



*The past lives
of a lifer Convict*

Mark Crawford

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Preface

It took the government three trials, humorous false testimonies and a general violation of the United States Constitution to convict Mark of murder, a murder he claims not to have committed. It took Mark sixteen years of soul searching to find Self-Realization, and then he understood why it had all happened the way it did. This is the story of his awakening.

Chapter One

I was born in Hagerstown, Maryland in the mid fifties, my family however, left Maryland when I was three and moved to Brooksville, Fla., so I don't know much about the place where I was born, except that it's really pretty country up there, well, that and I have a bunch of kinfolk up that way. But none of that matters much now, other than bein' something to talk about.

I guess if we think on it hard enough we can each come up with what we think is our earliest childhood memory. For me, that first memory was of being tired and curling up beneath an old chair that my folks had in this little red house they rented, in the hammock country near Brooksville. That chair had a skirt on it that reached to the floor, I remember feeling safe there, hidden. I remember it vividly, even today. I don't think that it was the act of being hidden which keeps this memory so vivid even after all these years as much as it is the feeling of safety that being hidden underneath it gave me. Crazy I know, but even now I distinctly remember how safe I felt hiding in the darkness under the drapery of that old chair.

I bring this, my first memory up, only because shortly after that I started to remember other things as well. For instance, I remembered things about the Civil War, things a soldier would know. I also remember being obsessed with dinosaurs, so much in fact that stories are told by my kinfolk about how my Aunt Becky (peace be with her) would sit and listen to me talk about these creatures, which I seemed to know the names of. I must have been three or four at the time. Sadly I have to tell you that my aunt Becky was taken from us by a drunk driver when I was that same age, and though I never said it before I'll say it now; that event shook my little life to the core, it was my first encounter, in this life anyway, with the reality that anything can be taken from you, at any time. I loved her so much that even after fifty years I'm still missing her. That my reader, is the power of a love that could not possibly have been found in the short year or so that this woman-child and I spent together, which of course brings this question to mind: it I could not have found such a deep and everlasting love, as the love I have for her, in that short span of time, then how could I have fallen so genuinely in love with her? And by extension, the question could also be asked, why did she seem to love me so much? That my friend is something to be considered when the totality of my story is weighed.

After those early experiences of love and remembrance I grew into a weird kid, very different from most other kids; I was kind of a loner I guess, but not really. What I mean is, that I would always have one or two friends, but I was not one of those kids who were popular or who had a lot of friends all at once, nope, I was more comfortable being alone or in the company of the few. Still am I suppose.

I have an older brother, half brother actually, who was mistreated badly by my father, his step-father, and since he was ten years older than me I don't know a whole lot about him, he lives in Hagerstown, married and has a family there, last I heard. I guess you could say that we love each other, we are brothers, but during my sixteen years of prison I've never received even a Christmas card from him, I suppose that we just never could get past the fact that my father had treated him so badly. It's a sad thing how family sometimes gets, but heck, I was just a kid, there wasn't nothing I could do, I know what a rotten S.O.B. my old man is, or was, don't know if he's alive or dead, no one needs to tell me about it. Anyway, the point is that my brother left our home as quickly as he could and so I missed out on getting to know him, at having a big brother to show me the ropes, per se.

Shortly after that my family started moving around Florida, places I don't remember, ultimately though I do remember that they ended up in Jacksonville, I guess I was nine or ten, by that time. I had a little brother who was born in Brooksville right before we left; he was five years younger than me, still is I reckon. Him and I were close growing up, still are, hell my parents always worked so we were left to look after each other most of the day, every day, couldn't help but be close or be dead. But, I won't go into all of the things in-between this and the other things I'm here to talk to you about, because I'd turn into a whiner and I'm not gonna do that. Sometimes a man just needs to be thankful that he has two arms, two legs and two eyes, 'cause some folks don't, and sometimes what happened to you in the past just needs to die with you, 'cause it don't serve no purpose at all to keep bringin' it up, so I won't.

I left Florida in seventy-three and went to Texas, after bouncing around for a while I joined the army in seventy-four to keep from starving to death; I'd been on my own by then for almost three years. It was in Texas, right after Boot Camp, that I met and got hitched to this pretty little ol' gal from Mexico; she turned out to be the best person I ever met, she's so much better than me that I always wondered how much God paid her to give up heaven and marry me (?Que Dios te pague por esta momento, mi amor?)

It was right after that that my new wife and I were sent to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland for military training, well I was, she went along, of course. We were there for several months and then I was given a thirty day leave before being shipped off on a three year tour of duty in Germany, which was a very happy time in my life.

The beauty of being young is that you don't worry about anything, don't plan for anything and just live life as it comes. So, here I was with a new wife, one who could barely speak english, no money to take her overseas with me, no functional family to help care for her while I was away, and not to mention that I was fixin' to go to Germany for the next three years. Yet, for some reason I wasn't worried, so her and I loaded up my old Rambler and drove to Brooksville to see my grandpa Ed and my uncle Jack, like all was just peaches and cream. In truth it was my grandpa who had takin' me in a few years earlier when I was close to starving to death the first time, and even though I only stayed there with him for a couple of months, it was the only place I had that even resembled a home, so I took my new wife there, and she was welcomed.

Now it was during this time, while I was in Brooksville visiting my grandfather and right before I was due to go overseas, that I was out riding around with one of my uncles; I actually have two uncles, my daddy's brothers, who are close to the same age as me, they lived in Brooksville at the time, one of em still does. Anyway, it was during this time, after I had left my home in Jacksonville, I was fifteen at the time, and before I left from there to go to Germany, I was eighteen then, that this story actually begins, this is how it all came together.

It was in this early carefree time period of my life that the strings in the tapestry of my childhood memories began to unravel to reveal the convict me, which I would later become. It was that year, 1975, that place Brooksville Florida, the memories of my aunt Becky, my dysfunctional family, my upcoming tour of duty in Germany, my crazy stoner uncle, my new wife and no where else to go, that it "all came together into a purposeful design for the present -day convict me to recognize, yes sir, after all these years it's now so clear to me ... The old prisoner that I have become can now see how those early places and events were all a road map leading me to this exact prison and this exact time and ultimately to you who is reading this. Yes sir, you and I, are somehow connected by a Destiny of arcane events that has yet to completely reveal itself to either of us. And I don't know what else to do except to tell it from my perspective, and hope that it will somehow help you to tell it from yours. With that said here's my story.

I told you that my first conscious memory in this life was of being curled up under that ol' chair, well, after that I don't have a lot of memories of any significance concerning my early childhood, but what I do remember about Brooksville Florida in them days was this; there were these two teenage sisters who used to baby-sit me. These two sisters lived in the mountains nearby where I lived, in Brooksville; in fact they lived in almost complete isolation on the side of the highest mountain in our area. I remember that near their house was a gorge and that stretched across that gorge was a flimsy bridge, of a construction I don't remember. I do remember however being terrified of it, so terrified in fact, that to this day I'm afraid of heights as a result of it.

Now these two sisters, whose name I don't recall, took care of me, loved me and carted me all over the place with 'em. I even remember them carrying me down that mountain a time or two looking for herbs. I remember them stripping down with me and us bathing in an ice cold stream that cascaded down off of some rocks near where they lived, and I remember laughing and making them chase the child me naked through the woods. But for some reason my clearest memory of them was the time we came down off that mountain to a nearby valley to pick what I think were blackberries near some railroad tracks.

Now later on when I was preparing to go overseas in the military, as I eluded to earlier, my crazy uncle Mike and I, were out driving around one afternoon, we'd been drinkin' and some more stuff, and out of the blue I started thinking about those two sisters. So I ask him to take me out to the mountains where I used to live, so that I could see the old place and maybe even check up on them; I still had a warm spot in my heart for the both of 'em. Yeah, you've probably already figured this out, he looked at me as if I was a nut and said, "There ain't no mountains in Florida!" And that was that, I knew it the instant he said it, heck, I knew it before he said it, any duffus knows there aren't any mountains anywhere in Florida. So, where were these mountains, those two sisters, that gorge and that wobbly old bridge that I remembered so vividly? That my friend is the question that I have never been able to figure out, because I swear to you that up until that exact moment when my uncle looked at me like I was a lunatic, that I believed there were mountains in Florida and that they were a part of my childhood in Brooksville Florida, but I was obviously very, very mistaken.

Yeah, that's the way it happened, strange I know, but even stranger still is the fact that I've always had memories of times and places other than the one I'm now in, but like those mountains in Florida for instance, I just could never piece it all together, until prison that is, tuned me on to alternative possibilities.

I will add here that I don't think that I am alone in these types of memories, in fact I think that all of us have the same types of recollections; I think that we all have deep within us memories of things we just can't rationally explain, and since our rational minds can't explain them we just push them to the backs of our mind and eventually forget about 'em. Yes, I believe that you my adult reader have forgotten many important things since your childhood and it is my hope that as you read what I have to say about this subject, that you too will become curious enough to search the dusty crags of your own memory and thereby recapture the hazy distant times and places that your childhood mind once remembered, as I, by accident, have done.

I will admit to you here and now, that yes, I have considered the possibility that these memories and these experiences that I am about to share with you are nothing more than dreams, or possibly subconsciously implanted figments of my imagination. Maybe they are shadowed memories of long forgotten books, or movies, or conversations, and I would be remiss, as a biographer, were I to deny any or all of those as possibilities, because they most certainly are possible. I suppose that it would also be

fair to say that it is possible that I have become a madman; I say possible but in reality it is a foregone conclusion, I am insane, because as I have said a thousand times, if the world is sane then I am undeniably insane. However, none of that changes anything, because I have seen what I have seen and subsequently believe what I believe. I also know that were you to access the deepest regions of your own mind, as I have, that you too, would proudly proclaim some degree of insanity as well.

In this book I am going to tell you of my experiences in what would seem to have been other lives. I know that lots of folks claim lots of things and that some folks claim things that just aren't true. In my defense I will remind you that the experiences of past life events are not new and that the subject has been spoken of, debated and taught since the beginning of the written word, greatly debated actually. In fact, even Jesus spoke on it. Yeah, I know what you're thinking, but it's true, in fact, though it does not belong in this book I will tell you that as a result of my experiences (or delusions) that I have studied his words concerning reincarnation and can prove my claim, that he, Jesus, was a believer also, and do so in other writings.

As for myself and those vivid memories of mythical Florida mountains, I can tell you that I have had other recollections as well. Silly, maybe, but remember my reader, that I have thought much on this subject and did not come to my beliefs out of choice, no sir, in fact I had no choice in the matter at all. I was forced by the harsh circumstances of prison to be alone with myself, and in that loneliness found not only the truth about the man I am today, but the truth about the multitude of lives I have experienced before this one, lives which in all actuality forged within me the desire to awaken myself in the life that I am experiencing today.

This book is not a recklessness endeavor; let it be known that I have been required to crawl through the halls of complete madness to bring to you this story, which in reality is nothing more than my own proof, that there is indeed life after death. My name... it is not important, for I am no one of substance, I am nothing more than a number, in fact I am Federal Prisoner I.D. #76603-079, that is how the government sees me...that is how I have learned to see myself, and I find it sufficient in its description.

Yes, I have been branded a murderer. Yes, I was thusly convicted by a jury of my peers and thusly I stand in the chains of that stigma with knees bloody and eyes swollen, yet I complain not, for I recognize, beyond all doubt, that everything that occurred in my life to bring me to prison was nothing more than one of the many cogs in the wheel of destiny, which deemed it best I come to prison so that I might open my eyes to the reality of worlds beyond the one I presently know in this body. Yes, these past sixteen years of living life as a prisoner have turned out to be a spiritual boon to me, for I have managed, as a result of it, to learn to fly, to fly about the heavens of time as it is and time as it was. I have learned to leap these walls and fences and to dance among the glorious limits of things you cannot even imagine. I convict #76603-079, once proud but now humble, shall take the time here to give thanks to those who unwittingly gave to me the gift of SELF in the form of a Life Sentence, a condemnation which forced me to gird the belt of desperate courage and free myself from the innate fear of mortal death. A punishment so heavy that it compelled me to free myself from the attachments of a painful physical existence that I could not accept and to thereby open my mind to the greater experiences of an eternal reality through the realization of an infinity of past life experiences.

Am I insane, possibly, but I'm not a fool. I say this here so that you might know beforehand that what I am about to tell you is not the fancy of a dupe, but the actual experiences of a man very similar to you in every way. I wanted you to know that I am or have been a painter, a poet, a prophet, a witch, an engineer, a robber, a warrior, a Prince and a convict. I wanted you to know that I have died a thousand heartfelt

times, some in contempt, some in valor, some in disgrace and some by extreme violence. My past lives have varied from royalty to beggar, from guard to prisoner, from lover to hater, from righteous to heretic... I have been all of them from the top to the bottom of the human pyramid... I have been them all, I am them all.

And under those conditions, where I have killed and been killed a thousand times, what else would you have me to say? What else would you have me do but to explain the idiosyncrasies of my mental experiences, to do that which I at present endeavor to do? In the light of this information with what face can I truthfully say that I do not deserve the brand I presently wear? With what voice do I cry out from the wilderness of this life, saying that I do not deserve this Life Sentence, when the truth is that we all get what we deserve, if not in this life then most certainly in the next. And with what face do I ask you to believe my stories about past life experiences when I have admitted so much in them, when I have worn the brand, the mark of Cain? - I cannot, so I will only lend you this word of caution: trust me my friend, trust me my enemy, you too will get exactly what you deserve, every jot and tittle.

Yes, I am a convict, I am a man who has been reduced to being nothing more than a number, but I contend that I, convict #76603-079 who has been removed from you, cast out, taken away and deemed useless, am not. I, who have been classified as unfit to be a man and whose face is reddened by it, stand before you at the very edge of infinity as the hunchback I was destined to become. Yes, here we are, you and I, and the question I asked of myself before I began to tell my tale is this, should I tell you my story and risk the wrath of man, or should I remain silent and risk the wrath of immortality? That my reader is always the dilemma when touching upon uncomfortable subjects.

It has been nineteen years now since I first began to plow the fields of my incarcerated mind, that is a long time under any circumstance. Oh to be sure there are many others who have done more time in prison than me, but I cannot speak for them, let alone beg sympathy for them or for myself, no sir I won't and I want to put your mind at ease here; I am not asking you for sympathy either, or freedom, or even respect, because I personally believe that things are as they are supposed to be, and in truth, I really don't care what you think, because you can think only that which you, at present, are capable of. That is the reality in which we all stand, with that said I will add that I would alter nothing in this life or in any previous one, if I am meant to die in chains then I shall, and if someone of you is meant to fight for my freedom then they shall, for it truly is as the Christ said "You can do nothing to me (or for me) except that which my Father in heaven allows."

In spite of all this talk concerning enlightenment and peace, I must confess to you that I do not enjoy prison, that even though I have obtained a fractional freedom of the mind, I from time to time still dream of a physical freedom as well. In fact, sometimes I dream that I am somehow released from prison without my family knowing about it, and that I am waiting outside their workplace at shift change to surprise them; or that I have my daughter bring my wife to the park, where she is sitting on a bench overlooking a small hill where I am likewise seated on another park bench with my back to her. I imagine that my daughter, who is in on the gig, points me out and tells her mother something like, "Doesn't that man look a lot like, pop?" Then I imagine how she watches me until she can no longer hide her curiosity at how the man sitting on the bench a short distance away not only looks like, from behind, her husband, but also has his mannerism and so forth. I then imagine her getting up from her seat and walking over to take a closer look, only to find this now, old man, anxiously awaiting to see if he will be accepted back into her life, and, of course in my romantic dreams, he is. Stupid right! Yea, I know but a man without dreams of romance is a man without hope, and a man of the spirit can never be without hope, for hope is the

essence of his being, it comprises the total sum of his existence, his purpose for existence. I am, therefore I dream.

No I will never again be a Mayor or a Welder or a Soldier, not in this present life anyway, for I am in Orwell's "Ministry of Light." These words of course are a well intentioned paradox, for it is light that I seek, but I am forced by circumstances to seek it here in this place where there is no darkness; a place void of darkness yet void of light.

Strange thinking for a simple man like myself, but remember that I am also a convict, and that if a man such as I am to survive this horrid experience, then I must learn to somewhat evolve. No, a man cannot survive here unscathed by this experience, because to be here is to have your bubble of faith pricked, to be here is to lose all forms of childhood innocence. Yes I have endured sixteen years of it, thrived in it even. Yes, out of a need to survive the mental stress of a Life Sentence I was forced to gut my old self and when I put myself to the test, I found that I was much too strong to be completely incarcerated, and with that revelation in mind I put myself to the test and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the real me is something other than this body. I didn't always know this fact, no sir I didn't, at least not consciously I didn't. This knowledge only came to me after years of incarceration, which is another one of those paradoxes, because as a result of an intense prolonged anguish I gained the gratification of a timeless existence; how crazy is that! Let me take you back to the very beginning of this journey.

It all started for me when I was first arrested; I guess that you could say that the exploration of my own mind happened as a result of being so miserable behind bars that I tried to pass my life away with sleep, and that after a period of undetermined time, when I had slept so much that my mind could no longer be completely asleep, I encountered a state of mind in which I found myself both asleep and awake simultaneously. I am speaking of my first prolonged bout with solitary confinement; this in the Nueces County Jail. Like I said, those hours in which I was unable to sleep were the punishment of a thousand lashes, the mental lashes of guilt that a man beats himself to death with, when he doesn't understand the principles of spiritual enlightenment, through personal suffering.

In those early incarcerated waking hours I read continuously, but even that could not occupy all of those waking hours and so sometimes I would simply let my mind wander. However, when it did it would inevitably go to places that I did not want it to go; you see, in those days I was not strong enough to deal with the total lose of my family, I had not mastered my own mind. As a result of that unfortunate fact any and all memories of my family had to be limited, controlled if you will, for to remember was to dwell and to dwell was to plunge into the quicksand of depression. So, when not reading I developed things to do with my mind other than allow it to dwell on those things that I was not emotionally strong enough to handle, things such as seeing how many breaths I could take before 'a thought presented itself to me. At first I could only go seven or eight thoughtless breathing rotations before a thought would come crashing through my calm. However, with practice, I found that I could take a hundred normal breathing rotations, thoughtless.

Another thing I used to do was to lie on my bunk and look for faces or designs in the limitless stains on the walls and floors of my cell. Sounds stupid right, but you'd be surprised at the things you can see on a stained wall if you only let your mind search for them. Another thing that I would do is to walk my cell floor in varying steps and then count those steps. If for instance my cell was three steps one way and four steps the other way, I would add the two together and come up with seven, which I considered to be a good omen. I would also measure the distances in my cell in all kinds of different ways, toe to toe, side of foot to side of foot, hand to hand and even finger to finger. Once (I had four different cells in Nueces

County) for a time, I had a big cell in solitary, I could not wait to map it out and to this day I remember that the distance from wall to wall as measured by the width of two fingers side by side was one-hundred and ninety-nine, by two hundred and six. I can also tell you that if I started in one corner and measured out the entire cell by finger size that it would take six thousand, one hundred and forty four of my index fingers to blanket the entire floor of that big cell. I suppose that I am telling you this to illustrate the things that I did to keep myself occupied. I'm not saying that all prisoners do these types of things, but then not all prisoners were flying a King Air one day and Con Air the next, and I believe that it was that very same culture shock which contributed greatly to the insane heresy contained herein.

Though boring to an extreme, not all was silent in the solitary confinement of that time and place. In fact, in the section of solitary confinement where I was housed, were eight one man cells. These eight cells were nothing more than boxes constructed out of quarter inch steel plate with angle iron framing, need I say that they were not sound proof. As a result of this obtuse design it was in fact quite the opposite, because to some of the men held there in the adjoining cells, those steel walls and doors were ideal replacements for drums. And it did no good to threaten them to be quiet, because they knew that you were as segregated from them as they were from you; never in that place were two men ever allowed to mingle, or fight. It was an island, a steel island devoid of beaches, fresh air, fruit, or contentment, an island absent of sunlight. The good thing however about this island of steel was, that after a varying period of time the bangers and noisemakers would, like the rest of us, succumb to the doldrums of depression and begin to fill their time with outrageous amounts of sleep, reading, or as the nut-jobs did, begin to search out faces in the wall stains or to measure out their cells by using their fingers.

I will add that men would, of course, also talk back and forth through their doors as another means of passing time, though I seldom did. Occasionally though someone would call to me by way of, "Hey, cell one, what do you think?" or something like that. And truthfully, though I am often critical of these my convict companions for their underachieving, I can not help but to feel compassion for some of them, no, not all, but I found through my interaction with them that most of them, deep down inside, are not bad people. In fact I firmly believe that once you isolate a bad person from their bad influences that they generally become decent folk.

For instance, I once met a youngster while in solitary, well, met is not the right word, I talked to this kid through the door of his cell where I learned that he had committed a senseless murder, he was seventeen at the time... darn it man, broke my heart. He was such a nice kid, but he killed an innocent young kid who by chance happened to be working behind the counter at the store he decided to rob...at seventeen. How does that happen? What type of beast overcomes a kid like that and convinces him to rob and kill...at seventeen? The answer of course is dope, and I could elaborate on that for you, but you'd just get angry if I told you the truth about the United States of America and drugs, so I'll move on. I suppose what I'm trying to tell you is, that what I'm writing in this book is a matter of record concerning me and my story as a person. And though none of these things are the story itself, they are events reflective of the primary source of this book, so, even though I will spare you the boredom of my entire separation from normalcy, my willing embrace of insanity, I am still compelled to put a little dirt in the hole if this story is to have the roots necessary to make any sense at all. That is what I will now attempt to do by telling you about my experience as a man named Joe.

Joe

There was rain among the leaves of the tree's that morning and a sorrow on me; there was a fury on me too. I don't know why they couldn't just leave my family alone. Why did they keep bounding me till something terrible had to happen? And now they left me no choice in the matter but to be a man of extreme violence, although the Lord knows I didn't do much to avoid it. Yeah, I suppose you could make the case that when they came out to start it all that I went out and met 'em at least halfway. Yeah, I know deep down that this is of my own making, I know it, you ain't gotta say it, believe me I know it.

As best I know I'm a man of twenty years, half somethin', half somethin' else, and that somethin' else won't buy ya much of anything out here if your money ain't silver. Out here is the flat land just north of Corpus Christi, Texas, the year is 1874.

I wish I could say otherwise but my life has been one of hard livin' and harsh judgment, one of long bitter lonely years, yep I'm sorry to say, but that has been my plight in this here life up to this point. My name is Joe and I'm a man with some very long years behind him; a man with little but a gun for a companion. It would be fair to say that life has made me cruel, and in truth, in me, there's love for only two things in this life, my woman and my child, and I have lived these last four years for nothin' 'cept them. And recently I found out that they was dead, dead by the hands of my own flesh and blood. Yeah I know that I said that I caused it all, but whether I caused it all or not don't much matter now, 'cause my woman and my kid are both gone. Maybe it was a thing unintentional, that doesn't much matter neither, 'cause soon enough my father and probably myself will be dead because of it.

This whole nightmare thing started a few years back when my father and I robbed and killed a family of settlers from some where's up north. They was Christian folk of some kind or other and my daddy kilt 'em and robbed 'em for reason's that to this day I cain't tell ya. I was sixteen then and I was there and I took part in it, all of it, but I didn't do it on my own, nor did I think it up. I ain't sure anyone actually thought it up, it just happened. One minute we was askin' 'em questions and the next we was blastin' away like we had no God in us, and I suppose by what we done, that maybe we don't.

It was a terrible thing we done, but I can't change none of that now, what's done is done. I cain't fix it with prayers and I cain't fix it with regret, I cain't fix it no matter how hard I might want too. Damn it all!

Believe me, I know that it ain't right what we done, but it wasn't right for me to take all the blame, neither. He started it, I just followed his lead, but it was me they hunted. It was me who had to leave his farmhouse, his wife, his baby. It was me who slept on the ground between here and San Antonio. It was me who was forced to live out these last four years as a road bandit; it was me who suffered all that. But it was him what brought the law down on me. It was him who set my cabin afire and it was him what kilt my wife and child. No he didn't shoot 'em like he did that settler woman, but it was him that put them out, and him what is responsible for the fever that took 'em. And now it's him what's gonna pay.

After that day when we kilt them folks things changed, and all them changes has brought me to this day of reckoning. I guess you could say that that one day of killin' four years ago, has finally come 'round for payment. Yep I suppose it's time for a reckoning.

I guess my daddy had his reasons for what he did, hell he's just a dirt farmer tryin' ta feed his family like our kinfolk did before us, but things was a changin' in Texas. Folks with money had power, and folks with power took pretty much what ever it was that they wanted, no matter who you was, so he decided to fight

back, but none of that matters much now does it. Yep the past didn't mean nothin' then and it don't mean nothin' now, 'cause change is a comin' and I'm headed home to live by it or die by it.

All the way home from San Antonio this fateful night I'd seen a vast array of unusual activity, lots of folks I just couldn't abide by, you know the type, poor folks who would accept bad things happenin' around 'em as long as it only affected someone else and didn't bother them personally. Poor men who'd give up their beliefs as men to jump on any band wagon willing to play a tune they could accept, without a fight. Weak folks without a doubt, but hungry folks for certain.

Everybody was hungry these days, so hungry in fact that it no longer mattered much about local rights and wrongs, most folks just wanted to be left alone. The fight was gone from most folks, Texas had finally been whupped by Yankee money. The rich settlers from up north had stole or bought up all the good land 'tween here and San Antonio, folks like me, we either lived with it, or died with it; the Rangers saw to that. Yeah I know what them ol' boy's will say, that the Rangers is hero's and all, but it ain't so, the Rangers and them they hired to help 'em was thieves who hunted and hanged any man who resisted them that put money in their pockets. They was the real bandits; but folks don't wanna hear that, even though it's the truth. Hell, it's always been that-a-way ain't it, simple folks got nothin' and ain't meant ta have nothin'.

The campfire was goin' and the last of my coffee smelled mighty good and the sound of the rain was a pleasant peace I had not felt in a long time. Maybe that peace I was feeling was the acceptance of my own guilt, or maybe an acceptance of a forth coming death I knew was probably in my near future. Maybe it was that I just quit carin'. Maybe it was somethin' else all together, heck I don't know, but like I said, none of that matters much now.

Sitting there, huddled near that small fire, I yearned the hours away wondering how I would show up and present myself to the graves of a woman and a child I had left with nothin' four years back. Yeah, I'd come when I could ta see 'em and all, but it was always dangerous to do so... and I know in my soul that it wasn't often enough; I know it. Then I came ta hear that my pa was bein' pressured by the Law to give me up. Then I come ta find out that he did, and all that happened after that had to do with the pals of that Ranger fella raping my wife and my pa turning her out cause of it. And, now this. Now I gotta kill my own pa and that Ranger fella too. I know what you're thinkin' but don't even go there 'cause if you do, then you yourself ain't a man anymore than them folks what lets other people take their land from 'em without a fight. So don't even go there 'causel ain't tryin' ta hear it.

Four years and I can still see it plain as if it were happening right this moment. That wagon on the horizon, right over there near those pecan tree's, those Christian folks cookin' supper, not a half mile from where I now sit. Yep, one bad decision, one bad lifetime afterwards, no doubt about it; it was then and there that I became the man I am today, a killin' man, a man of vengeance, a man returned to his most primal instinct. A man come to avenge his family. Yes sir, it was right over there that my whole world changed, and from that point on I been nothin' 'cept a menace to most men, grudge or no grudge and now this, now I'm gonna willingly kill my own daddy.

Yeah, I know that I ain't a righteous man by any stretch of the imagination, but even a bad man has somethin' what caused 'em to be that-a-way. No sir, that ain't an excuse, it's a fact. Some men are just harder than others, and some weaker I suppose, it's just like that, how ever it happened. No I ain't a righteous man, but I wasn't born a rabid dog neither. Truth is, I don't know what I am, 'cept I'm a man and all men have a point beyond which they cain't be pushed, and with me, that point is my family. With what happened to my family my blood went dark, dangerously dark in fact, and what I been thinkin' ever since

would freeze the balls on ol' Satan himself. Yep, once that happened with my Wife and kid, I became what all men are deep down inside; I became cold and dangerous... haunted and hunted.

That night when it got real dark I went to where I'd sat my "possibles" and got my ol' Spencer rifle. I loved that ol' rifle, my granddaddy gave it to me, anyway, with it I strolled off into the woods and headed towards my ol' place to do what needed to be done.

My plan was to go first and visit the graves of my wife and child, then ta go to my daddy's place and kill him for what he done. Then I was gonna cause a menace to folks all around these parts till that Ranger fella showed up, then I was gonna shoot him down like a dog with my granddaddy's rifle. Then I was gonna cut out that Ranger's liver and eat it, right after I left his carcass next to the graves of my family. Yep, I had it all planned out and I ain't shamed about it either.

As I neared the place where my ol' house had been I stopped at the clearing and waited to see if I could see any movement, I didn't. I then eased across some rain puddles and made my way up to the shadowed edge of what was left of the south wall; a man had to be cautious in unfamiliar places until he got the feel of it, but even a place you're familiar with, even your own place feels uncomfortable in the dark 'cause everything feels uncomfortable when you're a hunted man like me. And if you was a hunted man, like me, then you had to be extra careful around your own place; most especially your own place.

The smell in the air that night seemed almost normal, almost, standin' there I could smell that smell of burnt wood, but other than that I could find nothin' else out-a-place.

I poked some things with the tip of my boot and once I got more comfortable I walked that spot of land what used to be mine. I thought about my wife and our times together, lord she was a gooden'...a tear came to my eye, but I knew it was too late for all that, so I smiled at the memory of the last time I saw her and my only child.

They was sittin' right over there near that stump, and I gave her what I had taken from them government settlers over the last three month's and she kissed me clean down to my boots, like only the best of 'em can. I smelled her long hair and I touched her face and looked into her almond eyes, and right then and there I vowed that one day I'd strike it rich and take her away to someplace on the Mississippi River where we would, the three of us, get us a place and catch fish that were so big it'd take a week just to eat one. Yeah, I remember it all so clear. Yeah, I loved my ol' gal and I took it hard when I found out what happened to her.

After I got comfortable I walked south about a hunnert paces or so to the Spot that my neighbor Jaime had said was the spot where they had buried her and my child. As I walked towards that big oak where they were supposed to be laid I was looking so intently for the two graves of my family members that I was completely caught off guard when I heard a voice from some nearby hedges tellin' me ta drop my rifle, then in the moonlight I saw that I was surrounded by three men with guns, one of them was Jaime Garza.

Now Jaime and I was close, we had grown up together as kids, we weren't the best of friends but we was friends and I had trusted him to bring me messages and to take money to my wife when the law was around. But it was all clear now, he had set me up.

"Where's my wife's grave?" I asked.

“There ain’t no graves you idiot. Your wife ain’t dead. I made all that up to get you here. I burned your house, and I, not your pa brought the law down on ya...” Jaime kept talkin’ but I didn’t hear a word of it ‘cept the last word, “hangin””.

I guess you could say that I was happy about my family bein’ alive, ‘cause I was, but I was also distraught at lettin’ myself be fooled and trapped by the likes of a scoundrel like him.

My mind was tryin’ to work a way out of this here mess, and as he continued to talk I thought it all out, but in the end I saw the truth of it and reached down and grabbed my rifle, when I did they blasted me and I flopped back on the ground like somethin’ blown over in a wind storm. I just lay there with a half-moon as the last thing I seen in that life. I, as a man named Joe, died on that spot just north of Corpus Christi, Texas in the summer of ’74.

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My life as Joe from South Texas was not my first experience with mind travel, so I didn’t tell it to you here, as my first adventure, because of that reason, I tell it first because it is the most unusual of my mind travel experiences in that it occurred near where I had migrated, married and settled down as the man I am in this incarnation. Even stranger than that is that my best friend lives there as well, and his name is Joe. Stranger yet is the fact that I was betrayed in this life, to the Law, by a woman with the last name Garza! How surreal is that!

I tell you this story not to bolster your belief in what I am writing, because in reality I suppose that it could be said that the contents of these stated facts would seem to indicate that my experiences as the misshapen Joe took place not in reality, but in some dark possibly suppressed part of my imagination. I will go on record here as saying that that however is not the case. I will also say that, no, I do not have an explanation for those seemingly coincidental admonishments, and that when I at first encountered the life I remember as that of “Joe from South Texas” I was dumbfounded as you might expect, and can say that the only possible explanation that I have for it all, is, that maybe we live lives connected to others who somehow relive their lives along with us as a group experience.

At any rate I put this experience first so that the facts of it can be dealt with here and now, to whatever outcome that may lead you to believe.

Chapter Two

For the purpose of telling you this amazing story I must begin by introducing those of you who are unacquainted with my other books, to The Painter. The Painter is a man I met at the Penitentiary in Colorado back when I was new in the Federal System. The Painter, is of course an artist, hence the moniker, but he was more than that, he was my spiritual guide, my mentor, my friend, and without him I doubt that I could have survived the harsh atmosphere of the monsters who shared those walls with me; monsters both real and imaginary.

At the time that we met, I as I have said, was a new fish in the system which was hard enough, but I was also a man who was struggling with the reality that I had been convicted of a murder I did not commit, but above all that, I was a man who was confused not only about the idea of just exactly what God was, or purported to be, but about my own self as well. I was a man who, as a child, had seen and heard things that I was told were impossible to see and hear, and in my youthful confusion I believed what others told me concerning those unmentionable things. In following what I was told to be the right direction, I naturally fell upon the path of religion, believing it to be the ONLY path. With that in mind I practiced my religion with fervor I made a valiant effort to stay the course, but alas, as with Goldmund, I did not fit into that system and soon found myself dissatisfied and wanting more than it could provide. In short, I failed to be a good religionist. In that failure I fell from the fold; I suppose I lacked the faith required by the good brothers and sisters of the book, I became the sheep that was lost. It was this failure that led me down another path, one that would ultimately lead me to prison, and it was prison that led me to the Painter. And it was in this condition, this state of sorrow, this state of confusion, this state of guilt that the Painter found me and began to lift me up and to rebuild me as a person. It was the Painter who revived in me the spirit of the child I had been. It was the Painter who saved my life, and it was the Painter who ultimately saved my soul.

The first thing the Painter taught me was that everything I had known about life was suspect and needed to be personally examined and personally questioned, this because the majority of what I had been taught to believe was based on the misinformation promulgated by human error. He began by forcing me, often through crude humor, to question not only, history, patriotic agendas, the politics of the White Guilt platform, the different religion dogmas, he also taught me to question the taboo subject of God as well, or what I had come to believe was God. Though I fought hard to maintain my previous beliefs, in the end, my mind opened to the reality that I had been blind to the hidden agendas that had crafted my thinking process, most especially when it came to God, that my prior beliefs were the product of what OTHERS had told me concerning what OTHERS had told them was the truth of the issues. The Painter explained to me that what I now believed to be the foundational truths of life were merely a description of what I had been taught to believe, a description that had been pounded into my mind from the moment I was born. The Painter taught me to clear my mind of all preconceived notions, to put aside all outside influences and to find the truth of it within myself... I guess it would be fair to say that he violently shock me until I was awakened, then he gave me a name and a direction and a purpose. Thus as a teacher and guide, he gave me the courage to question the status quo and though I did not always understand his methods I can see with clarity that he endeavored to awaken me from my sleep from the first moment we talked.

That is how the Painter and I began our quest and I will continue with our story, but first I am going to step out of my cell and into the common area to grab a cup of hot water, I want a cup of coffee.

I rise from my seat and walk out to the common area of my cell-block... and there he is.

“He” is a man, a homeboy from Texas who has been in and out of different prisons his whole life, and now is in another. This time he has returned for violating the conditions of his Probationary Release, from his last prison sentence. He smiles as he approaches me and I lower my eyes, “Please, not first thing this morning” I say to myself. I lift my eyes and return his smile.

Mark McCarty (I put his name out there because he promised to send money back in to pay his debts, and didn't) begins my day with some words concerning what he's going to do when he goes home, again, in a month or so. He tells me about his grand scheme, shows me a picture of his Harley, and tells me this and that. I smile, nod and wish him the best, but inside I'm thinking something else. Inside I am thinking that a man like you doesn't deserve freedom, and even though I feel guilty for thinking this, inside I want to say “You're 54 years old, you're younger than me, but because you're a slave to drugs, you look 65.” Inside I am thinking that it should be me going home, not him. Inside I'm thinking that if I had a chance to go home I would appreciate it and subsequently not violate the conditions of my parole. Inside I'm thinking that if I were to go home, I could be at my grandchildren's school events, that I could hold my mother's hand and tell her that everything negative that happened in our lives were just part of life and that none of those things matter, because we love each other. That's what I wanted to tell him, that's what I was thinking... but again I smiled and wished him well... and meant it. But inside I must confess: I am confused. Why him and not me?

I would be dishonest to you my reader, if I did not admit these embarrassing shortcomings about myself. So forgive me if there are times when I say things which are offensive, I do not mean them as such and do so only to record the mindset of not only myself but of all Lifer Convicts, for we are here, and we are dealing with a reality that few of you even recognize exists, and sometimes this reality is an ugly thing to behold. And though this book is about the things that you imagine it is, it is also about another, it is about a reality so crushing that it causes a man to either master himself, or fall into the animalistic nature of a reality gone completely immoral. 'Tis a personal struggle indeed, a war in fact; a war that people who have never been to prison can not even recognize as taking place around them. And when I say “master himself” I am of course speaking of the mind, because the mind controls the body and every single day I have to be on guard because the Federal Bureau of Prisons is trying to give me the death penalty; everyday they put someone in my life that, according to the Bible, needs killin', and every day I have to prove that I am not the man they have portrayed me to be, everyday I have to prove that I have learned the lessons of my first incarnation as the vengeful killer Tey-Gar, and restrain my emotions.

You, the square, wouldn't believe some of the negativity here, guys who won't work, who've never held a job in their lives, guys whose whole life has been spent selling dope, even while incarcerated. Guys who stand in their cells and look out the window and masturbate while watching some female prison guard standing outside the cellblock, and then there's the Bible-toning child molesters, yeah, they're all here and it's a terrible reality check, a terrible portent to our future as a nation, and a prudent test to the self-discipline of a man like me.

Everything I have said about prison is true and my heart bleeds at what I see in the youth of my people. I try to show them that I am different and that different is better, and they respect me for it, but not enough to see the destruction that they are causing to themselves, their families and their nation. They have been washed far from the shore of reality and have been lost to the brainwashing sea of sex, drugs and absolute chaos; they have been conquered by religions which tell them that all men are created equal. Men who have become slaves to a Socialist/Christian agenda that has convinced them that their failures are not their fault, that it is the fault of some boogiemer, some other race of people, or some devil. These men, believing themselves to be victims, find no fault in violating the laws, in fact they have been brainwashed to see crime and subsequently failure as their only chance at success, an unrecognized agenda that demands not only the failure of their own lives, but the lives of their children as well. They are truly lost, and I am powerless to show them the way; my heart bleeds for them and my eyes are red with concern, but the truth is that I am barely able to help myself.

Yes, I have been awakened, or maybe I've lost my sanity, and all I can say in my own defense is that if this world in which I now find myself be sane, then I will gladly be the fool in the corner, because, I will not sell dope to my people. I will not rob old folks. I will not rape children and if given the chance, I will be a reckoning to any who does.

I confess to you that I have had having trouble dealing with the negativity of this convict reality, but with The Painters help I have learned to trust in my Watchers and believe that everything that is happening around me is somehow a purposeful part of my evolution. I will also confess that early on in my incarceration I had trouble sleeping, that I was oftentimes startled awake at odd hours of the night with piece-mill parts of dream experiences that I could not understand. The dream experiences of which I speak were different from normal dream recall, they are more like... well experiences, or memories of actual experiences. Sometimes I wake up like the snap of a rubber band with bits and pieces of dream experiences that are so real that I am beginning to have trouble convincing myself that they aren't real. Of late I am having memories that suddenly pop into my head of people I've never met, places I've never been to, and even languages I don't understand. Memories that I am sure are real, but that I know are not, memories of past lives. As an example I will remind you of the story about the mountains in Florida.

My first complete past life experience came after what can only be described as a restless night where sleep was in and out. What happened was this. At around 1:00 am I woke up only to find that I could not go back to sleep. I finally decided to get out of bed where I then drank a cup of coffee, smoked a cigarette and eventually went back to bed. After a couple of hours of tossing and turning, I at last drifted away to at last float upon that comfortable sea of sound sleep.

Next thing I knew I snapped awake to the realization that I had been somewhere else, while asleep; snap is the proper word, there were no tunnels, no light, no angels, nothing like that at all...I was there, fully conscious of being myself while there, and then I seemed to snap awake here, in my bunk, with a complete awareness, a complete memory of my experiences there. At first I began to giggle.

I suppose, because I knew that what I had experienced was not some meaningless dream, but something entirely different, something beyond the norm, something very significant and meaningful in a spiritual way. I knew that what I had experienced was a separate reality, possibly another dimension; I had

fallen asleep here in this time and space and had awakened there in that time and space, and then I left there and in the blink of an eye returned here. I realized that I had experienced something special, a miracle possibly, a revelation. My prison had become my own Isle of Patmos, and 1 another prisoner given a brief glimpse of something beyond earth.

Upon awakening my heart pounded in my chest at the excitement of what I had experienced, I arose from my bunk and looked at the clock, it was 4:45 AM; it was semi dark in my cell, but even so I didn't want to turn on the light for fear that it would somehow drive away the memories I had returned with, so I fumbled around in the dark until I found a pen and paper and went to work at writing down my experience.

As I began to work I realized that the notes I was making could not be limited solely to the physical actions I had experienced while in that other place. I realized that it was very important that I record not only the things that I had seen in that other place, but the emotional feelings I had experienced while there as well. Next thing I knew the sun was up and light was shining through my cell window.

Finally I had the pieces of my experience on paper. With a new sense of purpose I moved on with my life as prisoner number 079.

I spent the remainder of that day ecstatic about the first mystical experience I had had since childhood, in truth I was giddy about it. But as all spiritual advisors will tell you, don't get caught up in such things because they are few and far between, and so it was with me. And after several months without another glimpse I began having brutal bouts with my subconscious that resulted in actual depression. And I must confess to you here that I was on the edge of quitting this life, I was tired, I had seen the other side and as a result of that experience coupled with my prior mystical experiences I no longer feared death the way that others do and I was beginning to believe that another life, possibly a better one awaited me "out there" someplace and that all I had to do to get it, was to... well, get it.

I can see that I shouldn't have shared this with you because I saw how you spun around and gave me a long hard stare, and my mind heard the silent voice of yours. But, in my own defense to your allegations, I must say that you do not understand; I AM experiencing things beyond what I have put to paper, things alien, memories, or hallucinations that are bleeding over into this life, experiences that are burning down the walls of my sanity, my ability to have a normal life, they are consuming me. The me I was, is being taken from me. My ability to function, to be normal is slipping away like a child's toy fallen into a river, and all I am saying is that I am near the point of knowingly jumping in after it. "Quitting" you call it; I call it the next step, a step I am being compelled, driven to take. I am not trying to justify how I'm feeling here, I am only putting it out there so that you can know the profound affect that the arcane combination of prison and spirituality is having on me, on my ability to function in this form.

Let's change the subject.

After that first experience, as I just eluded to, my whole perspective on life changed because my whole view of reality changed. Thinking about how I might accurately convey this story into believable words I returned to my cell, but the words wouldn't come so I walked over to my locker where I grabbed a wash rag and then proceeded to my prison-cell sink. I looked into the mirror, unsure of what I would see,

something that of late had become a daily mystery. After a few seconds of careful scrutiny I washed my face, in the manner of a man clearing out the cobwebs after a long night with alcohol, then dried it briskly with a towel. Next I grabbed my art board and went to my bunk where I sat down with the intention of finishing a portrait of one of the fellows for my "101 Faces" project.

The guy I was, at the time, drawing reminded me of one of my friends from USP Florence named Tom, and I started to remember some of the good friends and the good times I had had while there. I remembered the time that Tom had bought these white Rockport brand shoes. Man we gave him the blues over those shoes. And no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't keep from chuckling at the endless cracks we made about 'em. Don't get me wrong here, they were GREAT shoes, but they looked a little, well, as politically incorrect as this is, I have to say that they looked like something a woman would wear as opposed to a damned hardened convict like Tom Platte, we, the fella's, nick-named 'em "Cockport's".

Now Tom hung on as long as he could with all the ribbing that he was taking, but in the end, he showed up one day without 'em, and when we questioned him about it, he confessed that he had went ahead and sold 'em to somebody else. Now I want you to understand that they were extremely comfortable shoes, and that that's a darn hard thing to come by in federal prison, and I felt terrible about the fact that we had ribbed him so hard that he felt compelled to sell 'em. Even so, I enjoyed the whole bantering bit and rolled on the floor in laughter as the fellas ripped him mercilessly about them.

That's the way it pretty much is in prison, we find any little opening and just rail away at it till something else comes along that we can rag on; and if its your turn to be ribbed, sometimes you just have to tough it out till that something else comes around. And, believe me, some of these guys are sheer genius with their jokes and pranks too. We had this one guy from Colorado named Jack Chrisman, he was my cellie for a short time, man this guy could make a wisecrack about anything, he kept me rolling on the floor in laughter the Whole time he was there. One time I remember that the fellas were in the TV room watching the Olympics... ok, we were watching women's gymnastics, anyway, Jack walks in and out of the blue says, "What are you guys watching, the Pedophile Network?" I just rolled on the floor laughing... I guess ya had to be there.

I worked on my art board for an hour or so went outside, passed through the metal detector and then proceeded to the place on the yard where I preferred to walk instead of the track. I chose this place to walk, first, because unlike the track its not crowded and I don't like crowds, but in addition to that, whenever I walk on the track the joggers speed by me, and being that I am in prison, it makes me uncomfortable whenever someone comes running up behind me the way runners do walkers on a jogging path. No this place is not dangerous to the extent that USP Florence was, but after ten years of penitentiary paranoia, I find that I just can't shake that mindset, therefore I am unable to relax with people running up behind me.

I suppose that that kind of paranoia seems strange to you the reader, but in prison its more than apprehension, in fact, in prison you are not allowed to run anywhere on the compound EXCEPT the Recreation Yard for that reason, because the only other time men in prison run, is when something is going down. So when a convict sees or hears people running towards him, he instantly goes on the defensive, because more often than not it's a sign of impending Violence. That's why I prefer to walk

where there is little or no running going on around me, otherwise my mind is in survival mode, not relaxation mode.

Here at the medium security prison in Louisiana they have fences as opposed to walls like the penitentiaries, so as I walk I am able to look through the fence and out into a beautiful tree line that sets about a hundred yards out, and sometimes when I do, I swear that I can smell the Magnolia Blossoms out there in those ancient woods, and Magnolia Blossoms are my favorite scent in the whole world, bar none. Yea, I love that fragrance, that's one of the things I like about this part of the country, the smell of perfume in the air, that thick and sultry smell of the deep South...man nothing smells as good as a bunch of Magnolia Blossoms, well that's not true, my woman's hair would smell pretty good right now too.

I contemplated exactly what and how much of my experiences I should put into this book and generally enjoyed my walk that warm humid afternoon and before I knew it they were sounding "Recall" over the loudspeakers and I knew that it was nearing the time when we convicts had to return to our cells and be counted; the guards count us six times a day, at least, sometimes more.

I am happy to say that the rest of the day went fairly normal; after the 4 PM count I went to eat the evening chow (roast beast, possibly mule) and then returned to the cellblock to do some artwork, eventually nighttime arrived and my peaceful day was spent.

That night I lie atop my steel framed bunk and the pale light of a rose-colored moon casts a shadow of prison bars across my face. Somewhere in the distance I hear the flushing of a toilet, but the loud boisterous noises of the men who share my prison had died down into the uneasy noises of restless men dealing with the nightmares of things unmentionable. Midnight in the garden of evil and evil. It was almost peaceful...almost, I say almost because in the back of my mind are the unsure thoughts of what my dreams would bring...pleasure or pain.

It is true even now, even after all these years, after all my studies and experiences my dreams are still somewhat of a mystery to me, mostly they're typical in nature, the Way of all dreams. Mostly they're silly and foolish, but a few of them are not, in fact a few of them are horrible, too horrible to put into words. Some though are remarkable, too remarkable to be anything other than glimpses of an alternate reality. And then there is the third kind, these are of her, my secret, the one who watches over me, the one who comes to me in my deepest moments of sorrow offering me the comfort of her milk laden breasts, breasts whose milk is like the sweetest of honey fresh from the comb, the one whose lips are as soft as air and as red as wine, the one who embraces me in the deep forest of these horrid prison nights and caresses me out of my despondency and into blissful peace. She is my secret guardian, my secret love; from her I receive that peace that comes from having absolution, the peace of having someone that I can go to when no one else is available, someone that is there for me and only me, she is that place I am certain that no other can go, a place to rest my weary mind. From her I have learned the truth about love, I have learned that everything which comes from the deep and melodious dreams of the other shore is pure and devoid of human perception and human opinion, that it is devoid of man's original sin and that I am welcome there, yes even one like me, is welcome there with her.

Tonight, like every night, I am awakened from the freedom of my nocturnal travels and abruptly returned to the shackles of this Mephistophelian existence, back to the reality of my cold little room. In my frustration I sit, stand, walk, meditate and pray, but tonight these things bring me little in the way of comfort because, in the back of my mind, I know that with the coming dawn and the popping of these cell doors that I will be remanded once again into the custody of this my insane asylum, yet for some reason I find myself at peace with it. Some things must simply be endured, the rod falls and it hurts, but there is nothing you can do to stop it, you just have to quietly wait for it to fall no more.

I awake at first light strangely refreshed and find my way out and onto the recreation yard. I am feeling slightly different, as if something very subtle has changed about me. I can definitely feel it, the world in which I presently live has somehow changed and I along with it; have I been enchanted, or blinded by some spell cast in a mirror; a mirror in which all those who've been cast out can see the truth about themselves and the world in which they live?

As I now try to put that morning and those feelings into words I realize that it is best to skip some parts for fear that they might be misinterpreted, but what I can say is this: that next morning I felt things I had never felt before, it was as if my equilibrium were somehow perfectly balanced. My whole way of thinking had changed, and so it was that during the daylight hours of that day I watch with spellbound eyes the movement of this strange new world in which I now found myself. Day after day I sat, I stood, I walked and I watched and listened to the movement of the universe as can only be seen and heard in that silent space between mortal thoughts, and by night I watched my body as it went about the movement of life, I watched as it took air in and sent air out again in the slow rhythm of life. Through these borrowed eyes, light and shadow rose and fell in perfect order, and in this borrowed heart, power and compassion found an end and then began anew.

At night I stood against the bars of my cell window and watched my sister moon in all her amazing phases, and I stood with white knuckled hands clutching the steel cylinders as the touch of her golden light caressed my blushing cheeks, assuring me that eternity was as much mine as God himself.

I watched clouds come and go, rainbows rise to their apex before arcing back to the ground at my feet. I watched wildflowers open and close, ants to and fro and I heard the music of birds singing songs about the beauty of life. With this prisoners body I felt the rain and the wind as it carried with it the aroma of things long forgotten. Of course all of these things had always been there in my pre-incarcerated life, the earth and the sky, the sun and moon had always been there for me; but until now they had always gone unnoticed, only existing as scenery for things I had then treasured above them. But now that my mind had been awakened, liberated and exalted to a higher level of perception I could finally appreciate the visible beauty of this, my amazing world, a world I had suddenly become a part of. I promise you this, it is a beautiful thing to see what I see, to observe the world as children do, with amazed eyes, so free of all limited opinion.

Over the next few months I became something completely reborn, I felt new, the way I imagined I would feel if a new person had taken over the operation of my physical body machine. I did not understand how or why, but I did understand that I had a new perspective on life, a new old knowledge about what reality was and what reality wasn't. I realized that something had happened to me that had

given me a new comprehension, a new set of eyes, a new train of thought, a new understanding of reality. With this new perception in combination with these blued prison eyes I came to appreciate the beauty of a sun rise as never before, and with this new comprehension I watch the miracle of the sunset as though I were in the center of a hologram seeing the entire event with eyes capable of seeing in all directions at once. My days were glorious, but my nights even more so.

I have spent one lifetime as a youth. I've spent another as a husband and a father and another yet in prison trying to figure out what I did wrong with my life. But those lives are behind me now because my secret lover has touched me and I am awake in the land of sleep. With my awakened convict eyes, the days of my incarceration are no longer the burden on my soul that they once were. My days of incarceration have become as gentle as a young lover who rushes me into the arms of a friendly nighttime full of wondrous experiences, and this amazing nighttime reciprocates by softly delivering me into the warm arms of a bright new morning, who in its own way brings with it some new treat, some new discovery, some new opportunity to learn something forgotten, about myself.

With my higher-self consciousness I explore the metaphysical possibilities of the Mystics; with my higher-self consciousness I am also able to explore the deepest recesses of my long neglected subconscious mind, in particular the part that contains the memories of my long forgotten but fruitful spiritual past. In this exploration into the darkest rooms of my interior castle I bring to mind not only the many different lives that I have forgotten, but those small yet significant parts of those earlier lives where I had touched ever so delicately the reaching finger of my creator; the times I spent searching for the meaning of existence.

As I look back to the beginning of the path I now walk and retrace the footsteps I have taken I can clearly remember the conversations that I have had with the good brothers and good sisters of religion, and I remember how, with their guidance, I explored the book they believed to hold all wisdom, the book they believe to be the very words of God himself. I also remember that their way, as beautiful and honest as it was, did not work for me the way that it did for them, and as a result I was compelled to move on in search of what would work for me, and so it was that I began to walk anew path, one where I was required to move beyond all books, beyond all conventional practices and all conventional teachings, one that require that I experience more than words, more than books, I was destined to follow the path of the "Doubting Thomas."

Of course I have known for a very long time... hell, I've always known that I was a part of something greater, of some greater happening, but I had always tried to understand that greater something through the parameters of my own human opinion; I didn't know any other way. Even so, even in the innocence of my youth I knew that my body was not that which I ultimately sought, nor was it my mind, nor IS it past life memories.

True enough, senses' and memories are an important part of the self, but I knew then as I know now, that beyond them, beyond that simple ageing face in the mirror and its memories was something deeper, something inherently more meaningful. In my recognition of these things I clearly understood then, as I do now, that I have yet to achieve the sum total of my highest potential. I have yet to experience that voice of silence which all the Masters say is to be found behind the chatter of an undisciplined mind. But

this prisoner in whose words you share, is committed whole heartedly to the divine search that will make this great achievement possible; a long shot at a last incarnation.

I have decided to whole heartedly follow this out, believing as I do, that this must be the path of highest possibility, after all, had not the great prophets spoken of it as so, and why had the great mystics, the guru's, the yogi's and the prophets of all ilk chosen the same path, the path of separation and silence, when the multitudes around them had chosen otherwise? - the answer to this unfathomable commitment to sacrifice the pleasures of this life, can be none other than a commitment to a higher calling brought about by some powerful message of wisdom, some powerful message spoken by a secret voice from beyond, a voice that others, less committed, were unable to hear; the secret voice of beauty behind the chatter heard by the undisciplined multitudes. I can only believe that the spiritual giants among us must have heard some instruction from that soundless voice I seek ordering them to silence their rambling thoughts, to rest their weary heads, to become something more than words, emotions and memories. It must be so; why else would they give up so much?

Though I admittedly have not obtained the higher levels of consciousness that I seek, I have learned that when I go deep within my subconscious mind in search of that elusive silence I sometimes fall into a place where I relive both the beauty AND the horrors of my youth, when this darkness comes, when I am cast back into the darker parts of my life the spikes are driven into me in the form of recognition, a recognition that I have been careless and ungrateful with the gifts I have been given.

It is true, the lofty, clear values and magical miracles that I had once believed in and subsequently experienced as a child, were for some reason ignored by the older me. The pliant willingness to hear the celestial voices of a child's innocence became just a guilty murmuring memory in the sacred wellspring that had become my now lost innocence. Oh to be sure I maintained deep within me the belief, the sensation, the desire to be in contact with that other more innocent me, that secret knowledge of things eternal that is neither this reality nor this consciousness, but for some reason I did not. Yes I remembered and believed the magical, but one thing after another came along to distract me and those memories became covered with the dust of neglect, the floating motes of wasted time and a wasted physical life until the wheel of my beliefs, the wheel of my experiences and the wheel of disconcertment slowly and hesitantly came to a slow and final stop. And in the way that water spoils when it ceases to move, so too did the water of my higher calling spoil with the stagnant repertoire of a social life I was ill-suited to follow.

For the longest now I have lived partly in this world and partly in that world of phantasmal memories. For many years now I have lived a divided life, a double life of what could rightly be described as a paradox, for certainly I am a prisoner and that cannot be denied, but I have also been a free man one who tasted wealth and the sensual delights that things like wealth affords. In my physical life I learned a variety of necessary things, I learned how to be a father, a husband, a leader, all this did I learn. I learned how to please my children, my friends, my wife, other people, and I learned how to please a misunderstood god. I learned how to wear fine shoes and fine clothing, how to appreciate good cigars, beautiful automobiles and I learned how to please women. But still I was, even in my enjoyment of life, always lonely, always apart from the rest, never a citizen in the present sense of the word, that sense of difference that one such

as I always feels; and in those moments of lonely reflection I came to realize that I envied them, the simple men and women, the humble creatures who seek nothing and give in return everything, I envied their blindness and in that envy I too became blind and in the End I became more like them and less like my true self the me Destiny had ordained.

It is all true, in my life as a freeman I tasted power and as a freeman I smelled the hair of many a beautiful woman. I married an angel, quickened children who love me and I experienced prosperity, but those things are now only the memories of a man past his prime, of a man gracefully doing his time.

Yes. I have been a fool about some things but it is here, behind bars, that I have been a different kind of fool, the kind of fool who believed in the innocence of Hope, the sensation of Belief and Expectancy, the expectancy of miracles, the expectancy of Truth and Fairness in the Justice System of my country, and I have felt the dark disappointment that only misspent Hope is capable of producing. In spite of the realization that my government is no longer the “good guys” I can assure you that I am not at war with Hope or Faith, however disappointed I have become in their trustworthiness. No not at, just as a beaten dog must ultimately return to its cruel master if it is to receive food, so too does the dog in me return to eat its vomit at the feet of my harsh master, Hope; and so it is that I still believe that the principles of Fairness which founded this great nation will ultimately vanquish it’s present evil: I love my country so what other choice do I have. Yes, the rigors of a prisoner’s disenchanting mindset have ever so slowly begun to rot my soul making me weary from the burden of it, but without Hope, a convict will perish. I continue to live under the spell of the prison twins, Faith and Hope; this because I also live in the world of sorrow and misfortune, and without Faith and Hope I would surely fall from the tree of life and rot upon the ground of anger. And there it is I suppose, my paradoxical position, and the truth that I have learned which says that what a man has had and what he will always have is in his own mind; my wife understood this, but somehow I did not. I have awakened.

Chapter Three

My life in prison has taught me that in today's society it is a sin to think things unknown to others, to seek out the mysteries which are beyond the masses. But alas, I am no longer of the masses, I am a prisoner, an outcast, and with the acceptance of that reality I have asked myself and now I ask you, "Is it a sin to risk one's immortal soul by questioning the unquestionable, to ponder the hidden meaning of things such as life and death, good and evil, light and dark?" I ask this because if it is a mortal sin to seek the truth then I am most certainly damned, because I am powerless to resist my own inquisitive nature concerning it. In my defense I will add, what alternative does a condemned man have except to explore that which is available to him; and what is it that is available to him if not resentment, hatred, anger, fear and loss of faith? With that said I must confess to you, here and now, that I have dabbled into the realms of evil as equally as I have explored the realms of good, I must, it is after all the only avenue open to me from where I stand, and I'll be damned if I will lie down and die without at least attempting to know the truth of not only my legal issues but of the mysteries of life as well.

Yes I know that in the eyes of patriotism and religion there is no sin greater than to do, or think, above the masses, no greater disloyalty than to try and separate yourself from the foolishness taught by the establishment. In this I have broken the laws, yet I am not concerned with the opinionated laws of man, because I am by nature a law breaker, a law breaker whose only fear is that he will fall short in his ability to bring to the light his experiences in these matters. That I fear.

This however is not my only fear, my only crime, I am after all a convict, that is without question, but I have committed a greater crime than any my retched flesh or some "Sham" trial could conceive; the greater crime I speak of is the crime of indecision and the crime of non-productivity. I, like so many others of my kind have allowed my fear of the unknown to turn my face at the advent of my own realization, and what punishment awaits me as a result of my slothfulness I do not know. Such crimes as these are not relevant to the ignorant, to the sleepers, the pistis of the masses, but it is my time, I am awake and am therefore accountable.

Awake, wide awake, beaten into consciousness and then murdered by a blow delivered to my heart by the very people and things I trusted. Torn into little pieces and cast into the pit of degradation and it was there, the last place on earth I wanted to be where I found that which I had been seeking for the last hundred lives, it was there at my lowest point of existence that I found me. Prison was the sword used to pierce my heart as surely as it was the surgeon who closed the wound, this I recognize and so I can truthfully say that prison was the spark that ignited the flame of me, a flame in the dark that illuminated the way, the hidden path that led me far from the masses. It is true, I have found the path, I have entered the tunnel and I am alone with only my groping mind to deliver me through it. I am afraid and my heart pounds in my chest, yet, I have no choice in the matter it is the way I have chosen, the cross I was born to carry. I cannot go back even should I want to. I have found the door. I have knocked and it has been opened... therefore should I not be bold enough to ask!

I am atop the earth. I am aloft from the dust of conditioning and I laughingly shake it loose from the souls (editor: spelled the way I want it spelled) of my feet.

The laws say that no one man is greater than another, that we are all created equal, and to think otherwise is the great transgression, the root of all evil.

My past life experiences however have enlightened me to a different reality, one that tells me that this is a false anti-god form of thinking. My past life experiences have taught me that I am not my brothers keeper, that we are not all equal, if, equality be measured by the rule of personal discipline; and valued progress a thing measured by goodness and sincerity. Some advance, some don't. However, the secret that I have learned in this lifetime is that in the end, all will advance, all will be equal, but this cannot happen until it is their time to do so, so do not criticize me for being on time.

I contend that any person can advance in this life if they are willing to work, willing to break free from the laws that bind them, be they rich or poor, educated or not, handsome or plain, genius or average. All that is required is the willingness to break the laws of equality. All that is necessary to be counted as an advanced soul, is to have the courage to commit the crime of striving to be better, different, above, more advanced than the slothful masses. All that is necessary for greatness is to lay aside the notion that you're the same as all the others, because to think yourself down, instead of up, is "tollebant hereses Diaboli" creating heirs of the devil.

I must warn you though, in the very near future, men like us who consider themselves different, who don't follow the program of the masses, will be hunted down like wild animals, they will face the persecution spoken of by John the Reveler. Be forewarned, the goals and the laws of humanity deal only in the physical, they do not understand the goals nor the laws of spirituality, and because the laws of man say that all men are created equal, they will seek to destroy those who profess otherwise; speaking for myself I can only say this, I am a convict and convicts break the law. Yes, I have broken many laws and been thrown away with the garbage, but I have been cured by the flame and have risen to fly upon the wings of a higher calling. My body and I stand in witness to the ultimate truth with only one thing to say, with only one question left unanswered, only one, and when it is revealed to me I will be gone, forever.

I know that you, my son, fear for me, for my soul, but don't, I was born in this life with a blessed curse; that curse is that I have always been driven towards forbidden thoughts. I have always had wishes and desires which men say are forbidden; I have never been normal, equal, part of a plan. This is my secret fear: that I will fail to resist the illusion, that I will become broken by my mortal desires, that I will become normal, that I will know the truth yet fail to resist those who deny it. No son, it is true, I am not a Musketeer. I am not "One for all," but separation is not the result of my having gone astray as some will believe, but is instead the inevitable result of knowing the truth, which is, that not all are worthy. I will say however, that I believe all men are capable.

I am a man to some, a number to others, number 76603-079, but none of that matters in the grand scheme of what's important. What is important is that I am not like the bulk of my brothers nor my sisters, and as I look back at the book of my so called lives, I see that it has always been so. Here is the path. Here is the realization that has illuminated me: in this life I was born a descendant of the Rainbow, the elite, and as a result of this, I was destined by forces beyond myself to search out the distant stars of my ancestors. It is a curse; it is a blessing, which has brought me step by step to my last and greatest transgression, my crime of crimes, my criminal intent: the recognition of my Godly DNA. Contained in that DNA are the seeds of my irreversible desire to explore my mind in ways abnormal, my curse is knowledge, my curse is recognition, my curse is my destiny.

With this understanding I have divined the future of my people and in that future I have seen the infant homes where children live together as “Children of the People,” children deprived of all individual accomplishment, children devoid of all ancestral pride. A misshapen world where all are alike, alike in mind, alike in race, alike in religion and alike in oppressions. But I am free from it for I have seen that God is with me, not them. I am of the blood, the Chosen and to deny it for the sake of religion or politics or race is the original fall spoken of in the scriptures, a fall that in my past I have taken. Now however I have seen the light, I have nailed my flesh to the cross and have risen from the cave.

This, my reader, is sin in the eyes of our cold new world. But I am a convict and convicts are like the mentally retarded, we can think or act in any way we choose, because we, like the insane, are considered animals, animals that cannot help what they are, animals who have no opinion, animals who count for nothing; I count for nothing and therefore I have been freed from societies walls. I have been unchained by chains. I have been freed by capture to think the unthinkable, to question the unquestionable. I can talk to the walls and no one will be surprised. I can spend hours looking at my hand and no one would care, I can claim to be Napoleon or Superman and none would give a damn, I have been separated from the commoners and as a result of this separation I am free to be me. I have awakened, I have risen, I have been saved.

Oh to be sure, out of ignorance I fought against this freedom, fought against my own impending destiny, but this life, this incarcerated outcome, this fate could no more be denied than the moon can deny the coming sun. And now I understand why prison was required of me; it was required of me to fast my freedom so that my emasculated life would have no other choice, but to face down the many devils I had created and to take the next step in my spiritual evolution; I have now done so and have gained a clear thought process.

It was not always this way, there was a time when fear held me in its rough grasp, I was a pasted convict with half a mind who ran from his own ancestry, his own destiny, I was somewhat happy in my ignorance, I wanted to be normal, I did not want to see the truth, I did not want to not care. I wanted to lie down my wit and take up the shield of denial, of ignorance, and for a time I did, but I could not sustain it, it was not in my DNA to be like the masses any more than it was in my nature to blame others for my errors. I was different from the masses, insane in the eyes of those with walled degrees. Then it happened, I went to sleep and woke up. And when that happened I knew for certain that I was not one of them, I knew that I had been selected even before this body had been enlivened. I knew that I was of the Light.

I do not want you to misunderstand what I am saying, because even after enlightenment my life has not been easy, the life of a convict is never all peaches and cream, because in spite of what I have achieved inside, on the outside I am a prisoner and as it is with all prisoners guilt is forever demanding its pound of flesh. “I am my brother’s keeper,” and “Love thy neighbor” are the words my guilt voice uses to confuse me. And in moments of weakness I tell myself to be compassionate, and being that I am a man blessed with good moral fiber, I sometimes listen to the voice careening the secret dark guilt of that supposed truth, and I began to doubt, and this doubt crushed the more apparent truth illustrating that I was more willing, more able, that I was a better man than most. The dark voice in my head hammered me with guilt, constantly reminding me that it was a sin for me to elevate myself, my thoughts, my desires and my knowledge above the masses. It told me that I had broken the covenant of equality, for I had dared to think that I, because of my willingness to work, had advanced my mind to encompass the meaning of the word “Individuality.” I had dared to seek what others refused to even contemplate, and therefore I was a sinner.

Television said, books said, music said, the Scriptures said and the government said, “All people are created equal. Love thy neighbor. Share what you have. Have pity on the poor,” but prison was illuminating a different truth. Prison was teaching me that books, the entertainment industry, religion and the government all had an agenda geared towards physical and mental slavery. Prison was showing me that some people simply try harder than other people and were therefore entitled to more; be that more time in prison or more compassion; be that more success or more failure. Prison was showing me an alternate reality than the one the voice in my head spoke of, prison was showing me that my neighbors had rejected common things like honor and moral fiber and that even though there were good men, here, whom I could love, that there were other men here who would rape my infant granddaughter if permitted. Prison was showing me that most of my brothers were mentally and spiritually lazy, so why should I share what I have earned with those unwilling to work for their own share; their own advancement? Oh how the new tree weeps for the old brown leaves.

Prison has jaded me, yet educated me to who and what I am in the eyes of the All, and I am here to say that no book, no religion, no entertainer and no government has experienced what I have experienced. In View of the fact that I have been where they are, I do not fault them for their beliefs, but they are just that, beliefs not first hand experiences, they are nothing more than the beliefs proffered to the gullible masses... but I am something different from the masses. Good I hope, but different regardless. Yes I confess it here; I am guilty of breaking the laws concerning Pride and Free Thought. Yes I am guilty of questioning the hypnosis of the status quo. Yes I am guilty of gazing at the stars, the home of my ancestors. I did it, I wished to know the mysteries, how could that be a sin? Yet in the eyes of some it is...I only desired to better myself not be above my brother. I who was born “trash” stood when others of my ilk sat and because I was, at the time, unprepared for the answers I would receive I was destroyed, but in that destruction I found my wings and became a god.

It is dark here. The flame within me stands still. I see a tunnel before me and I am alone in it save my groping mind to take me through it. Even with my new found knowledge, I am afraid.

On the walls around me I cast no shadow because the light which reflects me, comes from within; was I ill-prepared? Have I erred? Have I fallen through the other side of the mirror? Only time will tell.

I shoot through and into a nighttime sky, stars surround me completely; it is not a sky at all, it is the outer spaces of the physical universe. I am somehow, somewhere floating in that which I believe to be an unknown Solar System.

I hear voices, whispers, more like the sound of wind in a forest of trees, they are talking to me and I understand them all, simultaneously, “Experience“, they say, and I am gone faster than a beam of light.

I am there; where? Scenery develops slowly in front of my eyes like a scene does as you approach it through a forest of fog. I am a stranger outside looking in as a scene before me becomes real. I see the stage of life, then I see the actor and then I become that actor. Now we are one, I am he and he is me. I see the world around us through his eyes, breathe the air with his lungs, smell through his nose and think with his mind. He is not me, but I am definitely him.

Let me say here and now, that when I am there, I am there completely. When I am there I have no memories of here or of the man recording these experiences. When I am there in that other place I do not have the presence of mind containing the knowledge of this time nor this life. Therefore, I am unable, much to my disappointment, to ask that other—self the questions that this-self would like to know, nor do I seem to have complete access to the memories of that other self. To sum this up; I am unable to carry

the knowledge of modern inventions back with me, nor can I bring forward the complete memory of that past life. In fact, when I am there, I am not conscious of this life as Federal Prisoner number 76603-079 at all. When there I know only what that other self-thinks and experiences while there. And when I return I bring with me, not an entire lifetime of memories, but only scraps and pieces, a small window of experience that is all.

I am able to share with you these experiences concerning my past life memories, not because I am conscious of them while there, but because I return here with the memory of small frames of consciousness experienced while Night Traveling; memories akin, yet different from the memories one brings back with them after experiencing a strikingly vivid dream. No this is not a dream, it is a separate life, a separate entity that I am moving through time and space to share, yet we are one, he is me and I am him.

I look at my hands they are strong looking but withered and I know that they are the hands of an old man, the hands of an old man who is soon to die and contemplating his life while in the balance, a man passing the history of his people on to those he'll leave behind. Through the smoke he, we begin.

Tey-Gar

It is said that our ancestors were the first sons of the gods and that our first mother was the creator of our kind; this is the origins of our people according to the Old One's who lived in the far lands. No I do not know if this is true or not, but what I do know is that I was a man who hated and despised, who murdered and conquered, who ruled and persecuted, a man who did these things for the sake of doing them.

I was the first of our people in many generations to be something other than a slave to the Others.

The Others, the savages, came to our land ages ago and conquered it; as a result our people were divided. Those of my people who escaped that initial genocide fled into the mountains where our children fell ill in the harsh climate and died by the hundreds. So desolate was the rocky mountain terrain that my people were forced to inhabit, that the old folks starved so that their sons and daughters could eat, but we are a fierce people and we survived. The hatred however, it not only survived, it flowered into the very nature of my people, of me.

Every five years or so, the Others, would raid our mountain villages and carry our women and children off to be slaves. They murdered and plundered and raped my people without accountability; my people were herders and scholars, not warriors.

Long ago my people had learned from the sky gods the art of building serviceable shelter. They taught my people how to pack mud into blocks and then how to cook those blocks of clay until they could be stacked and fortified into walls for homes, and walls for fortification. We were the most advanced people on the planet. I am proud of that.

My blood, is the blood of the sky gods who flew the heavens beyond the gods worshipped by the savages; you see the savages worshipped the Sun and the Moon. My blood, is the blood of The Travelers. Yes my people, the chosen ones, are the children of the gods who in the days before man, flew the heavens above in great birds, and the savages hate us for it.

In the old cities of my ancestors, which the Others now occupy, it was common to see my people being brutalized, raped and beaten in public, especially our women. The Others envied us because our hair was the color of the sun, the same red-orange color of the gods, forever reminding them of our divine lineage. We, my ancestors, also had a written language; they hated us for this also.

There was a time when my people were thought to be the most advanced and respected people on the planet, but in truth we were weak and we tried to share our knowledge with other cultures, this was the beginning of our downfall. Being an advanced people we brought their young into our cities and we gave them the secrets of our people, then we accepted their families, and then their kinfolk. We treated them as equals, even though they were not; they bred like rabbits and over time they came to outnumber us, then they forgot our kindness and they overpowered us, and slew us and enslaved us. It was this way for many generations and during those generations my people forgot what the gods had taught them about agriculture, they forgot much of the knowledge that had made us great and we became like our Oppressors; no written language, no mental skills, no knowledge of crop rotations, and in the end we were little more than savages ourselves, savages who thought only of eating, sleeping and procreating. That is when I was born.

I did not blame my ancestors for being subjugated any more than I blamed my mother for not knowing who my father was. Nor did I blame my sister because her father and my father were not the same. I blamed no one for my life or my circumstances.

As a child of half years I saw my mother and sister taken into an alley by a group of savages and raped; I learned anger. As a child of half years, I championed anger as I watched a child grow in the belly of my sister. As a child of half years, I perpetuated anger, as I watched my sister die giving birth. And as a child of half years I became anger, as I watched my hands take the life of her child - their child.

Not long after the death of my sister's child, my mother, who was at the gates begging for work, resisted when one of them wanted her hair; our masters loved our hair, especially when it was golden red like my mothers; they would make wigs of our hair; it was considered very fashionable to them in those days. She died that day and I wept for her.

Even though it was forbidden I remembered the olden ways of my ancestors and in honor of my mother I dug a pit from the ground and I piled, inside it, rocks and then timber, on top of the timber I put my mother's desecrated body. I said prayers for her then I added dirt and covered her with it. I watched as the alabaster body of my mother disappeared with every handful of dirt that I myself threw and my hatred for the desert people increased within me to such an extent that I drew a stone blade across my chest until the blood of my ancestors flowed freely from me. All of this happened when I was a boy of only ten.

Later that night I looked beyond the stars to the gods of my people and I asked "Why," why had such an evil people been given life? I asked a god I had never known, what my people had done to deserve that which they were being forced to endure? I asked what it was that my mother and my sister had done to deserve the life and the death that had been theirs. And I vowed by the blood of my ancestors to bring as much vengeance as possible to my oppressors.

When I was twelve I saw one of them fall to the ground in a drunken stupor on the side of the main pathway leading to the center of the forest, he cried for me to help him. I took a stone and beat him with it until his body was lifeless, then I robbed him and left him for the wolves. The next day the Others murdered twenty of my people because of it. I was responsible, yet I said nothing because I was afraid. That guilt consumed me until I vowed to never again be afraid, even unto death.

Two years after that, my first murder, three of them fell upon me and raped me, they were drunk, and there was a custom among their people which said that a boy and a woman were the same. This is why they have no civilization of their own, they are a people who believe it better to take than build, and they prefer sex over family, body over mind. They are like rodents in that they take whatever they can from the land and its people without putting anything back to replace it, and then when all is consumed they move on. Like I said, they were drunk and that night I laughingly killed them and bathed in their blood. I then removed their heads and hid them in a cave that had been mine since I was a child.

The next day as I was returning to my town one of them saw me and how they knew I was the murderer, I do not know; but they knew. Without provisions I ran and in a panic ran into the wilderness and there I hid. I had no regrets then as a boy, nor do I now as an old man.

Time in the wilderness was hard and I was near starvation for I had been forty days with little to eat. In my weakened state I fell to the ground and faded in and out of consciousness, and in that delirium I began to pray not to the Sun and the Moon but to the god who flew the heavens beyond the Sun and the Moon, the god of my ancestors. I wanted to tell my god that I did not want to die in the wilderness and be eaten by animals, but I was unable to say anything except that I wanted to die avenging my people, then I lost all consciousness before I could finish my supplication.

When I regained consciousness a manlike figure was standing over me dressed in white. He was tall and pale with hair the color of gold. "Your people are my people, I am their father. I am your father" he said to me in a deep voice. I went to my knees and worshiped him there in the wilderness.

Together we were, and my god, my father, nourished me and taught me how to survive in the wilderness, he taught me a new/old language which he instructed was to be the language of my people, he told me that this new language would be a sign at the end of time that we were his people. He taught me the history of civilization, he explained that in the olden days, when the gods walked the earth, that they themselves became estranged, one from the other. That they, the gods, used humans as soldiers to war against each other and he taught me that the Others had been created by the gods in a land far away from where we now were, that they had been created by another god, to be workers. He taught me that my people had been created, last of all the people, and that our purpose had been to be the administrators of the new world. He taught me that we had been given an inventive spirit, that we had been designed, by the gods, to be the builders of civilization. He told me that my people had been created in the image of the gods themselves. He then taught me that it was he that had created us, and he told me that when he had created us, the people who looked like the gods, that the other gods became angry because he had given us too much of his blood, and that as a result of violating their laws, he himself had been banished from that place in the sky where the gods in those days lived. It was then that I understood that my creator, like me, had been driven away from his people and into that very same wilderness.

My god told me that as a result of my people having been created in the image of the gods that we were war-red upon and driven from the fertile lands of our original homeland like sheep scattered by a pack of wolves. But that did not satisfy the anger of the other gods, they wanted us destroyed, we were considered a blasphemy, monkey's who looked like gods, so in an attempted holocaust they sewed an enmity into the minds of the first men against my people. However, it became apparent that my people could not be easily erased from this planet, so the Other gods decided that the best way to destroy our people was to breed the god-gene out of us, to destroy the bloodlines of my people by breeding us with the Others and so it began, with the help of the other gods the first men enslaved my people and openly took our women and bred with them. But my god taught me that our bloodline would survive if we acted

together, he told me that my people had to rise up, that we had to move from the lands of our origins and move north past the big river and possess the land promised to us there.

Over the next few years my god taught me the secrets of war. Together we made weapons and a special warrior's hammer, the likes of which had never been seen and would never be duplicated; together we named it "My People." Later it would become known as "The Hammer of My People," for never had the world seen anything like it.

When our time together ended my god blessed my people and commanded that I be the leader of them, then he turned and left me in that place of high stones with these words, "Take the Hammer of Knowledge that I have given you, conquer your oppressors and then move your people to the land I have promised you. I have heard your prayers and I have dried your tears." I fell upon my face and wept heartily.

I found honor in my weapon, I found honor in my knowledge, I found honor in myself and I found pride in being created in the image of my god. No longer was I ashamed of whom my people were, my people had been the Builders and now they would become the Conquerors. A boy had fled into the wilderness, but a man would return from it.

As I approached the village of my childhood an old man sitting beneath a tree saw me coming; he looked at my long red hair and he looked at the warrior's hammer I now carried in my hand, and he knew. Rising to his feet he stood and followed me, rock in hand. As the old man and I neared the village, those of my people working the fields just outside the gates, and those herding the sheep, and those on errands for their masters stopped and looked upon me. The old man following me shouted "He has returned. The deliverer has returned!" The women fell to their knees, the children pointed and the men picked up their tools of labor and turned them into weapons.

Together my people destroyed the village of U-DEN and we slaughtered the Others. I, with "My People" cut the enemy down by the tens and by the hundreds and the Sun was low in the sky when we finished. I gave no mercy and in anger we hung from the walls those of our people who had willingly whored themselves to our enemies and we spat on them and when they had died we hung signs around their necks upon which I wrote the words "Impure Mind, Impure Blood" in the language that my god had taught me.

When the slaughter was finished the hatred inside me was not. When my blood-lust had been quenched I tried to leave U-DEN and return to the wilderness that I had known these past few years, but when I attempted to do so my people followed me, they kept shouting and chanting my name "Tey-Gar! Tey-Gar! Tey-Gar!" I told them to return to their homes so that I could go into the wilderness and give thanks to the god of our people, but they had no homes of their own to go to, so, there, on that spot, I built an altar of stones and there we worshiped our god for the first time in many years as a free people.

I taught my people the importance of our lineage. I told them of the sacrifice that our god had given in order to give us his own blood, his own image. I told them that from that day forward none of my people were to mix with any others outside our tribe, that our hair was a sign to the gods that we were in their image. I told them that my god had told me that in the future, the gods would return, and that when they did, they would look amongst all the peoples of the earth to find among them those people who will rule the new heavens and the new civilization that they, the gods, would create here on earth. I told them that my god had said that the keepers of the earth will be chosen by the godliness of our blood. I then slit the

throat of a young white lamb and let its blood flow between the alter stones we had constructed. "This," I said, "shall be a sign to our god that we understand the importance of our bloodline."

Word spread fast that a Savior had come, and my people came from their hovels, their caves and their mountains; soon I had a great army of over two thousand men. With them as my weapon, and driven by my anger, I became a barbarian, a man bent on destroying, on conquering, and so I did.

I was the first warrior and I was the first Warlord of my people. I created the first army my people had ever known and I created its first war, and in it I slaughtered the arrogance of my enemies. In my lifelong anger I became a great and powerful force of reckoning, a great hero who compounded the meaning of tyranny and in the end I became everything I despised, but I did not then know it.

I was driven to decimate any and all who had molested my people, my culture; I vowed to destroy any and all who had or would subjugate my people because of the color of our skin or our hair. I was a warrior in the truest sense of the word, I was also a barbarian; I had forgotten the superior intellect that my god had given to my bloodline, an intellect above that of all Others; for four years I marched and made war upon the enemies of my people. I killed and burned my way across the land, from the jungle filled south to the hot lands where the sun sets, and then to the great water of the sun rising and then I made my home around the great stone lion and the giant stone alters of the original gods, this was the original land of my people before the Other gods and their dark armies drove my people away.

But I had forgotten my god. I had forgotten that he had instructed me to move my people north and into a new and Promised Land; in my anger I had forgotten my promise to my god, my savior, and my creator. And then one day while climbing a tree in search of honey I fell and had it not been for a skilled healing woman I would have died. But my god was with me, even in my transgressions.

In time I began to heal, but never again did I pass a day free of pain; I hurt all the time. In an effort to relieve my pain I found that if I sat with my back propped straight and my knees pulled to my chest that the never-ending pain of my wound subsided, so I spent hours each day sitting this way. I would sit at the edge of the great river which sustained my people and watch the Sun and the Moon and the Stars and I longed to be among them, to fly like the great birds of the original gods. Yes, I sat thusly and thus I watched and I contemplated the meaning of not only my life, but life in all its other forms, in all its complexity. I sat day after day like a broken statue feeling the warmth of the morning, afternoon and evening wind as it blew through my hair and across my cheeks, and I sat like a broken statue as the wind dried the tears of guilt I bore concerning my failure to take my people to the Promised Land; the guilt of failing to honor my vow to my god.

I continued to sit and watch and I was awed by the great power of the Sun on our land and on my people. I was awed by the power of Light. In this state of awe I contemplated my god, the god who had come to me in the wilderness, the god who had taught me the secrets of war so that I could deliver my people.... and I wondered if I had done right by him.

As my health returned so did my hatred, but this time it was not the vengeful hatred of my youth, this time it was a hatred for ignorance. With this new hatred firmly implanted within me I went to my people and began to teach them about the original gods and about how they had put a part of their own blood into the blood of the old ones to create the first man. I told them about how our god had defied the Other gods by giving us more god blood than any before us had possessed, and that as a result of this we came to be in the image of the gods themselves. I told them the story of my life, about how our god came to me in the wilderness; these things I needed to teach because many years had passed since we began our

conquest and many new children had been born to my people, children who had not been taught the truth of our origins, our history. And from that day on I became a teacher instead of a conqueror, and as such, I required that all my people learn the language that my god had taught me and it became our language.

On 987987e day an old soldier asked me if our god was more powerful than the Sun whom, in the absence of true knowledge, many of our people had come to worship, I knew not the answer. Because I did not know the answer I did not know what to say, but after some thought I told him that I did not think so, I told him that since my god ate and drank the fruits of the earth, I had to assume that he, like the other things here in our land lived and died by the light of the Sun and therefore could not be superior to the Sun itself. But I was troubled by my answer.

I contemplated what the old healer and I had discussed. I listened as the wind blew among the things around me. I watched children play. I watched young people mate. I watched children being born, and I heard birds sing. I saw the movement of the flowers as they tracked the Sun across the sky. I touched rocks and trees, water and fire; all of these experiences, all of this contemplation took a long time to bring about the gift of reason, but as all trees produce seeds, so too does the tree of contemplation, and finally with my old age came understanding.

I was awed at the power of the Sun, but I also understood that the power of the Sun was limited and that the awesome power which beckoned the flowers to turn and to follow its warmth across the sky was powerless when it came to healing the wounded, teaching a history or delivering a child from the tyranny of its oppressors. I also understood that my god was very different from the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. I understood that the power, the purpose of the Sun, was to give life to the earth, I also understood that the only power it had over my people was our need for the sustenance of this earth. Therefore, I knew that the Sun had no power over how I chose to live my life nor how any other man chose to live his life, that the power which directed the lives of men came from other men, the leaders of the people, men and women like me. The Sun, I surmised, ruled the growth of food, and that the Leaders among us ruled the growth of men, but who ruled the Sun? And who ruled the Leaders of the people? To this I concluded there must be some ONE thing controlling the heavens and all other things as well. I understood that there had to be a single point of all control, an undisputed leader, a single God who was able to become the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the birds and who could even become a man, if need be. I understood that my God, the God that had taught me the history of my people, the secrets of war and who had delivered my people from tyranny, had left his place so that he might come to earth as a man to bring justice to his chosen people. I then understood that my God ruled all, that my God was All.

I stood at the edge of the great river where the old gods had built their colossal stone edifices and I took a breath of satisfaction into me. In that satisfaction I looked behind me at the great stone lion and I saw the army of my people spread out before me and I looked to the north and I knew what I had to do.

We left the land of the first gods, the land we had fought and died to recover and we walked around the water in search of the land that had been promised us by the One God.

The land we had let was fertile and green, but the land we now walked was barren. Many of my people died along the way, but after many years we came to an opulent land with rolling hills of grass, on oasis of good land and good water. Surely this must be the land promised to us by our God, but I was unsure so on we continued.

After several moons of walking in this new land we came upon the remnants of an ancient stone wall. This wall had been constructed of cut stones that were so big that no man could have possibly made them and we camped beside the remnants of them. Surely I concluded, this wall, had been built by the same gods who had built the giant stone edifices of our homeland; there we rested.

That night off in the distance my people saw a light in the wilderness and they had great fear, but I understood. I gathered the hammer of my people and chose two men and two women and told them to come with me as witnesses to the event that I suspected was going to take place.

The five of us walked towards the light in the wilderness and there we saw a beam of light, a pillar of light, and standing in it was the God of my people and we fell upon our faces in fear and in supplication.

My God told us to rise and then he gave us the history of this land that he had promised us. He told us that one day he would return to earth and rule it completely. He told us that the land upon which we now stood was a sacred spot of the old gods, the spot where they came and left earth, and he told us that one day the gods would return and that he wanted his people, the people with the god-blood to be here to welcome them. He told us that others would come and try to take this land for their gods, but that we were to destroy them and to hold this land until the day that he and the Star Gods returned from the heavens. This we have done.

At this telling I am an old man upon his death bed. I have lived a bloody life but one that I am not ashamed of, for I was a man who found his God and worshiped his people. My blood is pure and my hammer remains unbroken. I am the first of the Builders and I am the last of the slaves. I am Tey-Gar.

At sunrise on the winter solstice I died and when I died my spirit floated above my body and I saw the tears of my sister as surely as I saw the smile of my mother. She started to speak, and I longed to hear her words, but I did not hear them because I was once again inside of the body I remembered and my heart bled. I looked at my hands and they were the hands of a man shackled. It is dark here, this is a dark place.

Chapter Four

I seem to have found cheerfulness, a peacefulness in these last few years of my life that seemed to have, for some designed reason, eluded me in my youth. This cheerfulness mindset of which I speak has become an important part of my evolution, not only as a man, but as an influencer of men. I have come to understand that cheerfulness in its enduring form is not a result of a physical or emotional experience, but is instead a state of mind that had to have been consciously developed, over many lifetimes. Cheerfulness, like anything of value, doesn't become a lasting part of ones personal makeup automatically; it is the fruit of a carefully pruned growth. It is the result of disciplined thought.

I am in prison and I am surrounded by the negativity of that reality. I am constantly exposed to extreme hatred, anger, apathy and a general lack of personal discipline, and as a result of this barrage I have learned to ignore my surroundings and to be within myself and what this has shown me is that nothing that is going on around are matters, what matters is what's going on inside of me. For example, when I arrived at the prison in Pollock, Louisiana I did so with thirty or forty other men of whom I did not know, one of those men was an older cat named Calvin.

Like me Calvin had done hard time in the various Maximum Security joints we convicts call Penitentiaries. Though not the same one that I had been incarcerated in for over ten years, we still knew some of the same folks; the Penitentiary world is a very small world, indeed. Anyway Calvin was a stand-up guy, but what he truly was, was a story teller and in his company all were rewarded with laughter. As it so happened, Calvin and I were assigned to the same cell-block straight "off the chain" (a prison term used to describe a prison to prison transfer; probably resulting from the fact that we are chained hands and feet throughout the ordeal).

The medium security joint that Calvin and I arrived at here in Pollock Louisiana was a brand new facility, meaning that there were no convict established rules in place at the time of our arrival. For instance: at the time of our arrival there were six televisions in the open common area of the cell-block we were assigned to. These six TVs were intended to be shared between one-hundred and twenty-eight men from all different walks of life. Under normal conditions, such as they are at this writing, the TVs, like everything else in prison, are broken down by race. Today there are seven TVs that are divided up this way: two Spanish language, two Black, two Sports and one White TV. I will put a disclaimer here by saying that the Bureau of Prisons, like all Federal Agencies denies that this type of voluntary segregation takes place, yet they tolerate it, because to do otherwise would be the cause of constant race wars over them. Yes I know that you might think that convicts don't need, under these circumstances, TVs at all. But let me remind you that if you don't have something to keep the minds of these men occupied you will have even worse problems. TV, after all, is no different for us than it is for you...and that is, a tool by which "we" and "you" are pacified and therefore controlled.

In addition to the willing segregation of our TVs, (TVs which the prison population pays for through a tax put on items we buy at the prison store with our own money) I will point out that the majority of prisoners fall into two categories: predators or victims. It is this sad fact that necessitates the need for segregation in the first place, because, like in any other environment irregardless of race, religion or creed, the bullies will always persecute the weaker persons, or groups of persons, if allowed to do so by a lack of Laws, or in this case convict enforced rules. Anyway, the TV assignments are agreed upon by the convicts,

such as who gets what and how many, and it is done according to numbers. For instance in my cell-block there are fifty or so Hispanics, fifty or so Blacks and around twenty Whites, hence the numerical breakdown of the TVs. So when a convict refers to a White or a Black TV that's exactly what they mean. What is watched on a White TV is controlled by the White population and a Black TV is controlled by the black population and so on. This does not mean that other races can't watch a TV not controlled by their people, because they can and do, but it means that a Whiteman would be considered disrespectful if he were to go and change the channel on the Hispanic TV, or Black TV, and vice-versa. Hate what I am about to say, THE TRUTH, if your fear demands, but different races like to watch different types of programs, hence the report that our mutual segregation works just fine.

As I said earlier, Calvin and I were put into a new prison and a new cell-block. When we were assigned to F-4 cell-block there was, maybe, forty guys total in the unit, the BOP was only then beginning to fill it up.

When we arrived, the TVs were assigned this way: two Hispanic, two Black, one Sports and one for the White boys. All was good. However, as that cell-block began to fill up over the next few months, there were only six Whites TOTAL assigned to F-4; six out of one-hundred and twenty-eight men. Here is what happened.

Due to the fact that FCI Pollock is a medium security joint a lot of the men coming here are first-timers, in other words they did not know or if they were told did not agree with the respect issues of race and space. Therefore some of the young Blacks that were subsequently assigned to F-4 did not think that six Whites should be allowed to have a TV to control, and they began slowly and deliberately to take away from us, by force, the one White TV.

How they began this coup was to post up and watch whatever we had on at the time, then wait for the Whites to go to work, and then change the White TV to BET (Black Entertainment Television), even though BET was on at LEAST one of their own TVs at all times, and then get belligerent when one of us came in and wanted to change it; which we did in Spite of their protestations. In the end a couple of the youngsters got brave enough to just come out and say, "The White-Boys ain't got no TV." That's when it all came to a head, and that's when some of the older Blacks, Calvin the most outspoken of them, stepped in and prevented a race riot; in the end the White Boys kept our TV and as I stated earlier there are now about twenty of us, so the issue is now moot.

To tell you the truth, things are not at all smooth in the Federal Prison System concerning TVs; and no reasonably intelligent person could think that one-hundred and twenty-eight men from various backgrounds could share seven TVs without conflict. And I am here to tell you that at least half of all the violence taking place in the Federal Prison System is somehow either directly related to, or indirectly related to convict bullies and their lack of respect concerning others and TV. One solution to the problem, as I have already stated is, to remove them completely, however, like I said, they are the best baby-sitter money can buy and without them you'd have even more problems. So what to do?

Well the State Prison Systems have already solved the problem for us, they let the cons BUY their own TVs and have them in their cells. But the Feds are hardheaded and refuse to allow this commonsensical approach to solving the problem at hand. Oh they can come up with a thousand excuses for refusing to allow cons to have their own TVs such as, "Convicts will hide things in them" or "Federal inmates are transferred more often than State prisoners and we cannot be responsible for TVs." And of course they are right in both instances, but the State Prisons let the cons buy CLEAR plastic TVs that can be seen inside of

and it seems to work out just fine for them, and the very valid transfer issue could be solved with the flick of a pen; put a disclosure clause with the PRIVILEGE to purchase a TV that says, “If you are transferred by request or by staff choice you cannot transfer with your TV, so if you choose to buy one it is not transferable” and then have all buyers sign it.

This really is a problem in the Federal Prison System, one that needs to be addressed and yes, after seeing first hand the violence resulting from the present TV situation, I am coming down heavily in favor of allowing convicts to purchase and keep TVs of their own.

Two years have now passed since the event I spoke of earlier concerning the TVs. I am still here in FCI Pollock, but my friend Calvin has been sent back in the Penitentiary after putting hands on one of these ignorant youngsters over an unrelated set of circumstances. The TV situation is fine and we have had few other racial incidents, though there is always the constant drama that seems to be the prison way of life.

Even though the above mentioned story about the state of things in prison is informative, it is not the reason I put it to pen and paper, I do so because the story you have just heard is nothing more than a precursor to the spiritual lesson that this man Calvin would unwittingly teach me about myself. Here is our story.

As I have said in this book and in others, everything in prison everything is racial, like looks out for like, and one of the closest knit groups in prison are called the “DC. Blacks” and believe this, there’s a bunch of ‘em in the system; most especially the Penitentiaries and in my ten years at that custody level I have known a grip of them, Calvin himself is what is commonly called a DC. Black by the different cars on the yard.

Now, if you have read any of my past writings concerning prison you will know how I despise the senseless noise makers, well, of all the noise makers in F-4, you guessed it, Calvin was the most obnoxious, the loudest of the loud, and noise makers irritate me to no end. I just don’t get it and generally consider it to be, in most cases but not all, the result of a low intellect person trying to get attention, but, it is what it is. The thing that troubled me about my intense dislike for what I consider to be complete disrespect was, that I truly liked and respected Calvin, he was a good person, and I could see this goodness in him, not to mention that he had stood beside me for no reason other than he thought it was the right thing to do, and this made it very hard for me to dislike the noise-maker in him.

As a result of the fact that I owed Calvin a debt of gratitude coupled with the fact that I truly liked him, I had to put into check, my negative thoughts concerning his, what I considered to be, rude behavior. Being that I was forced by the above circumstances to invoke self-discipline concerning my attitude on an issue I felt then, and feel now as justified, I began to take a closer look at him, at the man I liked, and in order to stifle my negative opinions about his actions long enough to give him a fair evaluation I had to focus not on the one thing about him that irritated me, but on the many other things about him that I liked.

Over the course of the next few months I observed Calvin from afar with curiosity, much the way I suppose that an animal would watch with perplexity another animal of his kind acting a fool on TV. Completely oblivious to me and my thought process Calvin lived his life pretty much the way I guess he always had, from one good time to the next. And I will admit that I was very perplexed by the riddle of my honestly liking a man who had habits that I personally did not like. In this strife I found strength, the strength to put aside my irritation at his mannerisms and be objective about him as a person. I somehow

understood that this was a test in which I was engaged and not a coincidence, it had to be, this was the UNIVERSE trying to teach me something that it felt I very much needed to learn.

With the understanding that Calvin was the deliverer of some very irritating lesson that I was supposed to learn, or some hole within myself that I was supposed to till, I accepted the challenge and began to very reverently observe the various varieties of noisemakers from the different social, political and racial groups; I accepted this challenge by asking for strength and understanding from whomever or whatever was trying to call my attention to this situation. In other words I went beyond simply dismissing these disrespectful men around me and went into contemplating the reason for their acting out in this manner this I did while deep within a meditative state of mind. The more I watched the more I learned, the more I learned the less I seemed to like the men I watched, believe that, these men simply refuse to exhibit basic human courtesy and though my thoughts on the matter have changed little as a result of the Calvin experience I did find a peace with it.

After months of soul searching I finally understood the lesson, it was simple: I had been creating my own misery by sitting around and allowing myself to be angry at the actions of others. I suddenly realized that what was going on around me didn't matter in the grand scheme of the whole. What did matter was how I reacted to what was going on around me. I magically understood that the only person being affected by my irritation at how others lived their lives was me, and that I had the power to reverse any and all irritating circumstances in my life, by simply refusing to dwell on them; such a simple lesson, but oh so hard to put into practice.

The lesson in this is that prison and by extension life is a reflection of how we perceive them, i.e., we can choose to be irritated and subsequently unhappy by the things going on around us, we can choose to overlook them, or as in the situation I just described, be forced by our own maturity to see through the things we do not like about our circumstances and see the deeper reality, which for me was that these men, even without their knowledge of the fact, are by their actions teaching me something about myself that I very much need to be aware of. What I learned was that my life experience is dependent upon what "I" think, on "my" attitude. The truth of the matter was that there are lots of men in prison who go unaffected by the non-sense that goes on around them, which very clearly illustrates that our experience on any given subject is determined by what we allow ourselves to think, and by our attitudes concerning what we think. And once I was able to grasp that one simple concept, my life turned from one of constant sorrow to one of relative happiness...relative being the key word here, because like every one else, I do have my ups and downs, but probably for the first time in my incarcerated life I can honestly say that I am more often happy than sad.

I decided to put this story/lesson in this book, not because its relevant to the story at hand, but because I wanted those of you on the outside whose lives seem to be unhappy to take a close look at what I am trying to tell you. I do this because I sometimes hear from people on the outside who tell me how desperately wrong their life seems to be going, to which I can only reply that I wish that their lives were as happy and peaceful as my own, and I sincerely mean it. With this said the question must be asked, "How can the life of a prisoner be happier and more peaceful than that of a free person?" Of course the answer is in the understanding of the word "Free."

The truth is that there are a lot of people who have every reason to be miserable yet aren't, and the reason is that they have "chosen" to be cheerful, because they have "chosen" to find something to be grateful for. On the other hand, people who in truth have no reason to complain at all, often times find things to complain about, to worry about, to hate and to fear. Therefore one can readily see that the

physical circumstances of life do not guarantee happiness, nor do they cause suffering, these conditions are of the mind. I have come to realize that an advanced thinker will maintain his or her peacefulness, their happiness, their inner-strength, no matter where they are or what is happening around them. They may experience setbacks in the manner of all human beings, yet in the end they will overcome those setbacks by maintaining an almost magical equilibrium of poise, even in impossible situations. This is the mark of an advanced soul, and with observation, you can identify the hidden Master's in your midst by seeing those qualities in them.

I realized early on in my "bit" that in order for me to survive prison I had to make choices about how I was going to ACCEPT my life, such as it now was. I knew that it was essential that I maintain control over my actions, and the thoughts that create them. I knew that it was essential that I develop the fortitude to be calm and poised at all times, and I believe it is the same for you as well. If we are going to live a life of happiness we must strive for a mindset of cheerfulness and the only way to achieve this peaceful state of mind is to be willing to accept the reality that our happiness and subsequently our life is a product of how we accept the things that are going on around us. The hardest part of this mindset to grasp is that sometimes our Destiny actually causes difficult circumstances to arise in our lives, creating things that make us uncomfortable, simply to force us to develop intellectually and spiritually by demanding that we deal with them. With an understanding of the higher laws of common sense you will know that life's difficulties are designed to help us develop our highest potential as human beings. And the reality is, until you develop the ability to control your thoughts and emotions you will not be able to maintain any sort of happiness equilibrium, even when your life seems to be going well. It is a fact that without these higher human qualities, no matter how good our life is, our inner-weaknesses will create reasons for us to be miserable.

The thing that I learned from the Calvin experience and a thousands others just like it, is that life is supposed to be a challenge, that is the way life is designed, and I hate to admit it, but the truth is that by human nature we are slothful creatures when left unchallenged. Therefore to have a rough life is to be challenged and subsequently to be progressing, because it is adversity which creates the necessity for improvement, and just as it was harsh weather which necessitated the need for humans to create improved shelter, so too does the harsh conditions of life create the necessity to improve and strengthen our character. It is the person who experiences the most difficulties in their physical life that has the greatest opportunity to experience the most progress in their spiritual life.

It is true, difficulties are a very important part of human evolution, just as happiness is. And is it not true to say that if nothing goes wrong in your life, you will be unprepared to handle discontent when it does most assuredly come? Just look around you at the state of our nation today, where none seems willing to take responsibility for their own actions. Our new no-fault society has removed from us our accountability, and for this reason, we have become a nation of weak-minded complainers. We as a people no longer see ourselves as warriors, as builders, as creators, as contributors to the greater good of society as a whole. Instead we have become a selfish race of weaklings, weaklings who rely on the Government for our every spoonful of sustenance, and subsequently we have come to resemble Plato's democracy (rule by the mob) as described in his masterpiece, The Republic; a society completely unprepared for the difficult changes which lie ahead.

Each of us have, or have had, circumstances in our lives that cause us difficulties, that lead to things like fear, depression, sorrow, hatred, anger, extreme sympathy and so on, we can all agree on this, but the point I want to make is that we also have the power to survive any type of tragic event without so much as

a mental disparaging, if we choose to do so. And I contend that if we had to face real adversity, such as surviving a holocaust or a famine such as I did in one of my past lives as the warrior Tey-Gar, that we would see for ourselves that we do have, hidden deep within us, a fortitude that we were previously unable to recognize; harsh circumstances are the builders of character. Prison for me was that holocaust, that disaster of epic proportion, the harsh circumstance that challenged me to improve myself. Prison was that something horrid that I had to man-up to, and as is so often the case, such experiences completely change a person, for better or for worse; I chose to be a better.

I say that I am a better man as a result of prison because before I came to prison I had been emotionally soft, I have now been hardened and can face the remainder of my life with a new-found courage, a new-found cheerfulness and an inner-poise that the young careless me could never have developed. But few of us are so lucky to experience disaster on the level of a Lifer Convict and as a result we seldom have the chance to discover our true nature and inherent resilience. Instead of being forced to improve themselves the untested spend the bulk of their lives as freeloaders constantly polluting our planet and our society, or complaining about those who, unlike the majority, have achieved their highest potential physically, spiritually or financially. Yes, it is easier to point out the reasons why we can't better ourselves than it is to actually BE better. Herein lays the answer to the equation: one's station in life is all in one's attitude.

I too used to be one of those who believed that happiness resulted from material accomplishments, I wasn't a freak about it, but I knew that life had to be better than what I had, to that point, experienced. However, some folks ARE obsessed with material happiness, or should I say the desire for material prosperity, erroneously believing that it is the key to Utopia. People always think: If I had that, I'd be happy. If I had so-n-so's life, I'd be happy. If only I were rich, I'd be happy and on and on, and most people die Without realizing the truth, that happiness is a result of cheerfulness and that cheerfulness is a result of being happy on the inside, not the outside. Somehow, they, we, never seem to realize that actual physical circumstances are not as important as the attitude we have concerning the world in which we live. The verity of reality is that a person can be happy anywhere, and likewise a person can be miserable anywhere and you need look no further than the entertainment industry to see the misery of people who seem, on the surface of things, to have it all. The truth is, that even a Lifer Convict can find peace and happiness within by finding his or her true sense of value through contributing something positive to the greater good of humanity. That my friend, is the key to happiness according to Mark.

Chapter Five

I look at my hands; they are the hands of a man, not old, not young but withered and hard, nonetheless. I am wearing leather sandals on my feet and I am dressed in rags, the remnant of what I know was once a black robe.

We, this body and I, step from the mouth of a cave that Serves as our home and look to the heavens, the weather is gloomy and in that I find myself hoping for rain; it has been a long time since I have felt the purity of rain water washing away the dust and grime of my tattered skin with its cleansing touch. I look once more to the sky to judge the time? I cannot tell with the clouds.

I begin to walk the rock strewn flatlands outside my cave; I am heading towards the water-well where the faithful leave food for me, food that I will not eat, not today. My name is Juan or John, I am, or I was a man from a small village called Torrecilla, near Malaga, but I have since forsaken all worldly possessions so that I might experience the Divine Principle in the way of Ezekiel; so that I might experience Divine Forgiveness, in the way of David; so that I might experience Divine Revelation in the way of my name sake. Sixteen years now I have lived in the desert just outside of ----- ????, sixteen years I have served in isolation, the last thirty days of which have been without food.

I am emaciated, wasted, ragged and frail, yet today I will do as I have done for the twenty-nine days previous to this one, I'll walk to the edge of the "Angels Well" where I will sit and tempt myself with the food left there for my sustenance, by the faithful. Though the flesh I wear is hungry and weak, the me inside it is well fed and strong. Thirty days...I shall go forty like my Lord did in his own desert.

I am alone, alone with my thoughts and my sins, my memories and my fears, in this I walk the well worn pathway from here to there, as my kind have done for two centuries. Today I hesitate and then step so that I can stoop over to look at a scorpion passing nearby, evil beasts these things; I don't understand why the Good Lord even made them. I should smash the little pest, but I won't because it's not my place to do so; someday when I am perfected they will cease to be a threat to my flesh, or so I've been told.

Rising to my feet and continuing my trek towards the well I become aware of the heat and only then realize that the morning's cloudy respite has given way to the days clear duty; soon after that I feel the Sun beating down upon me in hammer waves of heat.

Deep within my thoughts I walk and the distance falls away behind me like the years of my youth and suddenly I realize that I am standing at the edge of the well where it is said that an Angel of the Lord appeared everyday for two years to a nomad named Ali Abdul Raheem. It's not true though, Angels do not appear to non-believers. Others say that Gregory the Nazianzen had a visitation near here though, that I believe. But I don't believe all those other stories Angels and infidels, no sir I don't. It's common knowledge in the church that the superstitious faithful will report seeing things that they do not understand and then believe them to be miraculous acts of God, for that very reason the church discourages the miracle business.

"Ouch!" I grunt as I step on something sharp, which I am sure has bruised my heel; I lean over to inspect my foot, its fine, but sore. I guess that I shouldn't have removed my sandals, but, as we all know,

suffering is that which builds faith, even my Lord embraced his suffering and so too must I. A bruised heel, an unblemished soul.

I decide to kneel in prayer and give thanks to the Lord for allowing me this life, and I ask, as I do hourly, for forgiveness of my transgressions...for I am a great sinner among men.

Upon completing my prayers I lean over and pick up a nearby stone and begin to strike myself with it, first on the chest, then on the top of my head and finally on my face. When I am delirious and exhausted and the blood covers my hand I fall to my face in the dust, where I lose consciousness and sleep.

I am snapped awake by the biting of ants, I hastily brush them off and cross myself, I am grateful for the pain. I look around me with a bit of confusion and then I look Skyward and notice that above me is a noonday Sun; the clouds have now been completely burned away by the power of heat, much the way that our sins are housed away by the fires of suffering, I cross myself once again.

Off in the distance I see dust being picked up by the now increasing noonday wind and driven towards me like a herd of animals. Quickly it comes, I steady myself and cover my face as it blows past me leaving parts of itself on my person; it passes in an instant and I am befuddled by the fact that once the whirling dust has passed over me that there is no wind behind it, not even a wisp. Curious I think as I brush a thin film of sand and debris off my robe.

Normally there are no birds this far away hour the grass lands except the scavengers, but today I notice that sitting atop one of the well-stones is a small sparrow, the type found in my homeland. He is supping from food left by the faithful; I am amazed at this and sit cross-legged where I generously watch him for an unmeasured amount of time.

It is as if this little feathered miracle does not even know that I am here, he seems oblivious to me as he peeks away at the bread splayed out before him. A sparrow in the desert...this I sense is significant; but in what way? Then my heart leaps as I contemplate the possibility that I am dead. I am disappointed to find after careful inspection that I am not.

I sit for what seems to be the longest time watching the sparrow at the well when movement off in the distance catches my eye. It is then that I notice the heat-wave distorted figure of someone walking purposefully in my direction and towards the well; I can tell by the poetry of the stride that it is a woman and that she is carrying something, probably a water bag across her shoulder. I suspect that she is one of the faithful who brings food here for me on a regular basis, however as she gets closer I can see that I am mistaken. She is not carrying a water bag, but is instead she appears to be carrying a book-but what would a WOMAN be doing with a book? The bird continues to eat and I continue to watch her approach without movement, in spite of the numbing pain in my legs.

After what seems to be an appropriate amount of time the woman arrives at the well but passes it by to stand directly in front of me. She looks into my eyes as if looking through them, yet says nothing for what seems like an awfully long time. I return her stare after looking her over from head to toe. I notice that she is wearing a sheer white garment that reveals her form in a manner most disturbing; my only thought is that, in it, the Sun would burn her to the bone. I look at her feet and notice that she is also barefooted, yet her feet have no trace of dirt or even dust visible upon them. She looks familiar to me...I seem to know her, yet I do not.

“I am from far away,” she says with a heavy accent, one I could not identify, and then adds “The Watchers have sent this to you.”

With those words the woman at the well hands me what I recognized to be the book she carried. Bewildered I pulled loose the binding flaps and opened it...page after page I turned, until seeing much to my chagrin that all of them were blank. Bewildered I look once more into the woman's face as if the answer to this mystery might somehow be found there, but no answer comes. Without a word spoken between us she takes from her shoulder a small leather pouch and likewise hands it to me; the pouch contains quill and ink.

I started to ask her the purpose of the things which she had brought me, but a knowing came to me in the form of words unspoken and I understood that I was being told to write the story of my life, for purposes beyond my ability to understand. Then the woman added vocal words in unison with the unspoken words by saying "Your life cannot be lived in peace until you have put it into words. Your life does not exist until it has been written of." Then she pointed towards the sky and disappears. It was then, in that instant, that her face was revealed to me, unclouded, and I saw clearly her almond eyes; I fell to the ground put my arms around her ankles and my face atop her feet, then I wept.

With dust and tears covering my prone body and face I stretched myself out in the manner of David's own plea for forgiveness. I do not know how long I lay upon my belly but when at last I rose, the Sun was low on the horizon. Only then did I realize that I had fallen into the deep sleep of a man without food, and my stomach ached as a reminder of my need, and I doubted that she had come at all.

I rose to my knees and then to my feet where I walked the last nine steps to the Prophets Well and pulled from it the gift of life. It was then that I remembered the sparrow, my eyes searched for him but he was gone. Upon closer scrutiny I noticed that his little bird body had savaged the bread that had been left, for me, only then did I notice the cheese and the rotted fruit strewn around the edge of the well; I lamented that the ants were feasting on the labors of the faithful...hasn't it always been that-a-way!

Kneeling in front of the water well I remembered once again the Angel who had come there to bring me paper and ink, I remembered my lover and my heart ached so deeply that it hurt worse than the pains in my legs and back and midsection. I remember her eyes in every fantasy, in every dream, in every thought... she was my goddess, and she was my sin. I wanted to weep but I hurt too much for more tears.

Off in the distance I saw clouds gathering and then closer to me I saw a small brown lizard and I wondered about the significance of my existence, and I remembered the secret, which is that Time is karma.

I turned to make sure that the book and the pouch were real and not some figment of my delusions, they were, in fact they were sitting exactly as she had left them. I wondered why she had walked halfway across this barren desert to deliver them and I thought about her words concerning my life being important, only if I put it into words.

Looking out past the rocks and off towards the mountains to the West I reminded myself that much of the day had passed and that nightfall would arrive before I could make the entrance to my cave, my home and my penance. With that in mind I dusted off my clothing and gathered up the things that she, my heart, my breath, my mother, my sister and my Guardian Angel had brought me, and began to retrace my footsteps along the pathway that had brought me here. I did not drink from the Angel's Well; sorrow would be my only sustenance for the day.

It is said that the souls of the men like me cannot leave this place until the second coming of our lord and savior Jesus the Christ. It is also said that those of us who devote our lives to penance gain, in the

end, complete forgiveness for all our past sins. It is said that to suffer until death is the greatest of all acts of repentance....and I believe it to be so. It must be so, or I am doomed to spend eternity in Hell fires.

Strange is not the word for what that walk back to my grotto could be called, for no more than halfway back did the phantasms of my brothers begin to appear beside me, walking this way and that as if trying to attract my attention with their movement; I was disturbed by this because, to some, this could be construed as proof that to die in penance is NOT a guarantee of salvation. Praying as I go I try to ignore them, but this proves impossible because they now seem to be following me, lined up and escorting me along my path. What had started out as one then two, had now become a cadre of things unmentionable so that by the time I arrived at the entrance to my cave there were perhaps a hundred or so phantasmal apparitions at my side, but, as always they stop at the edge of the rise to my cave, they do not follow me up the incline, nor do they breach the mouth of my cell. When I reach the entranceway I turn once more to look at them but they are gone, and I doubt my sanity, for many such delusions have I had these last four years, yet never have so many come to visit me at one time. I climb the slight precipice in front of me and enter my cave.

This cave that I have called home now for these past sixteen years has a rather small opening; in fact, it requires effort for me to enter. However, once inside it is quite spacious in that it is four steps wide, seven steps deep and probably that high. In it I have no chair, no table, nor do I have a bed, I only have The Book, and now I have parchment and ink.

It is rumored by the local nomads that I have command over the serpents and other creatures, but it is not so, and to know the truth concerning it one only needs to look at the welts from the ant bites on my upper body. However, I will say that the animals here-about do not seem to fear me, nor do they try to avoid me as they once did. Maybe a simple explanation is that over the years I have come to look and to smell more like them than a human. At any rate we have arrived at a peace for which I am eternally grateful, and yes it appears that even the serpent has come to believe the truth of The Book, which states that the lion and the lamb will someday lie together.

In what serves as one of the comers of my cell there is a flat stone about a hand high and about a chest in size, can't imagine how it arrived there, but it did, so I put the parchment and ink atop it. This of course causes me to once again contemplate the Origin of Reason behind the giving of these so rare and precious of gifts, gifts given to a sinful creature such as I.

I rise from my knees and in standing I stumble slightly, then move once again to the mouth of my cell and crawl through the opening; I find it poetic and interesting to contemplate the fact that I can only leave the darkness of this cave and gain the freedom of an outside world by first getting upon my knees; the story of my fall condensed to a simple reality. I am beset by the ironies of my life.

The evening air is crisp and sharp as the days heat is replaced by the nighttime cold; I marvel at the complete and beautiful silence of my wilderness surroundings. I look skyward, knowing as I do that the stars are watching over me as always; even when I do not have the sense to appreciate them. I run my hands through my thinning hair and contemplate the day, the month, the year, then I laugh at the vanity that caused man to create his calendar, knowing as I do that man's calendar is nothing more than a creation used to measure the only thing truly important to him, the length of his life. Here however one is beyond such things, here time has no purpose and therefore it has no hold upon men like me. It is said that it is also that way in the other dimensions such as heaven, that there is no death and therefore no time to pass, just a living without an end.

I sit and begin to meditate while listening first to the stars, then the creatures, then the air and then nothingness. After countless years of practice I am quickly deep within myself, while there I ask for knowledge and still my mind as I listen and look for whatever visions might come. However, the only images that I see on this night are images of her. Truth be known, she haunts me even still, and my curse is that I love her above even God Almighty. I can't help it and to lie about it won't make it any less of a sin.

I fell in love with her when we were only children, I the younger. In the warmth of that love I in awe watched as she grew into womanhood, and then in the horror of that love I watched as she was claimed in marriage by one of the elders of our village; her husband was old, twice her age and had lost his first wife in childbirth; now he had claimed the one I loved as his second, I was devastated. That first night of their marriage was torture for me, imagining as I did the consummation of their vows. And when I could no longer stand idle in my thoughts I took my skinning knife and crept to his home, my intentions were clear.

Silently I used my blade to lift the bar where I crept inside, and there in the backroom I saw her standing naked before a small wooden table cleaning herself with a white cloth, this was not the first time I had seen her this way, but it was the first time I had seen her naked as a woman, she was a goddess and my breath flew from me leaving me stunned and mesmerized...and then I saw him asleep on his furs behind her.

Attracted by my presence she lifted her face from the bathing bowl and cast her eyes upon me, and without any effort to cover her lovely body she hushed me with one finger to her lips, then stayed me with a hand; it was then that I saw him move, and it was then that I saw the curved warriors blade in the light of the fire. She looked to me with terror in her eyes and stayed me once again with her hand.

He called her to him and I watched as he lay her down without a word and mounted her. As he did this she let her face turn towards me and our eyes locked one onto the other in a bond of unspoken love that could not be broken, even in passion. I watched her and she watched me. Once I made a move to lift my blade in defiance of the laws of marriage, but the look of terror in her eyes caused me to halt my intentions, then he finished with a grunt and rolled off her; she then turned her back upon me and I understood her unspoken words; I left her and went back to the place of my birth.

The following day I watched her from a distance at the river washing herself, and though my heart hurt from the previous nights memories, I loved her deeply, nothing...not even what I had witnessed the previous evening could ever change that.

When she had finished bathing she took the path back to our village and it was there that I intercepted her. Alone we walked, alone we talked, until at last my courage found determination and I expressed my love to her for the first time. She told me that she knew of my love, then she took me aside and there in the brush beside the pathway I knew her as a man knows his wife. There she told me of her love for me as well. But alas, she was the property of another and that could not be changed.

The men in my family have peculiar eyes, they are wide-set and the color of a gray cloud in the sunlight, and later that year when her first child was born, he too had them; the eyes of her husband are dark and I knew that her first child was mine. I knew that we, brother and sister, were now bound by more than our love for each other, that we were now bound by a very dangerous forbidden secret.

Our mother was always wise and in this matter she was no less so, and one day as my love and I were in the act of togetherness, she appeared before us. When her anger subsided she made me see the truth

of the fact. that, should we be caught, as she had caught us, that it would mean death to both of us and probably death as well to the child she intuited to be mine. Even in our protesting that we would not get caught, I knew the truth of her words and in the face of this knowledge I left the only home I had ever known and began to wonder, Iliad fifteen summers and was a man in all ways except one...I had yet to kill in battle.

I walked the earth for many years after that, so many in fact, that my hair started to turn gray, but in all that time I never loved another save her, for the memory of her was sufficient to sustain a man like me for eternity.

Long ago had I taken up the cross, and long ago had I been an abomination to it, but I had no where else to turn, except towards a rumored forgiveness that I was positive would be denied one like me. And long ago was it that I first saw our son, now a man, a teacher of men, but not a man of the cross like me, but a man of something else entirely.

I first became aware of him through the rumblings of other church brothers; they spoke of a heretic from the village of Torrecilla, my village. And when they spoke of his name my knees went weak, for I knew that there could be no mistake, it was a name I knew well.

I asked for and received permission from my Bishop to seek out this heretic and to try converting him, and in doing so bring him into the merciful fold of our Holy Father. I did not confess our relationship to my confessor nor to my superiors and I later concluded that I had kept the secret of it not for his benefit, as a better man would have done, but out of a fear of something that I had yet to identify. This and more concerning that inevitable meeting with my son did I contemplate as I walked the three days needed to reach the place of my birth, once there I found him, my son, teaching ten young men just off the main square, not far from where he had been born.

He was sitting atop a cut of wood about an arms length long and was wearing what I can only describe as the plainest sun-burnt brown robe I had ever seen, in fact it was so faded and wash-worn that it actually looked comfortable in comparison to my own rough spun garment. Around his neck he wore not a cross as the priests do, but in its place he had a thin piece of rope with a slip-knot hangman's noose at the end; though I thought long and hard on it I could not even begin to imagine its meaning. I noted that both he and his clothing were meticulously clean.

His hair was unfashionably long and he sported a shaggy beard that hid what I could tell were otherwise handsome features. His eyes were steel gray and a little too far apart giving him the romantic look of a wandering prophet; his face was unmistakably mine.

In my observations of him I noted that in his movements I saw that he had what appeared to be uncontrolled spasmodic jerks; it appeared as if he were normal and in control of himself one moment, only to have that normalcy shattered by a twitch or a jerk of his body the next, which seemed to affect his facial expressions causing him to look shocked each time it happened in the manner of someone surprised by the touch of something hot. I noticed that there were times when he would only jerk from the neck up, like someone popping their neck. Other times he would close and then blink his eyes uncontrollably only to stabilize and be fine for a few moments after that, as if nothing were amiss. And I quickly came to the conclusion that if not for the fire and intensity of his words it would have been impossible to do anything other than avoid him, so painful was he to watch.

After quietly standing in the shadows for what seemed an eternity I was at last invited by one of the ten young men I took to be his followers, to come forward and sit with him on a bench next to the south wall of merchants square. I sat.

After a bit of time in which I was lost in my thoughts, contemplations and memories I was snapped back into real time when I realized that all of his followers had turned to look at me.

“Father!” he said to me. “You are my father, right!” he added.

“Yes, I am a priest,” I responded.

He smiled as his head jerked to the left, then said, “Oh I think that you are more of a father than you want to admit...father! And my mother...she is well.”

A brief silence ensued where our eyes were almost lovingly locked together, then he brought the attention of his students back to the issue at hand with a clap of his palms and went about his lesson.

It was at this point that he chose to tell a story so horrible, so blasphemous that I knew the instant he began his telling that I would be forever corrupted by it, but in spite of my better judgment I sat as though in a trance and listened as he began to tell his own heretic version of the Creation.

My son began his story by telling those gathered before him that in the beginning there was only Heaven, space without form, a purely spiritual realm comprised of nothing, a dimension void of Thought. He told his disciples that all of the Heavenly Beings were part of this One Nothingness and that in this nothingness even though populated by the heavenly masses that no Thought existed outside of the One Thought.

Then, after a measure of eternity, one of the heavenly beings had a Thought independent of the One Thought. He thought about being part of the heavenly masses part of the One, and then he wondered what it would be like to be separate, to be “Alone” and in the power of that independent thought, the one word became three “I am alone.”

With that first independent thought came an explosion of thoughts to follow, thoughts about self. That was not a bad thing, only a different thing, or so it seemed. However, since thought is a creative force, with that thought, no matter how innocent, came the creation of Individuality and with Individuality came Separation, something Independent and something different. And in that difference came the end of Social Oneness and with the end of Social Oneness came the beginning of Originality.

With the beginning of Originality came the birth of Wonderment, and with wonderment came the birth of Question and with the birth of question came the birth of Opinion and with the birth of opinion came the birth of Good and Evil, and with the birth of Good and Evil came the birth of the Great Decider....God.

Now God, being the creation of the original thought, which was “Alone” began to put meaning to the thought “I am alone,” and from that thought “I am alone” came the Desire for companionship and with that desire came a desire driven thought “I am not alone,” and in an instant The One was Two, and Two was whole, and whole was of the second heaven, (the heaven of thought). And The One and the Two evolved into the Three, the three was a child of that thought. All was well and a covenant existed between them.... for a time.

The creative powers of thought however cannot be denied, and so it was that the Child wondered who was the greater, the Child or the Father; believing that if the Father was dutiful that the Child would be

greater in the end. This thought however caused a separation from the Father who understood the Beginning in ways that the Child did not, and a divide formed.

With these words, my own son halted his story, wiped his brow in the manner of a man hard at labor, then turned his attention to me and asked, “So, father...who do YOU say is the greater, the Father or the Son?”

I turned my face to the left and stared momentarily off into the distance recognizing the play of his words and knowing full well should my answer be “The Father” that he would remind me of my sin in his conception, and if I answered “The Son” then I would be lending credence to his heretical words. So I pulled my answer from my religion and replied, “The Father and the Son are one in the same.” He burst into roaring laughter at my words then pointed and twitched in unison while shaking his head as if in disbelief at my pugnacious answer.

“So, what you are saying is, if the Father sins, then the Son sins without fault of his own? Oh father, you and your whole religion are so far from the truth of this, that were it not so pathetic, it would be almost humorous...and what saddens me is that you do not even know it.”

“The Bible is clear on this point!” I responded in typical priestly fashion.

“Oh, is that so! And just who is it that you think wrote YOUR Bible?”

“Why God,” I exclaimed. Again he smiled, but this time he didn’t jerk a twitch, but held my gaze for the longest, then replied, “We shall see about that... Father.”

Without another glance in my direction he returned to his students, who by now had become aware of something deeper going on between us, then continued on with his lesson; but I knew that his lesson was crafted entirely for me.

He went on to say that because the Child had expressed a question, that he was challenged by God who thought him rebellious. Then my son, the heretic, told his followers a story so horrid that I dared not even think on it much less repeat it to anyone else, for I knew that to do so would bring the wrath of the Church down upon him and with it a blasphemer’s death.

For years afterward I denied the telling of this story, but now however I am compelled to share it with you exactly as I remember him telling it that day so long ago. Here is what he taught on that fateful day.

After the original Thought other thoughts followed, and with each successive thought came a result, a creation; soon the heavens were full of Creatures of creative thought; not Thinking Creatures, but Creatures of Thought.

Being that Thought is creative, Thought is therefore energy and energy is never-ending, meaning it can never be destroyed. Therefore Thought is eternal, a perpetual creative energy force that can be accessed by any conscious being from the first to the last. So it was that fully a third of the beings in heaven, when coming across the original question, also innocently wondered who was the greater, the father or the son. Opinion was once again created. Opinion created Questions and Questions were considered lack of Faith, and lack of Faith was Sin, and Sin was Separation. As a result this question, this opinion, one-third of the Heavenly Beings had sinned and were therefore separated from the non-sinners, were banished; banished beings whose banishment gave birth to resentment and resentment gave birth to defiance.

Being that God was of the Spirit, God and the Holy Spirit remained in the first and second heaven, while the Son and those who thought like him were cast out and into a third heaven, separate from the first two.

Since this third heaven was separate from the first two it had to be different than the first two, so where they, the first and second heavens were Spirit-Form, or Spiritual, this new heaven was tut-spirit-form, or Solid-Form, in essence it was physical, a place ruled by Touch as opposed to Thought. In this, the third dimension, the dimension of banishment, it is Touch which creates.

In those days the Third Dimension lay uninhabited by creatures save those which had arrived from the heavens, they were alone and then they were not.

It was then that the fallen gods saw evidence of life in the manner of Water, then Earth, then Fire, and finally Air. Within each of these elements formed a being; a Water Being, an Earth Being, a Fire Being and an Air Being. The Third Dimension itself took on the Form of Life and after that Life took different Forms.

The dominant Form of Life in the Third Dimension was the evolution of the four primary Forms, Water, Earth, Fire and Air. This evolution of the Primaries gave Life to a fifth Elemental called Hu. Now the Hu was a physical combination of the original four Primaries. The Hu combined Water and Earth into form, then gave that form life through the warmth of fire and nourished this warm form with Air. The Hu was Water, Earth, Fire and Air, combined. The fallen gods watched and waited, awed at the splendor of Life.

The first Hu became Form, that Form is what we now call a Body. The first Bodies were neither male nor female, they were not sexual creatures. However, the Third Dimension was a dimension of touch and so it was that the Son Touched the Ho causing the Hu to become Man...HuMan. After the Son touched the HuhMan there came the WoMan, like yet different from the HuhMan.

Being that the first human beings were now male and female they were completely physical in all manner of the word. Where they had once been non-physical entities like their predecessors the Elementals, they now were not, they had physical bodies complete with reproductive organs and the Desire to use them. They multiplied in Pleasure and they multiplied in pain.

Before the creation of the Hu's physical body sustenance was unnecessary, but the male and the female body required food. With the need for food came the need to kill. At first the Hu only murdered the plants, this lasted for many generations. But the Son, in a moment of compassion, gave the Hu command over the Element of Fire. The Ha used that command over fire to heat his body and then to heat his food and finally to turn the other creations into sustenance... the Son wept!

With command over the Element of Fire the Hu soon gained command over the Element of Earth and he altered it to suit his needs. The Hu now toiled the earth, killed its creatures and cooked them with Fire...Hu became human, and humans became the rulers of the four elements...the Son was so distraught that he left the Earth for the faraway places.

The Third remained, observing with great interest the new humans.

The first humans were as of yet unperfected as a result of their sparse numbers. In time however, the genetics of the first humans spread far enough apart that they evolved from cave dwellers, of low intellect, to those of a higher intellect, becoming Hunters and Gatherers. The Others, the Third, interceded and Touched them in the manner of the Son, and the human's became "Like us" the Third exclaimed. And the Third Desired them and took them as they pleased... sometimes in horrid fashion, and ultimately they

came unto the human daughters and had children with them, and they loved them. These offspring children were the first born without the defects of inbreeding and were therefore intellectually superior to the original Humans.

Love was new, and Love was powerful.

The Third, like the Son were creatures of the first two dimensions, only banished into physical Form. To return to the first two heavens only required a repentance for their sin, "The loss of Faith, the loss of Oneness." However, with the advent of Love, the Third, no longer desired to return to the heavens, they loved that which was here and Desired to be with that which they Loved. Love became the Choice. The more Love they had the less Spiritual they became; and the less spiritual they were, the more physical they became. With this increase in solidity came the lose of telepathy. With the loss of telepathic communication came the need for physical communication... Spoken Words. At first those words imitated the clicking of the insects, then the grunts of the ape, then the roar from the beasts of the fields. And so it was that Sound and Thought became married and gave birth to Words; Words were Sound. The ability to produce Thought decreased and the ability to make Words increased.

Now that humans were advancing intellectually and genetically, due to their mixing of bloodlines with the Others (the fallen angels), they too gained a certain mastery over Thought through Sound and Word. Soon thereafter the subject was broached about who was greater, the Father or the Son and in this, sin came to humanity, the fruit from the tree of Good and Evil had been eaten, in the form of Opinion.

Most of the humans believed that the Father was greater, however some of them, though small in numbers, believed it to be the Son, and Religion was born to humanity.

The Heretic I call son, then went on to reference to the Book of Job in the Old Testament Bible, emphasizing the-part in the story where Satan was in heaven, conversing with God. As the Biblical story goes, God calls to attention the Faith of Job who believed in the superiority of the Father, to which the Devil responded by pointing out that the only reason that Job was a man of such stellar faith was because he was protected by God BECAUSE of his Choice.

God responded by pointing out that Job was of his (the Devil's) world yet he chose to believe in the Omnipotence of the Father, the One God. After much discussion the Bible tells us that it was decided that Job's faith could be tested and so it was, however, in the end he remained true to his belief in the omnipotence of the One God 5 Superiority to all other gods. After the epic life of Job was over, time passed and things continued for humanity as if Job had never existed; choices were made, Religions were formed, and non-believers were annihilated. Time passed and passed again.

Once again the Devil was in the presence of God and as always the subject of humanity was at the forefront of their discussion; God was proud of humanity and let it be clearly known to the fallen angel, through his countless blessings to them that he favored them highly. For God so loved the world.

Division reigned on the Earth as Religion itself became divided and soon humanity lost its faith in the gods completely and began to worship the ideals of man disguised as the ideals of the Three, and in a few generations humanity had fallen far from the Tree of Knowledge. Once again God summoned the Sun to heaven and there he accused him and condemned him saying that the falling away of humanity from the Faith was the fault of the Son. The Son argued that humanity was evil in and of itself, not as a result of anything which he had done, but God disagreed. In anger the Son told the Father that he would do as God thought right, that he would return to the Earth and represent to humanity the perfect ideals as outlined

by the Father's own directives, that he would do exactly as God wished and then bragged "I will even tell them that the Father is greater than the Son." Then he followed that up by saying, "They are animals Father, just watch and you will see!" Then he left heaven and came to Earth.

The Son was born on the earth in a place called Israel, there he grew into manhood. In his manhood he was perfect; he taught peace and love; he taught them the power of the Father and he professed his Father as greater than the Son. He walked on water and healed the infirmed, he was the greatest among them...and they killed him for it. After his death the humanity that God had tried to save turned upon the One God and began to worship the Son, saying that he and the Father were One; completely missing the reality of the Omnipotence of the Father. The Son having proved his point concerning the nature of humanity wept for the shame of their actions, in his shame he could not bring himself to return to heaven after resurrecting, nor did he gloat at having ultimately won the argument about who was the greatest; he simply vanished from the Earth, leaving humanity to their own devices.

It was here that I could no longer bear the weight of my son's sinful teachings and I left that place; never again did I see his tortured soul or his lovely face... there is a sadness upon my soul.

So appalled was I by his blasphemy that I returned to the Abby where I had been given lodging and once there I knelt in prayer and tearful supplication, begging for the soul of my child, knowing as I did that the sins of the son are sins of anger resulting from the sins of the father. "He is only angry at me!" I told God. Then I put myself to the switch until my back bled, the pain of it so great that I fell unconscious onto the cold stone floor.

In that state of unconsciousness I dreamt of my sister and she came to me. I took her into my arms and I looked into her almond eyes and I loved her the way a man does his woman. In my dreams I was not a priest, but a man. In my dreams I was not a failure but a lover. In my dreams she was not my sister, but the other half of me. In my dreams she completed me... but I did not live in my dreams, I lived in my world and in my world I was a sinner and in my world I had abandoned her.

When I regained consciousness I went to Confession, but I did not confess everything that needed absolution... how could I! Instead I told only of my dream.

I hid the story of my sister and I hid the truth of our child.

After evening prayers the Abby requested my presence in his chambers and there he talked about the young heretic. It was then that he told me my mission to bring about a conversion of the young heretic was now irrelevant, because an excommunicated and soundly insane err-priest had gathered together a cadre of followers and had put the young heretic to the death of stoning. I was stunned into silence and then I wept for him and the Abby thought me a Saint; a saint for loving so deeply a sinner of his magnitude. As if to further enhance my sins, before I left on pilgrimage, I heard it said that the last words of the young heretic had been "Tell my father that I love him," words of repentance they said...but I knew better.

This day was no different from the thousands of others I had spent here, the sun was unbearable this time of day, yet I sat like a statue under it and counted my breath. I do not know how long I sat this way but it must have been for a goodly length of time for I could feel the sun baking my blistered back like flat-bread on an oven-stone. Just as I was near to losing consciousness I heard a loud singing in my ear, so loud in fact, that I was compelled to open my eyes in an effort to stop it...and when I did, there, standing

before me, was the only love of my life, she was radiant and looked as I remembered her in childhood. “Why haven’t you written our story?” she asked.

So great was my remorse that I could not respond in words, but that did not seem to matter because she heard my thoughts “Because it is a story about evil,” they said.

She smiled and then said, “Evil. How can there be evil in love!”

“This I do not know, mi amor,” I said in words, suddenly finding my voice. Then added “but it is true non-the-less. We sinned and the result of that sin was blasphemy...you are innocent, but I am the father, and the sins of the son belong to the father. I do not know why this is so, but it is nonetheless. No my love, I’ll never put the sins of our family to paper...those sins will die here with me.”

In silence we stood and looked deeply one upon the other and then, as if God himself were sending us a message, a small butterfly came and lighted softly in the space between us, looking lovingly at the both of us, one then the other.

She at last broke the silence that I suddenly found laying between us like covers upon the nuptial bed of our queer life, “It will not die here, with you,” she said.

My eyes and ears snapped to attention as the possibilities of her words clawed their way into my consciousness. She continued. “We have a granddaughter and she will have a child who will have a child, and that child will bring the Church to its knees by publishing a list of its sins. He will carry your crazy eyes, my passionate heart and the angry blood of our child to the steps of the Church, thereby forcing them to relinquish their control over an uneducated flock. This abomination will happen because of the fact that our sin, as you see it, has given birth to two others, first, our son and second, you taking the cloth as a man of God. And those sins, as YOU call them, resulted in the murder of our child, a child whose own bloodline will never forget the injustice of that first murder, until many years later that same bloodline, yours and mine, will bring forth another priest, one that will bring the light of truth to untruth.

“This is the way of God, my brother, my lover, my priest. God sometimes uses things we humans consider sin to HIS purpose.” My lover then looked to the North and with a loving smile said “I love you brother.” Those were her final words and they fell upon my heart like a fallen tree, then she was gone.

I sat upon a flat rock and watched as the sun set over the rocky desert in front of me. I counted nine different blues in the sky that night and I saw the stars speaking in their quaint twinkling language, and just before I toppled over and into the arms of all knowledge I saw her again surrounded in an aura of golden light.

In that light she opened her arms to me and smiled; I returned her smile then I apologized for not Writing the story of our love, she laughed and then replied, “Don’t worry my heart, you will.”

I popped awake to the reality of my bunk, the walls, the bars on the window, and my wife’s picture on the wall... she smiling at me from it with laughter in her almond eyes.

Chapter Six

Things are going on outside of this prison that are beyond my comprehension, political things, techno things and family things. The very thought of all that is taking place beyond these fences, beyond my ability to see them, to hear them, to be a part of them rightfully drives some folks mad, but not me, I simply lay here atop my bunk close my eyes and play games in the corners of my mind; I do not dwell on things I cannot affect.

I don't know how you feel about this, I suppose that this could be considered a bad thing, that it could be considered an escape from reality, and maybe you're right, but in my case I think a little lee-way might be in order, because it has been through this escaping of reality that I have finally come to peace with the demons of myself, demons that have been with me since before my birth. What I've learned as a result of this cleansing is that deep down I am a moral person who values honor and loyalty above all other things; and when I think about the old me this truly bugs me because I know that even then I held those same qualities, yet for some reason I constantly violated them and as a result I let my wife and my friends down, the man I am today is ashamed of that. My old friend the Painter (see my book "A Poet Dreams") tried to help me put the guilt of those actions behind me, but I just can't do it, I don't want to act like they never happened. I failed and I won't act like I didn't. I want to let the people know that I am aware of my shortcomings and that today I am improving myself as best I'm able.

Early on I realized that there is no justice in the ways of men; later on I realized, and I don't mean any disrespect by this, that there isn't much justice in God either, well justice that we understand anyway. In fact, it seems that once you've been born God just lets you find your own way, hence the saying 'God helps them that helps themselves.' Yep, I have learned that a man either deals with his fate or he's destroyed by it, running from it is not an option.

Yeah, the Painter is definitely a better man than I am; he's brave, patient, and capable of self-sacrifice; he sees the best in the folks around him, even when that person is a real bastard. I suppose that deep down I too have those same qualities, but not in the quantity that he does. Another thing about him is that he believes in an absolute right and an absolute wrong, and in spite of all that's happened in his life, he still believes in the integrity of justice, in fact he's passionate about it. Yeah, he's definitely a better man than I am; I strive to be like him, I tried to become him, but in the end I found myself to be nothing more than a flawed ol' Poet. It's who I am...what I am, I guess you could say.

In spite of all that what I am is a man who believes that a person should make right, as best he can, the things he's done wrong. However, I also recognize that some things just can't be fixed...those are the things I can and will let go of, but the rest of 'em, I'll spend the remainder of my life trying to repair; again it's about honor, my honor, me, so you haters don't go to patting yourself on the backs because you think that I've somehow lost my manhood and been broken by your dirty deeds, because, first of all let me say this, anyone who doesn't like me or mine can just kiss my buttocks, and second of all, I'm very content with the man I am. No I'm not perfect, but I'm a heck of a lot closer now than I ever was before. So laugh at me if you like, but I'll match the happiness and success of my children against your children any day of the week, and isn't that the true measure of a man? - how he raised his children!

I was a loner as a child and would spend hours each day playing by myself or with my younger brother, lost in my own world of childhood fantasies. Yeah, I was always different, even then, and even though I didn't understand why I was different, I never questioned the fact. I guess I just assumed that that's the way it was supposed to be, I guess it would be fair to say that I still feel that way.

As a child I was shy and would go out of my way to avoid talking to people, even people I knew; I still do that to this day, don't mean any harm by it, I just...heck, I don't know why I do it, but I do. Crazy I know; after all these years I still prefer my own mind, my own space. This has always been the contradiction of me, because I willingly put myself in the public eye as a politician, and as a writer I suppose you could say that I am doing it again, yet, despite all that, I am a man who deep down prefers solitude. In fact I am a lover of peace and quiet, the two things hardest to find in my present situation. But life is what it is, and these men are what they are. But I'll not lambaste them or their shortcomings because in truth it amazes me to say that the most brilliant thinkers that I've met in this life are here, behind bars. Yeah, some of these men have incredible brains; but the tragedy of that fact is this, a convict brain is not a thing to remember with, it is a thing to forget with.

As a person, I don't know what else to tell you about myself that you don't already know, but the one thing that I can tell you is that I was never a citizen in the present sense of the word; I was never part of the crowd. I was different and I was powerless to alter that about myself, even had I wanted to. I guess that it was my dad who instilled that in me, because I grew up wanting to be different from him. I loved him, don't get me wrong, but there were a lot of things about him that I didn't like, first and foremost of them was the fact that he was an alcoholic. I guess you could say that I just didn't have any respect for him as a man. And when a young boy feels that way about his own father it has an affect on him, and as a result of that resentment I grew up wanting more flour life than I saw in his. I suppose that I decided early on that I would not accept a life like his as my only option, and I never did.

As a youngster I was without direction; I knew that I wanted something different than what I saw in my father, but I didn't know how to escape a fate that I was told awaited most kids with my background. In school I was a below average student who could care less about things like grades, in fact I had no interest in school at all. I didn't play sports and I wasn't popular with the girls, therefore the allure of school completely passed me by. But, for some reason I didn't worry about any of that, I somehow knew that everything would work its way out, that it would all be okay in the end. Yeah, I just seemed to know things like that, things beyond the usual chatter that we mostly hear rattling away mindlessly in our heads. Like I said, I somehow knew that I was different and in that difference I always knew that I would find my destiny. And so it was.

My destiny revealed itself to me for the first time when I was fifteen, in the form of leaving home. Now I will add here that my loving mother says that I was sixteen at the time, but I lovingly dispute her in that I clearly remember being in the army for my eighteenth birthday, and I remember Terry from Brooksville giving me the greatest birthday present ever on my seventeenth birthday, and I remember having a birthday in Brooklyn, N.Y. which would've been my sixteenth, so that means that I left home for New York, at fifteen. But, regardless of whether I was fifteen or sixteen, I could not at the time see that this event (leaving home) was the catapult which began my whirlwind of fortune and misfortune alike.

The word Destiny is a big word, one which implies big things like becoming famous or something, but the truth is that a person's destiny can be simple everyday things like becoming a teacher or a fireman, a mother, or in my case a convict. Destiny is not something defined as good or evil, it is nothing more than a journey that one must take in order to experience what they came to this life to experience. Sometimes that experience is happiness and sometimes that experience is sorrow, in fact our freewill in life is not the right to choose or to deny our Destiny, our free-choice in the matter, is in how we react to the circumstances of our Destiny experience. Prison taught me that.

Life and its inevitable Destiny is certainly a quandary, nevertheless the one thing I have learned for certain from this convict life is that there are no coincidences in it; I suppose that this is the intuitive knowing of many past life experiences. Now that I have a better understanding of this most basic higher thought principle, I have come to understand that something above me, something greater than me, has directed my every experience, my every breath in that experience, and that that something had correctly birthed me into the family I was born into, as surely as that same something engineered my parting ways with them at fifteen. In this I have come to know that it was not through the mistakes of my parents that I became a mendicant, or a convict, those things happened through a, greater than I, purposeful design. Yes, if I were to look at my childhood from a purely human perspective it would be easy to become a complainer, to see only the tragedy, a tragedy which pushed me into a cruel set of circumstances that eventually ripped me from the arms of a loving mother and younger brother. However, sometimes, life presents you with the greatest of gifts disguised as your worst nightmare, and in this knowledge I now understand that my family, to include my father, gave to me exactly what they were intended to give me; that they gave me exactly what I needed so that I could survive prison long enough to use that experience as a means to advance to the next level of human possibility.

For instance my mother gave me a basic knowledge of God through her religion. My brother gave me love and loyalty in the purest sense of the word, and my selfish, alcoholic father taught me to crave a stronger relationship with my future children than he had with us, he also taught me to recognize and to despise the weaknesses of undisciplined men. Yes friend, they all unwittingly did their part to give me exactly what I needed to be the man I am today. Yes, it's all true, this life has been a blessing and no one is to blame for any of my apparent failures or misfortunes...remember it's not what happens to you that makes you a better person, it's how you react to your circumstances that defines you as a positive or a negative entity.

To make a long story short I can tell you that I, with the help of many others, survived a messed up childhood, married an angel and had the family that I so desperately craved, but that was not the end of the road for me. This too brought with it its own lessons. Many of which I failed. On to the second stage of my life.

Now this kid who loved privacy and family one day decided that he wanted to be a Mayor, don't ask me why, because there is no why. I didn't do it because I wanted to do something good for my community. I didn't do it to set a good example for the kids, I didn't do it for any reason noble at all, I simply woke up one day and said "I'm running for Mayor!" Yeah, just like that, heck I had never even voted before then...it was crazy...something (there's that word again) compelled me to do it and I did.

My whole life has been like that, spontaneous. I seem to be oblivious to the thinking process; I just stumble, bumble or fall through one door only to find another one waiting for me on the other side. Yeah, my life has been like that, one pile of miracles stacked atop the other with something guiding me through it like magic. Maybe some folks would call it ambition, but that's not the right definition of me, no, with me it was my Destiny. Yes, I can see it all so clearly now, how that decision, to become a Mayor, led me here to this pen (no pun intended) and paper.

It didn't take long after I became a Mayor for me to realize that I wouldn't be a good politician, oh I was potentially crooked enough, I just didn't like all the gossiping that went along with it. As a result of my unwillingness to be on the phone every night with the City Council members, gossiping about this thing or that person, they became disenfranchised with me. I wasn't like them and they weren't like me. In the end I was an island and they became the sharks circling it. But, in spite of all their back-biting attempts to discredit me, and much to their chagrin, the people of Ingleside liked me and reelected me to a second term.

As a Mayor I truly did care about my city and I did try to do the right things for it. My greatest act as a Mayor was to the rescue a kid's cat from the clutches of the City Pound, yeah, one weekend this kid rides his bike up to my house, knocks on the door and asks to see the Mayor...just like that! When I go to the door he tells me that the City Dog Catcher took his cat. Now I hadn't given much thought to that part of my Mayoral duties, but I quickly realized that a good Mayor would do something about that, so I did. I put the kid and his bike in my truck, and off to the Pound we went...yeah, we rescued the little fleabag. Felt great! Never told a soul either; feels even better now.

After that I ran an unsuccessful campaign against a State Senator that I really liked, I won't tell you why I ran against a man I truly liked, but I did privately tell him why in the parking lot of the restaurant hosting a debate we once had in Taft, Texas during the campaign. No don't ask because I won't tell, that's between men; I always respected you Carlos, may you rest in peace.

During this period as a Mayor I attracted the attention of some fantastic people and like I said earlier, you don't attract people into your life by accident, no sir you don't, they are each and everyone a part of your life plan, your Destiny per se, and they are there to either teach you something or to learn something from you, and that's just the truth of it; Wish I had known that twenty years ago.

I don't know if I myself actually taught anyone anything of value, but I do know that during this time in my life that I learned a lot of things, things my father never took the time to teach me, things like how a man is supposed to carry himself; one reporter in the local paper said in reference to me "he grew up" in the Mayor's office and she was right, I did. To illustrate this point I am going to share with you one of my most embarrassing secrets by telling you a story that will reflect badly upon me as a public servant, but I tell it with pride, because, it was one of the greatest lessons that one man could give to another, and I want to honor the man who gave it to me, thereby proving that all good deeds eventually get told.

It all started in my first term of office, what happened was that I simultaneously started a steel fabrication business.

My brother John was my partner and had loaned me the money to start the business from monies he had received in a settlement from an industrial accident, which had claimed one of his eyes. This was my first crack at the entrepreneur ball. To make a long story short, I failed, and lost everything, to include my brother's money. It devastated me. I had to file bankruptcy to protect myself from the IRS who was all over me without mercy. When I say all over me, I mean ALL over me, they didn't like the fact that I used the last of my money to pay the wages of my employees, instead of my 941 taxes. And in retaliation they sent agents to my hometown to talk to all my friends, enemies, neighbors and acquaintances, they literally did everything they could to destroy me, remember, I was the Mayor.

This was a terrible time in my life and to compound it, I was up for re-election, and one of the women who served on the City Council was running against me. This woman, my opponent, and her friends went on a letter writing campaign and printed in the local paper all they knew about my failed finances, I was deeply affected by it.

The day after those ugly letters were printed there was a prescheduled meeting for all the local officials concerning Navel Station Ingleside; I was a key piece of the political puzzle and was expected to be there. But, I just couldn't do it. I didn't have the fortitude to face my detractors knowing, as I did, that virtually everyone who would be at that meeting had seen or heard about those letters, about my failure.

On the day of that event, as the time drew near for my wife and I to go to the meeting, while she got dressed, I sat on our bed and decided that I was not going to go. However, my oh so humble wife, yeah the one with the steel backbone, told me in no uncertain words to "Get up and get dressed" and then she put her hands on my shoulder and looked me in the eyes and added, "It doesn't matter what those witches think, because even if we have to live in a tent on the H.E.B. parking lot, they still have to call you Mr. Mayor!" and she was right. In her words I found the courage that I needed to face my enemies, and I'm here to tell you now that you could have heard a pin drop when I entered that building, but in the end, it was they who were embarrassed, because a lot of people there at that meeting supported me, and they lined up to shake my hand and to lend me encouragement...the first to do so was a lady named Carol, who always thought of herself as my other mother. To her I want to apologize for what happened later on. Sometimes a man gets caught up and just forgets who his friends are.

Yes I faced down that brood of City Council members...and of course my wife never left my side, showing that whole town why I was the man I was...yes sir, she was a Queen and in her presence those others were nothing more than washer-women and mule-herders. That's the first half of the story, here's what happened after that, the part no one's heard before.

During my first term as Mayor construction began on a large navel base called Navel Station Ingleside. We, the collective area surrounding Ingleside, had competed with various cities across the country and had won out to be selected as the future site of that very much coveted base; it was touted to be a big economic development opportunity not only for Ingleside, but for the surrounding area as well (I want to be clear here, we were not awarded this Navel Base as a result of anything that I did as a Mayor. In fact the base and all the work done to attract it to Ingleside was done before I came into office). As a result of this projected economic boom several big developers came into Ingleside and bought property for development purposes, the biggest of these developers was a man named Neal (N.O.) Simmons.

Now Mr. Simmons was a hugely successful developer, and had been for twenty or thirty years, and in my tenor as Mayor I came to know him very well. In him I found a man I could respect.

Let me say here that Mr. Simmons never, ever, not even once asked me for a favor concerning his development project, and I swear that on my children. With that said, I will remind you, that at the end of my first term in office I was broke, had the IRS putting it all over town, had lost my vehicles, was close to losing my home and was utterly embarrassed by my own failure...not to mention that I had a stiff opponent who would stop at nothing to take my job.

It was right about then that Mr. Simmons asked me to come to his office for a cup of coffee.

When I arrived I noticed that the office was empty, just him and I. He led me into a side room and offered me a seat, and then he offered me a job running his on-going development project, there in Ingleside. As grateful as I was to have a job opportunity I declined, calling his attention to “How it would look on both of us if I went to work for him” you see in those days the back-biters didn’t want him to have a profitable venture that didn’t include them, and they were constantly trying, through political means, to hamper him. He just smiled when I declined, I guess he knew I would...or should. Anyway, what happened after that is the story that I want to tell you concerning what kind of a man Mr. Simmons is.

“Mayor the whole damn town is worried about you! What do you plan to do for a living?” he fired across my bow after a few moments of silence; the Mayor’s office was an unpaid position.

I was stunned at his frankness and didn’t know how to answer his question so I cracked a joke and told him that my family hadn’t completely starved to death, so I still had a little time to figure that out. But, inside I was deeply worried because, in truth, I didn’t know what I’d do. It was then that Mr. Simmons gave me the words of wisdom that I have always kept close to my heart. He told me about how he himself had been in the position that I now found myself in. He told me that even though he had failed in one of his own business ventures that he didn’t give up as a result of that failure, and that because he had never given up, he had ultimately succeeded. He told me about being a man and how a man should act, he also told me about people like those who were trying to destroy me - then he broke all the rules and reached into his pocket and pulled out an envelope containing ten, one hundred dollar bills, and slid it across the desk with these words. “I would like to donate a thousand dollars to your re-election campaign,” he hesitated and then added, “but I’m not going to report this donation till after the election.” With those words I understood that he was telling me to use that money however I needed to...then I too broke all the rules, I took it.

Mr. Simmons went on to tell me that he would have nice professional re-election signs made up by someone he knew and that he would have them delivered in a week or two, for me, so that I could show my supporters that I was still in the fight. He said that people needed to see something from me to combat what my opponents and her supporters were saying about me.

I hung my head in shame, thanked him and left his office in a car I had borrowed from my brother, and went home. I gave the money to my wife without an explanation, and she used it to keep our house from being repossessed. Later that night I hit my knees and thanked God for N.O. Simmons.

I often say that the only bad vote I ever took as Mayor was to annex an area called Ingleside on the Bay, and I'll own that, but now you know the rest of the story about the optimistic boy who became a failed man in the Mayor's office.

I didn't tell you this as a confession, because frankly, I don't find the sin in it, even though I do acknowledge that it was a violation of my office. Instead I tell this story so that you might see more clearly, as I do, the pathway that brought me here with you today...well that and I wanted Mr. Simmons' family to know what kind of man he was.

The "Pathway" here, well, it goes like this. First I learned hatred from the I.R.S., a hatred that would last for years until that hatred caused me to go to extremes about beating them out of every dime I could. This hatred that I harbored for them, this war between us, which ultimately led to them forcing a trial by the Federal Government for a crime I had already been acquitted of in the State of Texas, was of my own making, that I can at long last accept, but they're still some lousy bastards far as I'm concerned. And my own responsibility in the matter of my conviction, in no way exonerates them of the false testimony they introduced in my case. Yes, I learned "hatred" from the I.R.S. and that hatred drove me into the very corner that would ultimately save my soul.

Next I gained backbone, that's what this set of events gave me, it gave me the backbone to face my enemies head on and it gave me the courage to remain true to my principles even when those principles counted for nothing visible, this lesson came of course from my shy, quiet wife.

Character was the next thing I learned from that part of my life, this from Mr. Simmons, and it was that "backbone" and that "character" that would be the two tools which, when salted with "hatred" and "anger" would be the weapons I needed to see me through those very tough early years behind the walls of the U.S. Penitentiary in Florence, Colorado. And I'm here to tell you that I could not have survived that gladiator school without them.

And now we enter the third part of my life, the part that has been spent behind bars and I am happy to say that I have left behind my anger, my hatred and forgiven all involved, even myself. In fact just recently, one of the people who helped put me behind bars contacted me and asked what she could do to help me, then put a disclaimer on it by saying that she would understand if I didn't want to speak to her. And I'm proud to tell you that I told her that I hold no ill feelings towards her, or anyone else for that fact, and it's true, the war is over. I can't live angry, won't live angry. And so it is that I am now a very different person, humble even, that's all behind me now - behind me also is the Penitentiary, I have left the Maximum Security Prisons and been moved to a Medium Security Institution where a man like me, a man of peace can better exist.

Here at FCI Pollock things are relatively stable, in saying this I am not trying to imply that it can't come unwound in an instant, because it can; I've seen how prisons can turn from easy-going to extremely violent in a matter of seconds, in fact, that very thing has happened twice since I've been here, and even though neither of those events involved my car, per se, a wreck can most certainly happen at anytime. I am ever aware of my surroundings. For instance.

I go to the Chow Hall for the evening meal and notice that a couple of new white guys have come in on the bus; we convicts know when a bus full of new arrivals show up and we're always looking to see who they are, for a variety of reasons. On this night though, before I can even get to the table to set my tray down one of the fellas comes over to me and points out one of the new guys and says, "So-n-so knows that one from another yard and says that he's a Cho-Mo" (child molester), I give him a long hard look. By the time I make it to the table with my tray I can see that a lot of the guys are gritting on him, hard, and I can tell that said Cho-Mo is afraid...though probably less terrified than the kids he raped. Finally one of the fellas goes over to him and tells him what's being said about him, he denies it. After that denial he's then told that if it IS true, then he needs to get off the yard, but if its not true, then it's all good.

I finish my meal and get up to leave, coincidentally as I'm leaving I notice that this new guy, the suspected Cho-Mo, is also exiting the Chow Hall and is directly in front of me in doing so. As we exit the Chow Hall he turns left and goes straight up to one of the cops standing outside the door and begins to talk to him, about what I can only guess. I pass them up and head back to my cell-block.

Said individual never returned to his cell-block, he "Checked In" straight from the Chow Hall, which means he asked the guards for PC, Protective Custody. A man does this when he does not feel safe in the presence of other prisoners...for whatever reason.

I go to my cell and tell my Cellie that there's a strong possibility that I may get put in the S.H.U. (pronounced, Shoe) Special Housing Unit, which is a bureaucratic term for the "Hole," this as a result of a white guy being told to get off the yard. However, two weeks go by and I hear nothing about the incident. All good, right? - maybe, maybe not.

I'm sitting in my cell-block and the guard working it that day comes up to me and says "Crawford, S.I.S. wants to see you." SIS officers are the investigative arm of the prison guard system, the cops who police behind the walls and fences per se. So I get up grab another convict to go with me and head to the door.*

After we leave my cell-block and begin to make our way towards the Lieutenants office, I see standing in the middle of the empty yard an SIS officer and another con; the one who had given the Che-Mo the ultimatum in the Chow Hall a few weeks back.

The SIS officer escorts us to the Lieutenant's office where I find that two other officers are there waiting for us.

After a brief delay we are escorted into one of the offices where they proceed to climb down our throats about not accepting Child Molesters on the yard. The officer in charge then informs us that the same Che-Mo that had been "Checked-In" was being sent back out to the yard, then he added that if anyone so much as says "boo" to him, that they would be locked up in the Hole for a good long while, and that two or even four unrelated white guys would be locked up as well in retaliation. He added that he would do whatever it took to protect this man. Of course I took it to mean that I would be the first to go, whether involved or not.

I explained to the officers there that day, that I understood their position, and that I was glad to see that the Federal Judges and Federal Prosecutors were finally being forced by public opinion, to lock these guys up. See, my reader friend, the reality is that our Federal Prosecutors and our Federal Judges will give

a kid twenty years behind bars for a bag of dope and then give another man eighteen months probation for having sex with a six year old child! Or in the case of this guy we're talking about, running a multi-million dollar child pornography network. Citizen, wake the "F" up! These Judges, Prosecutors and by extension these prison guards who protect these people are not the good guys here. In fact, in some Federal Prisons, the cops have posted notices stating that anyone who mistreats these guys "Can and will be charged with a hate crime." My reader, is that what you stand for? Is that what you believe? Is that what you pay taxes for? God help us.

Pedophilia: why has it suddenly become so prevalent in our society? That is the question I've asked myself; the answer however came not from my own mind, but from a friend of mine named Todd. His take on it was that it's the Internet which has flushed all these guys out of the woodwork. He believes that these guys were always out there but, that our society past, had convinced them that it was wrong to think this way, sick even, and so they remained in check, thinking themselves alone in their immoral desires. But with the advent of the Internet they have found others with similar desires, found others like themselves and realized that they were not, after all, alone in their desires. Through the Internet these guys are finding like thinking folks all around the world who are telling them that it's normal, that it's ok to be a pedophile. They read about it, think about it and then they act upon it...and up until just recently, they didn't even have to worry about going to prison for it.

With your tax dollars the Feds have even hired psychologists to design elaborate rehabilitation programs for Pedophiles. They tell you, the citizen, that they need your tax dollars for these types of programs, but I submit to you that these guys can't be fixed. "Classes" they tell you, will rehabilitate these guys, so we the Government need more of your tax payer money so that we can fix these bad guys. But the truth is my friend, that they can't be fixed.

Disagree with me do you...well, what if I told you that you were wrong for desiring heterosexual intercourse? What if I told you that you were wrong about your sexual attraction to the opposite sex and that I wanted you to change your way of thinking concerning it, because NORMAL sex was, for a woman, with a dog, and, for men it was with sheep, what would you say to that? What if I arrested you for having heterosexual relations and forced you to go to classes where I spent eight hours a day, five days a week, no expense spared, showing you films on the damages of heterosexual activity compounded with classes and films on the correctness of having sex with German Shepard's and Sheep? What if I did this everyday for a year and then let you out...what would you then do? would you go straight to the dog pound for a companion; would you become aroused thinking about sheep? The answer is obvious, the answer is that no amount of training, no amount of psychological hocus-pocus is going to alter what turns you on...me, it's a woman, you it's a man...to these guys its little children. You can't cause them to re-program what gets them sexually aroused anymore than I can change you being repulsed at the thought of having sex with an animal. A person can't change what turns them on sexually, and neither can they.

I have heard that on the outside sex offenders are listed on the Internet, the idea is that people have a right to know who they are living next to, or with. Shouldn't we have the same right? I submit to you this; what happens if you put a Cho-Mo in prison, but tell him not to tell anyone why he's in prison, and when someone asks him, you instruct him to lie about his charges (the guards hide them amongst us), then you

take this same Cho-Mo and put him into the cell with a man who has pictures of his kids and grandkids on the bulletin board of their cell, along with letters from his family, and their addresses readily exposed in his locker? What do you think is going to happen six months later when that man finds out that he's been living with a pedophile and that that pedophile has had access to his family? What do you think will happen? Do you think it's fair to prosecute or to put that man in the Hole for acting irrational under those circumstances? What about the guards who insist on putting them in population with instructions to "lie" about themselves? Wouldn't it be simpler to give them their own dorms or yards? Why the need to deceive? The answer is, that the Feds have been lying for so long that they no longer value the truth, even on important moral issues like this.

The solution is: the Federal Government needs to isolate them like they do some gang-members, give them separate prisons, or separate housing units. They need to quit hiding them among us. They need to put them right out flour with separate IDs, so that we know who they are, and then put them with their own kind so that no one is surprised to find out that they have been living with one.

I don't know. I just don't get the attraction. Maybe they start out watching porn of eighteen year olds, then work their way down to twelve year olds and then eventually start wanting to have sex with six year olds. I don't know. But, I do know this...in our new Socialist Prison System we are being told that you can be prosecuted for a "Hate Crime" if you harm one of them...even if they instigate it!

I acknowledge that I am a convict and that that did not happen by accident. I am here for a purpose, and I recognize that we as individuals do not attract people into our life circumstances by accident either; they are there for a reason. Sometimes that reason is as simple as to cause you to look at yourself in ways that you normally wouldn't. Sometimes human cockroaches are put into your life for no other reason than to disgust you into altering some part of your thinking process.

I'm finally figuring all this out, finally learning the keys to wisdom. I understand that these past and present experiences that I have shared with you were nothing more than the singular threads in the overall cloth of my life experience. And I know that these life experiences have served to give me exactly what I needed for what was and is to come. I know that I have reached another fork in the road of my life, and that what I am now experiencing is somehow important to what will follow in the next phase of my life, as surely as the day I left home ultimately led me here.

With my new found maturity I can, with confidence, tell those who love me that my failure as a husband, father, businessman, friend and person were all part of an overall plan initiated by "something" greater than myself; a plan to bring me to this underground existence where I have discovered myself and experienced a once in an existence mental breakthrough. It's true, in prison I have been deprogrammed. Every bridge that I had built on the outside has long since been torn down, either through my own abuses or through the passing of time. People, friends, partners, family and so on have fallen by the wayside with the exception of those who were "True Blue" as a friend of mine always says. The fires of time and separation have burned away all but the rare few who could see past the mistakes of the man I was, and see the 079 in me.

In that sense, prison has been a major blessing because it revealed to me the great lie... that lie of course, was that I believed that the essence of me was wholly this body that I wear and nothing else. Yeah it's true, for most of my life I was enslaved by my own mind, that "other person" who constantly tells us how we should think, act and live out our lives. Once I understood this and accepted the fact that I am "something" beyond this body, the crust of selfishness began to fall away from me like the skin off a shedding reptile. Oh it wasn't easy, no sir it wasn't. My old beliefs didn't flee without a fight, in fact, whenever I tried to ignore that other voice in my mind it would scream and tear at me until bringing me back into the fold, the sheep pen of limited thought. Yes, whenever I tried to silence my chattering mind so that it could receive "The Gift", the internal wars would rage. You see, the mind cannot do silence, it can only do chatter and most of the time that endless chatter is irrelevant to what reality is, to what is best for the real you. Prison taught me this. It was the failure of Prison that allowed me to trace the path of my every disappointment back to the roots of my own thinking process, which of course led directly to the thinker, my mind. Prison caused me to be so disgusted with myself that I began to search for the deeper reasons behind my place in existence and when I began to question those thoughts, my asthma and my shackled existence, the mind could only proffer excuses, excuses in the form of more chatter. But excuses weren't sufficient for me because, I had accepted the fact that it was I who had failed, that it was I who had made bad choices, that I was ultimately responsible for my circumstances, and then I began to disagree with that other me and its voice. In that disagreement I decided that I needed to hush that voice, who had for so long, dictated how I would live my life; to accomplish this feat I craved silence.

The problem however was that I am in prison and prison is comprised of noise makers. So here I was needing silence so that I could think clear enough to find my lost self, only to be bombarded with the reality of a thousand men who are themselves enslaved by that "other person," men who without understanding why, are compelled by their undisciplined mind to scream as loud as humanly possibly much of the time. 'Yeah, it's true. I've witnessed guys in the shower talking to guys at the entranceway of the cellblock; guys who scream at one of their buddies all the way across the yard... for no reason other than to be doing it. And if there's a basketball game on TV, forget about it. Mindlessness. Mindlessly these men, my brothers, go through their days, months, years and ultimately their lives enslaved to the endless charter of undisciplined thought, men who have not experienced the value of silence and therefore do not seek it. This is the biggest tragedy of our age: that we have so many other things competing for our thoughts, things like music, books and of course the Internet, so many things in fact that the majority of the race no longer even knows how to dream of something better. Prison taught me to recognize this truth about our modern society; Prison slowed my life down and taught me to think, and when I did, I found me, and the me I found looked nothing like I thought it did.

I don't know exactly WHY I had to experience prison in order to recognize the truth about myself, but I did. I suppose that prison is a magnified expression of failure and that failure at this level brings with it a measure of ridicule, both from others and from ones own self. And, I believe that it is this personal failure and ridicule which causes one to become so thoroughly disgusted with themselves that they ultimately release all previously conceived ideas about themselves... thereby causing them to be unconcerned with what others think about them. It is this release of the ego driven lifestyle that allows a person to

experience the true Self instead of the false self of the chattering mind. It is this putting into proper perspective the true value of the physical pleasures that allows one to experience the spiritual pleasures.

It's true, Prison and its companion Time, left in its wake little of my former life. In prison I was rebirthed. I was born a nothing, a convict, a man less human, a clown, a "Clown of Thorns."

This wasn't how I envisioned my life, this wasn't how I planned it, all of these events that I have spoken of are by products of my personal life experiences, and they were beyond the ability of my former self to predict, but I now know that none of it could have been changed even had I foresaw it... because "something" inside compelled it all to happen, but why? That became my new obsession. And even though I seem to be the same man, I am not, I have been transformed. I can now see so much more than the old me could. It is fair to say that I am looking through the same old eyes but what I now see, is dramatically different. I can now see that the world is nothing like I had been led to believe.

I suppose that the lesson I am to learn from my life is that failure is not about punishment, it's about learning, it's about expanding one's awareness to truth; that and the reality that truth cannot be realized until a person recognizes what their life experiences are trying to tell them. My life experiences have told me that it's all a lie. Politics, religion, cultural beliefs, patriotism, racial propaganda, history...it's all a fabrication. It's dark here and I am alone in it. And I am afraid.

* When dealing with the guards, most especially SIS, a convict, always takes another con with him as a witness to what's being said. We don't do this because we don't trust what the cop might say, we do it so that no one can say something like "I saw Crawford talking to SIS, and two hours later my cellie got busted with a bag of wine." I am writing this because some of the cops take offense to us coming in pairs, but the truth of it is that it has nothing to do with them, it's about us.

Chapter Seven

If you were to spend the day with me you would see that my fellow prisoners respect and honor me, sometimes unwarranted, nevertheless, there is no joy in my heart; for I have a spirit of sadness deep within, I am no pleasure to myself. I walk these walls and fences alone, I sit in my cell alone, I contemplate alone, I bathe my mind alone and I perform my prayers, alone.

Believe me, I am alone, I am haunted, driven, it has always been this way. I have for many years fought against it, but of late I have reversed that trend and have begun to nurture this wildling thing within me. I see things that haunt me and I have uneasy thoughts that flow through my mind, unbidden. My dreams are troubled and restless like the murky things spoken of in fiction novels or the teachings of the piously insane. Early on in my sentence I realized that the love of my wife, my children, my mother, my brother, and my friends could not save me from my destiny or myself. In this realization I began the holy quest, mans eternal quest, but in that quest I came to realize that the religion of my youth had already given me the greatest part of its wisdom, that it had quenched as much of my curios thirst as it was able; but I was still thirsty and my spirit was still restless and unsatisfied; my soul was parched. The ideals were good, but they were ideals that did not seem to take root in the garden of my mind, or at the least they did not bring forth the fruit intended, the fruit it purported, the fruit I saw in others. The rituals were good, but to me they were only water, they did not wash away the sins of future past, nor did they quench the thirst of my desire for those same sins which I believed had stained me. They seemed proper to the child that I had been, but even then, if I am to be truthful, there were questions unanswered, and so I had to ask “Was that it? Was that all they had to offer? What comes next? Am I the only one who hasn’t been fulfilled?”

I contemplated heaven and God’s supposed place in it, and to me, the bell of truth concerning it, rang fractured. Even as a child I knew that there had to be more, and I began to wonder with my child’s mind how God could be found, confronted and addressed outside of the afterlife, outside of death. In those times of quiet contemplation I pondered the questions of a million ages and I longed to feel, to see, to speak, to do nothing more than to hear the beat of my creators holy heart, and I somehow instinctively knew that my search had to begin not in the brick and mortar of church, but in that indestructible something within my own self. But where was this Self, this innermost thing I so greatly desired, this ultimate thing I sensed held the keys to my salvation, my true freedom?

The Masters all say that this “Self” is not the flesh and bone that I see daily in the mirror, nor is it thought or consciousness. I understand this, but if this thing that I seek is not physical, not thought, not consciousness, what then is it? And where is the path to be found that will lead me to the source of it? Ah, and there it was, my religion could not answer me. The teachers that I had so far encountered knew all the scriptures, they knew everything that a normal man needed to know about things spiritual, and they had infinite knowledge concerning the rules and stipulations that the average man sought. But alas, therein was the problem, I was abnormal. I was the lone wolf who did not hunt in the pack, and they were unable to answer the one and only question that lay heavy on my heart.

I do not want to sound ungrateful for the libations of religion; to be sure the holy books speak on matters of great spiritual significance. No, sir, I do not hold them lightly for I recognize the vast storehouse of knowledge contained within them as gathered by countless generations of prophets, the great holy men and women who before me followed the self-same quest. But where were those men, those women

who had succeeded in gaining that knowledge, who had truly lived the life of the miracle worker? Where were the prophets who could float steel on water, heal the wounded, give sight to the blind? Don't get me wrong, I have known virtual saints whose lives are admirable who appear to be wise and noble but can they see and hear the things the old prophets speak of? Could they, if they so desired leave this earth and be transfigured to heaven in the manner of Mohammad or John the Reveler, or are they merely seekers athirst like me? Is that why they are so embellished in their holy books; is that why the saints of today only speak of these things, rather than practice them? Is it this lack of practice that is necessary to keep them on the path of purification; the constant everyday study of the scriptures? Is the Self I seek not in them? Not found by them? These are the types of questions that run unrestrained through my searching mind and I, through much self-examination came to realize that this questioning mind of mine was the creator of my sorrow; yet I was compelled by some spirit within me to follow it out, to see the end result, to find the answers.

Many were the days when I read from the scriptures, memorizing those parts that seemed to be speaking to me, I used them like prayers, like mantras, like hope. Truly I knew the book as well as anyone and often the glory it spoke of seemed near, but for whatever reason I never fully attained it, I was never able to quench my ultimate thirst.

In my quest to be something that I wasn't I fell to my knees and wore the mantle of the meek, I became one of them. I tried in vain to turn away from my true self, from my instincts, from my past life experiences and I bent my knee to beliefs alien to my own and in the way of all who deny the truth about themselves, I eventually failed in my attempt. Oh to be sure, I admired the knee benders, I admired their profession of love, their adherence to honor, their faith in the unseen, their commitment to life and family. But this admiration did not bring with it acceptance and in the end I felt only contempt, not only towards myself but towards them as well.

In my failure to receive their grace I felt foolish and disgruntled, in this state of mind I became a different man, a man who laughed too loudly when in the company of others, a man who laughed yet seldom laughed; I laughed until my face slowly lost the beauty of its innocence to take on the feral stare of the condemned. Slowly I took on the mental malady of a man trying to live a life he was never intended to live.

Like a thin mist my thinking process became damp and unpredictable and a spiritual weariness descended upon me, everyday a little heavier, every month a little more uncomfortable was I under my own guise; already disappointment and doubt lay in wait. In this shortcoming I garnered a spirit of disappointment and I longed to be like the pious and then in my study of them, the pious ones, I came to realize that there was none of them who could prove to me that they themselves had fully attained the wisdom of the ages, none that I could see, could move the mountain and in my disappointment I had to assume that they, like me, were still searching.

In my doubt I went the way of all men without foundations, the world became my lover, my source of pleasure. I had been trapped and I became that which I had always despised; as if a veil had fallen slowly over me my soul became covered in a deep weariness. In the way that a new car begins to tire under the weight of use, this new life which I had created for myself began to come apart, it was losing the beauty of its shine and spots of rust and decay were beginning to show in its structure. But I was unable to see it...I was oblivious to my own very apparent, breakdown. The life I had chosen had become a burden to me and a liability to my future, but my time of recognition had not yet arrived.

I had been trapped by vice, the very same vices that I had despised in my own father; I indulged in the vilest of them. For a time I ceased in my heart to be the man I once was, in fact I was less a man than the child me had been. And every time I came to my senses and awoke from my delusion, every time I saw the horror and ugliness that I had built around me, and every time I divined my fall, I was seized by disgust, but being as I was, unable to face the truth concerning me,

I turned my back to reality in the meaningless cycle of old and new self. I, unsatisfied, consumed in sorrow, turned not away from that which created me, but instead turned from the road that I had been taught from infancy to walk, believing that it had not, after all, been the path that I was destined to take. In this realization I picked up the next book.

I took the Shahada and I made Salat. I read and I studied and I gained the knowledge garnered from discipline. In this book I found much wisdom, but the others around me who practiced showed none of the mental restraint that I came to love about my worship, in fact it was all racial, and I the odd man out. However, I persevered and in time came upon those who were led to whirling, and I knew that this was the right path, but alas, there was no one available to me who could instruct me in this wisdom. In spite of that I tried to stay the course and continued to observe them, looking for that which I sought, in my search I asked those who practiced and I found that some followed the daughter and some the uncle, but none followed the path I desired. They criticized me, my desire to whirl, they did not understand, and Ali Abdul Raheem was alone again naturally. In my frustration, I looked within myself and a door opened.

Compelled as I was, I thought about the path of The Prophet and with trepidation concluded that my search, my life, had stagnated, that I needed to move on. At this time desperation sat in because I knew that my life could be counted as non-productive; I denied it of course, I even cursed the thought, but then, beneath the weight of the truth, I cried. Something however spoke to me imploring me not to give up, to move on to the next pathway, to find the next seedling and with the burden of this message firmly upon my brow I sat beneath a banyan tree and stilled my mind so that I could think and see clearly. Time passed.

When I am listening I hear nothing. When I am looking I see nothing. When I am walking I am not moving. When I am awake I am not awake. When I sleep I am not asleep. But when I fear, I fear I am lost.

I look at my hands; they look normal, not old, not young, just normal' I do not recognize them.

I find myself in a cold and dark place. I am wearing the skin of animals as clothing and I know that my name is Atak. I do not know how old I am but I consider myself a man with a wife and children. I know that I am a loner, that I prefer solitude, and so it was that I took my new bride and left the safety of my village to move off and into the far plains where the tall grass grows. Here Ummah, my wife, and I established our shelter; with her at my side I hunted and together we skinned and cut the meat of my kill for our sustenance. Everything we did together, just her and I.

Ummah was tall and lithe and had the reddest hair imaginable; in my eyes no other woman I had ever seen could match her. To me she was a goddess and when I suggested that we leave our people and live alone in the land of the lost people she never complained and she never looked back, nor did she seem to miss her family, she was with me and I was with her we were one in life; and even though thousands of years stand between her and I, convict # 76603-079, I must confess that I am in love with her still.

I am waist deep in the cold wet earth, I am digging a hole. My hands and feet are near frozen and I can see my breath as it leaps from my mouth like the falling waters of a mountain stream. Drizzling rain has accumulated inside of the hole in the ground that I am digging; though it has not yet turned to ice, it is none-the-less deathly cold around the soles of my feet.

An old witch is standing at the rim of the hole, she is screaming at me, "Dig! Dig! You must dig! Hurry we must finish before the rise of the sun or all is lost!" I put aside the pain in my hands, the discomfort of the cold wet skins on my feet and I dig as the old witch has instructed; finally, satisfied that I understand her urgency she moves away from the edge of the pit to continue building a large pyre.

Finishing the first hole I climb out and begin the second. I am tired and sore, but I cannot stop. The life of my own child depends on it, so I put aside my personal discomforts and dig Again, and again I plunge my bone tool into the surface of the ground, but it is almost frozen and the digging is slow. I hear the old woman chanting and rattling her bones as she circles the first hole and then the second where I am steadily at work. Around and around she goes chanting and throwing powders into the flames of her pyre each time she passes by it, causing the flames to flare up and then briefly turn a greenish yellow color. In the light of the flames I see her face and it is horrid and evil looking. Her hair is matted with blood and half of her teeth are rotted out, she has no skins upon her feet and her body is clad only in the skin of an animal, one I do not recognize, yet she is not withered, nor does she appear to be cold, and for some reason I cannot bring to the surface of my thoughts, I know that I fear her. I also know that I trust her.

The second hole is finished and I now begin to dig a tunnel between the two holes that my all night labor has produced. When the tunnel connecting the two holes has been completed I am covered from head to toe in ice cold mud, but what was done had to be done, a labor of love and I do not complain.

Careful not to put my weight atop the ground over the tunnel, lest my weight collapse it, I circle the two holes. While I am circling the holes from right to left and chanting, the old witch is chanting and circling me in the opposite direction leaving two distinct foot paths, hers outside of mine. When I am dizzy with exhaustion she halts her dance and falls to her knees, I do likewise. We chant a prayer to the sun god who will soon appear to chase away the darkness that the lesser god of fire has protected us from.

With the fire blazing, with the two holes dug, with the chanting completed, and with the Sun soon to light the sky the old witch gives me a sign that it is time to begin our healing ritual.

I step from our circle and enter the witches hut and bring out my woman and my sick child. We three enter the circle and then lower ourselves into the first hole in the ground, the one nearest the fire. My child has become so weak from the fever that he can no longer even cry as my woman unwraps him and exposes him to what has now become incessant rain.

I hear the voice of the witch who has by now entered the second hole, she is telling me that I must remove all of my clothing and crawl to her through the tunnel I had dug connecting the two holes in the earth. This I do. Then as prearranged my woman Ummah gets onto her hands and knees and slides the sick body of my first child through the tunnel of mud after me. The healer woman, herself naked and on her knees, reaches into the tunnel and pulls my son through, simulating what I assume to be a rebirth. When she has the mud covered body of my child fully in her arms she chants the magic words, makes a sign of the stars over his body and passes him to me. I take him in my hands and lift him skyward where I hold him till the first rays of the new Sun break the top of the distant mountains revealing the power of the Sun god. "It is done," says the old woman and I lower my son into my arms and kiss his wet muddy face.

My woman, now standing on the edge above me beckons and I pass the child up to her, she wraps him and pulls him to her chest in an effort to warm him, and in spite of the rain I can see tears running down her face.

“The fever will not kill him, but you will die seven times,” says the witch to my woman.

“I would die a thousand times to give just one life to my child,” I interjected and meant what I had said.

The old woman leaned over and took a handful of the mud at her feet and then looked me in the eyes and replies, “Not a thousand deaths and not an eternal life.” She then tamed towards the darkness, makes a sign to ward off evil and goes into her but leaving my woman and I alone with the child and her mysterious prophecy.

By mid afternoon that day my child began to show signs of improvement and by the following day when we had returned to our land, all was well, and he was up and running around as if nothing had ever happened, as if he had never been sick at all.

Over the next few weeks my first born not only regained his strength but his vigor as well, and as a show of gratitude, every full moon thereafter I walked the great distance and left a gift of the hunt at the fire pit of the old witch whose magic had saved the life of my child.

The year after that my woman gave birth to another child and a year after that another. All in all we had four sons and one daughter with green eyes like her mother and in our isolation we grew into a family and prospered. All seemed to be well and the words of the witch were forgotten.

The winter after my last child was born was the worst that any of us had ever seen. Long about the third moon of that winter came a snow storm so fierce that my whole shelter was buried up to the top of the roofing top. Now this was not all that unusual, but what was unusual was that unlike past storms, which were always followed by a warm spell, this storm brought with it only colder air as its companion, air that whipped this way and that, bringing with it a chill to my earth mound homestead like none ever felt before.

It had been many days upon days and the storm continued, then after a week or so the storm stopped as abruptly as it had started and I left my shelter in search of food. All day I searched, but so fierce was the cold that I searched without success. That night we finished the last of our stored provisions and later that night without dry wood our fire died. That night Ummah and my children huddled together beneath our hides feeding on the warmth of one another, and in the morning I was relieved to find them still with breath, I vowed to find dry wood to warm our fires first thing that day. Food would have to wait.

After long hours of work I procured enough wood and cut it into manageable pieces and took it to my shelter where the lesser god of the blessed us with his warmth; I thanked him and asked him to keep us warm until the great father in the sky chose to once again bless us by sending his warm light to this, the land of my choosing.

After the fire was burning and had begun to shed its warmth I checked on my family one last time, and then went in search of food, when none could be found I made the long journey to the shelter of the witch, hoping that she might give me the wisdom to find the beasts of the field and thereby feed my family. But once there I found the old crone sitting cross-legged with her head tilted upwards looking past a burnt out fire and into an overcast horizon covered in snow. She was frozen in acolyte immortality.

I made a sign to ward off any evil that might be on the witch's property, and then I took what little food I found in her hut and put it in my sack.

I left the place of the witch without moving or touching her because I did not know her preference in death; some of my people preferred the fire and others preferred the earth. Fearing that I would choose wrong and thereby cause her spirit to be forever earthbound, I let her be and trusted her spirit to the gods.

I looked out across the lands on which I had chosen to live and saw that where there had once been never-ending fields of grassland full of critters and herd upon herd of beast, there now stood nothing except white snow for as far as a man could see. The snow I did not mind, the problem was that it was so cold that the animals had moved away from the storm or died, I did not know which, but I did know that they were gone. Never in the history of my clan had this happened.

Another day without food, then another and another, and after what proved to be another unsuccessful forage I returned to watch my youngest child die before my very eyes and in my very arms. I wept. My woman hardened by the life we had chosen did not show any outward signs of sorrow and when I began to rock back and forth in my own misery, refusing to let go of the limp body of my dead child, she slapped me across the face and told me that, "Green eyes, was gone." I lowered my head in shame nodded with understanding, and then I took her body out where I put her to the long sleep of fire.

More days followed and still no food. Another storm came and my children fell into constant sleep; hardly were they awake at all now. I knew that my children were weak from lack of food...but what could I do except go to the fields and search once again for some form of nourishment. I did and I found nothing.

I began to look for alternative means of food, I tried to remember what the animals ate but no matter how hard I tried all I could remember seeing them eat was roots and grass, so I dug through the snow and searched and searched until I found frozen grass and then roots and then bugs. These things I gathered and took to my woman who then mashed them into a paste and fed them the children, but they were so weak that they could not even eat what she gave them, that night another storm came and covered our shelter and I was beset with fear and grief.

That night one of my children began to cough and to cry without ceasing and all I could do was to watch as Ummah held him and rocked him and talked to him; but he continued to cry and then so too did the others. Days followed days and my children suffered. Days followed days and my children starved before my very eyes.

After what seemed like an eternity my woman, who seemed to be the strongest of us, came to me and aroused me and loved me. When she finished [lie down beside the fire and fell into a deep sleep. I slept thus until I was awakened to the feel of her straddling my chest. Bewildered I tried to move my arms, only to realize that they were pinned at my sides and held in place by her weight. Confused I looked into her eyes and saw that tears had cut pathways through the dried blood that covered her face. I tried to rise but she put her cutting tool to my throat and told me to be still. I did not understand, but I did not move either.

The sobs of our children were gone, our shelter was quiet, i could hear nothing except the crackling of the fire as it did what fires do, and the light of comprehension came to me. And somewhere in that silence, came acceptance, as my beloved Ummah took my life.

Chapter Eight

I know nothing of the veracity of things, and have painfully come to the realization that I know only one thing for sure, I know that I cannot return, that the life I had previously led is over and done with, that I carelessly cast it away. I have wandered far into the dark forest of abnormality, far from civilization, and I have been snared by my own foolishness. Dead to me is my freedom of movement, dead to me are the things of my heart; left to me is only disgust and sorrow and loneliness. I have blown the engine of my life and find myself afoot far from that cool drink of water that my parched life needs, there is nothing left of the world that had nurtured me and given me laughter, it is gone, it has vanished and left behind only the barren desert of a life sentence.

I have sincerely wondered about the peace of death, for I no longer cared about life, such as I now see it. If only I could cause myself to die. If only I could procure enough narcotics to bring about the relief of unconscious oblivion; if only I could go to sleep never to awaken. After all I had made the choices that had destroyed me, and I had made the choices which brought copious amounts of pain and suffering to my family...and now I have come to this, woe is me; is there any sin or foolishness that I have not committed, any darkness that I have not taken my soul through? In light of all this, how is it possible that I should continue to live; is it possible to keep seeing and thinking and living? Hasn't the cycle of life been taken from me, terminated; haven't] been cast out of life, rejected and removed?

Sitting on the shelf in the prison chapel sat a stack of magazines; the top one caught my eye, on the cover was a hot Indian chick (East Indian) and her smile reminded me of someone I knew, though I couldn't quite place who, nonetheless it called out to me. I picked the magazine up and studied her face, it was a kind and beautiful face, wide in the jaw and dark in the eyes; teeth as white as snow. I took it with me and returned to my cell, not for its content mind you, but because I somehow felt a sense of friendliness with it, and in time that attraction caused me to become curious and as a result of that curiosity I found myself repeatedly flipping through it to look; at the pictures, of her, yes that was it, she smiled openly and completely like my wife...no, that wasn't it, that wasn't why I was drawn to her face...it was something else, something that I, at that time, could not answer.

In my mental fatigue and in my incarcerated boredom I hesitantly began to read the contents of the magazine that I had pilfered from the chapel. Story after story, picture after picture did I read and study, every word, every line did I consume and each seemed to be telling me the same thing, they seemed to be saying that the misfortune that had happened to me were part of a grand design and were purposeful, that they were part of my life plan and that I should proceed towards the goal that my Guru, my spiritual teacher had set for me; what goal? - what Guru, what teacher, I asked? I was a Lifer convict, I no longer had things like goals or teachers, I had nothing but a sorrow that had morphed into hatred, I had chosen to spit forth the last remaining taste of wine that life had so graciously bestowed upon me. Goals, life, purpose, learning...Guru's, I know nothing of these things, I only want to bring to an end this pathetic and shameful life and I thought once more about how I might accomplish it.

With magazine in hand I slumped to the floor with my back against my cell wall, I looked towards my bunk where I had secreted away enough medicine to do the deed, all I had to do was to drink them, my co-conspirators, and go to sleep. I was prepared, ready; I was tired and there was a void in my soul, one that I, alone, could not leap. Iliad thought it through and there was nothing left for me to do but to abort

the mission of life, to throw it away and to begin anew as someone else. I had given it a lot of thought and I was at peace with it; this is what I longed for, death, the breaking of the mold, and the releasing of my soiled soul.

Slowly I rose to take a short inventory of my sparse possessions, I bummed a song from my childhood and I pulled them out...Sitting atop my bunk I admired them and touched them like tiny lovers, but I did not at that time partake of their relief, and in that moment of hesitation I lie down, atop my mattress, where I began to reflect on the faces of my love ones and somewhere in this moment of reflection I found sleep.

In that quiet space between sleep and awareness came the silent voice of all words, yet no words, and they beckoned me to follow, I did and found myself walking the streets of my hometown, and it is there, on that street, that I met the spirit of an old oak tree, an old friend I had long since forgotten. And from that encounter, that exchange I knew that my intentions were frivolous and I saw the folly of my thinking.

Yet, I feared the life ahead of me, the life I had created, things were bad and I was lost, abandoned by all things loving and decent, so separated was I in fact, that I had contemplated the embrace of death, believing that the only peace in my future was in the destruction of this body. However, the smiling lady Guru disguised as an old tree had shown me differently, she had spoken to me in the only way she knew I could accept. She had shown me what all my despair, all my sorrow, all my self-pity had not shown me, had not accomplished, could not accomplish and then, in that moment, I understood that what I truly sought was not the peace of death, but the peace of life and that that peace could only be found in the mystery of the soul. My eyes watered and my back straightened, the fog cleared from my mind, "Peace" I said aloud: "Peace!" And once again I met myself, the indestructibility of life, I remembered my calling, my purpose, I remembered all the things I had forgotten.

In a moment of consciousness I stood and made my way to my bunk where I fell once more into restful sleep, a thing that had eluded me for the longest...In that restfulness I put my head into the lap of deep sleep and once there my mother ran her fingers through my hair and sang to me in a language I did not recognize. Her skin was golden, her eyes were like two black moons and her jaw was wide. I knew her, yet I didn't.

My sleep was dreamless and immortal, I could not remember the last time I had known such wonderful sleep, and when I stirred I felt as though I had been afloat a great and winding river of light, but when I opened my eyes I saw the walls around me and I remembered once again where I was. Yet, I smiled, because the burden of the past had been lifted from me like a stone and cast far into the realm of things unimportant. All I had done and all I had failed to do in my earlier life were behind me and I had regained my sense of purpose as a human being. I had been asleep, but now I am awake, awake and looking towards my future destination the way the driver of a bus looks upon the road ahead.

What a marvelous awakening this had been. Never had the meaning of purpose been so clear, so rejuvenating. Such a beautiful gift this thing called "peace." Perhaps it was not peace at all, perhaps this is death. Maybe I had been granted my wish and had died and was now reborn into a better person, one who understood. But no, this could not be the case, I recognize my own hands, my own prison cell...yet, this new me is different, transformed, relieved of all burden, completely rested and aware of Self; I had taken another step in Consciousness.

Standing before me was the face on the magazine, and this time I knew her for who she was, she was my sleep, my rest, my mother, my sister, my lover, my guardian and my Guru. Her face was the same,

smiling as it always is when our spirits touch, but this time her language was different than I remembered, it was one I could not only hear, but one I could understand as well. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"I am unsure," I replied. "But, I know that I am on a sacred journey...and I know that whatever the outcome of that journey happens to be, that it will be for the betterment of my soul."

She looked away briefly as if to think for a second about what I had said, licked her wine colored lips and replied, "You are right. You ARE on a journey, but you must take that journey wearing the shoes of a prisoner. This cannot, at this time, be changed. Can you do this? Are you able to accept that?"

"Yes mother, I am able. You know this; you know about the many failures in each of my prior lives, now in this one I shall show you that I am ready to be purposeful. Yes, I can wear a prisoner's skin, you need not be concerned. But I will not wear it because I am being told to do so, but because it is my destiny to do so."

"Oh, your destiny!" at that she laughed, and then continued. "So you're a Guru now," and barked another fit of laughter.

"Embarrassed by my own pride I lowered my head. "No my lady. I am no Guru, only a traveler who is experiencing the euphoria of having seen the light of a distant shelter. I know nothing for certain but the hardness of the ground directly beneath my feet. I know nothing but to trust you to guide me...and that is what I mean when I speak of, my destiny." She smiled a mother's smile and was gone.

In my mirror love was reflected on my face and I had a smile in my heart; how could I not feel love with such a revelation, with such an assurance, with such a sure knowledge of Self? I had somehow been given a glimpse of what can only be described as enchanted sleep, and I am filled with the oneness of it; I somehow know that it was my past inability to forgive and to move on that has been the shortcoming of my many lives; the inability to forgive myself I That had been the lesson of Ummah, in our hour of desperation I had given up, I had been weaker than my mate and in the end it was she who had had the courage and the faith, to end the suffering of her, of our children. I had been weak and had failed my family, and I had carried that guilt with me at the moment of my death.

I found myself refreshed, my sleep has been greatly renewed and I laugh as I think of my situation, of my place here in this life. No longer do I berate my self for succumbing to the temptations of the fast and selfish life, and no longer did I embrace sorrow to the point of desiring death; sorrow has been put into its proper place.

"Now!" I said to myself. "Now," that my past has slipped beneath the warm waters of my current understanding what am I to do with myself. "Now" that I own nothing, not even the clothes on my back. "Now," that I know nothing and have nothing of value outside of my own thoughts. "Now" that I am no longer young and my hair is turning gray, when my body has lost its strength, "Now" that I am forced to start anew. I am once again the fifteen year old boy who in a moment of turmoil left his home to walk the streets of Jacksonville Florida in the guise of a homeless street urchin; oh how I have come full circle to become homeless again. At this revelation I smile and repeat the word, "Now" then add, "Destiny and Fate are fickle twins, indeed." Once again my life is spiraling, not out of control, but spiraling into some sense of ordered control, and just like it did with that fifteen year old kid in my past, I can see that my life has once again taken some purposeful and dramatic turn into an alternate direction. I am broke, naked, alone, empty and ignorant, yet for some reason I am unable to be saddened in the face of it, in fact I have a sense of relief concerning it.

My life is falling apart. Yet I am laughing, I have most certainly gone mad.

A butterfly came floating by and I knew that her life would be a thousand times shorter than my own, yet she floated happily past me as if that were no concern at all, and I understood this message in relation to my own life. I was pleased and took this to be a good omen, because in that moment I understood the lesson of the butterfly; it's not how long you live but how happy you are while doing it; that is important to know. The butterfly lives but a short life, but every hour of that life is spent being a beautiful example of happiness, what a great life that must be.

Concerning my own life, yes it has been a strange one, peculiar in the sense that it can be seen not as one continuous flow from childhood to death, but should be seen instead as a series of very peculiar parts, each a different dime novel, connected, yet not. As a child I was strange and alone with my mother and brother. As a youth I was on my own until the most unusual of circumstances created a marriage for me. I then became a father, a Mayor and a businessman...then I became a prisoner close to death, now] am a convict following the principles of Self-Realization with the oneness of the Universe circulating through me like my own blood. And, from this entire set of circumstances, from each distinct separate part, have I come to be.

I learned loneliness as a child, hunger from my days on the streets and pleasure from a variety of women. I accumulated a family and financial success; I flattered my senses, squandered a fortune and betrayed the gift of love. Yes, I have lived a full life, a full life of aimlessness, unlearned in the game of thought, never knowing the principles of my own higher possibilities, a fools life really, one with many different faces, one that could only be described as the sheep that was lost. But, it is not as if I slowly wandered from the path of normality and on to another, no, it is more than that, I recognize that I have been yanked and pushed and pulled by something greater than myself. In one direction and then the other as if on my own I would not have found the way, here...yeah here, to prison. How crazy is that! And yet my life has been a good one, the child in my heart has not been aborted. But oh what a journey it has been. I have lived so carelessly and committed so many stupid acts that my whole life can now be counted as one accident and one failure after another. It is true, I have lived through a multitude of disappointment and a lifetime of misery, only to be converted into a happy, productive convict. It has all happened for the best, my heart tells me this, and my mouth laughingly agrees. It was my destiny to experience failure at this level; I had to fail at this magnitude so that I could think the most foolish thought of all, the thought of suicide, this, so that I could meet my teacher, my watcher, my Guru. I had to meet myself so that I could sleep and awaken in the peace of self-forgiveness. I had to become the fool in order to become the master. I had to experience sin so that I could accept grace. I had to once again become a child so that I could meet my mother.

So much joy in my heart, but from whence has it come? Is it the result of sound sleep? Or is it from the teacher? Or could it be that I have escaped from reality to stand childlike and free in the land of complete insanity; to look upon the free floating universe like the child I used to be. I do not know, but I can promise you that it is very good to be awake and liberated; and yes I see the irony that my awakened liberation is the result of being asleep and incarcerated. Oh yes, how fresh the wind of thought is upon my brow, how good it is to have escaped my freedom. How very good it is to be the infant who can do nothing except lie in his bed and feel his chest rise and fall to the rhythm of his own breath. How good it is to once again experience breathing. How good it is to know the simple pleasures of life without the hooks, without the tethers, without the attachments. How foolish was I to have remained so long in that folly of false prosperity, believing my self happy. I have been the fool of fools. Yes I have been a complete idiot, and

never again shall I, as I was wont to do, think my self wise. Yet, I must admit that it feels as though I now have a path upon which I can walk, a path that leads to a place where I will become more than the fool, at last I have succeeded at something important; I have succeeded in hearing the voice within, I have succeeded in meeting my teacher, and from the crest of the wave, sighted what I believe to be Ithaca far off on the horizon. Once again I have the inspiration to do something productive, to be a working part in the machine of life. My heart sings and Sirius has responded.

I look into my plastic mirror and what I see there surprises me, for many years have gone by and sorrow has left its mark on my withered face. I move to my steel sink, press the button and take some of the wellspring provided there into my mouth, it tastes foul and I spit it out. I take another mouthful swish it about as I look once more at this face of mine and then I spit it out as well, but this time with it I spat out my past life, and I watched as it flowed down the drain, forever gone. And I said to my self, "It is what it is."

Yes, I could have remained the man I was, earning a living and squandering it away, and I could have had happiness with my loved ones, but it was not to be, for something inside of me was thirsty for a refreshment unavailable in that life. In order to quench that thirst I was given the medicine of absolute disconsolateness and despair, that extreme point of sorrow where I had been prepared to destroy my life. However, in that moment of final reflection and profound self-loathing I had not accepted the kiss, because it was then and only then did I first hear the voice of no words, and I am happy to say that that voice is still with me to this day, and this is why I am able to laugh, to giggle in this very un-funny place.

"Life is good!" I said to my self, to the face in the mirror. The worldly pleasures are good as well, but a peaceful mind and a restful sleep are better, even a babe understands this. I had known it all along, but have only now accepted it as so.

I walked to my cell window and looked out upon a bright sun-filled day and I reflected on my transformation, and in that moment of reflection I put my fingers to my lips and sent a kiss to my loved ones...and then I sent them a silent message which said that all was good, that I had died in prison.

Si, mi corozon I have died in prison, but not in the manner you might think, but in some other way that I am unable to explain...I suppose that you could say that my old system of thinking has died, that my old priorities have died, that my old desires have died, or at least changed. All of the things I had lived for, fought for, lied for, cheated for and coveted, the things that had conquered me have finally been subdued, have finally, here in this prison cell, met their death. And it is in this death that I can now rest. It is in this acceptance that these things are forever gone that I am free and so full of joy.

Today I understand why even at the height of my success I was not content, it was because I had been at war with myself. I had been the slave rather than the master of what the world had told me was important, too much stress to be happy, too many rules to follow, too much god to worship. In this blindness I had wormed my way into the house of prosperity; a beggar who became the master who could not recognize the beggar in himself, anymore than the beggar could recognize the master, in himself. Now, however, I see my new path illuminated before me and I am neither beggar nor master, I am only me returning what little I have to the source. Yes it can be said...that I died in prison.

Through a cold and raw morning I watched the night turn to day. I made a cup of instant coffee from luke-warm sink water, pulled my boots on and made ready.

Chapter Nine

Then one late night, in my despairing dreams, she came to me, to warn me of impending doom, a doom I myself was creating. Together we walked the barren shoreline of some distant seaside and in her beautiful sing song language she told me of her love for my soul and of her sadness, her weariness, her concern for me and my abuse of it. I listened and I told her that I had felt her tears upon my cheek, that the breath of her words had touched my heart, and that I would try and remember her warning upon my awakening; with a sad smile she was gone and my heart was sodden with the tears of my own indifference and I longed for one more full breath of her hair.

The next night my teacher did not come and I remembered the face of another, and I remembered the last time I had caressed it, the last time we had lain together in our bed of passion. I went to her as she slept, I watched her; I lay by her side with my face near her own. I looked ever so carefully at her and noticed that in the corners of her eyes I could see the beginnings of age written in the fine lines, in the soft wrinkles presenting themselves there. Even in sleep I could see the weariness that had been me displayed so quietly on her beautiful face, and I sensed something horrid in her, in our, future, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was.

I spent the next days doing as I damn well pleased, and as a result, when I went to bed I found not the rest my spirit or my body needed. I awoke weary and agitated and very close to that dreadful snap that causes men to do unnatural things, for my heart was full of misery, a misery that I could no longer bear, a misery which had its roots in. disgust. In truth I no longer liked myself, I was a wine that had soured, I had become pointless pounding music, but more than anything else I had become neglectful to those who depended on me and I knew that I had cast away everything decent and valuable and good about myself and replaced it with things which made me want to vomit.

Waking from my horrid dream I felt lethargic beneath the weight of my sadness. When I entered contemplation and thoughtfully tried to put value to my life, as it was up to that point, I found little of substance, I had Spent to many of my years non-productive, worthless, pointless, undisciplined and I knew that I had not produced anything of substance with the exception of my family; only they were proof that I had been worthy of breath, and there it was, the truth revealed. I was empty and alone and staring into the very face of my own worthlessness, I felt like a castaway on a lost shore.

Heavy of heart I returned to my jail cell where I sat down upon the cold floor with my back to the furthest wall, I felt like ending my life, I felt death beckoning for me to call out to her, to embrace her. Silently I sat and felt a fading of the instinct that compels men to survive and cling to life at all costs. I weighed my options and then in despair I collected my thoughts, beginning to once again inventory my life, hoping beyond all hope that possibly there was some good deed that I had performed which had been overlooked in my prior inventories, something of real value that I had given to the world without thought of payment. But nothing different presented itself, and I was left hoping that maybe I had done something selfless, something so selfless that I didn't even remember doing it. Then in resignation I tried to remember the last time that I had experienced happiness, not laughter, but happiness, bliss, and somewhere in that search I found rest, I found sleep, and in that sleep the chatter of my mind fell silent and in that darkness I heard a voice, the voice of silence and it said: "You have chosen a hard path to follow, but follow it you must, because at the end of it you will find your salvation." I remembered this

voice as the voice that had nurtured me as a child, the voice who had comforted me in my darkest hours, the voice who had consoled me when I was a teen alone on the streets, the voice that had given me strength when I was afraid, the same voice I had not heard for many elongated years. How long has it been now since it has spoken to me, how long since I have listened?

Many lost years did I have behind me, many frivolous goals, many years of thirst, many years content with the scraps of petty pleasures; I had traded my soul for bad fruit. Yes, for many years now I had been as wretched as any criminal, I had become the divine comedian. I had played a game with very high stakes and now found myself bankrupt. In that moment I knew that the game was over, that I could no longer play it, for I had regained the ability to hear the unspoken words, the silent voice of my higher possibilities. I shuddered, shook myself, and then smiled, because something had died within me and I knew it to be the heave of my own consumption, of my own ignorance.

Somewhere in the past hours I lost consciousness and lay down upon the cold floor and when I, at last, regained consciousness I saw that the night had arrived. I fell atop my bunk where the light of a full moon cast the shadow of prison bars across my saddened face.

I looked out from the barred window of my cell to watch with tear filled eyes as my sister made her way across the sky and in the shadow of her peace the noises in my head became silent. Mute and motionless my eyes fixed upon her radiant beauty and under her spell I became breathless and in that state of absolute passion, an arrow from the east was released from her and was shot through me with perfect accuracy; I knew this to be the next path which had been illuminated so that I might find it.

I asked for and received instruction, hours, days, months and years did I immolate that of my teachers so far away on the banks of the great river. I spent hours in contemplation, hours in meditation, and I longed for the personal discipline to forsake my desires, my dreams, my loves, my body and my sins, hoping that by doing so I could escape my prison sentence. I stood in the searching sun, I flew past the cool of the moon and I watched with closed eyes as a full panorama of stars sailed across the sky; no longer was I a man in a box, a man bound by chains and walls and ignorance. Yet, in my motionlessness I came to know the anger in my heart, the unrest in my spirit and the stranger in my soul, for in spite of it all, I remained a prisoner.

Again I sat and looked through the bars at my piece of the world. I watched as my sister brought forth the blood of life in woman, and then I watched her dance across the sky, and out of love for her, I wept for all the lies I had spoken to the gentle sisters of the earth, beneath the beauty of her blushing face; forgiveness did I ask, for all the hearts I had left unfulfilled. Hour after hour I sat in silence and measured my every breath, and in time my guilt fled and my anger melted away from me and when the first light of day touched the darkness of my cell I lowered my eyes and on unsteady legs swayed from side to side as I stood to give thanks for another day, for another breath.

I fasted and I fasted again. I cut my food intake and I explored my mind. Visions flickered in and out of my consciousness and my hands became a surreal part of me. No longer did I see women as the opposite sex, I had learned to see them as no sex, none at all. I had at last released that addiction.

From my prison I saw the world by way of television, on it I saw young girls jumping and gyrating to pounding music, I saw political debates, I saw religious wars in the Middle East, I saw starving children, I saw athletes praised, I saw supposed criminals in pink clothing, I saw preachers preach, I saw economic predictions and I saw the truth of it all... and I knew that none of it was worth the trouble of a thought, because it was all an illusion, a lie created to control the minds of the masses. I saw in it the decay and

death of my kind, I saw them rotting from the inside out. I saw the plan; “Order from chaos.” In my madness, I laughed.

My former life was gone and never to return, this I knew. Even should I somehow win my release it wouldn't matter, I had changed; I have exchanged my old thoughts and dreams for thoughts and dreams of a different sort. My goal now, is to let the world be the world so that can I focused on the flame within.

I realized that I desperately needed to either quench my thirst or to become empty of it. To do this I surmised I had to become empty of all other inhibitions, empty of dreams, hatred, anger, remorse, pity, self—pity, empathy, apathy, empty of joy and sorrow. To do this I knew that I had to find the death of life as I had known it, to find repose based on something different, some part of me not a prisoner. I had heard of the ascetics and decided that the path ahead was one that required I be liberated from myself, from my ego, from that part of me that was incarcerated. This became my new goal, believing that when all of the old me had been banished, when every desire was rejected, that the ultimate experience would then take place and that I would awaken to the reality my visions had shown to me, that I would be remanded back to my family, that I would then have, not only freedom, but the answers to the Great Mystery of life as well.

Silently I sat in my prison as the giving of life and the giving of death went on its unalterable way in the world around me; feeling no sympathy for one nor anger towards the other. Silently I sat and listened as one prisoner preached and one prisoner condemned, feeling neither inspiration nor condemnation, concerning their well given opinions. Silently I sat as the prison system practiced unfair policies on us and I silently sat as we practiced unfair policies on one another. Silently I sat as first my daughter and then my eldest son married and had children; even my youngest had married in my absence, I wept. And then I started the process all over again.

I sat in study and I sat in contemplation. I contemplated and I studied. Later I added prayer and meditation to the mixture and contemplated and studied prayer. I sat slouched and read from “The Equinox” and I sat straight and practiced my breathing, sometimes breathing deep and fast and other times breathing slow and shallow. Sometimes I did not breathe at all... a thing I previously thought impossible...I began to know my non-self, but like the heroin addict whose first experience results in the desire for another and another and then a continuous experience, I too could not be without my drug, the non-Self induced drug of euphoria. The Author told me to become in mind and spirit many different things, from rocks to trees to a decaying corpse (yoga teachings all). I followed his instructions to the extreme, I sat in stone and I fell wet from the sky, I felt myself rot on the vine and felt myself sprout anew upon another. I stood transfixed in an imaginary forest and I experienced my flesh falling from my bones in foul decay, but no matter how enlightening the beginning and middle of this practice was, the ending was inescapable and the hour always came when I was once again the monster in the mirror; my feral eyes forced to look at the world from behind bars.

The Painter came to me bringing with him a coat of many colors. Alongside him I loved and prayed and meditated and hoped to somehow right the vessel of my life before all of its fluids had spilled out and into the cracked sidewalk of reality. I was his artist's shadow, a thing which I now know is necessary to give a painting its life. He was the light and I the shadow, together we created.

I was the asker of questions, childish questions like, “Are we there yet? How much further?” and “How will I know when we have arrived?”

The Painter would only smile at me and then reassure me by saying, "Trust me, we are making progress. We have accepted that which was given to us." But in my heart I felt as though I had learned little of nothing from my prison experience, and that what I did recognize as progress, I felt could have been learned anywhere...so I could not understand why I had to experience the harsh reality of prison to learn that which I could have learned from anyone on the outside?

Oh to be sure, I had enhanced my concentration and I understood the value of it. And to be sure I had practiced fasting and the importance of controlling my breath. I had explored my mind and learned to leap the stars...but what is the functional value of those things? Do the blind see? Do the lame walk? What of the killer, is he repentant because of my fasting? Has the Victim found peace as a result of my controlled breath? Can a child overcome his abuser because I have learned to fly? No, and in this I understood that what I had learned was nothing more than the ability to escape a world, a reality that I seemed incapable of altering. The same escape that the fiend gets when he puts a needle into his arm. The same brief numbing of the mind that the wine gets when he uses alcohol to counter the pain of a senseless life; the numbing of the mind. Yes that is all I had truly learned...to drift away on a spike, to float atop a bottle, to shut out reality through shortened breath, to find a release from the body and dwell in the non-self. Yes I had learned a lot, I had learned how to forget the pains of life...I had learned to run and to hide and the Painter had called it progress.

In time I shared my feelings with him; he smiled.

I explained that it seemed to me that I found, in what he called spiritual practices, only a brief escape from a life of sorrow, and nothing more. I seem very far from the wisdom that the sages profess, and when I return I find that everything is still the same. I do not feel wiser. I do not feel as though my actions have changed a thing. These are the thoughts that I expressed. The Painter once again only smiled. I told him that it seemed to me, that there was no proof what so ever where I was concerned, that true knowledge could be found in spiritual practice, and that I was beginning to believe that it could only be found by those not searching for it. He smiled a third time.

One day as we were on the track breathing to the count of nine steps, frustration overcame me and I asked: "Painter, what are we doing?"

"We are walking, and we are coordinating our breathing."

In my sarcasm I replied: "Yes, we are walking, but are we on the right path? And yes we are concentrating on our breath, but are we breathing in life - or breathing out life? Or are we simply going around in circles?"

The Painter answered: "We have learned much, but there is so much left to learn."

I shook my head and then asked: "How old to you think Billy Graham is, or the Pope, or Guru Mayi, or Elizabeth Clare Prophet?"

"Some are older than others," he answered.

"Exactly" I responded. "And none of them has been whisked away to heaven like Enoch. And none of them, as far as I can tell, has attained Nirvana or Shangri-la, or whatever it is that the Easterners believe. And this makes me wonder, it makes me believe that maybe none of them will ever attain the level of spirituality necessary to trigger that which we seek. I mean, we practice and practice and we find ways to escape reality, but the essential thing, the path of enlightenment we do not find. I know that I speak

blasphemy to some, but in my life I have seen so many preachers, so many teachers, so many guru's, so many prophets...so many...but I have not seen even one who is able to walk on water. Not one, out of millions. And I am beginning to believe that if not one of these so-called holy men or holy women, so called Guru's, so called New Agers can find the Path of Paths, then what chance do I, a convict, have of finding it? If none of these giants can alter the impending wreck of this god forsaken world, a wreck that any reasonable person can foresee, then what is the value of a life such as mine?"

"We are trying to find peace brother - that is all. We are not trying to save the world, only trying to improve our small part of it."

"Again I say that what I have found is more akin to a numbing than an understanding." The Painter did not respond to my line of thought, so after a brief bit of silence I tried once again to make my point understood.

"I have always felt the need to seek the higher mysteries. Even as a child I thirsted for them and I have always been full of questions concerning how to learn them. I have also always felt the need to improve my self, perhaps I have always been delusional, perhaps I would have been better off to have been born an idiot. Hell, maybe I AM the idiot; maybe the holy-ones that I seek have disguised themselves as these men around me, men who see no fault in their lives, men who have no remorse for their actions, men who desire to know nothing beyond the happiness of music, sex and athletics. Is it possible that THEY, these convicts, who seemingly care nothing for enlightenment are the enlightened, and that we, the seekers of knowledge, are somehow the ones who are lost? Are we somehow repelling the enlightenment we so desperately desire with our constant learning, with our personal discipline, with our quest for knowledge... with our DESIRE for it?"

The Painter stopped short his practice and stood in silence and then cocked his head to the left as if talking to himself or someone who was not there. Then he softly agreed with everything that I had said, and replied. "Truly, your thoughts have come from a higher source. For who else but a man far along the path could recognize the godliness of the idiot? And who but a holy man could find such compassion as to see the potential goodness in these addicts and robbers."

In that moment of praise from my better self, I had to admit that, yes, I did understand the basic precepts of spirituality and therefore had to concede that I in truth did not think that all spiritual practice was a waste. No, I did not believe that a world devoid of prayer and faith and general religious morals would be a better place. In expressing these feelings I realized that they were only a manifestation, a frustration that I was feeling at what I perceived to be a lack of visible progress. After all, what would be left of civilization if those precepts were suddenly removed from the human equation? What else has survived the test of time if not faith, prayer, and religion? Then came doubt.

Then came doubt.

Around me convicts went about the business of being tricked, lulled by the illusion that they were something other than slaves of indifference, slaves to TV and the doctrine of fairness. My closest friend among them took refuge there as well. I threw out a ring but he spurned it, believing that I was lost. One of us most assuredly is. Once again I found myself unaccompanied in my walk; a lone red leaf feeling the pull of an ever increasing breeze.

My guardian revealed himself and a stone was cast upon my path. He showed me that my life and the world which houses it was in perfect harmony, a perfect chain of events, uninterrupted, fashioned out of a

designed cause and effect. Never before had I understood so clearly. My heart leapt with joy and I sensed a further awakening, a perfectly clear crystal disk beneath my feet supported by thought. Never before had I been as awake as that night when I experienced sleep without sleep, death without death. Never before had such an awakening been so irrefutably true and I felt that every interconnected atom was at that moment singing. I felt the voices touch my soul, sounds of power softly touching my deepest parts the way a child touches its mother. Nothing I had ever experienced had prepared me for such as this. What had I done to be so blessed? What goddess, guardian or teacher could bless in such a way as this? Were they singing for me, or was I only the voyeur being given a brief once in an existence moment of total ecstasy? And just when I thought it would end it resurrected itself and sent waves of love wafting throughout the universe, causing my soul to skip a beat like the heart of a teen experiencing that first touch of knees beneath a lunch room table. I did not question whether what I was experiencing was good or evil, whether it brought sorrow or joy, whether it was the past or the present, great or small, I simply stood immobile and looked at the universe through my hand. Then the voices were gone and the silence became empty sound, and in that emptiness I wept, for I knew that I was once again flesh, flesh, flesh and bone, flesh and flesh alone.

When at last I returned I began to write down my experience in its entirety, then I put those words away so that others could not read them. Question the wisdom of this if you so choose, but to share it would bring about the creation of opinion and its companion quarreling. And opinions have no place in this present sharing of experience for no one save I can fully solve the riddle of my Self. This I will say, what you have just read is true in the sense that I am true and it is light in the sense that I am light.

Time passed and I began to doubt my own sanity, for nothing in my physical life had improved. Yes, I understood the significance of spiritual progression, but what good is a journey if it does not offer the anticipation of your lover's arms upon completion? Is that not the best part of a journey, the return home? What good would one be without the other?

Yes, I have seen the glowing faces of the holy persons. Yes, I have seen the beauty of Guru Mayi's heart. Yes, I have seen the wonderful smile of Billy Graham; the happiness of a new believer and truly I wish that my eyes had that glow, that my smile could cause others to believe, that my own beliefs could bring a smile to a crying child. All this I wish in my childlike heart, because surely such things are Godly. However, the truth was that I saw Guru Mayi not in the way I should, but the way a man sees a woman, and I saw Billy Graham not as a spiritual leader with a thousand years of good works, but instead the way a convict sees another man, with distrust.

Chapter Ten

It is early in the morning and as usual I am outside awaiting the rising of the sun. We've had a lot of rain lately and there's standing water in some of the grassed-in areas of the Recreation Yard, in fact, there's a small area that is completely fenced off, "Out of bounds" and it is completely under water. And as strange as it might seem, in this fenced in area, there must be at least twenty or thirty bullfrogs, and the still solitude of darkness on this fine morning is shattered by their singing, one to the other. I stand and I pace back and forth in front of their habitat and listen as they: for whatever reason, croak away in the language of their kind. As I listen I can pick up the subtle changes in their vocal outpouring; they are communicating, make no mistake about it. The strange thing is that they seem to get louder and more vocal the closer I get to the fence line and all but die down when I take myself twenty or so paces away from it. I am befuddled by this. Maybe it's the movement that they see, or sense. Don't know, but I found it interesting and thought I'd mention it, that and I thoroughly enjoy the music.

He is standing next to me, I feel him before I see him. "Do you think that you could've been a frog in a past life?" he asks.

I hesitate for a few seconds take a deep breath and answer, "No, I don't believe that we were somehow lower case creatures in past lives, or that our ancestors are cows in this one, or whatever it is that the Easterners believe. I think that we were always human, in one form or fashion. Not that it really matters one way or the other, but it is something for religious minded people to argue about."

"Do I sense a little anger there?" he said with a little laughter, and I knew he was right so I silently vowed to keep my opinions in check.

After that a long silence ensued as we stood together and listened to the frogs, then we turned to the east and soundlessly watched as the first rays of a new day's sun breached the darkness of another cold January prison morning, in Louisiana.

Afterwards the Painter and I went to the furthest bench on the yard and sat facing the parameter fences so that we could look at the tree line off in the distance; only the pines had any foliage left. I began to tell him about my family and about my life with them as best I remembered them, it. I wept, I laughed, and when I had finished several hours had passed by.

After that we sat in silence, at silence so complete that it was as if I were alone, as if he weren't there at all. Even though he had not spoken a word during my outpouring, I felt as if he had not only heard every word that I had spoken but felt them, that he was more than just listening, that he was quietly, openly, hearing every single word, that he was hearing the truth beneath them yet not assigning any judgment either way to me because of them, merely listening. And somewhere in the silence that followed I came to appreciate how lucky I was to have such a companion in whom I could talk, confess and express myself to; that I could confide my weakness to; someone who would listen to my regrets, my heart, my suffering, my sins and my dreams for the future, without opinion.

In that honest silence I began to reflect on the night past, and in that reflection I began once again to tell my secrets, I spoke about ending my life, about my teacher, and how she had come to me after my long sleep and how in her presence I had felt the great love of total peace, within myself. The Painter

listened with complete devotion and as he did so he closed his eyes and began to rock ever so gently, forward and backward, in the manner of the mentally insane.

When I had finished baring my soul, the Painter, began to hum a tune that we both liked called “My Sweet Lord” and then it was my turn to close my eyes as I softly added the words to his music. When we finished he spoke. “You have found your purpose. The Universe has spoken to you, and your prison has released you. Sorrow has been a good friend to you, I hope you recognize that also.”

“I can see it as clearly as anything I’ve ever seen. Trust me Painter, I know myself for what I am, I know the truth of it, and I am grateful. I am also grateful to you for helping me to reach this point in my personal development, but I am most grateful to you for listening to me. It is a rare person who can listen without wanting to give their own opinion, which more often than not causes harm, and I have never before met another so willing to hear what I have to say. You should know that I myself have become a listener of people; you have taught me that.”

The Painter lowered his eyes as if embarrassed, then turned to look me directly in the eye, and replied, “It is true that you have learned the value of silence and the value of listening, but you did not learn it from me, you learned it from the spirit of anger...you have learned the value of silence from the walls, the walls of this angry prison. Yes, for you prison has been more than a great teacher, it has been a sage of great proportion, one who knows everything about the silent words of all wisdom; in truth a person can learn anything from these walls if they are willing to believe, if they will only watch and listen. Look, you have already learned to appreciate the sunrise, the singing frogs, the voices of the trees, these are all good things Poet; a free man knows none of these things. It is true that a free man learns other equally important things, this cannot be denied, but one is not more important than the other. What is truly important is that we learn what we can from that which we are destined to experience. To have forfeited your freedom to come to prison can only be a tragedy, if you had done so without learning to listen. Yes, prison alone has taught you to listen, but that is not all it has to teach you Poet...there is one thing left for you to learn.”

Not wanting to appear impatient, I waited silently for him to continue, when my patience ran out I said, “Are you gonna tell me or not?”

When he didn’t respond I added, “In about five seconds I’m gonna put my right foot on your left testicle, and there ain’t a thing you’re gonna be able to do about it.” I was, sort of, paraphrasing the movie character Billy Jack.

With upheld hands he laughed and said, “Hold on now Poet. First off, it’s getting late, they’ll be having Recall soon, and second off, in answer to your question, I can’t tell you what ‘IT’ is. ‘IT’ is something that you yourself must learn. It is something unique to you and you alone, therefore I cannot teach it to you, you must learn it on your own. If I had the ability to teach this last and greatest lesson, then I wouldn’t be here with you, I’d be sitting in the Himalayan’s someplace surrounded by gurus. No Poet, I can’t tell you what ‘IT’ is, I am only a simple convict, a man deemed a monster by society, and my task is to walk this fence line until death comes to release me. And believe me brother, I have walked this prison yard many times, thousands upon thousands of steps, one after the other. Even so I am incapable of telling you about yourself, that, you must learn on your own. But this I can tell you. Millions of people are, or have been, in prison, and to the vast majority of ‘em, prison has been nothing but a curse, something that inhibited them from doing the same things they had been doing before they were locked up; for them prison was an obstacle standing between them and their dreams of a thug life. But, for a few, just a

handful of that number, prison ceased to be an obstacle and became a bridge, because while here they, the few, heard the voice, they heard the silent words within themselves. For those convict saint's prison is not seen as an obstacle, but recognized as something holy, a holy place, a monastery, a cave in the wilderness."

"Tomorrow," he said. And then he was gone so silently that it was as if he were never there at all.

On the following day I did not see the Painter, nor the next, or the next. In his absence I went about my daily routine. I went outside at 6 AM to listen to the frogs, but they, like the Painter, seemed to have moved on so I watched the sun rise and I listened instead to the music of the wind and the trees. I wrote in the mornings, worked my prison job and painted in the afternoons. In the evenings I either drew with the pen or worked to edit my writings. But most of all I waited for prison to teach me the final lessons it had to teach.

I watched my fellow prisoners, heard their words and saw their deeds, this I did without judgment. Prison had taught me foremost to listen with a quiet mind, but it had also taught me to observe with a quiet heart, with a blank mind, to think without passion, without desire, without opinion, without judging...I supposed that these poor souls had been judged enough already.

Prisoner, convict, writer, husband, father, son, condemned, I lived from day to day without sorrow, I lived with my teachers female hand atop my head; I lived not in my prison, but with my prison and I waited for her to reveal her breast so that my soul could be nourished from the life giving properties of her sacred milk, but she continued to conceal herself and I continued to wait in silence.

In my silence my hair lightened and turned another shade of grey, and my eyes took on the weary shape of my true age. My once polished muscles fell away from the bone and my back began to ever so slightly bend at the shoulders. The shadow of Time is long upon the ground of my life, and in my laughter I knew that prison had prepared me for this eventuality also; she had taught me that there is no such thing as Time, that my friend is the secret of prison, and wise is the person who understands it, convict or not.

She, my prison, also told me the secret of Karma, that Karma IS Time and that TIME is Karma manifest, and that the only way to overcome one's Karma is to put Time in its proper place, which is here and now. To overcome Karma is to be here and now, because all Karma is self induced and is a result of the Past. Therefore, when a person realizes that there is no Past, only the Present, they have overcome Karma and its Keeper, Time. Time becomes irrelevant to a Life Convict, Time casts no shadow. I am here, that is all.

And once learning this I was able to look at the entirety of my life, from the boy who suffered at the hands of his neighbor, to the young man who set the direction of his future by leaving home, to the man who became the bane of his loved ones, to the old man who sits in prison silently watching his shadow grow long upon the ground. And I knew then that the only thing that separated the boy from the old man was nothing more than that shadow, not anything real.

This book is about past lives, mine, as best I can remember them. However, my experiences with past lives do not constitute a past anymore than the death of this body and the birth of a new one constitutes a future. I know that it is hard to understand and it is even harder to explain, because "Nothingness" is "Everything" and Everything is Nothing.

I know that my speaking of my rapidly aging body frighten others, do they not fear and loath the possibility of suffering, do not all fear the ravages of time? Is not all self-torture and self-fear driven by the

bounds of emanate demise, of the fear of death? Isn't it true to say that once we overcome the handicaps of our past, and our slavery to our desire, that all difficulty ceases to exist? I ask you to give thought to this question: if a lifer convict goes insane and in his insane mind believes that he is spending his days, years and life sitting beside a river and fishing with his children- where is he? Is he in prison, or is he sitting beside a river and fishing? The answer of course is two-fold. Because to you and I, with our limited perception he is certainly in prison but he, in his mind, is fishing. And I assure you that he is seeing and experiencing himself fishing just as surely as we are seeing and experiencing him in prison. So what is the truth? The truth is that when you understand the concept that Time does not exist, you can then understand the true power of Self-Realization, which is to know that we are not this body, but something which lives and operates inside of it. So, the answer is this. Our insane convict is insane only because he has ceased to concern himself with the Time constraints of his body. Our insane convict is only a convict in body, not in thought, in soul per se. And so, while you and I are bound by the sentences of Time which bind us, my brother the "Nut" is fishing.

One day while the Painter and I sat awaiting the coming sunrise, I commented on the silent voice and how it was odd that a man such as myself had been blessed with the ability to hear it. He replied that the voice comes and goes as it wills and that it is not in the least restricted or limited to kings or prophets, that it is the voice of all things from whales to ants, from children to crones, from birth to death, that the voice simply exists for all creatures great and small. Then he fell silent and we sat together in that silence staring out over the tops of the razor-wire as the first brush of light took to the canvas of a new day. The years went by, but neither of us counted them.

Shortly thereafter he left me as he so often did.

I remember him today and try as I might to put to paper the wisdom of his lessons, I am short the ability to completely do so; the crazy teacher whose words had helped me to, not only survive prison, but to accept it and to learn from it, whose simple and sometimes crude humor always brought with it the exact lesson needed at the appropriate time. I remember his crooked smile and his open and honest laughter, and through his eyes I was able to see the path of my own perfection and happily I remember him. Looking back I must admit that he had a sense of pride that I just couldn't seem to fit into the box of his obvious piety and I suppose that that is exactly the lesson isn't it? - to not put others into a box built of our own beliefs and expectations. And even though I could not accept all of his beliefs at the time he told them to me, it seemed that sooner or later they proved to be my own; take this book for instance: its about past lives, and it was this very subject that was our first point of disagreement, one in which I badgered him unmercifully about, and now I am telling you the stories of my own experiences, how foolish I have been. Now of course I understand that no true Seeker, one who has truly experienced the Silence, could find fault with the beliefs of another when they concern matters spiritual in nature. Because such a person of Truth, approves of every doctrine, of every path, understanding as only they do, that every path eventually leads somewhere.

With intentions I fell into a deep sleep, yet asleep I was not.

She was lying atop her bed, a Bible on the table next to her, pictures of her children and grandchildren, but no pictures of me, or us. It has been eight years now since her last visit.

For the longest I stood over her and looked at her face. For a long while I studied her wide face, her full lips and I remembered that once, in her youth, I had thought her face a thing of exotic beauty, and I think it still. For a long while I studied her face and eventually I saw the weary lines around her eyes and neck and thought about how even now, at sixty she was still a beauty; hair thick and rich, skin the color of cinnamon, hands like an angel. My heart hurt to think that I could not touch her cheek, but I was her past. I closed my spirit eyes and thrust myself to a time where her and I were walking the streets of Germany in our youth and in that moment of bliss I moved to put my hand over her heart and ask her to come and see me. I told her that I missed her and that I wanted to tell her that I was sorry for the lies, sorry that I had broken her heart and betrayed her trust, but she was gone and I was once more a sad old convict, burnt out from the disappointments of a life spent frivolously.

Sitting in my little room I watched as a ball of light came through my window, straight from her heart beyond.

As it circled the walls it radiated warmth and love and in its light I saw the nameless things I didn't want to see, and I saw a name for one like me.

I tried to rise and feel her love, but it floated away from me and out the window beyond, and love, her love was gone.

When the darkness returned I knew that my little room was colder than before, I knew that she had moved on, mine no more, that her love, was gone.

And in the darkness I saw the nameless things I didn't want to see, and I saw a name for one like me.

I was startled awake un-refreshed, lost was my understanding of the deeper mysteries, found was my old feelings, emotions, weaknesses and doubts. I went outside to the Recreation Yard and sat alone atop the bench nearest the fence line where I listened to the wind as it passed through the trees off in the distance.

"You are sad?" asked the Painter who was suddenly at my side.

"Yes, I am sad, brother" I answered as tears wet my eyes.

"Why are you sad?"

"I am sad brother, because I once had it all. I had a woman who was devoted to me. I had money. I had success. I had power. I had beautiful children. And now I have only this bench and those trees, and this tired worn out body with its old man's face. That is a lot to lose in one lifetime Painter."

"No Poet, that was a lot to HAVE in one lifetime," he replied, and then he was gone. And in my womb of sorrow I understood the truth of his words.

In my little room I thought about my children, recognizing that they were grown, with families of their own, with lives and paths of their own. I understand this, but I am still their father and in that I fear the fear of all fathers, the fear that they, my own flesh and blood will themselves while away the years of their lives frivolously, as I did. As I have so stated, I know that they each have eternal life, but they are still within my heart and my mind. I suppose that what I am trying to say is that they each, in some unique way, are like me and to be like me I fear, is to experience the full measure of suffering, this because of a soft heart but hard desires. It is true, I am prideful to a fault and people like us are required to suffer more than others, people like us go far astray from the path and we do great injustices and in the end pile up a lot of heavy

Karma. And I have not been there to help them, to show them the pitfalls of life, the things that I have learned these past sixteen years. And when I was with them I was soft on them, I did not hit them, or hold their feet to the completion of chores, I only showed them love. But now that I look around me at these other prisoners I see the faces of my sons in them, and I fear that my kindness was a mistake, that I should have taught them the value of always, “doing what you say you will,” to value truth and to despise a lie, but I did not teach them those things; and why should they listen now that I am nothing but an old idiot who sits on a prison bench talking to trees.

Foolishness, everything I just wrote is foolishness, it is foolish to think that I could protect them from their own destiny, after all who was it that saved me from my own vices, from my own avarice, from my own ignorance? - was it my drunken father? - I think not. No, when it was time for me to do so, I learned on my own and so will they. But how can I not be concerned with their development, how can I let the world have them without fearing for them? - will they not become presumptuous, will they not give themselves over to apathy, to dishonor, to the foolishness of power, to false patriotism, to simple religion, am I not in my silence compelling them to repeat their father’s mistakes?

I sat in the common area of my cell block; every man is provided one armless plastic chair to use as his own; I watched my fellow prisoners and I silently asked these questions of the heart to the spirit of my prison. This was my answer. It is a father’s duty to teach his children the ways of the world, not that of another. And just as it was my father who taught me to be a better man, not through his piety but through his weakness, in that way, so too shall my children learn that which they need to learn, about life, they will learn as I did, from their own failures. For what father can protect his children from living their own lives, from burdening themselves with guilt of their own, from the scars of their own failures, from finding their own path? After all, how is it possible to exempt anyone from their own destiny? My love for them cannot change them, it cannot, it can only be there for them when they thirst for a little relief here and there along the way of their life. “No” the spirit of my prison told me, that even should I die for them, take every lash from the whip in their place, offer my soul for theirs, I could not abate even the smallest part of their own destiny; their lives were theirs to experience and theirs alone.

When my mind returned to its plastic chair, I thanked the spirit for its wisdom and chided myself, because the spirit had told me nothing I did not already know, yet, I still worried for them; strong is my love for my children, never before, in my many lifetimes has a love for a child been stronger than my love for these three. Even my heretic, the son of my sister, whom I became tortured over, was not loved this deep, this completely. And in this profound love I have found the reason for this life as Mark the Convict. In my other lives I had never been able to completely love another except my mate, the woman with the almond eyes, and I guess that this is the difference between the knee-benders and I. But now, in this life children have come and I became totally absorbed in my love of them, so absorbed that it is I who suffers from .it and it is I who am renewed in that suffering. I understand that this love of a father for his child is also part of the great illusion, never-the-less I feel that it is an important addition to my personal spiritual development, that it is not without value, that it is a very important part of my path of growth, that it too must be atoned for at some later date; yet I know that these fears and pains had to be experienced, now, in this life, if I was to elevate myself to the next stage of my evolution.

For what seemed like hours I sat there in that plastic chair, remembering the events of my life as a father and as a husband, reflecting, seeing the film of those events running one after the other on the screen of my mind. I marveled proudly at the personal success of my children, knowing that they have, each in their own way, carved out the beginnings of their own masterpiece called life, and I saw images of

them as the small bright eyed children I remembered, and then it was all gone and I was once again old and tired; again came the sadness and again came the desire to put aside this life, again came the eyes of my Guru and again I silently repeated her words and again understanding bloomed, and again I recovered. For a long while I sat and watched as the forsaken children of this my prison wandered this way and that in search of something, anything, to occupy their untrained minds and even though they were not of my blood, my three, I felt a certain kinship and a certain sadness for the suffering that I knew he in store for them. However, I also knew that this line of sympathy for them and my concern for my own blood was foolishness, that I could not help them anymore than my own father could have helped me, and that it was wrong for me to have these attachments. Yet my runaway heart bleeds for these, my cast away children, as surely as it bleeds for the three I left fatherless when I came to prison. Separation, sorrow, regret, the lashes from prisons whip upon my back, wounds that had not been given so that] could keep opening them, but wounds meant to give me the strength of character necessary to put aside my own karmic guilt. The fact that I had yet to acquire that level of personal character brought with it a measure of sadness all its own.

In place of the regret I was feeling for not having had more time with my children there came an emptiness in my chest. Sorrowfully I sat as something in my heart I could not identify died. All I could do was remain sitting and let the events of my life play themselves out, to be patient and to find some way to block out the noise of prison and listen for the words of silence from the voice behind the chatter. Many days did I sit concentrating on the beating of my heart, waiting for peace and whenever the sadness, the remorse, the regret, the self-pity returned I silently spoke the sacred name that had been given me in a dream so many years before.

I was brought back to reality by a touch on my shoulder. I blinked; it was one of my fellow prisoners leaning down and looking me in the eyes...I could see his concern. "Are you alright, Mr. Mark?" he asked? I blinked again and looked around me at the absolute silence in the cell block and realized that every eye in the place was on me, and I replied "Yes, I am well" in that moment I felt the love of a hundred and twenty unloved men, and then I went fishing with my grandson.

Chapter Eleven

As I continued to do my time I watched and listened to the others around me; I heard them on the phone with their friends and families and not one of them did I not envy. I listened to them as they went about their day talking about going home, and their plans for that day of release and I wondered, why not I? Even the vilest offenders, men who had no desire for improvement were being given the opportunity to prove that they could exist as a productive member of society; men I knew, from their own admissions, would rob and get high within twenty-four hours of their release, yet they were going home. I was not bitter, I just couldn't understand why I, who had proven through all these years to be a good person, could not have the same opportunity; yet in my heart, I trusted the great order of things and believed that it was all somehow part of my destiny. And so it was that I smiled at their good fortune and sincerely wished them well; that was how much like the knee-benders [had become.

This is how uncomplicated my life has become; I simply accept life for what it is, at this moment. I don't see people as I did before, instead I see the good in them even if I have to look extremely hard to do so. Today when I look at the men around me I don't categorize them as dope fiends, sex offenders or criminals, they're just men sharing my experience and deep down, I feel that sometime, somewhere I was once the same as them. I know in my heart that I have shared their desires, shared their pride, shared their vanities, shared their weaknesses; I am one of them, they are my brothers, my children and I protect them from themselves as best I know how; the blind love of a father for his new children.

Time passed and passed again and I took pride in these, my villains, powerfully alive and trying as best they can to force themselves upon a world that does not want them. I watch them as they laugh, fight, suffer and gamble and I note the passion that they exhibited in these activities. I have to admit that they are lovable, each in their own way, their blind strength, and their relentless commitment to the desires of the flesh. So deeply do I think on them, that at times I began to doubt that my knowledge of the higher mysteries has any relevant value, that possibly it too might be nothing more than an alternate form of ignorance, another albeit advanced type of "The Trick," the illusion. For in truth, the wound of separation has not healed. I missed my family.

Over many years now I have counted a thousand sunrises and a million tears, a billion emotions and gradually with them came a quickening of realization, the understanding of what true wisdom is, what the goal of my self-imposed quest was. Yes, after all these lives, after all this suffering, after all the separation, it came to me and it came softly and silently without fanfare. I had been expecting to be whisked away like Enoch, to hear a great voice from a burning bush, to levitate, to see a halo in the mirror, to walk on water...something that would noticeably separate me from the indifferent masses, but it was none of those things. It was nothing but a peace within the soul, the secret knowledge of being in a state of oneness at all times; oneness in all activity, in all thought: the ability to feel and absorb the oneness of all things, animate and inanimate. This knowledge came to me so slowly that I did not even recognize its presence...my fellow prisoners saw it in me first, and it was in their words of praise at how I can have such peace, in light of my life sentence, that first brought my attention to the fact that I had, as a person, ripened into a desirable fruit; I had found at long last a comfortable peace, a recognizable calm.

But the old pain was still here, not within me, but within the hearts of my children and their pain was my pain. I sat and contemplated my options and in silence I spoke to my prison about my concerns,

about my feelings for my family. I yearned to see them, to explain to them the good news, meaning that all that had happened to us as a family had been purposeful and that all that had happened to them, had happened because, like me, they too were on a mission, a search for deeper meaning and that all of my pain was their pain and vice versa because we were bound together, as we had been in many previous lives, bound together by our commitment to helping one another find the peace of Self. Yes, the wounds hurt and yes I wanted to tell them that I too felt the hounding, the longing to be with them, to walk beside them, to hold them, but it was not meant to be at this time. These were the thoughts I silently shared with these walls, this was the blood of my soul and I offered it to my prison, and when I had finished, I sat in absolute silence and listened, waiting for them to respond.

The weather outside was cold and the wind was at work, but, in spite of it all I was sitting quietly awaiting the sunrise when I heard the voice: it sounded like a soft whistling, the type you would expect from an infant, if an infant could whistle.

The voice of my prison had decided to respond to my offering by whistling a child's lullaby; one I remembered from somewhere long ago. So soft and so frail did it sound that I sat in absolute silence afraid even to breathe, wanting to catch every decibel and in its final note something jogged my memory, something long forgotten; it all came back, it was a memory of my father telling me to always be a man, to always wash my feet, to not be a liar, to not steal, to never be a mooch and then I listened as he put music on the phonograph. In that instant memories of him playing music from Spain, from Arabia, from India, from Italy... some strange, others classical and I listened as he explained to the child me the precepts of different cultures and their different takes on things like God and Religion, and I felt the time he tapped me on the chest and said "There son, right there is where the secret can be found!" but that rare moment faded away and in my mind's memory the scene changed as I then watched him crawl into a bottle and throw his life away to the slavery of excess and perversion. Until that moment, I had not understood my father or his purpose in my life. But now I understood that he had given me all he had to give, that even though it wasn't much, it did indeed have an affect on me that I could recognize in my present existence; I understood that he himself had suffered, that he had suffered over his own shortcomings as a man and a father, that he had suffered over his own children. I understood that my father, by his own failings, had pointed me in one direction and steered me clear of the other. Yes, he had so perfectly done his job, he had pointed me towards the path...The walls of my prison had indeed whistled a tune, and that tune had caused me to remember some seemingly insignificant part of my childhood that I had overlooked, and in that remembrance came the understanding that my father had not been worthless, that he had had moments of clarity and that in those moments of clarity he had tried as best he could to give me something of value, to open my mind to other possibilities. It is true, that on that day I had found forgiveness for my father, life is such a strange and comedic play, and I the idiot who thought himself handsome.

Yes, the walls were whistling a tune that I recognized but even so I did not hear it all, for deep inside the wounds of my suffering had yet to produce all its fruit; I still resented my imprisonment, complete serenity was not yet mine. But, I was at long last at peace with my own father, and that gave me hope. As I entered my cell I found the Painter awaiting me there.

We sat and reminisced about our days together in the Penitentiary, how we had encountered truth and murder together as fresh fish convicts. We talked about Reiki and its power and we talked about a thousand other things, and then I found myself without words as I listened to him speak on the mysteries. While he went about the business of speaking, on giving wisdom, of making confessions I knew that he,

the Painter, was no mortal man, no human being. I knew that he was not only giving his own confession, but by proxy, mine as well and in the light of this revelation I knew that this old convict who had led me through the valley of the shadow of death was more than a man, that he WAS the voice of silence which had been my teacher, that he was god, God in the only form I was capable of receiving. As I listened to him I became less in awe of him, of my realization, and I saw with complete clarity how everything in my life had been played out to perfection.

I watched and listened, and when the Painter had said his peace a silence fell between us. After a long while we stood and found our way out to the Recreation Yard where we sat down upon the bench closest to the fence line, there we sat together in silence. That silence was at long last broken when he said, "You have understood the purpose of your father and your mother and the events of your childhood, but you have yet to hear it all. Listen now and you will hear more." Silently we sat.

The voices of men talked and yelled and prayed on the prison yard around us, the wind sounded through the trees and the walls of my prison softly sang a song of suffering, its words flowed towards me and into my chest, my heart; its voice lamenting and lilting. I heard it, I felt it and I listened harder. My eyes fogged over and I saw on the screen of my mind the face of my father, then my own and then those of my two, no three? - sons, and finally my grandson. I saw on the screen of my mind the faces of my women, the ones who have loved me. I saw my Guru, my mother, my Mata, my daughter and those of my granddaughters.

Then I saw the faces of my friends and my enemies alike come and go in the motion of the rising and falling tide, overflowing one into the other, all becoming part of my prison, each having a part in leading me to it, to my glorious suffering.

Face after face rolled past my vision moving towards some common goal; I saw that this music of lives was composed of me, all my loved ones and all the faces I had ever encountered, I knew that this tune of sorrowful music was the catalyst pushing not only me, but all of them as well towards goals, each to his or her own, and that each goal was followed by another and another and another and that each of these goals were intertwined with the wind and the whistling and the music. I watched.

I was all awareness, completely absorbed in what I was seeing, completely silent, completely receptive and I believed that I had now learned all of the lessons that this life had to offer. To be sure, I had seen it all before, but I had been unable to understand the message. Many times in many lives I had been shown the message, but today it was new, today I can see that tears are the same as laughter, that they both serve the same purpose. I can see that the laughing child and the angry convict, birth and death, are all one, that they are all interwoven into a thousand individual pieces compromising the quilt of life. At last I understood that all of these lives that I had been shown, the experiences I had become conscious of, all of the joys of life that I had experienced, all the sorrows I had fallen into; that all of it together had become the whispering of the trees, the music of the walls, the wailing of these my brothers and sisters behind bars, the love of my family, the duty of my enemies. . . all of it, the song of a million voices, and of one silent voice. And as I listened, I saw the wind of events and heard the music of life. A "lifer" who's Time never passes.

In this convict life I have ceased to struggle with my destiny, I have ceased to suffer in the ways I had before; I have found the serenity of a mindfulness that is not opposed to my Fate, a perfection that is part of the silence, part of the oneness, part of something so simple that even I was accepted into its order.

In this convict body I have learned to sit and to listen to the silent words of Teresa's castle and not to the sorrow or to the laughter happening around me. I have learned that when my heart is not bound to the emotional constraints of individual personalities that my soul will enter into itself and that the ears my higher self will open to the music, to the voice, and that when this happens that the serenity of eternal bliss becomes available to me.

"Can you hear it Poet?" he asked from beside me.

I did not Show him that I was startled, in truth, he had ceased to amaze me with his sudden appearances; I looked slowly to my left and saw him smiling brightly, the same smile as I had on my own face. I marveled as I looked at the glow about him, and I gleefully understood that he had become One with the All.

The Painter stood, put his hands on his hips, leaned back slightly and inhaled a long deep breath of fresh air, held it in and then released it in the manner of a person exhaling their life away; more of a release than a function of breathing.

I likewise stood, for I sensed a parting.

He looked into my eyes and smiled at me the way a proud father does a son, and then in his uncouth way he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Well butthead, never thought it possible, but you finally got it." He hesitated, smiled and added, "See you later alligator."

"After while crocodile." I answered. And he was gone.

Later that night in keeping true to my routine, I lay atop my bunk, reviewed my day, said the sacred "Hu" mentally for a few minutes and then drifted off to sleep. Somewhere in the night I awoke, but didn't. I found myself standing at the edge of a beautiful valley, and off in the distance I could see the workings of a coal mine; the land is beautiful in spite of it. I look towards a nearby road and there I saw an old car chugging by and I figure it to be something from the forties, but I'm not quite sure, could have been earlier. I look at my hands and they're the hands of a hobo.

I see a young boy in a pair of bib-overalls sittin' on a wooden fence and I can tell that he is troubled, so I walked over to him and introduced myself as a traveler, named Micah. He tells me that folks called him, J.P.

I had a sack of hobo things that I'd been carrying around with me and I sat it down and then hopped up on the fence beside him. We didn't say much until I asked him where his folks were; he told me that his daddy was off in the war fightin' Germans and that his Ma was in the house with the Bible man... somehow. I knew that he was upset about this, and my instincts were confirmed as he added, "they been in there more than a hour." I left it at that, but in my heart I knew that this young boy had seen something that no boy should ever see, that he knew things that no boy should ever know about his mother, and I knew that the memory of it would forever warp how he would treat his own women and children. I hung my head so that to a passer-by we must have looked like a sorry pair.

From out of nowhere the boy's mood seemed to change and he says with enthusiasm, "I'm gonna be a pilot! I know a lot about airplanes." I answered that that was a great goal to have and I encouraged him, but I knew that he'd never fly a plane, not in this life any way, and my heart hurt for a destiny I was powerless to change, for a father I was powerless to help.

I snapped awake amidst the jerking motions of a person sobbing heavily and uncontrollably; this was a rare way to be awakened and so I took inventory of myself; my stomach ached and my heart hurt and I thought about that boy, his mother and the bible man, and I thought of his father off fighting Germans. I understood the message, I understood the outcome and I felt the pain of three generations who would suffer as a result. In that state of mind I eventually drifted back to sleep and somewhere in the night she came and we talked...her with her youthful wide jaw and me nothing more than an old man ravaged by the long years.

She asked me if I had found enlightenment and I told her no, but that I had found myself. She asked me if I had found peace and I told her no, but that I had found purpose. She asked me if I understood the purpose of death and then she asked me if I had found religion. I told her that even as a young man living in the streets I had not been able to fit into the structure of organized rules and now that I am a prisoner nothing has changed, in fact I seemed to have developed distrust for religion and for those who purport to represent it. Yes, even as an old man I seem to have retained this attitude concerning teachers in general. Yet, I admit that I have had many teachers throughout my life. I had the lesson of my mother, the anger of my father, the lesson of respect the teenage me learned the hard way, the lessons from my wife, my children, the whores, the cops, the legal system, my Guru and the criminals I have adopted, I have learned from them all, but I have learned the most from the whistling walls of my prison.

“Tell me what prison has taught you, my child.”

I thought on her request, I looked at my feet, I looked at the stars and I looked at the translucent black disk upon which I stood; I didn't want to answer, because I wanted to stay there with her, and I knew that to answer was to remain a prisoner, then in my resignation I answered. “I have learned that knowledge, wisdom, salvation and enlightenment cannot be imparted, one to another. Because to try and give knowledge to one incapable of understanding it, harms them more so than their own ignorance. To give wisdom to the unwise before their time causes them to hate you for it. To try and give Salvation is to prove your own foolishness, for Salvation is a gift from God, not a thing taught or bestowed by man, and as for enlightenment, that is a property won in the battle for self; it is not a gift given freely. Prison has taught me that knowledge can be given to some, but not others; that Wisdom cannot be given at all, that it must be discovered through experience. Prison has taught me that Salvation is a joke, a trick, for how can a person talk about something so far beyond his ability to comprehend?- salvation is Life and life as we see it is death, and only Enlightenment will allow you to know this with any level of certainty. Prison has taught me that everything is false, that everything else is an illusion, that everything that the mind can conceive is incomplete and therefore misunderstood. And that anything words can describe is only the hull of a seed, not a tree and certainly not the entire forest. So whenever a religion, or a teacher such as me, decides to give something to the masses, in truth, it can only be a part of the illusion. But, the universe around us, now that is different, the ants and the stars can teach us things that no book can, as surely as prison has taught me, that no person is totally a saint and that no person is totally sinful, that every Prosecutor, every Judge and every Cop is a criminal and that every criminal is a Prosecutor, Judge and Cop, that Right differs from Wrong only in the illusion of who commits the act; that every Prosecutor, Judge and Cop breaks the law in order to gain a conviction and that every convict Prosecutes, judges and polices his own kind in prison, it is all an illusion of position.

Prison has taught me that Time does not exist except in the minds of men; only a Lifer Convict can truly understand that, only a lifer convict can fully comprehend the absolute necessity of living in the now, living without Time. That is the gift of my sentence, to know oh so well that Time is an illusion, that Time is

karma, the stick with which we whip ourselves and that Outside of the mind of humanity, it is not relevant, it does not exist.

Prison has taught me that every event in one's life is part of the grand design, that the world and all of the seemingly ill circumstances in it are part of our slow journey towards perfection, a perfection that perpetually exists, and one that is only awaiting our realization of that fact. I have learned that contained within every sin is forgiveness and that in every forgiveness is sin; that contained within every old man such as me, is the little boy he once was; that every infant born is born not into life but born into death and that the dying gasps of the elderly are merely the birth contractions for another life. I have learned that if you want to see the truth of something you have to look past the obvious and look at the exact opposite of it, much like the Cabalistic practice of reading words backwards to gain the full knowledge of their meaning.

Prison has taught me not to run from my sins, but to embrace them; prison has taught me that they were a necessary part of my personal growth, that it took the sins of my flesh, the sensual pleasures, the pride, the handsomeness, the vanity, the selfishness and ultimately the most humiliating of circumstances possible in order for me to give up the resistance, in order for me to awaken to my own higher possibilities.

Prison has taught me that it was my time to experience the feast, that it was my time to bite from the apple, to taste the forbidden fruit hanging from the Tree of Knowledge, the Knowledge of opinion. With the flesh of fruit in my mouth I have learned that the Knowledge of things like Salvation, Wisdom and Education are nothing but human opinion expressed into words, and I do not trust words, oh I love them, but they can be manipulated into things untrue. I have accepted the fact that I can love the things of my life that have brought me pain because they are at best physical, but the words of others I cannot trust; you well know that a person can't truly love something or someone they can't trust. Therefore the teachings of wisdom that men offer, the histories offered by government means nothing to me. Perhaps it is this distrust of words, possibly even my own which has kept me from finding complete peace; perhaps it was all those opinions put to words, even "God" has been categorized into words by the hounds of human opinion.

Personal experience is my religion and this prison is my sanctuary, my alter, my church. I have faithfully attended my prison my church, and I have learned from it, it has educated me, it has spoken to me, and it is like a god to me who without education, without wisdom, without opinions, without books without prejudice has taught me the true meaning of salvation, the value of life and the value of death. My prison has explained to me the workings of the world and as a result I have learned to have patience with the unlovable and to understand that which I cannot agree with; can any religion do that! My prison has taught me not to despise or hate myself for my own failures, not to despise or hate the physical pleasures and carnal desires of physical life, to see the beauty in them, yet it has also taught me not to be a slave to carnality; can any book do that! My prison has taught me to see my fellow convicts with a measure of understanding, with respect and even admiration, to find that little speck of good in them, can any god you have read about do more? My prison has taught me that my activities, my actions, my examples of life are more important than any salat I might make...that the fact that I can walk these floors as a "Lifer" and still hold my chin up, is more important than any words I might say to these youngsters who think their life is over because they have a ten year sentence, can any teacher do more?

I lowered my eyes and apologized for rambling on in her presence, but when she smiled I knew that she had not been offended. In her little girl voice she replied, “You are still angry my child...but you are progressing” then she was gone and I was alone once more with the stars.

Prolog

I have spent a lifetime in this prison, trying to figure out what I had done so wrong in life that required prison to fix. In this search I came to realize the full measure of sorrow I understood that even in a hundred different lives that I had never before known the full extent of grief. In those lives I have certainly failed but not to this extent, not to the point where self-realization became open to me. Yes I have been a thousand different persons but I'm completely different from them now. Here, in this life, I am a writer, an artist who is drawing and painting warm things in a cold place. It is true that my hands are older now, that I am older now in ways you cannot see, that it is an older man who goes about the business of this new life. It is also true that it was a younger man who came to this prison, one who believed in things like magic, honor and loyalty, a soft tearful boy really. But I have learned and I no longer cry...well that's not entirely true I do occasionally cry during sad movies, movies about families, families who've lost something, like the families of loved ones lost to senseless violence...and families like mine. Yes, every now and then I do awaken to the gasping of tears, and that's when I know that I've been thinking about them, my family, and even though I can't always remember the dream, there's always the smell of her hair on my pillow, as if my last life as a flee man could somehow be recaptured here in this one, if I only wanted it had enough, if only I were to sign my name in blood.

A convict learns quickly enough that the past can only hurt you if you stop to consider all that you did, and sometimes what you didn't do. A convict knows that its best not to dwell on what went wrong - better yet, don't think at all; there are days when I actually manage to do that, relying instead on keeping busy, relentlessly on my program. Of course there are days like today when I can't stop thinking, when the prison program supersedes my routine and pins me down, takes away the peace I find in having no time to think. It is in times like this that I can't stop the thoughts, the memories. I try to still my mind, to meditate, to read, to draw in my cell, and usually it works...but sometimes it doesn't, and sometimes all I can do is hear my cross in such a way that others cannot see it weight of it, but if you look close enough, it is there to be seen none the less, there between the eyes, like a hatchet wound. No one would deny that sixteen years is long enough to break any man; but then again, I don't know about that, because some men are more stubborn than others, but I do know that it's long enough to have a hole form inside of you. I know that it's the right amount of time to leave you empty, forever after, no matter how hard you are, no matter who you once were.

Some convicts know the exact moment when their life took a nose dive. Some see the exact moment every day of their bit, the exact decision they made, the first step down the pathway leading them to prison. Some convicts can see it plain as day, now, and they wonder why they didn't see it while it was happening. Some convicts mope around wondering why they picked up that first gun, or accepted that first bag of dope; but for every one of those types of cons, there's another who doesn't think about it at all, who has no remorse, who see no fault with their station in life. And who can say who's right about it. Certainly the government sees no fault in murdering its enemies or smuggling dope into the country, yeah I remember Oliver North. Even God has been known to say, "Kill them all, even their animals," assuming of course that you believe the Old Testament accounts. Hell I admit it, I don't know what the truth is anymore, all I know is that when I think certain things they make me unhappy and so I try as best I can not to think about 'em.

The fellas constantly ask me how it is that I'm not bitter, hateful or of a mind for revenge, I tell them that there's just no place for it in my mind, and when they ask me how they too can find that same peace, I tell them to be quiet and to listen to the noise going on around them, and when they are able to hear the foolishness of it, to listen instead to the sound of silence. Then peace will come; that's what I tell 'em, when they ask. But the truth is, for some of them it's not peace they think of, it's chaos. Once you get a taste of the Game, it sticks with you. It makes you remember only the highs. It tricks you into believing that you've got it figured out this time, that if you hadn't been careless that you wouldn't have been caught, that the next time will be different. But it won't be. Most forget so well the sorrow of their misfortune that they do not learn the lesson intended, and they'll be back. Like I said, I'm only the messenger here, a recorder of my own thoughts and my own events, and I readily admit that I know nothing, hell, maybe those chaotic ones have the truth of it, do and do until you die. Maybe the "one" in "All for one" means "I. Me. Just me." That seems to be the new thing, the "Me" generation, to hell with how others feel, to hell with how my actions affect others, to hell with it all. Maybe they're the ones who have it right. Do what you want, do what you will, and do whatever the hell you want to. Maybe that's what the voice has been sayin' all along; maybe I just got to damned old to hear it.

I suppose that the greater portion of what prison has taught me is that when faced with extreme disappointment, a person will react one way or the another; they will either quit trying to be human and revert back to the animal instincts of our ancestors, or they will lay aside their past priorities, which has led to their present suffering and begin to take up the search for the REASON to their suffering, which of course is the quest for truth; the first step on the path which ultimately leads them to Self-Realization and Self-Realization is the meaning of life; the realization that there is something greater and more important than oneself. With me that was an easy step because early in life, at the birth of my children, I realized that I did indeed love something more than I loved myself and in that love realized that I would gladly give my life for them or my wife, and in that complete surrender to love, a love powerful enough to overcome my fear of death, I found a value that I could add to the weight of myself. However, when I was removed from the loving arms of my family and sent to prison, I began to feel as though I were a burden to them, that dealing with my failure on a regular basis was harming them, and in this I found great difficulty. It was then at this point of feeling useless, of feeling hopeless that I considered the termination of this life, not the poor me mind-set that some use as an excuse, but the complete sorrow derived from the hopelessness of being an unwanted burden on those I believed the greater reason for my life. And it was at that point that I had to find a deeper meaning, another purpose, something else to live for.

This emphasis on finding another reason, a before unknown value to my life, a contribution that I could make, allowed me to believe that I had been given a second chance at getting right what I had previously gotten wrong. It was this belief, this goal of purpose that seemed to invigorate me, to enliven me. I became thrilled with the possibility that I could write something meaningful, even if those writings were nothing more than a record of my struggles; and what value could that have if the ending was not about my victory over those struggles. I did not want the final word written about me to be that I had failed, that I was non-productive, that I had been a burden to my loved ones that I had died without enlightenment. But I did learn that the past was the past and that the future did not exist outside of what I did at this present moment. And this mindset allowed me to realize that I could still win at the game of life. With this understanding I could see that my life would be valued according to its entire existence not just the past, and so I believed that if I became extraordinarily productive in the Second half of my life that I could still tip the scales to show a balance that was meaningful.

By declaring myself responsible for the remainder of my life, I found a purpose to live...and you have that purpose in your hand.

My three reasons to exist.

1. To create something of lasting value.
2. To be a positive influence on my surroundings.
3. To enlighten others to the value of suffering.

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