

Acknowledgements

Deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to my parents and ancestors for the gift of this life. To my beloved husband and children and grandchildren for bringing so much sparkle and love and joy to our days, so much goodness. To my teachers, for being patient.

And to you, dear reader and friend, I hope this book encourages you as much as the events it's built around have encouraged me and my dear hearts.

To protect my beloveds' privacy the living mentioned have been given pseudonyms as have a few place names. The gist is still there.

Introduction

God sends help when most we need it. When I was five things seemed very dark until one day a book tall as our two-story house suddenly appeared out on the back patio, with the angel hovering over the book turning the pages showing me they were blank. Somehow all of this conveyed that not only was I supposed to be a writer but would also some day write about my life.

The spectre of the giant book was no sword of Damocles hanging over me but rather something out there to be fulfilled at some unknown unspecified later date. Something always out there, always far far ahead. Then two years ago for the first time since age two I got really really sick – in and out of hospital and nursing homes and rehabs sick – and it became clear it was time to write the book and fulfill the angel’s unspoken message.



Houston house where angel appeared when I was five

The angel and the giant book encouraged me to keep going through the darkest moments.

Besides, you never know what wonderful thing might be around the next corner.

For a long time I collected my stories -- this person did this and that person did that. I was boppin’ along, relationships fairly transactional, as in: You be nice to me and I’ll be nice to you.

Then God touched my heart and showed me our stories can be a trap and a prison. My way out is to share my stories and put them to good use, to encourage folks as others’ stories have encouraged me.

Friends, I am an ordinary person who has been blessed with an extraordinary life. These pages are my pay-it-forward in fulfillment of the giant book and the angel.

They say in India you should seek God as though your hair’s on fire.

So I did, even before India.

Peyton Wolcott
Horseshoe Bay, Texas
July 1, 2023

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OUR HOPI FRIENDS ask three questions:

Where are you from?
 Why are you here?
 Where are you going?

Before reading further, take a moment and jot down whatever first comes to mind for you. You'll thank me later.

PART ONE – WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

1. Book tall as our two-story house appeared on back patio
2. Morning prayer – young American native warrior vision on Mt. Shasta
3. Brother's healing in first hypnosis session of lifelong life-threatening asthma
4. Quitting smoking
5. Wine becomes water thanks to our houseguesting guru in Beverly Hills
6. Chair(s) exercise
7. If you're ever really really desperate: My 10-day Psalm-A-Day program
8. Two Robert Culp sightings -- 15 years and 2 countries apart
9. Two Christian Science healings (Back injury, spinal meningitis)
10. The power of intentional visualization (little blue house)

PART TWO – WHY ARE YOU HERE?

11. Indian avatar Sathya Sai Baba showed up on I-45 in Texas as a motorcycle patrolman
12. When you're electrocuted it's like being superglued
13. Room for three cars on narrow two-lane road
14. Ball of green healing light
15. Didgeridoo stops epileptic seizure
16. At Hopi
17. Jesus was our matchmaker—in a California utility room
18. Baby deer dead for over an hour came back to life
19. The time I saw a soul leave its body.
20. What I learned on my Road to Emmaus (aka BBISD)
21. Math Olympics: God turned our sorrow into sunshine

PART THREE – WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

22. Jesus came to me, sent then helped me overcome covid wall of darkness
23. 800 butt lifts to freedom
24. Synchronicity
25. "Love lifted me" (James Rowe / Randy Travis)
26. Meditation, mantras & monkey minds
27. God's magic elixir: love, and forgiveness
28. BACKWARD: If a book can have a foreward.....

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PART ONE: Where are you from?

The past is no place to live in. It's not even real. That said, it's a good place to go to find out where we got stuck, so we can free ourselves and move on.

Recently on *Shark Tank* New York real estate mogul Barbara Corcoran said most of her protégé entrepreneurs had difficult childhoods. Hard times and early challenges make us stronger and if we're lucky help us establish our conscious connection with the divine -- although we seldom stop in the middle of the hard times and say, Gee, thanks God, this is wonderful stuff, please oh please give me some more!

Growing up in Houston's prosperous Memorial Drive oil patch, we three sisters and our baby brother had the stability of a large house where there was always food on the table.

The only hitch was that Mom wanted blond boys so my sister Kiki and I, first two out of the chute and born dark girls, became the Throwaway Kids. Third daughter Blondie got extra attention because she was – blond.

For Kiki and me, the unwanted dark girls, for succor there was no holding or cuddling and instead we were left alone in our cribs with a bottle of formula stuck in a sandbag contraption. Which gave us complete freedom to develop our minds and creativity unshackled by societal norms. Kiki and I didn't get warm squishy hugs? There's more to life than warm squishy hugs.

Sometime after the giant book appeared, it came to me that we'd all been beings of light on another planet and heard about this groovy place called Earth where we could go play in matter, make mudpies and tall office buildings and everything in between. It captivated us and we kept coming back, staying a bit longer each time until finally one day we overstayed and were trapped in matter and couldn't leave. In India they say God created our world because he was bored.

Our time here on Earth appears to be a record ever since of our attempts to free ourselves from matter, to learn that everything we can see, hear, taste, touch and smell is an illusion, or *maya*. Jesus told us, "I am not of this world." (*John 8:23*)

And remember the nursery rhyme:

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream

What better place to hide important and profound ancient wisdom than in plain sight.

Rowing my spiritual boat eventually took me across the ocean to India where I began to appreciate the great gift of having been born into this human life at all.

The ancient *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in Sogyal Rinpoche's translation, says we choose as our parents the two people who will be our best teachers for what we need to learn. No use complaining about them later; we may as well blame everything on our high school algebra teacher.



Backyard of Memorial Dr. house

And there have been so many other teachers: Researching how to be a better person has brought the blessing of so many teachers and teachings! Charles Schorre. Terry Cole-Whittaker. My darling sweetie pie, my constant love. My kids, two of the most amazing strong, smart, principled people to walk this Earth. John Crosby, for writing about how he quit smoking. Cal, the itinerant would-be guru from India who changed my wine into water. *Feng shui*. Sathya Sai Baba, the real deal, who first brought us to India in 91-92. My Hopi friends, Paul and Ruby Saufkie, son Morgan Saufkie. So many others. And my parents, who as it turns out were the greatest possible teachers this girl could have had.



**Paul Saufkie,
founder of
modern Hopi silver**

“I am the captain of my soul”

Eventually it became clear that our early challenges can turn out to be some of our greatest gifts, and hidden deep inside in each of them is the key to a better and stronger version of our selves. Growing up in Houston during its boom years, my closest friends were the recipients of their parents’ *largesse* and I looked on their cushy lives with envy; it’s only now that I realize how fortunate I was to have to have had so many big struggles early on. By age twelve I was buying my own clothes with babysitting money and my favorite poem was Henley’s “Invictus” – here are the first and last stanzas:

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul....
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

First half of my life I railed about my parents and am so sorry my kids ever had to listen. Mom and Dad overcame the poverty they both grew up in and in addition to giving four children the gift of life, they also gave us the stability of a house to call home.

And as parents they also did some terrible things, just wish it hadn’t taken me so long to finally understand that forgiveness is important – for **us**, not for the offenders.

George Nutwell, CS talks about encountering someone we’ll call Frank the Fox in the course of his prison ministry. Frank, locked away for decades, was lonely and alone; no one he’d known and loved wanted to visit him in prison. Frank was angry at everybody and everything until one day he finally got God’s message about forgiveness and began starting every new day by forgiving specific people by name. Within a few weeks he told George about the transformation in his relationships. Frank, who’d felt alone and forgotten by everyone, was suddenly hearing from family and friends again. Frank’s transformation affected everyone with whom he came in contact and soon he was conducting a prison ministry of his own. “If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.” (*Psalms 139*)



Father Greg with Homeboys

Jesus gave us some rules – and they’re for OUR benefit. Duh. Forgive seventy times seven (*Matthew 18:22*). He really meant it. Father Greg Boyle, the Jesuit priest who founded the Homeboy Tortilla movement in Boyle Heights to help young Hispanic gang members, talks about radical forgiveness.

Some favorite Father Greg quotes:

- Why would we settle for happiness when we could have joy?
- We want to be the front porch on the house everyone longs to live in.
- The demonizing only stops when enough people stand with the demonized.

Thank you, Mom and Dad

My mother's great gift to her daughters was the gift of *oomph*. She could summon her inner energy at will and being able to do this has been very helpful for me and my two younger sisters. When Mom played tennis, she used to beat the likes of Barbara Bush at country clubs; imagine, a girl who in high school helped her dad pick the cotton he'd grown on their small farm.



Houston Racquet Club

Dad's great gift was the arts, and classical music, which we three girls still listen to and enjoy. He also forged his own unique career path as a skilled artisan which inspired us to do the same; as one of the best if not most successful hand engravers in America, when LBJ would give something needing engraving to a head of state, odds are good that Dad did it. He could pull out a piece of paper and sketch anything. In our first Houston house, in Garden Oaks, the builder placed the wall studs too far apart with the result that Dad was forever patching cracks in the plaster. Midway up the stairwell was the most persistent vertical crack; in frustration, and to the kids' delight, one weekend he painted a crooked tree over the crack with Brer Fox hiding behind it.

Like father, like daughter: A few years ago the solders in the antique leaded glass insert in our front door started failing, which left the door unsecured, presenting us with a choice, repair or replace. The stained glass panel's colors were pale pastels, not my favorite bright Matisse primaries – so our decision was whether to go through the expensive and laborious plus time-consuming process of restoring something I didn't particularly care for, or simply have a carpenter remove the antique glass panel and replace it with a piece of plywood.



Alexander Girard Heart

At first I was going to stain the new plywood insert to match the existing door – until one day I remembered designer Alexander Girard's heart in the Santa Fe restaurant he designed; the heart is composed of the word "love" in various languages. I copied this heart, adapted it to several favorite wise words. Not quite the equivalent of Martin Luther's "Here I Stand" at the Diet of Worms, but you get the drift. On the reverse painted a giant smiling golden yellow cartoon sun – which my hubby says makes him smile. Any time you can make your USMC hubby smile, that's a good thing. Yes, it's an unusual front door. But who says we can't wear our hearts on our front doors rather than on our sleeves? Next to it is a verse from an old hymn, a gift from our kids.



It Is Well With My Soul

Years of prayer and therapy have helped me sort things out into manageable piles, like when during a cold spell Mom took baby me fresh from my bath up to our second floor patio and left me to die of exposure, double pneumonia being a small price to pay for survival. That goes into the "Mom must have been feeling desperate, and God bless her" pile.

Fast forward. After a lifetime, a half-century of good health and no doctors save for a few broken bones, two years ago I got sick (a Jesus story coming up later) and realized it's time to share our miracles, our good news – our "good tidings that publish peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation." (*Isaiah 52:7*)

Imagine this world if we all started talking about our miracles and answered prayers! Please pass the rolls and, by the way, the itinerant Indian guru we let stay with us forty years ago in Beverly Hills turned my wine into water one night. Oh, and I could also use some butter. Imagine that world.

2. *My morning prayer....*

Well begun is half done, they say. Here's my morning prayer, each morning out on our back patio.

How it came about: Early one morning while camping on Mount Shasta in northern California I looked up and saw what appeared to be a young native American male standing facing the morning sun, greeting it with outstretched arms. Struck me as a great way to start each new day, like a sacrament. This vision's been how I have greeted each new day ever since.



Mt. Shasta, California

Thank you, God, for the gift of this new day! Thank you for guarding, guiding, blessing and protecting me! And my family and friends and neighbors! This beautiful Earth! Our constitutional republic and everybody in it, even the ones I don't like! Thank you for helping me to see the good in everything and everyone today – including myself! May all the beings in all the worlds have peace and happiness. *Je Sai Ram.*

When I say this prayer I name and picture each beloved and anybody else who comes to mind. And I have added another list, those who I forgive – more about the importance of forgiveness later.

For me this prayer is a great way to wipe the slate clean. No holdovers or carryovers from the day before or any days before. God tells us, "Behold, I make all things new." (*Rev. 21:5*)

Today is a fresh new beginning.

If you can, when you say your morning prayer take a minute and go outside, look at natural trees and bushes and sky. Giving thanks – gratitude – is one of the life-changing truths that helped turned my life around and free me from the mess I grew up in.

3. One hypnosis session heals brother's lifelong asthma

After a lifetime of drama around Bubba's life-threatening asthma – Mom rushing with him to the emergency room in the middle of many nights – finally it all came to a head one afternoon when she came home from the grocery store to find Bubba hanging by a belt around his neck from a tree in the back yard.

Bubba was only seven years old.

My parents had taken Bubba to Houston's best doctors and obviously that was not working so they turned to their close friends, the Parkers, an older couple. John, the dad, was a successful wildcatter who donated a building to his alma mater. The Parkers suggested a Houston MD who'd recently introduced hypnosis to his sports medicine practice and had helped John, Jr. after a high school football injury.

During the first session Dr. Glover regressed Bubba back to his birth -- when Bubba had strangled on the umbilical cord; Glover explained that the later asthmatic episodes were Bubba's attempts to re-experience that earliest trauma so he could move past it.

Plans to move our family to Arizona or California for a dryer climate were put on permanent hold.

Even though I was only fourteen, the power of the mind in healing was self-evident. Bubba's healing changed my life view of everything. If a single hypnosis session could reverse the dramatic life-threatening asthma Bubba had experienced from earliest childhood – a condition that had dominated our family day in and day out for so many years -- what else could the mind heal? I'm still working on that.

Something else: While Bubba had frequent top-rate medical attention, when it came to my sister Kiki's deafness, Mom and Dad's idea of helping was to make fun of her. What were they thinking? They could shame her into wellness? Mom and Dad would tell Kiki she was a "stupid idiot" and yell at her for being retarded, make her stand in front of a mirror in the bathroom and stare at herself. Or they'd lock her in a closet. Things finally came to a head one day when a school nurse asked Mom if they'd ever tested Kiki's hearing. Uh, no. With school officials involved our parents finally had Kiki's hearing tested. Turns out her Eustachian tubes were blocked so she had surgery to correct that. Turns out Mom's idea of feeding infant Kiki and me -- by leaving us alone in our cribs with a propped-up bottle of formula inside a sandbag contraption -- was the cause of Kiki's deafness:

If you bottle-feed your baby while they are lying flat, they will be more prone to ear infections.When you feed your baby with a propped bottle, the liquid pools in the mouth and can go into your baby's ears through the Eustachian tube. Bacteria can enter through the tube into the ear and cause an ear infection. Prolonged ear infections can cause hearing loss, which can make it harder for your baby to speak and learn. *(Source--Intermountain Health Care.org in partnership with Primary Children's Hospital)*

What do you do with something like that? Go to the cemetery and paper Mom's headstone with "Shame on you, Mom" post-its? No, we forgive Mom seventy times seven. And love her for the beautiful creature she truly is that God made.

My favorite photo of Kiki from that period shows a young girl with the sweetest face imaginable; so much suffering she endured – it's the face of a saint. We're never given something hard without compensation. Kiki became a brilliant artist able who has been able to support herself throughout her lifetime with her unique and joyous art. How many artists can say that?

Rescuing Blondie from our Mom

One day when I was eight there was a lot of commotion out in the garage. Mom had my baby sister Blondie, age five, down on the concrete floor, strangling her. I called out to our next sister, deaf Kiki, for help; somehow Kiki heard me and we were able to get Mom off of Blondie.

While Blondie had been loved and adored for being a cute blonde since birth, by age five she was strong enough to reject that and about that same time discovered her mouth. Blondie's offense that day: telling Mom she wanted to marry Daddy when she grew up.

That day Mom showed her daughters what she was capable of.

Blondie is now a prototypical Earth Mother living in the redwoods, a true matriarch in her family who handcrafts beautiful art.

How you survive in that household when you realize your mom is a narcissistic alcoholic sociopath

My sisters and I were not alone. Lots of folks have had violent parents. Evangelist Nicky Cruz grew up in a Santeria family from Puerto Rico; he was beaten regularly from the age of three and nearly died at age nine. After encountering Pennsylvania preacher David Wilkerson in New York, Cruz abandoned his life as a gang leader and like Wilkerson has spent his life ministering to gang kids. Here's another one: Lately I have been listening to Randy Travis singing gospel recorded in Florida two decades ago, long before his stroke; his story is that he pulled his dad off of his mom to get him to stop beating her, and when the dad went after Randy with a gun Randy hid in a cornfield for two days and nights, no food or water. There are so many examples; these are just two.



David Wilkerson (L) and Nicky Cruz

First the good news: Like with Barbara Corcoran's young entrepreneurs, many remarkable people are remarkable in no small part because they somehow found their way out of a seriously challenging background. One of my favorite people is a woman at our local gym; she too had a murderous alcoholic mother and somehow Barb found the inner strength to defy her mother's negative energy. Barb put herself through college and law school, passed the bar and married a wonderful man and had three children. But she gained a lot of weight and her knees were shot. After double knee replacements, now most weekdays she walks five miles or more in an hour five days a week and is an inspiration to all who know her.

This is important: Finding the inner fortitude and strength – God – to survive and overcome hardships is actually a great gift -- albeit at the time usually well disguised as some form of yuckiness.

What a topsy turvy world. Mom and Dad, Sunday churchgoers, mostly worshipped money and those who had a lot of it. When you're a kid, how do you know which end is up?

Mom's lifetime *modus operandi*: If she saw something and wanted it, it was hers. She stole my life savings not once but twice. Parse that one. It wasn't just me; Kiki told me recently Mom would get her and Blondie, then eight and ten, to steal for her. Our parents would take the whole family to trade jewelry shows -- by then Dad's hand-engraving business had become a small jewelry store in a

downtown office building -- and Mom would tell my sisters which item she wanted from which display. Third bracelet from the top at the far right, like that. Good Lord. After we rescued Mom years later, among her legal papers I found her shoplifting records.

Mom seemed to feel everything she saw or wanted was hers by divine right. Kiki remembers getting a large package from Mom, shipped from our parents' annual two-month sojourn in Europe. Turns out, it wasn't Kiki's birthday present -- but all the hotel ashtrays and towels Mom had swiped.

God pulls us closer in so many ways. For me it was finding God when the material world -- everything you can see, hear, taste, touch or smell -- offered no nourishment or relief. When you're drowning in the middle of a vast ocean you're not picky about what the lifeboat looks like.

My first lifeboat: Dad used to read the funny papers to us sometimes on Sunday mornings. But he refused to read *Terry and the Pirates*, saying they were too grown up. That lit my inner journalist and one way or another figured out how to read and write by four. Being able to read meant I could start digging, looking for truth. Reading and writing gave me the keys to the prison I grew up in. Eventually learning how to love opened the doors.

Sidebar: Teaching myself to read meant I learned whole words rather than phonetically. I am dyslexic. Some time back I was told by a reading expert that most kids who teach themselves how to read wind up dyslexic. Go figure.



We were the big house in the nice neighborhood with the Village police car's flashing lights in our driveway; when Mom and Dad couldn't handle my sisters they'd kick them out of the house then report them as runaways. During Kiki and Blondie's teen years rather than be willing to undergo family counseling Mom and Dad shipped the girls off to convent schools.

We girls temporarily held Mom at bay until we each turned eighteen and could escape.

And escape I did, into an early marriage. Or so I thought. As the Eagles told us, every form of refuge has its price.

Before marrying I'd tried college, twice. Growing up in the oil patch during Houston's go-go boom years, I watched the folks around us especially after we moved to Memorial. Most of our neighbors had their own business or medical practice. With a few exceptions everybody had at least three kids.

The most interesting men around us were the wildcatters. When I went to university I could see the profs were nowhere as successful or creative in their thinking as the oil indies. Likewise the guys who got college degrees and climbed the corporate ladder; the degree guys were almost always to a man "yes" men. Conformists. Nice, polished, and dull as dishwater.

Add to that my own dad had dropped out of college his senior year -- on his way to a post-WWII GI bill degree in architecture -- because his business had become so successful. Dad was an entrepreneur, one of the best hand-engravers if not the most successful in the U.S. Back then if LBJ gave the head of another country something like say a gun stock needing engraving, odds are Dad did it.

So young as I was I could see the guys wearing cheap suits while safely ensconced in academia were nobody to pay attention to, much less learn anything of value from. The only exception was a tennis-playing priest my sophomore year. He at least was interesting. But Mom used to beat him, too.

When my first child was born a few years later I was 22 and we were living in a small rented apartment; being determined our beloved child would grow up in a nice house, I found one where she had her own bedroom and bath and thought we were on our way.

But my then-husband's largest client died suddenly and our income shrank by half; horror of horrors, the only job he could find was in his hometown which until then I'd thought of as the armpit of the South – never thinking I'd actually live there.

About this time PBS seemed flooded by anti-smoking shows. I'd started smoking in my senior year in high school and by the time I became a mother I was up to two packs a day; although smoking enabled me to skip dessert and be skinny, I wanted to quit smoking because I wanted to see my beloved child grow up.

Which was when I discovered I had no will power.



4. *Quitting smoking*

Although getting off the lovely vices bandwagon was not easy, I finally was able to thanks to an article by the late John Crosby, in *The Houston Post*. It helps if you have a powerful reason and desire to quit smoking, and mine was my beloved toddler. Back then PBS was coming out with all kinds of research about the dangers of smoking, and wanting to live to see my child grow up, having already discovered the previous year that I had no will power when it came to cigarettes, I was willing to try Crosby's method. **The gist:** Say today's April 23. Your freedom-from-cigarettes day will be a month from now, May 23. Each time you pick up a cigarette, tell yourself, this is fine -- and as of May 23, I will be cigarette free. The language is important; avoid harsh words that will allow your subconscious any arguments. No "quitting" or "stopping," etc. If you're smoking menthol go to non-menthol, or *vice versa*. For the next month smoke a lot more, and vary your usual smoking routines, the idea being to subtly modify your usual smoking comfort level. When May 23 comes and you wake up you'll finally be in a position to be free of cigarettes. **IMPORTANT:** Do not allow yourself to think about smoking much less quitting smoking ever again. Ever. It's a tape you simply turn off in your mind. Let smoking and quitting smoking become a non-thing, a no-thing. And don't tell anyone! It came as a big surprise when I quit that no one noticed, not even my then-husband. Hard to believe it's been fifty years since I stopped smoking. Heads up: Many of us develop a sweet tooth after becoming cigarette free – turns out, cigarette tobacco is cured with sugar.



John Crosby

An unexpected bonus of finally being able to give up cigarettes: Quitting seemed to unleash my til-then under wraps inner energy I'd been quashing all those years in order to survive my mother. Hungry for more feel-good feelings, I read all the positive thinking self-help books I could find. The two authors I started with were Napoleon Hill (*Think and Grow Rich*) and Norman Vincent Peale (*The Power of Positive Thinking*). Hill turned out to be a scoundrel and Peale a Mason. Jose Silva's mind control method was helpful. Now there are many New Agey self-help books on the market you can choose from. Plus YouTube podcasts on NDE's, quantum physics/mechanics, related subjects.

Wanting to make the best of things in my then-husband's hometown, I started docenting in the historic district, plus other volunteering, plus took art lessons from the late great Charles Schorre; a former Humble Oil art director, he told us about the Dream Day idea which changed my life. Most folks assume they have to go to school and get a job and eventually retire so they can have some fun.



Charles Schorre

Dream Day premise: You're going to wake up tomorrow. What will you do, where will you be, etc. Write it down -- a dollar-store notebook will do -- but don't tell anyone. Talking about your dreams too early dissipates the energy; you want to protect that little glimmer of hope like when you're starting a fire at a campground and you shelter and protect it until it grows strong. As Schorre explained it, by writing about your dream you start defining it and making it real.



Charles Schorre painting

Schorre said to keep a journal, describe your dream day, keep refreshing and refining the details and eventually that will become your reality. My dream day morphed into a newspaper column about interior design I wanted to sell

to our small local paper; I'd always drawn houses and house plans, always searching for the perfect house families could be wonderfully happy in, and I realized I wanted to write a newspaper column about interior design. Back then journalism seemed the noblest of careers and needless to say the one journalism course I took in college didn't mention legacy media.

The power of an idea clearly premised: The largest paper in Texas, *The Houston Chronicle*, wound up buying the column, as did the San Antonio paper, and it seemed I was on my way.

But after a few years I realized I couldn't save the world through better living room décor.

Grateful my child was so healthy -- back then childhood leukemia was a swift killer -- I volunteered to help with local cancer organization and even though only a volunteer, during my first year as county chairman we doubled the amount they'd ever raised, thanks to the *oomph* lesson from my mom. We pioneered many new fundraisers such as a motocross and home tours. When eventually I asked where all that money was going, the best they could come up with was a small grant to someone researching rare enzymes. Even I back then I knew enough to feel they should have first been investigating diet and environment as risk factors so resigned from the board and started looking into nutrition.

I couldn't save my marriage and after a decade together we separated; it didn't help that along the way my husband had figured out he'd not married a rich heiress with generous parents; fortunately for him he had better luck the next time: Where when he and I bought our first house Mom and Dad bought us a washing machine, for which I was grateful -- when my ex remarried, his new wife's parents gave them ... a house.

California, here we come!

Armed with a *Rhoda* spec script my firstborn and I moved to California. Why California? I remembered it as a happy place from family trips in the 60s plus the weather was way better than the hot and humid Texas Gulf Coast. Plus the only career I wanted to pursue was screenwriting.

It was as though life had finally said I got to have some fun, and oh, what a playground California was. But not for partying. Studied Zen Buddhism at a monastery in the Haight and also on Mt. Baldy. Somewhere along there as part of my California adventure heard Terry



Terry Cole-Whittaker

Cole-Whittaker speak in San Diego about the power of our word, the story about the Roman centurion who sent someone to Jesus to ask him to heal his servant.

As Terry pointed out, when the centurion told a hundred men to run, they ran. Jump, and a hundred men jumped. The centurion knew absolutely without doubt the power of his word. That talk helped turn my life around and I will forever be grateful to her.



Zen Center (Haight), San Francisco

The child I'd carefully raised in Texas was more or less dragged along when we got to California.

Chose Beverly Hills because it was centrally located and had great schools. We had no industry connections, nobody welcoming us with open arms except a cousin who let us housesit for two weeks while she honeymooned in Mexico. Felt like I'd jumped into the deep end of the pool without a floatie and couldn't remember how to swim.

Annd.... while looking for an agent I learned *Rhoda* had just been canceled.



Steve Martin

Scrambling to have readings of my work, I was invited to join the Playwrights Kitchen Ensemble at the Coronet Theatre – woohoo – where I once actually saw Steve Martin feeding actual coins into an actual meter out front. Double woohoo.



Rhoda TV show
starring Valerie Harper

5. Wine becomes water thanks to our houseguesting guru in Beverly Hills

Having given up cigarettes, that left only social drinking.

Given my family history, by all rights I should have become an alcoholic. High-functioning and attractive, my parents started their day with vodka and grapefruit juice. Both of my grandfathers were alcoholics. When my great-grandfather's body was found floating in the Mississippi the *Times-Picayune* wondered whether it was an accident; family lore said he was addicted to alcohol and cocaine. His dad, my great-great-grandfather, died of cirrhosis of the liver.

Except that forty years ago, shortly after we moved to California, I let an itinerant Indian guru stay with us until he could find another place. At the time it seemed a good idea, the right and kind thing to do.

Note re discerning our true motives: When we start our God journey it's often hard to tell if the inner guidance we're receiving is legitimate. Is that God's voice or our ego.

Here's what I've found: Carefully examine whatever guidance it is, see if there's anything in it for me (money, ego, etc.). At the end of the day, had I been more honest with myself, letting Cal stay with us seemed cool, hip, a very California thing to do, far removed from the Texas suburbs. Although at the end of the day, in fairness to me – aren't we all really our own worst critics? -- I was also trying to help, to do the right thing, the highest and best good I knew. Sometimes even if our motives are imperfect if at base we're trying to do the right thing the universe seems to protect us. Cal wound up helping me in a way I never could have guessed or imagined.

What happened: A few weeks previous I'd started having a half-goblet of wine with dinner; it seemed cool and hip. Having never been cool and hip, California and the film community seemed a good place to start. Half a glass of anything was enough to give me a slight buzz which bothered me on a soul level but not enough to do anything about.

One night at dinner I noticed the wine had had no effect. Poured another goblet then a third. Still nothing. The itinerant guru from India had turned my wine into water. There was nothing there for me, still isn't to this day. You could offer me the finest alcohol known to man and I'd politely refuse. Not a question of will power or girding my loins, there's simply nothing there.



President John F. Kennedy

Just like a decade earlier with cigarettes, it's interesting that now studies are coming out about alcohol's not being so great for us, and its being a poison that damages our organs. Michio Kushi who brought George Ohsawa's macrobiotics ("the brown rice diet") from Japan to America told us: The more food value something has the less advertising it needs. When's the last time you saw a glossy full-page spread touting broccoli? Or a brilliant, funny inspirational thirty-second TV spot for apples? All together now: Too refined is too refined is too refined. Ohsawa told us about Three Eyes White (*sanpaku*), a condition indicating extreme ill health leading to an early violent death he said, President John F. Kennedy being an example.

Researching how to eat better led me first to the Bran Diet (remember the 70s?) to macrobiotics, to studying with Kushi in California then later back in Texas. They said no animal food including dairy so I stopped eating meat and drinking the copious amounts of milk I'd always ingested daily.

6. *Chair(s) exercise*

One of the many things I tried those years was something I remember now only as the chair(s) exercise. It was useful for times when I had a dispute with someone and couldn't understand their point of view.

This is for when you're alone, when you have the house to yourself for at least an hour.

Set up one chair for yourself, your voice. Sit in that chair and say out loud how you feel about the situation, in as much detail as you can muster.

Then move to a second chair, which represents the person you're having a challenge communicating with. Really pray about this, put yourself in their shoes as much as you possibly can. Then speak for that person, allow them to present their point of view, what drives them to act as they do.

You can add a third chair; it can be for a facilitator, or a saint, someone divine. WWJD? Let them add their wisdom.



Chair exercise

7. If you're ever really really desperate: 10-day Psalm-A-Day program

Those years I made so many stupid decisions, including leaving LA to go to Oklahoma – more about that another time. Had sent my child to finish the spring semester (two months) with a dad who reneged on his promise to return our child after the two months. Why I would expect him to honor his promise and suddenly become a stand-up guy – stupid, stupid me. So I came back to Houston and moved into a tiny one-room apartment in a downtown high rise, so broke I couldn't get my furniture out of storage which meant I slept on the floor; thank God it was carpeted. For warmth I had a sheet and some poly batting like you get in a plastic bag for making quilts; this became my blanket. No TV, no radio, no telephone; this was way before cell phones. All I had was a Gideon Bible I'd taken from a motel room. For some reason it occurred to me to start studying the Psalms, one at a time each night, starting with the first one.

My lawyer told me I needed three miracles: One, to find a nice place for my child to come home to; two, to retrieve my furniture from storage; and three, for my child to come back home. My attorney told me I needed to do all three within two weeks, our next court date.

This was my first experience in really and truly studying the Bible in earnest as though our lives depended on it. Which they did.

Every night I'd study the Psalms in sequence, one each night. Remember, I had no distractions like music or TV. I can tell you for a fact that you get so much more out of studying them that way than you ever could from a casual – “Oh, that's nice” – one-time reading which is all I'd ever done before. Especially those short Psalms, like the First and Fourth. Miracle of miracles, I was able to get our furniture out of storage and moved into a two-bedroom condo in the nice part of town, just in time for the court date. The judge was pleased.

Jesus tells us to go into our closet and pray (*Matt. 6:6*) so I did. One nice surprise about the condo was the enormous size of the master bedroom closet; it was 12 feet long, room enough for not only my clothing but also the 16 pairs of French doors I'd rescued from an old convent that was being torn down, the plan being to eventually build a house around them. So I'd go into this closet with a bunch of century-old French doors taken from nun's cells and pray and meditate. Think about the vibrations those doors emitted from a century of nuns praying.

Just when things seemed settled, issues with my ex reared their head again. That coupled with a course in Werner Erhard's *est* – plus a friend's kind offer to rent us a car -- made it seem like a good time to head back to California with my darling child.

Got it, God. What next? For a while I continued to write screenplays, my most original idea being teams of grad students came to the U.S. and started wildfires randomly out West in order to tie up our



infrastructure; at a first public reading I realized I should not be planting this idea in the collective unconscious so discontinued public readings of that screenplay.

Ironically while doing research for this book I ran across an odd document I'd never seen before, a 1970 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture entitled, "Forest Fire as a Military Weapon," sponsored by "Advanced Research Projects Agency Remote Area Conflict."

In August 2006 Robert Baird of the USDA wrote about pyro-terrorism in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (August 2006): "I'm a wildland fire manager in California who is very interested in improving wildfire intelligence, operational effectiveness, and risk management. I also have published several articles on pyro-terrorism- the convergence of arson, terrorism and wildfire.: I'm a wildland fire manager in California who is very interested in improving wildfire intelligence, operational effectiveness, and risk management. I also have published several articles on pyro-terrorism- the convergence of arson, terrorism and wildfire." In 2017, Baird was named Regional Director of Fire and Aviation Management for the Pacific Southwest Region. According to a press release, Baird currently serves as forest supervisor on Los Padres National Forest where he oversees ecosystem management, land use and wildfire management for more than 1.9 million acres in central California. He has held that position for three fire seasons."

8. Two Robert Culp sightings – 15 years and 2 states apart

Next came a period of increased domestic turmoil. You'll just have to take my word for it.

One day while walking in downtown Santa Monica trying to sort things out it came to me:

I am a child of God and as such am entitled to love and affection.

For those of you with wonderful parents who knew how to demonstrate healthy family love to you, good on you and those words on a Santa Monica street may not mean much. But for those of you who felt unwanted as children – until you figured out the whole we-choose-our-parents thing – this shook my world.

It was not like later when after hearing something that sounded like the universe had opened the Akashic records to me (“Today you will see your children die before your eyes in an automobile accident”) then Sathya Sai Baba showed up on I-45 near Texas City.

That inner knowing with those exact words that came in 1984 on a Santa Monica sidewalk was the reassurance I needed.

Like icing on a cake, God always gives us a sign when we really, really, really need one. Mine was Robert Culp, the actor. Back up for a moment: When I was three months into my first pregnancy we went to Acapulco where one night we went to dinner with friends from my ex's hometown; we were the big noisy table in the middle of a nice rooftop restaurant. After a while I noticed giggling and odd picture taking. Our friends had spotted Robert Culp, fresh from a successful run on “I Spy” with Bill Cosby, at a nearby table with his wife France Nguyen. The game got to be our friends taking pictures of each other with Culp and Nguyen in the background. Fast forward to becoming pregnant and an unwed mother at 38. I was sitting in the plaza at Century City one day pondering just how stupid I was to have gotten myself into such a predicament when all of a sudden I looked up and there he was – Robert Culp, striding across the plaza. This was the second (and only other) time in my entire life I'd ever seen him. This synchronicity told me that somehow everything would work out.



**Robert Culp
with France Nguyen**

They say smart people learn from their mistakes.

I say, smarter people learn from other people's mistakes. Hopefully my kids have learned what not to do from me: I do not know how they do everything they do – they make parenthood look easy, with grace and style and of course much love.

9. *Two Christian Science healings*

By the mid-1980s, having tried just about every other wild new-to-me thing, I started looking into Christian Science. Karen, the nice librarian in a local reading room -- who was also the mother of four -- was very patient with me. And practical. She explained when Christian Science had worked for her and when it hadn't. She said once when she and her daughter were skiing down a mountain, the daughter fell and broke her leg. As Karen put it, she was "prayed up" and able to apply Christian Science principles; the leg healed quickly and they finished their run. Another time she'd been very busy and wasn't so prayed up when they attended their son's basketball game in a large crowded gymnasium. There was a mishap and she agreed to let EMS take her son to the hospital.

Shortly after meeting Karen the kids and I moved into a cabin up on Mt. Baldy and one night while moving our car I fell in the snow and ice and injured my back. I tried to use what I knew of the principles but three weeks later my back still hurt. I'm pretty stoic and hurt is too small a word. Excruciating pain no matter how I twisted and turned. Three weeks into the injury I attended a Wednesday night Christian Science healing service and sat next to Karen who must have been really prayed up because I could feel her giving off spiritual energy like a little coal stove. While a member of the congregation was giving her testimony -- something about going to Cabo with her boyfriend and experiencing red tide -- my monkey mind going a mile a minute about how vacuous and Valley Girl the young woman sounded -- suddenly I felt a click in my back and instantly the pain was gone. One minute it was there and the next it wasn't.

This is important: Almost all of our healings have been accompanied by increased spiritual insights, and God seemed to be teaching me it was time to give up being judgmental.

Soon after that, we moved back to LA and one of the kids developed spinal meningitis symptoms. Concerned Christian Science nurses came and looked in on us from time to time; it was a hellish time, 105 fever for five weeks Scary. But because of my back healing I knew God's love would heal this, too. Which it did. That said, for some years afterwards from time to time doubts would creep in, along the lines of: Had I done the right thing. Several years later after we'd moved back to Texas we met some homeschoolers for lunch and a cute little four-year old girl with gorgeous curly red hair bounced from table to table, the picture of happiness and energy. After a while her mother came over and explained that her daughter had had spinal meningitis as a baby, and when they took her to the emergency room with a very high fever, the medicine they gave her to bring down the fever had permanently damaged the daughter's brain, leaving her mentally retarded.

By this time, you might be wondering where I am today after all of this spiritual seeking as though my hair was on fire. It's gotten so simple. It's all about the love and once we truly love, it's also about service, giving back. A ninth century Buddhist priest told us, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." Meaning no one has all the answers.

Here are three documented CS published healings from the 1950s:

- A mother writes, "Our daughter, who was healed instantaneously of deafness over ten years ago, came home from junior high school showing symptoms of polio, which was prevalent at that time. She lay down and we both studied Christian Science earnestly. However, before long she was unable to rise, and I telephoned the same practitioner who had helped us at the time our daughter was healed of deafness. When I returned to the bedroom, I found that the girl was entirely paralyzed on one side. My report was met with such instant and complete

dismissal of the material evidence that all fear was destroyed..... Returning to the bedroom, I found the child up and dressing, radiant with joy and freedom. This healing took place about nine years ago, and there has been no return of the difficulty.” (*Mrs. BWS, San Diego; Christian Science Sentinel, p. 1271, July 21, 1956*)

- A son writes, “Through Christian Science my mother was healed of Bright’s disease over fifty years ago after a doctor had said he could do no more for her. Her life for nearly forty years thereafter was a succession of triumphs over sickness and limitation.” (*NWH, Plymouth, Michigan; Christian Science Sentinel, p. 1275, July 21, 1956*)
- A woman writes, “I wish to express gratitude to God for my healing of tuberculosis. Thirty-seven years ago I was told by two medical doctors that I had only a few weeks to live..... With the help of a Christian Science practitioner I was healed.” (*Mrs. MD, Norwood, Ohio; Christian Science Sentinel, p. 1275, July 21, 1956*)

NOTE: The accounts from all three individuals above are disclosed as described in the CS Sentinel.

That said, Christian Science is still a mystery to me. Like Karen’s experience with her two kids, and after having studied it for nearly four decades, my experience is that sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. Just like with Western allopathic medical practices.

I have never joined any church or had any classes. As I understand it, once we get clear that everything physical is an illusion, the two most important points, after connecting with our clearest understanding of God, are love and harmony. Without those there is no real healing.

Since returning home to Texas, for the past two decades my go-to Christian Science practitioner has been “Uncle Bud” who is like a family member.

10. The power of intentional visualization (little blue house)

The kids and I moved to Mt. Baldy for the winter then a high rise in Los Angeles but soon the time came when we needed a house. First place we looked at was totally wrong for us so we all sat down and described our dream home. Blue, with white shutters and a white picket fence. Large fenced yard for a dog. Fireplace. Trees.

Which exactly described the second house we looked at. From our mouths to God's ears.

We had some very happy years there. Dogs, cats, a menagerie. The most normalcy and stability we'd experienced in a very long time.

More synchronicity: Looked our old house up just now, thinking happy thoughts about the nice family who lived across the street. Found one of those sites online that offer videos of houses and there was our wonderful neighbor, standing in her doorway, talking to someone. Videos like that are generally careful to not feature humans but there was Mrs. Everett, lovely as ever..

What are we ingesting?

Things I learned with Buddhism -- both kinds of Zen: you either sit facing the room or the wall -- plus a third Buddhist practice, Soka Gakkai Nichiren* Shoshu Buddhism (like Herbie Hancock and the late Tina Turner you chant *nam myoho renge kyo*). -- and Hinduism: All taught me to look beyond material reality and ask, What spiritual thoughts am I ingesting? Yes, it's important to eat fresh healthy locally grown food -- and even more important to take in fresh healthy good thoughts.



Bowing in Buddhism

Daily meditation and prayer have been an important part of my life for four decades now although sometimes it seems as though I'm supposed to be doing more than meditating. And I still have to resist the urge to check out newsy pop-ups when I log in and out each day. Perseverance pays: Last week one morning after waking at my near-usual two a.m. meditated for the next five hours -- what a difference it made!

Figuring there had to be some decent folks back there somewhere, another of my many roads to God was genealogy. One of my favorites: The forebearer who was arrested for proselytizing -- sharing the Gospel, the good news -- on the streets of his village in England during the 1500s. There was also an early American farmer, a Carolina landowner who, when his state joined the Union permitting slavery, was so principled he moved his entire family lock, stock and barrel farther west where it was not legal to own another human being. As I write this, I realize he moved west to Indian Territory; did he displace Native Americans? Still researching this**.....

For a long time my modus operandi was "When in doubt, move." God bless my children for surviving nomadic me.

**The worlds are, in ascending order of the degree of free will, compassion and happiness one feels: (1) hell, (2) hungry spirits, (3) animals, (4) asuras [demons & benevolents alike], (5) human beings (6) heavenly beings, (7) voice-hearers, (8) cause-awakened ones, (9) bodhisattvas, and (10) Buddhas. (www.sokaglobal.org)*

*** (Hendricks, Christopher and J. Edwin Hendricks. "Expanding to the West: Settlement of the Piedmont Region, 1730 to 1775." Tar Heel Junior Historian, Spring 1995.)*

Sometimes God slams doors to get our attention

Still looking for opportunities in the film industry, my big break was of all things a movie about roller disco. Tom Petty was committed to doing the music and all the components were lining up, they just needed a viable screenplay – the one I was writing for them. Except another group got their funding together faster than my group did – Patrick Swayze’s *Skatetown USA*.



Skatetown USA starring Patrick Swayze

Synchronicity



Patsy Swayze teaching young students

When I was five years old – same year the giant two-story book appeared on our back patio -- I took tap and ballet lessons in Houston from a woman named Patsy Swayze -- who was pregnant at the time with her son – Patrick. Who grew up to be Patrick Swayze. Got it, God. No more film business for me.

Speaking of synchronicity, another way of describing meaningful coincidence: In *The Whole Language*, Jesuit priest Greg Boyle, who has spent the bulk of his lifetime in LA’s Boyle Heights working with Hispanic gang kids, talks about Joel who had “considerable” prison time. Says Joel, “When my feet hit the floor in the morning, I’m on the lookout for God.... God is always leaving me hints. He’s dropping me anonymous tips all the time.” Brilliant. Synchronicity is God’s hints and anonymous tips, God’s calling cards, how God talks to us – when we listen.

Here's another example, something that happened yesterday afternoon in San Antonio. As we pulled up in front of a grocery store I noticed a young woman apparently homeless sitting at a table where she was taking a nap, arms folded in front of her. The old me would have blessed her and moved on with my day – but not this day. Somehow God wanted me to connect with her. Hubby was hungry so we went inside and ate. After we’d eaten I looked for the woman but she’d already left. I have to confess I groaned inwardly when I realized the woman could be anywhere by now, blocks away, but I’d have to find her. One thing about this journey I’ve learned is that when you get an inner prompting to do something, a good deed, best to do everything you can to make/let it happen.

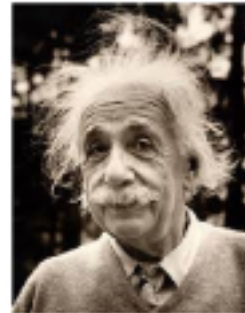
When I looked up after a quick prayer – along the lines of, please, God, help me find her – there she was at the checkout just in front of us. Talk about God’s speedy service! She’d apparently come into the store to buy some celery and still had it in her hand. I went to her immediately, told her my name and asked her what her name was. She drew back, afraid. Handed her a \$10 bill, told her God loved her and so did I, and I’d be praying for her happiness. We looked into each other’s eyes and hearts for a moment and then we both moved on. And now Brown Eyes is on my list.

Finding balance on the yin-yang seesaw

Many thanks to Michio Kushi and Georges Ohsawa for explaining Oriental yin and yang in practical terms. Picture a seesaw, with our optimum health balanced in the middle with brown rice:

YIN		YANG

^		
Sugar.....	Brown riceSalt
Sweet		Salty
Fluid		Rigid
Cold		Hot
Negative		Positive
Joy		Sorrow
Expansion		Contraction
Soft		Hard
Extravert		Introvert
Sugars, fruit		Meat



Albert Einstein

How this works: Alcohol and drugs – extreme yin for being very refined – are at the far left on the chart. Also at the far left is depression. At the far right are root vegetables and happiness. Our choice. From a purely dietetic standpoint, doesn't seem to much matter whether the yin we ingest is candy bars or alcohol, ayahuasca or peyote. Too refined is too refined. On a practical level, if Einstein was right, that the passage of time is an illusion, the folks I've encountered who have done a lot of hallucinogenic research (by ingesting hallucinogens) do n, not appear to be especially spiritually advanced. Often their research seems somewhat self-indulgent, along the lines of medieval theologians supposedly arguing about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Plus most of the advances being made appear to be material-based dot spiritual.

Interesting that so much research being put online now seems to focus on manifestation.

Using spiritual means to obtain material ends? What's the difference between the current craze for manifestation -- and buying our way into heaven with papal indulgences? Thought we'd outgrown that long ago.

Spiritual is spiritual and material is material.

The mind can take us on some extraordinary trips – but where? And what do they achieve? From my research, it appears the advances we make spiritually by dint of our own efforts – prayer, meditation, love and service – seem to be the ones of lasting value. Just as artificial “diet” sodas with their side effects show us that we cannot fool Mother Nature, so also with spiritual good health.

Kushi advocated lots of chewing, 50 times per bite. That way your mouth is saving your tummy from being overworked. Folks with digestive problems seem often to eat in a hurry and inhale their food.

Brown rice at the center of the seesaw gets boring so we add a little salt which makes us yang. Seeking relief we add some sweets which tilts the seesaw the other direction. Play with this for yourself, see if it's true for you.

PART TWO: Why are you here?

11. Sathya Sai Baba shows up on I-45 outside of Texas City

In February 1991 we came back to Texas for my aunt's funeral in San Antonio; afterwards, the morning we were leaving Houston, I heard the words, "Today you will see your children die before your eyes in an automobile accident." Yikes. I was standing in our friends' entry hall and the words were words without a voice. It was like I'd suddenly been able to access the Akashic records. That's the only time in my entire life I've heard words without a voice.

What do you do with something like that? Take your kids and go live in a cave?

Leaving our friends' house, the kids drove ahead, me following, eyes fixed like a hawk on their tires. Should I have let them go together? They wanted as much time together as possible. Do you live your life in fear or do you live it courageously as possible? Do you live your life in a tiny English farmhouse you do not own -- or do you pile everything you can on a small wooden boat and head for the New World?

Our little two-car procession made it through downtown Houston and headed to Texas City, our next stop, on I-45 when suddenly the kids' right rear tire blew and the car started circling around the highway. This was three lanes on each side, early afternoon, a fair amount of traffic but not enough to slow down yet. Having watched quarter horses all of my life my immediate reaction was to circle around the station wagon to buy them time, which tactic unusual as it was, worked. We both pulled over to the inside shoulder and opened our driver's side doors to make sure we were all okay and immediately an Indian motorcycle patrolman with black bushy hair pulled up behind us; he was dressed like someone out of a 1940s movie complete with taupe and maroon jodhpurs and his motorcycle was vintage, spotless, like it had just come from Central Casting. He asked sweetly, "Is everything all right?" I remember thinking to myself, *Yeah, we're okay now – but where were you five minutes ago?* But what I said out loud was along the lines of Thank you, we're okay. He nodded understanding and immediately got back on his motorcycle and disappeared into traffic. One minute he was there, the next minute *Pfft*.

Back home in LA, a few months later I had a little extra time so asked my well-connected friend Gigi what was going on spiritually in LA; she told me about Satya, a self-styled American guru, an offshoot of some guy in India named Sathya Sai Baba who held late afternoon *satsangs* at someone's home in Santa Monica so I went to the next one.

You may be asking whether my experiences you've been reading about were maybe another mid-life crisis.

I too have asked. Except for the angel with a giant book when I was five. And the vision of the native American warrior in my thirties. Discovering the Psalm-a-Day program. Our houseguesting guru turning my wine into water. The synchronicity of seeing Robert Culp twice, 15 years and 2 countries apart. The instantaneous healing of my back injury. Spiritual healing of spinal meningitis. Visualizing the little blue house and it appeared. God seemed to have had a clear path to enlightenment planned for me and my job was to find and follow that unique path.



Sathya Sai Baba



Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade

I came to think of my path as that scene in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* where Harrison Ford has to walk across a bottomless chasm towards the ancient knight and only when he takes each step in full faith does each step appear.

Back to Satya, the ersatz guru who'd set up shop in someone else's Santa Monica living room. Goofy as he was, I did get to meet some of the leaders of Sathya Sai Baba's U.S. devotee group who were attending and they invited me to spend the weekend at the Orange County center which back then met in someone's home. So:

- June 8, 1991 I first saw Sathya Sai Baba's photo but didn't connect him with the Indian motorcycle patrolman – or anyone else.
- June 9, I sat in Baba's robe chair and immediately got a spiritual hit.
- Next day, June 10, a bunch of us, maybe fifty people, were sitting in a Burbank living room praying for world peace, some kind of water ceremony, a little table set up like an altar in the center of the room; when I looked up Sai Baba was standing in the open front door in his traditional orange cotton robe beckoning me to come. It was clear I was the only person who saw him and Baba didn't mean to follow him into the front yard.

Within three months our universe rearranged itself yet again and I was on the plane to India with one of my kids and enough funds to stay several months if we were careful. India changed everything.

Ashram life in Puttaparthi

Our daily routine at Baba's ashram in Puttaparthi north of Bangalore, five hours by taxi, was simple: Get up early, walk to the big courtyard outside the *mandir* where we prayed and meditated silently while waiting for Baba who eventually came out and walked among us (*darshan*) then we went to lunch at the canteen then took a brief nap then rinse and repeat: courtyard, pray, Baba, dinner, early to bed. Vegetarian meals – great South Indian food which I fell in love with. In fact, before that trip I'd never cared for Indian culture in any way; seemed too garish. Now I love the food – especially *masala dosas* -- and the colors. Homeschooled. Was asked to write the ashram's Christmas play which was a hoot and we can talk about that some other time; when we do, remind me to tell you about the off-stage microphones.



Mandir at Puttaparthi

Why people say mantras

In India they tell this story: There once was a man who had a wonderful servant. The servant was a fine fellow who did everything very well -- except that the servant tended to get into trouble if he wasn't kept busy enough. So the man went to his guru and asked for guidance. The guru said, See that wall over there? Have your servant build steps going up one side then another set of steps going down the other side. The guru said the servant should be told when his chores are finished to stay busy going up and down the steps until there were more tasks needing doing.

The servant is our mind, we're told. It can and does serve us well -- except when we don't keep it busy enough doing useful things which is when it gets us into trouble -- too much time on the computer or gossiping or TV or..... So we say mantras, to keep our monkey mind busy. If you're a follower of Christ you can say certain Bible verses repetitively.

While at the ashram I learned the Gayatri Mantra. If we run into each other at the grocery store I can say it for you with the pronunciations and inflections they taught us in India:

*OM....bhūr bhuvah svaḥ
tat savitur vareṇyam
bhargo devasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt
(--Rig veda 3.62.10)*

In sum

Something unique about Baba: There were flies everywhere in India. Everywhere. Except around Baba. Have Googled this phenomenon and can find no explanation. The only one I have come up with is that Baba is such an advanced being and so full of light and love the flies leave him alone.

What was so funny as in funny/unusual: Baba had given us a great deal of extra attention before India (not one but two bilocation sightings plus we met many U.S. Sai VIPs) but when we got to India he virtually ignore us for which I am now grateful. He said to develop our inner relationship with him. After Baba passed away a self-appointed successor stepped forward and to my surprise some of the long-time devotees I'd thought wise fell for this ersatz Baba who has since been discredited. So we were saved that.

For the record, Baba said he was the second of three incarnations: First was Shirdi Sai Baba, then him as Sathya Sai Baba, and next will be Prema Sai Baba. Shirdi was very masculine and harsh, Sathya was balanced, and Prema will be very loving, he said. Although Baba had also said he'd live to be 96 he died much sooner. In India they call the unexplainable "leelas." Some devotees say he observed the lunar calendar and as such did live to 96. So there you go.

As one of my young grandchildren would say, "It's a mickery."

12. When you're electrocuted it's like being superglued

At the ashram things were wonky in a way in which we living in prosperity here in the States are not familiar. Back then – 1991-92 – by American standards much in India seemed third-world, the worst example being some poor parents deliberating deforming their kids so they'd be more effective beggars. Here in the U.S. many races live together in relative harmony where in India the untouchables are relegated to the most menial tasks.

One day I helped the male *dhobi* clean the room we'd been staying in.

When I noticed a small shelf overlaid with dust, I automatically reached for it with a damp cloth. Except that the innocuous-appearing wire running along it had no insulation and was in fact live.

That was my first and only experience of being electrocuted. It was like being superglued. I shouted to my child to stay away. The *dhobi* didn't seem to understand.

There we were halfway around the world.

I called out to Baba and immediately the current lifted. What was so remarkable about that moment was its ordinariness. No heavenly trumpets or choirs of angels. Nearest I could determine, Baba used that emergency to strengthen our connection.

P.S. Found out later there's actually a formal name for the being-superglued experience: tetanic contraction. In case you ever need to know.

The only practical side effect was that my inner wiring appears to have been rewired. For example, I cannot wear a battery-operated watch. The only ones that work are old mechanical wind-up watches; as it turns out that too is a blessing. Quartz watches, the batteries, should not be on our pulses. Messes with our wiring.

After 4 ½ months in India it was time to return to Los Angeles. Baba sent us back with instructions to "Love All, Serve all" and "Help ever, Hurt never." We arrived just in time for the LA riots.

Gang kids in Watts.....

Remembering Sai Baba's instructions to "Love all, serve all," Troubled mid-city LA seemed to need me. Never mind that I was struggling to raise kids with limited funds. Nevertheless, a group of us found each other and started a jobs program for the gang-kids in Watts.

Our inspiration was Father Gregory Boyle, SJ who was already in Boyle Heights with his Homeboy program. Never mind that Father Greg was a full-time salaried priest who had learned a thing or two.



Watts housing



Grant A.M.E. Church (Watts)

We pressed on and ultimately wound up with an architect-designed shaved ice kiosk we all helped build with the goal of moving the completed kiosk to Grand Central Market in downtown Los Angeles near Homeboy Tortillas. But it was an uphill battle all the way; after three years we were down to one employee we could count on – until he was arrested for carrying a gun into a store and wound up in prison. We gave the kiosk to Grant Avenue A.M.E. Church in Watts.

LESSONS LEARNED #1: From Father Greg: "I have learned that you work with gang members and not with gangs, otherwise you enforce the cohesion of gangs and supply them oxygen... I had mistakenly tried to 'save' young men and women trapped in gang life... I learned that saving lives is for the Coast Guard. Me wanting a gang member to have a different life would never be the same as that gang member wanting to have one."

LESSONS LEARNED #2: From this experience I learned just how much our inner-city public schools were failing our kids. We had teenagers applying to work with us who could not read or write a complete sentence or fill out an employment application on their own. Some of the boys were pushing baby strollers. Much, much later I came to understand the larger role of drugs in our culture.

Oh, yes. Should mention two more *leelas*:

13. Room for 3 cars on a 2-lane road

In the Sai Baba orbit I'd heard and read about such things -- where you're driving and there's room for only two cars – and suddenly three are safe. Sorry to say, I can no longer remember which road or when this occurred, only that it was in California before we moved back to Texas. My takeaway: God is able to alter what we consider to be so-called reality. If God can give us healing miracles, He can also give us traffic miracles.

14. Ball of green healing light

While on a trip to visit relatives in Oregon, one day when I was meditating a green ball of radiant glowing clear light appeared to me. The ball of light didn't come with written instructions – hah! – so I started sending it spiritually to everyone I knew and loved until it began dissipating and finally disappeared entirely. This was a one-time occurrence. Wish I could describe the color better.

15. Didgeridoo stops epileptic seizure

For a while we lived in a suburb of Los Angeles. It was a college town with great bookstores and a music store packed with interesting instruments. One week I noticed flyers for a didgeridoo demonstration to be held in the store after hours, complete with a woman from Australia who would demonstrate how to play the didge. Many people came including a director and a screenwriter who were enjoying success with a film starring a hot Hollywood actor. Not long into the demonstration the woman sitting next to me, to my left, had an epileptic seizure which I'd never witnessed before and had no idea how to help. Presumably nervous about potential liability issues, the director and the screenwriter had fled.



Didgeridoo workshop in California

Nobody seemed to know what to do, and nobody seemed to be in charge. The epileptic woman was not wearing an “in case of emergency” bracelet.

The only thing I knew about epilepsy was something about the danger of their swallowing their tongue so time was of the essence. Something told me to tell the didge presenter to come over to the epileptic woman and blow the didge over her so she did and within a few minutes the seizure stopped – well before EMS arrived. I never knew the epileptic woman's name or anything about her or how she fared afterwards. I had responsibilities at home so had to leave.

And as it turns out, the tongue-swallowing danger is a myth.

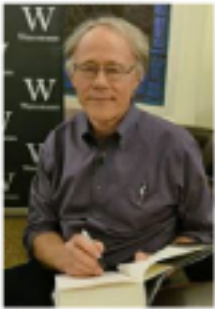
16. At Hopi

The Hopi had long fascinated me; from what I'd been able to research, native American tribes immigrated here from Siberia across the Bering land bridge – all except the Hopi, who'd come up from somewhere south. The Hopi's explanation for the series of worlds our planet had experienced – we are now in the fourth world – was something I wanted to know more about – especially what was coming next.



Hopiland

The Hopi are pretty much a closed society so I knew I'd need an introduction or something like.



Graham Hancock

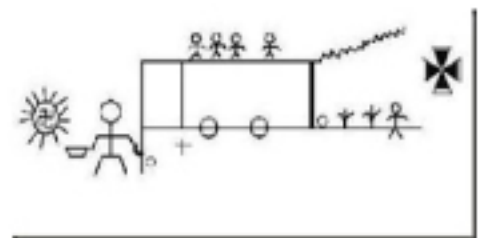
When Graham Hancock's *Fingerprints of the Gods* was published in 1995 he mentioned a Hopi elder; as part of his book tour Graham came to Los Angeles so I went to hear him talk, then afterwards asked him about the Hopi elder he'd mentioned in *Fingerprints*. I'd missed Graham's naming the elder (in one place at the back of the book) so Graham gave me the name. Except as it turned out he'd spelled both the elder's name and his granddaughter's name as "Sifki" in the book. And there are no "Sifki's" at Shungopovi. Finally found their actual spelling ("Saufkie") and soon as possible hopped in my car and drove to Shungopovi on Second Mesa in northeastern Arizona. Once there, locating Paul was easy.

A little about Paul: When Hopi men came home from WWII the jobs Uncle Sam had promised them were non-existent and they had to feed their families so Paul organized the Hopi silversmith trade. That's the kind of person Paul was.

By the time I made it to Shungopovi, Paul was in his 90s and nearly blind and deaf and spent most of his time in bed. Back then my intention was to go to Hopi to learn rare hidden esoteric ancient Hopi teachings so eagerly spent time with Paul and his wife Ruby.

What Paul and Ruby actually taught me how to enjoy life's small moments. They would laugh and laugh over apparently nothing. Sometimes we connect with people and sometimes we don't. I always felt connected to Paul. Ruby made and gave to me a tiny coiled basket which occupies a place of honor in the bow-front glass china cabinet in our living room.

While Paul was alive every time I went to Hopi magical wonderful things happened; one time I was welcomed with a vertical rainbow, and another time I was determined to see the famous Hopi two-choices petroglyph for myself, the one showing mankind dividing into two paths, the God path and the path of materialism. Survival or destruction. So went looking in the direction of where I understood it to be. Pretty soon a dusty old car pulled up and a youngish man in his 30s approached me, wanted to know if he could help. The WASPy college prof-looking man didn't match the dusty old rez car. When I told him what I was looking for and why, he nodded, got back in his car and left. I later realized the man was a Hopi who'd been sent by the elders to morph into someone they thought I'd be comfortable with and see what I was about. Good for him and good for them.



Hopi tell us man has a choice of two paths

Another time while camping at Shungopovi one night in my tent I had a burning desire to experience the *kiva* where a ceremony was occurring; suddenly in my mind I was transported down to the *kiva* and realized there was nothing there for me.

The Hopi were told by their elders when white men came to the East Coast that whites would come – and whites would go. Given current low birth rates, this may be truer than anyone could have guessed back in the 1600s.

One morning in January 1998 I woke up feeling Paul had just died – this was before they had a phone – and as things worked out was able to drive immediately to Arizona where I learned that Paul had just passed. They wouldn't tell me where he was buried and I respected their wanting privacy. Some time later I met Paul and Ruby's son Morgan; we stayed in contact for many years.

Second Mesa is still one of my favorite places in this entire world. Easy to talk to God out on the mesa.

Another visit I was meditating on the edge of the mesa and was transported back in time, could clearly see a settlement down at the base of the mesa, long ago. It was beautiful – had a peaceful calm feeling taking it all in. Told Morgan whose response was disappointing; he said no, there'd never been a settlement down there. But found this on Tony Hillerman's site: *The Shongopovi village is often considered the most traditional or conservative of all the Hopi villages. The ruins of Old Shongopovi can be found on the hills below the current dwelling place and are considered the oldest Hopi settlement.*

From such experiences I learned a valuable lesson: Listen more with my heart than with my brain and ears. Hillerman writes about something similar in "People of Darkness," one of his Jim Chee mysteries: After an exchange with someone, Chee thought, for what? "But he didn't say it. His mother had taught him one learns through the ear and not the tongue." So much at Hopi was about the silences, what was not said.

About the Hopi prophecies: Important as they are, eventually I realized that for each of us our individual thoughts, beliefs and actions are our most important determinants for our future. The passage of time really is an illusion.

17. Jesus was our matchmaker....

After many years of therapy and prayer and earnestly seeking God, I'd been spending time with my favorite cousin, a retired Marine sergeant major in San Diego; although we first met when I was two months old and he was seventeen, we didn't meet again for a half-century, after his first wife died. After two failures, it was nice to be able to spend time with a good man who was safely off limits. Until one day when we were standing in his Oceanside utility room next to the washer and dryer and Jesus appeared; my Marine saw Him, I felt His energy. My Marine saw Jesus pulling us together. If anyone else had told me this I would have laughed and said, Sure, right, you bet.

We had one date and decided to get married and date later. So now a trip to Trader Joe's and Costco in San Antonio is a date day. I knew he really loved me when he agreed to go to India on our honeymoon.

We have an age difference; he was so old (in his 60s, hah!) I just hoped we'd have a few good years together. As I write this we will celebrate our 25th anniversary this December. With God all things really are possible.

One more thing about the Hopi, what I learned from Paul and Ruby: how to laugh, how to enjoy life's small moments. One night my husband and I were turning off the lights as we do every evening. He tried to describe a lamp he'd just turned off.

HIM: You know, the one by the kitchen.

ME: Which one by the kitchen, honey? (We have lots of lamps.)

HIM; The one on the counter.

ME: The one with the red shade?

He was genuinely puzzled. My earliest background having been design journalism, how things looked was a big part of my life. But somehow my sweetie had never noticed the red shade; it just wasn't important enough to be in his wheelhouse. This is my 36-year command sergeant major Marine once the head NCO at Camp Pendleton -- Korea, Viet Nam, Purple Heart – whose ability to notice details had been a huge part of his career not to mention saving countless lives. Pure joy. We laughed and laughed.

That's what I learned from Hopi.



Jesus

Back to Texas, rescuing Mom....

Wonderful as California had been, we were both ready to return to our Texas roots so we found a house we liked in the Hill Country, settling within an hour of my parents in hopes of being of help if they needed us; back then Bubba was living in California and both sisters were in other states.

In the 70s a jeweler was in the news for having been murdered which frightened my parents; they found a book “How to Profit from the Coming Great Depression” that basically said to downsize to a small anonymous footprint. So with no prior announcement one weekend they quietly closed up their business and high-tailed it to a small ranch they’d bought outside of Austin. My well-dressed parents were suddenly driving an old pickup and wearing clothes from Walmart and Goodwill. Missing their former high life, every winter they’d spend a few months in Europe where they could bring their finery out of mothballs for a few months in relative anonymity.

After Dad died Mom reached out to me which I took as answered prayer for us to finally be close. By then Bubba had moved to a house on her property and she began complaining about his abuse and neglect so we offered to take her in. (I was the only one of her four children who ever let her live with me.)

Mom was actually nice to me for the first time which I took at face value with no questions or reservations; I ask you, who wouldn’t want to be close to their mother? Maybe she didn’t gush and wasn’t effusive but at least wasn’t mean to me anymore.

Mom brought with her forty years of legal papers which I started sorting through, trying to help her understand where she was at law before her upcoming appointment with the local attorney we’d found for her.

Even knowing her “If I see it, it’s mine” history, it was disappointing to come across Mom’s shoplifting records.

There were also forty years’ worth of wills; even though Mom had always insisted she loved all of her children equally, it was a shock to realize our parents’ grand plan had always been to leave everything to Bubba from the time he turned eighteen. Mom soon agreed to a more equitable distribution of her small estate which lasted a few years.

Until Bubba came calling and she wanted everything back including her 9-carat diamond she’d given me which was just as well – nice as receiving speedy service was at Starbucks, it felt funny wearing it on my usual rounds, the grocery store and Walmart.

Putting it all together, it appeared Mom had apparently lied to Bubba about my husband and me just as she’d lied to us about him, and soon she moved back to her small spread near Austin. Within a few years she was dead. According to the coroner’s report, the cause of death was a violent head wound. Apparently Mom had fallen off her tractor which she used to get to and from her mailbox down her hillside’s steep quarter-mile driveway. No telling how long she lay there bleeding out. I felt guilty, that somehow I’d let her down, until I finally came to understand that whatever happened on that driveway was between her and Bubba and it was not my job to save her.

Big life lesson: As anyone who’s ever sat through an Al-Anon meeting can tell you, we cannot save our beloveds from themselves.

18. Baby deer on Thanksgiving Mountain

Once when one of our kids was delivering pizzas they accidentally hit a baby deer; this was our child who never met a stray. Distraught, my child rushed into my study where I was working, told me what had happened then hurried back to delivering pizzas. I grabbed my car keys and cell phone and headed to where the baby deer was, by the side of the road here in Horseshoe Bay.

The baby fawn was easy to spot, lying very still on the right-side grassy shoulder of the road. I got out of the car and immediately began praying over the little body over the phone with Uncle Bud.



Baby deer on Thanksgiving Mountain

SIDEBAR: Not really my uncle, Bud is a Christian Science spiritual healer, a practitioner. How we met: After coming back from India to LA there were many Sai activities but after we moved to Texas there were very few Sai activities in the Hill Country. I longed for connection to a spiritual group and told Baba in my mind that I needed an American teacher closer to home and cultural background; soon after that “Uncle Bud” came into my life. It was as though we’d always known each other.

Back to the baby deer. An hour passed and the little deer was still not breathing. To all appearances it was dead. People stopped and offered to help, including the police who wanted to haul the carcass off to the dump. When I told everyone I wanted to pray for the baby deer they drove off. Crazy lady in a Oaxacan wedding dress. Uncle Bud and I continued to thank God for creating this beautiful little baby deer and for taking care of His creature, then it came to us to include the baby’s mother and the idea of the motherhood of God.

After a while little Lazarus came to himself and got up, ran off to join his mother whom I’d not noticed waiting in the nearby bushes. That all this unfolded on Thanksgiving Mountain Road was no accident. Plus: Love is love is love is love, no matter the form and expression. God really does care for all of his creatures great and small.

As a footnote to this, Uncle Bud was recently sitting on his front porch when he noticed a small falcon lying injured in his front yard. We are praying for little Joy’s healing.

19. The time I saw a soul leave its body

Remember my parents' friends the Parkers who suggested a Houston MD practicing hypnotism for Bubba? Eventually Mr. and Mrs. Parker wound up in Austin in assisted living. One morning – a day when my calendar was jampacked – something told me I had to go see the Parkers.

So I dropped everything and drove the hour to Austin, got to Mrs. Parker's room first; their daughter Quinn was down the hall visiting with Mr. Parker. Mrs. Parker was a talker and there were so many stories she wanted to tell it took me an hour to make it from her bed to the door to the hall. When I finally opened the door, Quinn was walking towards me, crying, accompanied by a doctor and a nurse; knowing that meant her dad had just died I asked where his body was; somehow in that moment it seemed completely wrong that Mr. Parker's body would be unattended. While Quinn went to tell her mother, I was pointed to a room halfway down the hall.

Mr. Parker's body was alone on a bed. So I sat on the other bed. I have never sat *shiva* and had no idea what or how to pray for a dead person lying in front of me so did my best with the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm, the Gayatri Mantra. Suddenly a younger livelier version of John Parker, his spirit, rose up from his body. He was in his 30s, a young whippersnapper, handsome, chewing gum and grinning at me. This was the guy who had founded a fortune. Then his spirit disappeared. Over the years I've tried to tell Quinn about that experience but she never remembers; apparently it was just for me. Why, I have no idea, except to show us that our spirits are separate from our bodies and our bodies like you hear are just temporary shells, a suit of clothes.

A word here about the value of maintaining long-time friendships: I'd known from the time I first met Quinn that we'd be friends for life; even though she and I are very different people, it is comforting to have lunch with someone who knew your parents and you knew theirs. We know each other's mother's stories. We remember when we were in high school and college. One of my favorite life moments was the time we met for lunch at Neiman-Marcus, the Post Oak store. Somehow our kids had suddenly disappeared and we couldn't find them. Frantic, we scoured the store. Then they appeared, coming down the escalator in the big open space in the middle of the store. Jake died too young of cancer while attending divinity school and we still miss his bright shining spirit.



20. What I learned on my Road to Emmaus (aka Burning Bush ISD)

Back then I'd transitioned from a Freedom of Information Act-filing investigative journalist to a new national project I'd started, promoting public schools' voluntarily posting their check registers online – as a self-funded volunteer -- so a lot of my time was spent reaching out to anyone and everyone I could find to spread the word. I'd gotten tired of filing FOIAs and found out the most effective approach was to be kind and friendly. Surprise, surprise! Christ did say to love one another.

Back then I was doing a lot of public speaking and was scheduled to speak at Burning Bush ISD not far away, less than two hours depending on traffic.

At that time I maintained online a roster of public schools across America who were posting their checks online for all to view, not just VIPs and trustees. I noticed although BBISD's check register had formerly been posted but it had suddenly disappeared so called the new superintendent, Jim Arnold.

Along the way I'd picked up some communication skills. An important one was the Japanese practice of always allowing your opponent to save face. So my conversation with Jim was friendly, welcoming him to his new post; how's it going? Oh, that's great to hear. By the way, I noticed your check register is no longer posted online, wondered if perhaps in the transition it had slipped between the cracks, these things happen. Back then my website was getting 6-8 million Googlies a month and nobody wanted to get negative publicity from me; although I didn't plan it that way, you could say the website was the big stick that allowed me to walk softly in dealing with school officials. Jim quickly acknowledged he hadn't noticed the checks were no longer online and said he'd get them back online as soon as possible – which to his great credit he did. Jim was very friendly so I mentioned I was coming to Burning Bush to talk to their Tea Party later in the week and would he like to come as my guest? Before it was all over not only did Jim come but also his BBISD CFO plus the president and the VP of his school board. Our evening in Burning Bush turned into a regular love fest. Folks who would normally have been at each other's throats were friendly and cordial the night of the meeting. Afterwards the Burning Bush Tea Party organizer said it was the most successful talk they'd ever had.



Something interesting happened on the drive to Burning Bush: I went prepared to give my usual public school finance talk, something by then I could almost do in my sleep. But on the way to Burning Bush words kept coming to me; I'd pull over, write down the new word, and get back on the road. By the time I got to the hotel a fully formed multi-layered acronym had come: L.O.V.E. The "E" stood for "Everyone does their best." That changed my life, seeing things that way. Helped me be more generous-spirited, generous-hearted.

And that was my last large-audience public speaking.

21. Math Olympics: God turned our sorrow into sunshine

Somewhere along here our son-in-law took a job in another state so they moved. No more Sunday lunches unless I wanted to drive 14 hours and/or hop on a plane. Happy as I was for them about the promotion, bottom line was we'd been close then they weren't nearby anymore. I missed them terribly.

At about this same time a local school district changed their math instruction method: Rather than follow the traditional tried-and-true path (addition tables to automaticity in first grade, subtraction in second, multiplication in third and division in fourth) the schools started first graders on multiplication, explaining that the kids all had calculators. Math-challenged as I was, I knew this was not good.

Where wealthier parents could hire tutors for their kids – or had the time to teach them themselves – our town's poorer children had no one, especially the kids at the local after-school program who often were there because mom and/or dad were AWOL (prison and/or drugs) and grandma and other relatives were raising the kids. Reasoning the poorer children didn't have much of a chance I decided to start volunteering at the after-school program teaching the kids math.

Which is hilarious because I am not a numbers person and am living proof you can have a great life without algebra. Nevertheless, God had put this in my heart so I basically figured it out as we went along. I say "we" because very soon I was joined by Karen Wines, a neighbor here in Horseshoe Bay who was already volunteering at the after-school, helping kids with their homework. Like me her grandchildren also lived in another state. Karen quickly saw the value in our Math Olympics and together we became the nucleus of this program for the next eight years. Our last few years another neighbor joined us. Other folks would come a few times then never return.

Karen and I quickly realized the kids could only absorb three new math factoids each day so on day one, they got $1+1$, $1+2$, and $1+3$. If the kids really knew those three (we tested them) they could advance the next day to $1+4$, $1+5$ and $1+6$, and so on, through all four tables.



Karen Wines

Because we were paying for this out of our own pockets, we used the simplest materials possible, packs of 3 x 5 unlined index cards and black Sharpies for our tables. For practice sheets and testing we made our own on printer paper.

Bottom line: Karen and I loved the children and they loved us. We were often surrogate grandmothers or aunts. To encourage the kids to come, we gave each a small candy just for showing up and working for 15 minutes.

We also put poster boards on the wall with everybody's names, a star for each new table they'd mastered to automaticity. We also gave great twice-a-year pizza parties complete with prizes, the grand prize usually a bicycle.

Which is not to say we didn't also have our challenges. We had our superstars, sure – the kids who came ready and eager to work every afternoon. Almost everybody who came, came to work. We were strict about that and the kids seemed to welcome having some structure.

Any time you have 400 kids in one place, one's going to be the biggest behavior challenge. One year it was Joey. He seemed to have a permanent spot on the after-school's time-out bench just outside our

math room door; seemingly every day there was some new infraction. If I had to characterize Joey at that point, it would have to be as a junior thug. His clothes were wrinkled and unkempt, shoelaces often untied, his demeanor sullen. After a while though I could see Joey eyeing us, as in, what gives? Eventually he started coming, shyly at first. (Joey shy?) He was belligerent, and not very verbal. Finally one day I sensed a turning point and sent all the kids at my table to another table so I could concentrate on Joey, by then a fourth-grader. I started him as we did with all the kids with $1 + 1$. For illustrations on those lower numbers we'd grab pieces of candy from the treat bag – the candy especially if the wrappers were red -- always caught their attention. And the kids seem to benefit from tactile involvement – we'd get them to use their pointer finger to touch the candy pieces as they arranged them in a 3D presentation of whatever table. One plus one meant one piece of candy a few inches from the second piece of candy, then we'd use our pointer finger to move the two pieces together then point again, one, two... one plus one equals two, all of this accompanied by our ever-present visuals, the index cards. I will never ever forget the day Joey's inner lightbulb lit up, I think we'd gotten to one plus three equals four. His brilliant smile brightened the room and he almost shouted, "I finally get math!" Years later I saw Joey at a local restaurant. He was clean and tidy and a transformed youngster. He came up to me and gave me a great big hug, saying, "I love math!"

Karen and her husband spent their summers in Colorado so while they were gone I started giving the kids rudimentary art lessons, a lot of fun for all. One time we got the kids (surprisingly, mostly boys) to copy great art and some were very, very good.

For years afterwards our kids would come up to us at the grocery store, telling us about their math achievements. College, good jobs, and one had even enlisted in our country's armed services.

Karen and I did this for eight years until the after school changed their schedule and we couldn't get the kids until 6 pm; by then most of them had already gone home. And Karen and I had husbands to make dinner for. About that same time one of my kids had married and started having babies so of course I was eager to watch them here at our house starting at ages one or two months.

And what of those other kids, the ones who didn't come to the after-school program? All I can say is ask your clerk at the grocery store why they can't add four plus six in their head but have to do it on a machine.

We lost Karen last year – a great friend and a great woman, and it was an honor to know her. She had a strong daily prayer practice and it lit her from within.

Math Olympics was not my first attempt to help underprivileged children. My awakening came when I was sixteen, at the Sakowitz Post Oak Tea Room where I was having lunch with some girls my age. There were maybe six of us sitting at a large table and over in the corner I noticed a group of black girls bussing the tables, waiting on us. I remember think how bizarre that they would be tending to us when we were the same age. That always bothered me. Then after my first marriage I was working but still remembered the girls at Sakowitz, wanted to do something to help on Saturdays, so somehow I wound up with a Girl Scout troop comprised of girls living in Houston's West Dallas area, mostly very low-rent housing and government apartments. Eventually came our 1992 jobs program in Watts.



PART THREE: Where are you going?

22. Jesus came to me, sent then helped me overcome the Covid Wall of Darkness:

Until two years ago, except for a few broken bones, I have been pretty healthy. For the past half-century, all systems strong, no doctors or doctor visits or meds, just prayer and healthy eating, plus natural food supplements from the health food store. No alcohol or drugs or sodas or fast food. As a very young child I'd already figured out that I needed to be optimistic and look for the good if I was going to get through this life.

This next part may seem a bit wild even for me but for starters you should know that I've never been a Jesus person. The connection just wasn't there. The medal I have worn around my neck forever is Mary, who gave me the sense of a mother's tender love.

But summer before last Jesus came to me and told me I was to undergo a period of extreme difficulty so that I could understand the suffering many people experience. Brown hair and beard, white robe with a red overlay.

The next day someone I call Silvery God appeared and let me know that basically everything would all be all right; this was a gentle reassuring presence.

The best way I can describe what happened next: It was as though an enormous all-engulfing wall of darkness came over me. WHOOSH! Then after eight days in a hospital bed I could no longer walk. And I seemed to have lost my mind; they called it "brain fog." All of the inner support systems I'd developed – positive thinking, goal-setting, etc. -- disappeared. I tried rehabs and nursing homes, anything to get back to my normal life. There was scant physical therapy – a few minutes here and there, done often by folks who seemed to wish they could be somewhere else doing something else.

Looking back, it appears the prior year's yoga seemed to have been fortuitous, especially given yoga's emphasis on breathing. This past year so many folks I've talked with lost loved ones to covid and breathing difficulties seemed to be a big factor. For example, the week I got covid we'd gone to a friend's concert in Luckenbach and through another friend were introduced to twin sisters, 60ish. Mary and Terri were sparkly and delightful, full of plans for the shop they were about to open in a neighboring town. Flash forward to a month later: I'd been in the hospital with covid as were the twins. Mary died within the month and Terri survived and opened their shop. Both twins had spent the month on breathing machines in their hospital beds. Somehow I was able to breathe on my own, probably thanks in no small part to decades of meditation and breathing exercises.

23. Stay or go: When I surrendered to God

Sick as I was, delirious as I was, I had a moment of great clarity somewhere in there and realized I could actually die. Very consciously at that most sober of moments I gave my life to God. I think we all have multiple moments throughout our lives where we are given the opportunity to stay or go. Turning right at a stop sign rather than left. Waiting at a light rather than dashing across a street. Catching one flight rather than another.

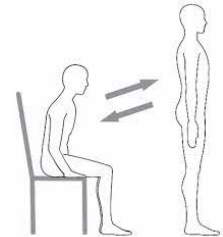
For me, it was double pneumonia at two for starters, then so many other times later.

And for some reason in the hospital God threw me back on the pile. I think now because I still had this book to write.

Every day is a gift. Every single day. Thank you, God, for the gift of this day

24. *800 butt lifts to freedom*

All of this – especially for someone who’d lived their entire life outside the Western allopathic medical system – was disorienting in the extreme. Like when I was sent to a nursing home and they quarantined me on an empty hall for ten days – no contact with anyone except my dear husband’s daily visits. Finally I heard about a healer two hours a day who told me about sit-to-stand exercises (which I called “butt lifts” – sometimes you have to find humor however irreverent in an otherwise humorless situation). How to do a butt lift: You’re sitting in your wheelchair. Using your arms, stand up and count to five. Then sit again. Soon I was off to the races. When I could do 800 in a row the nursing home finally had to admit I was healthy enough to go home and released me twelve months after that portion of this saga began.



And Jesus was right: I am now a better person, friendlier, more compassionate. For the year my inner pluckiness and cheerfulness seemed to have deserted me, I got to see how others view life and the world. To their everlasting credit my husband and my spiritual advisor never gave up on me. “There is no life, truth, intelligence or substance in matter,” Mary Baker Eddy wrote. This entire physical realm is an illusion, as the Hindus have long told us. The quantum world wonders about this except many appear to be trapped in material questions like finding the God particle or discovering how to make a lot of money. Australian aboriginals call this the “dream time.”

And all the while I had accepted that I had to go through the Covid/Wuhan darkness, like a hell or purgatory experience, as a cleansing for my soul. Then a few months ago it came to me very clearly that the wall of darkness was an illusion.

Hah!

All there is, is light and love. “I will give you peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.” (*Leviticus 26:6*)

Progress Notes: Last fall my husband and I prepared Thanksgiving lunch for eight of us including a turkey. In November as a surprise I enrolled him in an Honor Flight to DC from Austin, one that honors Korean and Viet Nam veterans. For Father’s Day I was able to prepare a steak dinner for 10 of us. I’m no longer exhausted most of the time; tired often, yes, but there’s a difference. We go places and do things; last weekend we went to a friend’s concert at Luckenbach and then next night went to the Llano Opry.

Where am I now? My legs and feet are still getting over the joke and I am transitioning from wheelchair to walker. Looking for the good – blessing, not cursing (*Deut. 30:19*) – being in a wheelchair this past year seems to indeed have made me more accessible, more approachable, more compassionate. My husband loves to eat lunch out so we do, most weekdays. While we’re waiting in line I offer my homemade bookmarks to the folks around us and it’s become a little ministry of sorts. Way more fun than being an investigative reporter and getting death threats.

Back to today: Now, people we meet via the bookmarks tell me their stories, and we smile and radiate love back and forth.

Like this: Earlier this week while out shopping a woman complimented my Oaxacan dress (my summer uniform), said she used to wear them all the time. The woman paused a moment then added, before they lost everything two years ago, in the big flood. Oh, dear! I gave her one of the Morning

Prayer bookmarks and she said she would frame it; usually folks tape it to their bathroom mirror. The week before, a dad told me about his infant son who had a rare cancer so we prayed quietly. This afternoon at the gym another dad told me in his wayward teens he started hearing Jesus' voice – go this way, not that – which turned his life around and now he and his wife (they were wed as teenagers) have a large happy family. Had it not been for the bookmarks that amazing man and I never would have talked.

The lesson from this seems to have been that I don't have to step in and rearrange folks' lives for them – form a committee, organize volunteers, fix everything, make it all better. It's enough just to be a witness, and to share, and to love.

This past week I found a banner we put where'd you see it in our entry garden: "Thank you, Jesus."

Joy the falcon

This is a combination of a recent synchronicity and miracle.

Both of our kids are away from home right now, one traveling the world as an MD doing humanitarian aid and the other is en route to a big family reunion in another state.

Is there a mother alive who doesn't worry about her children? Late last night I found solace and comfort and encouragement in the wonderful 91st Psalm:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.... He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy and buckler.” (Psalm 91:1, 4)

That settled me, that image of God shepherding our beloveds under his wing, and I fell asleep about 7:30 pm. By 1:30 am it was time to start the day— this year that's been my schedule, early to bed, wake after midnight, work on this book, then nap before starting the day. For some reason rather than go to work on the book, of all things rescue bird videos started popping up, adorable cockatiels. Despite not being an animal person, I watched four in a row before getting to the book. Even though the night was stormy with lots of lightning, there was a sense of peace about my kids.

Early this morning came a call from Uncle Bud who told me about a downed young falcon in his front yard apparently caught in a downspout hours earlier. We've had ferocious weather this spring. The young falcon appeared to have a broken wing. Bud and I had prayed together over the baby deer on Thanksgiving Mountain years ago, the one who appeared dead then came back to life. So now we're praying for Joy, the falcon. Someone from a wildlife rescue came and picked Joy up earlier today, and we should know more in a few weeks. The woman who picked the bird up said he was probably too young to fly which would explain Joy's hopping around inside the box Bud placed him in for protection, with a wire screen covering the open top of the box. Joy's mother was flying around overhead checking on her offspring until he was picked up.

Homeboy padre Greg Boyle said of a similar miracle, let's erect a cathedral on this spot! Indeed.

25. *Synchronicity*

I love calling meaningful coincidences God's calling cards because that's what they are. Remember Father Greg Boyle's friend, Joel? Joel's the one who says when he wakes up, "When my feet hit the floor in the morning, I'm on the lookout for God. God is always leaving me hints. He's dropping me anonymous tips all the time."

There's a new movie, "Sound of Freedom," about Tim and Katherine Ballard, a couple from Utah who started rescuing trafficked children. At a key point, in the beginning, someone gave Tim a missing child's necklace with a pendant engraved with a quote from I Timothy, which Tim took as an encouraging sign:



Ballard family

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. (I Timothy 9-12)

For Tim to be given a pendant with his name on it --

26. *"Love lifted me"*

My husband's love of country music is contagious so we go to live country events often. Through this we met musicians and one in particular, Joe Tom Thompson, who with his wife have become great friends. Mentioned to Joe Tom one day how much I loved Randy Travis' version of an old hymn, Love Lifted Me. My favorite is the Gaither's version recorded in Florida at a church two decades ago. As a special surprise Joe Tom sang it at a concert last weekend. My one beef about country music is that the lyric can be really downer: She done him wrong. He did her wrong. Etc. So when Joe Tom sang Love Lifted Me it seemed to take the SRO audience by surprise. They'd had their heads and hearts filled with Done 'Em Wrong for the past half hour. But it's as though they "came to themselves" and after catching their collective breaths gave a hug applause. God has his moments and love lifted us all.



Randy & Mary Travis

27. Meditation, mantras & monkey minds....God's magic elixir: love and forgiveness

In the ninth century, Buddhist sage Lin Chi told a monk, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." Meaning that those who think they've found all the answers in any one religion or person might benefit from asking some questions.



Buddha

Psychotherapist Sheldon Kopp wrote a book with that as the title, about his psychotherapy patients. He comments, "It is not astonishing that, though the patient enters therapy insisting that he wants to change, more often than not, what he really wants is to remain the same and to get the therapist to make him feel better." And concludes, "After a while, he began to experience the new reality of each person as being as strong and as weak as anyone else. Slowly, he learned that each of us grown-ups has as much and as little power as the other, and that we had best learn to take care of ourselves. No one is any bigger than anyone else. There are no mothers or fathers for grown-ups, only sisters and brothers."

One of the hardest parts of meditating is – everything. Finding time to do it daily. Finding a quiet place in the hubbub of busy career and family life. Having the discipline to do it every day. There are all kinds of folks on YouTube now who are eager to help you. For myself, I extend caution about the ones selling anything.

I have meditated off and on for four decades now. Breathing has been the constant and I have found very deep noisy throat breathing helps get me started – it's almost like a signal to my body, "Pay attention, arms, legs, psyche, soul!"

What else. I've already shared with you the story about the man in India having his servant build the steps going up and going down.

Two more things

Let's talk about money for a minute. Have you ever thought about haggling *up*? My parents were expert hagglers and from observing them firsthand I got very good at it. There were very few things I wasn't prepared to walk away from if the price was not right. But that's a very limiting perspective. When we see folks in need who are selling something, why not give them *more*? My turning point came years ago at a garage sale. A woman in a nice neighborhood was selling her used clothing at her yard sale. I spotted something and automatically offered her half of her asking price, in cash. She looked at me a moment as if to say, "You dumb cluck, you don't really mean that, do you?" Got it, Universe. Trying to squeeze every last dime confirms our belief in a chinchy universe, one based on lack. When in fact our universe is loving and expansive and there's plenty for all. My husband and I are not those people who pull out their calculator after dinner and figure out 18%; we overtip. Waiting tables is a tough way to make a living and most waitstaff deserve our generosity.

Spiritual is spiritual and material is material. We cannot achieve a spiritual goal through material means. Remember Johnny Lee singing, "Looking for love in all the wrong places"? We keep using any number of material-world feel-goods – food, sex, drugs, entertainment, you-name-it, to help us experience that incredible feeling of the divine – when in reality God and the highest possible ascended states are as near to us as our own breath.

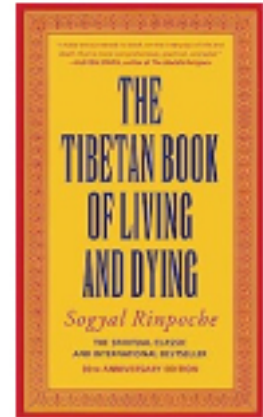
BACKWARD

God’s magic elixirs: love, forgiveness and synchronicity...

If books can have forewards, why not a backward?

And what is a “Backward”? Something that’s the opposite of a “Foreward.” Friends, I was going to post the following at the beginning of this book but didn’t want to scare anybody.

To all of you who were abused and/or neglected: Congratulations!!! You are a very strong soul! You chose as your parents your best possible teachers* for learning this world is an illusion. Meaning anything we can see, feel, taste, hear or smell is not real. Congratulations, ye advanced souls! In all things give thanks! **Tibetan Book of the Dead/Sogyal Rinpoche translation, and Christ Jesus “I am not of this world” (John 18:36)*



Sogyal Rinpoche's version

Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, Merrily, merrily, merrily, this life is but a dream...

Remember the three Hopi questions: Where are you from? Why are you here? Where are you going? Did you write down your responses? Have they changed any after reading these pages? Mine have changed much over the years; now I am here mostly for love and service.

There are additional Hopi questions and guidances on the Internet which do not cite an elder; here’s one of my favorites:

Where are you living?
What are you doing?
What are your relationships?
Are you in right relation?

Where is your water?
Know your garden.
It is time to speak your truth.
Create your community.

Be good to each other.
And do not look outside yourself
for your leader.



Feeling overwhelmed by problems and obstacles?

Give thanks! Being given the gift of meeting life's challenges means: You're alive! There are many roads to God and if you follow any road long and far enough it always ultimately leads back to God.

Growing up in an orthodox traditional religion, the Bible was not part of our everyday life. On Sundays the priest would quote a line or two during his sermon but that was it. Later during my freshman year in college when I noticed my roommate using a red-lined Bible with Jesus' words highlighted I was intrigued and began attending a Protestant student group on campus. I started to study the Bible and found some scriptures that were inspiring and life-affirming. I found quoting and repeating them when I needed help, helped – not just a time or two but for hours if need be, like a mantra.

Here was my game changer: *Blessing not cursing (Deut. 30:19)* For everything that happens today, or for starters, in the next hour, try to bless it. No matter what. See if you can hold that thought even 20-30 minutes. Much harder than you'd think; most of us are surprised by the “yes, buts” that come up. See the God nature of each person, even the difficult ones. As Father Boyle says, Forgive everybody everything.

Is 'no contact' ever helpful?

It's become fashionable in therapy circles to recommend that clients maintain radio silence with relatives they consider to be in the wrong.

Undoubtedly a good idea if your loved one is a sadistic convicted axe-murderer; yes, in that case probably better to have some distance. Anything short of that, going no-contact with our beloveds is a coward's way out; better to figure out a way to communicate. Sadly, rather than go through the pain and grief of final separation, towards her later years my mother picked fights with all of her nearest female relatives including her sisters and daughters. In both sides of my lineage there have been feuds and silences that lasted generations. What kind of legacy is that for our children? *Cui bono.*

In sum: A rising tide lifts all boats, they say. When we are able to raise our consciousness and rise above petty – or not so petty – irritations, when we can overlook folks' faults and frailties, we benefit all. As Christian Science practitioner George Nutwell says, “The divine Principle is Love—unconditional, infinite, eternal, without any expectation of return. It has no enemies or opponents. It just loves all.”

On a practical level, I started drinking milk again -- organic goat if I can find it – and no more bone mishaps. And after decades of various forms of vegetarianism and/or no meat, now it appears I need meat. As Alexander Girard – the Santa Fe architect and designer who was the first famous person I ever interviewed – said, there are no “isms.”

Hafiz of Shiraz wrote, “Even after all this time the sun never says to the earth, You owe me. Look what happens with a love like that. It lights up the whole sky.” Let's let our love light up the whole sky!



Alexander Girard