuits in the study of God's Word. They were in transition and because we, students, were a subset of their interests—so were we.

I had seen this a year earlier at S.U.N.Y. (the State University of New York) at Buffalo. SUNY was a college, not a university, until in the same decade they transitioned.

Both schools played with the curriculum, added disciplinary studies, hired PHDs from industry, luring them with money even if they couldn't teach. And as they played with their dream—I think it safe to say—they played with mine as well.

Back at Bible *School* (school, institute, let's be brutally honest and humble our pride for a moment) those in charge of this adventure into a new future (The school earned its academic accreditation to become a college in 1975) were introducing ideas designed, I guess, to educate us as tomorrow's pastoral staff in the denomination. Many managed to glean a good start from that learning and are still pastoring today, 50 years later. But I felt cheated (is that the word?), left out, short-sheeted not because biology and an introduction to psychology are not good things to know but because the meatier subjects like Classical Hebrew—and even a theological study of the Holy Spirit (remember, this is a pentecostal keystone) were *not* on the curriculum. Even some faculty members assumed one of their colleagues was covering some of these subjects...

but... No.

So four years later I entered the pastorate unprepared for surprises. This, I agree, was all on me since many of my classmates

had figured it out and thrived in the pastorate. Today the approach to pastoring is more administrative, more organized for fast church growth, more technical and more expensive but back in the late 60's, early 70's, the idea was to visit people, counsel them and pray with them and hope they stayed to hear the sermons as well. It was a good plan.

An aside: I was taught the correct way to stand in the pulpit when preaching. School also taught us how to run a mimeograph machine for the Sunday bulletin. That seemed important at the time but now it only symbolizes how we must outgrow the past, learn as we go, and accept change—as, I am sure, God would agree. [Isaiah 43:19²⁸ (God gave me this verse when I graduated and pondered what on earth it could mean!)]

In the ministry I met runaways, youth on drugs and young women out of wedlock talking abortion. My heart broke for those who were HIV positive and dying way before their time. The shattered reminders of broken marriages littered my pastoral history with incalculable heartache. Alcoholism was almost an acceptable challenge because it seem to have always been with us.... until I buried one man who drank the wrong stuff. There were the clinically depressed, those with secret love affairs as well as cancer and a hundred other medical emergencies... and the poor—the poor were always with us. I think this last the Savior mentioned [John 12:8]. I could go on.

While my own marriage suffered, many a night in the small hours I would just cry myself to sleep.

Who knew?

SELF-DISCOVERY

"To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life." — Robert Louis Stevenson

I have changed. I still feel privileged to be in pulpit ministry and enjoy the opportunity to conduct a bible study or have another chance at listening to someone in need where I can be helpful. But even without these possibilities I find myself surprisingly content and at peace. My peace comes from knowing that these aspects of the pastorate—at least in years gone by—were the things that gave me a sense of significance.

Sharing from God's Word made me feel alive.

I probably spent most of my life, sadly, not realizing this. It was not knowing that the added stress was because I tried to be someone I was not in an effort to define my ministry as *successful*. Knowing who I am is its own reward. It is intrinsically my source of all hope of any sense of fulfillment. I need to be patient and let God decide future possibilities.

Far too much of life was spent in trying to be someone I was not. I rationalized that it *had to be done* and since I was poor at delegating, I had to do it. When my pianist left the church, I sat at the bench and led worship—even though before this I had not played piano, or any instrument. I learned what I needed to learn, to do what I needed to do, not realizing that it wasn't who I was.

We work through the discouragement of a lot of failure that we never should have attempted. These were activities that didn't define us.

Life should be filled with questions that need to be asked and answered. Why did I find hours of studying the biblical languages so meaningful? Why was the gift of my first Greek New Testament—in modern Greek—such a treasured prize? Why were board meetings bored meetings? Why was visiting a con-

gregation in a round-robin schedule *my thing*? But church picnics were not?

Fund raising? All too many times, I forgot to take up an offering and I never preached on tithing. In fact one man wanted to donate a thousand dollars to the ministry without his wife's knowledge and I refused it. I was on the board of one church where a couple sold their home to raise 10,000 dollars for a church project. I encouraged my fellow board members to return the money. Since the money had already been invested, we had to make payments.

Regardless what hairpin turns we need negotiate in an effort to stay on course thru life, there is no true destination that maps the journey unless it is self-discovery. And when we someday learn enough about who we are and who we really want to be, we will be at rest—matters not our achievements. Knowing who I am, alone, is the biggest achievement of all. [2 Timothy 4:7]²⁹

I like the way Robert Louis Stevenson said it:

To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life.³⁰

AT HOME

Self-discovery is a very necessary part of emotional health.

I was an instructor in Biblical languages—and English—at a tiny Bible school in Western Pennsylvania. That's where I met Donna. Looking back to that time, life was complex and confused. I was feeling estranged from my wife of then just 4 years. I spent my days working at my future hope as an instructor and my time off isolated in some corner of the house listening to baseball on a hand held portable radio.

Self-discovery is a very necessary part of emotional health. Candid reflections on my behavior, although at the time I couldn't see it, discover with transparent honesty how I really felt. Notwithstanding the opinions of peering eyes, my recollections offer me a truer sense, I believe, of what happened when Donna seemed to be everywhere in my day with her alluring smile and consoling voice, her dedication to all things academic that mattered to me, and, of course, the thrill of her playfulness.

(She was, no doubt, unwittingly employed by the tempter to throw me off my game.)

But she was a delight to have as a student and she enrolled in every class I taught for reasons that I could not begin to imagine. I thought she simply wanted a fuller education in the languages of scripture and whatever else my brain could offer her from a classroom lectern. I think Donna was attracted to what she thought was scholarship with feet.

For a time, each morning at school I would begin my day with a Thomas' muffin which Donna had popped into the toaster for me. We sat in the cafeteria and enjoyed this light moment and

this light breakfast. Students had to be popping in and out all along with other faculty members unobserved while my focus was fixed on the unspoken mystery of a woman barely into her twenties who sat across from me. And I cannot recall one thing she ever said.

Looking back: I know now that I had no interest in another woman. But I didn't know that until I met Donna.

Donna was someone I could talk to about the weather or a breakfast treat or a Greek word. I recall her smiles and she was replete with good natured pranks. She was a party always happening.

At home, the pressure, the worries, the insecurity and the arguments were all but overwhelming. When I went full-time as a custodian and was making a livable wage after being months unemployed life might have improved had my health not taken a turn for the worse. I was symptomatic of a physical breakdown and the doctor wanted me on part time. No additional classes opened up for me to teach. We couldn't afford to stay.

(While Donna's smile and her seeming coquettish capering was like life-saving medication to a dying man, Joyce was home alone with our pre-schooler.)

Perhaps God's grace is tethered to us limiting how far we can go. I leave that thought to the scholars. But how deeply I loved my wife! I needed *her* smile, *her* touch.

(Holding hands with her is the highlight of this old man's day now.)

I just wanted to go home!

Joyce and I would continue to face more moves and lost career opportunities. My guess is that God needed a special girl to join me in adventures that would at times be living nightmares.

The years have come and gone and we find ourselves now sitting beside each other with the settled knowledge that we are—and have been all along—in love.

And this by itself is very nice to know!

PRIVATE PRAYER

The rule of thumb is simple: if the heart's right, the words are, too.

"THINK of us," she wrote home, "going into a place where there is sawdust on the floor...." [Ida Tarbell spoke these words according to Doris Kearns Goodwin in *The Bully Pulpit*, pg. 174.] I read this simple line and pulled it out of its context to put it in mine. My mind went back to a week in the Summer of 1960 at Lakeview N.Y. camp grounds on Lake Ontario and the tabernacle where we, kids, spent hours weeping before the Lord. The floor was wood shavings and saw dust over bare earth. Here is where God became real to me, so real that no argument can now reason Him away.

For a fifteen year old boy to confess tears, even 55 years later is not easy but in the context of a search for meaning and love (God's love in this case), prayer and tears cannot be left out of the story. It isn't universally recognized, but many of us make prayer a vital part of life. But it is the lodestar that guides our course thru life's difficult waters.

For me, I confess, prayer is a very private moment. If I bear my heart in public, I might expose myself to editorials and the talk of social circles—I fear.

Just so you know: I generally do not talk to God thinking He will question my meaning. Publicly I measure my words, for the sake of political correctness and only speak out after I have thought them thru—twice. Privately, I bear my soul. God knows my heart and my words just come out in real time. [Hebrews 4:16]³¹ The rule of thumb is simple: if the heart's right, the words are, too.

(Now, you have me wrong. Public prayer meetings are biblical—I know that!)

Praying is private for me because I tend to walk carefully through a minefield of hurting thoughts and I don't know where

to step. I may not know how to say it. Sometimes the words aren't there at all and I am silent before Him. He hears silence, too.

God is never offended by honesty but of great value also is the fact that as I talk to Him, I hear *me*. And God makes a better wall than a wall off which to bounce my concerns. The echo I hear back often enough is His wisdom.

There are people in my life that need Him to do something about their pain. And I pray for them. I want Him to drown out the voice of pain by speaking louder. I know they are suffering. But I admit: being at peace means far more to me than a thousand miracles. [Mark 4:38-39]³²

My biggest problem, though is myself. I talk to God about my past to make sense of things I had done—things I shouldn't have. When will I finally be at rest inside because I will know that I am at last living above temptations and hurtful memories? [Hebrews 4:9]³³

So you see: I have no one else I dare talk to about this. And I know publicly I would be embarrassed to talk about such things when some believers are being martyred for their faith. (I also prefer crying in private.) Oh, people say that they would not think less of me, but I cannot take the chance. I still wish I had one friend to confide in ...

I guess I do! [Philippians 4:6]³⁴

THE FOG

I sought counseling from a professional. Back in my room I was investigating an interest in talking to a computer, but with no clue as to the why of what I was doing.

I sat depressed staring at a black monitor, matching my mood. I was waiting on a line of code I just wrote to compile. All I asked the computer to do was to add two numbers and show me the answer. I was feeling like a scuttled ship—if ships could feel—sinking, sunk, into the lightless depths of an ocean of hurt. It is the existentialistic void where tomorrow means nothing, where no direction marks the way out. It is a black hole that sucks in all joy. More poetry is probably prompted by this numbness than any of the muses:

"I didn't want to wake up. I was having a much better time asleep. And that's really sad. It was almost like a reverse nightmare.... I woke up into a nightmare."³⁵

This was the second church that dismissed me as pastor. I was past tears. The reasoning offered to a stunned congregation—parishioners no doubt leaning forward in their seats, their eyes begging an explanation—was that I needed professional help for my depression.

On one other occasion when I emotionally curled up in the fetal position I took up an interest in learning the arabic alphabet. I forgot it all. On other occasions I took up growing bonsai and studying Civil War history. I needed to lose myself in another world a million lives away from my circumstances.

2 + 2 = 4 appearing in white numbers on a dark screen somehow warmed me with an embracing curiosity and the next thing I

knew I was developing an undeniable attraction to programming.

It started as an escape from painful thoughts. It was a raised draw bridge surrounded by an electronic moat against thinking things that were invading my mind about a career-less future, unpaid bills, and two sons still at home expecting dad to know what to do. I temporarily forgot that I had a family.

I was turning 50 that year and I knew of two other men who experienced similar. They never found the way to overcome the melancholy. They never found alternative career interests.

I did seek counseling from a friend whose profession qualified him to listen to my story of woe. Back in my room I was investigating an interest in talking to a computer, but with no ulterior motive in mind, no clue as to the *why* of what I was doing.

But it became a relationship that would prove lucrative as well. I returned to college for a degree in computers studying with kids my youngest son's age. For the next fifteen years I would be married to the keyboard eventually working in industry as a programmer and providing my wife some financial security.

The day I retired, my interest in writing code left me, it seems, for good. Today, I only write about it.

My story is not one of depression but one of a hope. Like an acorn sprouting from the ashes of the forest fire of a lost life, I found myself emotionally restored with new and, for the time, exciting interests.

There is another chapter to this story on three counts: not only am I convinced there is a God who cares but, secondly, my interest in computers would teach me something dynamic about

myself which had nothing to do with computers. And then there is my family who became more visible as the fog lifted.

But for now, I sat in my cubicle content with a sigh of relief. The pain of depression was gone.

THE BOYS

A search for meaning is a search for family, and some have discovered that it was yesterday's stranger with whom they now find belonging and closeness. We are introduced to love, sometimes, in unexpected ways.

To Joyce and me they will always be our 'boys'. Our three sons were my escape hatch, my way out, from what was classified by counsel as a clinical depression. I was in that tunnel between solutions for almost two years, 1993-1995. We moved to another nearby town during this time, and I cannot tell you how we budgeted all this. Both Joyce and I had low wage jobs. That's all my mind will give me.

Our boys gave me the courage to shake loose from the numbness, to get the passion for life flowing, to come alive again to possibilities and seek a second career. (I would become a programmer in 1998. Between '95 and '98 I went back to college.)

Our oldest was already a software engineer and he tutored me when my butter knife of a brain needed his chainsaw understanding to cut through the difficult concepts. (Do you know what a pointer to a pointer is? I do... *now!*) I never questioned his patience because for me it was a *must-learn* even at the expense of his own interests. Pulling rank as father sounds insensitive but I am sure he totally got it.

Our youngest was just that, young, too young to be deprived of a dad. I had to do what I had to do because he had the right, as all children do, to grow up in a family that loves him responsibly. I needed him to revive my passion for life. He was God's gift to prevent me from running away. Like a boxer with one eye punched closed, aching muscles and joints, bleeding cuts, and with strength near gone, I had to stay focused on the

fight—this was not my usual approach to things. But in my corner was this ten year old whose emotional future depended on it... and I knew it. I knew what I had to try. I knew what I had to do. I told Joyce when I went back to college on a student loan: *I am jumping; I hope the parachute opens.*

It did. After graduation with a degree in computer science, it was our middle son who compiled my resume and networked my talents until I got that all important phone call from my future.

And my wife? She's the next chapter and the hundred after that because I cannot say enough about the woman who stayed with me—as the song says—*through the years*. She has always been a no nonsense girl, a woman who just knew what had to be done and expected her *four* boys to do it.

Ask me about the value of family and I will say they are life-giving. Family is the antidote when the future is poisoned by hard times. Family is the salve that heals. It is the gold standard when other investments are crashing.

I recall finding myself in the hospital emergency room. I lay there silly with fever due to an unattended infection in the side of my face that was allowed to fester for days. I looked up and all three of our boys—now adult, two of them with families of their own—were at my bed side. That says it all!

All the times I wondered if my wife loved me anymore, all the times I questioned the logic behind giving my sons things that cost more than my resources wanted to offer, all the times I complained that I deserve my day in the sun, too—as if to suggest family was in the way. Family *is* the way!

THE YELLOW ROSE

Let me tell you: The Tale of The Yellow Rose.

At the birth of our third son I splurged and bought one dozen long stem yellow roses for Joyce. I took a picture of the moment. Now, I stare at this picture of her in the maternity wing of the Washington General Hospital holding Josh—a tired smile faintly visible on her face—and I wish we could begin again.

I stare at this photo now and wish that life had not been so impossibly crazy, that I had not been so ignorant of what is important to a woman, that I had not been so self-absorbed and my ideas in ministry so unwieldy that my love for her, all too often, went unexpressed and unnoticed. I wrestled with a thousand different shades of fear and anger, hurt and discouragement while she struggled with insecurities and a feeling, now and then, of thinking she was unloved. We didn't live in the same universe. She just wanted to be family but I, as a pastor, needed to save the world.

But even she noticed that during the months she carried him my love for her approached worship, a devotion to make the gods jealous. She noticed the change in me after Joshua's birth and I settled back into a more 'routine' manner.

This snapshot of her holding one of our little ones stirs memory. It represents a moment in time when my love for her could not be more sacred, my boast of her more real, my sense of how right the moment more right. Yellow roses were the closest I could come to symbolize in a golden flower the wealth of my affection for her. But, alas, all of this at the time went unsaid.

I am enjoying this photo. This was one of those private mo-

ments worth recollecting. This is my lottery winnings!

Now probably in an act of catchup, I stalk her through the kitchen as if this were our first time meeting and I wanted to get to know her better—and we have been in the same room, now, for at least a hundred years.

I regret not buying more yellow roses.

At day's end, while working in the city, I would pass a floral stand where a street vendor had a selection of colorful cut flowers and there were always a few men applying their art to a bouquet for some woman—was my guess—with whom they were looking forward to spending an evening. By then, I was cash poor; besides, Joyce managed our funds. But in the middle of winter, the fragrance of Spring, even the greenhouse variety, would have spoken volumes to her.

Since the birth of Josh, Joyce and I have enjoyed Springtime strolls through garden centers enjoying the blooms. We go together to select yellow flowers, usually daisies or mums for our front steps or back deck. And we make yearly pilgrimages to Longwood Gardens, the old Dupont Estate, outside Philadelphia, PA., where flowering plants from around the world are on display. It is our Garden of Eden.

With the years our lives tell the tale of two people who have developed a caring that has pulled us closer until the colors of our separate interests have become a new and singular shade of love.

And in old age the fragrance of the yellow rose symbolizes the memory of it all.

It is The Tale of the Yellow Rose.

UNFORGETTABLE DREAMS

She was beautiful standing there in silk while a gentle breeze waved at me in the soft folds of enticement that encircled her.

I was going through some old photos the other day and happened upon one of an old girlfriend I knew 40 or so years ago. She was gorgeous. What few memories I had of her began to impose themselves upon my thoughts both during the day and in dreams.

At work, I would find myself staring at the picture when others couldn't see me. My cubical was recessed from the main traffic area; so, I could hide from peering minds. I began to ponder what does she look like now—forty plus years later.

And then it happened. Don't ask me how but she showed up one day as if out of a vision. It took me a few minutes to register but I recognized her from her picture, the picture I was cherishing, the picture I couldn't risk anyone knowing I had, the picture that represented everything good I was feeling, every secret I was keeping, every memory worth having, every moment of thought. I guess I was still in love.

I felt possessed; enchained by a "*once was*" and "*what could have been*" so much so that I began to question the usefulness of an everyday routine that denies me my dreams and pretends to benefit me with perishables. Maybe this is just the transparent thoughts of an old man. I was beginning to think: *I wasted my life with the wrong people, doing the wrong things.*

I took her to lunch and we talked.. and talked...and talked. We began seriously catching up on forty plus years of silence. I was in love with a picture and now, I must admit, I was also in love

with the woman—probably all these years.

I don't know what I am going to do going forward, but I have one thing going for me: I am so glad that forty seven years ago I married her. [Ephesians 5:33]

I dream of her, too, the unexpressed longings that remain past the day.

She was beautiful standing there in silk while a gentle breeze waved at me in the soft folds of enticement that encircled her. I stared as if objectifying away everything else about her—my eyes tempting me with uncontrolled desire. We were standing in 2 separate worlds: she and I. She busied herself with the mundane; I lost myself in that vision where all else is out of focus, emotionally fogged over by the blinding glow of an angelic form.

She smiled effortlessly in my direction and with absent-minded disinterest turned away again while the feeling of wanting to hold her caused by that look set fire to my soul flashing within me—like fire to straw—consuming all interest in everything else.

The fire of love stops at nothing—it sweeps everything before it. [MSG Song of Solomon 8:7]

And she stood there continuing to talk to who knows who—I think her mom. They talked something about her taking the car somewhere. I watched her walk to the car. I watched her leave.

Then, I awoke to the ache of her absence. It was around three in the morning. She lay silently sleeping beside me unaware of where I had just been. I rolled over in her direction and draping my arm gently over her motionless form, fell peacefully to sleep.

CITY STREETS

The benefit of these walks were everywhere in evidence to me. I am not surprised anymore when life falls out in a way that reminds me of them.

ON sunny, warm Spring and Autumn days, often, I would walk the seven plus miles home from SUNY. The Buffalo campus of the State University at New York is on the corner of Main and Bailey Avenues on the northern edge of the city. The southern edge of campus runs along Winspear Avenue where, when classes were over, I would take my exit, deep in thought and conversing with God.

Not to bore you with details—and I asked Google to aid my memory—I would walk toward Bailey Ave., turn right on Kensington. and then zigzagged my way through northeast Buffalo down streets with such names as Deerfield, East Delavan, Filmore, and East Utica. Crossing Main Street at Utica I entered the western side of town and walked down West Utica to—if memory serves—Chenango, and Massachusetts Ave to Winter Street. I am almost home now. These streets brought me to Hampshire and around the corner to home on the southern end of Herkimer. I gave you the tour because it meant that much to me to walk these streets and talk to our Father in heaven. He has remained my dearest friend over the years and I don't hesitate to say it.

I have called you friends John 15:15

I have always viewed Friendship as a special gift. I have been amazed that anyone wanted to befriend me and when someone never wanted to hear from me again, it somehow made sense—and I don't know why. But the few who permitted me over the years to call them '*friend*' have honored me with that title for

which I am ever grateful.

My dearest friendship is with our Lord. This is not unique, nor does it make me spiritual. For me, talking to Him in the quiet moments, the alone moments, the desperate moments is simply life.

There is nothing I haven't told Him about what excites me or troubles me. I want to think we share in it all. I have memories of these 'conversations' that alone prove to me how real He is. Life was simple *back-in-the-day* before tech toys and cars were invented. But I had streets—city streets—and the occasional friendly dog. I walked everywhere—to and from church, back from school, or just around the block and spent time conversing with a friend.

The benefit of these walks were everywhere in evidence to me. I am not surprised anymore when life falls out in a way that reminds me of them. It is not answered prayer as if to suggest I told God what to do. I give Him no instruction but you cannot walk miles talking to a friend without their discovering your heart, what's in your thoughts or knowing what's priority in your life.

And if I had it wrong, He had the wisdom and the means to correct me. Not to sound crass but that happened, too. During some of these quiet times I just knew somehow that I was not thinking straight: like the time I was discouraged over a weak attendance at Bible study and I tearfully informed God that I would never conducted a study for fewer than four. I knew in that instant that I was wrong about this.

My search for meaning was always the topic of the day as a sauntered down city sidewalks undisturbed.

If it turned out that everything else of importance were taken from me and at journey's end this single friendship alone re-

mained, I will still know it has been a life well spent. In a search for meaning and love, I find in Him alone all I was ever really looking for.

A TREASURED LIFE

The ultimate experience for me was gaining enough insight into my past to be able to see myself as I was and to accept that person.

... and to give voice to a faith that affirms that my life has been underwritten by a divine oversight.

WITHOUT rerouting the story around misadventures and embarrassments, I have found that writing this brief overview of life has given me a deeper appreciation for my past. It has helped me to see myself in a clearer light. And I have learned a lot about the guy I am now because I have been reacquainted with the guy I was then.

All this put the spotlight on me without dragging others along as excuses for my *sins*. I need not blame the few whose innocence or ignorance failed them in the hour of my need. If I limp along, no one need be accused of hamstringing my future. Forgiveness comes easier now.

I don't need to belittle my actual achievements, either. I find no purpose now in boasting of things I never accomplished. Writing my story has helped me recognize false humility as well as where I might have taken the blame for wrongs I never did.

This short journey through the decades has given me courage to accept the truth about myself. This has altered my perspective allowing me to focus more on what really happened in my past, a reality I might have otherwise tried to explain away attempting to cope with unbearable feelings of shame and hurt. I find myself more accepting now of what happened and that has made me more accepting of who I have become.

I see who I am on many levels. My faith in God by His Grace remains unshakable even while debating His faithfulness with others less convinced.

I have been able to finally say goodbye to some old girl friends, to many regrets and some personal blame I assumed because there was no better explanation.

I know my wife loves me—in her way. I see now that the evidence is in after decades of her commitment to my happiness. Ours is a love purified in the crucible of hard times. Love changes here. Love shines purer as the impurities of selfish interests are burned off. Our attraction for one another is deeper than physical; it has become a marriage of souls.

I know now what church means even while it is changing in a modern world. I know what worship looks like and feels like for me. And I no longer confuse God and the church. This is a wonderful by-product of this review of my life.

I know that sharing, teaching, preaching the Word is what I enjoy doing most and I do that now by blogging and writing.

And one of the biggest benefits coming from this exercise in reviewing my life is my ability now to accept others. I am less threatened by differences or confrontation. I accept me; I can accept you.

The most treasured life is one, looking back, that brings a contented sense that living it was worth it. For me, this means looking back on the past and—finally being acquainted with who I have become—accepting that person as a cherished friend.

... and to give voice to a faith that affirms that my life has been underwritten by a divine oversight.

As John Newton wrote: *Grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.*

ENDNOTES



Mom and my Sister Faith and Dad (Left) Uncle Al
(Upper Right)
Joyce at Joshua's birth (Lower Right: A dozen yellow
roses in the background)



Our Family with Mom Miller and Joyce: age 4



Our boys: L2R Jim, Josh, Tim (Joyce is in the background)



1. <http://www.charlotteeriksson.com>
2. https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7056690.Charlotte_Eriksson
3. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. NIV
4. Dr. David Seamands, Emotional and Spiritual Wholeness (from a seminar given at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an Ockenga Institute Workshop.)
5. "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' NIV
6. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, NIV
7. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. NIV
8. For God has shined in our hearts.. to give the light of the knowledge ... of God
9. The Lord will plead my cause.
10. It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. NIV
11. Sarah Williams (1837–1868) was an English poet, most famous as the author of "The Old Astronomer"
12. Romans 5:5 NIV
13. taken from Call the Midwife, Farewell to the East End by Jennifer Worth. pg 116
14. ESV I Corinthians 13:7
15. Griffin, Joe; Tyrrell, Ivan (2013-04-29). Human Givens: The new approach to emotional health and clear thinking. Human Givens Publishing.
16. from the Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath
17. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." NIV
18. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. NIV
19. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy. NIV
20. Harold S. Kushner, rabbi emeritus at Temple Israel in Natick, Massachusetts, in the Forward to Viktor E. Frankl's Man's Search for

Meaning

21. Viktor E. Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning
22. Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning.
23. Brian Krans. Meetville.com
24. Albert Einstein
25. NIV Song of Solomon 8:6
26. Exodus 8:22 NIV
27. Dickens, Charles (2010-12-01). A Tale of Two Cities (p. 8). Public Domain Books.
28. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. NIV
29. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. NIV
30. Robert Louis Stevenson, Familiar Studies of Men and Books
31. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. NIV
32. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown? He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. NIV
33. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. NLT
34. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. NIV
35. [Ned Vizzini, It's Kind of a Funny Story](#)