

ORDINARY MEN & WOMEN

by Joe Smerkers

The last two weeks have been an exhilarating ride.

On Wednesday, November 13 I began chemotherapy. The good guys began the counteroffensive. John Wayne landed on the beachhead. I could feel the battle occurring in my chest. It felt good. We had taken the first step back.

Over the preceding weekend I wrote *Clarity* and sent it out to friends. I felt very proud of it, especially being able to be positive amidst such bad news. I read it over and over again and thought that it was probably one of my best writings.

It sparked calls and letters. Warm, emotional letters. An outpouring of support, and affirmation that I had made a difference in life.

On Tuesday and Friday I had lunch with two business friends. I perceived more of an interest on their part now to listen to me. I found myself with all these thoughts in my head. Remember I was facing my own mortality; I had achieved clarity; I had felt the wind; and I had experienced Sobriety of the Spirit.

All this learning in but two short weeks. Whoa!

Here were two people openly eager to hear my words of wisdom. I gave everything that I had. I wanted them to see, to understand, to get to where I was. Oh how much I wanted them to get it. Oh how much I wanted to make a difference in their lives.

At home I walked around imparting words of wisdom to my children. I didn't know how long I had left so I needed to share my new found wisdom with them at every moment. Cram a lifetime of learning into days, weeks, months. Certainly there must be something I can give them. I had gotten cancer. And with the cancer I must have gotten smarter.

Or, was I just the same ordinary man, with the same ordinary weaknesses and strengths as before. Not any smarter. Just sicker.

This revelation stopped me in my tracks. It's taken me a week to get a handle on my thoughts. And I know that I still don't comprehend the importance of what I am learning about myself. So I share with you where I am today, Sunday November 24th, accepting that these thoughts too are full of imperfections.

I am not GOD, and we are not on speaking terms. The cancer did not give me some special 1-800 line that patches me through when I am in need of guidance.

Am I here for a reason? Yes. We all are. Will HE make HIS reason clear to me in time? Yes. Do I have to listen to hear it? Yes. Do I have follow HIS directions? No. Will I find the answers by searching for them? No. Then how?

Clifford was leaning against the fence, enjoying a beautiful view from the top of the Grand Canyon, when the wooden posts suddenly ripped from their cement moorings. Seconds later, Clifford was plunging down into the abyss.

Halfway to the bottom his desperate arm-waving helped Clifford catch and clutch the branch of a scrubby tree that grew from the canyon wall. Grasping, gasping, he looked both up and down. No way could he climb that sheer cliff, even if he could swing his body toward the wall. But below yawned the chasm, unbroken by any other tree or holding place. To fall would be to die, horribly crushed on the rocks below. No one had seen him fall, and he hung there out of sight, knowing that the wind would scatter his weak voice no matter how loudly he shouted.

Desperate, Clifford cried out to the heavens: "God help me!" Hearing his own trembling voice, he wailed again, "Please, God, help me."

To Clifford's amazement, he heard an immediate answer. "All right," came the voice. The initial warmth Clifford felt turned to a chill wind gripping his body as the voice continued: "Let go."

Looking down, Clifford saw the huge boulders waiting below, and he knew again that if he let go he would surely die. 'Let go?' he thought. "But God, you don't understand!" he yelled up. "I'm too far up, I'll ..."

"Let go," the voice repeated.

Silence filled the canyon. Then, in a weak, terrified voice Clifford called out, "Is there anyone else up there?" [The Spirituality of Imperfection, Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham]

As I reflect on who I am? What am I doing here? What am I suppose to do? I take great solace in the idea of letting go. Putting my faith and life in God's hands.

I do not consider this abandonment, but I know that many do. I am not looking for a savior from above to put all my affairs in order. Although HE is welcome to help at any time.

So where am I? I really do not know. Somewhere amidst abandonment and sobriety. Somewhere amidst knowledge and clarity. Somewhere amidst ego and humility. Somewhere amidst concern and gratitude.

As I venture into and out of this place, as I deal with the realities of everyday life, I am beginning to accept my imperfections, my own being as an ordinary man. And maybe more importantly I am beginning to accept the imperfections and the ordinariness of others.

I cannot change you has been part of my vocabulary for several years now. But I continued to try. It's hard to let go of this. For if I do then what will I have? Like Clifford if I let go of my dreams of glory, of life, I will surely die.

Or will I? Could it be that by accepting myself and others as imperfect, is really the first step in letting go? Could it be that by letting go of trying to help you is the first step in your recovery? And mine.

There are billions of ordinary men and women in the world who have the potential to feel the wind, to achieve clarity, to gain sobriety of the spirit. But I am not GOD. So I know that I must let go of trying to help them. I know that when I do, HIS will be done.

I believe in Camelot, and windmills, and dreams. And one day there will be legions of ordinary men and women letting go of their belief in self-power, serving with purpose outside themselves, engaging their collective wills to make the world a better place to live and work. Of this I am sure.

My analytical mind wants to tear this apart and tell you the answers word by word. My teacher mind wants to help you to understand. My emotional mind just wants you to get it.

My sober mind knows that none of above are possible.

I cannot help anyone but myself. It will be by doing so that I make the greatest difference. Others will take from what they read and from my actions what they will. And I surely hope that they benefit as they do.

But this is not my burden. But theirs. My burden is to struggle with my own imperfections, to struggle to maintain sobriety of my spirit, to struggle to understand HIS will for me.

For I know that if I do, then I will achieve my destiny.