

# RUNNING FOR HOME

*A Healing Journey to Gratitude*



Steven Lynch

## *Dedication*

*To survivors of sexual abuse and all childhood trauma. May you find healing, peace, and freedom.*

## *Gratitude*

Many thanks to Harry Frey, for your patience and editing of this memoir. It was a blessing the day you and Hayley walked down the drive at the Hiker Hut.

To Catherine Kimball, working ten years creating the beautiful gardens at the hostel, nourishing the hikers with love and lentil soup, splitting and stacking wood, and all the moments you have loved me and served the hikers. You have added so much beauty to the world.

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To India, for all her blessings, grace, and wisdom.

To Mum and Dad. To my siblings. What more to say but Loveloves.

Thanks Murph.

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*You Are Enough*

You were told you must be successful,  
you were told you must get ahead.

To hurt yourself to be beautiful,  
to be good you must make your bed.

I tell you now, it's all a lie,  
I want you to know the truth.

You were born complete and whole,  
and you are the living proof.

As they push you and push you and  
push you,  
that to survive you must be tough.

I tell you now, child of life,  
YOU ALREADY ARE ENOUGH!

## *Making A Stand*

I stood anxious and still in the rear of the majestic Cathedral of the Holy Cross as a passionate group of protesters shouted through a bullhorn on the sidewalk outside. It was a drizzly, raw Sunday morning in Boston. A perfect storm of recent events had uncovered evidence and was about to blow the lid off Pandora's box, turning the Roman Catholic Church on its head.

The scent of polished pews and incense so familiar from my altar boy youth, were now the background to the sound of my heart, drum-pounding loud in the center of my chest. The cathedral was sacredly silent. Sweat annoyed my upper lip as a chaos of streaming thoughts, "*Turn around,*" "*What the fuck are you doing,*" caused me to glance left to a compassionate fellow survivor who had quietly appeared beside me. Though I knew Lori still claimed her deep-rooted Catholicism, this show of solidarity comforted and steadied me for an ever-so-fleeting moment. An unseen hand tugged my Irish sweater towards the seemingly endless marble aisle. I was about to breach the inner sanctum of the Catholic Church, the pulpit of Cardinal Bernard Law. The distance was just fifty yards to my sacred destiny.

As I sensed thoughts coming through Lori's anxious blue eyes, "Steven, you're not going to..." my body lurched forward.

### *A Baker's Dozen*



Bells from the nearby Carmelite monastery, across the river and up the hill, were comforting in their eternal consistency. The bells also foretold the pain of the family religion I was fated into, and that I would endure to bring this pen to paper so many tortured years later. I came ninth in a baker's dozen of siblings, nine boys and four girls from Irish Catholic roots in New York. Dad loaded up the car and moved us to Boston around 1959, the year of my birth.

Dun, dun: two a.m. The neighborhood gang and I slunk off the front porch, where we camped out to beat the heat on the sultry-still, August night. We were bold young fugitives and the night belonged to us, save the haunted house two doors up, and the crazy lady who dwelt therein. Mrs. Mahoney wore old, frumpy clothes and spoke out loud to no one on her front porch. When youngsters walked by, she often spread her legs to expose her genitals in a demented display. With Canadian mints, she tempted us neighborhood kids onto her porch, though I never saw anyone daring enough to take up her offer. After dark we avoided that house by running around it on the opposite sidewalk.

Tonight's innocent crime was perfectly timed to the deepest slumber of ever-alert parents. Victory was won skinny-dipping in the only swimming pool in this working-class neighborhood, and for boys to steal a glimpse of Michelle's pimply-chilled, moist young breasts. Bathed in soft New England moonlight, Michelle's body was firm and sculpted by sport. She was a quarter mile runner of

championship caliber, and those humid nights were full of sweaty possibility. I could smell her skin and was brought to hardness in that sensual, refreshing water. Was she as ready as I was? The now awake, pool-owner parents sabotaged any chance of fulfilling this youthful moment, and my desire for Michelle would be confined to summery kisses during games of hide and seek.

Dun, dun, dun, dun, dun tolled the bell... I shot out of bed, stumbled in the dawn light, and pulled a slightly soiled shirt and a pair of almost matching socks out of the chronic clothes pile on the boys' bedroom floor. Running one mile to the mysterious monastery, I served as altar boy for six a.m. Mass. Intimidating high walls surrounded the compound, and entry inside the chapel was limited to one door.

The cloistered nuns' residence was to the right side of the altar. During Mass I could catch glimpses of the sisters from the corner of my eye as they flowed silently behind what resembled bars of a jail cell.

Church duty completed, I arrived at the St. Thomas School for eight a.m. classes: the anti-life teachings of the Notre Dame sisters. Catholic grammar school was a torment for me. It was dark and shadowy. The classrooms and corridors were pervaded with fear and stress and the nuns dressed head to toe in black, with just a round opening for their faces to show. Who were these tortured teachers with twisted expressions and gritted teeth? Kids stepping out of military-straight lines on the way to lunch were ridiculed, then smacked with a 12-inch ruler, and a chuckling student was demeaned with a stiff piece of chalk poked in the chest.

The many Catholic rituals were forced and fear-driven and so held zero spiritual meaning for me. Devotion was feigned out of fear. Students were often denied permission to use the bathroom, finally urinating in their school uniforms and shamed again as the yellow liquid pooled beneath their desk and chair. It was humiliating for them and painful to witness. Children as young as six or seven years old were locked in dark closets at the back of the room, simply for speaking out of order or asking for help. These vulnerable, innocent kids were my friends and siblings. The distinct smell of sawdust-covered vomit was the result of Catholic school stress and anxiety. Lysol disinfectant was also used to mask the putrid smell, and is an odor that still provokes unpleasant memories for me. I

wondered why most of these women were filled with such intense, vengeful anger. What had been done to them to warrant demeaning and shaming children so young?

First grade teacher Sister Rita was a kind woman, and a few others, when they let their guards down, had a human, playful side, but laughter was rare. So much energy of my Catholic childhood was used to suppress joy and spontaneous expressions of life.

Mum's gift to the son who served that sunrise monastery mass was typically two breakfast sandwiches. One unforgettable day I opened the aromatic egg salad, drawing unwanted attention to the back of the class. I looked down in red-faced, 12-years-of-age horror at the Kotex feminine napkin bag which Mum had fashioned into a makeshift lunch container. In a family of 15, the family finances could be stretched, calling for relatively unusual measures. Before school let out, I had forgiven Mum for the embarrassing moment I had endured.

Growing up with 12 siblings, it was not uncommon to share clothes with two or three brothers, and even a little sister who could make fashion sense of a boy's sweater or jeans. Many of us were born one year apart, so "tight knit" was quite literal. Above the two bathroom sinks cream-colored racks holding eight toothbrushes each were used in a first-come, first-grab free-for-all in the morning. It was a daily norm for two sibs to be elbowing at each wash basin while one or two of the littlest ones bathed in the now-brown bath water. Late sleepers wallop the bathroom door, anxious at being left behind for breakfast. The one ground floor bathroom seemed as chaotic and crowded as a train bogie during Bombay rush hour.

Tasks and functions of the household were mostly shared and accomplished in common. Even leftover food on your plate was "fair game." Feeding a half dozen teenage boys who all played sports was a remarkable feat to pull off. I could eat three plates of pasta myself and still had a wiry runner build, though we all grew up strong and healthy on Mum's filling food creations. After dinner, one sibling cleared the kitchen table of dirty dishes, another washed, and the sibling drying returned the dishes to the cabinets. Because of the constant noise and activity, I sought solace wherever I could, at the kitchen sink washing stacks of dishes in a repetitive rhythm. While most of my siblings withdrew from this

boring, mundane task, I gladly took up the sponge without prompting, finding my peace from the family chaos in the suds and dirty kitchen sink water. After prodding from Dad, the entire family withdrew to the living room, and with subdued giggles on bent knees, the rosary would be recited to its tiresome, humorous end.

Though Father drank little alcohol, the need to maintain order and discipline with so many children manifested in frequent beatings. A four-inch-wide leather belt or open hand to the backside was used on any number of us boys, but I cannot remember if my sisters also experienced this physical fate.

*Dad*

We slept above you, the dwelling place of youthful freedom. You called in your power from below and we marched in religious order down the stairs. In the name of the Father the pain came, and then we marched back up to the place of safety once again. Maybe it was even on a Sunday after church, a visit to your God. I hated your God because he hated me.

*Brother*

I couldn't save you. I wanted to save you from his beatings. We marched down to where he waited. At the pillar, at the bottom of the stairs. I felt your pain as much as my own. He beat you in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Behind me in line you stood, over my right shoulder: I see you. Small, fragile, innocent. I still try to save you sometimes, in my dreams. What did you feel? I could not save you, Brother. I could not save you.

## *Family Frenzy*

Father and Mother slept in one ground floor bedroom, while the older sibs slept in four bedrooms above. Two then three sets of bunk beds. Later, modern trundle beds accommodated most of this huge brood.

When a sleeping space was open, you grabbed it without hesitation. Of course, if another body was occupying that mattress, there might be a mild act of piracy or some negotiated one-upmanship. Caught without a bed, you gathered cast-off clothes on the floor, piled and formed them exactly right and there you would doze off to get just enough sleep. Because there was constant noise and traffic through the house, my friends used to say my siblings and I “could sleep on a clothesline.”

Mum’s overflowing heart and ocean of compassion stretched beyond the doors of her home, as she gave love and safety to neighborhood playmates suffering from their own family abuse or parental alcoholism. Long term exchange students and kids from the inner-city program also found haven in our home. The extra occupants irritated Dad at times, his hard-earned paychecks already stretched thin, and the outsiders sometimes pushed all our patience to the edge. In the end, mom’s lessons of love won us all over.

22 quarts of fresh, local cow’s milk in glass bottles with paper caps were delivered to the back porch every other day. Two loaves of Wonder bread were laid out across the kitchen counter for making the morning’s peanut butter and jellies or the (much-despised) bologna and ‘yellow cheese’ sandwiches. We ate so many sandwiches that one day a week was set aside just for bread shopping. The loaves would half-fill the oversized freezer in the basement. The leftover space was loaded with ice cream, meats, frozen vegetables and the latest food sensation, TV dinners.

On Saturdays, Mum would do general food shopping, one child riding in the store cart, one or two within arm’s length, and of course one in the oven. One shopping cart would be tediously filled and parked at the front of the store while a second cart would be more speedily filled and wheeled over with the first. If newly hired stock boys hadn’t dismantled the first two carts, we arrived at

breakneck speed to the checkout counter, weary yet successful with three overflowing shopping carts: food for one week.

Saturday morning was also a day of ritual sock matching for one or two of the younger siblings. Our socks half-filled a 40-gallon drum. When each sock had found its mate, there was wrestling, then napping, in the warm pile of what seemed like hundreds of socks. This was a mountainous task for a seven or eight-year-old that obviously came with a lot of whining and complaining. So, shortcuts were found, and I soon learned that slightly differing hues of brown or green socks were barely visible under school pants. When we were finally ready to be done, single socks would mysteriously go missing. Perfection was not our goal, and we would surely be late for Saturday morning cartoons or the first round of hide and seek with the neighborhood gang. Besides, most games could not start until the Lynch numbers showed up. More 40-gallon containers were kept in the attic to hold next season's change of clothes. With the scent of mothballs wafting through the bedrooms, the drums were muscled out, signaling to me that Winter was dissolving into Spring, Summer into Fall, and on. This family ritual marked the passage of time for me.

My siblings and neighborhood youngsters lived outdoors for most of each day as we explored the world around us. We would make go-karts and bikes out of Dad's lawnmower parts and whatever else we could find in the garage. We made forts in the woods up the road. We played games of speed and games of chance, innocent games and some not-so-innocent. I kissed my first girl on the swing set behind our house during one such game. Days were full of sports, hide and go seek, tag and just lazing in the sun. Another place I found some peace and quiet was launching a rowboat in the river that circled our street. I'd take my dropline and hooks and spend hours alone on the water, catching flounder that mum would cut, clean and fillet for that night's meal. The world was ours to discover and the huge brass bell, rung by mum from the front porch, alerted us when it was finally time to return home for dinner.

We were thirteen siblings and we always had each other. Sisters taught us how to ask a girl on a date, change diapers, and dance. Brothers showed us how to scrap in the school yard and hold a football. The caring connection and protection of so many siblings deeply bound us together. There was an

overflowing abundance of love in our family of fifteen. I never thought our lifestyle was different or unusual. It was simply my experience.

We lived in a white neighborhood of hard-working Polish, French and Portuguese fishermen, bricklayers, and laborers. Large families of Italian and Irish descent having ten or more children was not uncommon during the fifties and sixties in Catholic Boston. Seems there wasn't a condom to be found in the New World! As that eighties song lyric goes, "The rhythm is gonna getcha, rhythm is gonna getcha," yes, the rhythm method of family planning got a lot of Irish Catholic women pregnant, time and time again. The McCarthys, McNiffs and Perretis were huge families.

I don't know how Mum and Dad raised us all. At any one time, five or six of us were teenagers wearing jeans and sports uniforms. Girls wore school dresses and there were oh so many cloth diapers for the newborns. I remember Mum washing piles of clothes, then hanging it all out to dry on a clothesline, day after day. She would be on her knees waxing the kitchen floor after we all turned in at night. So many mouths to feed, meals to cook, bills to pay. Mom would somehow find the time to cheer me on at cross-country races on the home course, and she received an award for having twenty two of her children and grandchildren attend the same high school over the years. How was it possible to raise so many children? Mom was petite in stature but the strongest woman I have ever known, a truly divine mother who cared for many people around her.

I came home late, no doubt smelling of alcohol, one night as a teenager and Mum was sitting in her comfy chair, praying that all her children would return home safely. She commonly sat there until four in the morning, until the last of us was safe and accounted for.

"How many beers did you drink tonight Steven?" she asked in loving relief.

"It was vodka that fucked me up Mum, and perhaps the orange juice," I slobbered in drunken, youthful disdain.

I tortured Mother many times and we constantly butted heads, since her Catholic creeds did not resonate with me and only tortured my soul. I knew early in life that institutional religion was not my Truth. After serving in the Navy, Dad was graduating from college, had four children and sold Fuller brushes door to door. His strength was evident. When did he even sleep? After long, hot days at

work he still found time to hold me in the rocking chair and massage my legs to ease the growing pains. He took us sledding and swimming and showed us how to wield a hammer and saw. As bedtime neared, Dad would march us children upstairs, singing his favorite song, and swing us up into the top bunks like toy airplanes. How did he do it? Where did Mum and Dad find the patience? Their self-sacrifice and love are immeasurable!



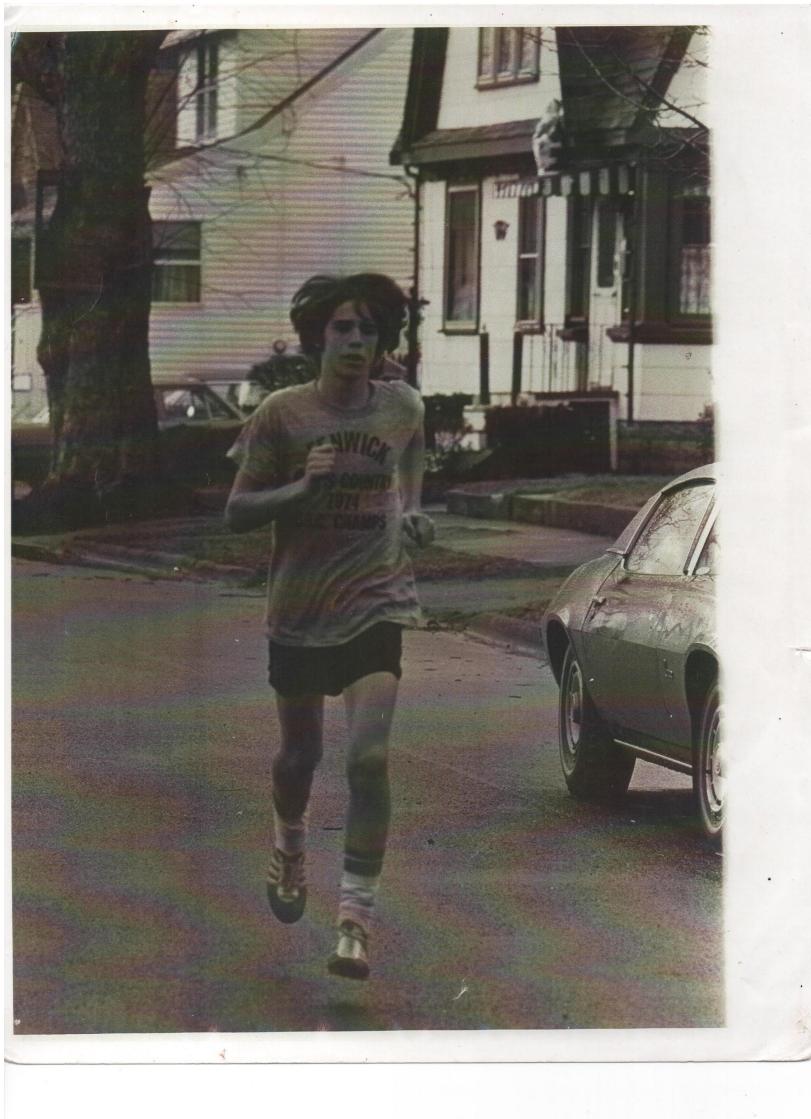
Having enough siblings to fill an eight-man toboggan was normal to me. With nine boys to field a baseball team or two teams for touch football on the street in front of the house, some of the family were guaranteed to come home

winners. The neighborhood homes were an extension of our own and many other parents lovingly fed, sheltered, and watched over our littlest ones. The Portuguese kids across from our house were like brothers and sisters to me.

The exception was the alcoholic child molester up the street who sexually abused children openly and arrogantly. In those days, the dark side of life was often denied or turned a blind eye to, and children were to be seen but not heard, even as they reported the acts of this beast of a man. His crimes scorched and burned so many bodies and souls in our youth, including people whom I dearly love.

As Shakespeare wrote, “Take the roof off any home in any village and within you will find life and death, love and hate, beauty and joy.”

## *Running*



At 13 I didn't drink much alcohol or dissolve into a haze of youthful drug use, which many chose as a form of escape and relief. Putting a gun to my head would come ever so close to fulfillment, later in midlife, when pain and grief would become unbearable. Instead, I ran. I ran far, and I ran fast. Dad took me out that first day. A three-mile loop starting from our doorstep went up high school hill, rounded the cemetery, and followed the river road back to where we began. I would run this course more times than I could possibly remember.

Running was my prison, but it was also my freedom. I ran in my childhood to survive. I was a smart kid in that way. Running was my escape from the monstrous pain and powers of childhood, and I wonder if sports were the same escape for Dad. As an adolescent I may have killed myself, my perpetrator, or both, for the seething rage that was simmering inside me, a rage that would propel me to the heights of athletic achievement.

Dad was a world class athlete in his own right. A collegiate rower, he went on to win the National championships in 1952 but lost the 1956 Olympic qualifying race by one second. He was humble, not one for self-inflation or showmanship, but so prolific at winning that he gained the nickname “Ironman,” and became a quiet legend throughout the US rowing community and international competitions. While being profiled on the cover of popular rowing magazines, three of my elder brothers reached national fame, competing in world championships in Europe and Olympic trials. I longed to perform as well as my brothers. All sports came natural to me yet running was the sport I truly took to.

By eighth grade I was competing for the nearby high school and by my sophomore year I achieved second place at a prestigious regional race. Soon I was captain of the cross country and track teams, our squad was winning championships year after year, a teammate and I often traded first and second places. Like many young boys and girls, I dreamed of competing in the Olympics. I ran every day and twice a day at summer training camps.

The horrors of being sexually abused by a Catholic priest were hidden and locked away deep in my inner world and I ran endlessly to keep the secrets at bay. I was always beside or behind Dad by a few paces on our Sunday ritual run. Maybe 13 at the time, he must have realized my talent and that I was holding back. He said, “Son, you have to pass me now.”

I realized that I had been afraid to pass my Father, thinking if I did, he might die. I don’t know why I ever thought that, but this rite of passage was a surrendering for him and a handing off to me. I will never forget that moment when he pushed me forward into my own possibilities. His words assured me I could shoot for the Olympics, and away I flew.

But red flags of triggered behavior momentarily threatened to reveal my secret. In grammar school I would get into fights in the recess yard in

uncontrollable anger and rage, choking a classmate nearly unconscious before the nuns finally pulled me off. I remember clinging to the chain link fence, not wanting to be sent back into the presence of my perpetrator until my mother pried my red-spasmed fingers loose. After track practice one day I collapsed in the locker room stairwell, curled up in a fetal position screaming and violently kicking away my coach. I would often throw temper tantrums in the middle of the street screaming and holding the back of my legs near my buttocks because I had been anally penetrated. I lived in a silent inner world of shame, guilt, and fear that the secret would one day spill out.

The Catholic priests were systematic in their predatory crimes, knowing what families to infiltrate and what children within those typically large families to “groom.” They knew our Father was out of the house working long hours, perhaps emotionally unavailable to his wife, and Mother was surely overworked with 13 children. Seeking guidance and solace with the local parish priests, perhaps she did not see that the fox was guarding the hen house. Raised by staunch religious parents, the unspoken tribal rules created an unquestioning and blind obedience to the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church, so three pedophile priests walked easily and honorably through the front door of my childhood. With full license to the contents within, these men of the cloth spoke an effectively special mass in the family living room and finished their convincing charade by sitting at the head of my father’s table, filling themselves with Mother’s home cooked food.

The holiest of rituals was completed with handshakes, smiles and pats on the back as the perpetrators just as easily left the scene of their playful masquerade. The crime was committed, the ceremony complete and the soul, spirit and body shattered. The crimes were so perfectly staged, the cover-up so complete and the ensuing years of silence and secrecy so excruciating, that the world became a place I wanted no part of. And if adulthood was this brutal and dark, then I ran to never take part in it.

The crime of sexual abuse has been perpetrated throughout the history of the Catholic Church, with roots in Ireland and families of Irish descent, though not exclusive to that country or nationality. The priestly endeavor to force one’s body to be sexually celibate is a life-denying rule that often comes to manifest in twisted and distorted behavior. Institutional religions that enforce suppression of

sexual expression could be perceived as directly creating criminal behavior. The risk of being a member of institutional organizations is that you stagnate, stop questioning, and become dependent on a surrogate father figure who determines and dictates life choices for you, even into adulthood. It's possible you never grow up, emotionally or spiritually, beyond your childhood beliefs or conditioning. This business of keeping the flock arrested and dependent also keeps the church's coffers filled, and with these untold profits, the so-called servants of God live like princes and kings in gilded palaces. The Catholic Church has been one of the largest pedophile crime cultures in the world for decades, and it keeps the perpetrating priests abundantly provided with scores of children to prey on.

Through my teens and twenties, I lived an image of happiness contrived by the need to function and survive the dark secrets that dictated my addiction to run. Through college, running and rowing on the crew team occupied my days and kept me from plunging too deeply into drugs or drinking alcohol more days than I already did. Both of these escape modalities were easily available on college campuses in the late 1970's and early 80's. Rage inside me would sometimes erupt against classmates, as some of them would attest to. I mistreated teammates when shame and guilt was projected onto them. I am so sorry for the pain I may have caused to many forgiving and caring friends. I went to a small private college just outside New York City, where the Irish Christian Brothers lived and taught. I didn't put much importance on the academic side of college, but my world expanded from the narrow, white, middle-class high school I had attended, to a much broader experience with new friends and students from different backgrounds, cultures, and countries.

My second year at college I joined a seminary of Carmelite Brothers and found it a peaceful time of prayer and silence, yet also tumultuous, as I was struggling with thoughts of one day being married and having a family. I found seminary life quite hypocritical: we ate steak and eggs for breakfast and had beer kegs built into the wall to entertain guests, all while talking about a life of

simplicity and service to others. We lived like kings in a stone structure that looked like a castle. I eventually figured out this wasn't the spiritual life I yearned for.

Three teammates and I were unbeatable in college rowing, dominating local races and winning league championships until circumstances changed the make-up of the team. My last year of college ended with my best friend Teddy and I earning a silver medal in the pairs race at the prestigious Dad Vail regatta on the Schuylkill river in Philadelphia. I went on to stroke a mediocre eight-man boat for the exclusive St. Catherine's rowing club in Canada, and my failed attempt at the USA Olympic rowing team would soon push me in a different direction athletically.

Relationships with women came and went, none moving to any depth of intimacy. I was now training five to six hours a day. I had recently moved to Seattle and years of running with my dad were starting to pay off with higher placings, corporate sponsorships and exposure to national training techniques and opportunities. I became a fit tester for Nike and modeled their running and cycling gear at runway shows. I had recently changed from exclusively running races to the Duathlon, a fresh new multi-sport competition consisting of alternating running and cycling for varied distances. I qualified for the Zofingen, a prestigious race in the mountains of Switzerland. Though I would not compete there, qualifying for a race in Europe was quite an accomplishment for me at that time.

As an aspiring amateur racer, a lot of energy is spent impressing sports companies and manufacturers, "promoting yourself" to acquire the latest high-tech equipment. Working your way up the rankings is when you need all the support you can get, but sponsors shy away until you can prove yourself in competition. Corporations want their name exposed on your jersey or bicycle and it's best if that name is in the top three places at a race. It's a bittersweet experience when you finally make the winners' podium without their equipment, and the PR people come calling.

One day a bicycle company rep brought me to the basement of a high-end wheel maker stacked with literally hundreds of bicycle wheels, each of which cost several thousand dollars. "Choose what you want," the rep said, and I stubbornly thought, "Where were you and all these fancy wheels ten years ago when I was a struggling, half-starved upstart?" I held my tongue and humbly accepted the bicycles, sports drinks, sunglasses and running shoes.

I now realize years of practice put into your chosen sport day after day, year in year out brings success, and the primary element to accomplish any goal in sport, or life, is consistency over time.

It was 1991. I was 31. Dad died of a massive heart attack that summer after rowing a scull on his favorite pond. He loved rowing evenings when the setting sun danced like diamonds on the water. In the doorway of his cabin in the woods he collapsed and could not be revived even by the efforts of my sister, an experienced nurse. It seemed to me a fitting and soulful end to his life, being in the place he loved most while rowing his boat on his favorite pond.

Dad's imposing aura and physical stature had cut a large figure; he'd had a huge presence in the community and our extended family. My father was a beautiful man, humble, disciplined, and devoted— to his wife, his children, and his church.

We siblings retreated across the country, each to grieve in our own way. As the funeral and functions came to a stark end, the door closed on Mum's role as wife. She would never be the same, and she would return to the cabin on the pond only once after Dad's death.

When word had first reached me, two profound emotions arose. I felt liberated. I had the freedom to live my own life, released to be who I truly was. Secondly, I realized an uneasy fear had been hidden behind a sense of safety while Dad was still alive. Father had physically defended me a few times in my life, and that security was gone. Now there was nothing between me and life, myself and death.

I sought therapeutic support for the deep grief I felt when my father died. I met a therapist who was trained in western psychotherapy techniques before living in India for years, integrating eastern spirituality into her practice. We worked together using a breathing technique called 'Rebirthing.' I would lie on the floor and breathe in a circular fashion, from my chest to my waist, which was the extent of my capacity at the time. Suppressed emotions and unconscious memories would arise, as the breathing continued. As emotions were released, awareness would drop further inward, exposing still deeper sensations and

unlived life. As therapy moved forward, the breathing extended further into my pelvis and lower body and up to the top of my head.

It would be a fruitful therapeutic model for me over the next ten years. After 25 years of athletic training and competition, I had successfully turned my body into an armor to keep any pain out, but the truth was, no love could come in. With consistent therapy, I eventually uncovered layers of unlived sadness from the death of my 20-year-old brother ten years earlier in a car accident. A second brother had been arrested, jailed, and accused of a felony, since he was driving the car.

I remember when I got the call from my Dad. At the time, I was working at Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. We had taken the kids to a weekend overnight on Cape Cod. Both staff and students were having the time of our lives on the beach. The children were so happy, carefree, and playful since they were allowed to be away from the formalities of the exclusive school campus.

We had put the children to bed. The staff could now wind down after a long, yet fulfilling day. I received Dad's call at 2:00 am and as the phone dropped from my hand, I collapsed to the floor in overwhelming sorrow. I was broken. As other staff members consoled and comforted me, I wept as never before until the sun rose.

Walking through the hospital room door, I glanced left where my lovely brother lay dying, and instinctively turned right where my second brother was sitting in wounded shock. I dropped to my knees in tears, and with my head in his lap uttered, "It's not your fault, you are not to blame." In that moment we shared a deep, deep brotherly sorrow. Journalists came to our home at all hours, while gossip and speculation were rampant. Since ours was a well-known family in the area, the story of my brother's accident ran on the front page of the local paper.

We three brothers, along with our youngest sister, were closest in age. Our sister taught us the courage to talk to girls, prodding us onto the dance floor. We danced the night away in fun and freedom. Dave's sudden death blew us all into shock and grief.

Making the excruciating choice with Mum to remove their son from a machine that was keeping him alive, I saw my Dad cry. His head fell into his

trembling, Olympic-sized hands in tears. That image is forever etched in my heart, an image of strength and weakness, love, and pain enough to fill an ocean.

Because my deceased brother was brain dead, we were able to donate his heart and other organs to be transplanted into a man in Boston. This surgery was still quite groundbreaking at the time, so the story continued in the news. My dead brother's name as heart donor was revealed to the public when it was meant to be kept legally and ethically private, and this caused even more stress for our family.

As I carried one corner of my brother's casket out the front doors of the church that was overflowing with young people, my knees buckled. It felt like my heart had been ripped out of my chest. I loved my brother dearly. We all did. He was a funny, playful character who provoked belly laughter in all of us. He was a bright, shining one. On the sidewalk outside the church, I felt a vengeful sense of evil as TV cameras whirred and news people surrounded my grieving family, violating such an intimate and personal ceremony. Filled with anger, I wanted to lash out at the media for being so callous and invasive. The following weeks, I also experienced immense love and kindness from neighbors and friends. They brought home-cooked meals to our house and watched over the littlest ones who needed care during our long days of grief. I had never felt depths of evil and heights of love as I did during this time of my life.

One year later my older brother Mike was hit by a car while walking across the street. Lying in a coma for five months, he woke up to rehabilitation for one and half years more and lived the rest of his life in a wheelchair, head injured and quadriplegic. Mike had been the star high school quarterback and baseball player, recruited to play in college, but more recently to his accident, he had been living in sadness and dealing with drug addiction, both triggered by the shocking death of his lovely future wife.

Waves of grief were washing me under. I just wanted to come up for air. Between training and races around the US I found myself back at the therapist's office. With consistent inner work, it felt like layers and layers of heavy winter coats of sadness and pain were being taken off my shoulders.

There is a confident capacity, some may perceive as arrogant cockiness, that athletes rely on at the highest level of sport. At this time in the duathlon I was running the first five kilometers in 15 minutes, held my own or moved up several places on the 30k bike portion, and finished with a strong 16 minutes in the final 5k run. These times typically put me in the top three at most races. Without footwear at the time, I won a five kilometer race wearing only beach sandals.

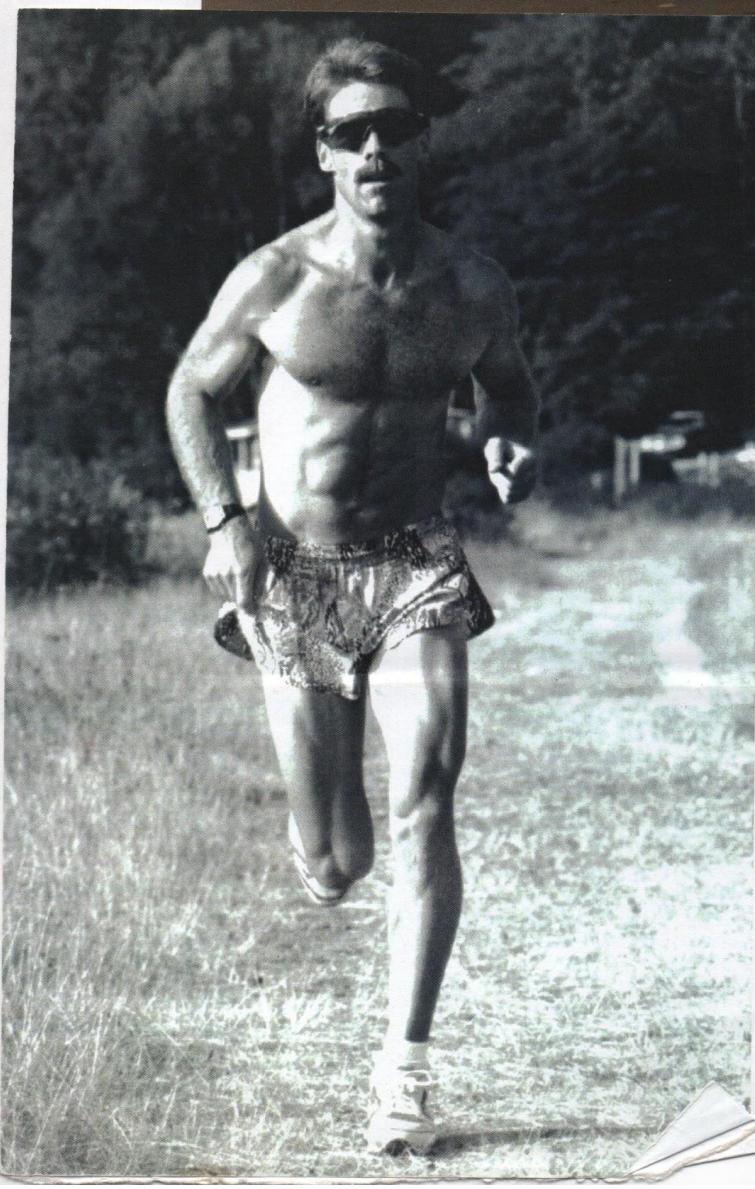
There is also humility, acknowledging that anyone can win on any given day. Most competitors have a respectful admiration for each other, since struggles and sacrifices have been made equally by all who toe the starting line. Competitors were often my friends as we traded first, second or third in different cities and venues on the racing circuit. We congratulated each other on winning and I always went back out on the racecourse to encourage all who participated. My motivation was never to defeat, diminish or humiliate my fellows, it was to find out what I was capable of and to reach goals I had set out for myself.

A typical training day would start before sunrise to immediately get food into the body. At six a.m. I would cycle two to four hours, eat again, stretch, then nap for an hour. Afternoon it was an hour or two distance running on the road or a speed workout on the track, refueling with a sports bar or fruit smoothie and followed by gym workouts and strength training. The day would end with stretching or massage, then the biggest meal of grains, salads and protein. The body at peak performance continues to burn calories even while sleeping, so food was consumed whenever possible at any hour.

Sport, to me, is a poetic form in motion. Nothing beats being on the bike at dawn on a silent Sunday morning for a 125-150 mile ride, the mist lifting off a pond as the heart rate accelerates and sweat forms on the brow.

There is a cycling workout called a ‘double rotating paceline’ in which 30-50 riders form two lines side by side, one behind the other. The cyclist at the front of each line “pulls” for 30-45 seconds while blocking the wind for the riders behind him. The first rider then “peels off” to the outside of his line and drops to the back of that same line. Riders continuously rotate from the rear through to the front for the duration of the ride. Maintaining speeds between 35 and 45 miles per hour, each cycle’s wheels in front and behind yours are equally six inches apart. One small flinch and this sweating snake of rotating riders would topple like dominoes.

The rhythmic sound of spinning wheels as miles pass underneath, birth of a dawning day and the bright colors of cyclists' jerseys, this intense, dangerous workout was an experience of incredible joy and a potpourri of the senses. This level of physical capacity brings a feeling of wholeness, and faith in one's body, that anything is possible.



I TURNED MY  
BODY INTO A COAT  
OF ARMOR, TO PROTECT  
ME FROM ANY MORE PAIN.  
I WAS ISOLATED FROM  
ANY LOVE THAT  
WANTED TO COME.

One of my favorite races was a 5k/30k/5k Duathlon near Portland, Oregon in the lovely Pacific Northwest. The top pro Duathlete, a retired Olympic marathon gold medalist, as well as other elite local competitors, showed up to compete. Only an upstart at the time, I did not expect much at this race, but I had just acquired a sponsor and new wheels to improve my cycling speed. Coming off the first 3.1-mile run in seventh or eighth place, I was having the perfect race. Everything was unfolding with ease and I was in the zone. I was running out of my body, feeling pain in my muscles but transcending the pain at the same time. Afterwards, Sue, my sister and most devoted supporter, told me that "something magical was happening." Overtaking the Olympian in the transition area, I started the cycling leg and quickly moved from fifth into second place. Instead of being slowed by the pain of lactic acid building up in my muscle tissue, I was accelerating. It was a feeling of effortlessness. It was seemingly happening on its own, and I was simply a witness to it. Passing the top professional, moving into first place behind the police vehicle which leads the competitors, the thought "What are you doing, you're not supposed to be winning this race," flashed through my mind. In that instant, the front wheel on my bike collapsed under me and I pulled to the side of the road, knocked out of this once-in-a-lifetime race. Wheel in hand, I woundedly watched, as all the competitors passed me by. Sue waited for what seemed like forever, and after the sag wagon dropped me off at the finish line, she held and comforted me as we sat on the curb, shedding tears of sadness together.

When I phoned the famous wheelmaker the next morning and told him of the failure, he casually admitted "Oh yeah, I forgot to glue the spokes into the rim, sorry." The faster I went, the faster the spokes were unscrewing from the rim. It was only a matter of when the high-tech wheel would give out.

Even without finishing, the transcendental experience I had that day makes it still my favorite race ever.

When athletes reach international levels of competition, the difference between winning and losing is very slim, since participants are of nearly equal abilities. A good night's sleep, an unbalanced meal, or any number of tiny circumstances can land one on top of or just off the podium on any given day. Throughout history, athletes have sought an element their competitors have not

yet discovered, aiming to gain even the slightest advantage on others in the race. In days gone by cyclists stayed hydrated with beer instead of water during the Tour de France and cigarettes were often seen in baseball dugouts. Not necessarily looking for an advantage, perhaps they were simply staying relaxed and enjoying themselves, keeping the role of sport in perspective. As sport became professional and saturated with money, the objectives of the game changed, and so did how it was played. Not long ago my brothers were experimenting with caffeine and bee honey to give themselves a jolt across the finish line. In baseball, methamphetamines became the norm and Jamaican sprinters believe yams are the reason they are the fastest humans on earth. HGH, blood doping and EPO reveal the lengths athletes will go to in the pursuit of victory, money and fame.

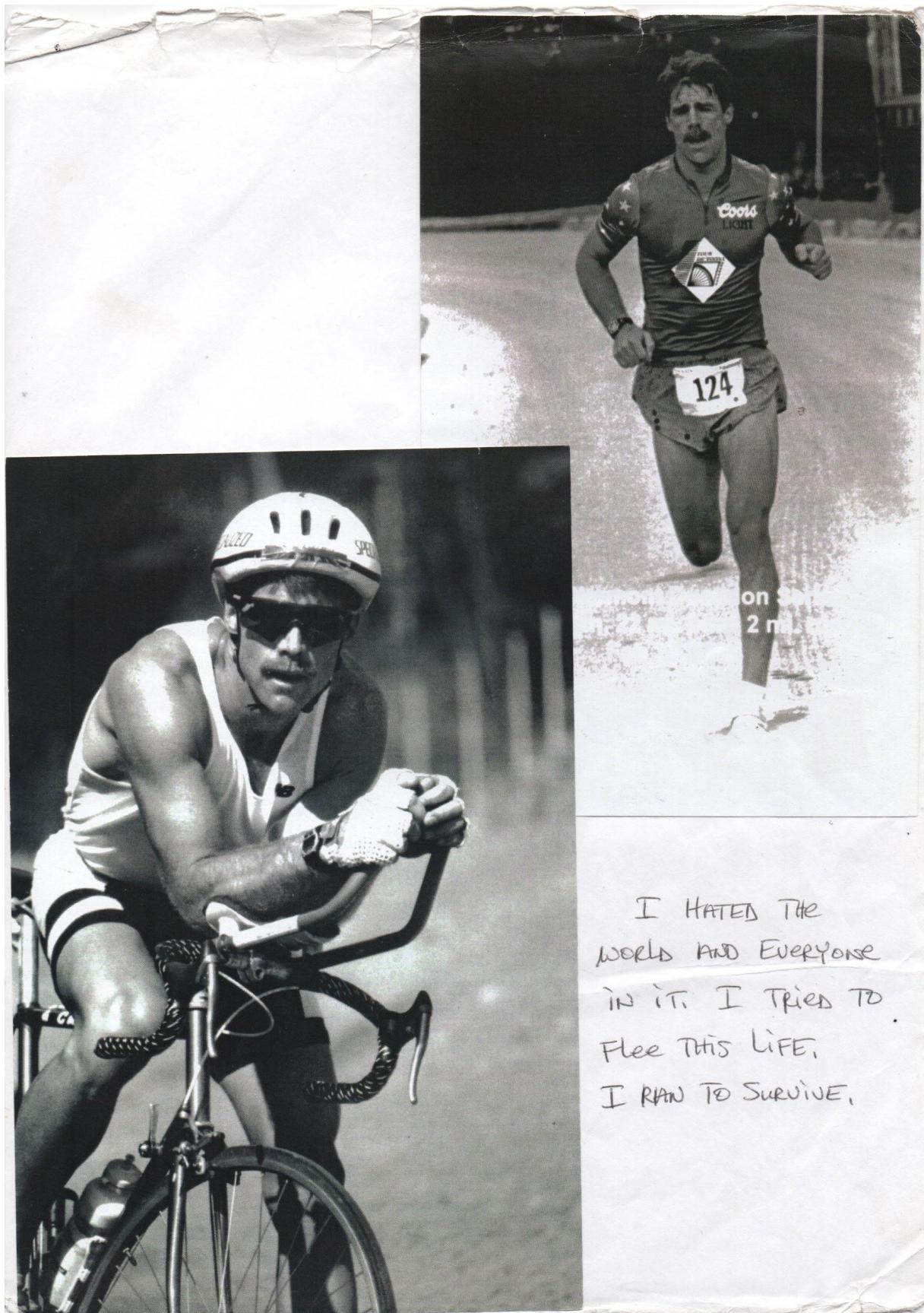
The closest I came to a rather foolish yet legal advantage over my competitors, was drinking 2 oz. of acidic-tasting, midstream urine in the morning. Yes, it was my own "Golden Gatorade." Along with fermented rice experiments, my Russian coach at the time promised success with the "urine shots." Since my training partner and I could not keep the Dixie cup steady enough through all our belly laughter, this medical madness lasted all of one month.

At the elite level, athletes know who is cheating and who is not. Often they are familiar with their competitors from repeatedly crossing paths at sporting events around the world, and can tell by the muscle structure and the accelerated improvements in physique and performance who is taking what. I was quite surprised by friends and training partners who had vials of steroids lined up in plain view in the door of our shared refrigerator. I didn't think they would be ones to cheat, but maybe it was my naiveté at the time.

After the World Championships in 1995, sponsors were supporting me to continue my career at the Tour de France, but that very next season is when widespread, systematic doping took hold in that famous race. Had I gone to Europe, I would have cycled headlong into the pressure-filled world of money, fame, and the biggest cheating scandal in sports history. Though I was tempted by the possibility, life had other plans for me, and I thank my lucky stars I didn't have to face the choice of having to cheat to compete. I sometimes still wonder what it feels like to participate in that greatest cycling event of all, but let us raise a Dixie cup toast to fair play!

Success gave me confidence of qualifying for the Duathlon World Championships in maybe two or three more years. One random day while out training with some professional riders, a wave of spirit-filled awareness washed over me. It was an intuitive, prophetic sense that my goal would indeed be fulfilled.

With that realization a great peace enveloped my future training, and the typical stress and struggle came to an end. I would still have to wake up every day to put six to eight hours of effort into practice, but I felt a new ease. It still came as a surprise in 1994 when I achieved first place in one of the ten World Championship qualifying races around the U.S. I'd joined the race as practice rather than to win it all, and so it had felt easy and comfortable. Maybe it was the lack of pressure on myself, but I was quite stunned to win my age group, and I became a member of Team USA for the World Duathlon Championships two years earlier than I had planned.



I HATED THE  
WORLD AND EVERYONE  
IN IT. I TRIED TO  
FLEE THIS LIFE.  
I RAN TO SURVIVE.

I remember calling my sister Sue to report the news. Through the years she had reined me in when I overtrained, prodded me on to fulfill my dreams, and nursed me back to the bike or track after injuries. During these years this younger sister gave me an even greater gift than any athletic success, the honor of raising her son Andrew. She was a single mom; I was her birthing coach and through tear-filled eyes I was the first person to see my godson's head crest into the world. My heart was overflowing with wonder, awe, and incredible joy. I would put Andrew in a backpack and off to the woods we would go, introducing him to the healing elements of nature. I pushed him in a stroller on three-mile loops around the neighborhood lake in Seattle and we played in the sand for hours on end. This was my period of fatherhood since I would never marry or have children of my own. Forty years later it is still the most sacred, awesome gift of my life. Sue and Andrew would often drive or fly to support me in out-of-state races, so she was the first person I called, to tell of "our success".

I felt ecstatic and elated thinking of all the hard work, training, and the days, months and years of discipline and devotion to one singular goal. I had reached the pinnacle of sports success, the ultimate moment in my life. I had the tiger by the tail.

Then it hit me like a ton of bricks: the realization that everything I had worked for in the last 25 years, everything I had been conditioned to believe about success and happiness, was not true. It was gone, over, disappeared. There was no permanent happiness where I was taught it would be found.

At this moment I received my 'spiritual slap,' an experience or event that thrusts a person inward, causing dramatic change in one's perception of life. The concept of happiness I was taught to aspire to as a child, and had carried with me throughout my life, was always something to be obtained in the future, when I became famous or successful. The source of happiness was outside of me in objects, relationships, or experiences. Always another thing to dream about, to strive for. I realized that dream was empty. I began to question and unlearn everything I had been taught. I began to seek the Truth.

These realizations rattled and awakened me with a full and mighty force. It shook my whole way of being in the world. In that profound and painful moment,

I started questioning everything about life, God, and myself. "There must be some other reason for living," I thought.

Any slap we get from the world is to move us inward. It is a blessing of Grace, for our own benefit. Our true longing is home within, and the world will continue to toss and buffet us until we stop chasing shadows and the illusion that happiness is outside of us in the objects we perceive. This realization certainly does not diminish the pain or suffering triggered by the slap. Indeed, that pain is both the poison and the cure.

Standing on the mountaintop of athletic achievement, the only way for my life to go was down.

The top 1% of racers in the USA competed one month later at the National Championships in Chicago. I had the sixth fastest time on the cycling portion of the race, and I was confidently gaining places coming into the transition area for the second run. I felt sure of a place on the medal podium. Early in the race I had noticed just a slight breeze blowing off the water from Lake Michigan, yet because it was June, I hadn't been concerned with the air temperature. Jumping off the bicycle and into my racing shoes, I had unknowingly started the second run with my glycogen stores completely depleted and hadn't realized my body was in imminent danger. Weaving side to side with blurry vision, I remember wanting to lie down and sleep. I screamed out for help to a race official before collapsing on the racecourse with hypothermia. I was rushed to the hospital in critical condition, given five liters of IV fluid and wrapped in blankets with warm water circulating around my body to keep my core temperature up. My sister Mary and her daughter were at my bedside and I was delirious, unable to remember anything about the race or how I had gotten to the hospital. I was scared and shaking uncontrollably. I thought I was going to die.

Discharged from the hospital and driving away from Chicago, I quietly accepted that my racing career would soon be over. A few months later I attended the 1995 World Championships in Mexico, but did not compete due to a longstanding injury that had grown worse. I was content with simply making the USA team, as that had been my goal all along, and I enjoyed the friendly camaraderie with my teammates and competitors from all over the world. I left Mexico feeling content, without any 'what if's or I could have been' to haunt my

future. Without any nagging regrets or loose ends, that chapter of life naturally closed behind me. I had not trained much since Nationals and a couple months later I started having withdrawals like a drug addict might experience. I was going cold turkey, crashing off the natural chemical cocktail of endorphins which had kept me high for two decades of training and competition.

I knew Dad had sometimes experienced brief post-race depression, but I had no idea what I was about to experience after ending my athletic career.

This was the beginning of my freefall into “the dark nights of the soul.” Songs, people, and other synchronicities affirmed my destiny to board a plane East, far East. The following writing, which I spontaneously read, was a powerful affirmation that it was time to go.

A long and difficult journey is before you; you are preparing for a strange and unknown land. The way is infinitely long. You do not know if rest will be possible on the way nor where it will be possible. You should be prepared for the worst. Take all the necessities for the journey with you. Try to forget nothing for afterwards, it will be too late and there will be no time to go back for what has been forgotten, to rectify the mistake. Weigh up your strength. Is it enough for the whole journey? How soon can you start? Remember that if you spend longer on the way you will need to carry proportionately more supplies, and this will delay you further, both on the way and your preparations for it. Yet every minute is precious. Once having decided to go, there is no use wasting time.

Do not reckon on trying to come back. This experiment may cost you very dearly. The guide undertakes only to take you there and, if you wish to turn back, he is not obliged to return with you. You will be left to yourself, and woe to you if you weaken or forget the way - you will never get back. And even if you remember the way, the question still remains - will you return safe and sound? For much unpleasantness awaits the lonely traveler who is not familiar with the way and customs which prevail there. Bear in mind that your sight has the property of presenting distant objects as though they were near. Beguiled by the aim toward which you strive, blinded by its beauty and ignorant of the measure of your own strength, you will not notice the obstacles on your way; you will not see the numerous ditches on the path. In a green meadow covered with luxuriant

flowers, in the thick of grass, a deep precipice is hidden. It is extremely easy to stumble and fall over it if your eyes are not concentrated on the step you are taking. Do not forget to concentrate all your attention on the nearest sector of the way - do not concern yourself about far aims if you do not wish to fall over the precipice.

Yet do not forget your aim. Remember it the whole time and keep in yourself an active endeavor toward it, so as not to lose the right direction. Do not be overcurious nor waste time on things that attract your attention but are not worth it. Time is precious and should not be wasted on the things which have no direct relation to your aim. Remember where you are and why you are here. Do not protect yourselves and remember that no effort is made in vain. And now you can set out on the way.

-George Gurdjieff

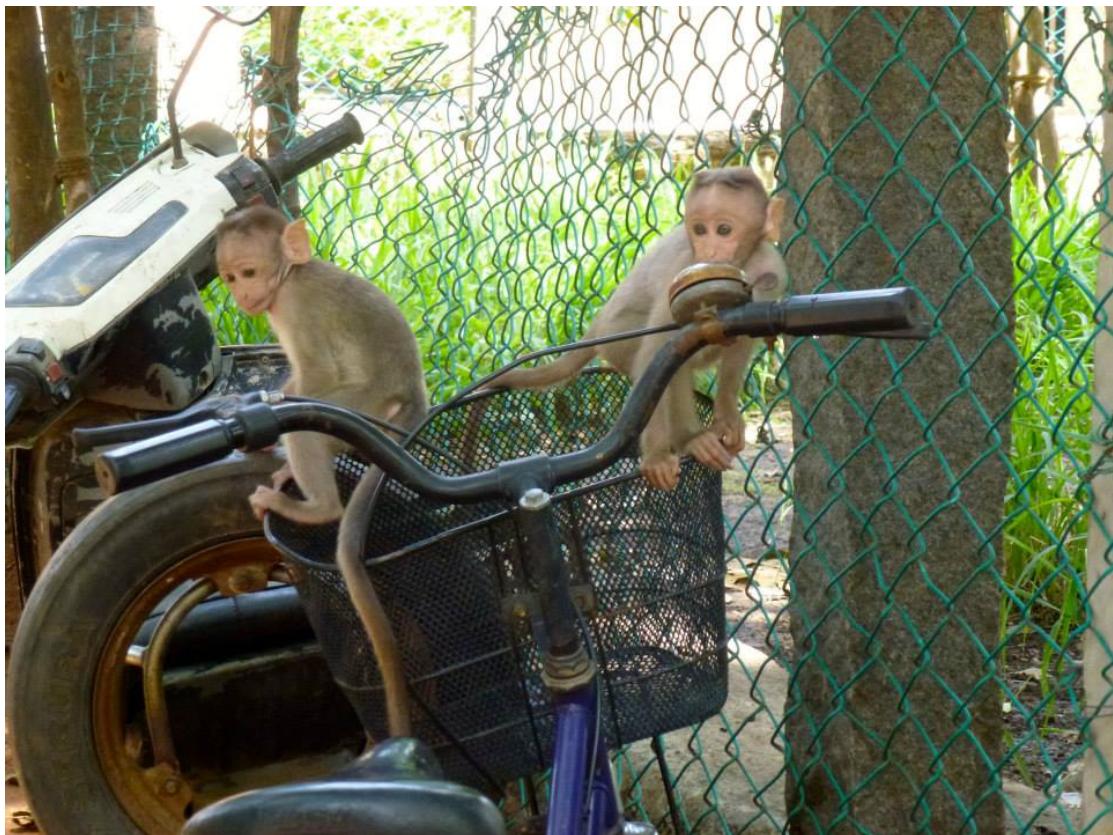
November 1997. The jumbo long-haul plane landed on the dusty runway, surrounded by the biggest slum in the world, and the most powerful sense of coming home swept over my being. The feeling was profound, palpable, and undeniable.

## *The Fragrance Of India*

I step off the plane at Bombay International Airport. Before long, the essence of this country bellows towards me and seeps into my soul. It does not wait for me to reach the exit: pregnant air gushes at me like opening the door to a sauna. "Welcome home," it speaks, and my being comes to rest. This air in India is ethereal, hot, and heavy. It is ancient, one of the loveliest smells I have known. Laden with the fragrance of humanity. An earthy, essential smell. India, where life is lived on the open streets. Children are born in the streets. Men still walk about half or fully naked, if a religious sect, on pilgrimage. Some wear the single white loincloth of days gone by called a dhoti. Children run nakedly free. (I will sometimes buy them sandals for their comfort, but within ten minutes the novelty wears off, and I turn to see the gifts discarded for their natural preference, bare feet.)

I exit the terminal and my senses expand to secondary smells. Incense fills the nostrils morning and night in the shops, homes, and temples. Diesel and carbon fumes spew from buses, trucks, and millions of now-motorized, black and yellow rickshaws. Cumin and coriander, turmeric, and saffron mix with the odor of sacred cows that stroll about freely, protected by the rules of society. Feces blot and dot the pavement. Smelly monkeys roam trees in nearby temple complexes, using telephone wires as sidewalks. Goats, chickens, and pigs wander wherever they can feed themselves and escape the fate of the shopkeeper's axe, if only for one more day. Add to this scene the spittle of Pan, a red chewing tobacco enjoyed by men, women and teens splattered everywhere. No wonder, it is said, not a piece of ground in India is not shat or spat on.

The smells of animals, incense, and diesel blend with the fragrance of humanity and fills my lungs. A mass of humanity. Here live 1.5 billion inhabitants of the second largest population in the world. I feel re-born here, as a smile broadens across my face. My heart and soul are uplifted. I am home. Home.





The day after my plane landed, I was standing on a street corner in Bombay. I was nervous, excited and wide open to adventure. An old woman with leprosy approached me and lifted the stumps at the end of her arms up to my face asking for money. In the same moment I deposited a few coins in her deformed hands, a man on crutches with one leg was passing behind her. Without hesitation, she turned and gave half of her rupees to him. After years of traveling around the world, I knew I was in a country more unique than all others.



I would live and travel across India for six months each winter for the next 23 years. I wanted to know this place and why I felt so at home here.

I walked round holy mountains and made pilgrimage to distant temples. I rode on the tops of buses and slept between railroad cars. I held babies in my arms who gently coaxed the doors of my heart to burst open, and I almost died in a local village hospital, where dogs slept under the nurses' desk and monkeys climbed through the windows to steal my bedside crackers.

I lived in a cave for two months in silence with a sage who threw flower petals in loving playfulness at visitors. This inward-facing time of silence provoked questions and observations. “Why can children, who possess none of the objects or experiences that we consider the source of happiness, why can they skip down the street in utter joy?” “Where does their happiness come from?” “Who or what is this “I” that I call myself and is always present, while thoughts, feelings and

experiences come and go?" I was aware that my spiritual life had changed direction. From my institutional Catholic upbringing, I was now looking inward for the Truth.

Realizations and writings arose from the silence:

*Shadows*

We live as if we are shadows not knowing we are the sun,  
thinking there are many, not seeing we are One.

We seek here and there outside our very home,  
thinking we are separate, an illusion of being alone.

We've wandered from ourselves to distant foreign lands,  
not knowing that the Truth is right within our hands.

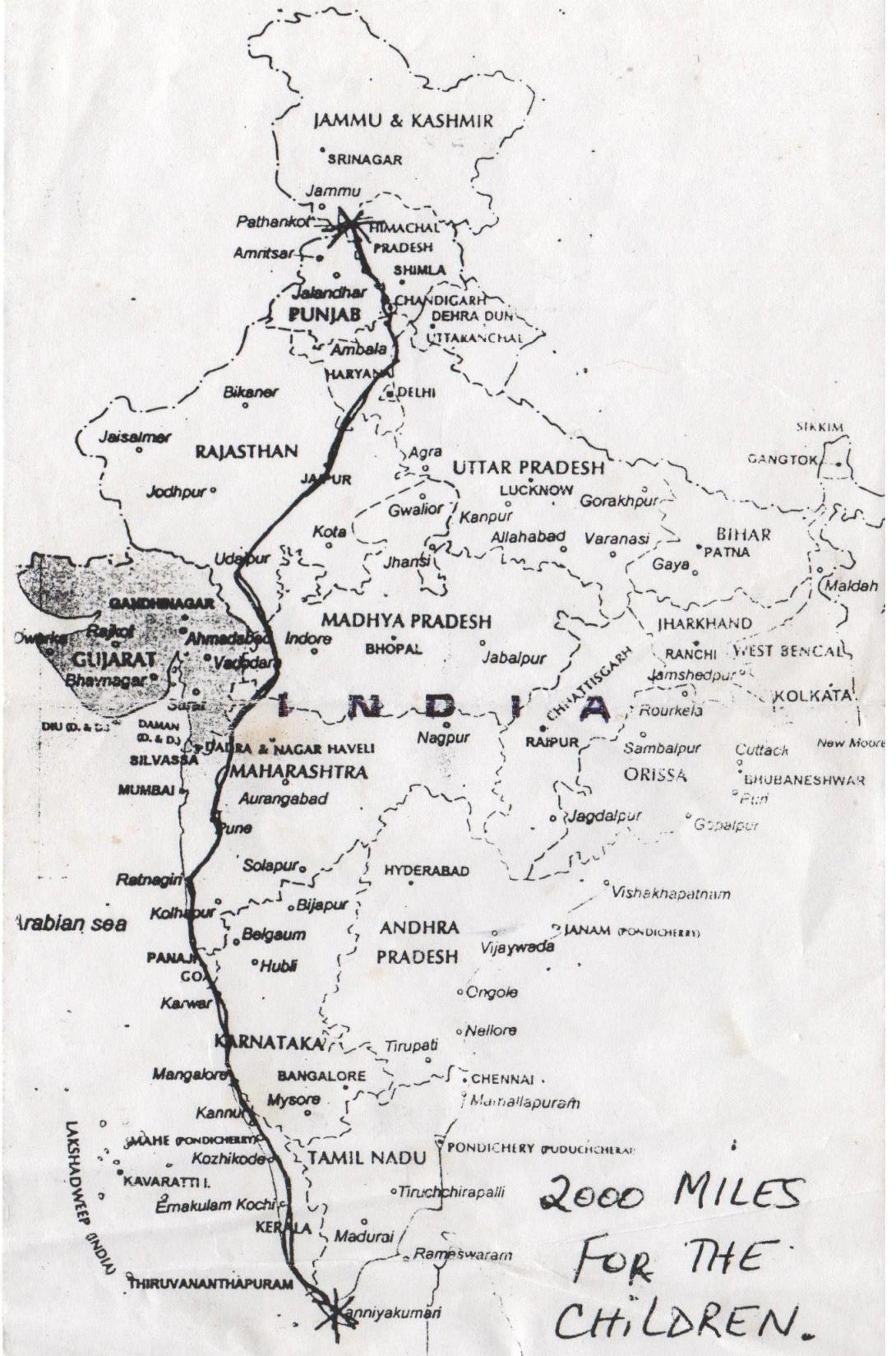
All that you see is just a passing dream,  
things you think are real, are not as they would seem.

We live as if we are shadows not knowing we are the sun,  
thinking there are many, not seeing we are One.



I explored ashrams and sat with wise and faux gurus both. I accepted *darshan*, or blessings, from a “Divine Mother,” who hugs thousands of devotees every day.

I was physically pushed back by an indescribable power emanating from the eyes of 93-year-old Mohammed. He was a Muslim Sufi *mast* who spent 50 years hunched over, gazing at shiny objects on the ground, intoxicated with the God he saw in them. I saw in his gaze freedom and beauty like the open sky, and his glance taught me the power of faith and devotion.



2000 MILES  
FOR THE  
CHILDREN.

One year I rode an English one-speed bicycle two thousand miles, from the city of Kanyakumari at India's southern tip to the far northern village of Dharamshala. On that pilgrimage, I saw a 12-year-old boy crushed to death under the wheels of a sand-laden truck right in front of me. In broken-hearted grief and physical exhaustion, the locals warmly consoled me, a random, cycling foreigner. I could not escape the image of that boy's death, and I did not want to get back on my bicycle. My sorrow quickly turned to anger at life, and death. I pedaled on with my inner wounds into the desert country of Rajasthan.

Here is classic India. Men in bright colored turbans with handlebar moustaches and deeply crevassed, coffee-colored hands. A lit cigarette between bloated, leathery fingers. Goat and camel herders, mirage-like, as if born from the parched, dusty landscape itself. Hardy, strong women with the tinkling ankle and wrist bangles wearing handmade, brightly colored dresses adorned with tiny mirrors stitched around the chest. Face-filling smiles and huge gold hoops in women's ears and noses.



My senses came alive, my spirits rebounded. I pedaled further north and my body regained strength. Coming over a mountain pass near the end of this trip, I was brought to my knees and wept a second time, moved so deeply by an expansive panorama of the mighty, majestic Himalaya. I was in tearful awe. These peaks stand like whitecaps on the ocean, wave after wave stretching to what seems like forever. These glorious, powerful monuments are truly breathtaking.



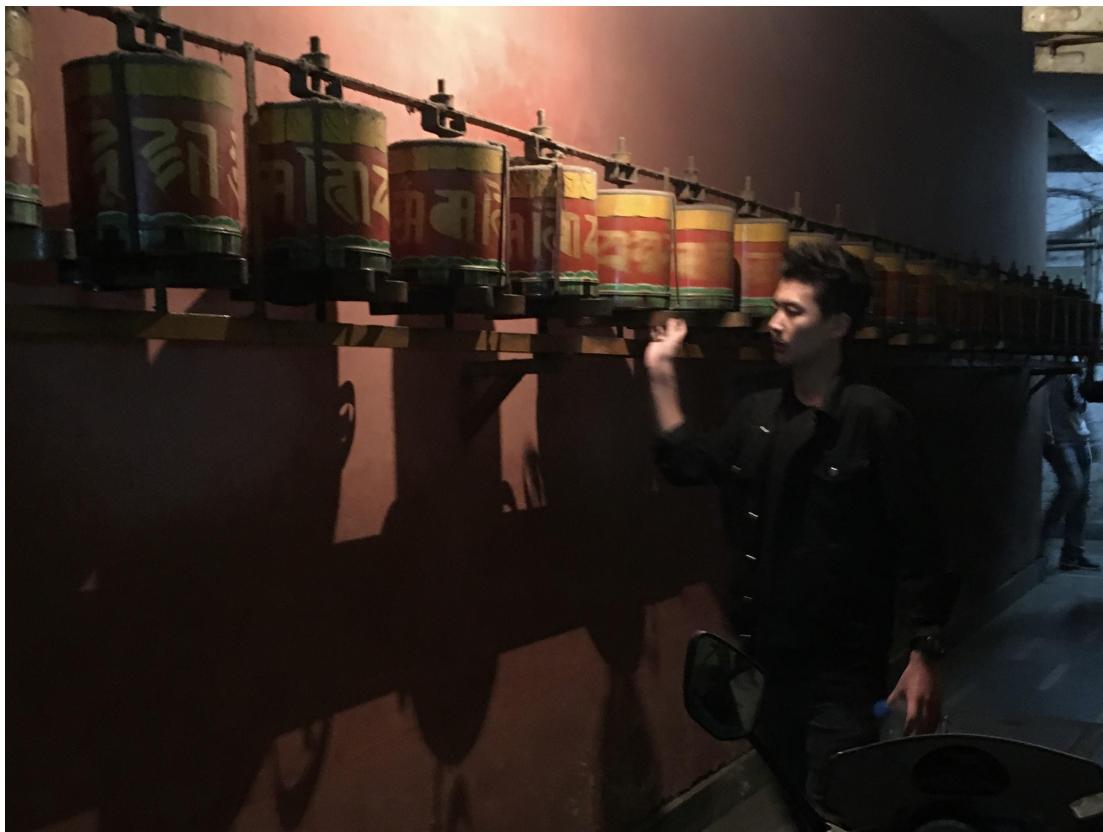
Dismounting my wheeled steed, I bowed low in humble, sacred smallness at this natural beauty beyond the capacity of words or photos to capture.

You must see these godly mountains someday. Make a note of it.

Colorful prayer flags waved and welcomed me as I ended my journey in the mountain-side town of Dharamshala.



Dharamshala is the soulful town where Tibetan refugees escaping Chinese occupation of their home country first landed in India, and it is still a haven of Himalayan Buddhist culture. It is also the home-in-exile of the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibet, and 14<sup>th</sup> incarnation of Chenrezig, the patron saint of Tibet and a *bodhisattva* committed to helping mankind. Tibetan elders saunter silently through the streets, praying constantly with their holy beads and spinning colorful prayer wheels.



Tourists and locals chat in two-table cafés, where hearty thuk-pa noodle soups and freshly made momo dumplings delight the palate. Roadside vendors sell brightly colored sweaters and woolen hats that help thwart the mountain cold.



At the end of my journey, I thought it right to make a gift of my bike, my faithful “highway camel” and “road horse,” so I knocked on the door of the Dalai Lama.

This bicycle had become God to me. I'd been dependent on my two-wheeler, but not just as a mode of transport. She'd been my partner and a trustworthy companion who'd carried me through two months and over 2,000 miles of adventure, sweat and tears. I loved this bicycle. Presenting it to the Dalai Lama seemed a fitting, sacred goodbye ritual. A perfect end to the trip I thought. Ironically, I was told the Dalai Lama was visiting my country of birth at the time. What the Holy Himalaya, go figure!



On another pilgrimage, I swam the Ganges River in Varanasi, the holiest city of the Hindus. Here I sat for two weeks in a meditative quiet on the riverside charnel grounds, where corpses are cremated in the open twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year. It was on the Ghats I realized that my essential identity is not this body. Death is not personal. My true Self is infinite, whole, eternal awareness.



The Hindus say if you are lucky enough to die in Varanasi, you will immediately rise to heaven. Perhaps I'll be back one day, to test the truth of it.

I thought there was an I, and so there is.

This I is not 'my' I but THE I.

## *There She Is*

They carried a body through the streets today, down to the river's edge where the burning-ghats are. Ghats are commonly rectangular stone slabs, like a porch with a cutout in the center, where a dead body is placed on wooden branches for cremation. Steps lead from the stone slab down to the water. The height of the wood pyre communicates your status. A ten-foot-high stack is common for the Brahmins of the highest caste or government officials, and maybe four or five branches are placed under a laborer.

Since much of life is lived on the streets here, a wedding or funeral passes by me just about every day. Funerals are not held behind closed doors or performed in secrecy. In India, the body is carried on a makeshift bamboo stretcher shouldered only by men. Sometimes the body lies on the back of an open funeral vehicle, slightly slanted up for viewing. It is easy to see the age, skin, and expression on the face of the deceased.

Mourners follow behind in procession, marking the walk to the burning grounds by throwing handfuls of orange and yellow marigolds and garlands of jasmine. Many times this is a lively affair with dancing, drinking, drumming, and firecrackers.

I propose this ritual be held through the streets in Western countries. It might lessen the darkness and fear of death.

In the West we dress up the body, put it in a pressed suit and pretend he's not dead saying, "Oh, he looks so good," at the wake. We also keep children hidden from this most natural and imminent experience of life.

In India, the matches are lit under the wooden sticks and the whole thing is right in front of you. After some time the body splits open with a pop, the skin sloughs off and the inner torso is exposed. Ashes and smoke rise into the air, swirling around in a dance. Above your head rises mortality without façade, makeup, or lipstick.

Death is there, and when you face it, it is not so frightening. It becomes another experience of life, and it is never far away. It is healthy to see death going

by in the streets. "Look, there is Death. Look how close she is. I almost forgot about her today, but hey, there she is, no denying her. There she is."

I stepped down from the train at the very southern tip of India as news came that a tsunami had just hit. It was a dreamy feeling and the loudest silence I had ever heard. The animals were silent, the cars and trucks seemingly quieted, the people's voices were hushed. The sea, which had just violently buried thousands of people under its surface, was likewise still and quiet. I felt rattled and anxious, sorrow-filled, and empty.

I soon heard of friends who were missing, friends who had died, and others who could not be accounted for. Retreating to the house of a local family, I was given a private room to regain my senses and get some rest. I wept in emotional exhaustion. For forty-five minutes, random snapshots of my life flashed through my awareness, like pictures on a movie screen. I grabbed paper and pen and the following writing was the result.

## *Acceptance*

One day I will not hear the cry of a baby or smell his fuzzy down hair. I will not see the sun rise or set. One day birds will not sound in my ears, nor the slapping of clothes on rocks as they're washed by the dhobi wallah of India. I will not smell another springtime, nor a rose in summer. The sheep's bell in Spain will not touch my ears one day, nor a snowflake brush my cheek. My eyes will no longer see the seaside in Portugal. The fragrance of a woman will not pierce my nostrils. The salt of her lips will not be on mine one day. I will not hear church bells in Sweden nor smell a summer night. The brown eyes of children in India, I will not see again. The embrace of my sister, sand between my toes. I will not feel love through a telephone nor see a bird glide across the sky. The green tree will not be the greenest anymore or the blue sky the bluest. I will not put him on the bus for the first day of school.

I will die. Your smile I will see no more, and I will not return across the sea to your doorstep. I will not smell baking bread. Nor fresh cut grass. Nor the scent of one who is old. The sea there will not be seen by me, nor will I say goodbye or good morning again. The rustling leaves will not be heard by me or the cry of a newborn. I will not hear the door shut behind me, nor the words "I miss you."

I will not hear the singing birds; I will not hear them again and the white clouds drifting home will not see me. The cock will not be heard. The clatter of a train, the blue of your eyes. One day I will die. And the summer rain will not touch my head, nor the wind kiss my cheek. I will not lie down to bed nor awaken to the smell of morning. A glass of water will not wet my throat, nor will I be able to embrace you.

I will not see your face. One day, I will not see your face.

India's images, experiences and influences can hardly be described, especially to those living in Western societies. India is ancient, beautiful, bizarre, majestic, and mysterious. Only one word can describe this place. *India!*



In the town of Tiruvannamalai in 2003, I was working at a second-floor internet shop when two small figures emerged from the roiling street below. Despite their faces, which were deformed by multiple tumors, I had never seen such beauty, grace, and dignity in any two persons before, and in that moment my life turned on a wholly different course. But I am getting ahead of myself.

After my first 6-month trip to India in 1997, I returned to Seattle where I had been living. In June, I was expecting to attend a huge family reunion in Boston. Of 250 relatives, I was the only Lynch that did not attend, and the clan wondered about my absence.

I had certainly been planning to go, but a trigger arose that changed my plans. It was a routine call from a cell phone representative telling me I needed to pay a recent bill. That conversation ignited unconscious anger and rage so powerful and alarming, I was truly afraid of what might happen next. Wanting to

kill a bill collector over a thirty-dollar debt was so far from rational that I hung up the phone without ending the conversation and ran to my room. I pounded my fists into the bed mattress as memories of being molested by a Catholic priest came flooding into my consciousness, wave after wave. It was the same rage-filled energy that had propelled my running for twenty-five years, all the way to the World Championships.

*You stank of Holiness. Your ugliness penetrated me as you held my head back and told me I enjoyed it. Your lies filled me, and your darkness seeped into me. Your ugliness and darkness tortured my soul. You told me it was ok, you told me it felt good. You bastard, you bastard of Holiness. I spit your seed out of me. I expel you from myself. You were fat like your prick. You stank. You pushed your lies deep into my body. You bastard, you whore.*

I was furious and pounded my fury into the mattress for two straight hours. I was alone, utterly alone. Every person had fled, life itself had evacuated. Even God had fled. I was that alone in the darkness. After this frightening power was released from my body, I collapsed in tears and grief. I drifted off to sleep for twelve hours, waking in the morning to another two hours of terror being expelled from me.

### *Images Of A Sexual Molestation*

The meteor came from the heavens with the thrust of a thousand lions. I rested in myself, my innocence. Flailing, barreling direct. With no self-control, an irresponsible force of life. With the sound and speed of Zeus' thunder, it raged towards my earthliness. Penetrating the atmosphere, unchecked flames of might propel it forward. The sound of fury and destructive majesty. Plunging, crashing might, that threaten annihilation.

I began to write, and a clear image came to me. A 9-year-old frightened, vulnerable boy standing at the foot of a towering mountain. A mountain of sorrow and shattered innocence.

These words followed: *No longer will you avoid this. You will not go around this mountain, over it, or through it. You must move this mountain of pain, stone by stone.*

Utterly depleted, I could no longer outrun the memories of being sexually abused by a priest at nine years old. Thirty years of running had exhausted my escape route. After so many years of inward isolation, it was time to turn around and face myself, and what I had been running from.

Life unraveled. I was seeing black, feeling black and living in a black hole. Ending my life seemed the only way out of the pain I was experiencing.

I spontaneously realized, the only way out was within, the only way to survive was to surrender. So, one night soon after my life had come undone, I walked out under the stars and let go. I surrendered to whatever power was above my head. Like a trapeze artist high above the ground, I had let go of the swinging bar and fell freely, totally untethered, trusting that the bar would return to me from the void.

The student was ready, and my teachers began to appear. I knew nothing of the blackness I found myself in. I retreated alone to a tent in the mountains for 3 months.

My only thought, “How will I survive what I have to face?” This song played on the radio that same day, and offered affirmation of what to do next:

Gather your deeds and your possessions  
Whatever certainty you've known  
Forget your heroes  
You don't really need those last few lessons  
Stand in the open  
The next voice you hear will be your own  
Well alright, they knew how they could hurt you  
And you let them cut you to the bone  
But god forbid  
You allow them to rid you of your virtue  
Forget their laughter  
The next voice you hear will be your own  
The next voice you hear

The next voice you hear  
The next voice you hear  
The next voice you hear  
The next voice you hear  
The next voice you hear will be your own  
Throw down your truth and check your weapons  
And don't look to see if you're alone  
Just stand your ground  
And don't turn around whatever happens  
Don't ask directions  
The next voice you hear will be your own  
The next voice you hear  
The next voice you hear will be your own  
--Jackson Browne, *The Next Voice You Hear*

## *Fire*

The Olympic mountains stand jagged and snow-covered, a 40 minute ferry ride across Puget Sound from Seattle. I packed a tent, water, and a bunch of health bars left over from my sports career.

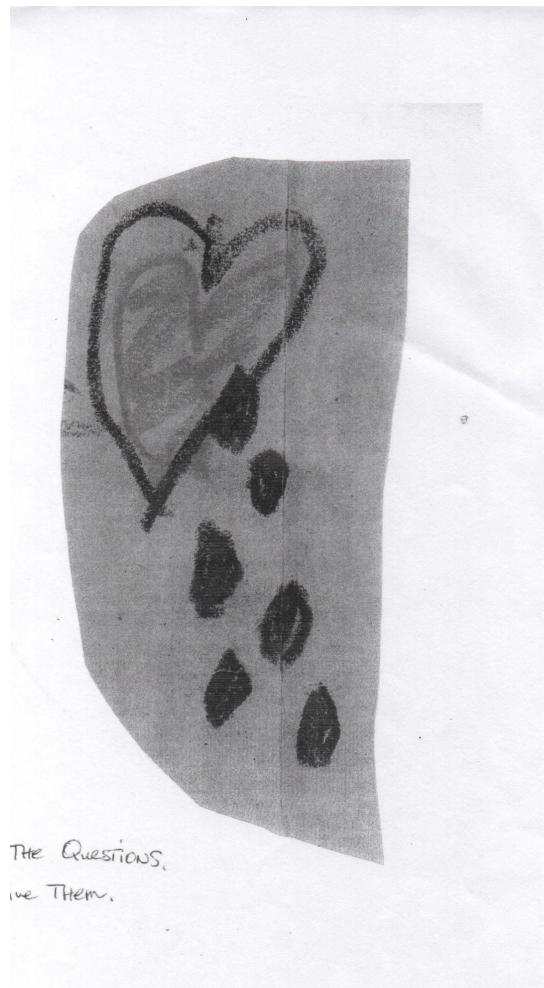
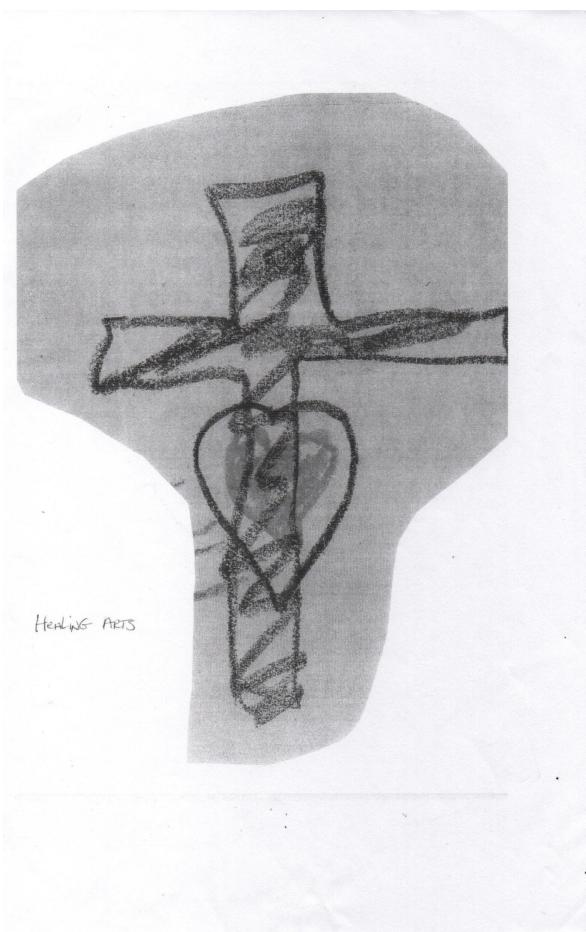
Pine-needles softened my six thousand foot ascent to Marmot Pass, over fields of scree and still deeper into the backcountry beyond the ridges. Where no person could hear or see me, I would ritualize my sorrow and pain.

I shaved my head and hiked mile after mile until exhaustion brought me back to my tent at nightfall. I cut and buried rosary beads in the ground after each rage filled "Fuck You." I made cocks and crosses out of mud and tree branches, violently smashing and burning the splintered pieces. I wept and screamed at the

top of my voice and the mountains echoed back to me. I was totally alone, being burned in a fire of purification. I wrote. I drew pictures. I scratched words and messages in the dirt and on scraps of paper, like this: *Grieve as long as you must, for grief has its own timeline. And the tears of grief shall water the growth of your soul.* I recovered strength in my tent as days blurred into weeks. I was a man trying to break free from an unjust prison sentence of guilt and shame.

Silent trees and mountain peaks sanctified my madness and rage. Hillside wildflowers were watered by my tears of sorrow. Clouds and sky caught my cries for help. Black bears witnessed my healing from a distance.

I sat on a high plateau shaking through the chilly night, while marmots scurried support around me. Under the silent stars I watched the moon roam fully across the sky and finally sunrise warmed my body and soul. Nature held and healed me.



Winter loomed. When the zipper on my tent froze, the same compassionate friend who had brought me to the mountains, pulled me out of the frosted forest. Renewed and strengthened spiritually and emotionally by my healing in India and months on the Olympic peaks, it was time to face the Catholic Church.

Feeling fragile and vulnerable in the moment, I asked Mary Liz to make the phone call from Seattle to the Archdiocese of Boston and I formally reported my perpetrator. An urgency rose in me to protect any other child from experiencing what I had. "If I could save just one other kid from being sexually abused," was all I felt pounding in my soul.

The church employee who answered the phone told us my abuser was on his deathbed, and that there was nothing they could investigate. He died two

weeks later. Many secrets were buried with this man. He was freed in death, and I felt imprisoned in life. It felt brutally unjust.

So began my struggle for justice with the Catholic Church. I wanted them to reveal the truth and acknowledge what had happened to me, and this phone call was the first of many that would land on deaf ears and end in frustration, distrust and anger. The church protocol was to delay and deny, emotionally abusing victims by hiding the truth. I wanted to hear these three things: "I believe you." "It was not your fault." "You did nothing wrong."

Many victims were not believed in the first place. They were lied to, and even re-abused after telling someone they were raped. In the recent past, it was common that the victim was blamed for what happened to them. I continued in therapy and started on pharmaceutical drugs for the suicidal depression I was experiencing. Though I took myself off the meds in three months, I wanted an end to the pain I was feeling.

The winter of 1999, my fortieth year, was the darkest season of my life. It was a living hell. I often woke up at two in the morning and walked the streets of Seattle in darkness, restless and alone. I lived with bodily anxiety that became destructive, feeling like I wanted to jump out of my skin. I was in the belly of the beast, barely functioning except to continue the journey inward.

Mary Liz lovingly gave me shelter and food since I was like a child who couldn't feed himself. She was a true blessing in my life. For three months straight, I sat in front of her fireplace each evening staring into the flames, where I found some soulful solace from the pain.

## *A Healing Session*

Do you have someone you can cry with, heal with? Then do. After a while of practice-crying, cry some more.

Then throw in the “Fuck you” sessions. Assume the form of a vulture, while your nose and lips have shame and guilt dripping from them. Do not hurt yourself, but cry until sadness is flowing from your eyes and your broken heart is splattered across the room. Until wailing and howling fill the air, the sound of a wounded dog, and it is you.

Your shattered heart vibrates and pounds in your chest as every sensation of shame begs to be released from within. The pain has been festering inside you for so long. You really start cursing with fury and force and the room is saturated with the sorrow of lost childhood. There is no way out. Then the deeper tears start coming and you weep and cry from here to there because healing has nothing to do with time. After years of inner work, you get up off the floor, then you begin healing.

I felt my brain pathways re-wiring. Thoughts, sensations, and perceptions were shifting from shame, fear, and contraction, to joy and opening. There was release and softening in my body. I was starting to see the world in a different way.

## *Boston*

I decided to move from Seattle back to Boston in the summer of '99 to reconnect with family. They wondered why I had missed the reunion, dropped out of sight and cut off all communication. I had no clue what was gathering momentum on the East coast while I was struggling to survive in the West.

I arrived in Boston to a shocking front-page story of a young church employee, arrested for molesting many children at the same church Father Sam, my perpetrator, had been assigned to for 20 years. Investigators found recording devices installed in the walls of the rectory where he had lived. A photo of Father Sam was pinned next to the peephole. Police confiscated videos of children being sexually abused.

The story and pictures hit me like a typhoon. I was scared and confused. The public demanded answers, and an open forum with investigators was quickly organized.

The meeting was held in a gymnasium full of families and parents who were angry and frightened for their children. I attended that meeting with my Mother. Authorities revealed only tidbits of information and skirted direct questions, making parents even more anxious and angry. The tension was palpable and rising.

A reporter sitting behind me leaned over my shoulder. "Do you think maybe Father Sam was involved?" "Do you think the young employee was molested by Father Sam as a child?"

My mother turned and looked nervously into my eyes. I could not believe what I was hearing. That reporter knew nothing about me, my family, or my story. She'd shown up to investigate Father Sam's 'possible' role, and she was sitting right behind one of his victims.

After years of therapy in Seattle and sadhana in India, I felt strong enough to speak publicly now. The problem was that Catholic Boston was not quite ready to listen. Devotion ran generations deep here. Parishioners still perceived the priest as above the law, as God himself. Church authorities tried to isolate the story of that youth worker as an anomaly, but even without every detail, I knew

the depth of the coverup. This story was a powder keg and the match had just been lit.

I made many phone calls to authorities, but when none cooperated, I took my protest to the front door of the residential compound of Cardinal Bernard Law. A few days later another paper unwound the story further, exposing more cases of sexual abuse. With the media digging deeper and deeper into the scandal, the Catholic community was growing increasingly anxious and defensive. Placing myself physically in the middle of such a volatile situation left me vulnerable to many threats. My family worried for my safety.

I mostly sat alone and in silence during my protest, yet some friends did come occasionally to give support and encouragement. My intention was to be visible, and so bring attention to the issue of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church to the lay community. I slept in the cemetery across the street at night and returned to my sacred patch of grass under a solitary tree early in the morning. My Mom showed up on the sidewalk one day and I was profoundly moved by how loving that simple act was. We said little, but I knew how much courage it took for her to come, as the mother of a sexual abuse survivor, but still a devout Catholic and overcoming her personal wounds and fears to support her son.

I planned to fast for the full forty days, living only on water. I had practiced fasting for shorter periods before, and it was a powerful spiritual experience that gave me tremendous inward strength. After three weeks, some fellow survivors thought I was trying to starve myself to death as protest. I gave in to their loving pressure and added honey and cayenne pepper to my fasting water. I ate some food from my mother and a friend who lived nearby.

From the journal I kept during my demonstration in the summer of 1999:

*Day 22.....The Silver-Haired Bandit*

I had just finished my morning meditation beneath the small tree that had become my steady companion. I had willfully carved out sacred space amidst the clacking of the Green Line trolley and the scurrying students of Boston College. I began my morning ritual up the barren stretch of sidewalk running along a four-foot-high stone wall of Cardinal Bernard Law's residential compound and the seminary for new priests. In my days here I would contemplate the story of David

and Goliath, its significance in my present attempts at justice with the Catholic Church. I reached the end of my walk and turned towards my devotional tree. A woman in her late sixties was intently reading the two small handwritten signs that expressed the reasons for my protest, and before I could accept this “feel good” show of solidarity, the passerby glanced left, then right. She lunged across the sidewalk, tucking my signs beneath her arms. My eyes widened as the silver-haired bandit turned to make her escape in my direction. Aw shit! Like watching myself in a dream, my hands become sweaty. The thief was advancing up the sidewalk to where I stood dumbfounded. Damn! Should I wrestle Silver-Hair to the ground? Allow my uncomfortable bellyful of laughter to express itself? Would my days under the tree be shortened by jail time?

I love a good mystery, so I will let you guess the outcome, perhaps revealed later.

This was one lighter moment during my 40-day protest. Sadly, 80% of the public were angry or aggressive towards me at this time, flipping me the middle finger and screaming out their car windows for me to “get a job.” 20% of passersby gave me a thumbs up or stopped to offer quiet words of support. Two dreadful years later, those percentages would be fully reversed.

A month later I stepped in front of the powerful cardinal as he exited a conference of priests at the luxurious Park Plaza hotel. His entourage of bodyguards surrounded him to intimidate me. Tears running down my face, I humbly asked the Cardinal to tell the truth, so victims living in limbo could move forward in their healing process. With the media closing in on us, he patronizingly patted me on the head and asked me to pray... for him! “Steven, I was just telling the truth to fellow priests inside the conference,” he said. The pious one was lying in my face. The cover-up continued in Boston.

A few days later I contacted Joe, a man who had been quoted in the newspaper and seemed hell-bent on getting to the truth. He and I, joined along with fellow activist Anne, took our protest to the Holy Cross Cathedral where the Cardinal held weekly high mass.

From 2000 to 2002, the height of our protests, each Sunday the fifty feet of sidewalk here at the Cathedral came alive with uprise, healing, and history-making events that reverberated across the USA and eventually throughout the world.



More 400 protesters, including members of a group called Speak Truth to Power, demonstrated yesterday against Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick in front of Boston's cathedral. Cardinal Law did not show up for Mass.

Survivors and supporters organized, marched, held signs and stood in silence, Sunday after Sunday. We shared stories of abuse and healing, we cried together and sang together, and collaborated to bring our stories to the public. Week by week our numbers grew, as did anger and evidence. We acknowledged a palpable, energetic vibration of historical change, sharing an experience much larger than any one of us. Together we held our ground against Goliath. It was incredibly empowering to feel so connected to all who came to the sidewalk, whether they came for one day or one year.



One burden each survivor carries is knowing that the whole story of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church will never be told. The crimes go wider and deeper than anyone can imagine. The cover-up of crimes orchestrated by the Bishops, has been massive and prevalent for generations, condoned by State powers invested and enmeshed with the institution of the Church. In Boston, the Church and State have been comfortable bedfellows for decades. By withholding information, the Church and police worked together to keep victims separate and silenced. Parents in my own community called to tell me their son had been molested by Father Sam. The District Attorney and two different investigating bodies gave me conflicting stories of how many victims of my perpetrator had already come forward. I felt so confused and angry, frightened and frustrated. An objective,

outside investigation was never performed. The bigger story at the parish of my abuser was quickly and efficiently swept under the rug. After speaking out publicly, I received death threats via the internet and phone calls in the middle of night, listening to stories from other victims. Locals told me that my perpetrator drove his black luxury car around town to influence officials with lots of money. Lawyers wanted to share information with me in shadowy restaurants, while other influences demanded my silence. It was a confusing, chaotic time for me while continuing to heal and deal with unsettling emotions and memories.

There are seven rehabilitation centers across the US for pedophile and alcoholic priests, yet not one for the victims of these same perpetrators. For every priest being served and supported in these so-called ‘sabbatical centers,’ there are multiple victims living in silent agony. Church leaders have known all along that there were, and are, thousands of victims.

I spoke at many protest events and shared my story, but a realization came to me clearly one day. Even if I could expose the Church’s crimes and inform people around me, I would still have the broken heart of a 9-year-old boy. This awareness pushed me back inward, and I accepted the task to use my suffering to end my suffering. I would do whatever I could to find relief from the emotional and spiritual pain.

After that moment, I intuited when to speak publicly and when to stay home. I was living with my sister Mary at the time, who would lovingly sit next to me and witness my continued healing. Days came and went as I lay curled in a fetal position on her floor, going within myself and releasing blocked memories of grief and loss that lay dormant inside me. Fear had contracted my body and entombed my Truth for far too long. The discipline, endurance, and strength I’d trained with years of running, were the same characteristics I invoked during this long journey to peace. I placed my hand over my chest, closed my eyes and gave words to the pain deep within my heart.

I did not ask for this abyss of sorrow to be taken away. I prayed for a slight film to cover the chasm, stretching over it so that I might not be consumed by it. I prayed for the courage to survive it, trusting that people would hold me from falling, and the strength to heal. I wanted to live.

Mary held space for me and held me in her arms for many days. I am forever grateful to my big sister.

I learned that healing is not linear. I would come one step forward and two steps back. Allowing all and every emotion to arise, without trying to fix or pushing any sensation or emotion away. Deep sorrow would dissipate but then return with less heaviness. There would be plateaus that felt like stagnation but were necessary times of rest and recovering strength to continue the work. The physical pain of sexual abuse manifested less often over time. Eating healthy and sleeping well, spending time in nature, exercise, and alone time in silence were important elements in my recovery. The people I expected to understand and be there for me did not come to pass, but teachers and guides showed up spontaneously in many forms to support and affirm my journey. I had to fully surrender and learn what faith and trust in life is.

Some days the pain of healing feels so huge and monstrous, and I struggle with survivor's guilt. I have many friends who did not make it through the dark nights to reach the other shore. The task to heal from sexual abuse is monumental. To mend a splintered soul, a ravaged body, and a shattered heart, is the toughest race I have ever run.

Spokespersons for the Archdiocese continued their bamboozling at press conferences. They were puppets of the wizard behind the curtain, Bernard Law, and the lies they told were followed by more lies. Ray Flynn, former Mayor and a devout public spokesperson for the Church, kept his faithful finger jammed in the now-bursting dike. Lawyers for the Catholic corporation were rolling in money. Many families' generations of generous donations now funded the Church's legal battles.

The families whose children had been molested were now seeking justice. Private lawyers started representing hundreds of victims coming forward. Survivors and supporters were coalescing around the 'Sunday Sidewalk' protest and the anxiety in Boston was palpable.

Thousands of spineless priests, who previously stood aside as children were raped, continued watching from afar in silent apathy and obedience to powers of the Church.

Strangers approached me on the street with questions and support. I felt buoyed, yet vulnerable and exposed. Attorneys gained access to increasing volumes of hard evidence, justifying the growing righteous anger. Patrick McSorley, a young husband and new father well-known in our community of survivors, died of a rumored suicidal drug overdose during our protests. Anger and cries for justice rose higher still. We all sensed that something was about to break.

Finally, one courageous female judge, Constance Sweeney, took the “good old boys’ club” to task, ordering moving trucks into the Archdiocese compound and retrieving 11,000 pages of documents pertaining to pedophile priests. She bravely broke the Church’s historical ability to commit atrocious crimes without fear of reprisal.

In 2002, the house of cards that was the Roman Catholic corporation of Boston came tumbling down. The generational cover-up came to light, revealing the Church’s criminal underbelly. The public was left wondering if the paper trail would lead all the way to the Vatican.

The Cardinal’s public relations team was on the defense as calls for his resignation and imprisonment began. Protests erupted in Los Angeles, New York, Kentucky, and Seattle. Media teams from Ireland, Australia and Sweden descended on our sacred sidewalk. Protesting voices gathered strength, and the emotional temperature in Boston was at a peak. The powder keg was ready to blow.



### *Speaking Truth To Power*

“Steven, you’re not going to...”

My body lurched forward. After that first step landed in the direction of the Cardinal, I surrendered in complete trust. With no plan and no idea of what next, it all just happened. As I reached the foot of his pulpit, Bernard Law paused to begin the homily. The congregation in the packed pews fell silent. He towered majestically above my small, nervous figure like the great and powerful Wizard of Oz. He noticed me and his face winced, making a disgusted expression of “How dare you approach my throne, you small being.” I will remember that expression of condescension forever.

I heard my voice. “I am standing before you to take back my power. Victims have names and faces, and I’m standing for all those who ...” TV cameras from around the world recorded history unfolding, and out of the corner of my eye two undercover cops in trench coats sprang from the pews. Wrestling my arms, they escorted me in willing surrender to the back of the Cathedral where I had been standing just minutes earlier, and handcuffed me.

The Cardinal's spokeswoman, who knew of me, whined loudly, "Steven, what are you doing? You can't do this, you're not allowed to..."

"Donna, I just did," I said aloud. The two unshaven Irish policemen reeked of the definite smell of O'Malley's Pub, and anger arose in me at their disrespect for sanctity. I was sweating now as the officers took me into the expansive basement, with Donna tagging along and berating me incessantly. They were trying to intimidate and put the fear of God in me. I felt so alone. I was paraded roughly through many doors and dimly lit rooms as Mass proceeded above. I wondered, if not for Ms. Donna being there, would my ass be throttled in the bowels of the Cathedral? Maybe the Irish officers were just too hung over to put a thumping on me that morning. The winding walk scared the hell out of me and though it felt like an hour, the shakedown lasted maybe 20 minutes until we finally climbed a set of stairs and burst out a side door into the light of complete chaos.

The police were hoping for a secret escape to dodge the media, but as we stepped outside journalists thrust microphones into my face and shouted questions. Cameras recorded and protesters bellowed through the bullhorn, "He's telling the truth!" "Arrest Bernard Law!" I finally felt safe.

With sirens squealing in the background, my anxiety rose, and the police tightened their hold on me. We waited far too long for a police car to arrive before I was finally thrust into the back seat and sped off to jail. Ironically, I felt relieved. The booking officer further calmed my frayed nerves, leaning over the counter whispering, "I wish I had the balls to do that ten years ago."

As the noise, chaos, and my emotions abated, I took a seat in the holding cell and drifted off to an emotionally exhausted and welcome rest. It had been a long day in Irish Catholic Boston.

After I was bailed out of jail by my protesting friends Richard and Ann, an old college buddy sat jittery in his car, waiting to hurry me across the state border for my own protection. "You know the Catholic Church has done far worse to people for speaking the truth," he started. He could sense my fear and anxiety as we continued our long drive up the coast of Maine in silence. After hours on the road, we finally stopped at an out-of-the-way diner for food and a

much-anticipated night's rest. I was unnerved one final time that day as a young waitress took our orders.

Pointing to the dusty TV set in the corner of the café, she asked "Did you think you wouldn't be recognized way up here?" I grimaced shyly in tired acceptance as the nightly news broadcast today's events.

For the next few days, Good Morning America and other major television crews from New York stationed themselves in front of my Mum's house, asking if I would appear later in the week on national TV for a more in-depth storyline. I felt some guilt that she had to deal with all the drama and chaos by herself, but she consoled me with, "I just stopped answering the door" and "Don't come back until you feel safe, Steven." She understood my fear and embarrassment to be thrust into such public exposure, especially concerning the taboo issue of sexual abuse.

A month or so later a judge let me off my two charges, trespassing and disturbing a religious ceremony, with a glorified scolding.

"No more surprises for the Cardinal," said the judge. "Don't come within 600 feet of his cathedral."

"Yes, your honor."

I informed the judge of my annual trips to the far east, and that it wouldn't quite fit with his demand that I meet weekly with a parole officer in Boston. He accepted my bargain.

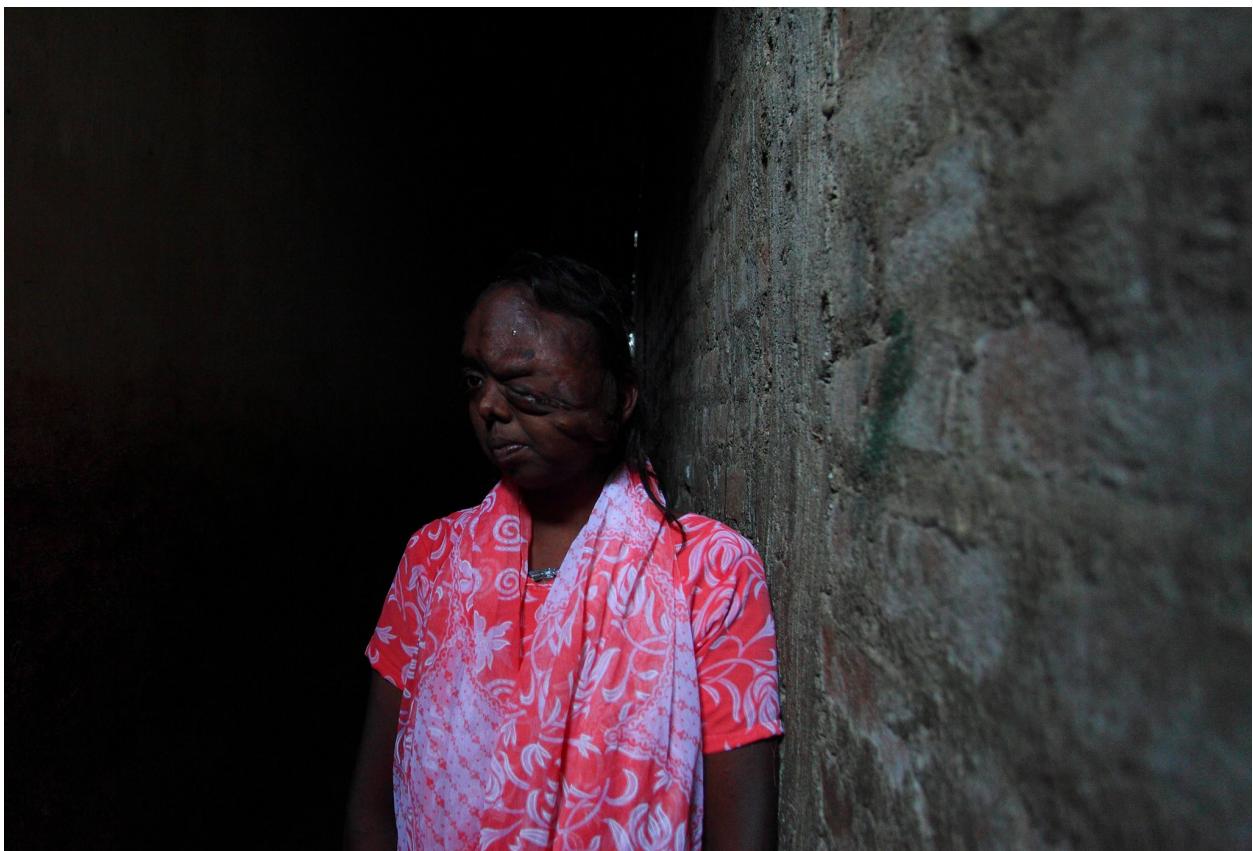
"Mr. Lynch, why don't you spend the next six months in India until things cool down around here."

"Yes, your honor."

A few days later I took the judge's advice and boarded a plane.

## *The Face Of God*

In the town called Tiruvannamalai in Southeast India, I was working on the second-floor balcony at a local internet shop. Rumbling caused me to look down at the dusty, packed street below where people were pointing, shirking back, and spitting comments. Then two small, vulnerable figures emerged from the parting crowd. I felt awkwardly unsettled as my heart jumped in awakened love and compassion. A boy and girl with intensely deformed faces blew the doors of my heart wide open. I was looking into the face of God, Reality revealed. I saw these two children, without names or judgements, just as they are. Never had I seen eternal beauty in two human beings until now. In this moment I realized all things are vessels of the divine.



At the time, Jayanthi was 14 and moved in statuesque grace with a maturity beyond her years, even as bystanders mocked her or turned away. She was filled with light. That light shone through her deformity and enlightened her physical presence. My heart pounded in awe and wonder. Her arm was around her brother Silambarasan protecting, mothering, comforting him. His image was heroic, and I sensed his inward strength. They were both small and vulnerable, yet mighty, divine. I realized them as God.

For the second time in recent years, an unseen force pulled me down the stairs, across the crowded street, and into the front door of the kids' school. I entered in total surrender to the complete unknown. This holy moment was my resurrection from the "dark nights of the soul," and these two courageous, tender beings became my teachers for the next 15 years. So profound and deep was our connection, that after their father died some years later, I felt they were my own children.

Shortly after their births, doctors had offered Jayanthi and Silambarasan's parents a sum of money to end the siblings' lives, since medical specialists foresaw years of suffering and struggle for the children. Even for the strongest person, being born in India can be a brutal fate.

When she was younger Jayanthi had a prophetic vision in the temple where she was performing puja, the act of worship. She saw into the future that one day she would receive healing from her deforming condition. She and Silambarasan suffer from Neurofibromatosis, what the western world calls "Elephant Man Syndrome," which manifests as disfiguring tumors on the face and body.

In the marketplace Jayanthi would tug on the shirtsleeves of adults, asking if they were the ones destined to help, and years went by as she waited and prayed patiently.

Her family owned a small breakfast shop at the front of their home and the kids with abnormal faces were told not to show themselves, as customers would threaten to stop eating there. Except for intermittent school, this brother and sister were mostly kept out of view of others. This is when my life met theirs and as our story would later be told, they saved my life, and I helped them receive medical treatment.

## *A Mountain Of Grace*



The mountain called Arunachala is where the well-known sage, Ramana Maharshi, sat in a cave for sixteen years in total silence. After an awakening experience as a teenager, he began his teaching of "Who am I" to thousands of pilgrims who flocked to Arunachala, who sat in surrendered devotion at the feet of this loving and Grace-filled master. On the full moon every month, between one and two million pilgrims silently circumambulate this holy peak barefoot, offering their hopes and prayers to Shiva. Jayanthi, Silambarasan and I would stand for ten hours here at the foot of Arunachala each month. We did this for two years under the searing Indian sun collecting donations for their future medical treatment.



My friend Laura Breault, a school teacher from Hanover, Massachusetts, was the devoted and strong power behind my efforts. She brought her Nantasket-Hull Rotary Club on board and Laura responded to my requests for help year after year. We organized fundraiser road races in the US, music nights in India, and, with the help of Pat Hendy and her friends, a film screening fundraiser in Australia. If not for Laura Breault, there would not have been a Project Om Shanti. From the beginning, the project has been blessed with fortuitous happenings and donations from people all around the world.



How can I explain the odds of a world-renowned plastic surgeon, Dr. McKay McKinnon, responding to my hastily written email to ask his help with the kids in India? Dr. McKinnon is from Chicago but gives two months of the year to helping children with this same disease in many foreign countries. He, I, and so many others around the world would finally fulfill Jayanthi's prophecy of many years ago.



How can I tell you of these two young kids, who with trust and patience entered my life and my heart, and in helping them receive medical treatment, I was graced with a life far more fulfilling than chasing my own personal desires. Jayanthi and Silambarasan have sweetly and courageously touched the world, one person at a time.

You must meet this young man and woman whom I cherish and honor and speak of. You must find out why this “Mountain of Grace” has descended upon us all and upon Project Om Shanti.

I now invite you to share the story of Jayanthi’s childhood prayer and how it blossomed into a medical and educational collaboration between acclaimed surgeons from India and the USA and the possibility that many more lives may be helped and healed in the years to come.

## *Back To Boston*

### SPEECH GIVEN TO GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON SEXUAL ABUSE, Boston, 2002

I want to speak with you all to address some of the questions I've heard on the radio and in newspapers concerning sexual abuse by clergy: "Where are all these men coming from?" "Why didn't they step forward before?" "Why didn't they tell the truth?"

A simple answer, my fellow man was not ready to hear the truth before. Many men and women did tell someone. They were lied to, not believed, or re-victimized for what they said. Some were beaten for telling the truth.

Can you understand that I was 9 years old when this happened? The world was big, the people and powers that surrounded me were big, at 9 years old. Do you remember being a child that small?

My parents, my neighbors, everyone in my society revered the priest as God himself. So, a 9-year-old boy is in the room with God, and there is unfathomable shame and pain. Excruciating stress, psychological confusion, and fear absolutely fill this room.

What do you think happens? Does a 9-year-old boy blame God or shame God? It was an unresolvable, incomprehensible experience at 9 years old.

Do you understand what I am saying to you? The priest said Mum would go to jail if I told. What does a 9-year-old child do with that? So, I stood in the middle of the street that I grew up on and I screamed. I held the back of my legs near my buttocks because I had been anally penetrated by the priest and I raged and screamed my pain.

But you did not hear, you considered it a childish temper tantrum. Perhaps It was too much for all of you then, and my fear is that it might be too much for all of you now. I'm frustrated you still don't hear all the screams.

At that point, at 9 years old, I had to choose to possibly be molested again or have my parents' love withdrawn. To be abandoned by my family, friends, and the town I lived in. My fellow man was not ready to hear the truth. Do you know what a choice that is, psychologically, for a 9-year-old child to make? Do you understand me? I chose survival. I ran and I ran.

Now, at 42 years old, I must choose again, knowing some people will feel threatened, not listen, and even send me death threats, which they have done. But I am telling you I will not betray my own heart. I am telling you lawmakers and I am telling leaders within this church; I will not be silenced. I will not run away again. I will not betray that little boy. I will stand and speak for that little boy, and that little boy will have his voice. Maybe it is just too much to comprehend, to fathom.

Can you understand the sorrow, the loss of a childhood that did not just slip away but was stolen from me? Fearing the world I would have to live in? Given a prison sentence of shame and sadness I may never be released from? Not feeling safe in my own body. It takes a long, long time to grieve so much loss, to cry so many tears.

I do not want your pity and I do not want you to fix it, because you can't. You cannot give me back my childhood. Allow me time to live through the healing of it.

Support the victims coming forward to heal the pain, grief, and sorrow of such a loss. You can listen. You can witness. Realize that your fellow man coming forward is afraid, vulnerable, and wounded. We are returning to a world that threatened to destroy us. A world that hated us and never heard our screams. Maybe it is just too much for all of you, to acknowledge such an experience. Do you hear the screams? Do you?

You could hear a pin drop in the crowded government chambers in the Capitol. Then, supporters and survivors rose in cheers. We had finally found our voices.

Years of protest evolved into reformed laws and documentation of the Catholic Church's systematic crimes and cover ups. The number of victims of sexual abuse by priests is staggering, as documented in [bishopaccountability.org](http://bishopaccountability.org). We supported survivors' healing and we educated groups of Catholics who could no longer deny the facts about their institution.

A pebble called Justice, dropped in the waters of Boston, rippled across the globe. The documentary movie *Spotlight* portrayed the story in Boston, winning accolades and awards and bringing further attention to our cause. The Sunday Sidewalk demonstrations, ground zero for exposing sexual abuse by Catholic priests, continue to play their role in survivors' lives, 20 years later. Groups like STTOP.org and SNAPnetwork.org support survivors to speak truth to power.

As I look back on years of protest and my confrontation with the Cardinal of Boston, I see that I was playing a part in something far bigger than myself or any one of us.

As I continued to grow and find healing, a day came when the words of Buddha deeply resonated with me: "Events happen, deeds are done, yet there is no individual doer thereof."

From my years of seeking Truth in India, I realize that life is simply happening and experiences, whether I label them good or bad, right or wrong, they do not touch my essential identity.

My body and emotions were brutally scourged as a child and life became a fearful prison, but my eternal Being is whole, self-aware, and peaceful.

Evading criminal prosecution, Cardinal Law was soon flown to Rome. Betraying all evidence, and the pain of so many victims, the Pope elevated Bernard Law to a higher position in Vatican City.



Bernard Law would not return to Boston for the rest of his days. Sadly, I was on the other side of the world, not with my fellow protesters, when news reached me.

I was alone in an internet café in the Himalayan mountains. I didn't expect this change would happen, that justice would come, or that I would ever love the world again. I felt enormous relief, like finally crossing the finish line of an exhausting footrace.

I let go. Tears tumbled down my cheeks, proof that I had *survived* this brutal childhood experience. The tears also reminded me there was life to be lived. I felt at peace.

People sometimes ask me about forgiveness. Forgiveness is not an intellectual endeavor, feigned or mimicked because others suggest it is time to move on or get over it. You slowly heal and live into forgiveness. It comes from within, naturally, in its own time. It releases the one who is forgiving from being emotionally and spiritually bound by experiences or memories.

I forgave my perpetrator three times over the course of my healing journey. First, I visited his grave, pissed on it in rage, and forgave him psychologically. Second, it came emotionally after a healing therapy session. The final time, I cried in deep spiritual forgiveness, emptying the darkness from my heart.

Survivors must also live with the questions that will naturally arise. Why did I survive this, when so many friends committed suicide or drank themselves to death? Why me? Where was God? Why didn't anyone help?

Someday, long into our lives, perhaps an answer will bring resolution and peace, wisdom, and freedom.

*For the Beloved.....*

*Tin Man Of Udaipur*

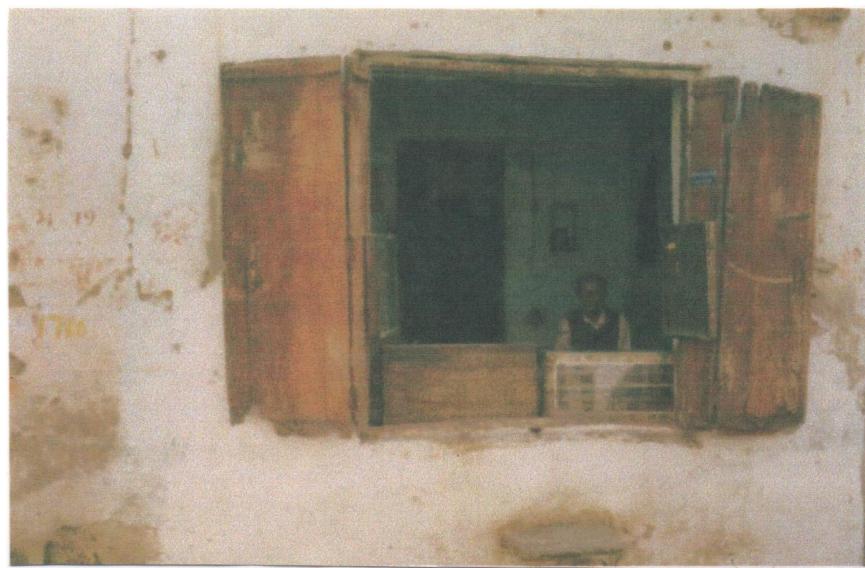


I wondered if he was trying to avoid death, as he filed tiny pieces of tin into fine shapes. I watched as his face became thin and his breathing labored. His eyes never stopped shining with eternal life. The same light I experienced when my mum and uncle took their last breaths.

Meeting the Tin Man was a spontaneous happening in a meant-to-be way. Whenever I was in Udaipur, Rajasthan's 'City of Lakes', I would stop by his place to say hello.

His home and shop were the same welcoming, simple, ten-foot-square room. The drab paint peeled from the walls. Cobwebs hanging from the tube light and electrical wires fell onto the floor soaked with oil from his metal-shaping. After so many years, the floor was saturated and slick, but he didn't seem to notice.

He had moved into this room fully after his wife died some 25 years back. The Tin Man was 90 now, or so they said. He slept, ate, and worked here, behind a pair of crooked shutters that looked onto the main road. When open, the wooden shutters framed his window to the world, just two feet away from cars and crowds surging by the shop. Not many noticed the now-hunched-over Tin Man, plying his rings and tinkering away in a hole in the wall. Only sacred street cows showed interest, poking their heads in for a bite of left-over food. I was fulfilled by the simplicity of our friendship and the silent love between us. We both felt it energetically, and being together unfolded with ease and a natural comfort, as if our meeting was awaiting fulfillment all along. His warm and welcoming smile invited me in.



As his death drew near, I wanted to sit with him more often, drinking chai together as had become our custom. With no chairs to be had, sitting was always on the concrete floor.

Language differences didn't allow many words. Hand gestures and facial expressions worked sometimes, but silence was our preferred speech. Usually for two hours every day, he sat in his place, and I in mine, and this was my first lesson from the Tin Man: We all have our part to play in the dance of life.

Tin Man was a gentle soul, seeking no company but always welcoming, focused solely on his work though known to all the locals. He had weather-wrinkled skin from life in Rajasthan's desert country. His hands were worn like old baseball mitts and bent from holding the same tools in the same position, day upon day, year upon year. Those hands formed small tin pieces into rings, medallions, and pendants. Sitting with him for eight years, I had not actually seen him sell even one.

His jewelry was worthless by today's standards but his friendship and lessons to me were priceless. Sitting beside him in silence was soothing and peaceful, like all in the world was in its rightful place.

My train to Bombay was to leave in less than a week. I did not want to go. I sensed I would not see him again. But if I did not leave, his lesson of finding my place in the world would have been wasted on deaf ears. This was his life, his place, not mine.

He had recently stopped using heavier tools that caused pain in his joints. He was tired from years of life piling up on him, but now he was indeed working again: shaping, and blowing fire onto the tin in the old way. He spent an hour on each piece of the tiniest metal. It was an insignificant size of tin that sold for even less significant amounts of money, but I was delighted and proud of my dear friend's patient, precise effort. As he tapped eyes into the face of a snake ring, he was not making profit, he was creating.

My teacher was a man of tin. He tapped, he taught, and I learned the meaning of Grace, by sitting silently in his presence. After all those years contracted from the pain of my childhood trauma, I was again opening to the

world. The Tin Man taught me how to carve out a fruitful life with little money and more soul. He taught me how to care for another person. I felt blessed.

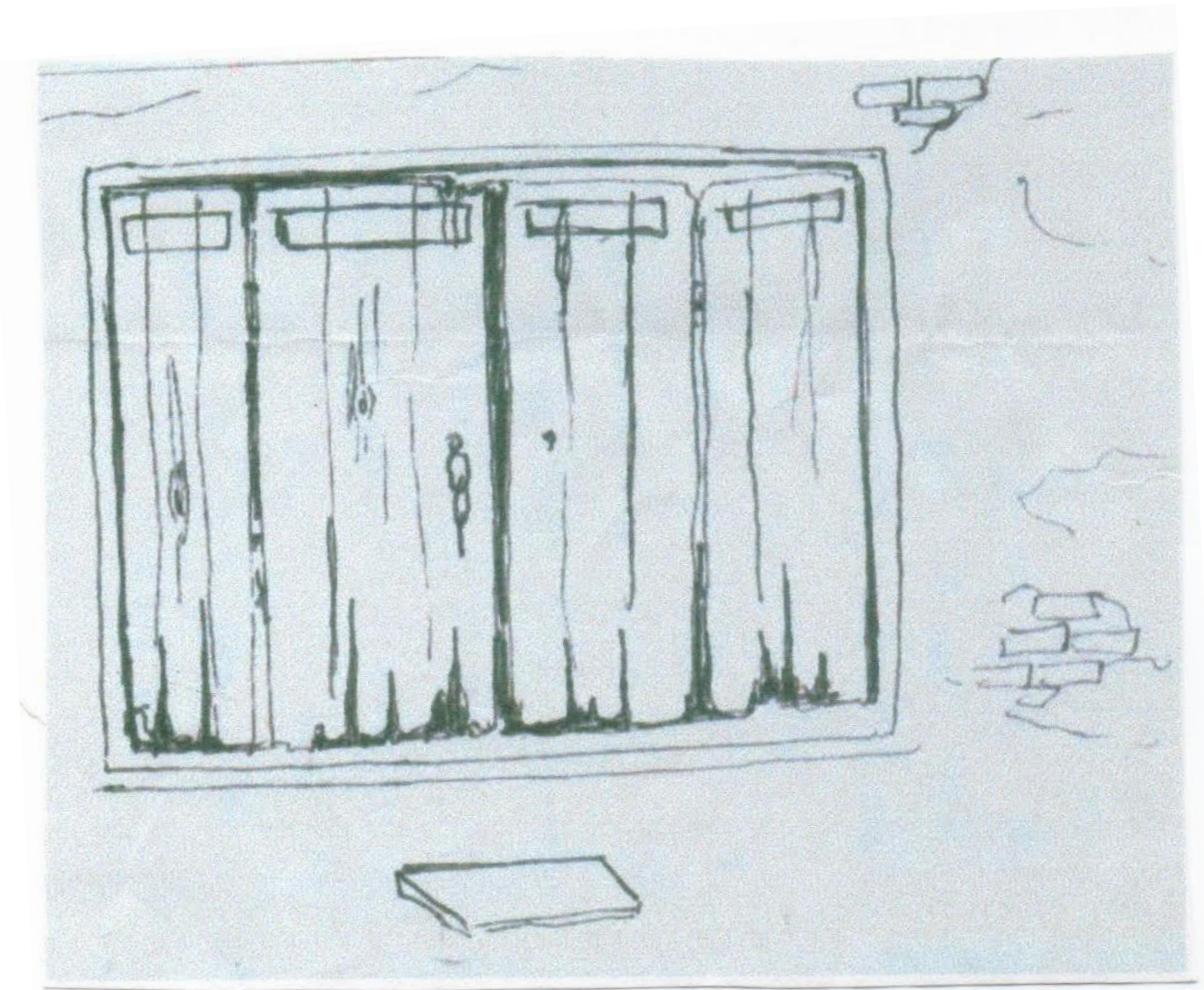
Did he know his influence on my life? He raised his head up from work, glanced over at me, and smiled. His diminishing eyes looked from glasses that were oversized and thick, out of balance with his wiry body. I was like a sponge, soaking in every drop of love that was dancing between us. I was eager for tomorrow's sunrise, but that meant I was closer to my departure. We smoked one last stick of Indian tobacco before he closed the wooden shutters.

He worked on the tail today, the tail of a snake ring. He could still handle the smaller pliers to twizzle and twist the tail into just the right position. He was child-like, exuding the joy and satisfaction of creating.

The tail was the last step before polishing, and I wondered how many snake rings he had made over his lifetime. His medallions hung on the cheapest and simplest string at the front of the shop. The gods and symbols of Hinduism: Siva, Ganesh, Aum. All made from tin, handcrafted by my friend, golden in the early morning sun.



With the help of an English-speaking neighbor, the Tin Man said he wanted to die here in his shop, and I suggested I pay the rent to fulfill his request. Otherwise, he didn't need anything except perhaps a new pair of trousers. I was visiting him in the mornings and evenings now, and as the sun set, he shuttered away for the night. I wondered if he missed his wife. Good night, Tin Man.



This evening he reluctantly agreed to join me for dinner. He was shy and did not often venture from his shop, and never far. Perhaps trust eased his vulnerability enough to take a rickshaw with me to a well-known restaurant. Cane in hand, he strode onto the rooftop terrace exuding grace and dignity. He wore a frayed woolen cap on his head and his old stained trousers with holes, yet I felt I was dining with Prince Siddhartha. He was at ease yet giddy. With so many items on the menu, his eyes lit up in delight, and he chose the most scrumptious foods, things he probably hadn't eaten in years. We seemed out of place in this restaurant due to our age and cultural differences, but the waiters still served us with respect and dignity. I was so happy to see my friend in such joy at our last dinner.

Not wanting to keep him out too late, we finished our vegetarian meal and returned to his room. We both sat cross legged sharing a smoke, until a desert chill sent him to sleep. Two tiny mice scampered across the room.

At sunrise on my last day in Udaipur I walked the short distance through empty streets to his shop. I found him outside, sitting on the opposite side of the road, absorbing the warmth of the morning sun. I'd given him new trousers the previous evening, but I was amused to see the same tattered pants of yesteryear covering his bird-thin legs.

We sipped our first chai of the day and talked about the direction of my travels. My mouth was at a loss for words, my heart full of gratitude. There was no way to express what he meant to me. I was concerned for his health and diminishing days of life, and a simple 'thank you' seemed painfully shallow in this moment.

Unable to accomplish his goodbye to me, he retreated to the shop floor. I sat alone for the first time, as he drew the covers up over his body, then his head. This was his way of telling me, and I accepted. It was all so clearly spoken, he had his place, and I had mine. Now I could go. Without words, he expressed the goodbye I could not.

I returned to his shop two hours before leaving as he sat serenely framed by the opening to his room. I watched each breath in his chest and wondered, Would he even see this summer? Would he wait for me? Tears slowly moistened my cheeks as I struggled with grief. I was so fond of him, and I'll never forget pulling away from his shop. Cap upon his head and a tattered shawl wrapped around his tawdry shoulders, he leaned slightly to one side, held his head high, clasped his palms together, and saluted me with one last loving Namaste. Then he playfully grinned, spread his arms wide, and with hands upward towards the sky, the Tin Man clearly conveyed to me, "It is enough, it is enough."

This is the last image I have of my wise old mentor with a playful childlike heart. My scooter pulled away, and I wept until the train station. Looking up, comforted by an unannounced full moon, I was smiling at the same time. The Tin Man died two months later.

The eight years I had spent with Hari Om were now a closed chapter, part of a larger story. I realized that, like the moon, my life had become soulfully rich, full of love, beauty, and joy. I was fully open to life again. Fly high, Tin Man, fly high.

## *The Mountains of Maine*

I returned from India in 2006 seeking a life of solitude and silence, deep in nature. Fame, money, and consumerism were no longer my reason for living. Many countries were in social and political chaos at the time, and I intended to create a little beauty, Grace, and dignity in whatever small quiet corner of the world I could find.

As a child I'd had three dreams to fulfill: traveling the world, being a competitive athlete and living in a cabin in the woods. I'd done the first and the second, now for the third. I was slowing down at 50, and my recently divorced sister Mary and I drove to the mountains of Maine looking for a new place for her to live. We Lynches have a soulful connection to this state, having spent our childhood at Moose Pond in Bridgeton, two hours south of where Mary and I were snooping around the woods. Mum and Dad had bought a pondside cabin in the seventies, and we spent magical, care-free summers at the water's edge.

Maine is still wild, with mountains, rivers, lakes, and streams running throughout the entire state. Rugged individuals come to these parts to get out from under the rules and regulations of government and to carve out open, independent lives. Many people homestead in Maine or just dive into the woods to begin a fresh, new life. Mary found a little cabin of her own, and then she and I stumbled upon a wildly overgrown parcel of land bordering the Sandy River, a lovely meandering stream.

It was three acres with a broken-down, moldy, ten foot square A-frame dwelling on it, but I felt a powerful connection here, and I meditated nearby for a few days to decide if living here would be possible.

I knew nothing of this western part of Maine, just 60 miles from the Canadian border across from Quebec City. The land bordered the Appalachian Trail, a 2,100-mile walking path stretching down the East coast from Maine to Georgia, but I didn't think much about that fact when we first saw the parcel. I was longing to live in the woods as a hermit.

After my meditation I felt the need to learn more. I went into Rangeley, the nearest town, and asked a realtor about the owner of the land. I heard it was held

by a woman named Andrea, and that it was unavailable. I wrote Andrea and told her about my life, my travels in India and my desire to pursue a life of solitude and meditation. She said, "The land is not for sale, but according to your letter, it seems you are meant to be there, and you are the type I would eventually want to sell to. If you are willing to pay full price, I'll sell it to you now."

Not knowing the fair price for an acre of land up here in the mountains, I signed papers at double what I should have, and a life of solitude in nature had begun. I realized soon enough that when something is meant to be, no amount of money matters. There could be no price for what has come to manifest on this little piece of good mother earth.

I had given up my car some years back and was getting around by bicycle. I would ride the nine miles into town, work for a day landscaping, sleep in the woods, and work another day to make money to feed myself and make the repairs the hut would need. Remembering my Dad's and brothers' teachings with a hammer and saw, I replaced the four-foot-square beams, added insulation, and put a new metal roof on. I framed in a five foot skylight window, and soon had a

livable “hoki hut” to call my own.



Simplicity and solitude are spiritually nourishing, and long days of hard labor with starry, silent nights of deep, peaceful sleep suit my body, mind and spirit. When I first moved in, my presence felt a bit intrusive, but the foxes, black bears, and moose, here long before I was, accepted me onto their land and came to visit almost every dawn and dusk.

The moose stare at me whimsically, “Where the hell did you come from, stranger?” Owls call from the ridges above and below my hut and the broad-winged hawk circles around the clearing, just above the trees. A gray heron periodically glides two feet above the water and swoops around my favorite bend in the stream, where I dip to cool off after sweltering summer days.

I can hear storms coming from miles away, rumbling up and down the mountains and finally booming with lightning over the roof of my simple abode.

Late in my first June here, before I was accustomed to things that go bump in the forest, I stepped out into the dark summer night to relieve myself. Looking across the stream with sleepy eyes, the entire woods were twinkling with lights. I had to be dreaming. I shook my head to clear my vision and wake up. I was bewildered for more than a few minutes until I turned around into the open part of the land and realized the whole landscape was lit up with fireflies.

I was like a kid in a snow-globe, standing in wonder and giddiness for half an hour. Tiredness finally took me back to bed. Now and then the fireflies come through my open A-frame door, up to the peak of the ceiling, and treat me to a private, natural light show. The fireflies return every year for about six days in June.

City life would never again have its pull on me or soothe my soul like the mountains of Maine do.

After a few years on my own I met Catherine working in the nearby jewelry shop. She helped me clear the land and taught me the ways and habits of the locals. She lives 40 miles away in the valley, making handcrafted gold and silver jewelry inspired by the mountains and forests. Catherine and I would become dear friends, companions, and lovers. When not with her I mostly stayed to myself, and other than work, ventured into the community only for food. The townspeople wondered if I was a trust fund baby boomer, a peaceable prison escapee, or a Buddhist monk lost from Tibet.

Catherine moved into the hut with me and shortly after I realized I needed minor surgery for an umbilical hernia. The doctor informed me that I shouldn't do labor jobs for a few months, so I needed to get creative with work and income to feed myself. I placed a small handwritten paper at the Appalachian Trail parking lot a thousand feet from my land inviting hikers to come for a night's rest at my hut. I had no intention of being a hostel owner when I first arrived here, but 50 hikers stayed at my place that first year.



Necessity being the mother of invention, the Appalachian Trail hostel called the Hiker Hut was born, and my days of solitude in the Maine woods were over. Life had other plans for Catherine, myself, and this little slice of heaven I had initially settled on as a hermitage.

For the next ten years we built more huts for the increasing number of hikers. Catherine prays while planting colorful, extensive gardens. I meditate on different parts of the land, and Catherine reminds me of the power and energy of the Sandy River headwaters nearby, and its effect on what was being created through us. We work long, solid days, carving out a sacred space of beauty and silence and recovering in well-earned nightly sleep. What was a run-down, moldy

shack and overgrown, unloved parcel of land has truly become a flowering oasis providing rest and rejuvenation for thousands of pilgrims hiking the Appalachian Trail.



Many hikers on this sacred 2,100-mile path in the woods are walking off trauma, going through their own midlife crises or throwing off society's pressure to conform. A few hikers, carrying ashes of their loved ones who died before completing the trail, have reverently placed some ash in Catherine's lovely flower beds. My mom's and brothers' ashes lie in another garden of daisies and poppies, where hummingbirds feed above. Mom would like that. Other hikers share their stories of pain from divorce, the death of a loved one, or a young person's struggle to find what is next.



One hiker season, the first guest down the Hiker Hut driveway was a young man carrying the typical overstuffed backpack. I could sense his energy from a distance and said to Catherine, “He is carrying much more than just his camping supplies.” We welcomed him with a home-cooked dinner, and the next day Mike felt safe enough to share with us that he had just buried his baby sister back in Texas. She had died by suicide in the family back yard. After the funeral, his dad drove him to Maine and told him, “You have to walk this path.” I could see how heavy his load of grief and sorrow were to carry.

Catherine and I fed and sheltered him for three days, and loved him as best we could for the short time we had with him. When he departed, we turned to one another with tears in our eyes. If he’d been the only hiker that came down this driveway, then that is the reason we’re here.



I remember my Mum telling me long ago when I was a younger man: “Bloom where you’re planted.” I am grateful to now live and express the beauty, love, and Truth of her words. I sometimes feel like a foster parent to hikers, sheltering and feeding them for a couple of days, then sending them back out onto the trail and off into their lives. My heart wonders if they have indeed found their way in the world, fallen in love or discovered the peace they are seeking on the path.

At times I wish I could remember the day I began running, to mark it as an anniversary of sorts. Running saved my life. Today I still run as prayer, to honor all the starting lines I stood upon, finish lines I crossed and the sacred foot strikes that carried me through. I was always running towards home. Home within.

*When you reach the place which is all your longing, you will chuckle at the folly. Then you will curse the distance traversed and finally you will bless the unnecessary necessity of each and every step on the way.*



TO THE CHILD I STILL MUST BE...THAT CHILD, ETERNALLY FREE.

