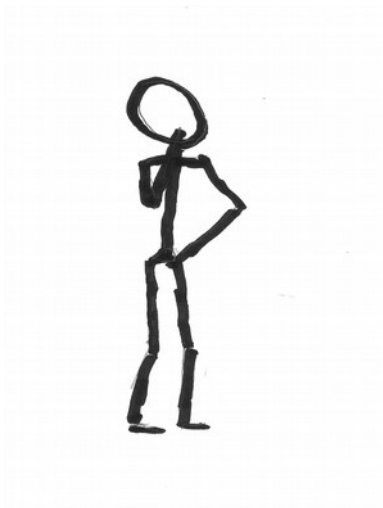


How to Be a Child



title drawing: a child, hand to chin, looking up thoughtfully

(What few names there are have been altered.)

For blind readers, this book was written to be compatible with text-to-speech reading programs. (In accordance with “Section 508”).

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There is a paper trail to show work on this book began in 1998, on to 2005 and continuously since then.

The author has an email address, HowToBeAChild@gmail.com, and will try to read all emails, but unfortunately cannot reply to each of them.

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How to Be a Child

(What few names there are have been altered.)

This Book

This book is not a "make believe" book.

This book tells a true story.

The story in this book really happened.

In this book, a child asks God for a favor.

He asks for this because his older brother hits him and hits him, far too much. So he asks God for a "magical favor" to help him with his life.

In this book, God shows up, and God says "No".

But then, something good happens.

As this child becomes all grown up, God helps.

God shows how to work through anything that can come up. God will show us, those of us that ask Him, how to work through things.

But, to get to all that, first we have to start at the beginning.

NOT YET IN SCHOOL

Once there was Theo, a five year old boy. Theo lived with his mother and father and family, in a house with an upstairs floor and a downstairs floor.

Theo was unhappy. His big brother Patrick liked to beat him up. Patrick was nine years old, while Theo was only five.

When Patrick was beating Theo up, Theo would say, "Please don't beat me up! Or I will tell Mommy and Daddy!"

Now, listen. Listen. This is strange. Because when Theo said to Patrick "I will tell Mommy and Daddy", Patrick would smile.

Then Patrick would say to Theo, "Oh, go ahead. I am not afraid of them."

Patrick would also say, "You will learn, Theo, that

telling Mommy and Daddy is going to do no good."

Patrick was right. Theo told his mother and father about Patrick. He told and told them.

But they would not do anything. They acted like they did not hear him.

Listen.

That is what really happened. Theo learned two things, and these two things made him sad.

The first thing was that his parents were not going to stop Patrick when Patrick beat Theo up. They just would not. Theo did not know why.

So . . . there was the second thing. The second thing was very sad, and Theo felt very VERY sad about it.

Theo had decided that his mommy and his daddy did not love him.

It seems that this second thing was very true. Not

only did they not stop Patrick from beating up Theo, but when Theo kept asking his parents, saying "He is still beating me up, please please please, make him stop", Theo's father got mad and yelled. And he yelled at Theo.

What Theo's father yelled at Theo was
"I work all day! And I am just trying to watch television!"

Listen. Listen.

When Theo was asking his father to protect him from his older brother, and when he heard his father yell about watching television instead, . . . well, Theo had a sharp feeling take place inside him. Deep inside. You could say that Theo felt something inside break.

Maybe it was because he realized,
"Oh, my. Patrick was right. It is going to do no good to tell Mommy and Daddy."

Or maybe it was that Theo realized,
"I am on my own."

Theo believed that, if his Daddy yelled about watching television, then his Daddy must think that television was more important than Theo.

* * * * *

But really, what had happened is that there was something that Theo had always believed was true. And now Theo did not believe that any more.

Theo realized now that his Mommy and Daddy did not love him.

Theo knew he had not done anything to make them not love him, or why God had put Theo in a family in which they did not love him.

But he knew that they didn't. While Theo was not sure what "Love" actually was . . .

Theo did know that, if anyone twice as big as you attacked, loving parents would be alarmed and immediately put a stop to it. They would not yell at you and tell you to not bother them.

He knew that they didn't love him. This is what made him sad.

And when those nights came when Patrick was sitting on Theo on the floor, beating Theo up, and Theo was screaming and crying, sometimes he could hear the television. He could hear people laughing and music playing on the television, and he knew his Mommy and Daddy were watching it, while he was being held down on the floor and slapped and punched.

* * * * *

TRYING OTHER THINGS

Theo kept trying different ways of defending himself. Each time he tried something, he felt hope. Because it might work.

But it didn't work. It never worked.

Theo still could not stop Patrick from beating him up.

Theo never gave up, but he began to feel bad. Because ... Nothing worked.

* * * * *

Theo “wished” Patrick would stop. And Theo had read that there were ways of getting “wishes” to come true. Theo had also seen it on TV, but none of the ways to get wishes really worked.

One of these ways was the "magic lamp".

He had heard about the "magic lamp" - if one rubbed a "magic lamp", then a magic man would come out of the lamp and grant three wishes.

Well, Theo had never found such a lamp. Theo had rubbed all the lamps in his house, just in case one of them was an unknown "magic lamp". Sometimes, when he was at someone else's house and was alone, he had rubbed the lamps there. None of those worked. Theo thought, "Maybe I am rubbing it wrong."

He had heard that magicians had something called a "magic wand". If one waved the "magic wand" around, and said the right "magic words", then ANYTHING one asked for would come true.

If Theo could get a "magic wand", it would be great.

But . . . he tried to get one. It turned out that there was one, but it was for girls. So he got his little sister Mae to ask for one on her birthday. She was happy

when she got a "magic wand" for her birthday.

The "wand" had batteries inside it. It really looked like a flashlight with a plastic star on its end. It came in a box, and the box said things about using it with "fairy costumes", or using it to light the way when walking around in the dark.

It seemed like this "magic wand" might just be a flashlight.

But Theo and Mae tried using the wand for magic anyway, for a long time, just in case.

They tried one magic word after another, and tried asking for different things, and tried waving the wand around with its light turned on, and with its light turned off. They tried waving it different ways, and tried touching the wand down like they had seen on TV. Theo tried it and Mae tried it.

"Abracadabra, I want a toy plane!" Nope.

"Abracadabra, I want a piece of paper!" Nope.

"Abracadabra, I want a rock!" Nope.

"Theo, maybe the word should be 'hocus pocus'!"

"Maybe . . . Hocus Pocus, I want a toy plane!"

Nope.

"Hocus Pocus, I want a piece of paper!" Nope.

"Hocus Pocus, I want a rock!" Nope.

And, after a while, they gave up.

The magic wand they got from their parents did not work. Their wishes were not coming true.

Asking the parents for things did not work. Magic did not work. Asking the parents for your own magic wand did not work.

Nothing worked. Theo was feeling bad. But he still did not give up.

THE POEM

Theo had started school, the first grade.

At first, it was nice. He had fun there, and the schoolwork was interesting.

But out in the schoolyard, a strange thing happened. Bigger boys, ones who were in second or third grade, would walk up to him and start talking, and before Theo knew it, he was in a fight.

It was like fighting his big brother. He tried hitting in the stomach or hitting in the face, and nothing worked. He lost these fights.

And the fights with his big brother Patrick kept going on. Nothing Theo did could change how they finished. Patrick would still be hitting him for a long time, each fight, long after Theo had told him that he had won.

Nothing worked. Except to just “take it”. When his brother was beating him up, Theo had to just “take it”.

This was strange. Because on TV, something always worked. The children on TV would keep trying and trying, and they would ALWAYS find an answer that worked.

But Theo could not make that happen, it seemed. Nothing was working. The fights and the losing went on. And on.

Theo knew pain. It was always a part of his life. He could survive pain. He didn't like it, but he did not have to like it.

So Theo “took it”. When he got beat up, afterward he would climb to his feet, stumble away, and then try to act like nothing had happened. No point in telling Mommy and Daddy. Or telling anyone.

Theo started sinking deeper and deeper into sadness.

And he had no God in his life. Everything failed.
Nothing worked.

* * * * *

Nothing worked. Nothing, nothing worked. Except
to just “take it”.

Theo was feeling low . . . He felt lower and lower
and lower, and did not feel like he was well.

No God in his life. With no God in his life, his life
failed.

Theo was unhappy, and Theo was sad.

There was no way for Theo to control what
happened to him. All he could do was keep trying
one thing after another.

* * * * *

Sometimes a child gets hurt, and a little later they are better. If a child slams his or her finger in a door, it hurts, but then later it stops hurting.

But what was happening here was Theo was being hurt, not day after day, but year after year.

So Theo began to think that, maybe, maybe he would not survive it after all. He just felt so "dead" already. Theo felt numb. Theo felt like he was already dead.

One day, he wrote a poem. Not on paper. It was in his head.

After that, in all the years that followed, he had this same poem in his head.

Here is the poem.

Although I try,
Each day I die.
But I must keep trying
And dying.

He wrote about "trying" because his life was so bad.
He tried and tried to solve the problems he had.

He wrote about "dying" because he could not make his life better to the point where he felt okay. After all, he could not solve his problems, and he had no one to help him.

This is the feeling. He felt not alive much. He felt like he was dying. He felt like the things inside him that made him "Theo" were disappearing, one by one. Those things just could not remain, when every day his world kept getting worse.

Saying the poem in his head would make him feel a little better. The poem seemed to understand his life,

and said what he was feeling. It was mostly a description, just explaining the way things were.

And ... the poem itself needs a little more explaining.

The poem sounded like Theo was feeling sorry for himself, but it was more than that. Theo's poem was a thing that said that Theo was deciding NOT to "quit", that Theo actually was telling himself, again and again, to keep going.

But the poem was also a way for Theo to begin admitting that he seemed to be not making it. Theo thought that, if he could just describe this feeling for himself, that maybe he could do something about it.

But THAT didn't work. Like a drowning person in the water who keeps trying very, very hard to stay at the surface to breathe, but who also notices that they are not staying at the surface and still can't get air.

Theo was feeling bad about that.

The two things had to happen at once. He had to accept that he was possibly not going to make it, and he had to keep trying to make it. He had to.

Although I try,
Each day I die.
But I must keep trying
And dying.

Theo already felt like a walking dead child. Dead inside.

And NOTHING WORKED!

AT THE END OF THE 2ND YEAR OF CHURCH SCHOOL

Theo was seven. He began second grade.

Every day during the week, Monday to Friday, Theo walked to second grade and learned to read and to spell. Then, on Saturday, Theo also attended "Church School", and he was in second grade there, too.

Second graders in "church school" learned about people who used to talk with "God".

God was either a man about Daddy's age who was nailed to a cross, ...

... OR God was a nice old man with a white beard who lived up in the sky. Both of them listened to "prayer", and Theo knew about that because he had

learned some prayers when he was in first grade, and he had learned some prayers at home, too.

He was in "Church School" all fall and winter. After spring began, Theo had his eighth birthday. Then, a month after that, "Church School" closed down until the fall, and Theo spent his Saturday mornings playing with his friends.

Theo now knew that sometimes prayer is just "talking to God", the old man in the sky, and one would just say the prayers to God., and that was all, you were talking to God.

But, sometimes, you could also ask for things. Theo would try anything. But asking God did not seem promising at first - asking his parents for the things he needed had just gotten him ignored, or gotten him a "no".

Why would it be any different with God? Theo did not want to ask and get ignored.

Listen. He didn't think God was "Santa Claus". He didn't mean to treat God like a magic wand, and he didn't mean to treat prayers like they were "abracadabra, open sesame" "magic words".

But all Theo was trying to do was ask for help, and he thought he knew what the help would be.

Theo also thought that he knew how to force God to answer.

He would pray to God, the God who was a powerful man in the sky with white hair. He would pray a prayer, and then ask for this favor, and then pray the prayer again, and then ask for the favor again, . . . And he **WOULD NOT STOP**.

Theo would not stop praying, until God said yes and did the favor.

Theo could keep praying, not just until Theo would think "God heard me".

Theo could keep praying until Theo would know
"God has done it!"

Theo did not know how long he would have to pray.
But even if it took years, he would not stop.

This seemed to be a way to FORCE God to listen,
and FORCE God to help him.

For an eight year old little boy, this seemed like a
very good plan.

* * * * *

One Saturday morning, Theo decided that it was
time.

Theo set the plan in motion. He began saying a
prayer, a prayer named the "Hail Mary" prayer, to
himself under his breath. That is, he said it so softly,
only he could hear it, sometimes just barely hear it,
other times only imagining that he heard it.

Sometimes his lips would move. But other times, he breathed the prayer without moving his lips at all.

Around ten o'clock, his best friend's mother asked, "Do you boys want to go for a ride with me? I am going to do chores."

They said yes. Theo and his friends got into his best friend's family car, and his best friend's mother drove.

Theo rode in the back of her station wagon with his friends. And they were talking about something or other, without Theo.

Theo had decided he could be quiet, and talk to God, and still be with his friends. So he was whispering under his breath. Or in his head. Imagining that God was listening.

It was noisy in the car. He could hear the engine, and the other cars.

Theo's friends asked what he was doing and Theo ignored them. They just stopped asking him, and kept talking to each other.

So he could hear the other cars and their horns, and he could hear his friends talking. Sometimes his friend's mother would say something, too, or even turn on the radio.

Although Theo could not hear what he was saying to God, he was sure that he was talking to God.

And even though most of the seats were taken, he figured that God could get into the car if He wanted.

Now, Theo had prayed for thirty minutes. It was half past ten.

His friends ignored him, and kept talking for another ten minutes.

Now, Theo had prayed for forty minutes. The "Hail Mary" prayer, again and again. It was important.

* * * * *

When he had been "talking to God" in the noisy car for three quarters of an hour, his friend's mother had driven them to a shoe factory in the city, a building where shoes were made. Their car was the only car in the parking lot, which was just an area of dirt with no grass.

His best friend's mother got out to go inside. She could buy cheap shoes there.

But she only took one step, and then she stopped.

And then she turned around and asked if the children wanted to go in, too.

They all said yes, except for Theo.

"Are you sure, Theo?" the mother asked. "Do you want to sit here by yourself?"

"Yes, please," Theo answered, as nicely as he could.

So they closed and locked all the doors. Theo sat by himself in the back of the station wagon. He kept "talking to God".

* * * * *

Now, Theo was alone. Now, it was quiet. And it was peaceful.

Theo liked quiet times. Like when he was by himself out in the trees and could hear the wind. Or when he was up by himself at the start of the day and no one was around but the rising sun and the birds, and it was peaceful.

And he kept on busily praying, in the quiet.

The "Hail Mary" prayer, again and again. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. . ." Again and again.

Quiet. Peaceful.

That is important. It was noisy before. The car was making noise. His friend's mother had been talking, sometimes. And all Theo's friends had been talking. While Theo had been praying.

But now, Theo was all by himself. Praying in the silence, alone in the quiet and the peace.

* * * * *

One minute or so later, it was still peaceful.

But then, it was something else.

Quiet, peaceful. But Theo did not feel alone anymore.

He couldn't tell you why he thought someone was there. He certainly didn't see anyone.

He couldn't tell you why he thought he was not alone.

But he stopped praying, and he started listening.

He started listening.

It did feel like somebody was in that car with him.

It "sort of" felt like someone was there, he realized.

Theo could have been wrong, Theo was not sure, but it did sort of feel like someone was there. And it felt like Theo could almost hear that person talk, but "almost hear" that person without Theo using his ears.

Listen. Listen.

What Theo understood from what he thought he was hearing . . . was that . . . that it was God . . .

. . . it was God and . . .

. . . and God said . . .

. . . and God said . . .

'no'

'no' God said. God said he was not going to do for Theo the favor he had prayed for.

'i wont do that. BUT,' God added quickly.

'but' God said **'it is going to be ALL RIGHT'**.

And Theo felt wonderful! The words "**ALL RIGHT**" made him feel wonderful! When Theo thought God said "**ALL RIGHT**" Theo felt as if a thrill flew through his body, from his hair down to his ankles. It was like God was pouring a big pitcher, a pitcher full of liquid PEACE, into his body and filling it!

Theo listened some more.

God said **'I want you to just HANG IN THERE.'**

Theo was listening.

'SOMEDAY', God said.

God said, 'SOMEDAY, you are going to be GROWN UP.'

God said, 'And this CHILDHOOD thing will be over . . . And it will be ALL RIGHT'.

Theo heard again that it was going to be 'ALL RIGHT', and he felt that THRILL again, all through his body, he felt wonderfully PEACEFUL again when he heard that.

Theo heard that it was going to be 'ALL RIGHT', and that it was going to take a long time, but - this was a promise - some day Theo was going to be grown up. And it was going to be 'ALL RIGHT', then, too.

And then it was quiet.

* * * * *

Theo listened some more. "Is there going to be more?" he wondered. But he decided that God was gone.

Theo listened carefully. He began to realize that God had said all God was going to say.

Theo decided that God was gone.

* * * * *

Theo still sat in the back of his best friend's station wagon. He was all by himself again. It was so quiet. It was silent.

Theo finished that time quietly. He sat in the back of his best friend's car, and thought about what God had said.

His best friend, and his best friend's mother, and his other friends, came out of the shoe factory, got in the car, said hello, and drove him home.

They never knew what had happened. Theo never told them.

He never told anyone.

* * * * *

So . . . God had heard Theo's prayer, and answered his prayer, and said 'no'.

But God had said more than that, God had shown "The Way" where there was no way before. He had said to “just hang in there” and wait until Theo was “grown up”.

Now, somebody might say that this wasn't much of a plan. Just to let everything go on the way it was. Why was this a “plan” at all?

But, what made this different was it showed a way to a better time, a better future. If Theo could “hang in there” until he was “grown up” ... well. Patrick

would stop beating him up. Theo would not need to get a grownup to help him, because he would be a grownup himself. And Theo's world would not be a child's world any long, but a world that would make more sense.

Maybe Theo would be happy then. This plan would work. It was “The Way”. From God Himself.

* * * * *

(Remember? Theo had tried many things. None of them had worked.)

God had said 'no' to what Theo had asked, and then shown "The Way That Would Work" where there was no way that worked before.

* * * * *

Many, many times, Theo's mind would go back to that morning.

And he wondered if he had imagined it.

After all, what had God looked like? Theo had not seen anything. When he thought back to that time in the car, what he "remembered looking at" was just "the inside of the car". God hadn't looked like anything, that morning. Theo could not see him.

So how did Theo 'know' he was listening to God? Well, at first, he didn't.

The 'knowing' was more of a 'feeling'. It wasn't the same as 'knowing' that you are listening to the radio. It was just a feeling.

Another 'feeling' Theo had gotten was the feeling that he was not alone in the car. Just a 'feeling' that he was not alone.

But . . . after some long time, Theo DID decide that this had all been "real", what we people call "real".

The reason was because of "The Message".

Because it was just not something he would have come up with by himself.

After all, it had started with "No". Theo had not expected that. Then it had gone on . . .

Even though Theo had spent a lot of time, trying to come up with a plan that would work, he had failed. Then, in the time of a few minutes, this "God" message had given him one.

The BIG thing was . . . THIS PLAN WOULD WORK.

He finally could see a way out of his problem. It was a plan that would hurt. And it would take a LONG time.

He was eight. And he figured out (this part was hard) figured out that the age that he would be "Grown Up" was twenty-one.

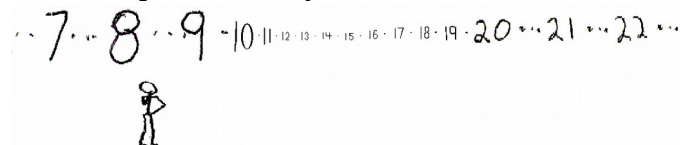


Image description: A child is facing a long line of numbers floating above. The child is under the number eight, and studying the number twenty-one far off in the distance.

And he could do the subtraction now, because he was in second grade. So if he was eight, and would be grown up when he was twenty-one, then that would be in . . . twenty-one minus eight ...

Thirteen. Is that right? 21 minus 8 is 13 .
Yes.

Theo would be twenty-one in thirteen years.

Thirteen years.

God wanted him to "Hang In There" for thirteen years. And then he would be grown up and the childhood stuff would be over and Theo would be "ALL RIGHT".

Thirteen years. Theo had only been Alive for eight years. This would take thirteen years.

Hm. That is a long time. And it was not going to be easy.

BUT . . . Theo had to admit that he had not come up with any better plans himself. Nobody, nobody, was helping him.

None of his plans worked.

BUT . . . he was going to spend 13 years doing something anyway. THIS PLAN WOULD WORK.

Listen.

For one thing, Theo was 'ALL RIGHT'. Yes, Theo was 'ALL RIGHT', just the way he was.

And Theo felt safer, now. Let's not mince words - Theo was physically in danger nearly all the time,

with bullies and older brothers and parents ready to hit at any instant. Theo was in danger all the time.

But he felt safe. Who wouldn't, with God watching out for him? God was promising that, some day, Theo would be grown up and "all this would be over".

WHY IT WAS UNFORGETTABLE

For two reasons, this was unforgettable .

The first reason is that "The Promise was Believable".

Theo had gotten used to promises being broken. But this promise was different. It was surprising.

It was surprising, too, because it was a "No". It was not a promise to do what Theo wanted, but a promise of help to do what was planned for him. What GOD wanted.

So, someone promises to do something to get what THEY wanted. That was more believable than promising to give you what you want.

It was "surprising", too, by the way. Have you found

that something, that you have made up, usually, does not surprise you?

You can't surprise yourself, can you? It is like tickling. You can't tickle yourself. Go ahead and try.

Go ahead.

It can't be done. Whatever you do with your fingers, or whatever you do by dragging a feather across your skin, part of your brain is expecting it and . . . it just doesn't tickle.

But if someone else does it, boy, it DOES tickle!

The same is true of "surprises". Theo could not think of any way to say "Now I am about to surprise myself" and then actually do it. If the thing came from Theo, part of his mind would expect it and not be a surprise.

After all, could Theo give himself a "surprise" birthday party? No.

But if someone else does it, boy is it EVER a surprise!

* * * * *

Another reason that this all was unforgettable, is "It Was Just About The Strangest Thing That Had Happened To Theo". It seemed like Theo had actually listened to a voice without sound, heard a message without words, from a person Theo had not seen.

Everything, or everyone, Theo might have talked to would tell him that Theo had imagined the whole thing.

That makes it strange.

But . . .

But Theo did not believe he had imagined it.

* * * * *

For one thing, remember this: Theo had not tried to “meet with God”.

Instead, he had decided to ask God to do something, and he would ask and ask and ask until God did it. He had expected God to maybe let him know somehow that his wish had been granted, and that would be all.

But when God actually showed up and started talking with him, Theo forgot all about that part of the plan. Instead, he focused entirely on listening to this nice, invisible person that was the ruler of the Universe.

But Theo had not planned for it to happen that way.

* * * * *

Here is a tough question, and an important one: "Did this change Theo's life?"

Theo had mixed feelings.

He noticed that there had been no promise that anything would CHANGE about his troubles. In fact, later on, they did NOT seem to change.

His older brother still terrorized him. His parents still hit him when they lost their temper. In the neighborhood and at school, bigger boys would still appear out of nowhere to start fights.

But Theo had been given a lot that morning. He found that the world inside HIMSELF had changed quite a bit. The feeling of being alone had gone.

GOD HIMSELF was on his side. And that was a new perspective.

Look at this picture, of Theo and three bigger boys.



Description of picture: Theo is in the middle of a group of bigger boys. The biggest boy is standing in front of Theo, pounding his fists together.

Before that morning, Theo's whole world had been the neighborhood and the schoolyard, and it had been full of "monsters" that hurt him: his bigger brother was a monster that hurt him, his parents were monsters that hurt him, and the bigger boys in the schoolyard were monsters that hurt him.

But, after that morning, Theo saw that the school and the neighborhood were very small parts of God's whole world. Look at this picture.



Description of picture: Theo is in the middle of the same group of bigger boys. But in the sky above, the kind, concerned face of God is looking down, watching.

All of these people, bigger than Theo, were not as big as God.

God sees everything, God knows everything. That was what Theo had learned in Church School.

Theo felt better, because he knew that God, a loving God, was watching Theo live his life.

God had told Theo it was going to be 'ALL RIGHT'. His plan was for Theo to get to be grown up. And God's plan was good, it would work.

God's "Hang In There" plan was much better.

* * * * *

This experience was always going to be there for Theo to remember. Theo would always remember this time when he had prayed, and God had come to help.

So, even if God may not have changed anything about Theo's house or Theo's life, God had changed Theo, and how Theo looked at things.

Theo had changed. So Theo believed that "that time in the car" was real.

GROWING

In the years after that, it often seemed to be working out. But there were some times when, for a while, it would not seem that way at all. It would take a while before things started working again.

For instance, one thing hadn't changed - Theo still seemed to get his father angry a lot. Theo felt like he was a bad boy.

After all, his father acted like Theo was a bad boy. He yelled at Theo every day.

Then, Theo decided to STOP being a bad boy.

Theo tried to be good for his father, and so he tried to just not do anything that got Daddy mad at him.

He tried, very very hard, to not make his father angry. But . . . He was not able to do that. Every day,

his father yelled at Theo about something.

Then, Theo got an interesting idea. He thought, "Could I try to get through just one day without having Daddy yell at me?"

He could, he decided. He could try to do just that. He tried to just get through ONE day.

One single day.

* * * * *

And he found out something. Theo found that it could not be done.

Theo failed repeatedly.

Theo could not get through One Single Day without his father yelling at him.

After a week of trying that, Theo knew

- (1) it could not be done, and
- (2) Theo was not the problem.

Theo finally knew that he was a good boy. Actually,

Theo knew that he was a really good boy.

What was the real problem?

Theo realized that his father could not be satisfied. He thought "Daddy yells, and that is that."

And . . . It was much later that he realized that, again, God taught him something. Theo was growing.

Theo was beginning to rely on the fact that God would show him how to work through things.

* * * * *

Something DID happen, about the time Theo was ten. Something wonderful DID happen.

The family was building an addition to the second floor of the house. Because of that, Theo's parents had moved him from the room he was sharing with his two older brothers, Patrick and Johnny. Theo

was moved into the other bedroom with his little brothers Michael and Arty.

Patrick was now fourteen. He had been still beating Theo up. Theo was ten years old and could not win against a fourteen year old.

But after Theo moved out of "the big boys room", Patrick STOPPED beating Theo up.

It was wonderful.

* * * * *

He had stopped calling his father "Daddy". It was a little more grown-up for Theo to call his father "Dad".

He called his mother "Mom".

So, about the two new brothers, who had been born a while after Mae was born.

Michael was a happy little boy, now five, and Arty

was two. Theo liked sharing a room with them.

Michael and Arty were fun to be around. They liked to play, and Theo enjoyed being with them.

And, FINALLY, Patrick had stopped beating Theo up.

For a while, that is.

* * * * *

TROUBLES WITH THIS

Two years later, Theo had become twelve years old.

Theo had come to think of his talk with God as something he had done when he was younger. “That time in the car” had happened four years ago, and Theo wasn't sure that God had really showed up at all.

Listen. Theo was not sure about that time with God any more.

One of the things that is known about people who have had “visits from God” is that, sometimes, the memories of the visits begin to fade.

That is what was happening to Theo. When he was eight, his memories of “that time in the car” were new, and somehow he was able to convince himself that he was not imagining it.

But now, years later, all his arguments with himself had come to nothing.

He was not sure that the message he had gotten was all that unusual.

The feeling of being "ALL RIGHT" had left him.

So . . . Theo, the boy who had thought that he had actually heard God talk to him, was wondering if there was a God at all.

He began to feel very bad, when he thought about the world and everything being simply a big bunch of dirt and rocks that moved around without a purpose.

* * * * *

And then ... When Theo was twelve, Dad told Theo that he was going to have to move back into that room with Patrick and Johnny again.

Dad and Mom had not told anyone yet, but Mom was going to have another baby. Dad told Theo about it now.

Dad was trying to set up the bedrooms again. In about a year, the new baby was going to move into the room that Theo was sharing with Michael and Arty.

In the room he shared with Michael and Arty, Theo argued with his father. His father insisted and insisted, and Theo insisted and insisted.

“You HAVE to move
back into that room!”

"I am NOT going to
move back into that
room! Patrick will
beat me up again!"

"You CAN'T stay here!"

"I am GOING to stay
here! Have the new
baby move into that
room!"

"No, YOU are going into that room!"

"NO! NOT with that big jerk in there!"

"Yes, you are GOING BACK in that ROOM!"

"No, I am NOT going back into that room!"

Round and round. Nothing either of them said changed the other's mind. And finally ... Theo had to give in.

As soon as he had moved back into the room with them, the fights with Patrick started again.

Theo had just gotten out of grade school. Patrick was almost ready to go to college. So of course Theo lost each fight.

* * * * *

And a year later, Theo was nearly at his wit's end.

It was a year later. Theo was thirteen. Patrick was seventeen.

He began to have feelings that "nothing has changed after all".

He was OVERWHELMED with the feelings that came from "nothing has changed after all".

Patrick was beating him up! Mom did nothing about it! Dad did nothing about it!

Theo could NOT win against a seventeen year old! It was not a fair fight!

Theo "prayed" about this . . . and Theo slowly decided . . .

To kill Patrick.

To kill Patrick.

He was sad about the decision, but he saw no other way to stop him from beating him up. Whether Theo

was 12 and Patrick 16, or even 13 and 17, Theo was not able to win a fight with Patrick.

He sort of thought that God thought that it was a good idea.

So . . .

So Theo began the process of killing his brother. It was a plan that would take some weeks to set in place.

(I don't think I am allowed to tell you how he was going to do this, or how he "began the process".)

* * * * *

Theo was making a mistake, and you might think that God wasn't watching out for Theo anymore.

But you are about to see that God was watching all the time.

* * * * *

So Theo began the process of killing his brother and it was a plan that would take some weeks to set in place.

He began preparing. He needed tools, and a weapon, and he was going to make sure he had them.

And he needed a place to practice what he was going to do, so he'd do it right. So he made sure he had that.

He was going to need the element of surprise, and so he would only have one real chance.

And he began to work on it all.

And then . . . God stopped him.

Just like when Theo was eight years old, now God said something to Theo.

Theo was alone, again, and in a quiet room, working

on his murder plans.

And then . . . Theo had that same feeling, that he was no longer alone. He thought perhaps that God was there.

He couldn't see anyone, and there was no sound. But that was how it had been in the car, years before.

Okay, then. So God was back. Theo waited quietly to see what God would say.

And God said . . .

And God said . . .

God said:

**"You must not do this thing.
You know it is wrong."**

Theo was surprised.

Theo asked, "Then what am I supposed to do? Just

let him live?"

And God said:

"Yes.

Just hang in there."

and . . . God didn't say anything else.

And . . . that is why Theo never killed his brother.
God stopped him.

You see, Theo had by that time decided that he would always try to obey God. God was the only friend he had ever had that had always been there for him.

And Theo had not WANTED to kill his brother. Never. He had been seeing it as just something he had to do to somehow make his brother stop hitting him. But God . . .

Well, God seemed to have decided that Theo's older

brother should go on hitting Theo.

Perhaps it was because of what would happen to Theo if he killed someone.

If Theo killed his brother, then . . .

Theo certainly was not going to go on sleeping in a bedroom with Johnny in the upstairs of his house.

Instead, he would probably have to go live in a place like a jail.

Like a JAIL.

Perhaps, that was it. "Just hang in there" had seemed like a good plan when he was eight years old. And it still seemed that way, now, when he was thirteen.

* * * * *

And, in fact, Patrick moved out about one year later, when he was eighteen, and never hit Theo again. Because he went into into the Army, and apparently

wasn't able to bully anybody there. In the Army, Patrick learned to not lose his temper and hit people.

Theo still suffered, in the years to come. He still was hit by his mother and father. Patrick would come home for the summer or for a visit, and Theo felt he needed to be careful around Patrick.

But it was like before - Theo had decided that the suffering was something he would do for God.

It was what God wanted, and he would be 'ALL RIGHT'.

God had shown him how to work through this thing. After all, the plan was to "just hang in there", and Theo knew that This Plan Would Work.

THE PAPER

Years later, Theo had a homework assignment to do. He had to "write a paper".

The paper really was important to him. It was homework, and now it was Monday afternoon, and it was due Friday. That meant he had Monday night, and Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights, to write it. So what Theo needed to do was to "finish the paper by Friday" and "to pass it in on time".

All week long he worked.

* * * * *

But Thursday night, Theo knew it wouldn't be done.

That is, the "writing" would be done.

But it also needed these things: a cover, a "table of contents", and a "list of books used".

Theo could make the these three things, but it would take more time than he had. For instance, he knew he could not make the "list of books used" in time.

So he felt like he was in trouble. He was so tired, working and working on the paper.

And, actually, he was also scared of both of his parents.

* * * * *

Now, remember. I said I was talking about talking to God. You may have noticed that Theo did not talk to God about any of this.

So this is all about how Theo tried to handle it on his own, without talking to God about it.

Here is how it turned out.

Theo knew that Friday morning, the paper would not

be done.

So what would Theo do?

Theo wondered which bad alternative was the one to choose.

The first thing that Theo could do ... Well, first of all, he could miss school that day, Friday. And, well, that option was OUT.

It was never a good idea to skip school, and Theo did not consider it for more than a second. What was he going to do, stay at home and work at home? His mother would catch him and send him to school.

So forget that.

Then there was the second option, which was to go school that day, Friday, but when it was time to pass his paper in, he could just not pass the paper in. Then Theo could finish the "list of books used" over the weekend and pass the paper in Monday. It would be late, but it would be done.

But ... it would be late. He would get a bad mark.

The third option, the last one, was to go to school, and pass his paper in. It would have everything except that "list of books used", but at least it would have been passed in on time.

But it would not be done. It would get a bad mark.

So, which option was "best"? What do you think?

* * * * *

Actually, none of these options were "good". Instead, Theo found himself trying to decide which one was "bad" the least.

People have called this "trying to choose the lesser of two evils".

Theo had thought and thought about it, and couldn't figure it out.

"On Time, but not Done"?

Or

"Done, but not On Time"?

So, finally, this being Thursday night, Theo had another option . . . one he did not like. He could ask his father.

I did not tell you this before, but Theo's father was a teacher. And a teacher would know these things.

Should Theo ask his father? Theo knew Dad yelled, but he was a teacher! Shouldn't his father realize that it is important to answer this question?

So Theo could take a chance and ask his father. He would try to get Dad at a good time and hope for the best.

* * * * *

"Um. Dad?"

"Yes, Theo?"

"I am trying to get this paper done, and it needs to have a cover and a table of contents and a list of books used."

"So?"

"Well, it's due tomorrow, and I figure I can do most of that ... except for the list of books used. And I wonder if I should pass it in tomorrow, or pass it in Monday. You are a teacher. Can you tell me if it is better to pass a paper in, not done but on time, or done but late?"

Dad got mad and yelled, **"YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO PASS IT IN DONE AND ON TIME !"**

Dad was yelling. He looked at Theo as if Theo was

in trouble. Theo did not say any more about the paper. He did not want Dad to hit him.

* * * * *

Theo thanked his father and went back to his room. That option had not worked out well.

After all, "Dad yells, and that's that."

Okay, he had given that a try, and it didn't work, and no real surprises there. What could Theo do?

Do you still notice? Theo was still not talking to God about any of this.

It would be a good time for him to close his eyes, and just say a short prayer. Maybe not an Our Father or some long prayer. Instead, Theo could just close his eyes and say "Please, God. Help me get through this."

And maybe God would give Theo a good idea.

But Theo did not do that. Not just yet.

Instead, he worked late, late, into Thursday night, just writing on and on. And he was getting exhausted. Very late that night, he was still "almost done, but not done" with the writing of the paper.

* * * * *

Friday morning, just like Theo had predicted, the paper was NOT done. The writing was finished, but he did not have a cover yet, or a table of contents, or a list of books used. And he was bone tired. He had not slept at all. (That is not a good thing to do, skipping a night's sleep. It is unhealthy.)

So, you may ask, what would talking to God have done about all that?

Theo finally thought about God. And Theo DID talk to God about it.

He quietly talked to himself, talking to God.

"God. Oh, God.

"Please, God, . . .

"Help me to know what I should do about this paper. I can't finish it because it is almost time to go to school now. But it would get a good grade if I passed it in done."

Theo thought some more. . .

And he got an idea.

He had tried asking his father, a teacher.

He could try again, asking another teacher.

But who? He thought about all the teachers he knew. Some lived up the hill from Theo. Others lived farther away.

But none of them lived close enough for Theo to talk

to them before school started.

And Theo was going to have to leave and go to school soon.

But then, Theo got another idea. Theo thought . . . he could just ask his real teacher. The one that had asked him to write the paper.

Hey. Now that was an idea. Bring the paper in, show it to the teacher. And then ask about it.

Yes?

.... No.

That was too simple. It couldn't be that simple.

No?

.... Yes!

Actually, Theo realized, that would be the best answer!

It was that simple!

Why hadn't he thought of that before? Theo realized that the prayer had worked. He thanked God.

Before he left for school, he did the things he always had known he could do, making the homework assignment into a "paper". He added a "Title Page", and then added a "Table of Contents". Finally, he made a cover for the whole thing.

It was lying on the table in front of him. His paper . . . (without the "list of books used") . . . and he was taking it to school on Friday, the day that it was due.

Then Theo picked it up, and went to school as usual.

* * * * *

In his classroom, the teacher collected the papers. But Theo did not pass his in right then.

At the end of the class, he went up to the teacher.

"Excuse me, sir. Here is my paper."

"Well! Thank you."

"I was hoping, that you might let me pass it in Monday?"

"Why? Why would it be better Monday?"

"The paper is done, except that it doesn't have a 'list of books used'. I can add that over the weekend, but if you need it now, I'd understand."

Theo waited. The teacher looked the paper over, flipping the pages from the beginning to the end, reading just a little.

Then he said, "This looks interesting. I like it!"

He smiled, and handed the paper back. "All right. I will look forward to reading this on Monday! Have a good weekend!"

* * * * *

Theo was happy.

Without prayer, Theo thought he had only two bad options. But . . .

. . . With prayer, instead of choosing one of two bad options, he got a third good option, and that got him BOTH of the GOOD things.

He had showed up, "On Time", with what looked like a finished paper.

Now he was going to pass it in again, "Done", on Monday, and with the teacher's permission. The teacher knew all about it.

He had prayed, then waited for God's ideas. It had worked.

God had shown him how to work through it.

Theo now had learned to pray for help when he needed it.

Say ... did I mention that Theo got an “A-” on that paper?

* * * * *

And did I mention, by that time, Theo was 17 years old? Time passed by more quickly than he had ever thought it would.

And soon, he was 21 years old.

AND...

And he had learned to ask God for help whenever he had gotten into a tight spot.

This way of living was not always pleasant. After all, God was giving Theo problems to teach him how to work through things.

So Theo did that the rest of his life. He learned to thank God for help granted, and prayers answered. Even when the answer was “NO”, like his original one.

He found out “God is a Coach, God is not Santa Claus.” And Theo did "just hang in there".

God is a coach.

God is not Santa Claus.

God did not always solve Theo's problems. But God

always helped when Theo called out to him.

So, for a child like Theo, the first thing to do, the very first thing that helped, would be to try to talk to God.

* * * * *

It is said that God likes helping children. Little kids, big kids. And it is said that God is waiting for everyone to call out to him.

So, if you are a child, one could say “God does want to meet you. He is waiting for you to ask.” It did seem that way to Theo. God seemed to like helping him grow up right, when Theo asked.

And, if you have already grown up, you may have seen that you still have problems. One could still say that God wants to meet you, too, and is waiting for you. It seems that He does that for everybody.

* * * * *

Now, please remember ...

This is not a "make believe" book. This all really happened.

When he was eight, Theo really did ask God for a favor, and God said "No".

But then God told Theo how to handle his life.

Later on, when he was older, Theo had learned to pray for help when he needed it. God would show Theo how to work through things. He would show “a way” where there had seemed “no way”.

There was a time, after that, when Theo almost made a bad mistake. But it seems like God “gave Theo the message” again, and Theo avoided hurting his brother.

Theo, the kid who had talked with God, got through everything, it seems.

He DID grow up. He DID get past his childhood.
He DID get to be an adult, and he was able to make
his life what God thought it should be.

God DID stay with Theo all Theo's life,
And Theo, a boy who did meet God, just talked to
God whenever he had a problem.

Whenever it looked like there was NO WAY to solve
a problem, Theo would pray, and God would show
"THE WAY", some way, to handle the problem.

Please give it a try yourself.

NOTES FOR THE OLDER READERS

This book is a "memoir" and a "testimony". As its first lines declares, it is a true story.

My hope is that this nuts-and-bolts description of an encounter with God might clear away some of the unmet expectations that might come from TV and movies. There are no lightning bolts, no clouds with thundering voices. Hopefully, the reader will not expect them.

That said ...

I am beyond middle age, and my parents have both died in the last few years.

Having written this memoir, it is a relief that I have spent enough time examining their negative side, and am able spend the rest of my life trying to remember their better times.

Like others who have had chaotic upbringings, my early memories were terribly disorganized. Although it has been a burden to go over these early memories in fine detail, I have benefited greatly in getting the story of my genesis sorted out, and in finally getting it on paper. But now I can let it go, and I look forward to focusing on happier times.

Because this testimony involves a little childhood abuse, it was printed and/or distributed anonymously, to protect my family members that have long since grown out of their described practices. Basically, I do not want my older brother to have to hide in the cellar every time the doorbell rings. He did grow out of his bullying behavior, has spent the last decades being as good a brother as he could, and even was helpful in providing information that eventually (without his knowledge) made its way into this book.

As a final note, there is no need for anyone in my family to learn of this book. No one in the family, not even "Patrick", has been told about this book.

* * * * *

I know that this story may not appeal to adults. It was written for younger readers.

One hope is that this book would be helpful for "overburdened" young people. I know that it is considerably "rougher" than the usual children stories. It was expressly written for children that are not "usual", but children that are living through especially "rough" childhoods. For them, the opening chapters necessarily depict situations to which those children may relate and identify.

Can you understand that? To them, this will not seem "rough", but will seem "realistic". A response of "hey, this child is like me!" would not be that unexpected.

I will repeat that: This story is not for most people, though they are welcome to read it. It was written with troubled children in mind.

I am never surprised when adults say they do not like this book. They think the "roughness" is unnecessary. But I remember spending time, while growing up, looking for help in books and stories, searching through libraries and book stores. At that time, the typical childrens book about "mean parents" normally would end with the child finally just telling them how he felt. Right away, the parents would

apologize and change.

This type of thing did not work with my particular parents. I am sure that they were working hard to provide a home and food and such, but that kind of emotional response seems to have been beyond them.

What I am trying to say is: *The hope is that troubled children, who are “looking for help in books and stories” the way I did, will instead find this book. When they read the first pain filled chapters, I hope their response will be “This child is like me!” and that they will read to the end, and maybe find the help they were looking for.*

It was written especially for the abused young. I hope the reader will realize, in her or his isolation (and abuse is “isolating” in the extreme) . . .

. . . that he or she is not alone in the world.

ABOUT THE “**ALL RIGHT**” FEELING

When I heard God tell me that it would be “**All Right**”. I got a wonderful sensation throughout my entire body. I am no expert, no doctor, no biologist, so I have no real explanation.

I have heard about the “pleasure center” in the brain, so it may be something to do with that.

But one other thing I *have* noticed. I learned much later that the stories of angels or God appearing to people often begin with such a friendly reassurance. The angels in the gospels often would immediately say something like “Fear not!” as the first part of their messages. The two times Jesus Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, his first words were recorded as “Peace be to you”.

In the case of the appearance in the station wagon, the “**No**” was very quickly followed by the “**but it is going to be All Right**”, and I do suppose that is similar to the “Fear not” and the “Peace” expressed in the gospel stories.

ABOUT PATRICK AND THEO'S PARENTS

It seems to be a good idea to explain the mystery of the parents' behavior. Some of the story was told to me by my older brother (the 'Patrick' of the story) thirty years after our childhoods..

The parents started out like many couples do. They met and married and had children. When the children reached their first birthday, the mother and father began to discipline them. As parents, they were physical about that last, and perhaps too rough.

Was there something out of the ordinary here? Perhaps. This was the 1950s. What may be unusual is that this couple was doing all this while living in the grandparents' house.

The grandparents could hear their grandson (and later, other children) being punished and crying and screaming. They possibly could hear the actual strikes and slaps. The grandparents found it hard to ignore.

So the grandfather, who was a product of an 1890s "the-father-is-in-charge" household, stepped in and instructed his son to stop the corporal punishment, at least with respect to the oldest boy.

A while after that, the parents managed to buy a house of their own, ten miles away, and they moved out. Still, they obeyed the grandfather's injunction.

That command was possibly "Don't ever hit that boy again!" . . . because the result was a household in which all children were punished physically, except for the oldest, who was not ever touched at all. The father tended to take statements literally, and not only obeyed his father's bidding, but did it for the next two decades.

This explains a bit about why the parents in the story were not willing to stop Patrick from bullying Theo. The older brother grew through childhood without parental discipline. Please note that this is a form of abuse and neglect in itself.

APPRECIATION

The advice and consideration of the following were very helpful and warmly appreciated.

- My wife, who was the first to see this testimony on God's involvement in my life, has given me enthusiastic support of the story, and tolerance for the time and effort spent in this work.
- Demetria Hayes, author and help, who supplied the (rather expensive) ISBN number for this edition. (Technically, that entitles us both to consider this book as a product, in a way, of her publishing company.) More importantly, her own book "Daffodil: A Mother's Journey" came out before mine and shares important topics with this one, especially as to how divine help can produce health out of abuse. When I first met her years ago, I answered her questions about this book and she immediately voiced support. (Her books can be found at <http://demetria-hayes.com> , including her latest, "A Mother's Love".)
- Allison Churchill and Edward Grinnan. of Guideposts Magazine for a kind and very helpful response to my request for advice. Ms. Churchill, especially for the time she must have put into her thoughtful questions and suggestions, and Mr. Grinnan, especially for overlooking how I had gotten his name wrong when I wrote. His latest book is at <http://www.shopguideposts.org/the-promise-of-hope.html> .
- My previous minister, Terry, for his opinions of the story, both personally and theologically.
- The Bull City Writer's Group, meetings held at the South Regional site of the Durham Public Library. My fellow members have provided unceasing encouragement. Their examples of work and their own works have inspired me, egging me on with this work.
- Shirley, of the above group, heard parts of this book and gave me another perspective on Theo's character and his attempts to bring control to his world. I have to give her special thanks.
- The librarians at the library in Northboro, Massachusetts, for safe handling of a copy of this story during its development. They got it safely to me when it had been misplaced.
- And anyone else I missed, of those who gave advice when I mentioned this story, as a whole or in part.

Not surprisingly, my greatest appreciation is always given to the one I mentioned in the text, as "this nice, invisible person that was the ruler of the Universe" for giving me his time and undivided attention. Not just for a few minutes in a car, long ago, but for a lifetime.

I call him God, or The Father, or Jesus Christ, or The Holy Spirit.

And I believe that He does that for everyone.