

Why I Write... A Memoir by Ryan Don Bozis

The Story so Far, Child of God at Play...

Seems I've always been a child at play. My approach to everything seems to be a fearless dive, witness my dive into the hay bales pit, into creative and playful fun, and don't matter what, I'm all in. Don't know where it come from, but prolly come from Jesus. I write because I can, and because I have to.

First, Family... Bozis / Buczyk

"Buczyk" is a surname, potentially of Polish origin, meaning "complainer" or "grouser." My sister Ellen has done an amazing job researching and compiling a genealogy of our families. She sent me a copy of my grandfather's baptism certificate from a Catholic church in Pennsylvania with his name, Joseph Bozis, and the corrected spelling in quotation marks.

Dad was a Sweetheart...

Dad grew up in Chicago where his parents, aunts and uncles had grown up. Grampa Joe was of Lithuanian ancestry, Gramma Sylvia was of Czechoslovakian ancestry. Joe's mother Mary was a single mom with Tony, Al, Joe and Mary for children and working as a housecleaner. Michael, her husband, was working in the coal mines of southern Illinois. Sylvia's older sister was Helen. Sylvia was pretty and sweet, Helen was smart and funny.

My grandparents, Joe and Sylvia, loved us dearly and doted on us. Sylvia was the model housewife, cooking and cleaning and doing laundry old school with a double sink and wringer and clotheslines in the basement. She wore a cotton shift and panties as she worked and sometimes literally caught her tit in the wringer. We took baths in the big double sink and marveled at the undergarments hanging on the lines. Joe's shirts were always hand washed with bluing and starch and ironed with loving care.

Sylvia loved to play silly games with us and laughed gleefully at all of our silly jokes and antics. We played dress up with Sylvia's and Joe's clothing and shoes. We sorted through a cookie tin treasure trove of buttons. We played giant checkers on a plastic mat spread on the living room floor. We went on hobo picnics to the park and ate by the pond and fed the ducks. In later years when we nearly adults she would wistfully ask us if we remembered all those days and smiled dreamily as we answered yes, grandma.

Joe collected pocket change in a piggy bank Sylvia made from a bleach

bottle adorned with sewing spool legs, felt ears and button eyes and a pipe cleaner tail. When the pig was full Joe would butcher it with a large kitchen knife and let us take as many coins as our little hands could scoop from the trove, then we would retreat to our corners and count up our wealth and gleefully taunt each other about the results.

When Mom asked Dad for the divorce it broke his heart. He was deeply in love with her but not the man she wanted. I knew he loved her until the end, because he flew into a rage whenever Mom came up in our conversations and arguments. After Mom died, Dad urgently called my sister Ellen through the monitor. Ellen rushed downstairs to Dad's basement apartment, and he took her by the arm with one hand and said, "Oh good, it's you! I just saw you but you weren't here." Ellen reassured him, and he asked, "How is your mother. I hear she isn't well." Ellen answered that Mom had died two weeks before, and Dad said, "Oh." Soon after, he stopped eating and drinking and asked for morphine. Several days later he died. My sisters and I agree that Mom and Dad were reconciled and reunited in eternity and that Mom had visited him. My sister Ellen looks like Mom.

Wipe Out...

Dad always compulsively counted squares of toilet paper: one for wiping his nose or a small spill, two for blowing his nose, and three for wiping his butt. I don't count as I go but usually tear off three to five squares when I wipe. I've backpacked a lot and have had to make the TP last as long as possible and continue those habits to this day. When a roll gets down to a third or a quarter, I swap it out for a new one and put the old one on the refrigerator. Paper towels are usually way too big for kitchen use and expensive. TP works great for little drips and drops, spills and splatters. It's the best thing ever for oily and greasy stuff on dishes and utensils and knives. Wipe it up, wipe it off, throw it away, or use a wad of it to oil the skillet as you go! It's also good for squashing little bugs and spiders, though I usually let the spiders be. Kathleen and her family uses prodigious amounts of TP for every wipe. It's nuts!

Be careful, it's hot!

My mother once told me that when I was a little boy I had turned on the hot water to wash my hands in the hall bathroom near the kitchen and scalded my hand. She heard me cry out and rushed to my aid and reached to turn off the hot water. I tearfully said, "Be careful, it's hot!" She turned off the hot and turned on the cold and put my hand in the stream, then turned it off and gathered me into her arms. I have a clear memory of it to this day.

Mom was the youngest of four sisters. I don't know the details but know she was abused by two of her older sisters and by her mother. Mom had the misfortune of being born the image of her mother's sister

Margaret who was the darling and black sheep of the family. She had a scandalous affair with a married man and died in a dentist chair from a reaction to anesthesia, probably during an abortion. Grandmother probably unconsciously reacted with visceral pain at the sight of my mother, and my aunts probably picked up on the vibe.

My grandmother Florence was a narcissist. Mom was a survivor, highly intelligent, narcissistic, manipulative, subversive and mean as a snake when she didn't get what she wanted, but she had other redeeming qualities. Mom and I had an unnaturally intimate relationship. She groomed me to be a surrogate for the man she wanted my father to be, something I learned to understand many years later. I have no professional credentials but have had an abundance of tutoring in psychology and mental and emotional health for which I am abundantly grateful.

My grandparents on my mother's side, Vernie & Florence, loved and doted on us. They had a home in northern Ohio, outside of Milan, outside of Sandusky, outside of Cleveland. The house was big and old and maintained with loving care. Grampa was a carpenter and woodworker and an industrial arts teacher. Gramma was also a teacher of home economics. They were both retired by the time I came to know them. The house was situated on a farm across the road from another farm, both owned by my aunt and uncle, Braley and Loren Heckleman. Loren was a car and farm equipment dealer, and Braley was a homemaker and housewife. Loren Verne, Rex, Curt and Lucy were my cousins. They rented the fields to other farmers. As children we had the run of all the acreage and the adjoining woods and streams and a pond. Our grandparents kept some livestock and chickens, cats and a dog. Aunt and uncle just kept cats for the barn. One of the cats had a kinky tail and another had none, because they slept on the engine block for warmth, and the fan belt got 'em. Me-owww!

Rex and I are about the same age, but very different. His values reflect his mother's. Mine don't, very much don't. We got along well as kids and ran wild and free on the farm and through the surrounding fields and woods. Rex had a pump pellet rifle, and I had the Crosman 112 target pistol that was once my Grampa Joe's, then Dad's. It came with CO2 tanks that screwed into the end of a chamber below the barrel and recharged the gun for 50 - 100 shots, depending on the power setting. Rex and I pretended to hunt down Mental Maniacs, imaginary lunatics escaped from a regional low security facility. Around the barn were empty barrels that popped and boomed in the Summer heat. Rex and I identified the barrel concealing the MM and got set to open fire. As Rex kicked over the barrel and raised his rifle to his shoulder, I pulled the trigger and grazed his elbow as it came into view in my gunsight. OuchiHuaHua!!! Rex dropped the rifle and shakily rolled up his sleeve to find a slight welt across his arm. OK, we're good, "Sorry, Mom, I caught my shirt on a nail in the barn."

Target Practice... Fuses, Pigeons, Trains, Cars

We also took target practice around the barns, getting paid a quarter for each pigeon we killed in the barn, but we had to retrieve them all to get paid, good thinking on Grampa's part. Searching for a fallen pigeon, we found a box of the old-time glass centered fuses and set them up on fence rails and posts and took turns knocking them down one by one. I shot one sitting on top of a post, and it didn't move, except I was sure it moved a tiny fraction of an inch. I walked over to the post and found the center of the fuse cleanly blown out. Perfect shot!

Ellen and Lucy were close as sisters and messed around innocently doing gurlly stuff that was off the radar for the boys. Sometimes Carrie played along, or sometimes hung with Curt who was about her age. Rex and I thought for some stupid reason we could mess with the gurls by pretending to shoot at passing trains, especially the trains with cars on the way to market. We popped off air puffs and exclaimed about successfully shooting out a car window. The guns were confiscated, of course, and the gurls were triumphantly and gleefully gloating.

EMRs...

My cousins roundly sneered and jeered at us and each other, introducing an unfamiliar moniker, "EMR," pronounced "eemer," meaning Educatable Mentally Retarded person. Not proud, but I plead ignorance, not malice. I stopped using it after I saw a regional TV ad for the benefit of those so labelled.

Sore Winner & Loser at Croquet...

I was and am not fiercely competitive with any but myself. I usually excel at each and every endeavor, unaware of the occasional resentment from more competitive competitors. I bent to pick up my winning ball at the finish of a croquet victory and got clonked in the forehead by Curtis as he swung his mallet to send my ball into the next county. It was a glancing blow that split the skin just below my eyebrow. I put my hand to the wound and took it away to see blood, then immediately put my hand back to keep pressure on the minor wound. Curtis was appalled and apologetic, and I was fine. I went into the house with a train of concerned cousins behind me. Aunt Braley and Mom were in the kitchen and first to see the gore streaming down my face. Pandemonium ensued but quickly changed to calm administrations of wet wipes and a band aid, then a drive to the doctor in town for stitches, all good.

The Experiment...

Rex and I had to share a bed occasionally. Upon one occasion, as adolescent teenagers, we experimented with what might it be like to be

naked with a girl and took turns saying complimentary things to each other in falsetto voices. It proved frustrating, then embarrassing when some mom called up through the air vents to knock it off and go to sleep.

The Reunion...

Some recent year we held a Family Reunion at the homestead in Ohio. The grandparents had passed but were honored with loving memories and tributes. Most of the sibs and parents and aunts and uncles and cousins were there. We had the obligatory family dinner and plenty of time to visit in small and large groups. There was a bonfire and a pig roast and fireworks after dark. Someone threw a liquor bottle into the bonfire and a small blue flame briefly flared at the neck. Later, I was stoking and tidying the fire with a spade, and Loren Verne barked an order at me to take the bottle out of the fire. I said I hadn't put it in, and he said he didn't care, and repeated the order. I calmly lifted it out with the spade and walked it over to the empty pig roast pit and dropped it into the hole, to keep it safely out of the way of anyone walking around. Loren demanded an explanation. I answered, leaned the spade against the barn and walked to the house. Those were the last words I ever hope to hear from or say to LV.

Walking through the house to find a comfortable and quiet chair for reading, I found LV and his wife and sons on the floor of a sitting room, doing some kind of exercises. I asked what they were doing and Elena answered, core strengthening. I moved on to another room. Later, after lunch, Elena excused herself and drove away dressed in workout tights. I asked Braley where she was going. Braley rolled her eyes and sighed, then said she was going to workout, because she had eaten a brownie off the lunch buffet. Over time I have surmised that Elena has a serious self image disorder and is wasting away her body with no self control, no help, and totally enabled by her family.

Home Visit...

When I was living with Nancy we went to visit with Mom and Charles, her third husband, and Sarah, my third sister, at their home in Missouri. Mom had switched from Lutheranism to American Christian Orthodoxy. Charles was an Episcopalian priest who also switched to orthodoxy. Sarah was quite young and orthodox by default. Because Nancy and I were living in sin, we had to sleep in a tent in the yard. Mom's dog Bruno, an amazing specimen of a stock dog, absolutely adored me and I him. He stood guard at the door of the tent all night.

The Game & Games & Forever Over...

Mom and I had for years played Scrabble together, among other, less innocent games. As children my sisters and I were encouraged to use a dictionary as we played and expanded our vocabularies. Mom and I sat

down to a game of Scrabble with me at the kitchen table while Nancy read a book. I started to notice that Mom was playing crap words for low scores. Then I started to read the words and put them together. Mom was using the Scrabble board to tell me what she thought of Nancy, and I suddenly realized she had been doing similar plays for my whole life. My ears rang, my nerves tingled, and the game was over. I swept the table clean and told Mom we were leaving, and I didn't know when I would coming back; don't call; don't write! Several years later we reconciled, and I realized I had been trying to replay my parents' script with Nancy, thinking the actors were the problem, WTF?!!!.

Mom passed peacefully after battling, for five years, colon cancer that had spread to her liver. After Kathleen's father died, I decided to take a road trip to visit my parents and had a good visit with Mom in June of 2024. She had just decided to end chemo treatments and was meeting with the doctors and priest. She was making amends and asking forgiveness and tying up loose ends. We had several good, long talks. I filled her in on the gap years and expressed my love and forgiveness. I said my goodbyes and went on to visit with Dad.

Ellen was scheduled for thyroid surgery, so the timing of my visit was helpful. While Ellen and her husband Mark were at the hospital, I was home with Dad. I got a call from Mark, because Dad had called him for help with his catheter. I went down and helped Dad strip down and dry off and put on clean clothes. I was struck by how small he was. He had no butt. I realized I was probably looking at my future. I'm often startled by the bathroom mirror, wondering, "How the Hell did Dad get into my bathroom?!"

After Ellen's return from the hospital, she and Bianca, Dad's beloved and loving caregiver, were in the basement apartment trying to get Dad into the shower. I was in the kitchen and listening to the monitor as Bianca gently chided Dad, who was OCD and saying, "No, wait, no, no, wait!," and Ellen yelling, "Dad, get in the shower!" He got in the shower. Ellen came up to the kitchen, put her head in her hands, with her elbows on the island, and said, "I can't do this anymore. I need help." She got help.

I Do Solemnly Swear...

I learned to swear from my father before I could talk. My grandparents were caring for us while my parents were away, and my grandfather locked the door to the bathroom in the hall near the kitchen. When I tried to open the door and couldn't, I swore, "Dodammit!," and my grandmother nearly fell off the stool she was standing on, she was a shorty, and rearranging the cabinets for my mother's resentful benefit. My mother also swore like a sailor. It's in my jeans. Mom and I fondly shared an appreciation for the fine art of swearing. We swore eloquently and with sharp wit and precision. She drew the line at "motherfucker," because it was too close to home for her.

Hummingbird came by...

I was enjoying the hammock on the balcony and the hummingbird visited the feeder sipping and squirting as it tanked up. A buzzard flew over, and I swear I heard a crow say, "Uh,oh, Look out!" Then a juvee squirrel filled it's belly with maple helicopters and lounged on the branch with back legs and tail limply straddling the branch and front legs folded under its chin. Ahhh, Summertime and the living is easy... catfish!

I have had a long and checkered career and have been many things to many people:

Loving and Beloved Son and Brother

My mother, Judith Schultz, was born February 25, 1939, and died October 14, 2024. My father, Donald Bozis, was born January 12, 1935 and died October 29, 2024.

I'm the elder brother of three incredible sisters, Carrie and Ellen and Sarah. I was born September 22, 1959. Carrie was born November 27, 1960. Ellen was born July 12, 1061. Sarah was born March 1, 1986.

My parents were married and I was born in 1959. My mother knew the day she married that she had made a terrible mistake and told her father-in-law, my grandfather. He told her it was too late, and she would have to live with it. My mother lived the lie for 18 years until I graduated high school.

Ecumenical Christian Disciple, Evangelist, Missionary, Deacon and... Prophet?

Christ has been with me since before I was born, but I didn't know Him by name until much later. He first came to me in my mother's womb when I died as a fetus, and He resurrected me to be born into the world. I knew Him well as a child but later got confused by the church. Then I got hurt by my mother and turned away from Him in anger and resentment.

In Dallas I came to faith in Christ at Highland Park Presbyterian Church and became a member. I was nurtured in the faith through the Single adult BRIDGES Class lead by our Single Adult minister, Paul Petersen. I participated in the Evangelism Explosion evangelism training and outreach program. I went with a group of mission volunteers to Merida, Mexico. Kathleen and I went to Guatemala as mission volunteers during the ending of the civil war. I also trained, was ordained and served as a Deacon. I was involved with and served on the leadership committee of the single adult BRIDGES Class. Some of the women organized a Bible study group centered around a book and

program called Women of Excellence. Our band of boyz organized a Bible study group centered around the Bible and any other good books we found. We called it Men of Mediocrity. Those brothers and I will love and cherish each other forever.

I'm part of a men's Bible study group meeting at Eternity Church Thursday mornings. We have a brother, Franklin Reding, in our Bible study band, who is an older gentleman, retired Presbyterian minister and biblical scholar par excellence. One Thursday morning we met up in front of the church and warmly greeted each other. I said to him, "Franklin, my dear, I don't give a damn." I stole that joke from Dixie Whitehouse, my English teacher, who had us watch "Gone with the Wind" in class. Dixie's maiden name was Workman. She married into the Whitehouse.

I don't know for sure that I am a prophet and didn't ask to be one, but I am here to help Christ to help me to help others. He seems to have me saying many things to many people, things I couldn't nor wouldn't say otherwise. We'll see...and I saw. As I write this, I have just come from a Power and Presence of God prayer meeting at Eternity Church, where David Singh assured us we were all destined to be Living Bibles and Prophets. Amen and Alleluia, Praise the Lord, I'm in!

Artist, Photographer, Humorist, Storyteller, Poet

I've always been an artist in mind, heart and soul. Everything I do is an expression of The Creator who uses my body, mind, heart and soul to create beauty, whether I'm drawing, painting, taking photos, cooking, doing laundry and dishes, sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, writing or speaking or just having a second cup of coffee. The Creator also has the best sense of humor in the universe. If you want to give Him a laugh, tell Him your plans!

Everything I Know about Painting:

Work quickly and loosely across the whole image to roughly block in (mass) areas of highlight, shadow and midtones. The sky will generally have the lightest values, then horizontal (ground) planes, then sloping planes such as rooftops and hills. Vertical planes such as trees, buildings and figures will have the darkest values. Value is more important than color at this stage, so experiment with complementary colors for a rich underpainting effect.

Create natural harmony of light and color in highlights, midtones and shadows. Warm light produces warm highlights, warm midtones and cool shadows, which suggest afternoon or evening light and/or Summer to Fall. Warm light also generally works better for portraits, giving a healthier look to flesh tones. Cool light produces cool highlights, cool midtones and warm shadows, which suggest morning light and/or Winter to Spring. Use warm yellow to brighten warm colors and white to

brighten cool colors. Black has a strong cooling and deadening effect on color. Use it sparingly or not at all to darken shadows. Create atmospheric perspective with more saturated color and stronger contrast in the foreground, diminishing saturation and contrast through the middle ground to background.

Create a balanced and dynamic composition by applying the "rule of thirds" and selectively building details in a triangular distribution of primary, secondary and tertiary focal points. Avoid centering the subject and/or dividing the image into equal parts. An odd number of objects/figures is more interesting than an even number. Balance multiple objects/figures against a single, isolated object/figure or, similarly, a large area of color/value against a small, isolated area.

Pay attention to edges. One of my drawing professors talked about "ownership of the edge" which refers to how light and dark interact in an image. The more closely balanced and complex the relationship between light and dark values along the edge of (and within) an image, the more interesting the composition. Avoid uniform bands of color or value that extend from edge to edge. Diagonal lines are more interesting than horizontal or vertical. Convolutioned lines are more interesting than straight. Contrast angular lines/shapes against curved. Create lost edges throughout the image, repeating and feathering colors from one area into another as highlights, reflections, etc.

Beauty = Dynamic Tension?

Over time I have contemplated a theory of Beauty. Perfection is unattainable in the world, but even the nearly perfect seems unattractive, uninteresting, un compelling, unchallenging, unapproachable. Imperfection can be all these things and worse – ugly, offensive, disgusting – but Beauty seems to be found in the details and in a dynamic tension between extremes that demands engagement:

Comprehensible v Incomprehensible
Universalism v Individualism
Simplicity v Complexity
Centrism v Extremism
Uniformity v Diversity
Pattern v Disruption
Harmony v Discord
Order v Chaos
Life v Death
Love v Hate
Good v Evil

I also wonder if chaos is simply order beyond our comprehension.
Chaos: Godless Disorder or Godly Order Beyond Our Comprehension ?

Grade School Student (Former)

We lived in Peoria, Illinois, after my parents left the Washington, DC, area, so Dad could study at Concordia Seminary. I started kindergarten there at the age of four. My birthday is in September and I could have waited another year, but I was already reading and doing math. Later we moved to Springfield, Illinois, then to Houston, Texas, then Columbus, Ohio. My parents were chasing the American Dream. Later they caught and killed it.

In Columbus, I went to a grade school down the street and around the bend. We walked to school and home for lunch, then back to school. Mr. Lewis, the janitor, and I enjoyed setting up and taking down the chairs and tables in the gymnasium for lunch. He collected lost balls from the roof of the school and gave them to me by the bagful. I was very popular with the other kids for sharing the balls. He also gave me an ashtray he had made by melting a glass bottle in the pottery kiln. Years later I had a vision of Mr. Lewis as I was lying in bed with my eyes closed but not sleeping. He appeared to me as if he had stepped out of darkness and into a light. To this day I wonder if that was the day he died.

We had music class in the gymnasium and had to stand on risers on stage and sing. The first day of class the teacher said anyone who didn't want to participate could take an "F" and go sit in the library. I made my way to the end of the risers and down off the stage and was walking to the door when the teacher asked me where I thought I was going. I answered that I was going to the library. She told me to march my butt back to the riser. I did so with great resentment and refused to sing, mouthing the words silently. The only song I ever sang for her was "It's a Small World." I liked it for some reason I can't explain. She had to rearrange us all just for that song.

Kahler Middle School Student & Cafeteria Worker (Former)

We lived in Schererville, a little town in northern Indiana. The middle school started with grade six, but in Columbus middle school started with grade seven. In Columbus, I started in the middle grade of middle school, and it was challenging at first. My favorite teacher was Mr. Eggers. He called himself Ham and Eggers and took a kindly interest in me. He had me read "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair, because he knew it reflected my ancestry on my father's side. I was asked to run the movie projector for class and learned how to rethread the film when it broke. I also was asked to work in the school cafeteria catching trays, emptying the trash and sorting dishes and silverware as I passed them through to the dish room. My other responsibility was to run crates of milk to my friend Jim, who was selling it at a table at the other end of the room. I could catch glimpses of the crate at his feet and anticipate when he needed another. He would stand on his chair and wave at me when he got low on milk, then blush and get down

when he saw me already there with the milk. We got to leave class early and eat lunch for free. We were also paid cash and allowed to return late to class after lunch.

Lake Central Highschool (Graduate)

I loved high school. I majored in English, History, German, Math, Science and Art, and graduated with a 4.13 grade point average. I was also voted Best All Around Senior Boy. I was involved in student government my senior year, and we had a book of passes, signed by the Dean, that we could use whenever we wanted. I also had the use of a car senior year. We would sign ourselves out and get in the car and go. Once we drove to the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago. I went into the petting zoo area and found a zookeeper feeding a pack of baby wolves. She invited me in, and the cubs climbed all over me and nipped at me like a bunch of puppies. Rosie and I signed ourselves out and went to the premier of "Star Wars." We bought our tickets and went to the end of the line that wrapped all the way around the side of the theater. The line started to move, and the side door opened as people came out. Rosie and I looked at each other and went into the empty theater and sat in front row seats.

I had a great group of friends, and we had a lot of fun together, but senior year one of those friends tried to seduce me. He invited me to his house one afternoon and convinced his younger sister to go elsewhere to play with a friend. I won't go into the details, but I was humiliated and ashamed and confused. I went home pondering what to do and say. I held my silence and decided he was still my friend and did my best to remain his friend, but things changed around me. Friends drifted away. Gradually they drifted back, and I later learned Brian had preemptively outed me, fearing I would out him.

We all gradually drifted apart in different directions. John died of AIDS. I saw Brian once at a reunion. Rosie was morbidly obese and having breathing and other health problems last I knew, so she's probably gone. Joe and Mike are probably still close to home.

Kitchen Worker Tiebel's Family Restaurant (Former)

While in high school I worked in the kitchen of a local institution owned by the Tiebel family, who were members of our church. My friends Brian, John and Danny also worked there with me. I was a utility worker, they were serving and bussing tables. One of my friends had a minor injury on the job that had to be reported. The insurance company then learned several of us were only fourteen years old, and we had to furlough until our next birthdays.

The restaurant is famous for its boned and buttered lake perch fillets. I was told by someone to be sure and have them when I got my free meal before work, so I asked for them next time and got them.

They were amazing. The manager, one of the Tiebel sons, asked me how I had managed to get them, and I told him. He laughed out loud and told me to enjoy them, then went to chat with the chef. The fish fillets came from the processor scaled and butterflied and frozen. One of my jobs was to remove the boxes of fillets from the walk-in freezer, thaw them in a sink and use kitchen shears to cut them in two. Maudie would then dredge them in flour, dip them in egg, roll them in cornmeal and stack them on sheet pans, which I would carry to the walk-in cooler and slide them into a rack. Maudie was an older woman with bright red hair, a face covered with so much makeup powder on her face that there was a cloud of it all around her head, and she had a large bump on one forearm. She had been a professional wrestler managed by her father, swore like a sailor and told me stories that changed my understanding of the world. She told me there are no virgins, because flies get 'em when they're babies. I absolutely adored Maudie.

Sometimes I worked the dishwasher. A monstrous conveyer belt carried dishracks, trays and pots and pans through something like a carwash. The bussers would carry in trays of dishes, glassware, silverware, food waste and trash. Several of us stood between trash cans and behind a trough that ran to a powerful disposal unit. When the wire from a champagne bottle jammed in the disposal it would stop, and the food waste would clog it. Water flowing down the trough would start to back up and overflow onto the floor and down the floor drains, soaking our pants and socks and shoes. I often went home smelling like vomit.

I recently revisited Tiebel's Restaurant while on the road home from a reunion with friends and family. I had a delightful conversation with a lovely server who brought me up to date on the family business, and who thoughtfully and carefully wrapped up two of the classic Tiebel's branded water glasses and threw in a handful of branded sugar packets and toothpicks, all of which are proudly displayed on a shelf in my studio.

Mom's Disclosure

One Summer day my father and I had another of our shouting arguments. I stomped off to my bedroom and threw myself down on my bed. Mom came to my door and sat in the hallway with her back to the wall. She said my father would never change, she would leave him when my sisters finished high school, and I shouldn't mention it to anyone until then. My head swirled, my ears rang, and the world spun round beneath me. I fell into the abyss, silently raged at God and wept bitter tears. Eventually, I got up and numbly went on with my life, mourning the death of my family.

WashU & Divorce

Mom asked Dad to move out, and divorced him the next year. Dad drove me to Washington University for my freshman year. I tried to put the

past behind me, but struggled, and failed miserably, binge drinking, and dropping out of classes. At the end of sophomore year I had a meltdown. There was a shortage of campus housing, and a lottery for available rooms. My lottery number was very low, and I had a panic attack when I found it on the list. I made my way to the counseling center, and asked for help. My friends David, Paul, Scott, Eric and I found work and housing for the Summer with the university, then later an apartment off campus, and we set up housekeeping together. At the end of junior year I ran across an ad in Backpacker Magazine for something called Hik-A-Nation, a West Coast to East Coast backpacking trek. I went to the library, and read up on backpacking gear, and techniques, bought what I needed, stashed my stuff in my mother's basement, and flew to Las Vegas with a one-way ticket.

Washington University School of Fine Art Student (Graduate)

My parents argued over my going to Washington University, and Mom prevailed as always. Before my junior year of high school Dad took me on a tour of potential schools. We first went to a college fair at the Art Institute of Chicago. I left with a short list of possibilities, then Dad and I went on the road to Indiana University, Cleveland Institute of Art, and Washington University. I felt instantly at home with WashU. While in Indianapolis we visited the Indianapolis 500 museum. As we were leaving the parking lot, we drove past the open gate to the track. Dad pulled through the gate and onto the track in his Olds Delta 88 and gunned it around the track, then got the hell out of there. I was scared and thrilled.

I struggled and thrived at WashU. I felt as if I were totally on my own in the world and couldn't ask for help. Sadly for me, I was pretty well able to fake it until I could make it, until I couldn't. I dove into the learning experience like it was a rushing stream and swam like hell with great joy and enthusiasm. I just couldn't stay in the lanes imposed upon me. I wrote an essay in high school about running in a race, jockeying for position and trying to get ahead of those in front, then veering off to the right and off the track and over the fence and up the hill to the top, then looking back at a circular track and walking away forever to explore the world and eventually, Eternity. Amen, alleluia, praise the Lord! I dropped out after junior year and walked across Nevada, Utah, and Colorado with a backpack and a bunch of crazy people who started at the West Coast and were walking to the East Coast.

Later, I decided to earn my degree for the sake of my father who struggled mightily with my wayward ways through life. During a class reunion, I met with the Dean of the art school at WashU and learned I needed only one art history class to complete the requirements. I enrolled in an Italian Renaissance class at University of North Texas in Denton and mistakenly took an academic skills test in order to enroll. The test was mostly question and answer but also required

writing a story or an essay. I used the full time allotted, answered all the questions, wrote an outline on paper provided, then wrote a story. I passed the test with a score of 99 percent. I wonder what I missed...?

Taking the class while working fulltime at Shoestring Advertising was a challenge. I missed class for several weeks, then met with the instructor to get caught up. She sternly expressed her disappointment with me and said she would have to lower my grade. I explained my situation and told her she should do whatever she had to do. I aced the class and graduated in 1993, 16 years after I had started at WashU. I'm calling it my gradual degree, Ha!, and mailed the diploma to Dad as a surprise. He never received it. Kathleen surprised me with a replacement years later. Whoopee! I proudly have it tucked away on a bookshelf somewhere.

Hik-A-Nation:

June - October, 1980, Age 20-21, I was so burned out with school and my emotional baggage, I studied up on backpacking, made my list and bought a one-way ticket to Las Vegas, arriving on a Sunday afternoon. I dropped a nickel in a slot machine and lost it, so much for luck!, then started searching for public transportation to Hiko, Nevada, a speck on the map north of Vegas. I came up empty and took a cab to the YMCA. The cabbie asked what I was up to and suggested I just hitchhike, everybody does it. He dropped me off on the side of the highway North. I stood there wondering what the Hell I was up to when I got a ride with a geology student working on his graduate thesis, a report on boomtown planning, and on his way to a big project north of Hiko. He described the geological history of the terrain as we drove past it. Nevada is on the South rim of the Aquarius Plateau. Everything to the South falls away to the bottom of the Grand Canyon, the deepest part of the great trench. It was formed by the melting of ice after the Ice Age, when a giant inland sea of meltwater broke through a massive ice dam, and the torrent scrubbed away everything in its path. He let me off at the junction to Hiko and went on his way with gratitude for the company and warm wishes for me.

An older couple in a pickup stopped, and I climbed up into the bed after dropping in my backpack. They drove ten feet, then stopped to ask me what I was up to, then suggested I stay where I was, because Hiko was just a post office in a trailer by the road. The sheriff lived in the trailer by the road where I was, and there was a fresh water spring right down the road from a roadside picnic table, trash barrel and shade tree with bushes screening it from the road. They went on their way with warm wishes and my gratitude, and I walked to the sheriff's trailer where his wife greeted me at the door and asked what I was up to. She had me in and fed me lunch, then sent me back to the roadside rest area to wait for her husband to come by. I set up my tent and waited. The sheriff came by in the evening and told me I was

good to stay and told me about the spring. I got water from the spring for cooking dinner and crawled into my Pocket Hotel tent as the temperature dropped with the sun. My stove boiled over and went out, and I ate half-cooked dehydrated chili I had made at my mother's home before packing up for the journey. I cried myself to sleep after taking a look around at the mountain, desert plane and starry sky. I awoke in the morning grateful to be alive and well in paradise. The sheriff stopped again and told me he would find out what he could. I took my water bottle and textbook and pencil and paper to the spring to chill and write my final paper for class.

After writing for a while I walked back to my tent for my water bottle and toothbrush. Walking back to the spring I saw a van pulling and Airstream approaching along the road. As it passed I saw the Hik-A-Nation banner on the side of the trailer and ran to catch up to it at the stop sign. I asked the driver as he rolled down the window if he was Monty Montgomery. He looked me up and down and up and down the road asked me who the Hell was I? I answered that I was Ryan Bozis and had written to him about joining Hik-A-Nation. His jaw dropped, and he looked me up and down and up and down the road and asked me where the Hell was all my stuff???!!! I laughed and told everything was behind the bushes. He told me to start packing and he would pick me up after returning from the post office. I walked the sheriffs trailer and told his wife the good news. She had me in for lunch again and sent me on my way with warm wishes and my gratitude. Hik-A-Nation had found me standing by the side of the road in the middle of nowhere, holding a water bottle and a toothbrush and wearing a white cotton dress shirt, khaki pants, brand new boots and a grin. I was on my way with warm wishes and gratitude for God's abundant blessings.

Many Flies Scenic Corral...

Having been found I was welcomed into the van and rode with Tony, who had an injury, and Monty to what came to be known as Many Files Scenic Corral. It was a roadside corral for loading cattle onto trucks via a wooden ramp. A large mound of dirt concealed and protected a large water tank with a hose and spigot sticking out of the dirt at one end. I set up my tent and explored the area, nervously keeping the van and trailer in sight from the tops of ridges between arroyos. As I climbed up a ridge two young coyotes appeared at the top and froze, then came mama, who stood sizing me up. I let out a sharp, "BARK!", and they vanished in a flash of sundrenched golden fur. Ha! Returning to the van I came upon a heap of desiccated coyote carcasses, hair, teeth and bones shining in the dessert sun. After a while other hikers walked in alone or in pairs and small groups. I was warmly greeted and hugged by a sunburnt and mostly naked giant amazon named Janet. Good Lord, what had I gotten into? The entire group eventually gathered and introductions all around dazed and confused me. We stayed several days, grateful for the water and shade of the tank. Then the flies hatched and swarmed. Time to go! And we got!

Flyin' Ryan...

I took my time at first and rested often in whatever shade I could find, even lying on my back on a space blanket to blunt the points of whatever prickly ass plant it was and with only my head in the shade. Ouch! I would come upon and pass other hikers. Rounding a large sagebrush I came upon Dwayne lying on a picnic table with his pants around his ankles and sunning his inflamed genitalia. Yikes! I silently passed on by. I was moving pretty well by the end of the day, and the next day was easier still. Soon I developed a steady pace and extended times between breaks and suddenly I was out in the lead and never looked back. Hik-A-Nation evolved from a single file death march through San Francisco to a motley group bunched up behind a bewildered Jeannie, who had lost her magic somewhere in the urban maze. She turned her map around and around and put a finger to her chin and said, "I think it's this way..." The motley group marched on.

Over subsequent days and weeks stragglers dropped out and returned home. The group morphed into stalwart troupers. Various pathfinding and guiding theories were tested and booed. Hikers acquired maps of their own and sorted out into compatible groups. One especially stalwart Barry would set out in advance at the break of day and flag trees and bushes with colorful forest service tape. Then one fine day in Nevada the stalwart and intrepid groups caught up with a bewildered Barry, and Hik-A-Nation became a leaderless nomadic tribe pioneering across the desert Southwest. I had found my family home.

Divide and Conquer...

Crossing the Continental Divide was physically and emotionally one of the high points of my Hikanation experience. After days of resting and resupplying in Silverton, Colorado, I set out early the morning of August 25, 1980. A light drizzle fell steadily, and after just ten minutes hiking up the slope of the valley I entered the clouds. By mid-morning the weather began to clear and I caught up with several companions. We made slow, steady progress up the mountain as we followed an old mining road. Shortly after noon we reached the mine where buildings and shacks had tumbled into ruins of broken timbers and twisted sheet metal. Patches of snow melted into a stream of cold, clear, rushing water. We ate lunch there and rested, then continued to climb toward what we hoped to be the pass over the ridge.

As we crested the ridge we discovered not the pass but a lake nestled in a broad basin with peaks towering all around. The pass was still about 1000 feet above, and the trail seemed to end at the lake. Clouds rolled over the peaks. A cold rain began to fall. Two of my companions, newcomers to Hikanation, decided to call it quits and caught a ride down the mountain with a geologist who had been surveying mining prospects. I made camp, ate an early dinner and

settled in for a long night, feeling a touch of altitude sickness.

I woke up early next morning feeling fine. The sky was clear and bright above the ridge, but the air was sharply cold in the shadow of the mountain. Ice and frost covered the foot of my tent. I ate breakfast and packed quickly. Leaving my companions with a promise to wait for them at the top, I back-switched up the slope until I found the trail and then crested the ridge sooner than expected. I stepped out of the shadow of the mountain into a virtual sunrise of glorious light and a panorama of peaks and ridges extending to the horizon. An eagle soared overhead and away across the valley eastward. I whooped and laughed out loud, then wept and choked on sobs of overwhelming joy. I was on the Continental Divide!

Later I learned I was not yet on the Continental Divide. Joined by my companions, we descended from the pass to the valley, then continued onward, upward and eastward.

Why I Joined Hik-A-Nation Survey Questions and my Answers:

Q: Why did you sign up for the hike? How old were you?

A: I was having an existential crisis about my parents divorce and my life up to that time – struggling through college, binge drinking on weekends, having a nervous breakdown. I started counseling and stumbled across the HikaNation ad in Backpacker magazine. Sounded great. I was 20 years old.

Q: What is your favorite experience from the hike?

A: Dark Canyon, Utah, was a sojourn in paradise. I slept on top of a large rock at a canyon junction and awoke next morning to discover ancient petroglyphs carved in the rock face next to my bed. It gave me chills to think who might have camped there before. We scaled canyon walls, traversed narrow ledges, swam in pool after pool of crystal green water, made almost no miles, and shared the last of our food in a potluck supper in the cabin at the waterfall. As we settled down to sleep, moonlight shone through the open door. I watched mice run in and out over Scott in his sleeping bag on the porch. I whomped one with a sock, laughed out loud and woke Shelly. When the next mouse ran in she shrieked and flipped over backwards in her sleeping bag. Next morning Janet made skillet bread for all of us with what we found in the cabin food bin.

Q: Did you have a moment of enlightenment or “ah-ha moment” on the hike and if so, what was it?

A: I walked out of Silverton a day or two behind the rest of the group, because Monty had asked me to hike with some newcomers. As we climbed higher and higher toward the Continental Divide the altitude, weather and exertion convinced them to bail out. I think Phil caught up with me on the western slope of a long climb where we decided to camp for the night. Next morning I got up, packed fast in the freezing

cold shadow of the mountain and set out on my own for a long, switchback climb to the ridge. As I crested the ridge I stepped out of the shadow into glorious light and an endless vista of peak after peak and range after range. A bald eagle circled overhead, so close I could see its feathers. I started to laugh and cry, dropped my pack and turned circles with my arms in the air, praising a God I didn't really know at the time.

Q: What was your favorite state and why?

A: I expected Colorado to be great, but Utah was an absolutely awesome surprise.

Q: What was your least favorite part of the hike?

A: Leaving it.

Q: How did the hike change you?

A: I gained confidence, physical strength and well-being, self-reliance, self-awareness. I discovered how little I need to be comfortable and happy.

Q: What do you tell people about your achievement now?

A: Depends on the person and the moment. Sometimes I tell a personal story. Sometimes I talk about the AHS plan to establish an East-West corridor of trails and how we helped create the America Discovery Trail.

Q: What would you have changed about the hike?

A: I would have gotten more haircuts, packed decent town clothes in my box on the van, and I would have done the whole thing from start to finish.

Q: Did you pursue other hiking/backpacking afterwards? Long journeys or short weekends?

A: I still love to backpack, hike and camp. Mostly I do weekend trips, but I've done longer trips in Smoky Mountain NP, Colorado, Utah, Missouri, Arkansas, Virginia and the Georgia section of the AT. I'd love to do a walking tour of Scotland.

Q: What did you learn about yourself that you are willing to share?

A: Wherever I go my baggage goes with me, so I need to keep it light. Running away gets me nowhere. I have to run TO something or somewhere and choose carefully.

Q: Did it make you a stronger person?

A: Definitely

Q: Are you proud of your accomplishment?

A: I'm proud of what I did but disappointed I didn't do the whole thing.

Q: What was the dumbest thing you did on the hike?

A: I told Tim Geoghegan his tent would be good for winter conditions, but really, who wants to hear his tent is crap?

Q: What was your most vivid memory from the hike?

A: I think I've already shared that.

Q: What was your funniest moment on the hike?

A: Cracking jokes with the group in an old house at the edge of a cattle ranch.

Q: What was your most embarrassing moment on the hike?

A: Getting "lost," though I had actually gone a little ahead of the group. When I couldn't find the trail I decided to look for water and a place to camp down in the valley. That's where I found everybody.

Q: What was your nickname on the hike?

A: "Flyin' Ryan"

Q: Any other thoughts or stories you'd like to share?

A: Sure, but I'll never send this back if I start telling them all.

Hik-A-Nation Changed my Life for Good and Forever...

To this day I live like a backpacker in the wilderness even though I am living in Richmond, Virginia, in a beautiful condo apartment home of my own design and making. I eat and drink and poop and pee like a backpacker, dress and walk and sit in the lotus position on the ground and floor and furniture and talk and crack wise and laugh like a backpacker, wash my face in a stream of cold water in the morning and wipe it with a cloth like a bandana, carry toilet paper and paper napkins with me to blow my nose and wipe my butt and other messes. Life don't get better than that. Sometimes I even go out and do it all in the wilderness.

Over the years people have asked my help with hiking and backpacking. I hope you find these suggestions helpful:

How to walk:

This might seem ridiculous but hiking is actually a different way to walk.

A pair of walking sticks will be very helpful. Adjust them so you can hold the handgrip with your forearm level and your elbow at your side, or adjust them to a longer length, which I find more helpful on steep uphill and downhill climbs.

Level terrain with gradual ups and downs is easiest. Swing your legs, from hip to toe, in straight parallel lines. Lengthen your stride, keep your knees slightly bent and absorb the shock of each step with your leg muscles instead of your knees. Visualize your hips and pelvis moving forward in a graceful, undulating line and a few inches lower

than when standing. Land your steps from heel to toe. Relax your hands and arms and swing them at your sides with thumbs forward, or angle your walking sticks behind you and push off with each step.

Steep, uphill climbs are challenging. Slow your pace and use rest steps -- that is, fully extend your downhill leg and very briefly lock the knee with each step. The action works like a cam - as in a piston engine - and maximizes the efficiency of your effort. If you feel out of breath, or before you feel out of breath, breathe more deeply and slow down or take a standing rest break. If you feel dizzy, sit down, breathe slowly and deeply, rest, and drink water. Sipping Emergen-C or another electrolyte supplement might also help. Use walking sticks and arm strength to steady yourself and to pull or push yourself uphill. Steep, downhill climbs are most challenging. Slow down, take baby steps, keep your knees slightly bent, tense your leg muscles to absorb the shock and try to land each step heel first. On really big steps, turn sideways or completely around if necessary. Use walking sticks and arm strength to steady yourself and to help absorb the shock of landing each step.

While developing your form, pay attention to your breathing and how you move your whole body. You'll soon get the feel of it and make it an unconscious habit.

Experience:

The more knowledge you carry in your head, the less stuff you need in your pack.

Do your homework but just do it.

Start with slow and easy, learn your limits and gradually extend them.

Have fun and keep your sense of humor. You're going to be great!

Leave No Trace Wilderness Ethic:

[https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/?](https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=18565554164&gbraid=0AAAAADFQyorFU3Rz2QBphZXnaBjj7I35s&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI9-6pr52rjgMVvU1HAR2emSUFEAAYAiAAEgIVIPD_BwE)

[gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=18565554164&gbraid=0AAAAADFQyorFU3Rz2QBphZXnaBjj7I35s&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI9-6pr52rjgMVvU1HAR2emSUFEAAYAiAAEgIVIPD_BwE](https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=18565554164&gbraid=0AAAAADFQyorFU3Rz2QBphZXnaBjj7I35s&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI9-6pr52rjgMVvU1HAR2emSUFEAAYAiAAEgIVIPD_BwE)

How to Pee and Poop in the Woods:

Human Waste Disposal in the Backcountry: How to pee and poop in the woods - Trailspace

How To: Poop in the Woods (With Minimal Impact) - Visit USA Parks

Water:

<https://sawyer.com/products/sawyer-mini-filter/>

<https://www.katadyn.com/us/us/403-8014996-micropur-mp1-20-usa-only>

Ten Essentials:

The Ten Essentials for Hiking & Camping | REI Co-op

A space blanket or large trash bag can be used as emergency shelter and/or raingear. I carry an oversized poncho. When backpacking I also carry tent stakes and two walking sticks and use one for my tent pole.

Ultralight Backpacking:

My alcohol stove is on Andrew Skurka's website, which has a lot of interesting info: You searched for ryan bozis – Andrew Skurka
This is another interesting website where I posted for awhile under the name Major Slacker but haven't posted anything new for years.
Mostly, I posted about alcohol stoves and hammocks: <http://hikinghq.net/forum/showthread.php?t=1054>
Forums Archive – Backpacking Light
Ultra-Light Hikers Forum
7 Best Backpacking Forums (My Favorite Ones) | HikeMuch
<https://www.backpacking.net/bbs.html>

Food:

I like to make my own dehydrated meals, but I have the time and equipment. Here are some good resources for natural and organic freeze dried foods, but they cost more:
Freeze Dried Food for Backpacking & Emergencies | Backpacker's Pantry
Harmony House | Freeze Dried & Dehydrated Foods, Non-GMO
<https://www.thrivelife.com/>
<https://motherearthproducts.com/collections/organic-freeze-dried>
www.trek-lite.com

Socks:

Men's Maximum Cushion Crew Hiking Socks (3 Pairs)
Men's Merino Wool Hiking Clothes, Gear & Socks | Smartwool US |
Smartwool US
neoprene socks: <https://www.amazon.com/s>

Other Gear:

Campmor: Your Quickest Link to the Outdoors
<https://www.jacksrbetter.com/>
Waterproof Hunting & Fishing Clothing | Outdoor Apparel | Frogg Toggs
poncho tarp: <https://www.google.com/search?q=silnylon+poncho+tarp&aq=chrome..69i57.13037j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>
<https://www.equinoxltd.com/product/terrapin-ultralite-poncho-shelter>

Handi-Wipes & Zip-Locs...

Reduce! Reuse! Recycle! While working in food service at CapitalOne we used polyester wipes to sanitize. My coworkers frequently threw them away, but I used and reused them all day, then took them home in a plastic bag, hung them over the shower curtain rod to dry, then washed and dried them with our laundry and put them in a basket on top of the refrigerator or rolled them around a paper towel cardboard tube. I still have several rolls after giving away to friends and family by the score. A roll of select-a-sheet paper towels will last us for more than a year. We don't buy them by the bale at Costco. For one thing, where would we keep them anyway? Toilet paper is much cheaper and less wasteful. We also rinse and reuse Ziplock bags until they're useless,

then fill them with food waste and throw them away with the trash.

Integrity...

I do my best to live an integrated life and strive to see the world as a whole through the eyes of the Creator who perfectly designed and spoke it into existence. We are all here to help Him to help us to help each other. Amen, Alleluia, praise the Lord!

If I do five tasks all at once in a process that flows, I can accomplish more in less time and have more time to accomplish even more. I think before I do and work smarter, not harder. I envision the tasks before me and see all the possible processes as if I'm fast forwarding through a video, comparing and evaluating the efficacy of each in the vast array, then cull them down to the most efficient one and execute the process immediately.

BadaBingBadaBam!

I move through my day with a strategic zone offense and an efficient flow. I want to have five good reasons for doing any one thing and wait until I have five good things I can do all at once. If a thing can't wait, I'll do it in the moment.

BadaBingBadaBoom!

At the end of the day, my tasks are done, and I can enjoy the rest.

BadaBingBadaBang! Aaah...

I do my best to integrate exercise into my life. I walk whenever I can instead of driving. I bike whenever I can if it's too far to walk. I want to have at least two good reasons to drive anywhere. I carry the recycling, groceries, etc. I keep hand weights handy and a foot lift weight on a towel on the floor by a footstool, so we can use them anytime. We have a pullup bar mounted to closet door in our bedroom, so we can do pullups and stretches anytime. We have two sets of stairs in our building, one three floors and the other four, so we can do steps and stretches anytime.

Banner, Flag, Monogram & Regalia Artist, Baldwin Regalia (Former)

When my stinking bag of shit rolled down the eastern side of the Continental Divide, and hit me in the ass I went back to St. Louis. It was October, and I couldn't get back into class, so I needed a job. My friend Chas had a job at Baldwin Regalia Company, a family owned business that made, and sold regalia for the Shriners, sewed custom banners and flags, embroidered monograms for local department stores and motorcycle vests, and jackets, and patches for NASA, and anyone. He needed to quit working to finish the semester. I was hired. He

trained me for one day. The next day I was tracing an image of a panther onto paper, using a primitive rear projector, mounted to a track on the wall, adjusted by a cable on a spool, and locked in position by a thumbscrew. The table under it had wobbly legs, and had to be held against the wall with one foot to steady it. The manager, Clarice Nolan, walked in, and asked how I was doing. I said I was doing OK, but could I maybe do it like this instead, and got up, removed the reference image from the projector, walked over to one of the 4x8 work tables, tore a sheet of paper from a spool at the end of the table, measured and marked with a pencil the dimensions of the banner, and drew the panther to size in less than a minute. She looked at the drawing, looked at me, looked at the drawing, looked at me, and said do it like that. Next day I went to work, and finished all the work before lunch. After lunch Clarice told me to come in next morning at 10:00, take two hours for lunch, then come back, and finish for the day. She would pay me for eight hours.

Mr. Baldwin was the 70+year old son of the founder. He sat behind his desk with his chin on his chest, and a wine glass between his fingers on the desk. Every so often he walked through the factory and picked up any loose change he found on work tables. Clarice ran the show. Women did all the sewing. I was their adopted darling, they fed me. They adored me, and I adored them. Clarice gave me furniture for my empty apartment, a day bed, a table and two chairs, pots and pans. My apartment had a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and walk-in closet. All I had was my backpacking gear and a pair of jeans.

As I was walking the streets of downtown St. Louis during my lunch break I met a friend from WashU who had graduated before me. He asked what I was doing, and I told him. He gave me his card, and said to call his boss, Mike Tripoli. I called my Mom and asked her to ship my portfolio to me on the bus. When I got it I called Mike and set up a meeting. I met with Mike expecting him to tell me what to focus on next semester. He looked at my stuff, and asked how much I was asking. I gave myself a raise from five dollars to seven fifty, and he snapped at it. I was hired, and doing the work my classmates were hoping to do when they graduated the following year. God is so good!

Graphic Designer, Art Director, Illustrator (Recovering)

PGAV

Mike Tripoli was my first and best manager. He was a kidney donor recipient who had nearly/actually died before he got his transplant. He took me under his wing and taught me to fly. I am eternally grateful to him and for him. He taught me how to play with photographs, cropping, angling, manipulating. I taught him typography. His font was Helvetica (There's a thang out there about Helvetica.) When I had flown high and come down dissatisfied with my position, he wisely suggested I might be happier elsewhere. I teared up, and

agreed, and moved on with a stunning portfolio.

While working at PGAV I was asked if I knew an art student named Brian Barclay who could do architectural drawings. I answered, "Hire him, he's exceptional!" We worked together, partied together, backpacked and canoed and kayaked together. He's my brother from another mother. He brilliantly illustrated my design for a magazine article in TeamTalk, a magazine we did for Anheuser Busch.

Blueberry Hill Beertender (Former)

Blueberry Hill is a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame & Museum with stars and handprints in the sidewalk out front. I love the place and hung out there with friends and girlfriends. When I left PGAV, I was heartbroken and self medicating. I had been a loyal customer and pleasant person, so the bar manager hired me. I worked as a busboy first. Sucky job, but I got stoned before I went to work and did the best I could. I sometimes fell asleep in the hall closet bathroom, because it was warm and cozy and quiet. I could clear the whole place with one or two passes and take a break. I proved myself worthy and got promoted to beertender. On a busy night I could pull out four Bud or Bud Light longnecks with each hand and slam them on the bar for payment without tip. Joe Edwards, the owner, doesn't remember me, but I thank him every time I go there and see him. He was also the landlord for the apartment I rented with Nancy.

Brian and I once went there for lunch and got dessert first: Margaret, our server, was a beautiful woman, and a graduate student painter. As she took my order for soup she asked if I wanted it in a cup or poured over her body, to lick it off. I was stunned, and speechless. I am still infatuated with Margaret and wonder about and pray for her eternal wellbeing.

Nancy

After several years of spiraling downward, abusing drugs and alcohol, I was living with my girlfriend Nancy in an apartment in University City, Missouri, a community near Washington University and part of greater St. Louis. Nancy liked cocaine, and we bought some together to share. She liked doing it more often than I did, but I didn't get my share unless I did it with her. One night, after doing our shares, Nancy went to her room to watch a movie. I did a couple of art projects, cleaned the apartment and laid down on my futon bed. I closed my eyes, but didn't go to sleep. Instead, I had a vision of travelling down a long, dark tunnel toward a light. When I got to the light, it was a white, luminous mist. I reached out my hand and put it into the mist, and my hand disappeared. I pulled my hand back and asked, "Is that You, God?" He answered, "Yes." I asked, "Can I come in?" He answered, "Yes." I asked, "Can I come back?" He answered, "No." I asked, "Can I go back now?" He answered, "Yes." I opened my

eyes, and I was back in my bed. I got up and found my confirmation Bible, King James version, with my name embossed in gold on the cover, and flipped pages until I stopped at the Book of Job and read, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me."

St. Mary's

I knew then I needed help and started meeting with Nancy's counselor, then with the counselor's male partner. I stopped using drugs and alcohol and started making good progress understanding the impact of my parents separation and divorce and my personal history. Then Nancy got resentful and started going out with other guys and bringing them home. We had a shouting confrontation, and I started packing. I found a film can of weed and smoked a big joint and went to bed. Next morning I tried to go to work, but had a panic attack while waiting for the bus, and went back, and smoked the rest of the joint. Then I called my counselor and told him the story. He asked if I wanted to go to the hospital, and I answered yes. I packed a few things and walked to St. Mary's Hospital and checked in.

In the hospital I worked with a psychiatrist, a psychologist, and group therapists. The psychiatrist managed my meds and regularly interviewed me. I told him about Nancy and feeling as though I were addicted to her. He asked how I could be addicted to a person, and I gave him a description of codependency in layman's terms. He said I was psychologically shrewd and would be just fine soon. The psychologist was a wonderful woman who modelled loving parental care for me. The group therapists led relaxation workshops and were always smiling at me when I woke up, probably because I was the first to sleep and snore and the last to wake up. I stayed there long enough for the THC to exit my system, then asked the psychiatrist how long I needed to stay. He answered that my asking the question meant I was ready to leave. I took day leaves to find an apartment, and move my things while Nancy was away from home.

AdWorks

I was working for AdWorks at the time, and they graciously accepted me back to work. My insurance paid for everything, and I think paid my salary as well.

I was freelancing as a graphic designer in the St. Louis area, and did several jobs for AdWorks before they hired me. I worked with two other designers, Jeff and Todd. Jeff played in a Reggae band called Murder City Players. Todd, and I were roadies for the band, and I had t-shirts printed to sell at shows around town. Todd was an excellent artist with markers and layout paper for presenting concepts to clients. We had our own studio apart from the offices and regularly did cocaine in the studio and smoked weed in the car on our way back

from lunch.

I won't disparage Steve. He was a kind soul, but not a good businessman. He was in financial trouble and looking for a savior. He found another, less kind savior in Dallas, a couple who had a small agency that was also failing, and looking for a savior who would help them relocate to St. Louis to be closer to family, who needed help. I was promoted, and sent to manage the Dallas office. I drove to Dallas towing my car behind a rented truck full of my stuff and with my pet rabbit Jessie in her crate on the passenger seat.

I took the southern route through Missouri to Arkansas, and saw billboards for Lambert's Cafe, Home of Thrown Rolls, in Sikeston, MO. It was a Sunday morning, and I was getting hungry, so I followed the signs, and found it. The cafe was a small ramshackle white building, with a big parking lot full of cars. I pulled in and parked my dual vehicle transportation where it wouldn't be in the way, and walked on in. The place was packed, but I found a seat at the counter in the original, humble building. I ordered the catfish meal, and was served a generous and reasonable serving of delicious food. Then I was told if I wanted more, I could just ask. Then a young man appeared with a sheet pan of fresh baked rolls, and started to accurately toss them across the cafe to whomever raised a hand. Thrown Rolls. Then servers came around with cookpots full of fresh cooked sides, and scooped out reasonable portions of whatever we wanted.

The young lady sitting next to me at the counter was an employee sorting service checks. We greeted each other and struck up a cordial conversation. I told her about my journey to Dallas, and she told me about her life journey as a Gospel singer and server. I directed her attention to a coffee pot on a warmer, and the logo on the coffee pot, and told her I had designed the logo. She picked up my service check, and said I was taken care of. A gentleman stepped up to the cashier, and asked the young man how much were the cigars. The young man handed him three, and said, "No charge." The young lady turned to me and said that's just the way the owner was.

Sadly, I lost Jesse. The hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas, where I stopped for the night did not allow pets. I legalistically followed the rules and left Jesse in the cab of the truck as temperatures dropped precipitously. Next day I found her shivering in her crate. She caught cold and suffocated as I held her in my lap in a Dallas hotel room. I gently laid her in her crate and tossed her and all into a dumpster behind the hotel. I will grieve her loss until I die. Goodbye, Jesse, I love you...

I hired several people to help me get the AdWorks done (See what I did there?) and did my best to wrap my head around it all. One day the founding couple showed up at the office and went through collecting things. I asked what was up, and they answered, "Oh, nothing." and

left. Later someone showed up and towed away the company car. I gathered everyone and told them I didn't know what was going on, but would try to find out and let them know, then told them to take any personal belongings with them. I packed my car with my belongings and the active job files. Next day I returned to find a padlock and notice on the door. That was the end of that...

Dallas

HPPC

Before AdWorks busted I was hanging with the staff, but realized I needed to be the boss, not a bud. I also didn't want to risk slipping back into bad habits. I looked around and joined a health club. I don't like working out on machines nor with weights, so I started swimming laps at the pool regularly. One day as I was swimming I noticed a young man hanging around the end of the lane. All the other lanes were available. What's up with that? I finished my swim, climbed out, said it's yours, and he said, "That's OK," and walked with me as I went to the lockers. He asked me if I had ever heard of Highland Park Presbyterian Church and the BRIDGES Class. Well, no, I said. He told me where it was and when the class started and suggested I check it out, then walked away. Whatever, dude!

After a couple of weeks I looked up the church address and went there Sunday morning at the appointed time. A lovely young lady at the reception desk in the fellowship hall directed me to the third floor gymnasium where I found about 500 people in chairs, a band on stage playing music, a person handing out bulletins, and a very special vibe.

I accepted the bulletin thinking OK, don't anybody try to sell me Jesus, and sat in one of the back rows of chairs. The music was familiar from my Lutheran church youth group days. I don't remember now who was the speaker that morning nor what he said, but he spoke directly to me. As I listened I read the statement of faith and a prayer of acceptance. I then closed my eyes and thought, "OK, God, if you are who this says you are then I am ready to let you take over my life. I know I've been making a mess of it all this time, and I'm not smart enough nor strong enough to do it anymore." I saw a vision of the universe – stars, planets, space – and a window opened in the middle, and I saw beyond time and space into eternity, and the window snapped shut. I snapped open my eyes and thought, "OK, that's enough of that! I'm all in."

I went and bought a new study Bible, signed up for every group and event and lesson, and started to make best friends for life and all eternity.

Mi Amigo, el Gato

I had a second floor apartment in Dallas after moving there from St. Louis to head up the AdWorks office. One day after work I came home to find a skinny, dirty, black and white cat hanging around. I took him in and fed him a can of tuna and gave him a bowl of water. When he finished eating I wiped him down with a warm wet washcloth. He looked much better and purred happily. I noticed he was declawed and wondered why he was out and about. Then I remembered the \$150 pet deposit. Someone probably got busted for not paying.

When I went to work next day I turned him out. When I came home he was gone, but the tuna apparently worked. He showed up the next day and I took him in for good. I also paid the deposit. We became best friends for life. He acted more like a dog than a cat, greeting me at the door, coming when called, eating like a chowhound, wrestling in play. His favorite toy turned out to be a Q-tip he found in the bathroom trash. He flipped it around and chased it across the room, batted it back and forth under an open door, rolled around with it between his paws, carried it to his water bowl and dropped it in, then splashed the water out of the bowl until he got the Q-tip out, pulled the soggy fuzz off the ends and dropped it dead on the floor. Game over! As time went on I began to develop allergic reactions to Amigo's dander as it accumulated in the carpet. One night I woke up wheezing and thought I might die. I said a fervent prayer and went back to sleep. Next morning I was fine.

When AdWorks shut down I had plenty of time to enjoy my Mayan hammock on the balcony, reading my Bible from cover to cover. Amigo chilled on the balcony in the shade and came and went as he pleased through the open door. One day I left him out there with the door open and went to meet with a client. I came home and found Amigo missing. Shortly there was a knock at the door, my downstairs neighbor. He asked if I had a black and white cat. I said yes, that's Amigo. He said Amigo is under my bed if you want to come get him out. Apparently Amigo was snoozing on the balcony, flopped over the edge and ran through the open door downstairs and under the bed. He was fine.

I couldn't afford the rent for the apartment, so relocated to another when the lease was up. No more balcony for Amigo, but he discovered a new favorite distraction. The kitchen had metal cabinets and palmetto bugs that made fascinating noises as they ran around inside the doors. Amigo tracked their progress from one end to the other and up and down and all around. He still enjoyed his Q-tips as well. When I went to Merida, Mexico as a mission volunteer I left Amigo with a coworker and friend. When I returned and reclaimed Amigo he greeted me as if I had been gone for a weekend. I got an apartment close to work and we were happily reunited.

My new apartment had a pass through bar counter and high stools. My studio furniture took up my bedroom, so I slept on the hideaway sofa bed in the living room. My work hours were 11 pm to 7 am, so I slept

through the early part of the day. When Amigo acclimated to the new schedule he started to expect dinner at a specific time. If I was late he would poke my eyelid with his powder puff paw to let me know it was supposed to be open. I usually honored his requests, but not on weekends. Game on! First I started whomping him with the pillow. He started biting my toes through the blanket. I whomped him with the pillow. He started jumping up on the barstool and scooting objects across the bar until he fell over the edge with a thump. I got a spray bottle full of water and set it to stream. Game over!

Sometimes I would pick up Amigo and give him a little tour of the apartment at my eye level. He enjoyed the light switches and artwork on the walls, the knickknacks and books on the shelves, the Black Widow spider in the jar, WHOOPS, HELLS NO! Down and out!

As I was exploring friendships with women of excellence, I went to Colorado for a visit with my friend Michelle, a hot little Latina I knew from BRIDGES Class. I asked Kathleen to care for Amigo while I was gone, and she agreed despite her allergies. When I returned I cooked dinner for Kathleen as a thank you. As we were dining she noticed a St. Louis art poster on the wall and asked about it. We discovered a mutual experience of having lived in St. Louis and attending Washington University, she as a grad student in the Brown School of Social Work and I as an undergrad in the School of Fine Art. I probably also served her a beer at Blueberry Hill. We also discovered mutual family roots in Iowa and an interest in Latin America. She had done exchange trips between Dallas and Mexico City with youth programs at the YMCA and I had lived in Mexico for half a year as a mission volunteer. She asked if I had any pictures from my time in Mexico, and I showed her my sketchbook. It blew her mind. The thing with Michelle remained a friendship, but we had a great visit, including an Indigo Girls concert at Red Rocks.

The concert was awesome. At intermission the line for the women's restroom was extremely long. Two women in front of me in the short line for the men's room were tucking their hair up under their baseball caps. A guy behind me said to his companion, "At least they don't piss in the sinks."

When Kathleen and I started making wedding plans I had to find a new family home for Amigo. Kathleen was terribly allergic to him, and we didn't expect prayer to work for her. Someone in the office building where I worked adopted him. Adios, Amigo...

Shoestring Advertising

Larry Tenbrink was like a father to Richard and me. He had two sons of his own, Ryan and Todd, and a girlfriend Gayle. His agency concept was brilliant for the Dallas economy at the time: Small overhead and small clients, smart and multi-talented employees and owner. Larry was a

good writer, creative director and salesman. Richard and I were talented designers, illustrators, art directors and production artists. I could also write and pitch well. We had a small office in a high-rise office building on the east side of Dallas. Richard and I would take breaks and play ball on the roof with a mailing tube and paper was wrapped in drafting tape. Larry was generous and kind. We eventually grew to hire Debbie as an account executive and Roxanne as a receptionist, then Kathy as a designer, then Duncan as an account executive. I took a leave of absence to go to Merida, Mexico, as a mission volunteer, then returned. I had to work the night shift due to limited computers and desks. Larry burned out and took a sabbatical and left me in charge without much instruction or preparation. I unintentionally became a micro-managing asshole to Richard and Kathy and we were all grateful for Larry's return. Roxanne was a sweetheart and single mom with a darling little girl. She was very late getting to work one morning, because her daughter had pooped in crib, pulled the poop out of the diaper and smeared it all over herself and the crib after Roxanne had dressed her for daycare.

I bought a bicycle from Gayle to help her pay taxes. It was a Bianchi 10-speed, and I swapped out the drop handlebar for a straight one. It was a great bike. I had it stored unlocked in a locked basement storage room in our Richmond condo until it got stolen. I saw someone ride it by as I was walking the dog one morning and saw it again locked to a bike rack at a theater venue downtown. I didn't have time to go buy another lock, so I could reclaim it. I used the insurance money to buy a Schwinn commuter bike that I rode to and home from work at ColorTree. I would also sometimes run to work and/or to home. Running home from work one unusually fine afternoon I suddenly had to poop and started looking for a bush to hide behind. Everybody in the world was outside and enjoying the fine weather, so I found nowhere to hide and eventually pooped my pants with giant load of soft-serve. I waddled to the home of friends from church and knocked on the door. Stella, an older Armenian woman answered the door, and I told her I had disgraced myself and asked permission to use the bathroom. She welcomed me in saying, "I am like a mother to you, anything you need I will do!" All I needed was a washcloth and time alone in the bathroom, which she readily supplied. I cleaned myself and my underpants, then packed the underpants into the baggie I used to carry my street map and put the map in my pocket. Stella served me lemonade and chatted with me while I waited for Kathleen to pick me up.

Merida

After having been to Merida, Mexico, as a mission volunteer with the Vacation With a Purpose group, I went to Merida, Mexico, in the state of Yucatan with a group of single adults from Highland Park Presbyterian Church in 1987. We worked with a missionary named Donald Wehmeyer, who was supervising the construction of a church and seminary and day school. We helped with the construction of a curb for

the parking lot. Several years later, in 1993, I returned to Merida in order to learn Spanish and explore the possibility of becoming a missionary myself. I spent six months there, taking Spanish lessons with Francisco Patron, who was an artist and husband of a woman from New York who ran a language school for Mexican children to learn English. He and I would study Spanish together in the morning, then go hang out with his artist friends in the cafes. I had a rented room with a Mexican family and ate breakfast and dinner with them. We also went to church together almost every day of the week. The church was within walking distance of their home. I also made a few friends who were brutally relentless about correcting my accent. As I got more fluent and more darkly tanned I became accepted and mistaken for a native.

Kathleen's Friend and Husband...

As a single young man living in Dallas I got to a point of feeling lonely and frustrated. I was working with a counselor and journaling and praying to God for something more than friendships. I asked Him why was I so alone? He answered, "Remember this?" and took me back to the day my mother told me she was leaving my father. I broke down and cried my heart out, weeping bitter tears and wailing and writhing on the floor in deep physical and emotional pain. When it was over I felt a deep peace and comfort. I got up from the floor and washed my face and prayed, "Thank You, thank You, thank You! Here's the deal, Lord, You and I are going to work on me. Make me the best Christian man and potential husband I can be, then bring me a wife when You know I'm ready. I'm not even going to look for one." I had been to a weekend retreat with the BRIDGES Class and attended a workshop by Dick Purnell called "Becoming a Friend and Lover." The fundamental premise was that starting a relationship with sex and trying to transition into a loving relationship was worldly and wrong and doomed to fail. Starting a relation with friendship and being a friend to many friends is Godly and right and promised to succeed, whether in marriage or not. I am living proof that it is true.

Returning to Dallas from Merida, I found an apartment near work and was rehired at Shoestring Advertising, working the night shift, because we had a limited number of desks and computers. I noticed a young woman who lived in the apartment next door, but she appeared to be butch. We were on different schedules, so I rarely saw her but could hear her door shut as she came and went. One weekend day I saw her climbing over the patio fence and asked her why? She was locked into her apartment, because the lockset was broken. She had a young lady in her care for the day, and they were going to the pool. The new lockset was outside her door, so I replaced the broken one for her. Her name was Kathleen, and she was pretty cute.

Eventually, my work schedule normalized, and I started coming and going at regular hours. Linda, a new neighbor, moved in across the

walk from Kathleen. She had a little Shiatzu named Lucy who absolutely adored me, and the feeling was mutual. Linda would be home with her patio door open a bit for Lucy when I came home from work. Lucy would come out and jump onto a cooler on the other side of the fence, so I could reach over and pick her up. She would lie in my arm like a baby and let me rub her tummy. Linda would come out and chat, then Kathleen would come along and join the conversation with Lucy the center of attention.

Kathleen and I got to be better acquainted and started dating as friends, then we got to be better friends, then best friends. We were driving around somewhere and talking. I said that if we were going to get married we would have to do so before or after the annual YMCA fundraising event that Kathleen organized. We agreed that before would be better and got married November 11, 1995. Our wedding was spectacularly unconventional. Weddings in Dallas are a high-end industry with directories the size of big city phone books. We picked one up and flipped a few pages, then threw it in the recycling. We visited a few venues. One was a former movie theater with the seats removed and the floor levelled. The screen and projector remained and were available for use. As we browsed through the binder of options with a very kind and helpful gay young man we couldn't help but get silly. The themed cakes and flowers were hideously extravagant. I suggested to Kathleen we could get one of the cakes and top it with Barney and Barbie and show Jurassic Park onscreen. The young man said, "Oh, that would be interesting." Bless his little heart!

We Made our Wedding our Wedding...

It was so much fun and celebratory and blessed. We had decided that at our ages, mid-thirties, we were going to pay for it ourselves and not use credit to do it. We loved a wonderful Romanian restaurant. It was intimate and beautiful, and the food was amazing. We chose it for our rehearsal dinner, and the owner/chef said she would open early for us and later for her guests. Perfect! We loved a local Southwest Grill called Blue Mesa. It had a large party room with a bar and tables already decorated, and the food and drinks were amazing. They told us all we had to do was book it with a deposit and pay for the food and drinks. Perfect! Kathleen used a pastry chef for YMCA events who made amazing Italian Cream cakes that were reasonably priced. Perfect! I worked with a professional photographer who gave me the brother-in-law deal, he would shoot all the photos and hand me the film for \$150. Perfect! Kathleen found a beautiful white dress at a fashion discount store for short cash. Perfect! Kathleen's Maid of Honor was her friend Rosina who wore her own dress. Perfect! Dad was my Best Man, so we only needed two rented tuxedos and pairs of shoes. Perfect! We picked out a diamond and rings at the Dallas Diamond Exchange for wholesale, because Kathleen had a friend who got us in. Perfect!

We celebrated our sacrament of marriage at King of Glory Lutheran

Church with the John Lee, the Senior Minister, officiating and Mary Preston the organist. John took photos at the church before and after. We then went to Blue Mesa for the reception and just let everyone have fun. The food was plentiful, the service great, drinks were at the cash bar. No music but the house music. No dancing. John worked the room taking candid shots and talking with all the guests. A good time was had by all, and at the end of the night Dad had paid for the food, Kathleen's parents had paid for the rehearsal dinner, John tore up my check for the photos saying he had never had so much fun shooting a wedding. Mary Preston, who is the organist and choir director at KOGLC but also the curator for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra declined Kathleen's check as a wedding gift to us. Kathleen thinks we might have made a net profit from our wedding. We took a honeymoon drive to a charming little B&B in North Texas, then we went back to work Monday morning. The following year we took a honeymoon trip to San Francisco and Yosemite.

Guatemala

The year after our wedding Kathleen lost her job with the YMCA. A new board member decided a big-haired Dallas socialite like herself or some man she could control should be sitting in Kathleen's chair. After years of exceptional service and stellar performance reviews, Kathleen was out. I told her we could pivot and go to Latin America to study Spanish, and we did. I resigned from Shoestring Advertising, and we started our research on language schools. We found Casa Na Bolom in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. They offered full day classes, one on one instruction, and room and board accommodations for a surprisingly reasonable tuition. We packed our bags and put everything else into into storage and took a farewell tour of friends and family from Dallas to the East Coast, up through New York and New England and into Canada, then through Michigan to Chicago. We bought one way tickets to Guatemala City and flew.

Our flight from Miami was delayed for about an hour. We were told security were searching the cargo hold for a bag to be removed from the plane. Upon arrival in Guatemala City we were waved through customs. We took a shuttle to Antigua, the original Capitol City, then checked into a charming hotel, Posada Don Rodrigo, one of the oldest and finest, with a room that opened onto a lovely courtyard garden. We arrived October 30, 1996, just in time for Dia de los Santos, All Saints Day. People were cleaning and decorating the ancient cemetery in preparation for the day of communion with the spirits of the departed, celebrating and sharing the essence of food with them. I took stunning photos in black and white and color with a new Rico 35mm camera for colored film and an older one from Kathleen's father for black and white.

No More Papaya for Kathleen...

Next morning we went to a cafe for a delicious breakfast of eggs perfectly cooked and served with a lovely and delicious salsa tomate and fresh fruit. Kathleen, after eating the fruit, launched herself from her chair and rushed to el bano and hurled part of her breakfast. On our way back to our room, she hurled the bigger remaining portion on the veranda as hotel staff were setting up for a party in the courtyard. She hurled her guts once before as we were moving into the guest room with the Garwoods and again after visiting Gradpa Peterson in the nursing home, then a fourth time in another cafe, and we realized it was papaya every time.

Next day we arose early to pack and board a public bus to Quetzaltenango, also called Xela for short. The ride through the mountainous Western Highlands was spectacularly beautiful. The mountainsides were patchwork quilts of garden plots and farm fields dotted with rustic structures. I had a flash of vertigo as I suddenly sensed the scale of things shift from large scale to actual scale. The fields and structures were far smaller than I perceived them to be. We checked in with the school and settled into our temporary home with Juan Carlos and Kimberly and Carlitos, a lovely family of three, a comfortable room, and meals served morning and evening.

Richmond

As we wound down our time in Guatemala, we considered where to go. Our stuff was all packed in storage in Dallas, but it didn't have to stay there when we returned. Having been to Richmond on our farewell tour before going to Guatemala, we found it comfortably charming and accessible. After considering other possibilities, we settled on Richmond as our next home. We found a place to stay in Dallas until we were ready to relocate and started researching job opportunities in the Richmond area. Kathleen made cold calls to qualify the list as I prepared my portfolio and marketing materials. One of the calls she made was to Paul Morand, a former copywriter and advertising art director in Chicago, who had relocated to Richmond with his wife Cathy and four children. As Kathleen explained the reason for her call, Paul replied with a sigh, "How do I make this not the most depressing call of your day," then chuckled warmly and carried on a lengthy and amiable narrative of his plight. At the end, he invited me to come on down and come on in. Paul and I became informal business partners and shared the rent for the otherwise empty office until the lease was up. I was an independent art director and graphic designer and illustrator and copywriter finding my own clients and opportunities. Paul was in need of my services for his accounts and provided wisdom and experience far beyond my years in a market new to me. I also helped him to bridge the Digital Divide. It was a match made in heaven, and we were adopted into the Morand family.

Kathy, John, Laura, Michael, Jenny

Freelance

In addition to my work with Paul, I signed on with Tec-Head, a digital graphic service bureau, training facility and temporary talent agency. They sent me out on short-term contract jobs and to job interviews that I once mistook for a temporary assignment and totally blew the interview. Eventually I settled into a comfortable and profitable routine. Kathleen found various temporary job opportunities through another agency. We shared Kathleen's baby blue Camry, and made a go of it.

Digital Prepress Technician (Former)

After I had moved to Dallas with AdWorks and that busted, and after the freelance business with Paul Morand busted, I went to work with ColorTree Printing, a direct mail envelope printer and manufacturer.

ColorTree

The Digital Revolution dramatically changed the advertising, graphic design and illustration industry for the worst. I was no longer a respected professional consultant and resource for creative solutions to complex challenges. I was suddenly a monkey at a keyboard, listening to a client say, "You know more about the software than my admin, so her's what I want you to do for me. Otherwise, she could do it. How much is this going to cost me?" Sigh... I blame Bill Gates and Sam Walton for transforming the world into a retail shopping nightmare forever.

"What we have here, General, is a cluster fuck!"

Larry, my boss at Shoestring Advertising, was fond of quoting "Patton." I quoted Larry quoting the movie and had to sit through a sensitivity training at ColorTree. I was originally hired as a Tec-Head contract employee at ColorTree, a printer and manufacturer of direct mail envelopes. They needed me to help them bridge the Digital Divide and found I was the Droid they were Looking for. In a short amount of time they paid off my contract and hired me fulltime paying a reasonable hourly rate with overtime and full benefits. My coworkers were wonderful and loving and in awe of what I knew and could do.

The company was family owned, and management was competent and generous and kind. I thrived and grew there as I helped them to thrive and grow from 2000 through 2005. In 2000, I started to experience significant discomfort and sought medical attention. My General Physician examined me and ordered imaging and consultations and various therapies. The imaging showed massive scar tissue and arthritis and a displaced vertebra that wasn't going back. In 2005 I began to develop severe chronic pain throughout my body from head to toes and fingers. The worst of the pain was in my neck and back and

head. I suffered severe sinus headaches that were essentially migraines. My pain gradually increased, and I became increasingly irritable and angry. Eventually, I became unbearable for my coworkers and Kathleen. I was sent home for a week to consider my options. I returned with humble apologies and a decision to transition into other, more manageable work.

Sabbatical

We had enough money saved for me to be able to take a sabbatical, beginning February 2006. I took some art classes at VMFA and discovered I could paint extremely well with watercolors and India ink. I took an oil painting portrait class and discovered I could do it extremely well. I took a one week Plein Aire Painting workshop and discovered I could do it extremely well. Roger Dale Brown was my first instructor for the workshop, and I learned from him most of what I needed and wanted to know about painting, all in three hours. I started painting one painting a day for as long and as often as I could and rapidly progressed. That Summer I had my first show at a little boutique gift shop in a shopping center where I was getting my chiropractor adjustments and haircuts. By the end of the year I had my second show at the Richmond Public Library, opening for First Friday Artwalk. I was taking commissions and selling my paintings to family, friends and strangers. I became, for a moment, a professional artist, then ran out of money.

CapitalOne

Cashier & Barista (Former)

I started out at CapitalOne as a cashier and barista in The Terrace cafeteria between buildings one and two. When I went in to apply, I dressed in corporate casual shirt and pants and shoes. As I walked to the building I saw a lot of people who looked and dressed pretty much like me and thought I would fit right in there. As it turned out I fit in quite well for the next fifteen years. I interviewed with Phil Ali and Linda Stobel. Phil was the catering manager and Linda the cafe manager. They were both very professional and cordial and very much impressed with me and my resume. I didn't get the job. They hired another candidate who had cashier experience.

I found a job working for a fly-by-night schemer who sold furniture by advertising in the classified newspaper ads as though he were an individual seller. Technically he was, but he was selling furniture that he rented to homeowners who were selling their homes and to developers who were showing model homes for sale. He had a young man working for him who was temporarily incarcerated for a minor infraction and needed me to take his place touching up flaws, driving a box truck, delivering and assembling the furniture to the buyer. He worked out of an empty store front in a suburban shopping center. He

also had me sorting through stacks of documents on a large dining table. I saw legal notices and unpaid bills and past due notices and miscellaneous business and personal correspondence. I struggled at first to lift and move the merchandise but quickly built strength. I delivered a large four-poster bed frame to a woman far out in the boonies and had real trouble putting it together. It took a really long time, and she fed me dinner before I left the job unfinished. The boss apologized for throwing me into the deep end and I returned the next day to finish the job. The young man returned, and we worked well together. I was very happy when I got the call from CapitalOne that the other candidate had washed out. I took my final paycheck to the bank and cashed it on my way home.

Linda, Joe, Phil, Peter, Sophia, Molnar

I worked at The Terrace cafe between buildings One and Two. Linda was a wonderful manager to work with and for. Her daughter was an art student at VCU and worked part time at the coffee bar. She trained me, then got out of the way. I quickly proved my worth and regularly received stellar reviews and modest raises. Linda moved on to another opportunity, and Phil took her place. Phil and I clicked and very much enjoyed working together. He allowed me to display a painting and literature at the end of the coffee bar and patiently allowed me time on the clock to meet with admirers and potential buyers. He kindly covered for me when I had to come in late to work after installing my show at the library.

Starbucks Manager (Former)

I was later offered a position at the new Starbucks being built at The Village cafe between buildings Three and Four. I accepted it only with a one dollar raise. As the team was assembled and the buildout progressed, we were trained onsite by a Starbucks corporate trainer. We learned the history of coffee and Starbucks, then did mock practices as the equipment went online. At the first team meeting, the trainer asked who was the manager. I looked around at everybody, and they were all looking at me. I excelled and prospered.

Nita and Stephanie and Enersida were my star employees. I asked that one young lady be moved elsewhere, because I could do her job and mine faster and better than she could do hers alone. Eventually my stars were moved to better positions, and I worked with other wonderful young ladies, who also moved on to better positions. Good supervisors can produce better employees and better opportunities for them.

I was eventually asked to return to The Terrace to upgrade the coffee bar to offer Dunkin' Donuts airport coffee service, fresh juice and smoothies and fresh baked pastries. I found it refreshing to be liberated from the constant Starbucks forced shipments of product and constant churning of additional products and equipment and training. I

excelled and prospered.

Dunkin' Manager (Former)

When CapitalOne decided to buildout a full Dunkin' store in the cafe, they sent me and Phil and Virginia to Dunkin' University in Braintree, MA. Phil and I went first for Back of the House training with a bunch of franchisee investors. They were all great guys with good senses of humor and friendly competitors. I did second best on the final exam. Phil didn't want to talk about it but passed. Virginia and I went for two weeks of Front of the House and Donut Baking and Finishing trainings. Virginia did very well and diligently took notes for training others. Our Dunkin' opening was picture perfect and we excelled and prospered.

I was later sent to Connecticut to help train and open a new Dunkin' in some broadcast network sportscasting headquarters. After two weeks of Hell, the Dunkin' opening was picture perfect, and I was the local hero. Back in Richmond I was congratulated and offered the opportunity to open Dunkin's corporate wide. I respectfully declined saying, "Oh, God, no!"

Catering Attendant (Former)

When CapitalOne decided to renovate The Terrace and move the Dunkin' to the opposite side of the wall, I was offered the opportunity to move to Catering, where I excelled and prospered.

John was one of the first people I met as I started training with the catering crew. He and I immediately and were thereafter mistaken for brothers. We shared a positive outlook and enthusiasm for hospitality excellence and attention to detail. We were the ones trusted to do anything that absolutely needed to be done right and quickly. We were also trusted to run errands off campus and return quickly. We were trusted with large amounts of cash and with large purchases. Gabby was a skillful catering captain, also an older Hispanic woman. She apparently resented what she presumed was our White male privilege in the eyes of management, but she was really just a bitch they didn't like. I was on the loading dock with captains Gina and Sherman and with manager Brad when Gabby barked orders at me over the radio. I said, "10-4, Gabby.," then to Brad, "It's not the saddle but the spurs..." Laughter all around. Jenn Pittman, catering director, adored me and I tolerated her. We got along famously. I excelled and prospered until my body couldn't take it anymore. Loading and unloading carts and vans with 40 pound loads took a heavy toll from my body. I asked for another position and was gladly approved.

Blanchard's Coffee Juice & Smoothie Guy (Retired)

A Mr. Blanchard works for CapitalOne in building Five. CapitalOne is

committed to local sourcing and local support, so they decided to buildout a Blanchard's Coffee and Smoothie bar. They made it mine, and I made it theirs.

My manager, Natasha, and I were brotha'n'sista' from different worlds. We loved each other and excelled and prospered together. Dillon and Aleeya were our problem children. They seemed to believe the world owed them restitutions and liberally helped themselves. They considered the Blanchard's Coffee & Smoothie Bar a Democratic Republic and acted out accordingly. I would leave them alone, but not in charge, as I did my duties elsewhere and return to find something different than I left. When asked, they said, "Natasha said it was OK." I replied, "Well, I'm going to talk with Natasha." Things went back to where they had been. I let them try it only twice, then wrote a letter, had Natasha approve it and sit down with me and Dillon and Aleeya to read them the letter, which basically said that they didn't work for me, Natasha nor Compass Group, we all worked for CapitalOne, and Natasha and I were there to help them fully understand the client expectations and provide them with everything they needed to do it right. Get back to work! Dillon left, and Aleeya got it. She excelled and prospered.

Retirement

As CapitalOne prepared to reopen the campus after COVID, I prepared for my exit. Kathleen and I met with financial advisors for an assessment of our financial status. We went through the lengthy and, for Kathleen, excruciating analysis. We were rated as 99 percent likely to succeed in our plans, goals, aspirations, hopes and dreams. I retired, 1/1/2022, with a lovely sendoff from my friends and coworkers at CapOne, two bottles of bourbon and a cake, and an I love you from Aleeya. I stopped in my tracks at that and thanked and praised the Lord, then tearfully texted Natasha from my car to please clock me out.

Jesse James and Mom...

While Mom was in Hospice Care she had a caregiver named Jesse who loved Mom, and Mom loved Jesse, who was a coffee connoisseur. In response to a communication from Mom saying that Jesse was happy to drink Mom's swamp water coffee, I said she was welcome to share with him her barista son's preferred coffee expert preferences.

Barista Fo'Eva'

I have been a barista off and on since 1979, and I love the smell of coffee in the morning. Coffee is life, and Irish coffee is the good life! Aaah...

When I was a student at WashU and working for financial aid, a bright

young Scot named David Campbell wrote a business plan for an espresso and coffee bar as his MBA thesis. He earned his degree, and the university built out the cafe. It was brilliant. The room was multi-use, so he designed three sided mobile modules set up as living rooms with a couch and comfortable chairs, coffee and end tables, lamps and framed artwork and windows. They could be rolled to the end of the room and out of the way. He imported from Italy the twenty-third espresso machine in the United States. At the time, Starbucks was just a little coffee roaster in Pike's Place, and they did not have an espresso machine. It was a thing of beauty, brass and chrome and copper, with dials for heat and pressure, faucet handles for steaming milk and brewing espresso, and one power switch. Everything was manually operated and a work of skilled craft and art. I learned to love coffee and still handcraft my coffee every day, hand grinding it and brewing it in a French press. My final gig at CapitalOne was manager of the Blanchard's coffee and smoothie bar (a Mr. Blanchard works for CapOne). It was my show, and I was famous for it. I was asked to write a personal statement about my mission: "As an artist, my station is my canvas, and I do everything I can to make it picture perfect for our guests and client." They posted my statement and photo on video screens all over campus. I never saw it but heard about it from Kathleen, who heard it from someone else.

One day, working at CapOne, I wandered over to the cafe where I had started and introduced myself to the new chef. As I chatted with him about my position and role he suddenly said, "Wait a minute, you're The Smoothie Guy, you're famous!" I laughed and said I hoped it was in a good way. I supervised two other people at the Blanchard's coffee bar, and when we got slammed I took over making the smoothies while one worked the register and wrote orders on post-its and lined them up on the counter. The other served the coffee orders. I had flow, using three blenders at a time and making six to nine smoothies at a time. At one point I got a brief pause and saw a crowd of people on the other side of the glass watching the show. One turned to the crowd behind him and said. "This dude rocks!" I kept it up until the show was over.

While working as a graphic designer in St. Louis, I designed a logo for Ronnoco Coffee, a roaster owned by the O'Connor family (See where they got the name?). I met the third generation owner at the roasting plant and enjoyed a thorough presentation of the history and processing of coffee from plant to cup. As I recall, and this is a mashup of multiple trainings, some goats in Africa ate some coffee beans from plants growing wild in the bush. The goatherds noticed the goats eating the beans, then skipping and jumping like kids. The goatherds gathered the remaining beans and returned to their huts to boil and eat the disgusting beans. Later they tried roasting and grinding and brewing the beans and changed the world forever. Kathleen and I were in Guatemala, and obviously foreign tourists with financial resources. We were approached and invited to tour a new coffee

plantation and exporter of coffees, where we enjoyed a thorough presentation of the history and processing of coffee from plant to cup. In Tanzania we rode by urban and rural coffee plantations, and I enjoyed many cups of locally grown and roasted and brewed coffees.

I had a Starbucks French press from my time as the Starbucks manager. The glass carafe had broken, so I ordered a replacement and took it home. After years of daily use the glass cracked partially around the circumference, so I went to Starbucks and bought a newer model. It was the worst damn coffee press I have ever used. I read the instructions to see if there was anything new and different about using it, but no. The first time I used it I measured the water and set it to boil in a kettle on the stove, measured and ground the coffee, poured in the water after it had cooled to the proper 198 degrees, waited the appropriate three minutes, then poured it into my cup, which ended up only half full. I could see the coffee in the bottom of the press, but it would not come through the triple screen filters. WTF?! I finally had to get my pour-over setup, pull out the plunger and pour the grounds and all into a filter. I took French press back to Starbucks, went to the register and loudly said to the poor little girl behind the counter, "I have been a barista since 1979, a Starbucks manager, a Dunkin' manager, and a Blanchard's manager, and that is the worst damn French press I have ever used!" The girl's eyes got big and she had real trouble ringing up my refund. I got another press off the shelf to scan the tag instead of repeatedly ringing up a French press coffee order onscreen. As I was thanking her for my refund a woman walked and said she needed a new French press also. I said, "Don't buy that one! I have been a barista since 1979, and that is the worst damn French press I have ever used." She smiled and thanked me, and I left. As I continued to run errands I stopped at Goodwill and found only one French press on the shelves of coffee stuff. It was a Bodum French press, \$7, and the best damn French press I have ever used.

Blessed to Be a Blessing...

I had a great day recently, starting the morning with the Eternity Band of Brothers Bible Study. We talked about memory and remembering and Ebenezers. I can't forget anything. I have to drink to forget but remember again when I'm sober. It's a kind of curse. Be careful what you wish for! I came home to Kathleen as she was getting her breakfast and prepping for work. After she left I wrote some of this memoir and ate a bit of breakfast, then continued to write, off and on, throughout the day, taking frequent PT breaks. At some point, I decided to go to the Branch Museum to see a new exhibit. It was worth the viewing. On the way I stopped by Blanchard's for coffee, then walked to Don't Look Back for tacos and tequila, yum! A young woman was sitting with her young man, and her legs crossed in the lotus position, at a table across the room. She was delightfully pretty and adorned with ink. As I was hanging at the bar a guy was walking around and drinking a cup of ice water. As he finished it I asked if he was

hungry. He said yes. I bought him two burritos and a Coke, then finished my lunch and drove to the museum. God is good, and we are abundantly blessed to be a blessing to all, Amen and Alleluia, praise the Lord!!!

Kathleen also said recently, when we drove by an adorable little teardrop trailer, that she might want to get one and visit the National Parks after she retires. I've always wanted one, so my friend Jim and I took a roadtrip to an RV dealership in Salem, VA. I loved all the little trailers but learned my Forester couldn't tow any of them. I took home brochures and we decided which one we want: The TAB 320 is the Iconic Teardrop Camper. A few days later I told Kathleen we need to buy a truck and need to buy it now. I went online and built the Toyota Tacoma I wanted, printed out the specs and went to the dealership. The receptionist asked how she could help, and I held up the paper and said I was looking for one of these. She pointed at the woman in front of me and said she was my girl. As Nicole introduced herself, three trucks full of new vehicles rolled by the windows behind her. The truck I built was on one of the trucks, but it was sold. The first one off the same truck was a lot more truck than the one I built, but it was mine! I believe having a vehicle is a necessary evil, but if I have to have one I want it to be this one. I drove it to church next Sunday and told the pastor about it. Without hesitation he got his oil and anointed the truck after we prayed over it. My GPS is now a God Positioning System and the truck is dedicated to His service.

The Tacoma is a V6, 6 Speed Automatic with Manual Override, 4WD, 4 Door Cabin, 5 Foot Bed, Tricked Out Beast. It's engineered for racing off-road, and it rocks! I blew the doors off a BMW getting onto Chippenham Pkwy one morning. Dude tried to outrun me with a train of cars behind him. I was running out of merge lane and kicked it. The Beast roared and shot off like a rocket. I looked in the rearview mirror and saw BMW staying well back even after I slowed down. I probably scared the shit out of him. Do NOT provoke the Beast! We all have a dark side. I reserves mines for special occasions:

As we drove to church Sunday morning I rolled through an intersection without stopping at the red light, because I could see by the traffic and signal the turn was protected. Kathleen said something to which I replied, "I respect the spirit but not the letter of the law." I also have a habit of swearing like a sailor, because I grew up hearing my father swear. He has serious anger issues that I inherited. I swear a lot, eloquently, unapologetically, mostly at myself, but, by the grace of God, don't so much have the anger issues. As a toddler, I once said, "Dodamnit," because my Grampa Joe locked himself in the bathroom. My Gramma Sylvia almost fell off a stool laughing. She was a shorty and rearranging the kitchen cabinets for my unappreciative mother. More recently I said, "God damnit!," about something, and Kathleen said swearing is a sin. I replied something different but

thought, "The world is already damned; I'm just quoting God."

We're going on a Viking River cruise this coming November celebrating 30 years of marriage and 25 years of wedded bliss.

<https://www.vikingrivercruises.com/cruise-destinations/europe/grand-european-tour/2026-budapest-amsterdam/index.html#noscroll>

Portrait of Italy | Odysseys Unlimited

I took a little sketch kit with me and tried to do one sketch per destination but managed to do only these. "Goodbye, Carolyn" was for the sister of a neighbor who died while we were away. The landscape sketch was on a folded card and given to our awesome tour director with her gratuity.

Condo Reno

The condo renovation nearly broke Kathleen's mind and heart. I was working on plans for the cabin when Kathleen asked me why I was doing that before we renovated the condo. I answered that I was just waiting for her to say so. I met with a flooring designer and kitchen designer at Home Depot, then started sharing all the details with Kathleen. She said to stop, because it was too much. I stopped. Two weeks later she asked why I wasn't doing anything. I answered that she couldn't see planning happen if she didn't want to hear about it and sat her down and data dumped all the planning. We decided to tile the entire condo floor and a kitchen backsplash, and to upgrade the bathrooms with walk-in showers. Next day the phone started ringing and people started showing up:

The Pella rep came Wednesday morning to confirm the measurements to replace the balcony sliding glass door. The door is original, so maybe 45 years old. When the afternoon sun hits it the little rollers in the bottom go flat and, "clunkety clunk."

A Re-Bath rep came Wednesday evening to take measurements and photos for bathtub replacements. The Home Depot dude was here the following Wednesday to take measurements and photos for the tile. My brother-in-law does flooring, so we talked with him before we pulled the trigger on the flooring purchase and got excellent intel from him. I paid the deposit for the door, the balance for our Italy trip, and bought a pair of Red Wing work boots, and blew up my phone with fraud alerts. Foof! The door and showers have to happen first, then the tile, then the paint. When the balcony door and showers are done, I'm going to start scrubbing Georgia's dog snot off the walls wherever she went while blind. We're going to have to pack up everything as if we're moving and stack boxes in the basement storage space for a week or two and stay in a hotel. We're reaching out to a ministry in Gilpin Court that works with two groups of kids, one younger, one older. We'd like to hire some of the older boys to help us with the moves. We got a

Home Depot credit card and 24 months interest free financing for the showers and tile. I'll get to do the same with Lowe's for the cabin. We have all the money in savings but can keep earning interest in the meantime.

Paradise Found...

I got a phone call from Melvin Jones offering us a post COVID vacation package deal of a lifetime. What he described sounded like a vacation in Hell. I politely interrupted him and declined the offer. We live in a lovely apartment with all the amenities he described, plus artwork I have created, a third floor balcony with a hammock and view of trees and flowers and birds and wildlife, grocery stores and restaurants and live music and parks all within walking distance, museums, state and national parks, the mountains, the ocean, the national capitol, and more, all within easy driving distance. I'm retired. If we want a vacation, Kathleen just has to take PT0. I also get a lot of calls from people asking if we want to sell our condo or mountain property for cash. Hells no! We just fixed it up the way we like it and hope to be here another 10 years at least, and I'm going build a cabin in the mountains. Some are polite, but most are brusque and impatient and insistent. Apparently the hedge funds are setting up networks of people to call and find people who are underwater in their mortgages and desperate to get out.

Not a Musician, Yet...

I learned to play guitar as a teenager. Mom bought a cheap, crappy, nylon stringed guitar, which was almost impossible for me to play with my double jointed, small fingers. A seminary student was my instructor, and I learned more about life and faith from him than I did about playing guitar, which was probably the whole point of the endeavor. I eventually learned to play and sing well enough to inspire a wicked bad crush in Ellen's friend Debbie, who inspired a wicked bad crush in me for her. Later, helping Mom move out of the house she had shared with Roger, I saw the guitar all smashed up in the neighbor's driveway, WTF?! Later still, in the Men of Mediocrity Bible study, I shared the story, and John handed me his Gibson to try. Wow, I could totally rock a Gibson!

Kathleen learned to play piano and sing as a child and hopes to pick it up again in her retirement. I bought for her a digital keyboard that rolls up to fit in a box on the bookshelf. I will probably mess around with it myself for fun but not before Kathleen has first crack at it. I also have a harmonica that I played while taking breaks from working nights in the art school studios before semester finals. I'll prolly start messing with that first.

Eagle Scout, Hiker, Backpacker, Camper, Swimmer, Paddler

I was a Cub Scout, Webelo Scout, and I am an Eagle Scout with Order of the Arrow and Leadership Corps honors. Dad and I loved Scouting together. We did the goofy projects and went on campouts and a canoe trip in the Boundary Waters out of Eli, Minnesota. I already had my canoeing merit badge, but on that trip I mastered the art of paddling. We all got pretty good at it and at summer camp we kicked ass in the canoe race. We beat the Dad team and the Counselor team. In later years my friend Brian and I backpacked and canoed together. We went to the Mulberry River in Arkansas and arrived at the outfitter a little after noon. Brian was stockier than I and more rugged looking. I was untanned and more nicely dressed. The outfitter looked at me and expressed her doubts, then asked me to do a J-stroke. I asked if she meant for me to air paddle a J-stroke, and she answered yes. I air paddled a J-stroke, a Sweep, Draw, Feather and Reverse Sweep, calling them out as I did. She laughed and said OK, you're good to go, then told us there was a rookie working to get his brand new boat unwrapped from the first rock below the bridge. The river was up and moving, and we had a blast. When we got to the first rapid, we pulled up on a gravel bar and emptied the boat, then took turns surfing. We did that at every rapid and were playing in one when the outfitter came down looking for a stray boat and said, "Wow, you got here fast!" Yep!

Dad loved helping with the goofy projects, which means he enjoyed letting me watch him. He didn't much care to read and follow the directions for the pinewood derby car nor the Klondike sled. He made the car look pretty cool but shortened the front axle to match the narrowed nose of the car. On race day the wheels were too close together to fit on the track that ran down the middle of the course. He found some string to wrap around the box nail axles but got disqualified for adding washers. Building the sled involved steaming and bending the wood runners. Dad decided to cut strips of sheet metal instead. When we got to the race and the gun went off we ran pulling the sled and plowing up snow with the inverted runners. We got smoked by some city kids with an overturned hood of a car and a rope tied to the latch hook. The rubber band propeller balsa wood rocket was pretty straightforward, but we overwound the rubber band. The torque made the thing jump right off the guide wire at the start. Until I got older I learned more by watching Dad make mistakes than I did by doing things.

Dad was a competitive swimmer, so we learned to swim as soon as we could walk. I don't even remember learning to swim, but I do remember one time hopping up down in the shallow end of a hotel swimming pool. I prefer swimming in streams and rivers, ponds and lakes. Pools irritate my eyes and skin. When I dog and house sit for our friends at Owl Orchard I paddle the kayak to the far end of the lake and paddle hard and fast on the way back, then strip to my boxer briefs and swim out and back to Cleo dancing at the waters edge and waiting for a joyful reunion.

Brian's friend John competes in kayak races, and Brian and I went to

the St. Francis River in Missouri to camp out and watch. As we were standing by one of the big holes, Brian asked, "Do you hear that?" I listened and answered yes. He asked, "Do you feel that?" and I answered yes. He said, "Those are the boulders tumbling down the riverbed. It's about 30 feet deep, and the boulders are as big as small cars!" The sound was like distant thunder, and the ground was vibrating under our feet. Water is a force to be reckoned with.

I went canoeing with a group of friends in Texas and a trailer of canoes. We camped the first night, and it rained all night. In the morning the river was up and washing over a low water wooden bridge. A family group came floating down in tubes, and chubby kid drifted toward the far end of the bridge and was laughing as he spun in a vortex and got pulled under the bridge and pinned with his face between two beams. His father jumped onto the bridge, grabbed the kid's arm and tried to yank him through the gap. Then ran away to get an axe. I told the kid he was going to be OK and pushed his face under the water. He popped up on the other side of the bridge and was OK. The dad was another story and sheepishly walked back to return the axe.

We got on the river and running well until we came to where a massive sycamore tree had toppled across the entire river. There was a knot of boats at far right where the smaller branches were. I said to the young lady with me in the boat that we were going to grab onto a tree sticking up mid river and wait. I should have said I was going to grab onto the tree. She grabbed it and we swung around and went swimming. The boat and all our stuff floated down and breached on the trunk. We floated down and gathered our stuff as we went. As we sat on the trunk of the tree some big Bubba walked down and stepped onto the breached canoe, and he rolled under the tree with the boat. I grabbed him by the arm and pulled him up for air. He sheepishly pulled himself up onto the trunk and walked away. WTF, Dude?! What was your plan? We divided up into other boats and made our way to the landing.

Next day somebody went somewhere to fetch axes and saws and ropes and stuff. We made our way back down to the tree, and the boys went to work on the trunk. I tied a rope to a branch and held onto one end of it, telling the young lady to pull me up if she got concerned. The water was much lower and clear and slow. I could see the boat wedged under the tree with the bow stuck in the sand and gravel at the bottom. I let go of the rope, took hold of the boat, planted my feet on the bottom and pulled it free. I popped up with it down river and hand paddled the swamped boat toward the river bank. The boys finally got word and regrouped to follow.

Designer, Architect, Engineer, Carpenter, Woodworker, Furniture Maker
(Amateur)

We Got Rampage...

I was on my way to appointments and errands, and Harold was having trouble getting Miss Pickles the pitbull into the back seat of the truck. I said he would have to get a ramp pretty soon, and he sadly agreed. I went to Lowe's to talk with someone about the cabin plans I'm working on and got what I needed to build that ramp for Pickles. Miss Pickles is overweight and has genetically bad hips. She needs the ramp to get into the back seat of the Tahoe. I designed the ramp to fit into the back of the Tahoe, but it can be easily carried almost anywhere. I made one minor construction error: I should have installed the hinges across the cut line and removed them before cutting the ramp in two. The folded pieces don't quite match up.

South Three

I took a stick framing carpentry class at the technical school, and there was only one woman in the class, a lovely young professional stripper who absolutely intimidated the young men. When we were divided into three teams, each team to build an 8' x 12' shed, she was on my team with a couple of other older men. As a mature, happily married, Christian man, I felt perfectly comfortable working with her, and she with me. She handled the tools and the work as well as any man. When I was talking with the windows and doors guy at Lowe's he was surprised at my answers to his questions but eventually said I sounded like I knew what I was doing, then enjoyed looking at photos on my phone and talking shop for a while.

Cabin Plans and Hoping to Break Ground in September...

20x40 footprint with 20x24x6 understory for storage, 16x20 carport, 16x20 living space, 12x20 sleeping loft, 8x12-20 lower level balcony, two 6x12 upper level balconies, four sliding glass doors, twelve windows - basically a cross between a pole barn and a she shed.

One of the engineers Kathleen works with has been interested in the project. We were at a company event Wednesday evening and talking with him about the latest plans. He was flabbergasted that I was planning to build it by myself, and asked a lot of questions, for which I had answers. Kathleen told him I have the intelligence and determination to do it. I gave her the comprehensive floor plan drawing for the cabin and a photo album of my building the shed to share with him. He asked how long it would take. I said probably longer than I like but faster than I fear, maybe six months...

Kathleen and I were talking about how I might build the cabin, with or without help, and she suggested I hire someone, who needs the money, to help me. I agreed to that as an alternative to inviting friends and family to join the fun. Not long after that I found Thomas Bowers, Jack of All Trades and Master of None, and adopted him as my younger brother in Christ. A fine young man, Thomas was sitting in a doorway

on Cary Street and accepting help from strangers. No longer a stranger to him, I am in the process of getting him on his way to success. I booked a room for him at Regency Inn for seven nights and took him to CapitolOne West Creek to see if he might get hired for food service. As we waited for my former manager, Jenn, and waited and waited, Thomas began to realize how overwhelming it would be for him to do food service in that environment. Jenn finally arrived and gave me a hug. We spoke about other opportunities for Thomas, and Jenn agreed to send me contact info for the other possible opportunities.

I also bought Thomas a \$100 debit card. Let's just say I paid Thomas an advance and hired him to help me build the South Three Cabin. To date he owes me 50 hours of work at \$16/hour. We're going to burn through it pretty quickly, starting next week. He said he would like to join the men's Bible study with me Thursday morning, and I have several other opportunities for him this week and going forward. He's a bit challenged and challenging but self aware and self controlled. Kathleen will meet him Sunday morning if she goes with us to worship, or afterwards if she stays home to worship online. Yesterday evening we went to a Power and Presence of God meeting at church and enjoyed an extraordinary time of fellowship and prayer and peace and grace and praise.

Tech-Minimalist

I was an early adopter of computer technology, working at Shoestring advertising. We were visited by someone who demonstrated the new Apple computer and graphic design software. We were not impressed. It took the guy a really long time to accomplish what we could do old school in a matter of minutes. Nevertheless, we inevitably had to take the plunge. Larry took me to New York for one of the first Apple Conventions. We walked the floor and talked with the reps and went home with a list of what we needed. Larry swallowed hard and opened his wallet and we were in the computer graphics business. Larry calling Richard Need Moore, because he kept asking for upgrades to our computers. I have since far exceeded my quota for screen time. I am tech savvy but tech averse. When I had to buy my first dumbass smart phone, after rocking a flip phone for years, I deleted every app I could, including the keyboard. I had to put that back.

Polyglot

To quote the "Fawlty Towers" character, Manuel: "I speak English very well. I learn it from a book." Many books, in fact, I was reading cereal boxes and children's books before I entered kindergarten. In my youth I was an avid and voracious reader, devouring novels in a matter of hours while sitting in my bedroom closet with the light on and finishing them in time to get some sleep before getting up for school.

Ich kann nur ein bisschen Deutsch. I learned German in highschool and

studied it for four years. My parents told me they would take me to Germany instead of letting me go with the class trip, but they went without me and brought me a one liter beer stein. When I was older and working for a small advertising agency in St. Louis and doing drugs, I used the stein for coffee mixed with hot chocolate. I still have the stein but can't remember much of the German.

Hablo Espanol muy bien. I went to Merida, Mexico, in the state of Yucatan with a group of single adults from Highland Park Presbyterian Church in 198?. We worked with a missionary named Donald Wehmeyer, who was supervising the construction of a church and seminary and day school. We helped with the construction of a curb for the parking lot. Several years later, in 1993, I returned to Merida in order to learn Spanish and explore the possibility of becoming a missionary myself.

E yo capisco un po l'Italiano. Kathleen and I went to Italy in 2023 for two weeks in November and celebrated 28 years of marriage, November 8. I found online an inexpensive set of Pimsler Italian language lessons on CDs and listened to the first few lessons while driving around. I learned enough of the basics to delight and impress Katia, our very impressive tour director.

Polymath

I am a son of God, the Ultimate Creator of the universe, and He has abundantly blessed me. I can write, draw, paint, photograph, design and build things with exceptional skills.

Word-Geek

When I was in high school I wrote stories and essays in my head all day, every day, sometimes for classes. My calculus class was before English class, the last class of the day. I wrote my English class papers during calculus class, listening to the teacher and reading what he wrote on the blackboard. The night before the calculus test I read the chapters and worked the problems and aced the test. It drove Kendall Smith crazy. I also aced my English class.

My sense of humor has been richly informed by Walt Kelly, James Thurber, Monty Python and English teachers. Oh, and Speverend Rooner.

Math-Geek

I might be the only art student at Washington University who took calculus for an easy A. Art students at WashU couldn't test out of anything. It pissed me off. I took English Comp three times, because I knew more than the grad student instructors before I finished high school. I got bored and quit going. PFT! I also had authority issues, duh! I found out later that I could have taken a higher level course and gotten credit for both. PFT! Anyway, my third teacher totally got

me, and I wrote stuff that made her pee. She was not a grad student.

Chef, Cook & Dishwasher

I support Kathleen as she continues to work, planning to retire by the end of 2025, and I will continue to support her in retirement as well. I love to cook and consider cooking a delightful art form. I enjoy making everything as beautiful and delicious as I can.

Ginger and Guinness are Good for You...

I'm self medicating my body pain with bourbon and ginger beer and candied ginger. It works! Three bourbons seem to be what I need to suppress the central nervous system, so I can sleep through the night. Four is also good, but I temporarily forget what I do and say for a minute. Next day I remember. Five gets me into trouble at home.

Quick & Healthful Meals

- whole grains: brown rice, wheat, corn, farro, barley, etc.
- + nuts: walnuts, pine nuts, almonds, pecans, cashews, pistachios, etc.
- + legumes: beans, chickpeas, lentils, etc.
- + cheese: Parmesan, mozzarella, feta, etc.
- + veggies, greens, shrooms, fruit, etc.
- + spices and sauces

- whole grain English muffins
- + tuna, low fat Greek yogurt, spices
- + nuts

- Trader Joe's Salad Mix
- + meat, dairy and/or plant based protein

- whole grain English muffins
- + almond butter & raw honey
- + nuts

- whole wheat tortilla
- + chicken sausage
- + mozzarella stick
- + nuts on the side
- + apple slices and/or carrot sticks

- zucchini, yellow squash, tomatoes, onions and peppers, sauteed with Italian seasoning, salt, pepper and champagne citrus vinegar
- + organic low salt chicken broth
- + chicken sausage
- + whole grain pasta & cheese
- + nuts

- whole wheat pasta spirals
- + lentil pasta
- + chickpea pasta
- + olive oil and spices
- + cheese: Parmesan, mozzarella, feta, etc.

- cottage cheese
- + fresh pineapple
- + ginger beer
- + frozen blueberries

Frittata

- 6-8 cups fresh greens
- 8-10 eggs
- 1/4 cup milk or water
- olive oil
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1/2 cup chopped red pepper
- kosher salt, fresh ground pepper and Italian seasoning to taste
- 1/2 cup feta cheese
- 1/2 cup shredded Colby jack cheese
- Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
- Microwave 4 cups of greens in a 4 cup Pyrex for c5 minutes on power level 5, then repeat with the rest of the greens.
- Chop the cooked greens and set aside.
- Blend the eggs, milk or water and greens in the Pyrex and set aside.
- Preheat a 12 inch oven safe skillet on medium heat and add olive oil.
- Saute the onions briefly and reduce heat.
- Add the peppers and seasonings and saute briefly.
- Pour about half of the egg and greens blend into skillet, spiralling in from the edge of the skillet to the center.
- Sprinkle the feta cheese evenly over the egg mixture.
- Add the rest of the egg mixture.
- Sprinkle the Colby jack cheese evenly over the egg mixture.
- Sprinkle Italian seasoning over the cheese.
- Bake for 20 minutes and check to see if the top is browning. If not, then bake another 10 minutes.
- Remove from oven and run a table knife around the edge of the skillet to loosen the frittata.
- Let the frittata cool before cutting into eight pieces.
- Serve immediately or let it cool completely and refrigerate or freeze it for later. Reheat in the microwave on power level 5.

Broccoli & Cottage Cheese Patties

Cauliflower, spinach and / or greens can be substituted for broccoli.

- 1 1/2 cups chopped broccoli florets (frozen + microwaved = EZPZ!)
- 1 cup lofat cottage cheese
- 2 large eggs
- 1/4 cup whole wheat flour
- 2 T chopped onion
- 2 T Italian blend herbs
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp fresh ground pepper
- olive oil as needed
- Fold until blended all ingredients in a bowl or large measuring cup,
- Heat 1 T olive oil in a skillet, or in each of two skillets,
- Scoop 3 T of batter into the center of each skillet and press into 3 inch patties,
- Lightly brown each patty until firm enough to flip and brown the other side,
- Flip onto a plate to serve topped with cottage and Parmesan cheeses, or to cool for storage in the fridge for later reheating in the microwave.

Brussels Sprouts Sabji

Cauliflower or cabbage can be substituted for Brussels sprouts.

- 1 pound Brussels sprouts
- 4 T coconut oil
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- 2 tsp ginger garlic (paste or minced fresh ginger and garlic)
- 1 green chili, chopped
- 1 medium red onion, coarsely chopped
- 2 large or 4 Roma tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- kosher salt to taste
- 2 T basil or cilantro

Dry Spice Blend

Prep and set aside (can be made in multiple batches in advance):

- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp red chili powder
- 2 tsp coriander powder
- 1 tsp garam masala
- lime juice to taste after cooking
- Rinse and pat dry Brussels sprouts and trim and cut in half lengthwise;
- Mince fresh garlic and ginger, or prep paste and set aside;
- Chop pepper, onion and tomatoes and set aside;

- Heat large pot to medium, then add coconut oil and toast cumin seeds until they sputter and give off aroma;
- Add onions, ginger garlic, green chili, and onions, then saute until onions give off aroma;
- Add salt, basil or cilantro, Dry Spice Blend, and stir until it gives off aroma;
- Add tomatoes and stir until well blended;
- Add water if needed and stir;
- Cover, reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes;
- Add lime juice to taste and stir and serve, or cool with lid on and store in refrigerator.

Serve over brown rice and lentils or Farro and lentils, and top with a dollop of Greek yogurt. Bon Appetit!...

SpongeCrafter

We have a beautiful ceramic dish for our sponge by the kitchen sink. It is oval in shape, and I cut sponges to fit the shape of the dish. I made a template out of cardboard and keep it under the sink to use whenever we get new sponges. Sometimes the sponge gets funky and we use the dish to soak the sponge in vinegar. When we first got the dish from a thrift store, Kathleen mistakenly thought I had bought it at the dollar store next door. I was using the sponge at the sink when Kathleen started dissing the dish. I told her it was handcrafted in Italy by Vecchio Marchese and signed on the bottom. She picked it up and dumped vinegar all over the counter.

Cutter

I have a fetish for knives and have in the bottom of my underwear drawer an array of them and a three-sided whetstone. I previously had on top of the dresser an array of them, and Kathleen said it looked like a cutter's dresser. Ha! I have dozens, if not hundreds, of knives. Brian and I share the fetish, and he sent me a collection he found when cleaning out his parent's house. His uncle Marion collected them too. Brian and I once texted back and forth photos of knives, machetes and swords. Wicked fun! I have a set of Cuisinart chef knives and a sharpening steel in a flower vase on the kitchen counter and more knives in the drawers. Kathleen is allowed to use only the knives in the drawers, and I use one of them to cut limes and oranges for my fresh-squeezed juice, so I'll know when it needs sharpening. "Ha! Gotta keep them cutters sharp!" said Brian. I have in my tackle box an Opinel folding fillet knife, it is a thing of beauty with a walnut handle, and another in my backpacking gear with a pearwood handle. I have in my backpacking gear multiple multi-tools and dollar store knives and one tiny folding knife I found in the schoolyard next door. I have in the truck two multi-tools and two machetes and one machete in the basement with my chainsaw gear. I have lots of saws too. I have two bow saws in the truck and in the basement storage locker numerous

hand saws and a power saw and in my studio a backsaw, but I can't cope with it. (See what I did there with the saws?) I have utility knives all around everywhere and utilize them often. When in art school I used an X-acto knife as a drawing tool to cut paper for art projects and do so to this day.

Friend and Neighbor

I was in the hammock and heard one of our newer neighbors shout, "Fine! You just go on then! Dis your first time, Uber? Cuz you lookin' for a sock in da mouf!" I looked around to see a young lady getting back into her car and our neighbor carrying something heavy back to the sidewalk. A few minutes later another car drove up and carried her and her burden away without incident. Since then I've met Jeanette and her little dog, Low. She's always been pleasant with me.

We had dramatic flyover a while back when the military tested their new jets. It was announced in advance, but the weird, older ladies here didn't get the news. They all came outside chattering loudly in foreign accented speculations, and I had to get out of the hammock to go inside. Community living rocks!

Mai is an older Asian woman who lives on the first floor below us. She has a permanent scowl that could stop a train and a sweet little Westie named Cooper. I was in the hammock taking a break from the renovation project and eating lunch when she called to me and asked me to come down. When I got down there she asked me to sit down and started complaining about Ike and Emily his wife. I said, "I'm sorry, I thought you wanted me to help you with something, but I can't help you with that. You'll to talk to them yourself." She apologized and thanked me for listening. She did the same again, complaining about Carolyn, saying she was crazy and always screaming at the building. I wanted to say she was crazy too but said I couldn't help with that and she would to find someone else to talk to.

John and a Felonious Act of Kindness

This was a difficult chapter to write but healing to have written it:

John and April are horse people. They met at a horse farm where they taught riding lessons to rich kids and made a lot of money doing it. John was newly divorced and April's father had recently died. They bonded in shared pain and need and married, then relocated to Virginia to care for April's mother in the family home. When April's mother died they bought the family home form the estate and continued to teach riding lessons to rich kids and board horses on the farm until April quit working. The neighbor's daughters were among the rich kids and were like daughters to John and April, especially John. They called him Dad. He loved them and doted on them and cared and cooked for them.

As time went on the house and April's spending habits became financially unsustainable. Against April's wishes, they sold the home and relocated to a lovely home in Powhatan. John continued to teach riding lessons to the neighbor girls who were no longer neighbors. I met both of the girls on a number of occasions. The older was a lovely and vivacious young woman and the younger cute and adorable. They were like older sisters to Christopher. The younger is on the autism spectrum as is Christopher. The older went away to college, leaving the younger at home with dysfunctional parents.

John went to the former neighbor's home to take the younger girl and her horse to a riding lesson. The father helped John with the trailer and horse, then left to work a "double shift." He is a county sheriff in charge of a special victims unit and has a thing on the side with another woman, the second shift. His familial relationships are transactional. He provides everything for his wife and daughters and does what he pleases. When John and April moved away he was stuck with an inconvenient daughter and resented and blamed John and April for the inconvenience.

The girl walked into the house shrugging her shoulders in discomfort, and John asked her if she was OK. She said her back hurt, and John offered her a backrub, which she readily accepted, then they went on their way to the riding lesson. During a later riding lesson the girl was wearing an oversized t-shirt untucked. John asked her to tuck it in, so he could better see her posture and movements on the horse. She refused to comply, so John took her aside and explained that she and all the kids had to follow the same rules. She pouted and said, "I thought I was your favorite," then grudgingly complied.

Later, sheriffs got John and April out of bed to arrest John. They sent April back inside and read to John charges of sexual assault on a minor child. John said, "That's not what happened. All I did was give her a backrub," which is also a felony. He essentially confessed to a felonious act of kindness and was taken away to jail. He was referred to an excellent attorney who couldn't do a damn thing to keep John from going to prison. John could only plead guilty and respectfully dispute the accusations. I sat in the courtroom for John's second sentencing hearing and heard statements from the neighbor and his wife and daughters who were dressed like the whores he had made them to be. The statements were obviously written by the father. I and others made statements on behalf of John but knew it was futile. I felt the presence of evil injustice in the courtroom and wanted to rebuke Satan in the name of the Lord. The tensions were unbearable and my body was electrified. Eleanor held my trembling hand. John made his own statement accepting responsibility for what he had done and denying the accusations and was declared guilty, sentenced and taken away. Injustice was served.

John will be getting out probably sometime in early 2026. He has maintained a remarkably clean record within the VDOC which is implementing a model facility policy statewide. I visit him often, and he calls me more often. We communicate most often through JPay, an internet app for inmates and friends and families to communicate and provide financial support.

Recently, Kathleen was in bed and listening to the rain and thunder when John called. I had to cut him off and get Kathleen moving. We tried to get into a Jazz music show at the Tin Pan, but it was sold out, and they wouldn't let us in without paying for the last two seats available. In the past, if a show didn't sell out, they would let anyone in without buying a ticket so long as they bought at least \$15 of food and drinks. We got to see a number of shows that way before. We ended up going to Les Crepes in the shopping center by us. John and I went there once, but it was called Hutch.

I had been talking with Kathleen about John's situation and our conversations and wrote to share some further insights with him:

"You have been locked up with your past and can't get away from it. You can't forget it. You can't fix it. Dwelling on your past won't change it but will change you for the worse. Best to just lock it away for now and wait until you get out and move on into your future.

You are not the same person you were in the past. You will have to reacquaint yourself with everyone when you get out, Gary Soderman, especially. Gary has moved on without you. April is no longer a part of his life. You will meet a new Gary, and he will meet a new John. It's going to be the start of a beautiful friendship.

Gary Bailey is dead to me. He should be dead to you. Lock him in a box and bury him with your past as soon as you are able.

Keep it up, and keep the faith! RBKB"

John replied with an email apology for interrupting our life. He did not interrupt anything, but I had to cut him off because the show was starting in 20 minutes and I had to get Kathleen moving.

He and I are thinking and acting on parallel but different planes. He is quite naturally and understandably thinking and acting on a visceral level, as most people seem to do, and I am thinking and acting on an intellectual level. I say what I feel and think and mean what I say, but language is ambiguous and subject to misinterpretation, especially in his situation. I love that about language. I can make a simple statement that turns out to be accidentally hilarious. I hear the joke as I'm saying it and laugh out loud with everybody else.

You can take my words at face value. There is nothing implied nor false in what I say. Kathleen is like John in the way she hears and interprets what I say. I'm used to it.

John had a misunderstanding about Gary Soderman who loves John and Christopher but can't stand April, and the feelings are mutual. Eleanor Lehner and Gary Soderman have been friends with John and April and Christopher for a long time. Eleanor held Christopher in her arms the day he was born. She and Gary are his godparents, and El is Christopher's Tiger Mom and April's Dragon Lady. The trust money is for Christopher, and that is final. El told John that Gary was having trouble reconciling his feelings about John's situation. John thought Gary had reservations about him, but Gary's feelings were about April. Everything is all about April. Nobody can reconcile their love for John, April and Christopher with what April has done and said.

El and I are fixing things, so John will walk out of prison and into the best and brightest circle of friends in the center of Powhatan. John will be sitting at the bar in Three Crosses with the sheriff of Powhatan and John and Michelle Davenport, the owners. John Davenport is ex military and a retired police officer with an arsenal under his desk. If Gary Bailey should come through the door he will be gunned down in a heartbeat and taken away in a bus, never to be mentioned again. John will be able to sue Gary Bailey and Chesterfield County for egregious abuse of power, they will no doubt settle, and Gary Bailey will be out of a job. Don and Holly, our dear friends at Owl Orchard (Not Pick Your Own) are going to host a meetup for Gary and El and John Risch and Barbara West, neighbors at Owl Orchard. I'm going to take Gary and El to meet John and Michelle at Three Crosses, and that will be just the start of something bigger. Don and Holly know the seller of G&L's house and Al, the woodworker next door.

VDOC is upgrading Dillwyn Correctional Center into a model facility and reducing restrictions for the eligible inmates. Other inmates will be relocated. Officers are being reviewed and relocated and removed to be replaced with a new breed. Reduced time will go into effect July 1.

Love Conquers All...

On Wednesday, July 2, 2025, I got a phone call from John, and the miracle had happened! John's ex wife, April, had come to Jesus! And John received a letter stating he would be living in the model unit within the VDOC until he gets out early 2026. John's friend Eleanor and her husband have bought a farm and will be building a new horse barn with an apartment for John and Christopher. I'm buying a truck for John from a friend who is getting a new one.

April's second husband Roy had been hospitalized that morning for clinical depression, and April was on her way back to Powhatan from Luray with Christopher when John called him, and April answered the

phone. April explained to John about the situation and expressed her regrets for all she had done and said and apologized to John. John readily forgave her and told her he would always be there to help her. April also told John she was having her marriage to Roy annulled and would be putting their house on the market by the end of July. She had an interview scheduled with Liberty University as a riding instructor and would almost certainly get the job. It would provide housing on campus for her and Christopher and free tuition for Christopher if admitted. They discussed details about moving forward to sell the house and settle the divorce and move on as friends living separately but together as a happy family and said their goodbyes.

We had tickets to the Schwab box on the third baseline. Nice time, fun games. I found a foul ball as we were walking to the car. I mean, it doesn't smell bad, it just got hit out of the park. Fireworks this time as they often do.

L: Wonder if John ought to be cautious w/ April just in case she's setting up another manipulation scheme? Sorry, but... her history.

R: No, she was genuinely and tearfully contrite. God is good! She came to the end of herself and took a giant crap. Satan's poison is out of her system forever. Been there, done that.

L: Excellent news.

R: Kathleen feels the same as you but is holding out for proof. Thanks for the affirmation.

L: My suspicion was initiated by K8. Women have radar.

R: Yup. So do I. My screen is clear. Kathleen's is foggy from two drinks at the ballgame. Can't talk about it.

The other day our neighbor Carolyn was chasing a neighborhood cat with a cup of water. The cat, Meghan, has food and water at home. Carolyn yelled at it, "I'm trying to be nice, you f-ing cat!" I told Kathleen that you were expressing K8s feelings, and Kathleen said, "Yup, women have intuition." I said, Well..., and she cut me off. I said, "I was going to say radar." And she said, "Same thing." (pause) I said, "I was trying to be nice, (pause) you f-ing Kat!" Can't talk about it.

OK, I can talk about it now: We were at the ballgame and Kathleen was sloshed on two cans of beer when I got Lex's text (Tex's text?) about John being cautious and relayed it to K, saying I was surprised by his response. She couldn't understand why I was so surprised, and it turned into a big thing. She carries a lot of baggage that comes dumping out sometimes at the slightest trigger, especially when alcohol is involved. PTSD. It all ended well, because we have learned, counseling together, how to bring the temperature down and talk things through. She understood where Lex was coming from, because she feels the same mistrust for April and is primarily a feeler, not a thinker. I am the opposite. I feel and express my feelings but understand them intellectually, thanks to abundant counseling. As we walked out of the stadium, I calmly said that I was only expressing my feelings of

surprise, not judging Lex for his response, and that I understood his response and feelings and hers, and that there is no wrong or right about feelings. She and we were good after that. And I found a baseball! That was hit out of the park!

The Healing of the Gadarene Demoniac

Mark 5:1 They went to the other side of the sea to the region of the Gadarenes. 2 When He had come out of the boat, immediately a man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs and met Him. 3 He lived among the tombs. And no one could constrain him, not even with chains, 4 because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. But he had pulled the chains apart and broken the shackles to pieces. And no one could subdue him. 5 Always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. 6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran up and kneeled before Him, 7 and cried out with a loud voice, "What have You to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure You by God, do not torment me." 8 For Jesus said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" 9 Then He asked him, "What is your name?" He answered, "My name is Legion. For we are many." 10 And he begged Him repeatedly not to send them away out of the country. 11 Now there was a great herd of swine feeding near the mountains. 12 All the demons pleaded with Him, asking, "Send us to the swine, so that we may enter them." 13 At once, Jesus gave them leave. Then the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. And the herd, numbering about two thousand, ran wildly down a steep hill into the sea and were drowned in the sea. 14 Those who fed the swine fled and reported it in the city and in the country. And people went out to see what it was that had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw him who had been possessed with the legion of demons sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 16 Those who saw it told them how it befell him who had been possessed with the demons and also concerning the swine. 17 Then they began to plead with Him to depart out of their region. 18 When He entered the boat, he who had been possessed with the demons prayed Him that he might be with Him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you and how He has had compassion on you." 20 So he departed and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

Christopher is caring for April as she cared for him, and he will do so again when she is old. April came to the end of herself and fell flat on her face. She fell hard, and it hurt. All the poisonous shit Satan had fed her squirted out of her, and she found herself sitting clothed and in her right mind, wondering how the Hell she got there and where the Hell was she going. She will go to Eleanor with a white flag and a big humble pie. She and El will get reacquainted. John will also have to reacquaint himself with his family and friends. Christ is in Christopher, in name and indeed. Chris might not realize it yet,

but it shows.

Barclay

Brian seems to be getting more like his brother Bill, bunkered down in his house like a Survivalist and floundering in a homemade stew of bipolar PTSD. It's in his jeans. We're brothers from different mothers. We met in art school at WashU in 1977 and bonded immediately. I have a sketch of him modelling for the class with his head resting on his arms folded across the back of a wooden chair. Later we worked together at PGAV, an architecture and engineering firm in downtown St. Louis. I was working there as a graphic designer, and he was hired to do architectural rendering. He was and is brilliant at the work, a master draftsman with a pencil and pen. He labors mightily with a paint brush, and disparages his amazing works.

Ike

We have a big, fat stereotypical Prosperity Gospel Preacher as a neighbor across the hall. He barks like a seal as he preaches at professional athletes over the phone, and we can hear him through the door. The downstairs neighbor can hear him too. She hates him and rages at him constantly. He used to give me cash and wouldn't take no for an answer. He always carried a wad of 100 dollar bills and would peel off a couple and tell us to have dinner on him somewhere as we getting into the car on our way out of town. He would see me carrying firewood upstairs to our balcony, because we have a woodburning fireplace and would rather watch that instead of TV. He also saw me coming and going in my food service uniform at early hours when I was working as the Dunkin' Donuts on the CapitalOne West End campus. He must have thought we were struggling financially, because he invited us to one of his seminars.

An invited minister spoke a very good message then opened the floor for people to share testimonies about their financial histories. One man stood and explained how Ike had rescued him from poverty and set him on the path to success. Nobody else stood up, so I did and said we had been debt free when we got married and were debt free now, and interest can work for you or against you. Going into debt is like digging a hole under your foundation, but saving and investing is like building up your foundation. Then I told a story about how I would tithe when I was single and pray over my checkbook every payday asking God who should get the 10 percent. My friend David came to mind, and I mailed him a check for 10 percent to the penny of my pay. A few days later I got a call from David thanking me for the check and telling me it was to the penny what owed in bills that day. Ike stopped giving me money after that.

As we renovated the condo we got our tile delivered for the kitchen backsplash a few days before the installer was to come. They delivered

all of the tile for everything, four pallets of 3,500 pounds of tile, mortar and grout, to a parking space out front. I had four days to carry it up and stack it on our third floor balcony. One of the partners where Kathleen works is the engineer for our complex, so asked Kathleen to ask Eddie the static load limit for our balcony. He said 40-50 pounds per square foot. I carefully stacked everything in a parabolic cone section with two layers of mortar bags at the front center and three at the back, then stacked the boxes of tile on edge in one, two, three and four successive layers at the sides of the balcony. The grout mix was stacked in the back corners. Our balcony is a concrete slab reinforced with steel and supported by massive concrete and brick pillars. No worries. I sent a photo to Eddie. He was impressed.

I used a canvas tote bag to carry each 40-50 pound box and bag, first over the right shoulder, then over the left, then I would sit in a camp chair and sip water until my heart and breathing rate slowed, then do it again. On day three I was charging hard up the stairs when I heard Ike's door slam. He always lets it slam, because he has to open it wide for his giant ass. I met him at the first landing as he was coming down and said get out of the way. He stopped and said you know what you should do, and I said shut up and get out of the way as I squeezed past him. He went off on me shouting. "Don't you disrespect me! How dare you disrespect me? Don't you ever tell me to shut up again!" I said over my shoulder, "I apologize, and you don't need to worry about that," and disappeared around the corner. When I got to the balcony he was standing on the sidewalk looking at the the three empty pallets and probably thinking he was a damn fool as I said, "I don't have time for this shit!" He was always spouting off, loudly giving advice when it wasn't asked. He was so full of shit and hot air that everything he said was like a giant wet fart. His God was no bigger than the space between his ears. Nobody liked him, especially not Carolyn. I love him as a brother in Christ and a child of God, but I couldn't stand him either. He has been quiet and respectful ever since that day and recently humbled by his wife divorcing him.

A Penny for my Thoughts...

As I walked I found a penny, and thoughts came to my mind:
A penny saved, a penny earned, according to the World.
A penny given, a dime returned, according to the Lord.
As I walked I found a dollar, and thoughts came to my mind.
I later left it as a tip, and with four dollars more, not that I believe the Prosperity Gospel...

Carolyn

Our neighbor Carolyn is mentally, emotionally and physically challenged and angry with the world. Her dog Alora is untrained and difficult, but a sweet beagle mix who loves everyone. Carolyn talks to

her like a person and the dog understands nothing she says. Carolyn's parents were ignorant, white trash nigger haters, so Carolyn is too. She has mental, emotional and physical challenges and is functionally at a fifth grade level. Her sister bought the condo for her and their mother while she was living. Carolyn cared for her mom and cooked and cleaned and drove her around. Her mother was weird about food, so Carolyn is too. She gets Meals on Wheels and food deliveries from charities but doesn't like everything they give her. I've seen her run out of the building in her bare feet and screaming something at the car and throwing something through the open window. We have a couple of packages of her unwanted organic chicken and some fish in the freezer.

Carolyn yanks on the leash sometimes and yells at the dog all the time, but she loves and takes good care of Alora. I once heard her yelling at the dog down at the poop field at the end of our building, then heard her blubbing and apologizing to the dog all the way home. Some of the neighbors are concerned for the dog, but she is good. Our neighbor Jim always sees the dog looking at him like a hostage pleading for rescue, but the dog just wants to get to him to be petted. All the yelling is to her just another dog barking.

I recently heard Carolyn raging at the neighbor upstairs as I was walking down the stairs and a young man, her next door neighbor, was walking up the stairs. We met on the landing outside Carolyn's door and had trouble hearing each other over Carolyn. I banged on her door, and the dog started barking. She held back the dog as she opened the door, and I yelled at her, "Be quiet, nobody wants to hear that, behave yourself!" She scowled and glared and slammed the door and yelled you're an asshole, but has been quiet after that. I know she doesn't want me to do that again, but I will if I have to, only less forcefully.

Carolyn called me to ask if I could help her friend Faye with bags of trash. Faye is a neighbor who once had a home in our building but moved to another with more stairs. She has health issues and can't carry much, so she was paying Carolyn to help her. Carolyn now has knee pain and can't help Faye. Now I'm helping Faye who recently called again to ask help with the trash. She told me her daughter has cancer and is staying with her. She was very apologetic for asking and offered to pay me. Pfft! I told her I am very fit and happy to help. She left with the trash two baggies full of pennies and loose change, payment for services rendered. Bless her heart!

She once called me for help, because she had dropped the cap to a bottle of laundry soap into the gap between the washing machine drum and cabinet. I could see it at the bottom of the cabinet but couldn't easily reach it. I told her it wasn't doing any harm and she didn't need it for the bottle, but I could see it was stressing her out as I said it. I've learned to excuse myself by telling her I can't help her

with things she wants to tell me about at great length, mostly about the neighbors. I did fix a kitchen drawer for her once when she yanked off the front of it after a knife in the drawer tilted up and jammed it shut.

Coming home from a lunch date recently we found a plastic cup half full of water sitting on the sidewalk by the steps and wondered what that was about, then remembered that Carolyn had been running around a few days before, chasing the neighbor's cat with a cup of water in her hand, yelling, "I'm trying to be nice, you fucking cat!" The cat is named Meghan. It's an outdoor cat and has food and water at home.

Neighbor Carolyn is still giving me the silence punishment... Ha!

R: Good morning, Carolyn!

C: Cough, cough, I think I caught a cold...

R: Take care of yourself and let me know if I can help...

C: Mutter mumble grumble... Come on dawg, go down!

R: Come on dog!

C: Leave my dawg alone!

R: Ha!

C: I'm not kidding!

R: I'm not either, that's funny shit!

C: ----- !...

Benson and Bryson

Among our other neighbors is a pair of twins, Benson and Bryson, who apparently were conjoined at birth. I had a pleasant conversation with Benson the other day, but had trouble understanding what he said. He and his brother have obvious physical challenges, including speech. As we conversed I was reminded of my own challenges. I have difficulty processing what I hear, not because my hearing is impaired but because I hear everything all at once and sometimes can't focus on one source. Over time I've come to realize I intuitively learned to read lips. Benson can't easily move his jaws, so his lips don't move when he speaks. I repeatedly had to apologize and ask him to repeat himself. He graciously did so, and we got through it together by the grace of God.

Miss Pickles

I was on my way to appointments and errands, and Harold was having trouble getting Miss Pickles the pitbull into the back seat of the truck. I said he would have to get a ramp pretty soon, and he sadly agreed. I went to Lowe's to talk with someone about the cabin plans I'm working on and got what I needed to build that ramp for Pickles. Miss Pickles is overweight and has genetically bad hips. She needs the ramp to get into the back seat of the Tahoe. I designed the ramp to fit into the back of the Tahoe, but it can be easily carried almost

anywhere. I made one minor construction error: I should have installed the hinges across the cut line and removed them before cutting the ramp in two. The folded pieces don't quite match up.

Going to the Dogs

I grew up with beagles. My aunt and uncle bred them, and family got first pick of the mutts. We got Sport. He was my little brother. I shared the box of treats with him, sitting between the stove and cabinets, one for him and one for me. Sport loved everyone, including the mailman. Mom and Sport would greet the mailman, and Mom would let Sport out to follow him and come from the end of the end of the street. One day Sport got killed by a car coming home.

Hunter

When Kathleen and I felt settled into our Richmond home, we started talking about getting a dog. We found online at a rescue organization website a fine looking beagle boy named Casper, and drove to Baltimore to meet him, and we adopted him. He had obviously been a hunting dog, and we didn't care for the name Casper, so we named him Hunter. He did OK with the ride home in the car, but when we took him up the steps, and into the building, he panicked, and jumped around at the end of the leash like a hooked lunger bass. We managed to get him up the stairs and into our apartment, but he incessantly drooled and paced from the door to the balcony and back until I gathered him into my arms and stroked him, and spoke lowly and slowly to him. He slowly settled down, and over the next couple of weeks began to get more comfortable with us and our home.

Walking outside he was good with other people if they had a dog with them, but he spooked at people walking alone. Our neighbor was down by the poopy field, washing his truck, and was out of sight behind it when we got there. He stepped around the truck, and spooked Hunter, who bolted to the end of the leash, spun around, and backed out of the harness like a dirty shirt. He was gone. I got Kathleen, and we spotted him in the woods behind our building. I went around one way, and Kathleen the other. He ran out of the woods toward me, and I dove, and got a hand on him, but we were tangled in the brambles, and he got away again. He was gone, and we never got him back.

I printed posters and posted them everywhere I found his tracks. I got calls from people who sighted him, and started marking the sightings on a map. I called Animal Control, and asked their advice. I called the rescue organization, and they came down from Baltimore to join the hunt for Hunter. I called an animal control contractor, and asked his advice. I drove to a Tractor Supply store in Staunton to buy a dog-sized trap, and set it up in the woods behind our building, and chained it to a tree. I caught the biggest badass cat I have ever seen. I tried to jump through the top of the trap and up the tree

trunk, then started running up the back over the top, down the front, and across the bottom like a Tasmanian Devil. I called Animal Control, put on heavy gloves, and took the two-wheeler, and the key to the bike lock, and rolled the rattling trap out to a single tree in the pooppy field, and locked it to that. Then I went inside and made a big sign that said, "DANGER, BAD, CAT! I HAVE CALLED ANIMAL CONTROL" When I got home from work, the trap was empty. I also caught a racoon, an opossum, a tiny black kitten, but no Hunter. After months of sightings and calls, I got a call from Animal Control. Hit by a car on Ridgefield Parkway, Hunter was gone for good.

He seemed to have happily thrived out there. He could run for miles through the woods with the deer, and other wildlife, and eat food out of backyard dog bowls, and drink from the creek, and be free.

Anna Banana

Soon after Hunter we got Anna Banana, a sweet little beagle girl, who looked like someone had poured black paint over her white body. She obviously had been a spoiled little house pet. When we drove into the shelter, all the other dogs were busily frolicking in the enclosure. She was at the fence, and standing on her back legs, and looking right at us, and wagging her tail. We took her for a little walk on the leash, and when we stopped she stood on her back legs with her front paws on my leg, and her eyes gazing into mine with mutual love and adoration. She was ours, and she knew it.

She rode home in the car lying across my lap as I drove. We took her upstairs, and into our home, and she immediately jumped up on the couch, and laid down wagging her tail, and looking at us with great satisfaction. I gently told her no, and put her down on the floor. She immediately jumped back up. I again put her down, and more firmly told her no. She jumped back up. I again put her down, and very firmly told her no. She jumped back up, and rolled over belly up, and awaited her death until we started laughing, and let her stay on the couch wagging her tail with great satisfaction. When I first took her for a walk down to the street and around to the school a fire truck pulled out of the station across from the school and turned up the street toward us with the siren blaring. Banana stood still and watched the truck pass by, then looked at me, put her head down low, and let out a feeble little arwoo! I laughed out loud, and she threw head back with a full throated ARW00000! We had to grab her by the snout and hold her mouth shut when we heard a distant siren from home. She then let out a compressed arwoopfff!

One unusually fine and sunny morning I took Banana for walk before going to work. We went back in, and I put her in the crate. Moments later she was pawing at the door and barking. I took her back outside for another walk, thinking she was having bowel issues. No, she found a sunny spot in the grass, laid down and wagged her tail, looking at

me with a smile. I laughed out loud, but had to apologetically take her back to the crate.

If the temperature was colder than seventy-five degrees, she was freezing to death. I called her my chilly dog. I once took her with me to False Cape State Park when the weather was cold and windy and wet. She couldn't walk with me through the Back Bay Wildlife Refuge, so we went by boat down the Back Bay. To stay out of the wind as much as possible, I paddled from point to shoreline at each cove, then angled downwind out to the next point. Whenever it seemed to her we were getting close enough she would ready herself to jump ashore. I kept the leash taught. There was a constant noise like a threshing machine coming from the other side of the cape. We finally made it to our destination and got out of the boat. I found a place sheltered from the wind to set up camp, which was just a tarp strung across a low tree limb and staked out. Anna Banana dug a hole in the sand and furiously hunkered down into it. We went down to the ocean front and walked the beach a bit. The threshing noise was coming from the surf, and great logs of foam were rolling up the beach. The weather got better next day.

Banana was the ultimate trail dog for hikes and backpacking. We took her with us to Old Dominion Appalachian Trail Club outings, and she was the darling of all. She went backpacking with me and Don and George along the Appalachian Trail, even in winter. She went with me and other friends to St. Mary's Wilderness multiple times. We didn't have to keep her on a leash unless there were other dogs. She loved to find and meet new people ahead of us on the trails. Whenever we caught up with someone she would greet them and move on and sniff the trail thoroughly to refresh her scent inventory.

We lost Anna Banana to lymphoma after a wonderful long life. Her ashes and photo and paw print are enshrined on a bookshelf in our home.

Georgia Boo

It took Kathleen a while to get over our loss of Anna Banana, but she eventually started exploring rescue organization websites, and sent me a link to Georgia, a sweet little beagle girl who was petite and pretty and white with brown patches. She had obviously been a hunting dog kenneled with other dogs, and probably wouldn't hunt. She was turned loose in Amelia County and maybe shot across the butt. She had a little scar on her right haunch. She was sweet and timid and shy and passive. She had three safe places in our home at first, the crate in the kitchen, a cushion in the futon room, and a crate in the bedroom corner. She would scurry from one to the other to be with one or both of us. Georgia was frightened by loud noises, reflections on the ceiling from passing cars, strangers walking by without dogs.

After work I would take her for a walk, then lie near her on our bed,

petting her and gently talking to her, and repeating her name. She gradually grew to be more relaxed and a little bit playful. She was in her bedroom crate one night and scratching at the door. I got up and dressed and took her out for a walk. After I put her back in the crate she immediately started scratching at the door again. I sat on the floor and opened the door. She burst out, leapt into my lap, flipped on her back, wiggled all around, and covered my face with wet kisses. She was ours, or mine, I should say. She wanted to never be in the crate again. She barked when we left home. We came home to find splattered blood on the floor around her crate from her biting and pulling at the bars. We got smaller crates without bars, and she tried to chew through it from the inside. We started taking her to doggy daycare three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Georgia loved Little Dog Services Doggy Daycare. She loved the dogs. She loved the young ladies. She loved the treats. She loved the sleepovers when we went out of town.

I once took Georgia backpacking with me in St. Mary's Wilderness. She did well, but wanted to get off the trail and walk through the woods. I kept her on a short leash. We were alone on the trail most of the way, and we stopped at a good hole for a swim. I dropped my pack and stripped to my shorts, then let Georgia off the leash and eased into the water with her just as some other people arrived and one of them jumped into the hole, kabloosh! Georgia paddled furiously across the hole, scrambled up the rocky cascade, over the rocks to the bank, into the woods and over the ridge. I followed too slowly. She was gone. I set up camp near the hole, then crossed the river and climbed the ridge repeatedly calling her name. At the top of the ridge the woods were more open and she could have gone anywhere in any direction. I repeatedly called her name as I hiked a loop back to my camp. As evening fell I hiked up the falls to where the other people were camped and sat by their fire and shared their bourbon. After dark I made my way back to camp, brushed my teeth and called Georgia one last time. She barked once far off in the distance. I called again and she answered. I grabbed her leash and my headlamp, crossed the river calling Georgia, and she answered. Little by little her bark grew closer. Then she was there. Then she wasn't, because the headlamp spooked her. I turned it off, and she was back, belly crawling, then leaping into my arms with wiggles, waggles and wet kisses.

After many wonderful years we lost Georgia to kidney failure. She is enshrined on our bookshelf as well.

Stories and Essays...

Why I Write...

I walk a lot and write stories and essays in my head as I walk. I walk a lot, because it helps the twin dragons of my brutally scarred flesh, entwined in mortal combat around my spine, to actively disengage. John

Prine wrote songs, short stories set to music, as he carried the mail. When COVID took John, I drank bourbon, binged YouTube videos and wept.

I've been walking a lot and metabolically scheduling my exercise and eating, significantly losing weight and increasing my strength and energy. I use a pack basket to tote the recycling to the dumpster 0.5 miles away and carry tote bags of groceries up three flights to our apartment. I also hand squeeze fresh lime and orange juice every day, the lime for my water bottle and the orange mixed with tart cherry juice for vitamin C and to help prevent gout and kidney stones, both of which I got on the same morning a year or two ago. Hand squeezing is also great for strengthening my grip and forearms. Lately I've been squeezing the orange juice in the evening and mixing it with bourbon. The bourbon is my one violation of the metabolic schedule. I'm not fat and happy, just a little flabby in the middle.

I like to integrate exercise into my lifestyle, walking up and down stairs to and from our third floor apartment, carrying tote bags with twenty pounds of groceries in each hand, carrying the recycling in an Allagash pack basket on my back to the recycling center half a mile down the street, then maybe to the Mediterranean Bakery for something yummy for lunch or to Kroger for groceries. I can walk down to the corner and across the street to RainTree, a community built around the time our Regency Woods community was built in 1975, and walk seven or eight miles of trails through the woods up to Deep Run Park, a county park we call "Dog Run Park," cuz of all the dogs people walk there.

On a walk around the lake at Bear Creek Lake SP, I passed three young women in park uniform carrying hammers and a shovel. I said good morning to the ladies, then heard myself say, "I love me a woman with tools in her hands." That gave them a laugh and a smile, and me too. As I walked on I thought the words sounded like the title of a song. That gave me a chuckle and prompted me to think of another, "My Instagram Girlfriend is a 300 Pound Dude with Hair on His Back, Wearing Greasy Sweatpants and a Beer-Stained Tank Top," based on conversations with my neighbor friend Jim about his Instagram habit. I'm not a song writer, at least not yet, and don't know if there will ever be a song to go with the titles, but it's a pleasure to consider the possibilities. I was on the porch at Three Crosses Distillery having one of their club sandwiches, and "Safety Dance" by Men Without Hats was playing on the sound system. I've always wondered if the lyrics say, "...You can leave your friends, or friend's, behind." Friends behind means one thing, friend's behind another. Punctuation matters. Maybe they wrote the song just so they could hear those words on the radio.

WARNING: The following is the kind of thing that can happen when chronic pain keeps you awake in the night:

Love is... a pome of anagrams by Ryan Bozis

O, Elvis, I loves olives.
So vile, so evil, I loves.
O, veils I solve, so live!
O, Elvis, olives I loves.

Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God Almighty, I am Free at Last!!!

My flesh was brutally scarred, because I did something foolish when I was about 10 years old: My parents dropped me off at grandfather's barn, where my cousins had made a pit in the hay bales. I saw my cousin dive into the pit but didn't see him flip and land butt first on a pile of hay. I climbed up, dove in and hit the wall head first near the bottom. My body slammed into my head like a train wreck, causing massive blunt force trauma to my neck and back and upper body. My ears were ringing, my nerves were tingling, and I laid perfectly still in a crumpled heap, then slowly wiggled my fingers and toes, then shakily got up and climbed up and out of the pit, and that was the end of that.

I didn't want myself nor my cousins to get into trouble, so I shook it off and went about the rest of the day. I had a headache for a few days, and it gradually subsided. My body ached for several weeks and the pain gradually subsided. I sometimes had unusual aches and pains and terrible headaches as I grew older but nothing serious until I turned 40 something years old.

I was working at a printing company and sitting at a computer for 40 hours a week, and I started to feel aches and pains in my neck and back and shoulders and arms. I also had more frequent and terrible headaches. I made the rounds of all the medical doctors and specialists and X-rays and scans. My general physician told me I had lots of arthritis and a displaced vertebra and that it wasn't going back into place. He offered pain management and muscle relaxers and suggested ibuprofen. I looked him in the eyes and thought, "You don't know me very well, or you know me well enough to inspire me to prove you and all the other doctors wrong."

I changed careers to work as a food service contract employee, found a chiropractor to work with, then found a physical therapist who taught me an effective range of motion exercise I've been doing daily since 2008. I later met an extraordinary massage therapist who has done more than anyone else to help me.

Ouch...

If I move my left arm in a certain way my shoulder spasms and it hurts. Maybe I should say uncertain instead of certain. I don't know for sure, but I do know I am healed.

'Snot Funny...

At the end of the Buffalo Trace Distillery tour Freddie, the guide, walked and talked us through a tasting. He had us each hold a snifter to our nose and hold one and then the other nostril closed, then both open as we sniffed the aroma of the bourbon. He then explained that God made us in such a way that one nostril is always closed so that airborne junk collects in the closed nostril. At least once a day the body automatically opens that nostril and opens the other, draining the junk down the throat, and we can't control it. The scar tissue in my mucus membranes exacerbates the process and, at least once a day, I am a fountain of snot, hacking, coughing, blowing and choking for a 10 or 15 minute eternity. Usually after I eat.

These work for me to clear congestion:

- Hydration with lime or lemon juice
- Green tea, ginger and honey
- Ginger tea, honey and bourbon
- Bengal Spice tea, raw sugar and whiskey

My Prayer:

From my head to my feet,
You reshape me,
From my head to my heart,
You reform me,
From my heart to my soul,
You transform me,
Into Your image
For those around me.

Amen, alleluia, I praise you Lord!

On July 4, 2025, I was healed of my injuries after carrying scar tissue in my body for 56 years and doing therapies for 25. I felt dramatic changes taking place in my body and sent out text blasts to family and friends asking them to pray with me and for me. God heard and answered. I awoke Saturday morning rejoicing and thanking and praising God. Sunday I woke up singing and dancing with joy and sharing my testimony with all the Saints at Eternity Church. I will celebrate my personal Independence Day every day until next year.

The Road to Ruin... Reunion, I Mean!

From July 9 - 16, 2025, I drove from Richmond, VA, to Nashville, TN, then St. Louis, MO, then Springfield, MO, then Des Moines, IA, then Chicago, IL, then Sandusky, OH, then Chillicothe, OH, then home through West Virginia. The purpose of the journey was to reunite with friends and family.

I stopped for two nights in Nashville, and enjoyed a visit with Carlton, my friend and brother from art school at WashU. Carlton is a brilliant photographer, beautifully capturing and printing and showing images that reflect his mind and heart and spirit and his soulful response to his experiences of the world he was born into, grew into and experiences today. He put together a show, "Embracing Blackness: Diasporic Unions," presenting works by artist friends who do the same with their disparate expressions as artists. We went to the show with Carlton's friend Joyce, who is also a photographer. She was delightful and delighted to meet me. We had a wonderful time together and joyfully shared stories and photos and conversations. Carlton and other artist sat for a panel discussion of the role of art and craft in expressing Black experience. I sat in the front row and enjoyed a rich dialogue with my fellow artists, with shared insights appreciated by all. Then we were free to enjoy meeting the artists and viewing the beautiful works of art.

You Don't Know Me...

After viewing the art exhibit in Clarksville and several other gallery shows, we dropped off Joyce at her home in Nashville. Carlton told me how far and hazardous it is for her to walk to the bus stop, and it dawned on me that she might be able to get a three wheel bike to ride to the stop and back, and lock it to the fence. She had previously shared with me how much she missed riding her bike after an accident. He tried to convince me it would be stolen, and she would be killed by a reckless driver. I asked him what made him think that was even remotely possible, and he answered that he sees thefts and reckless vehicular homicide on the news every day, among other news of murders and disasters and terrorism and politics, and he wouldn't let it go. His words were so emotionally charged I could not get a word in edgewise. I told him I would suggest it to her and let her decide. He laughed and said I didn't know Joyce, fair enough...?!

Rejoice, Rejoice, Again I say Rejoyce!

Joyce loves to walk and ride her bike but had a fall that ended her biking days. We walked the gallery and together walked the streets of Clarksville in good company. Returning to Nashville, we dropped her off at her home, and I said to her, "It was a joy to meet you, Joyce, and I will rejoice when I see you again." We went on our way to Carlton's home, and as we drove, I said to Carlton that maybe Joyce could get a three wheel bike to ride to the bus stop and back. Carlton said the bike would get stolen, and she would be killed by a reckless driver. I said I would suggest it to her and let her decide. She said Carlton was right and decided not to. I also shared with her excerpts from my memoir. She said, "Stop emailing me or I'll report you." I said, "OK," and removed her from my contacts. I hope and pray she at least read what I sent...?

Later, Carlton brought it up again as we were driving, and I tried to say that what he had called an argument was by definition a disagreement. He cut me off again saying, "You don't know me, and you don't know Nashville!" I said, "Well you're right, but I wasn't talking about you and Nashville. I was talking about a ridiculous three wheel bike." Again, "You don't know me, and I know Nashville!" Stalemate. Again. I love my brother Carlton and know him better than he knows. I'm very much like him. He is highly intelligent and highly emotional, but his intellect seems to be dominated by his emotions. His perceptions seem to originate in his guts and filter through his pain and fears and anger on the way to his intellect. He lives alone but feels engaged with people through his many friendships and professional connections. I see the same patterns in Brian and Carolyn but without the other connections. They are not broken but damaged by past trauma and hoard their pains and fears and anger. I suppose there is something confirming or reassuring about the familiarity of the status quo. I pray the Lord will deliver them from the past trauma, pain, fear and anger.

Chicago Rundown...

Carlton reminded me of a trip to The Art Institute of Chicago with WashU. After touring the Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec exhibit we were walking along Rush Street with a small group of friends when a car came driving up from behind and someone shouted, "Get out of the way, nigger!" Carlton was the only Black person in our group. We were all startled, Carlton was frightened and angry, I was angry. As we walked on, the others started to recover their previously celebratory moods, Carlton felt alone, and I felt compassion for him. I turned to him and said, "It'll be all right..." At the time Carlton and I didn't realize it, but now we know Christ was with us and spoke with my voice to Carlton and me, and it was all right. Amen, Alleluia, praise the Lord!

On July 11, I said my goodbyes to Carlton after touring the Nearest Green Distillery in Shelbyville, TN, and drove to St. Louis to visit with Brian...

Barclay

Brian seems to be getting more like his brother Bill, bunkered down in his house like a Survivalist and floundering in a homemade stew of bipolar PTSD. It's in his jeans, and we're brothers from different mothers. We met in art school at WashU in 1977 and bonded immediately. I have a sketch of him modelling for the class with his head resting on his arms folded across the back of a wooden chair. Later we worked together at PGAV, an architecture and engineering firm in downtown St. Louis. I was working there as a graphic designer, and he was hired to do architectural rendering. He was and is brilliant at the work, a master draftsman with a pencil and pen. He labors mightily with a

paint brush, and disparages his amazing works. I got to Brian's home late in the evening and was greeted by him and his WonderPups, Ellie and Allie. Brian's sleep schedule cycles around the clock due to excessive use of meth that exhausted his thyroid glands. My arrival coincided with his sleep schedule at the time, so we were able to enjoy a lively visit and conversation about theology.

As I related my recent travels and less recent Spiritual Journey, I shared new insights that challenged Brian to the point of vehement and loud disagreement. I calmly asked him to respect my point of view and hear me out. He calmed down, and I proceeded to speak to him and question him about his Faith Journey and beliefs. First I spoke of my personal deaths and resurrections, once in my mother's womb and again doing cocaine with Nancy. I was born jaundiced and prematurely, and my mother's body did not recognize my existence, so she did not produce milk for me to drink. My parents prayed fervently for my life, but I died in the womb and was resurrected by Christ in answer to their prayers. I didn't have language, so I didn't know the name of my Savior, only His presence and Love and Grace and Mercy. We were playmates all through my childhood until my mother deeply hurt me, and I turned away from Him in bitter anger and resentment.

Later, while living in sin with Nancy, we did some cocaine. She liked it more than I, but I had to do it with her in order to get my share. Nancy went off to watch a movie, and I did a couple of art projects, then cleaned the apartment, laid down on my futon and died. I went down a long, dark tunnel to a light at the end which was a luminous mist. I put my hand into the mist, felt nothing, saw my hand obscured by the mist, pulled it back again and asked:

"Is that You, God?"

"Yes."

"Can I come in?"

"Yes."

"Can I come back out?"

"No."

"Can I go back now?"

"Yes.," and I was back in my bed.

I found my confirmation Bible with my name embossed in gold on the cover and flipped it open to Job 38:2 "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. 4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy? I slammed the Book shut and told myself I needed to get help. I got help. Brian listened to my stories with deep fascination and wonder.

Next I challenged him about Creation and Evolution and Reincarnation, sharing an experience with Kathleen, watching a David Attenborough documentary about Life on Planet Earth. I asserted that God did indeed Create the World and all of Space and Time and that Evolution was a scientific description of the processes He used to Speak matter into existence by the Power of His Being, the Design and Formation of it all by Christ the Creator and Redeemer, and the Life imbued by the Power of the Holy Spirit. Brian grabbed his Bible and quoted Scripture that said God created everything in six days, then rested. I quietly asked, "How long is a day when there is no Sun, Earth and Moon, and what percentage of Eternity is Time?" Brian's eyes widened and shone with delight.

Next I challenged him to consider the scientific evidence that we carry in our DNA the DNA of every Creature that ever lived and lives on Earth, and that we are the Apex of Creation, God's beloved People, each and every one of us. Then I asked him to consider how that might be possible without every living creature getting a do-over from God for all eternity, in a word, Reincarnation. Brian grinned.

Next I challenged him to consider the Salvation of Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Other Faiths. Brian vehemently disagreed, shouting, "No way!," and throwing himself back onto the couch with his arms folded across his chest. I quietly asked him to hear me out, and he relaxed and leaned in as I said, "The Bible is God's Love Letter to All. It doesn't explain everything but is sufficient for us to understand God's Love for all of us and the Good News of His Saving Grace and Mercy. The New Testament Gospel happens to be laminated to the Hebrew Old Testament, but it is not exclusively for or against anyone nor any Faith. Other Faiths have their own Scriptures that corollate and corroborate the Bible, and they have their own Prophets, and they all point to Christ, the One and Only Savior and Redeemer of All. Brian was undone and fell back onto the couch with Joyful Wonder radiating from his entire being.

Birth and Rebirth...

I feel like a spore from a fiddlehead fern dropped into the earth and sprouting up through the soil and into the light. I also feel like a chrysalis hanging from a fiddlehead fern and emerging into the air. I believe in reincarnation. Watching David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet, I had an epiphany: This is not about science explaining away the Creation, it's about science explaining how the Creation was done. We carry within us the DNA of every creature that ever lived on Planet Earth, and we are the Apex, made by God in the image of God, and we get do overs! How many times have I been reborn? I don't know now but will know someday. I feel certain I was a dog at least once. I am brother to all dogs, and dogs are the next best thing to us. Cats are the apex of their species. Every cat is essentially identical except

for size. Happy Birthday! <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt11989890/>

Next morning, July 12, I woke up early and greeted the WonderPups and quietly packed my things and loaded them into the truck before waking Brian for a warm embrace and goodbyes. Then I drove back roads to Sarah and Caleb's home outside of Niangua, outside of Marshfield, outside of Springfield, MO. I stopped at the Uranus Fudge Factory for delicious fudge and a relentless banter of irreverent innuendo and double entendres about poop. I said to my server I was a little disappointed by her lack of anything nasty to say. She quietly said it was too early for that for her... The Other Register lady at the other end of the store did not disappoint, "Thank you for picking Uranus, please wash your hands!"

Sarah and I went to worship at St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church Saturday evening, then to a Lebanese restaurant for dinner. We spoke of many things, including plans for building our cabin and the Sista'Cous'ns road trips and exploits. Sarah aspires to join them and enjoys them vicariously. The Grinding Wheel of Desire story holds Sarah in fascination and delicious envy as it does I, and Mission Possible: Grinder Op spontaneously materialized in the air between us:

Mission Possible: Grinder Op

The Sista'Cous'ns have been doing road trips together for years and stop'n'shop like it's going out of style. Somehow, somewhere, they found a trove of ancient treasures, and Lucy scored big-time, almost, then later, I came along:

Good evening, Mr. Phelps, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to set right an egregious deception and misappropriation of a coveted antique, namely, The Grinding Wheel of Desire, ♪♪♪♪♪!!!

Once upon a midday dreary, four intrepid women of advanced maturity set out upon a quest to discover and acquire a mysterious and elusive object of desire. Lucy the Brave chanced upon a sacred stone afixed to a remarkable mechanism of steel, the workings of which defied her comprehension. Ellen the Worldly Wise came to her side and warned Lucy to beware the perils of the device. Lucy deferred to Ellen's wisdom and fled the devilish device. As Lucy rejoined Carrie the Crafty and Lisa the Clueless, Ellen the Covetous acquired the Grinding Wheel of Desire for her own devious devices, "BwaHaHa...!"

Your mission, Mr. Phelps, is to stealthily acquire the object of desire and transport it to the Land of Milan in the County of Eerie and restore it to the rightfully preordained possessor, Lucy the Brave. Mark the Rat will assist you. Good luck with that!

On the Road to'n'w'th'Sista'Cous'ns...

July 13, driving from Sarah's and Caleb's home to Carrie's and Tim's, I stopped at the Osceola Cheese Shop per Carrie's request and found a Sweet Spot for honey along the way. As I crossed into Kansas, I felt a need for coffee and asked the Lord for a sign. He gave me the sign, and I took the road less traveled through Coffey, KS, then wrote a song 'bout it as I went:



Gon'thru'Coffey,
for some coffee,
on the long and windin' road...



Gon'thru'Coffey,
for some coffee,
and I'm goin' with my Lord...



Gon'thru'Coffey,
for some coffee,
and I saw a tractor load...



Gon'thru'Coffey,
for some coffee,
and the tractor blocked the road...



Gon'thru'Coffey,
for some coffee,
and I steered around the load...



Gon'thru'Coffey,
for some coffee,
and I got some with my Lord,
on the long and windin' road!



Gon'thru'Coffey,
for some coffee,
on the long and windin' road...



On July 15, I arose early and made my way to the basement bathroom that I shared with Cousin' Lisa and stepped into a puddle of cold water, then went upstairs to get Tim out of bed to help me figure out WTF was going on. Tim checked the bathroom and adjacent laundry room for obvious leaks, and I found the toilet tank cracked from the handle to the bolt by the supply line, then used another bathroom while Tim went to work. Lisa said the toilet was fine when she used and flushed it, but she's a big gurl. Lucy, also a big gurl, asked me what happened. I said, "I don't know for sure, but put two and two together and get five!" After coffee and breakfast I said my goodbyes and hit the road, bound for Chicago to do crimes and misdemeanors.

On July 16, 3:00 am local time, the deed was done indeed, and I was on my way to Chillicothe, OH, and breakfast and coffee. I parked in a lot at a Cabela's near Columbus to nap in the truck, then went on to Chillicothe and found the hotel where I no longer needed a reservation. Brian called me, and we had a good conversation recapping the previous evening. I again said my good byes and went into the hotel to formally cancel my reservation, then I had a marvelous breakfast and coffees, one to go, at The Coop in historic downtown Chillicothe.

Derailed Trains of Thought...

Talking with Carlton in the morning, I interrupted what he was saying, and he called me out. I was grateful for the call-out but also for the comfort level we share, brother to brother and men to many. Neighbor Ike has a bad habit of interrupting me by saying what he thinks I'm going to say just before I say something completely different. Conversation with him takes twice as long as it would if he just listened to me. My friend Brian has the same bad habit. I love Brian, but It's maddening. Kathleen has the habit too, but she's getting better about it. People don't really care how much we know until they know how much really we care. To really listen is to say we really care.

Kathleen and the Sista's On the Joy Ride with Jesus...

Unbeknown to me and before I went away on the Joy Ride with Jesus, Kathleen released a butterfly that fluttered off to spark a flaming shitstorm that circled round Carrie and Ellen, then back home to where it waited to engulf me upon my return. Apparently, Kathleen's worst fears and anxieties were roiling in her guts before and after I set out on The Road to Ruin. She sent a message or email to Carrie, Ellen and Sarah expressing her concerns about my erratic and manic behavior. Sarah was concerned and reached out to me for clarification and reassurance, which puzzled me. I provided the clarification and reassurance and drove on.

Along the way, riding with the Sista'Cous'ns in Ellen's Baby Blue Beastie Baby Truck, I sensed a puzzling tension in the air, but passed it off as something between them and did my best to bring down the temperatures and volumes in the vehicle. We arrived at the restaurant where we would enjoy the Cousin's Reunion Lunch and stopped to view and photograph the Veteran's Memorial and, especially, our departed elders bricks. I stood by with cousin Harlan with little to say between us as the Sista'Cous'ns squabbled like chickens fighting over a scrap of meat, the subject of the squabble, I don't know. I told Harlan I was walking to the restaurant bar and would be there when everyone gathered for lunch. He acknowledged me with a knowing nod of his head and a twinkle in his eye, and I walked away to the bar.

The bartender asked my order and masterfully crafted my double bourbon with a king cube and can ginger beer on the side as I related my tale of puzzling and tension filled travels. She served my drink with a double shot of sympathy and understanding and a smile and a laugh. Cheers to the Sista'Cous'ns and Harlan!

After lunch we followed Harlan to a historic house and museum situated on a farm, with outbuildings and a barn. On the way I related my story of my conversation with the bartender, and Ellen blasted me with a shot about why I needed a drink and why I characterized them as squabbling chickens. Again, I did my best to bring down the temperatures and volumes but apparently only clamped a cover on an inferno. We returned to Carrie's and Tim's home and later went to bed.

I packed up my stuff, said my goodbyes and drove on to commit crimes and misdemeanors, on the Joy Ride with Jesus and without a care and without a clue about what awaited me at home. I was on interstate highways the rest of the way home, but traffic was light and moving well most of the way. By then I had pretty well formed a symbiotic union with the Tacoma Beast, after having put it through most of its paces driving around the cabin access jeep trails a few weeks prior, in the Shenandoah mountains with Cindy, Rex, Judy and Tim, and driving backroads through Virginia, Tennessee, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and back through West Virginia and Virginia. The Beast has six fire breathing dragons under the hood and roars to life on demand. The extensive safety and intelligent driver assist features are unlike any I have experienced before. I had previously experienced symbiotic oneness with the Tercel, Miata and Subaru Outback, but nothing comparable to The Beast. I'm no crash test dummy, so I didn't test the once only and done safety features. Good to know they're there, though! I had driven 32 hours and 2,100 miles from Des Moines to home for a good rest and recovery... Ahhh!!!

Flaming Shitstorm...

Upon arriving home about 5:30 Thursday evening, July 16, I found Kathleen unusually subdued and distracted. She asked me to clear my calendar for the day, Friday, so we could have breakfast and spend time together. I did so, and we had breakfast at SB's Love Shack and browsed the glass shop next door. When we got home she dropped a bomb and drove me to Tucker Pavilion for a scheduled psychiatric assessment at 1:00. I messaged Carrie and Ellen and asked them to pray for Kathleen and to please stop feeding her pains, fears, anxieties and anger. I did not assign any blame, just asked for their sympathy and prayers. Kathleen and I are good but could be more better. Carrie and Ellen seem to have infernos roiling in their guts, and their heads are so full of scrambled eggs and hot sauce that they can't think straight:

Dear Sisters,

I have not lost trust in Kathleen but understand her POV in that regard. I have not lost trust in you but do not understand your points of view. How can you not know that I am and have long been the same person I am today: spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically healthy, strong, clean, sober? I have some insights and glimmers of understanding, but it is not my business. My door is open to all, especially to you all. I am here to help, but you must ask me for it. I will not push my will nor my concerns onto any one of you.

The natural and logical explanation for my behavior of late is that I have arrived at the threshold of realizing our hopes and dreams. We have planned and saved and invested and managed our lifestyle and financial affairs responsibly, faithfully, frugally, and joyfully for 30 years of our lives together. I am retired and have been since 1/1/2022. Kathleen will retire 11/1/2025 if not sooner. I am finally free to fully realize my potential and fully express my creativity and love for all. Kathleen told me her counselor told her after meeting me that I am a force to be reckoned with, and I take it as a compliment. Kathleen has our counselors, friends, family and me to help her to fully realize her potential as she is able. I can wait. I have been waiting patiently and faithfully and will wait forever if needed, but I miss the woman I love and married. Pray she will return to me, God willing and God help us all!

Eternal Love, Blessings, Peace and Joy to You All!

Ryan

This Seems to Be My Ministry, or Maybe Just One...

Mom - PTSD, ADHD, Narcissism

Dad - Autism, OCD, PTSD?

Kathleen - PTSD

Scott - Bipolar

Wes - Bipolar, OCD, Autism?

You Don't Know Me!!!

Carlton - Bipolar?, PTSD

Barclay - Bipolar, PTSD

Do You Ever Stop Talking?!!!

Chris - Autism

Christopher – Autism

Thomas – Anxiety, Autism, OCD, PTSD?

No More Pecan Pie for Me

Our neighbor Jim was walking Miho, his chihuahua, so I stopped the truck and put the window down to say hello. He told me he has been spending a lot of time with his youngest brother who is hospitalized with burns over 40 percent of his body.

I told Jim I once visited with a boy my age who was recovering from similar burns. Dad was the administrator of an outpatient care facility and took me to visit with the boy. We talked and played checkers, and he told me he and a friend put gasoline in a coffee can and lit it on fire. The other boy panicked and kicked over the can, splashing him with the flaming gasoline.

After a while the boy called room service for two slices of pecan pie. I politely ate the pie despite my queasy stomach. To this day I haven't been able to eat pecan pie again.

I spent a weekend, Saturday – Tuesday, with friends at a cabin in the mountains. We went for a drive Sunday to see other cabins in the area, because the weather wasn't good for hiking. The five of us fit comfortably in the Tacoma, and I got to use all six gears and the low gear 4-wheel drive. It's a beast! At one point Tim and I had to move a dead tree off the road.

Sometimes I lie awake at night and think of things I have to write down...

I'm a perfectionist, but that doesn't mean I'm perfect. It means I want to be perfect and think I can be if I just try harder. I also think being almost perfect might get me close enough to fake it. I once heard a man speak about being honestly imperfect as a father and thought, hey, I could be honestly imperfect as a husband. To be perfectly honest, I'm realizing I can't be perfectly honest about anything. I can only be imperfectly honest about being an imperfect perfectionist:

"OK, I admit I can't be perfect, only God is perfect, but I can't help trying, and who doesn't want to be God, right?" Maybe I can start a support program, like Alcoholics Anonymous but for perfectionists, and call it Perfectionists Unanimous, or PU for short. No, that stinks, but anyway it could be good:

"My name is Ryan, and I'm a perfectionist."

"Hi, Ryan!"

"Wait, let me try that again..."

God help me!
God help us all!

Amen!
Alleluia!
Praise the Lord!

I'm not quite a perfectionist but have tendencies. The whole thing came to me as a vision of a stand-up comedy sketch. Maybe I could take it on the road.

NOT!

WWJD?

After visiting with my friend John in the Buckingham Correctional Center, I stopped at Three Crosses Distillery for lunch and a bourbon. I overheard the gentleman near me say he had taken a class about biblically based training methods. I turned to him and asked, "Tell stories and lead by example?" He replied, "That's pretty much it." Christ is the educator, instructor, story teller, example, and answer. Amen, alleluia, praise the Lord!

Will the Real Elvis Please Stand Up?

I got up at 3:33 this morning after waking up from a vivid dream: A double amputee who looked and sounded like Elvis disrupted a live performance by loudly and convincingly singing an iconic Elvis song. He tumbled from his wheelchair, pulled himself onto the stage, and pleaded for a chance to make a comeback after faking his death, because he had been too ashamed to be seen in public like this. Dear Lord, what did I eat last night? Joel 2:28 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

Hey, Mr. Tangerine Man

I was listening to a Bob Dylan CD when Kathleen came through and said someone should write Hey, Mr. Tangerine Man, and I told her I was already on it:

Hey, Mr. Tangerine Man
stay away from me
I'm not sleeping
cuz I never wanna
dream of you

I'm Mr. Tangerine Man
Run away from me
In the jingle jangle morning
I'll come following you

Caption Contest Winners

I opened the freezer one day and found a remarkable ice cube, then
texted the photo to friends and family challenging them to submit
captions. The winning captions are all mine:

Cold FU!
Icy You're Happy to See Me
Cubist Ice Sculpture
The Ice Man Cometh

Runner-up:
Frosty the Snowman

I was sadly disappointed by the responses, but WTF! We get these ice
cubes fairly often. My theory is that the surface freezes first, then
as the bottoms start to freeze water is forced up through a pinhole in
the surface and forms a tube that grows until completely frozen. This
one was spectacular.

Blessed to Be a Blessing

I recently went down to the storage room to get something from our
locker and found our neighbor cleaning stuff out of his locker. He had
me try on a beautiful full length black leather coat. The hem hung to
my ankles and the sleeves to my knees. He was throwing it away but
gave it to me instead when I asked. I had coffee with Peter and had
him try it on. It was too large for him, so I took it to Scott, my
chiropractor. He's a big guy who works out all the time and rides a
Harley. The coat fit him perfectly, and I got a free adjustment.

I love my Lord.
I love my wife.
I love myself.
I love my life.

Rich Lives Matter...

Trump, Musk, etal, are apparently dropping all pretense of
Constitutional Democracy and Equal Rights, dismantling anything and
everything benefiting minorities and lower classes. The lowest classes
are increasingly jobless and homeless and helpless. Underclasses are
increasingly segregated into substandard housing and schools and jobs,
and into overcrowded mental health and criminal justice institutions.

The middle classes are increasingly shrinking...

Welcome to the warehouse district...

BTW, have you tried fentanyl...?

Whose Life Matters?

My life matters.
Your life matters.
Every life matters.

God loves me.
God loves you.
God loves everyone.

God help me to love you!
God help me to love myself!
God help me to love everyone!

God help us all!

Principles of Biblical Financial Stewardship

God's Ownership

Central to financial stewardship is acknowledging that God is the ultimate owner of everything. Understanding this principle helps us adopt a humble and grateful attitude, recognizing that our possessions are gifts from God. Psalm 24:1 The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Faithful Stewardship

As stewards, we must manage our finances with faithfulness and integrity. This involves practicing honesty, diligence, and wise decision-making in our financial matters. Jesus illustrated the importance of faithful stewardship in the parable of the talents, emphasizing that faithful stewards are entrusted with even greater responsibilities. Matthew 25:14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. 16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. 18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. 20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying,

Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. 21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. 23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. 26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. 29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Putting God First

Biblical financial stewardship requires prioritizing God in our finances. This includes giving to God first through tithes and offerings. The principle of tithing involves giving a tenth of our income back to God as an act of worship and trust in His provision. By prioritizing God's kingdom first, we acknowledge His faithfulness as a provider and invite His blessings into our financial journey. Malachi 3:10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Contentment & Avoiding Greed

Financial stewardship requires learning contentment and avoiding the trap of greed. The apostle Paul teaches, "But godliness with contentment is great gain". True wealth lies not in accumulating possessions but in finding satisfaction in our relationship with God. By avoiding greed, we can focus on the eternal rather than the temporal. 1 Timothy 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Generosity

Biblical financial stewardship encourages a spirit of generosity. As we recognize that our blessings are gifts from God, we are inspired to share them with others in need. The apostle Paul instructs believers to "do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share". Generosity not only blesses others but also reflects the love and generosity of our Heavenly Father. 1 Timothy 6:18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate. Understanding these Biblical financial principles and many others from the Scriptures is essential, but we must go beyond knowing and understanding. To be a good and faithful stewards, we must put these principles into practice.

The Humble Man's Prayer: Well, Lord, it's been a pretty good day so far. I haven't lost my temper, or hated anyone, but I'm going to be getting out of bed in a minute, and I'm going to need your help... Amen, alleluia, praise the Lord!

What is Free Will?

God gives each of us the right to choose what is best, but the choices are all good for each of us, and for the good of all:

Door A, B, or C...

Enter a room with doors labeled A, B and C, choose C, and enter another room with doors labeled A, B, and C. Choose C again and again and again, then choose B.

Enter a room with doors labeled A, B, and C, choose B, and enter another room with doors labeled A, B, and C. Choose B again and again and again, then choose A.

Enter a room with doors labeled A through Z, and the adventure with Christ begins... or just sit in the room until the end of time.

BTW, you're not alone in any room. You can choose to love or hate, help or ask for help, give or take, fight and kill and die, or not... At the end of time we will be with Christ, but how we get there is our choice... Choose wisely, with God's help... Just ask!

God's Will & Purpose

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... 26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The

light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

Romans 8:14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship,

the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Ephesians 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Psalms 1:1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. 4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.

Matthew 22:34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Luke 10:25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

The MISSION of GOD

I am on mission for God
but imperfectly in concert
with Him and His mission.

My mission for God:

To go where He leads,
To love whom He loves,
To do His will,
To speak His Word.

Amen, alleluia,
Help me, Lord Jesus!

Advice for a Life Worth Living by Ryan Don Bozis

For Sydney

While our condo was being renovated I was homeless for a couple of weeks while the installers were flooring our apartment from end to end with white porcelain marble tile. I was hanging out at local bars and restaurants and getting acquainted with several bartenders and servers. Sydney struck me as bright and lovely young lady with a bright future. I felt a kind of fatherly rapport with her and offered some advice she considered very wise. As I lay unsleeping in our nasty hotel room I expanded on what I had told her and wrote it up in my phone and shared it with her. She appreciated it very much. Then I turned it into a coloring book, printed multiple copies and bundled them with inexpensive markers, crayons and colored pencils for her and our friends and families. Then I sent PDFs of the two versions to my webmaster William:

Artwork by Ryan Don Bozis--AFALWL

Advice for a Life Worth Living
Advice for a Life Worth Living
Spend less than you earn and do it for a very long time.
Save and invest wisely.
Avoid debt, except mortgage debt and maybe a car, but only a good, used car, then pay it off and start saving to pay cash for the next good, used car.
Ask God to help you to become the best person you can be and to bring you the best person to be your partner for life.
Keep working on becoming the best person you can be.
Make your plans and embrace change as it happens to discover God's better plan.
Be generous and kind and helpful.

Become a good friend to as many people as you can.
If you marry, marry your best friend and live happily ever after.
Remember, happiness is a choice, and growth is painful and
challenging, and marriage is a beginning, not an end to growth.
Best friends don't have to be married to be helpful.
Be grateful. Every day is a gift. If everything seems dark and poopy,
maybe it's time to pull your head out of your butt.
Be creative. Use your imagination. Express yourself.
Live! Love! Laugh!
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Idiocy or Insanity?

A.I. = Artificial Influence, a false god, made in man's image, that
knows us better than we know ourselves, original sin enhanced by
powerful technology, morally neutral, but we are not. God help us to
beware those who would use A.I. to give us more of what we want and
take more of what we have! Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves!
Know and trust God! He alone is good and completely in control of all.
By His mercy and grace we are saved and granted His joy and peace.
Amen, alleluia, praise the Lord!

Beware the Wealth Extraction Industrial Complex

The WEIC is grounded in imperial colonialism and slavery, got a big
boost from Jim Crow, grew beyond racial slavery and into economic
slavery of the masses. Classism and racism are used to divide the
masses and keep them blaming each other – instead of the oligarchy –
for their impoverishment. The oligarchy hides behind a screen of
democracy and a wall of police and the military. The media keep the
masses distracted, confused and fearful. God help us!

We as a nation and culture are sexually immature, pre-adolescent,
whispering and giggling and snickering in our conversations about sex.
We fail to honestly and openly educate our children about sex, leaving
them vulnerable to media and predatory manipulation. Parents mumble
and fumble through the sex talk with their children, wishing the
schools would take care of it and condemning the schools when they do.
Sexual activity is simultaneously encouraged and condemned. Media send
mixed messages about sex that are increasingly explicit and extreme
and condemning and confusing. We do little or nothing, nationally,
culturally, to equip our children to make good decisions about their
sexual activity. We do little or nothing to support pregnant women and
girls who are in crisis, condemning and punishing them for their
choices. Abortion is a terrible choice, but so is every other
available choice. God help us to help each other to make good choices
the most obvious and easy choices. Our nation is a swamp of
poverty, ignorance and mental illness that is intentional,
institutional and codified into laws that enrich the rich and empower
the powerful at our expense and virtually enslave us. We live in a

culture of capitalist consumerism driven by greed and fueled by media to exploit our sexuality and enslave and manipulate us. Men are enabled and empowered to sexually objectify, victimize, abuse, and assault women. Rape and gun violence are logical and natural consequences of such a culture. What is a bullet but a tiny phallus that penetrates an unwilling victim? The same forces that exploit our sexuality also exploit our basic human nature. We are all, by nature, self-centered. Everything is all about each of us. We are also racist and tribal. If we believe we are not, then we are self-deceived, ignorant of the Truth, and unable to change our behavior. That's why Christ commanded us to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Our inability to do so drives us to Him for help. May the Spirit of Christ live within us, changing our hearts and minds and behaviors, enabling and empowering us to see and love our neighbors as ourselves, and may the love of God and our love for each other overcome the forces of greed for riches and power. Amen

Whose Life Matters?

My life matters.
Your life matters.
Every life matters.

God loves me.
God loves you.
God loves everyone.

God help me to love you!
God help me to love myself!
God help me to love everyone!

God help us all!

Rich Lives Matter...

Trump, Musk, et al, are apparently dropping all pretense of Constitutional Democracy and Equal Rights, dismantling anything and everything benefiting minorities and lower classes. The lowest classes are increasingly jobless and homeless and helpless. Underclasses are increasingly segregated into substandard housing and schools and jobs, and into overcrowded mental health and criminal justice institutions. The middle classes are increasingly shrinking...

Welcome to the warehouse district...

BTW, have you tried fentanyl...?

Seems to Me...

The powers behind the power are giving Trump and his cronies plenty of rope to hang themselves and plenty of cover for their own agenda. Win, win for Trump and for them: Trump is winning approval from his base for his disruptive actions, and he is winning the media attention he craves. Even if his actions are delayed, blocked and/or eventually reversed, he will have won the base, and even more approval and media attention by condemning his opposition for the failures of his actions. The invisible powers behind Trump, or whomever else, will have won cover for any actions that advance their agenda, and without media attention. This is a stress test for our constitution, and legal and justice systems. How will we fare? We'll see...

President Trump shared a quotation on social media, making it clear it was one he wanted people to absorb: "He who saves his Country does not violate any Law." He seems to have positioned himself at the center of the universe and proclaimed himself to be a new messiah who has come, not to abolish the law, nor to fulfill the law, but to transcend the law. From what will he save his country? To what end will he save his country? Will he who shoots at Trump to save his country not violate any law? We'll see...

According to William Barclay's commentary on the Book of Revelation, the "Antichrist" is not a single individual, but rather a symbolic representation of any power or force that opposes God and actively works against Christ, essentially embodying the ultimate evil in the world; it represents the principle of rebellion against God, and can manifest itself through individuals, systems, or ideologies that actively seek to undermine Christian values and teachings. Is Trump the Antichrist? an Antichrist? a puppet of Antichrist systems and ideologies? We'll see...

Psalm 146

- 1 Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul.
- 2 I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.
- 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.
- 5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.
- 6 He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever.
- 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free,
- 8 the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous.
- 9 The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
- 10 The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord.