

Searching For Intimacy

Sex, Drugs, and Insecurities.

By Terry Gibbs

"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of working these steps we carried the message to others and practiced these principles in all our affairs." Step 12.

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About The Author: Terry Gibbs teaches people how to do things by writing books and producing videos. He writes mostly on topics relating to marketing. His biggest business is teaching people to run profitable home based antiques and collectibles businesses and sell antiques on eBay. You can find out more about Terry's Antiques, Collectibles and eBay materials at: www.IWantCollectibles.com

Terry's most recent book is called "Profitable Fan Pages -- The Marketer's Guide To Facebook."

It's available at: www.ProfitableFanPages.com

NOTICE: This is a true story. The events happened as described. At least I think they happened as I've recounted them here. Sometimes I can't tell the difference between fantasy, delusion and reality. I tried to be as honest as I could, and I think I managed well enough.

The names and some of the details/environments I walked through have been changed to protect the anonymity of the people god used to teach me these lessons. With a little digging you could easily find each of them, but, please remember, while I have decided to tell my story, they haven't made the same decision. **Please respect their privacy.**

The story you are about to read covers five weeks with god, or my imaginary friend some people call god, or a delusional character spawned by my years of drug use, despair and loneliness, walking beside me showing me the things I've done in my life to keep people away from me.

I've hurt people. I've hurt myself. I've made money, and had prestige only to throw them away because I was lonely. Because I didn't have a woman in my life. Because I didn't appreciate my friends. Because I didn't like myself.

Today, things are different for me. . .

Wednesday, November 25th

Wednesday morning was a morning like any other. I checked my email, drank coffee, and then at about 12:00 I left the house for a meeting. I go to meetings a lot. I've been going to meetings for 22 years. Sometimes, I go to meetings because I've got things I need to talk about.

Sometimes I go to meetings because my friends are there. And, sometimes, I just go to meetings because I have nothing else to do.

Anyway, on Wednesday, I went to a meeting to hang out with my friends. After the meeting, we went to lunch. Just a normal day like any other day.

Later that night, I went to a dance. The 12-step fellowships hold events on holidays so people will have somewhere to go, and the next day was Thanksgiving. At the dance, I did something I hadn't been doing recently. Something I'd told myself I wouldn't do anymore. I stood outside the dance and I told stories about my life that maybe I shouldn't tell. Revealing stories. People find the stories funny, and I soon had a whole crowd of people around me. We laughed and joked and had fun.

As the night got longer, one by one, the people around me left and eventually I was alone. I went inside the dance thinking I'd meet somebody else and see what was going on.

Inside, I saw Emma. I find her very attractive, but I can't talk to her. If I talk to her for more than 2 or 3 minutes, I get nervous and just have to walk away from her. Over the past 4 or 5 months I've never talked to her for more than a few minutes.

With women like her I feel anxious. If I talk with them for more than a few minutes I have panic attacks. Eighteen months ago, I had a panic attack and fainted while talking with a woman similar to Emma. I avoid these women, but I always see them in crowds. I am drawn to them.

In fact, my therapist and I have been exploring these feelings trying to figure them out since I fainted. We've done hypnosis, we've attacked the feelings from all angles, but even though I want to spend time with these women I can still do nothing but walk away.

Anyway, Emma was sitting alone in the back of the room looking miserable. I looked at her, then looked around the mostly empty room. I said to myself, "No, I won't talk with her," and left without approaching her.

When I got home, I was ashamed of myself. Here was a beautiful woman alone on the night before Thanksgiving and I couldn't force myself to reach out to her.

Emma's mom has cancer. She doesn't talk about her mom much. At least with me she doesn't. Then again, it's probably hard to have a conversation with someone who just walks away after a few minutes. I lost my dad to cancer two years ago and know what she is going through, but still I didn't talk to her. Instead I walked away.

I was also ashamed because, instead of meeting people and having fun, I'd gone out and played the clown to get some attention. I've been the clown for years and, while I do get attention, I never make any new friends.

I went to bed feeling like a failure. In my despair god came to me. He's been doing this for years. When I was a lonely child; he was there. When I was doing LSD; he entertained me. When I was doing cocaine; I was terrified of him. Today I mostly just take him for granted or ignore him. Sometimes I even forget him all together.

On that early Thanksgiving morning, god said, "You don't have to live this way," and then he told me to do 3 things:

1. Reach out to Emma,
2. Reach out to Hailey,
3. Spread the word.

I've already told you about Emma and my anxiety around her. I certainly wasn't going to talk to her no matter what god wanted me to do. So let me tell you about Hailey. . .

When I first met Hailey in 1998, I was in a relationship, and all I saw was a beautiful woman doing what she loved to do. Her family owns a restaurant where she worked as the hostess. The waitress. The person who made sure the diners had everything they needed. She flitted from table to table listening to stories and jokes with a smile on her face. She lifted sad people's spirits and listened to the lonely.

Hailey was fantastic, but I was with someone else. I thought she was too beautiful, too wonderful for a man like me. So we were just friends.

In 2001, my world collapsed around me. I'd started a business a few years earlier. I made money, but my friends, my family, my girlfriend all pushed me to do more. They told me I had a college degree, I was intelligent, I could do anything.

They told me I was lazy. I wasn't good enough and should be working for a big company rather than scraping along on my own path.

The more I heard these statements, the more I believed them, and the less I worked. I ended up hiding from bill collectors and process servers. I ended up losing my apartment.

In January 2002, I moved into a new apartment. My dad and his wife helped me move in and after we were done, we went to Hailey's place for lunch. I hadn't seen her for months, and I was awed by her. She was doing what she wanted to do, and doing it well.

Over the next few months I built IWantCollectibles, and ate at Hailey's place once a week. As the weeks went by I went from being another customer to a friend. I went from sitting alone to sitting with her family. At the time I was dating a spindly goth girl and saw Hailey as a friend.

One day Hailey told me she wanted a dog. A certain kind of dog. I knew someone with a dog like just she wanted who couldn't keep the dog. I made some calls and got her the dog. The look on her face when she first saw the dog was joy.

Another day at the restaurant, Hailey opened up to me and showed her sad side. When she's working, she's happy, outgoing and upbeat. Even when she isn't.

I was trying to learn how to be encouraging so the next day I went to a local pizza place and had a special happy pizza made for Hailey. It had pineapple slices for eyes, a green pepper nose, and pepperoni slices for a mouth.

I wrote a simple message on the top of the pizza box, "Here's a smile for you," and had it delivered to the restaurant. Unfortunately, Hailey'd taken the day off and her sister ate the pizza. She never saw it, but it did put a smile on her face.

Here's another Hailey story. . . Hailey knew I bought and sold antiques, and kept asking me to get her a vase. One day I saw the perfect vase for her. It wasn't what she wanted, but it was the vase I wanted to give her.

You see, she wanted a big impressive expensive looking vase. The vase I found was a small ugly thing. It was old and dirty. It was cracked and chipped. The only thing it had in common with the vase in Hailey's vision was it was a vase.

I offered 50 cents for it, but the owner gave it to me because he was too embarrassed to take money for it. I dropped by the restaurant on my way home, but Hailey wasn't there so I left the vase with her sister.

The next time I went to the restaurant, Hailey lit up with a big smile. She grabbed me by the hand and dragged me off to show me the vase. She'd cleaned it up, put flowers in it, then placed it in the bathroom where everyone could see it.

It was the perfect vase after all.

In the summer of 2002, Hailey started making plans for a new restaurant. The Mesa place was the family's restaurant. It was a dingy place with only two things going for it. The food, and Hailey.

The new place would be different. Of course the food would be good, but, more importantly, it would be a place for Hailey to shine. The whole atmosphere would be an extension of Hailey. It would be warm and welcoming.

Over the next few months, Hailey told me her plans for the new restaurant. She wanted the inside to look like a 1930s Paris street cafe with streetlights. It sounded fantastic.

In October, Hailey told me she'd found a location in Chandler for the new place and would be signing the contracts. Watching her excitement, I thought about my father had reacted a few weeks earlier when I mentioned I was selling 50 copies a day of my eBay training video.

I was making a thousand dollars a day doing what I loved, and my dad told me it wouldn't last. He told me I should go get a job and put my talents to work. He told me I was wasting my life chasing pipe dreams.

I was crushed and disappointed. I wanted my dad's validation so much, but he wasn't impressed with my success.

Remembering those feelings I decided I'd do something for Hailey. Something I wished the people in my life had done for me when I took those first steps. When I was excited about my early progress, and they kicked me instead of encouraging me.

Now, I can be a creative person when I put my mind to it. I knew the theme of the restaurant and found a small statue of a Buddha for sale on eBay. I bought it, and had the seller ship it to me.

But, just giving Hailey the statue wasn't enough. I wanted to do something more. Something over the top.

One of my friends owns a limo service. I had a case of cheap wind up tin dinosaurs so I gave one to a driver and told him to take it into the restaurant.

More than that, I told the driver to pull his Lincoln Town Car right up to the front of the restaurant and walk in like he owned the place. I told him to loudly ask for Hailey, and when she was standing in front of her to put the dinosaur at her feet and say, "Today is a special day for you."

Hailey told me later that she had no idea what was going on. She was standing in her restaurant with a tin dinosaur walking around her feet, as a man in a suit walked away. The lunch crowd looked at her to see what it was all about, and not knowing she picked the toy up, and did what she does so well.

She started walking around winding up the dinosaur and entertaining her diners. Fifteen minutes later part two started.

You see, the driver and the toy dinosaur were just a fun way to make sure Hailey would be there for the next act. When he left the restaurant, the driver called an Elvis impersonator I'd hired to tell him to go ahead.

Elvis drove up in front of the restaurant in a restored bright pink 1957 Cadillac convertible with the top down and jumped out without opening the door. He ran inside with a boom box blaring Elvis tunes in one hand and a nicely wrapped package containing the Buddha in the other.

For 30 minutes he entertained Hailey and her diners, then let Hailey open the gift and left.

I wasn't there when these events unfolded. I didn't get to see the look of joy on Hailey's face. I didn't get to see her share the dinosaur with her diners, and I missed out on her dancing and singing with Elvis. Today I regret not being there, but I was busy. I was building my business.

Maybe I was just unsure of myself?

It was a five days before I found time to go and see Hailey. She was still excited about the experience. I was busy and only had half an hour before I had to leave to meet someone. I remember her being confused because I had to leave, but I'd done what I wanted to do.

I didn't need to hear her tell me how wonderful Elvis was. That wasn't why I did it. I did it for me, and she got a wonderful experience.

Looking back on it today, I did manage to be the encouraging person I wished I'd had in my life. I didn't just hire an Elvis impersonator. I hired the best one I could find. The guy with the car, the sequined outfit, and the over the top attitude.

I was an encouraging person by design. Over the next few years, I became a naturally encouraging person, but this experience was the start of a building a new me.

Weeks went past and one day I was single. The relationship I was in during these events isn't important. It's only important that it ended and I found myself single.

I looked around me and saw a wonderful woman. Hailey. I wanted her, and went right at her.

Where earlier I'd done things to make her happy because it made me happy, I started doing things to make her mine. My attitude changed, and Hailey rejected my advances. In December 2002, Hailey and I made plans to go out and have coffee. I found a little silver Buddha on eBay and bought it for her for Christmas.

I went to pick her up and gave her the statue. She opened the gift, then told me she wasn't going to go to coffee with me. She was going to go Christmas shopping instead. I sat and talked with her for a few minutes, and then left. On the way out the door I told her to call me.

Maybe I was going too fast? Maybe I gave up too fast? I don't know.

In any case, I walked away feeling hurt and telling myself I wouldn't call her again. I never did.

In fact, I didn't talk to her for seven years. I'd thought about her every now and then, usually when I'd see a review of her restaurant in the paper, but I never contacted her.

Oddly, I'd seen her a few weeks before god told me to talk to her at Coffee Rush. Coffee Rush is a coffee shop in Chandler that overlooks a man made lake. I go to coffee shops in the afternoons because I work at home. and the hour is a chance to interact with real people instead of over the phone or online.

On the day I saw Hailey again, I was sitting talking with my friend Charlie while throwing bits of a muffin on the ground for the ducks to eat. I like to feed the ducks. They're interesting and each one has a different personality. When you feed them, they get excited. They're fun to watch.

During our conversation Charlie said, "That woman keeps looking at you." I looked over and saw Hailey. She looked at me, jumped up, and came at me. I grabbed chunk of muffin and threw it at her feet. The ducks started jumping around her and she was smiling.

We talked for a while and, as she walked away, Hailey said, "Come see me." I replied, "Okay, I'll come see you." But in the back of my mind I was thinking, "This woman hurt me. I'm not going to go see her."

Now you know who Hailey is. Lets get back to the night before Thanksgiving when god came to me. . .

When god told me to reach out to Hailey, I thought about the pain I'd felt that day seven years earlier. I felt the rejection again, and told god, "No. I will not talk to Hailey."

The third thing god told me to do was tell others. I don't know what he wanted me to share with others. I have no friends in my life. The people around me take from me, use me, and no one listens to me. My life sucks.

God showed me a vision of myself in a hospital bed, with the people who love me around me, my family, my friends. It was similar to the last few days of my dad's life. When we watched him wither away while waiting for him to die, but hoping and telling each other he'd be ok.

Looking at the people around my deathbed, I shouted at god, "It's not enough. I want more!" I looked god in the eye and told him, "If my life doesn't get better by the end of the year I will kill myself." Then I turned my back on him and went to sleep.

Thursday, November 26th

The next morning, I went out and did Thanksgiving. I went to John's house. His wife was out of town and he'd invited a bunch of people over. He cooked a turkey and a ham with all the side dishes for both. He really put out a good spread of food.

When I walked in, John said, "Come on in. Try not to break anything. And if you do, make sure you tell me, so I know to clean it up."

This made me feel comfortable. Not that I was planning on breaking anything, but just knowing I could was OK. For a while as I hung out with John and his other guests, I forgot how lonely I was. For a while I had good people in my life.

We had dinner, watched a movie and played a few games of pool. Then, a few hours later, I drove away. I went back into my misery, into my loneliness and isolation.

Sunday, November 28th

I was going to go to a meeting Sunday night, but I was running late, so I just drove right past the meeting and went to a titty bar instead.

This is something I've done for years. I go into a titty bar and, for a while, women pay attention to me. I pay them to pay attention to me, and then I leave.

I pulled into the parking lot, and met a guy who also has an old VW bug. He asked about my car and I spent 10 minutes showing it to him. His bug was at the upholstery shop getting a new interior, so I didn't get to see it.

He told me about his bug -- it sounds like a great little car. He shared his plans for the car and I could see his enthusiasm. My car is done. I just drive and enjoy it.

After a while we wound down, and went inside the bar. I didn't sit with him, or even talk to him again. I was there for something else.

I know how to do titty bars and I know how to pick the women that will do what I want, whatever that is at the moment. I'm not going to teach you how to do this, but if you want to know, just spend a few years and a few thousand dollars and you'll figure it out too.

Anyway, while I was there, I spent \$90. I had a pretty little college student sit on my lap and talk with me. I had a busty entertainer crawl and rub against me for 10 minutes. Then I got a hand-job through my pants from a girl who just wanted to make me happy.

I walked out disappointed. It's not about the money. I have money. Something else was missing.

I drove away thinking, "This is not what I want. It doesn't meet my needs. It's just mechanical." It's no longer enough.

Years ago, I had realized I don't want the girlfriend experience. I can't stand to pay a girl to sit and talk to me. To pretend I'm interesting. To be my friend as long as the money lasts.

I go because it's safe sex. I used to pick up street walkers. In the titty bars, I don't have to worry about getting arrested. I don't have to worry about getting robbed or catching something. It's in and out, and then I'm gone. It's just mechanics.

Driving home I realized I had a better time talking with the other customer about our cars, than being with the girls. I might as well have just stayed home and jacked off to porn for what I was getting.

I went to bed disappointed and lonely.

Saturday, December 5th

The following Saturday I had dinner with a bunch of my friends, people like me that have 20 or more years clean and sober. As we were eating I said to the woman across from me at the table, "No one listens to me." She said, "I listen to you." I said, "No, no one listens to me. People call me on the phone and ask me for advice. They ask me to help them figure out problems they are having in their lives, the questions they have about their futures, because I'm the guy who can see everything. I can see how the pieces fit together, and turn over the rocks and look underneath them. I can help them understand."

"I'm also the guy that doesn't give advice and doesn't tell them what to do, but leads them to the answer that fits best for them."

"I spend hours on the phone with people calling me, asking me for advice. When we get done talking about their lives, and I say, 'Hey, this is what I'm doing,' they blow me off. Or worse, some of them say, 'That's stupid! You don't want to do that!' And then they're gone, and I'm left feeling like they used me."

After dinner, we went to a meeting. That's what we do. We go to meetings. This particular meeting is held in a fellowship hall, a place where they have dozens of meetings a week. They have a list of all of the meetings on the wall, with the names of the people who run each meeting. I looked at the list, and saw Emma's name. I thought to myself, "Okay, I know where I can find Emma."

I sat in the meeting with the people I had eaten dinner with. Now, I don't talk much at meetings any more. I stopped a few years ago. I refuse to brag about how long I've been clean and sober

because I need attention. I refuse to go into meetings and drop a lecture on the steps or what the book says because I'm lonely. And, more than anything, I refuse to go into a meeting and just spout the dogma so people will accept me.

So I go to meetings. I sit, and I keep my mouth shut. I just listen to the people.

Sometimes, I don't want to listen.

On this Saturday night, a guy came in and sat down. As soon as he could, he talked for a couple of minutes. If you're not familiar with meetings anyone can share for 3 to 5 minutes and then someone else will talk. Everyone gets the opportunity to share about what is going on in their lives.

This guy talked, and then he got up and left. I watched him leave and thought to myself, "That's fucked up."

You see, it's reciprocal. When we go to meetings we can share, but we also need to listen while others share. I was taught we talk about the things happening in our lives and listen to others share about their lives.

When I talk about myself, people who have been through similar situations can speak to me after the meeting. When I listen, I can spot people who are going through things I've already experienced. This is why they are called meetings. We attend them to meet people. By dumping the problems in his life then leaving, he doesn't get the benefit of other's experience.

Anyway, he left and another person talked. Then another. I watched as the meeting unfolded, and I thought to myself, "I can share tonight about where I am." I rarely share in meetings because I have a rule that I'll only talk when I can speak honestly about what's going on with me, not when I'm seeking validation or anything else, but just to talk about what's going on with me.

So, I decided to talk, but someone else decided to talk first, which is okay because he can have his 5 minutes. With 15 minutes left in the meeting, this gentleman sat there and talked for 15 minutes. Worse than talking, he read from the fucking book, and then told us what it meant.

I sat there looking at him while waiting for him to shut the fuck up.

This is one of my other rules about meeting behavior: it's not okay for me to tell people to shut the fuck up. It is not okay for me to throw chairs at people. It's okay for me to walk out. I'm trying to be the guy that lives by these spiritual principles, and I don't think telling some asshole to shut the fuck up is a spiritual principle.

That night I wasn't in a place where I could say, "Hey, let somebody else share," in a loving manner, so I just sat there with my mouth shut. The guy used up the last 15 minutes of the meeting.

After the meeting ended while we were walking out, my friend Ted looked at me and said, "What's up with you?" I was trembling with rage, and said, "I want to kill the fucker!" He said, "Why?" "Because he fucking talked for 15 minutes! He told us all the shit that's in the book. It's all bullshit. He didn't say a fucking thing about himself."

Ted looked at me and said, "Okay, you're pissed off. Why are you pissed off?"

So I told Ted the same thing again, and he said, "No! Why does him doing that piss you off?"

I looked at Ted and said, "Because I refuse to do that. I won't allow myself to do that. Because in my mind, humility says that we're the people that we are, and we don't attract people based on our knowledge, we don't attract people into our lives based on lecturing and bullshit. We live our lives and people come into our lives."

Ted and I got into his car and drove off, talking about my rage. I don't remember exactly what we said, but I was pissed off when he dropped me at my house. In fact, I was still pissed off when I went to bed.

Monday, December 7th

On Monday, December 7th, I got up in the morning and went to see my therapist, Lawrence. I've been going to see Lawrence for years. Now, I go every two months and sit with him for a while. It's actually a good way for me to see what's going on with myself.

If I go in his office and get my 50-minute hour and then he gets up and does his little procedural stuff with the billing and the next appointment, and I feel he's not paying attention to me anymore, it's good indicator that I'm not hanging out with a lot of people and I need attention.

Conversely, if I feel at the end of the 50 minutes that it's time for me to go back out and live my life, then I'm in a good place.

As I said before, Lawrence and I have been talking about these feelings. The nervousness. The anxiety. The panic attacks. We're trying to understand why I can't hang out with specific women, but have no problem with other women. The ones I don't want, I have no problem with. The ones I find attractive, I have problems with.

Lawrence's got this light bar thing. It has lights that go back and forth. He has me imagine situations while watching the lights go back and forth. After looking at the lights for a while, they seem to start going in circles. As I look at the lights I've got headphones on playing the sound of surf rolling onto the shore. The whole effect is quite hypnotic.

After watching the lights circle for a while, Lawrence shuts off the light bar, I take off the headphones and he asks me probing questions. "How do you feel? Why do you feel that way? Is it realistic feelings? What are the people you around doing?"

During the session we do this over and over again. We talk and we dig. We're looking for that feeling and trying to find what's wrapped around it so I can understand why I have these panic attacks.

We spent the hour doing that and also talked about me seeing Hailey, and my resentment toward her. Lawrence told me to talk to Hailey. Just to call her and ask her to meet me at the coffee shop.

At the end of the hour, I paid him and left feeling I'd wasted my time. I didn't tell Lawrence about my suicide pact with god.

Wednesday, December 9th

On Wednesday afternoon, I called Hailey to ask her to have coffee with me. I figured if she would meet me somewhere, that would be fine, but I'm not going to go to her restaurant and meet with her. She has to come to me, or at least meet me halfway.

She wasn't there when I called. Later that afternoon, I went to the coffee shop, and guess what? She was there. But she was sitting with another woman so I didn't talk to her. I want to sit and talk with her, but I'm not willing to impose on her.

But I did see her. She was wearing a jockey outfit that looked really good on her. I just smiled and waved at her, then sat with my friends drinking coffee, talking, and feeding the ducks. Then I went home thinking about Hailey.

Saturday, December 12th

On Saturday I went to a noon meeting. After some meetings, we all stand around outside smoking cigarettes and decide where we're going eat. On this day, we went to a place called "The Grill Next Door." This is a restaurant that's best described as a downscale version of Hooters without the fun. They have the girls in skimpy outfits, \$12 cheeseburgers, and \$4 sodas, but little else.

I sat in this restaurant with another guy and the two guys who wanted to go there. I looked around and I didn't get it. The other guy didn't get it either. We're sitting in a restaurant, and the guy across from me who wanted to go there so bad said, "Look! Look!" as the little 18-year-old waitress bent over a cooler, rummaged around, to get the drinks out.

Seeing this I asked him, “They only serve Coke, Diet Coke and water. Why does it take her three minutes to get one of those out of the cooler?” He said, “She’s showing you her ass.” I replied, “Oh, I’ve seen those before. I’ve even touched a few.”

I walked out sad, because I couldn’t fool myself into liking the attention. These women fawn on you a little bit, but to me, it was just a charade.

Later that night, I went out dancing and met a woman I could have taken home for a few hours – not to my place to hers. I’d learned, over the years, to protect myself by going to their homes. Because if they come to my place, then they might want to come back. Also by going to their places, I’m saved the chore of figuring out how to get them out of my place.

If I go to their place, it’s safer. I can just leave when I’m done.

I don't want to have relationships with these women. In my mind, they are nothing more than receptacles. They’re so desperate for attention that anyone that gives them attention – me – will be rewarded with sex, and I can’t stand them.

Yet, I find these women everywhere I go. For the past few years I've grown disgusted with them and just walk away. For years, I didn't walk away. I used to do hookers, but I stopped 15 years ago, because I learned that I can go into a bar, club or a coffee shop and meet a woman who is desperate for attention. If I give her attention, and she’ll give me anything I want. Later I learned that if I give her some attention and then take it away, she’ll give me more of what I want.

When I first started picking up women, it was about conquest. It was fun, and made me feel good about myself. Over the years I had sex with many women, but I rarely had sex with the same one twice.

After a while there wasn’t even a feeling of conquest. It got to the point where there was nothing there. I would go out and meet these lonely women. Fuck them, and then go home when I was done just to feel alone.

After a while, I just stopped picking up women because it wasn't working for me. Rather than dealing with the crowds at clubs, I'd just go to a topless bar when I wanted some female attention.

While I was out that night, I ran into an old friend of mine, Mark. Mark's kind of like me. He's intelligent. He thinks about everything. Everything he does is planned out and it's all details and how things fit together.

Mark's really into the pick-up and dating scene, and speaking to him reminded me of the things I'd learned when I was first learning pick-up. He said things like, "I met this girl and I did push/pull." Push/pull means to give the woman attention, pull her a little bit in, and then push her away. He said he went out on a date and tested the woman. Testing is doing something to find out how the woman will react. Testing gives you an idea of who the woman is and how she handles situations.

As we talked, I realized for Mark it was about the jargon and the actions. It seemed mechanical. He enjoyed doing the pick-up things he'd learned, and kept track of them in his mind.

For me, somewhere along the line I'd forgotten the words, and what I'd learned became the things I do. I became very good at pulling lonely, desperate women out of bars for sex.

I never took the next step to meeting women I really wanted, I just got better at meeting women I didn't want to know.

One of the things Mark and I talked about was the concept of being an alpha man. For years in my life, I thought I was an alpha man. But, looking back, what I'd actually been, was the arrogant man; the guy with a bunch of insecurities under the surface, running around acting super-confident and standoffish, because inside I didn't want anybody to know how much I really hurt. I didn't want anybody to know how insecure I was. How lonely I was.

It was an act, but one I could do very well.

Later that night, I went home alone and went to bed thinking about the lessons I'd learned and how they hadn't helped me meet a quality woman.

Monday, December 14th

On Monday night, I went to an evening meeting. After the meeting a guy named Jack came up to me and said, "Terry, can I talk with you?" I replied, "Yeah, go ahead." He said, "No, I need to talk to you alone." So I said, "Let me go to the bathroom and I'll meet with you in a minute." I went into the bathroom thinking, "This is kind of cool. He wants some of my advice. He wants to talk to me about something going on in his life, because everybody wants me to help them with their lives."

Later, we walked off into the parking lot, and he looked at me and he said, "We had a home group meeting," that's a little business meeting that makes sure the meetings run on time, "and we talked about you. You've been disruptive in meetings and you're setting a poor example for the newcomer."

I looked him in the eyes and my first thought was to just beat the shit out of him. I didn't because attacking him wouldn't be practicing the spiritual principles in my life.

Instead I said, "The newcomers have big eyes and little ears." Jack didn't understand, and I didn't care. He told me to change my behavior again.

I walked away from him, telling myself not to go back and beat the shit out of him. I got in my car and drove off thinking, "How dare this asshole tell me this shit! I am a great example for the newcomers. I'm the guy that goes to meetings and doesn't throw chairs when I'm pissed off. I'm the guy that goes to meetings and doesn't scream at people when I want them to shut up and I'm tired of listening to them. When life is good, I go to meetings. When life sucks, I go to meetings. Sometimes the best I can do is just go to meetings."

"How dare this needy little fuck who comes to meetings and brags about how he has so much recovery because with 7 years clean and sober he gets pulled over for expired tags and gets a

ticket from a cop for no registration and no insurance, but he is 'Mr. Recovery' because he didn't yell at the cop who gave him the ticket tell me how to act."

In my mind I ranted about Jack and the other assholes in the meetings all the way home. As I walked in my door, I started thinking about the people I remembered from when I was a newcomer.

In May 1988, I'd moved into my mom's house after living on the streets. When I moved in, I'd promised to attend meetings and not use drugs. In my mind I'd agreed to go to meetings and not tell my mother when I used.

This is the only reason I started going to meetings - so my mom would let me stay at her house. I didn't want to get clean and sober. I just wanted a vacation from the misery of living on the streets.

Anyway, thinking back, I remembered a man named Roger asking me repeatedly if I wanted to go to coffee after meetings. The first time Roger asked me to go to coffee after a meeting my mom had dropped me off and was waiting for me so I didn't go with him.

The second time Roger invited me to coffee, my mom had let me drive her car for the first time. I was trying to earn her trust so I went straight home after the meeting.

When Roger asked me the third time, I screwed up and said, "I don't have any money." Roger told me he'd buy me a cup of coffee so I went because I didn't know how to say no.

We went to the Sugar Bowl restaurant and Roger bought me a cup of coffee. He might have also bought me a piece of pie, but I don't remember and it's not important.

That first night at the Sugar Bowl Roger took out a meeting list and circled some meetings. He gave me the meeting list and said, "I go to these meetings. Come down to any of them, and I'll introduce you to everybody. After the meeting we'll have coffee and hang out."

It was sitting in the coffee shops after the meetings where I started to see the people in the meetings differently. When I was in the meetings I could easily tell myself I was different. I could tell myself they were lying just like I was.

At the coffee shops I started hearing their stories and saw they had come from places just like me. They were people like me, but they had lives that didn't revolve around poking holes in their arms anymore. They had jobs, apartments, girlfriends, houses and families. They had what I wanted.

Thinking more about my early meetings, I also remembered walking through a parking lot of a Mesa hospital on my way to a meeting. It was the first time I'd ever been to that meeting. While walking towards the entrance, a man named Walter came up to me and said, "Terry! How are you doing?" I didn't know him, but I must have met him somewhere else, because he knew my name.

Not feeling very enthusiastic about attending a new meeting, I told Walter, "I'm here." Then he asked me if I'd been to the meeting before. When I said, "No," he said, "Come on in. I'll introduce you around."

We walked in and Walter introduced me to everyone, and had me sit next to him. It was a book study, but I didn't have a book. When Walter saw I didn't have a book, he went and got me a book from a box of supplies.

At the end of the meeting, I gave Walter back the book. He asked me if I had one at home. When I told him I didn't have a book, he said, "The books are \$4."

After I told Walter I had no money to buy a book, he told me, "Take it. When you get some money, put it in the basket." The basket is how the members pay the group's costs. It's passed around during the meeting and those who can put money into it.

I also remembered one night when I had a couple of months clean and I wasn't in a good place. I had the knot in my stomach that would only go away by sticking a needle in my arm. I

remember sitting in a late night candlelit meeting thinking about going out and using, knowing that if I left the meeting I wouldn't get home without poking a few holes in my arm.

Knowing that if I poked holes in my arms I might not live through the night.

After sitting there for a half-hour with the knot growing in my gut, I got up and I walked out of the meeting. A man named Carl followed me out. He asked me, "Terry, what's going on? Do you need somebody to talk to?"

I looked at Carl with tears in my eyes and said, "I want to fucking use. I can't do this. I don't care."

Carl and I sat and talked until 4:00 in the morning. After listening to me pour my desperation out for hours, he looked at me and asked, "Terry, do you think you can get home now?" When I said, "Yes I can get home," he told me, "Let me give you my phone number. Call me when you get home. I'll wait up for you."

These are just some of the people I remember from when I started going to meetings. Thinking about what Jack had said, I asked myself, "Do I do these things?"

Sadly, the truth is no. I sit in the meetings with all these years clean, and I wait for the newer people, the people with two and three and four and five years clean to reach out to the newcomers.

When they don't reach out to the newcomers, I get angry at them because they're not doing the deal.

I sit in meetings and watch people walk out, but don't walk out after them because I'm waiting for somebody else to do it. Or, I sit with my friends, having fun, and I don't realize that somebody's going out that door who might not come back.

I felt ashamed of myself, but it was easier, more comfortable, to be angry with Jack.

Tuesday, December 14th

I woke up the next morning still pissed off. In a meeting a few weeks earlier I'd heard a guy named Bob say the quote that I said to Jack, "Newcomers have big eyes and little ears." Bob is the only person to say "you're being disruptive" to me the past year, as I've gone through all of this crap in my life and been miserable, that I can hear. For some reason, I don't want to kill him when he tells me to quiet down in a meeting. Instead I do quiet down, or I go outside.

Because I can hear him, I decided I should call Bob. I got him on the phone and told him about this asshole, Jack. He said, "What meeting does he go to? I'll go with you. We'll yell at him together."

You see, when somebody's hurting, you don't do what Jack did. You walk up and say, "Hey, do you need somebody to talk to?" like Carl did for me.

I'd been going to meetings for months, sitting there listening to the same crap over and over again, the same words coming out of different mouths, until I could no longer hear the words. Shit I have heard thousands of times and said myself hundreds of times.

Still I continued to go to meetings. After a while I stopped hearing the words, and it got worse. Instead of words, I felt the underlying feelings and ran from the rooms. If I didn't run, I'd fidget in my chair while alternating between suppressing the urge to explode in rage, to clowning and teasing the people around me.

I couldn't stand the feelings I saw, the loneliness, the neediness, everything else that was going on with these people, because all of them were mirrors of me.

Thursday, December 17th

Bob and I arranged to meet for dinner on Thursday night. After dinner we'd go to a meeting I knew Jack would attend.

At dinner we talked about our lives: it's a couple of weeks before Christmas, and our holiday expectations aren't being met; Christmastime sucks; like life sucks all the time. Christmas is supposed to be the happy time. So, Christmas sucks even more.

We talked, and during our conversation I looked at Bob and said, "You're married?" And he said, "Yeah, you know my wife."

Bob gave me a curious look, and asked, "Why are you asking me that?" I said, "All of my friends are married now." He said, "Really?" And I said, "Yeah, they're all married."

This has changed just in the past year. A year ago, all of my friends were single. My friends were the guys that when we'd walk in to a club and not 10 feet in the door one of them, sometimes me, would look around and say, "Hey, these women are all stuck-up. Let's go to the titty bar." That's who all of my friends were.

Today all of my friends are married. They have wives, kids, grandkids, and they're running around with people in their lives. I don't know if Bob understood what I was talking about, but I did.

It's a different attitude. When I meet a woman and talk to my single friends about her, they're the ones who hear the silent "but." They're the ones who are quick to point out all of the little things that are wrong with her. They're the people who help me find reasons for not pursuing the relationship.

Whereas when I'm hanging out with my married friends and I see someone who's interesting, they say, "Go talk to her." If I say, "But, she's got a tattoo," or some other bullshit answer, they say, "So what?"

The married people have a different attitude. I didn't realize my friends had changed until I was sitting with Bob.

After dinner with Bob, we went to a meeting. Usually I see Emma at this meeting, but she wasn't there. Jack wasn't there either.

It was the week before Christmas. During the meeting people were talking about how they were going away for Christmas. How it's their first Christmas without drugs. Talking about their families and how Christmas sucks because of the family dynamics, and sharing other tales of holiday sadness.

I sat and listened to the others. Then I shared. I shared about how when I worked my way through the steps a few months earlier, I realized I don't like going to holiday get-togethers in my family. In the past, I didn't answer the invitations or return the calls. I just didn't go.

Then for a while, I'd go but didn't have fun. Instead of fun I would wait for the shit to hit the fan. It was easier to go than listen to them bitch about me not showing up.

Maybe this year, I wouldn't go.

I shared about my feelings toward the holidays, and it was a very different meeting. It wasn't the people with their lectures and their bullshit dogma. It was people talking about themselves, people sharing what's going on with them, people fumbling around like I have done so many times while trying to figure out how to express themselves. It was people supporting each other.

It was a good meeting.

I walked away thinking, "Maybe it was going to dinner with Bob that changed the meeting. I should do more of that – go to dinner with my friends and then go to a meeting."

Friday, December 18th

I went to the noon meeting, just to find something to do afterwards.

As I was sitting in the meeting, they passed a basket around for the 7th tradition. The dollars collected in the basket are how we pay the rent, buy coffee and supplies.

Anyway, I was sitting next to this guy, and he kind of looked familiar, but I didn't know who he was. When I'm in my own shit, I don't pay much attention to anybody else.

The basket came around, and he didn't have a dollar to put in. So I gave him one. I figured, "Here, you don't have one, I've got two. You can have one of mine."

After the meeting ended, he came over and asked, "How come you gave me the dollar?" I said, "Because I didn't want you to be embarrassed over not having a dollar to give." Hearing this he laughed and said, "You don't remember going to lunch with me a few months ago?" "No I don't." He replied, "I'm Henry, I moved here in August from Indianapolis, and my friend Lisa introduced us."

This caught my attention. I remembered Henry, but more so I remembered Lisa.

Now, Lisa reads the book in the meetings, something I absolutely hate. But for some reason, I can hear her. We've had coffee together after meetings and had talks that caused me to walk away with new understandings. After my experience talking with Bob, I realized talking to Lisa might help me understand why I hate people who read the book in meetings.

So I told him, "I need to talk to Lisa. Give me her number." I grabbed a meeting list, turned it over to the blank space on the back for phone numbers, and handed it to him. Henry gave me Lisa's phone number. As he was writing, I said, "While I'm getting her number, give me yours," and he also gave me his number. I folded the meeting list up and put it in my pocket, and then went off to do whatever I did that afternoon.

Usually, on Friday nights I'll go to Tempe, get a cup of coffee, then go to a bigger meeting. It's a speaker meeting, where somebody comes in and talks for half an hour or so about his life, what it was like before he first went to meetings, why he started going to meetings, and what his life's like today.

Because the coffee shop I normally go to was closed, I ended up walking down Mill Avenue to another shop. On the way, there was a street musician, a guy with a guitar, sitting and playing

Christmas music on the sidewalk. I hate Christmas music. Even more, I hate the bums on the streets begging and whining.

But the guy with the guitar looked like he was having fun. For some reason, I just reached in my pocket, then gave him a dollar while saying, "Have a good night."

I got my coffee and went back to the church where the meeting is held. Before the meeting, I stood around talking to the people I know -- basically talking to everyone because I know everyone at the meetings.

At the meeting a woman spoke. She talked about what was going on in her life, but she wasn't being specific. She wasn't saying exactly what her life is like today. Instead, she was talking around her feelings while moving toward them. After a few minutes of listening, I turned to the guy sitting next to me said, "She's talking about isolation." She was.

I'm not going to tell her story, but she was talking about feeling isolated after being clean and sober for decades. It was really interesting to see somebody in the same place I was at, in a meeting, actually talking about her feelings.

After the meeting, I introduced myself to the woman who spoke. I took the meeting list with Lisa and Henry's numbers out of my pocket and asked for her phone number. I was taught to do this when I first started going to meetings, but hadn't done it for a really long time.

After the meeting, I went to another dance. This was a smaller dance so I ended up standing outside talking with others. A few minutes after I got there, a woman I've known for years named Julia came up to me.

The first words out of Julia's mouth were, "Have you seen Rachel? Have you talked to Rachel?" I said, "No. She doesn't return my calls." Julia replied, "She doesn't return my calls, either. That bitch just doesn't want to be my friend."

Julia and I talked for a while longer, and I realized that Julia was just as lonely as I was. She was unhappy with her life and basically stuck watching her friends drift away one by one.

As we were talking, a newcomer came up and started spouting the clichés of recovery, “Life on life’s terms; let go, let god; turn it over; just do it; easy does it.” The words we’ve heard thousands of times. The sayings we’ve spoken hundreds of times.

I couldn’t hear the newcomer. Sure, I could hear the words, but they meant nothing. In my pain and loneliness they were just words.

Instead of trying to hear the words, I watched Julia. She couldn’t hear him, either. Maybe we didn’t want to hear him?

A bit later, I went home. I gave a newcomer a ride home because it was on my way. I don’t remember anything about him except he needed a ride, and he thought my 1969 VW bug was a new car. I must have been so caught up in my own crap, I couldn’t see him. I hope I was encouraging, but he’s got to live his own life. He’s got to write his own story.

After dropping the newcomer off, I got on the freeway and I thought about the last time I talked to Rachel. It was a few months earlier. She told me then that her dad was having surgery for cancer the next day. He’s in his 80’s, so they’re just trying to slow down the inevitable.

My dad died two years ago from complications during cancer treatments. I miss my dad and I don’t want to be around Rachel while she goes through the same thing. I want to move on and not be forced to watch someone go through the pain with her father I went with mine. I don’t want to listen to her talk about what’s going on with her dad and relive all the shit I went through.

Thinking back, I realized when my dad was sick, I didn’t talk to many people either, because when people called me on the phone and asked, “Terry, how’s your dad doing?” I’d tell them about my dad’s latest round of treatments, and then we’d talk for a while. Very few of them ever said, “Terry, how are you doing?”

I just found it easier not to answer the phone, than to have somebody call, bring up my feelings only to say, “Hey, I’ve got to go,” then hang up leaving me alone with my feelings.

I figured Rachel is in that same place. That’s okay.

When I got home, I tossed all of my stuff on the table, and checked my voice mail for messages. I have a book I write down all of my calls.

A couple of weeks earlier, a man named Frank had called me. I met Frank at a meeting I’d started going to in March when I was trying to become a part of the fellowship again. We talked a bit and went to coffee after the meeting a couple of times, and then, because my life got busy or whatever, I stopped going to that meeting so I hadn’t seen Frank in about a month and a half.

Frank had called to say hi and inquire about where I’d been. I’d listened to his message and I felt good. I told myself I’d just go to the meeting and see him. I didn’t make that meeting or the next one. I didn’t call Frank, either.

As I stood there looking down at the message book, I realized it had been almost three weeks since Frank had called me, and I felt ashamed. I felt guilty for not calling him back. I felt I wasn’t good enough to be his friend.

I went to bed and god came to me again. He wanted me to do the 3 things he’d instructed me to do earlier. He wanted me to reach out to Emma. He wanted me to reach out to Hailey. He wanted me to spread the word.

Again, I refused. I told god I was unwilling. He stood there looking at me. I looked up at him and said, “Make me willing.”

He did. . .

God reached inside me and cut all of the connections to the people around me, all of the little strings connecting me to my friends, family, and the people I work with. Every connection was gone.

I was alone.

I was alone.

I had felt so isolated and lonely before, but now I was truly alone.

There was nothing. I was a 6-month-old baby crying in a crib, and no one comes. No one comes.

I cry and still no one comes.

Then, god comes, because he cannot stand my pain. He resists, knowing how it will hurt me, but he cannot ignore my pain. So, he comforts me anyway. He knows no relationship with a person will ever measure up to the embrace of god, but he holds me anyway. He ruined my life.

He ruined my life!

In anger, I scream at him that he had ruined my life, and he shows me visions of all of the times he's been there for me. I saw myself as a child, when I felt alone and unwanted, seeing him out of the corner of my eye.

I saw myself seeing him clearly one night, when I was doing cocaine and, in my terror, flushing an 8-ball of coke down the toilet. This was towards the end of my using days, when I was regularly having seizures. I used to tell my friends, "If I hadn't flushed that coke down the toilet, I probably would have died." But I never told them about the guy I saw standing there, the guy who wasn't really there, looking at me while I flushed the toilet.

I remembered climbing to the top of Squaw Peak, when my girlfriend left me, to throw myself off a cliff and having him appear. I saw him calm me down and guide me off the mountain.

I remembered throwing myself off a riverboat in St. Louis, in an impulsive gesture, because someone said, “Hey, I’ll give you \$50 if you jump in the river.” I grabbed the bill out of his hand and took two steps and was thirty feet high over the Mississippi.

This was in December. It was cold and freezing, and I’m in the middle of the river. I came up from under the water freezing, and my clothes were soggy, wet and heavy.

The river was pulling me down, the boat I had jumped from gone behind me. The \$50 dollar bill lost in the current, and my only thought was, “I’m going to die!”

In my vision I saw god reach out to calm me. As I calmed down, I realized I needed to just get my clothes off, so I could stay afloat, and just work my way to the bank.

When I hit the cobblestones of the riverbank I knew I’d live. In my vision, I saw people run up and drag me shaking trembling and blue with cold from the river. I saw god fade away to let my rescuers take care of me.

I remembered all of these appearances and more, but they’re not important here. Let’s just say that I saw how god had been protecting me.

Having seen god in my life, I fell asleep with the knowledge that god was with me. I had lost the need for faith and found trust.

Saturday, December 19th

I woke up Saturday morning, and things were a little different. I got a call from a friend of mine, Alan, who owed me some money. I like friends like Alan, who call me when they owe me money, to pay me.

While I was on the phone with Alan, we talked about some of the things going on in his life and some of the things going on with mine. Alan mentioned that years ago he'd attended "The PSI Seminars." He said he'd found them to be very beneficial. I said, "I'll look into that."

During our conversation, I mentioned having people in my life who don't listen to me. Alan said, "I know why that is. It's because you're talking to the wrong people. You've got people who come to you for advice, and you've got people you go to for advice."

I thought, "Really?" And he said, "Yes! As a matter of fact, you can go and look up some stuff that the church teaches. It's called 'The Seven Motivational Gifts.' God gives each of us these motivational gifts, and we all have these gifts, all seven of them. But some of them are our primary or dominant ones."

Alan went on to tell me that he's the guy who can see situations and how everything fits together. So when people remodel their houses, he can go in and say, "Have you thought about this?"

As Alan explained this, I realized, "Hey, that's me!" He said, "But there's more. I've got a guy I call when I need advice. I've got different people for different questions. I know who all of these people are so I can reach out to the right person."

Hearing this, I thought to myself, "Wow, that's neat. I'll have to look at that some more."

And then, I made arrangements to meet Alan on Christmas Eve, to pick up the money and look at his trains. He's been wanting me to come by for years, to see his train layout. I've just been too busy.

After I got off the phone with Alan, I felt lonely. I picked up the phone and I decided I would call people. When I first went to meetings, I had a meeting list and I got phone numbers. I had started getting phone numbers again, but I needed to take the next step and make some calls.

I picked up the phone and I called Deanna. She's the woman I had told that no one listens to me at the dinner the week before. She's the one who had told me that she listens.

I called her, but she wasn't there, but on the other side of the piece of paper with her phone number was another woman's phone number, Lauren. I've known Lauren for 20 years, but we've never been close. I don't think we'd ever talked for more than 10 minutes at a time, but she'd given me her number which I assumed meant she's willing to talk with me.

So, I called Lauren on the phone, and she answered. The first words out of my mouth were "Lauren, this is Terry and I'm lonely." She said, "Really? Do you want to talk for a while?" And I said, "Yeah, that's why I'm calling."

I talked to Lauren for about 45 minutes. I shared about the loneliness and isolation I felt. As I talked to her, I realized Lauren's lonely too, but there's a difference.

The difference is Lauren's still trying to be comfortable being lonely. She wants to learn how to stay home on the weekends and do nothing, and be comfortable alone in her house. She's still stuck in the isolation phase, whereas I want to go out into the world and live my life surrounded by people.

As I thought about this difference I realized, Lauren's not somebody I should be talking to a lot. I should continue to reach out to her because we're likely to become friends. Maybe even ask her to have coffee with me, but in her current state of mind, she's not likely to be able to help me move away from my loneliness.

This is something I just started to see during my conversation with Alan, that people have specific roles in my life. They fit into niches, and I can reach out to different people depending on my moods and situations. When I felt people weren't listening to me it was because I was talking to the wrong person for the situation.

After I got off the phone with Lauren, I called Julia to explain my thoughts about Rachel not calling us back. We talked for a while, but Julia didn't get it. In her mind, a friend calls back. If

a friend doesn't call back after three or four calls, the friend is then blacklisted. What's going on in other people's lives means nothing. A friend calls back regardless of her mood or schedule.

Julia is a little different than Lauren. Julia is lonely too. She's is unhappy with her life. She's going to do something different. She's going to meet new people. But talking with her, I could see it won't work for her.

She's the one who comes down to a dance full of people and stands and talks to me all night.

She's the one who goes to a huge party and sits with two or three people the whole time, and never meets anyone new.

She's the one who's going to find something interesting on MeetUp.com, and drag one of her friends down to meet new people.

But she's not. She's going to walk in with the person she goes with, and spend the whole night talking to her friend instead of meeting anyone new. If she does meet anyone new, she'll filter the person out by seeing only the negatives. By seeing only the reasons why the person shouldn't be allowed closer.

This conversation was enlightening. I'd talked with Julia earlier and seen other things she does to close off the people in her life.

For example, when I'm going to someone's house to buy antiques, I show up a couple of minutes late. I'll tell the seller I'll be there at 8:00, and I show up at 8:10. I do this because it makes the sellers anxious and nervous. While they're waiting, they start thinking "Maybe he's not going to show up. Does he really want my stuff?"

Then when I walk in their door, they feel a sense of relief which sets them up to sell me their items. This is just one of the negotiating tactics I've learned over the years.

I remember talking to Julia about this technique, and she got infuriated because anybody that shows up late just doesn't care, doesn't respect her, doesn't respect her time, and doesn't have proper manners.

I thought about that, and it was like, "Yeah, I had women in my life that never showed up on time. I had people in my life that didn't care, and I'd felt like that." Of course back then I was self-centered.

Today, I think differently. I think, "Hey, we're just living our lives and we're hanging out."

Another example is looking for reasons to be offended. One night when I was out with a friend, I saw Julia walking towards us. I said to my friend, "Don't ask her if that's a wig." So naturally my friend asked her about her wig.

Now, Julia doesn't wear a wig. She has really fine good looking hair, but rather than enjoy the simple teasing, she got upset with my friend.

But if I'd asked her about her wig, she'd have laughed and enjoyed the teasing. It's only with people she's just meeting that she gets offended.

One last example of ways Julia blocks new people from getting to know her. One night Julia and I were talking and a guy neither of us know well walked by. The stranger was dressed really well.

As he walked by I remarked on his clothes and he stopped to talk with us. During the conversation he mentioned his grandmother had always told him wearing nice clothes was the easiest way to make a good first impression. He went on to say his grandmother had told him the most important part of getting dressed up was the shoes because people tend to notice them first.

I don't know much about getting dressed up, but the shoe idea does make some sense. Women seem to be obsessed with shoes, and when we talk with people we tend to make eye contact and then look down. When we look down we'll see the nice clean shoes.

The three of us talked for a few more minutes, and then the well dressed gentleman went off with his friends. Julia and I talked as other people came and went from our conversation.

At the end of the night, we were all in the parking lot, and the guy with the nice shoes walked by. Julia called him over by yelling out that she had something to say to him.

He came over and Julia said, "Your grandmother is an idiot to think wearing nice shoes is important when meeting new people. Anyone who is easily impressed with shoes or clothes isn't worth meeting."

I have to admit, I was shocked, but the guy with the nice shoes responded well. He just shook his head and walked away. I've seen him a few times since then and he's been a bit standoffish. If he's keeping his distance from me, an innocent bystander who is only associated in his mind with the woman who attacked his grandmother, he's certainly giving Julia the cold shoulder.

I could see these people blocking behaviors in Julia because I did many of them myself. I'd been unwilling to let new people into my life, and I'd placed unrealistic expectations on those I already knew. I'd been self-centered and sought reasons why I should turn away from my friends. I'd created my own isolation.

As I was thinking about the ways I isolated myself from humanity, the phone rang. It was Deanna, the woman who said that she could hear me at dinner the week before calling me back.

The first words Deanna's said were, "I can hear distress in your voice. What's going on? Do you need somebody to talk to?"

I said, "Yeah. I'm freaking out."

I launched into the story about Jack and his bullshit. Deanna said, "You don't do that shit! You never do that! One, the guy might beat the shit out of you." I replied, "Yeah, I wanted to do that." "And two, what you do is you reach out to them. You go up and say, "Hey, do you need somebody to talk to?"

We talked for a while about my reaction to Jack's accusation, but I'd already been over that with Bob so see moved on to other topics.

Deanna asked me about feeling no one listens to me. I said, "I'm starting to think that when I feel someone's not listening to me, it's because I'm talking to the wrong person." We talked about selecting the right person for each situation by identifying how each person fits into our lives. We talked about not trying to force people to adopt different roles in our lives. We talked about stepping outside of ourselves long enough to know who to reach out to in any situation, rather than just dumping on the nearest person.

After we discussed how people fit into our lives for a while, Deanna asked me about when I got clean. I told her how twenty-two years ago, I'd lived with a woman named Anna in an apartment in Tempe, and how four, five, six or seven nights a week - depending only on if we had money - we did cocaine.

We'd moved across town to get away from cocaine, but only ended up driving back and forth to get coke. The dealers wouldn't let us use in their homes. They would hand us the coke, take our money, and tell us to leave.

They knew I'd lock myself in a bathroom in terror, and they'd have to kick the door down to get me out. They knew Anna would stick a needle in her arm, and then walk around apprehensively looking out windows while dripping blood on the floor. They knew I'd probably fall on the floor again and flop around for a while at some point in the night.

They didn't want to put up with us. We weren't welcome. Only our money was welcome.

So we'd buy as much coke as we could afford, and drive home with knots in our guts. When we got back to our apartment, I'd dump the coke into a small sour cream bowl I'd stolen from a steakhouse and add water to make the right consistency. A piece of a cigarette butt or a cotton ball and some needles were the only other accessories we needed.

There were no mechanics left. When I'd started doing coke it was a social thing. I sat around with my friends doing lines together. We'd chop it up finely then make pretty lines on fancy mirrors. Later, we'd freebase the coke a quarter gram at a time, and spend hours teaching each other the best way to cook coke.

By the time Anna and I moved to Tempe all that was gone. We didn't use with others. We didn't use outside the apartment. Given the choice between anything and cocaine, we chose cocaine.

After dumping the coke into the bowl, I would be in the bathroom, poking holes in my arms and feeling the walls to see if "they" had hollowed them out from the other side. I would walk into the bedroom and turn the lights off by twisting the bulbs in their sockets with my burn-callused fingertips because I'd figured out "they" were watching through the walls and were using our power. Occasionally, I'd come to on the floor after having a minor seizure.

While I was living my terror, Anna would be standing at the window with the needle in her arm, dripping blood on the floor, looking out at whatever it was that she was seeing. Sometimes if I wasn't too high, or if it was early in the evening's cycle, I could look out the window with her, but we never saw the same things.

We would do this for hours, meeting up every 15 minutes or so in the bathroom to refill the rigs, until the cocaine was gone. Then, the jonesing would start. I'd search the apartment looking for coke she'd hidden. She'd search for the coke I'd hidden. We'd watch each other knowing we'd each stashed a hit or two somewhere during the night's festivities.

As the jones weakened we would move around the apartment, looking at each other, but not touching. Never touching because neither one of us could stand physical contact when we were on drugs. This inability to be touched when high and the cocaine itself had brought us together.

We were a perfect match. The perfect couple.

We'd move around in our filthy little apartment looking at each other, and slowly we would get a little closer. We'd touch for the first time that night, and one of us would back off. The other one would understand.

After a while, the terror would recede a bit, and we would fall into each others arms. We would start kissing, touching, and licking each other. When I licked her, I could taste the cocaine in her sweat. So I licked her more.

The urgency and desire would build until we started fucking. We would fuck for hours, and she would push herself towards me while pulling me closer while begging me to come. Then she would hold me in her arms and yell, "Come, Terry! Come!" In my mind I was hearing, "Come closer! Come closer!"

Until finally, in an orgasmic explosion, I would melt into her. In that moment of surrender, there was nothing in my world except Anna. I have never felt loved like that since.

For the last few months we lived together, Anna and I had sex like that over and over again. Then in the morning we would wake up and go on with our miserable lives. If either of us managed to come up with money during the day, we'd start the whole cycle again in the evening with a drive across town to get some coke.

In early January 1988, I'd had enough. I gave Anna a needle with some coke in it, and she went to look out the window. Telling myself, "I can't live like this anymore," I sucked up about a gram of cocaine. With tears in my eyes, I put the needle in my arm and said goodbye.

I woke up on the floor in the hallway outside the bathroom and saw the front door wide open. My first thought was, "The bitch left! She fucking left me!"

I got up and locked myself in the bathroom. I sucked up another gram of cocaine. Thinking to myself, "I won't live like this anymore," I pushed that fucking coke into my arm.

I woke up a second time lying on the floor against the bathroom door. I heard voices on the other side of the door. I had been hearing voices and seeing things for months when I was high, but this time, they sounded different. This time there were really voices out there.

In terror, I got up and I sucked another gram or so of cocaine into the syringe, and I set it down on the sink. I told the people on the other side of the door, "No, not yet. Not yet." I quietly washed the coke bowl out in the toilet. Then I stuck the needle in my arm, and pushed the plunger in. As the taste came to my mouth and the rush went to my head, I threw the rig into the toilet and flushed.

The next thing I knew, I was lying on a gurney in the back of an ambulance, in the middle of University drive, in the left turn lane. The ambulance was stopped, and there was a guy in a uniform moving away from me. He was looking at me and smiling. Another paramedic was looking at me while saying, "He's back! He's back!"

As I looked up at these uniformed strangers I told myself, "Don't tell them I was trying to kill myself. Don't tell these people I was trying to kill myself, because they'll lock me up. It was just an overdose. They'll let me go."

On we went to the hospital. The seizure had been so bad, I'd broken my shoulder and one of my toes. I remember lying on a table as they pumped me full of Valium so they could relax the shoulder muscles because I was so tense from the coke.

I remember laughing as the doctors and nurses pulled on my arm to put my shoulder back into the socket.

I remember looking over at Anna sitting in a folding chair in the corner of the operating room, wringing her hands and crying. Thinking, "Fuck, I've done this to her. I've hurt her."

Within a month we had lost the apartment. Anna went to live with her mom, and I moved into a halfway house while my mom paid for me to go into a drug treatment program. I didn't complete the program and ended up moving out of the halfway house with nowhere to go.

As I came to believe I could live life without drugs, my relationship with Anna ended. The more I moved toward a better life, the more distant Anna became until one day I realized I'd been off drugs for months, and hadn't seen her for months either.

Deanna asked me if I dated women in the fellowship, and I said, "No, I don't date women in the fellowship." When she asked why not, I replied, "Since you ask. . ."

The December after I had 3 years clean and sober, I ran into a woman at a meeting who I had met a couple of years earlier. We'd attended the same meetings for a while, and then she'd gone off into another fellowship. I hadn't seen Natasha in a few years.

After the meeting, we all went to a coffee and sat around talking as usual. Natasha sat across the table from me. We talked, and slowly the rest of the group around us was forgotten. After a while she said she needed to get home. I got her phone number. Then she gave me a hug and left.

Natasha gave wonderful hugs. I could have just melted into her arms. Her hugs were the nearest thing to love I'd felt since I'd been with Anna.

One of my friends who didn't know her from before asked, "Who's that? She's stuck-up. She didn't talk to me at all." I thought to myself, "No, she's not stuck up. She's not paying attention to you because she's interested in me."

I called Natasha the next day, and we made plans to do something together. I wanted this woman in my life, but before we met again my mom called me.

My mom said, "We need to talk." She came over and we sat down together. After some small talk, my mom blurted out, "Your brother has AIDS," and started crying. This was in 1991. Back then, having AIDS was a death sentence. A quick and painful death sentence.

After talking with my mom about my brother having AIDS, I went home and called Natasha. She offered to come over, but I refused because in the back of my mind, I couldn't be needy. I

was afraid that if she came over and gave me one of her wonderful hugs, I would be crying in her arms causing her to think, “Eww, I don’t want a needy guy in my life!”

When I first started my recovery journey Anna left me. I thought when she came into my life that she would take care of me, and I would take care of her. Somehow this meant I didn’t have to take care of myself.

With the clarity that came from not using drugs, I realized I'd become very needy. I decided Anna had left me because I was needy, and told myself I would never be needy again. I wasn't willing to let Natasha see me being needy.

We'd made plans to go to the Nutcracker or some symphony thing that Natasha had always wanted to see. To be honest with you, I didn’t want to go to the symphony. I just wanted to hang out with Natasha. I decided I could handle going to the symphony with her, but we'd just talk on the phone until then.

For some reason I don't remember, we didn't go to the Nutcracker together. Maybe they cancelled it? Maybe Natasha had to work that night? Anyway, we didn't get together, but we'd talked on the phone almost daily. I was getting very comfortable on the phone with her.

Over the next 3 months, while my brother slowly withered and died, Natasha and I continued our phone conversations. Sometimes we talked every day in a week. Sometimes we’d talk two or three times during a week. Looking back, I doubt we ever went longer than three days without speaking.

We’d talk for an hour. We’d talk for three hours. We had long conversations about what was going on in our lives. I was going to college, and working. She was working her job, and doing modeling on the weekends for local stores. Her life was good. My life was good except for my brother's illness.

We spent hundreds of hours, getting to know each other on the phone. But I refused to meet with her, because I was too afraid that I would be needy.

I held her away from me. I told her I couldn't see her because I didn't want to be needy. She was willing to spend time on the phone with me until I was ready. She was OK with waiting.

I remember talking to Natasha the day my brother died. She asked, "Do you want me to go to the funeral with you?" I said, "No, I want to do this myself. I don't want to start a relationship with you based on you helping me through this. I can do this. I'll call you. We'll keep talking. I'll see you when I'm ready."

Shortly after my brother died, a woman asked me for a ride home from a meeting. I gave her a ride home. She wasn't a woman I found attractive, but she invited me into her apartment, and I went in. The woman sat down on my lap and stuck her tongue in my mouth.

After having sex with her I got up, got dressed, and left. To me, this was just sex with somebody who was there, somebody I didn't care about. Someone I didn't have to hide anything from so I could just let myself go for a while. Entertainment.

I went home, and went back to my life. Dealing my feelings of grief about my brother dying. Going to school and work. Talking with Natasha on the phone.

Then something weird happened. The girl I'd had sex with became obsessed with me. She got my phone number, and started calling me. Somehow, she got my address and started mailing me cookies and other odd little gifts. Then she started talking about her obsession with me in meetings.

Soon after this started, Natasha called me on the phone. She screamed that she had been waiting for me. Telling me she knew how hard dealing with my brother's illness and death was. Telling me she cared for me and had been patient with me. And now, she hears about some woman I fucked who is obsessed with me.

Natasha went from screaming at me to sobbing and crying. Before hanging up she said, "I don't ever want to talk to you again."

I called Natasha back, and she hung up on me. I called her again, but she hung up on me again.

Over the next few weeks, I called Natasha only to have her hang up on me many times. My calls got farther and farther apart until finally I stopped calling altogether.

Over the last 17 years, I have not had sex with a woman from the fellowships. I stopped dating women who go to meetings. I don't even look at them as prospects for sex or relationships. They are just people in the rooms.

I'd never told anyone that story until I was on the phone with Deanna. I hadn't even thought about it in years. I just didn't consider the women I meet in meetings as potential partners.

After hearing this, Deanna told me, "There's all these women in the rooms you can date. Some are healthy, some aren't. Open your eyes and start looking for the healthy ones." I said, "I don't know. I don't know. Maybe."

After Deanna and I got off the phone, I realized I'm going to a potluck that night but didn't want to go alone. So, I picked up the phone and called Sydney. He'd just moved to Arizona from Indianapolis, and I figured he needs to meet people. So, I'll take him with me. He can meet people and I don't have to go alone.

Sydney and I went to the potluck. It was fun, because instead of being in my shit, I walked around and I introduced him to the people I knew. Together we met people neither of us knew.

At the potluck, I saw Jack. I still wasn't happy with him telling me what to do. But I saw him with his kids and I realized that, like me, he's doing the best he can. He doesn't know any better. I can't expect him to tolerate me when I'm in my shit, if I refuse to accept him when he's just trying to get by.

Let me interrupt here. . . If you are enjoying reading this, your friends will also want to read this. You can send them an email with a link to the searchingfortimacy.com website so they can get

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Sunday, December 20th

I got up Sunday morning called my friend Mark, who I'd seen a week earlier at the dance. I talked to him for a while.

Part of the reason I called him was I thought his girlfriend might know Emma's telephone number. I could see a change in my attitude and God had told me to reach out to her.

But Mark didn't know Emma's telephone number, and his girlfriend wasn't there.

We ended up talking about Mark's frustrations with his relationship, and we talked about being men of value and looking for value in the women in our lives.

During our conversation I started to think about providing value to others in terms of the seven motivational gifts Alan had mentioned the day before. The values stuff didn't really make too much sense. It was just words, but I felt there was something there I needed to understand. I decided to spend some time researching the seven gifts online later.

Mark and I moved on to talk about other things. We talked about push/pull again and I realized my relationship with Anna mirrored this over and over again. While high on coke, we were completely separated. We weren't lovers, we were two people running around a ratty apartment watching each other to make sure neither hid any coke. We were suspicious and untrusting.

When the coke ran out, we slowly started approaching each other. I'd pull her toward me, and she'd push me away. She'd pull me closer, and I'd move away. This would go on until we were both ok with being touched, and then we'd escalate until we finished spent in each other's arms.

In normal relationships the push/pull period ends as the couple get closer. In a healthy relationship there is little need for testing each other. Trust and mutual interest remove the need to test each other.

Anna and I only had trust and intimacy in the short time between when we finishing fucking and when we fell asleep in each other's arms. We woke up ashamed with ourselves for doing coke again, and disgusted with the messy trashed apartment around us.

Mark and I talked for a while about this concept, but I think I've explained it enough for you to understand so I'll save you the time and not repeat the rest of the conversation.

My phone rang after I got off the phone with Mark. It was my mom calling wanting to know if I was coming to Christmas dinner. I paused for a second before replying.

The holiday events at my mom's had come up twice when I'd worked the steps in March. In the 4th step, I'd written about how I dreaded going to these nightmares. In the 8th step, I'd written about owing my mother amends for not showing up or in some cases not even responding to her invitation. I'd just ignore her and not go, and then avoid her for a few months afterwards until she got over me shutting her out.

On the phone with my mother that day, I knew I didn't want to go to her place for Christmas dinner. I surprised myself and told her, "No, I'm not going to come. Let's just get together and have dinner some other time."

I know this wasn't the answer she wanted to hear. But I'd trained my mom not to do the shame based manipulation thing by hanging up on her whenever she tried to guilt trip me into doing things I didn't want to do.

Faced with the choice of try to get me to come by telling me it's Christmas and a good son would come to dinner only to have me hang up on her, or accepting my decision, she paused. Then she asked, "Okay, when do you want to have dinner?" I said, "I don't care. Whenever."

We set the details to have dinner together after Christmas. Then we talked about the family holidays and how they sucked. My mom mentioned she didn't like them anymore than I did, but she feels she has to do something with the family on holidays.

I mentioned some of the things I see that cause problems at the gatherings. For instance, we have pictures of the family during holiday parties going back to when I was four or five years old. In these photos we're sticking our fingers up behind each other's head while laughing and acting like we have devil horns.

It's a family tradition. We always do one picture like that, and then we take the serious photo to show to the grandparents and whoever else is supposed to see the glum side of the family.

In my stepfather's family, they do the glum picture, but they don't do the happy one. So he gets upset when we start clowning for the first photo. For almost 30 years at every holiday he yells at us to stop clowning around. I don't like going into a situation where as soon as I start having fun, I get yelled at and told to be serious.

Another problem at the holiday get together are the games. My mom loves to play games and thinks the Norman Rockwell way of having fun together is the family plays games together after eating. She thinks playing a game together is a way to share some time having fun.

But the truth is that my mom doesn't think about the people playing the game. She doesn't consider the 10-year-old grandson who can't play word games because he doesn't know the words, or the 16-year-old granddaughter who can't think fast on her feet.

Because she doesn't consider the players, people get frustrated because they're paired up with the 10-year-old that doesn't know what the words mean but still needs to get somebody to guess the word. Or the 16-year-old who looks at the word and freezes because she doesn't respond to pressure or stress well.

Because they're frustrated, they say things. For example one year playing some kind of guess the word game with a beeping timer that flashes a new word as it's handed around the circle, I

said, "How about Ashley (my niece) and I play all of you." Which hurt the 16 year old girl's feelings because I didn't want her on my team anymore.

So the fighting starts, "Oh, how dare you say that! ... You've hurt her feelings!"

Simply put, a holiday at my mom's house can be diagramed:

- We show up and try to pretend we're interested in people we only see a few times a year at holidays. The truth is if we were really interested in them, we'd see them more often.
- Then we eat packaged food from boxes that was heated in the microwave, while talking about nothing important at the table. We can't talk about anything interesting at the table because the communists will end up arguing with the anarchists and the devout are threatened by the skeptics.
- After the boring bland meal designed to be palatable to everyone, we all get herded into one area of the house for the glorious family photo.
- After the photo - I should say photos because there are always two - it's into the family room for the game and fight.

That's what a holiday at my mom's is to me. I'm just not willing to do that anymore.

My mom told me she doesn't really want to do it anymore, either. She just keeps on doing it because she feels she has to for the kids and grandkids. Hearing this I told her, "Well, go on a cruise. You go on cruises all the time. It's not like you're going on a cruise to avoid having a holiday get-together, you're going on a cruise because you and Jay go on cruises and it's Christmas and they're cheap."

This had to have sounded good to her because she said, "Yeah, we might do that next year." I told her, "I'm going to write that down on my calendar. In October, I'm going to call you and ask, "Where are you and Jay going for Christmas cruise?"

After talking with my mom, I cooked a full dinner. I made a ham shoulder with green beans and salad.

I ate what I wanted, then threw the rest out. That's something I'd been doing often. A few weeks earlier I'd made a whole turkey with stuffing, gravy, and vegetables on the side, ate some of the turkey breast and threw out everything else.

Actually, what I'd wanted was the bird out of my freezer, but I was too cheap to put it directly in the garbage. So I cooked it up and did the trimmings since I was cooking anyway. I'd thought about inviting people over to eat with me, but then I'd have to clean up a bit and that'd have been too much work.

Later that night, I thought about going to a titty bar, but went to a meeting instead. Actually, I was going to go to meeting then the titty bar, but after the meeting we went to Denny's and I ended up hanging out with my friends until midnight. So, I didn't go to the titty bar. I had a better time at Denny's than I would have had at the titty bar and spent a lot less money.

Monday, December 21st

I'd been walking around for a few weeks, thinking I'd see Emma in a meeting and be able to work up the nerve to talk to her, but she hadn't been at any of the meetings I'd attended. But I'd see her name on the wall at the fellowship hall and think to myself, "I'll see her. She's around."

On Monday, I walked into a meeting at the fellowship hall. I sat down, and looked up at the board and Emma's name was gone. It had been erased. I thought, "Fuck! She's gone!" I hadn't seen her since Thanksgiving night over 3 weeks earlier. "She's gone!"

I sat there feeling I'd waited too long to reach out to Emma while I listened to people talking. I heard the thing we call the disease of addiction speaking through people's mouths. I felt nervous energy building within me.

After a while I looked up, and god was standing beside me. I asked him, "Should I?" He nodded and said, "Go for it."

At that second I realized the feeling in my gut was god telling me to share. He was making me ready. So I opened my mouth, and I took my 5 minutes.

I started by slapping down the words I'd heard. The chronic drug users who come to the rooms wanting something better, but are unwilling to leave the drugs behind had been telling the room the program won't work unless you work the program.

I introduced myself and then shouted out, "Bullshit! The program will work if you just keep showing up and don't pick up no matter what. I keep coming to these rooms no matter how I feel. I sit in this fucking chair and I can't hear you. "

"I sit in this fucking chair and hear you and want to run from the room. But still I sit in this fucking chair. I sit in this chair when I am unwilling to change and the change happens anyway, despite my resistance."

I went on to share about my pain and my loneliness. Then I shared about god coming to me and wiping away the connections with everyone around me. I showed the people in the room the terror the feeling of being completely alone had given me. I showed them the inner yearning I felt for contact with humanity. Then I shared about the changes in my outlook, my emerging understandings and where I was right then.

After I finished sharing, the meeting changed.

I sat there and I listened to other's share, and thought to myself, "This is weird." The guy who, two weeks earlier, had pissed me off so much by reading the book, broke into tears and shared for five minutes about how his wife had left him, his kids are junkies, his life sucks and he's so alone.

Another man talked about feeling overwhelmed because of his situation. Both these men have long term abstinence from drugs, but are going through hard periods in their lives. When I opened up, they felt safe and opened up too.

After the meeting both of these men came over and asked me for my phone number. A few others also asked me for my number. This doesn't happen much anymore. Why should it? I rarely share in meetings, and give no one a chance to see who I am.

While I was outside the meeting room, I could hear the thing they call the disease of addiction coming out of some of the people's mouths when they said, "But," and then made excuses for why they couldn't stop using drugs, or "But," and made excuses for why they didn't do things.

I realized I had done the same thing too many times to count. I'd been making excuses and justifying myself by looking for reasons not to do things.

After talking for a while with others outside the hall, I started walking to my car. A man came up and told me I curse too much when I share. I asked him what I'd talked about, but he only wanted to talk about my vulgar words.

I said goodbye to him, got into my car, and drove away. While driving home later, I realized he didn't want to hear me. By choosing to hear only my cursing, he was avoiding hearing my feelings.

I do this too. I find reasons not to listen to people when I don't want to hear them. I don't mind cursing, but I really get distracted when people say, "You know" as a placeholder between each paragraph.

If someone doesn't have clean clothes, or acts a bit weird, I just ignore him. You know? I told myself to start listening for the feelings and ideas people are sharing rather than looking for reasons to ignore them.

I went into a hardware store a few blocks away to get some Christmas presents for my step-mother. I hate to shop and I've talked with my therapist and others about my dread of going shopping for years.

I think the reason I hate to shop springs from when I was little. My mom sometimes was really overwhelmed with all of us screaming kids. We would go into stores, and my mom would drag the four of us kids around. She would pull clothes off of racks and say, "This will fit you," before throwing it into the cart. Then she'd pick something else and say, "and this will fit you." Into the cart it would go with no feedback from us kids wanted, or allowed.

All our clothes were purchased based on cost, and whether it would last. She called this "value shopping." There was no thought given to whether it was something we wanted to wear or something we liked. It was just, "This will fit. It's what you're getting. Come on." I've always hated going shopping.

Anyway, even though I dread shopping, I like going to the hardware store because they've got employees standing up at the front waiting to help shoppers find anything. I can just walk in, tell one of them what I want, and they help me get everything.

So I walked into the hardware store and a woman asked me, "What can I help you with today?"

I said, "I want to buy \$50 worth of gardening tools for my stepmother." She started leading me to the garden section while saying, "Come this way. Was there anything specific you wanted?"

I said, "I want a saw." She showed me a couple of different saws, and I picked one out.

Then the saleslady said, "The saw's \$15. You've got \$35 left. How about some shears to clip with?" Picking up some shears she asked, "Like these?" I replied, "No, she has some of those with the long blades. How about the little short-blade ones for cutting branches?"

So she showed me some shears. She pointed at some and said, "These are the cheap ones, and they work really well." I replied, "No, those won't work, they have wooden handles. She'll use

them once and leave them out in the yard. The dog will chew on the handles and the sun will dry the wood out. Then the next time she goes to use them, they'll be no good."

The woman looked at me and said, "Oh. We have these. These are stainless steel with aluminum handles. You can leave them outside. You can throw them in the pool. They'll be fine." Seeing this set of shears, I said, "Cool! That's great. I'll take those."

Then the salesclerk said, "You've got \$10 left." I said, "What else can I get her?" The woman and I went through a short list of gardening related items that Fran already has, but failed to come up with anything else to spend the last of the money I budgeted.

Then she asked, "Does she have houseplants?" I replied, "She doesn't have many houseplants, because she forgets to water them, and they quickly die."

While saying, "Oh, come check this out," the saleswoman led me to a display of glass bulbs with a long stems that you fill up with water and jam into the pot. The bulbs water the plant for 2 weeks. They were only \$7.99 so I grabbed a set of the glass bulbs and headed for the check out line.

While standing in I started talking to the guy in line behind me, and it turned out he's married to my sister's sister-in-law. I've known him for years, but never really talked to him. I just see him every few years at my sister's house. We talked for a while, and then I paid and left the store. As I drove away I was thinking, "It is a small world out here."

As a result of talking to Alan about the seven motivational gifts, I had been thinking about my friends. Basically, who they were and how they fit into my life. I'd decided I was going to call a some of my friends and invite them to lunch or dinner. If they went to meetings maybe we'd go to a meeting together too.

I'd called my friend Steve the day before and said, "Let's get together and have dinner and go to a meeting." He said, "I don't want to go to a meeting." So I said, "Fine, let's get together and

have dinner.” Hearing this he asked, “What’s going on? What do you need?” I said, “I just want to hang out with my friend, Steve.”

We made plans to meet at Palee's Crown. This is a Thai food place that I'd went to once months earlier, but never gotten around to going back. When I went before I looked at the specials and said, “I'll have the soup to go.”

The little Thai woman who owned the place looked at me and said, “No, you can't have that soup.”

Huh? I looked at her and said, “Why can't I have that soup?” She told me, “You can't have soup. Too hot for you.”

I looked at her and I asked, “Do you have mint squid?” She said, “Yes.” I told her, “Well, I used to go out with my dad, when I was in grade school, and we'd have mint squid. As we ate, little beads of sweat would pop up out of our foreheads from how hot it was. We'd sit there eating and sweating and laugh at each other.”

After hearing this tale, she looked at me, and said, “You can have the soup.”

While I was talking to the owner, a waitress in the restaurant came up and set down a glass of water. I was just going to get the food to go, but I looked at the water, and decided to eat there. So I went out, got my newspaper from the car, found a table I could read at, and sat down.

The waitress brought me the soup, and I started eating. While I was eating the cook came out of the kitchen. The busboy, the waitress, and the woman who owned the restaurant came over, and they all stood around watching me eat my soup. It reminded me of sitting at Hailey's restaurant with her and her family years ago.

Anyway, since then, I'd been telling myself, “I need to go back to the Thai place.” So Steve and I agreed to meet there at 5:30 and have dinner, because I wanted to go back there, and it's on his way home from work.

I got there a few minutes early only to find out they're closed on Mondays. I was sitting outside waiting when Steve showed up. We talked about where else we could go, and decided on the sushi restaurant across the street.

Since I'd talked with him on the phone, I'd been thinking about who Steve is. He's the guy that when people are hanging out together, he excites them to do things. He's the guy who when he wants a fire, he makes sure there's firewood. He's the guy that when one of his friends needs a couple of bucks, hands it to him quietly under the table.

So, we went to the sushi restaurant and ate. While eating Steve told me about his grandson's birthday party the day before. He told me about the kids riding on the train in the park while he threw popcorn at them.

We talked and ate. Then the check came. It was \$55. I was figuring we were going to the cheap Thai food restaurant, so I reached into my pocket to find I only had \$50. Seeing this, Steve said, "Oh, I've got some money," and he threw a \$20 on the table to cover the \$5 I was short and for the tip.

Then Steve looked at me and asked, "What's wrong?" I told him, "I was going to get a cup of coffee and go to a meeting." So he reached back into his pocket and gave me a \$5 while saying, "That will get you some coffee."

We walked out of the restaurant and talked for a few more minutes in the parking lot. Then I got in my car and drove away thinking, "That was kind of neat. He got to do what he likes to do because I didn't bring enough money to pay the check."

Because I was hanging out with Steve, I ran late for the meeting. I did stop for coffee because I won't drink the crap they serve, but I got to the meeting after it had started.

As I was walking toward the meeting room, a guy walked out of the meeting. I could see he was agitated so I said, "What's up?"

He asked if I had a cigarette. “Yeah, I’ve got a cigarette. Come on, let’s sit and talk.” We sat down on a short wall outside the church. I gave him a smoke and listened to him. He talked about his shitty life and explained the reasons why he’s going to his first meeting.

This is his first meeting and he walked out? I asked him why. He told me the people in the room yelled at him. I can see he’s a little drunk, and he probably was a little disruptive in the meeting; but that’s no reason to drive him out of the meeting.

I didn’t think he could hear me, so I didn’t tell him what to do, instead I just listened to him. Having been where he was I knew sitting there and smoking a cigarette with him was all I could do for him.

We sat there for a while, and he talked. After about ten minutes he said, “I should go in there and tell those fuckers what I think of them.” I replied, “You want to?” while standing up and pulling him towards the door by his shoulder. “Come on.”

We walked into the meeting together, and everybody in the room turned to watch us. I asked somebody to move over so I could sit next to this torn up newcomer. We sat down, and the people in the room continued to watch us.

When the woman who was sharing when we walked in finished speaking, I turned to the newcomer and said, “It’s your turn. Tell them your name and talk for 5 minutes.”

He did. He shared about the suicide of his aunt 3 days earlier. He shared about his friend being shot and killed in a drug deal the day before. He shared about his girlfriend being pregnant and wanting something better for his kid. He shared about his life and his despair.

After about 6 minutes, I put my hand on his shoulder, and said, “We talk for 5 minutes so everyone gets a chance to share. If you want to talk some more, we can go back outside.”

He thanked the people for listening to him, and stopped talking. Then, somebody else started talking, and I asked him if he wanted to go back outside. He didn't so we sat in the meeting listening to others share.

As he was sharing the people in the meeting realized this was his first meeting, he's a little drunk and he's scared, but he wants a better way of life. So they did something that has always bothered me.

At many meetings newcomers are asked to identify themselves so people can get to know them after the meetings. Some of these meeting then pass around meeting lists so members can write down their phone numbers. After the list goes around the room, someone gives it to the newcomer, and tells him to call someone.

This bullshit with the lists bothers me because it's not what I was taught to do. I was taught, by Roger, that you talk to the person, reach out, then ask him to coffee.

I was taught, by Carl, that you talk, listen, be there for him, and then you offer your telephone number.

I wasn't taught that you put your telephone number on a list so the guy can call you if he ever works up the nerve.

While watching the other member hand the list of phone numbers to the newcomer, I realized giving newcomers numbers was a way for us to tell ourselves we are reaching out so we feel good while limiting our risks.

Then I thought about a newcomer I'd reached out to years earlier.

I spent three months sponsoring Patrick. I listened to his pain and his loneliness. I shared my experience with him hoping he could find hope in my tale. I held him when he cried, and talked with him for hours on the phone when he hurt.

I was there for him. I let him into my life. I thought he was moving forward. But he wasn't, or maybe he just lost sight of his future.

Patrick called me one night when I wasn't home. When I got home I was tired and not in the mood to listen to his pain. I didn't call him back.

The next morning, I got a call from his roommate telling me she'd found him dead on the floor the night before. Patrick was not the first man I'd sponsored to commit suicide, or die from a drug overdose, but he was the last newcomer I sponsored. After his death, I put my number on the lists as they went past, but don't remember anyone ever calling me.

Thinking of all this, I wondered how many men had reached out to me over the years only to be ignored. I wondered how many had died because I was unwilling to be hurt. Because I was afraid to be hurt.

Knowing I couldn't let this happen again, I asked the newcomer, "Do you want my number?" He said yes, and I told him to ask me for my number. When he asked, I gave it to him. I've seen him since then, and he's even called me a few times, but this is not his story so I won't share more about him with you. He'll have to decide if he wishes to share his story with you.

We walked out of the meeting, and the newcomer had to go home so he left. The other people from the meeting stood around telling me things like, "That's so neat, that you would do that for him," and "This is a side of you I've never seen," and other bullshit compliments.

As I listened to their empty praise, I was thinking to myself, "It's so fucked up that you would drive him out of the meeting and even worse that none of you went after him." But I didn't need to say that to them.

You see, rather than being angry with them for letting him go, I was sad because I used to be willing to let them chase people out. I used to be willing to wait for somebody else to reach out to the newcomers. I used to be afraid to let people into my life.

Tuesday, December 22nd

I got up on Tuesday morning, and I was running late. I had a dentist appointment, and barely enough time to get there. I'd been seeing this dentist regularly for a couple of years, but before that I hadn't gone regularly for six or eight years. Before I didn't go to the dentist except when I had problems or pain.

When I was young, I had my teeth cleaned regularly. While the woman cleaned my teeth she'd tell me how filthy they were. She'd point out what a poor job I was doing flossing and brushing. It was an hour of her tsk tsking, and berating me, while telling me I'd lose my teeth if I didn't start taking better care of them.

A couple of years ago, I broke a tooth in a restaurant, and the manager said he'd pay for it. The dentist I used to see was on vacation, so I got a name from a friend. I found a dentist who was really good, and I realized I didn't go to dentists often enough because I went to the wrong dentist.

You see, when I went into this new dentist's office to have my tooth fixed, I had them clean my teeth since I was there anyway. Instead of telling me how I don't take care of teeth, the hygienist told me, "Your teeth are in really good shape. There's some things that you can do to make them better." It was a positive experience, and I went back.

Since then I've been going to the dentist every three months. Every visit they do those little numbers measuring gum recession, and all of my numbers are going down. This hygienist has taught me how to take better care of my teeth. Now, when I go to the dentist, I walk out feeling good about myself. But, I'm still kind of apprehensive when I go, and on this morning I was running late.

So I got dressed and jumped in the car. Driving down the road the other drivers were crazy. They came to a complete stop to make right turns. They didn't signal when they changed lanes. They did other unsafe behaviors that upset me.

I've yelled in the past. Many times. Long ago, I used to get so mad I'd throw things at other drivers. I stopped throwing things by keeping the car free of loose objects within quick reach after throwing a special \$35 wrench at a woman who had cut me off on the freeway. Today I can go for months, even years, without being upset by erratic drivers. In fact, as I write this I cannot remember the last time I yelled at someone in traffic.

Anyway, on that early Tuesday morning on the way to the dentist I was pissed off, but instead of yelling I got calm and realized, "These people aren't driving any different than they always do. I'm just nervous about going to the dentist, and I'm running late."

All of a sudden, the drivers around me went back to driving fine again. I got to the dentist a few minutes late, but had to wait anyway. I had my teeth cleaned, and the hygienist told me my teeth and gums are wonderful. She didn't have to show me how to do anything because, obviously, I'm doing a good job.

When I got home from the dentist, I started thinking about Emma. I'd been thinking about her on and off for weeks. Before god came to me and told me to talk with her, I'd see Emma, and walk away wondering why I couldn't talk with her, but my mind would quickly shift to other subjects.

Since Thanksgiving morning when god told me to talk to Emma after I walked away when she was alone, I'd been thinking about her more and more, knowing I'd see her sooner or later. I was running dialog through my head trying to figure out what to say to her.

Since asking god to make me willing, and seeing the immediate effects, I was looking forward to seeing Emma. Along the way, I'd realized it didn't matter what I said. After all god wasn't telling me what to say to her. He was only telling me to talk with her.

But now Emma was gone. My mind started coming up with reasons why I hadn't seen her in almost a month. She'd moved. She'd died. She'd fallen into the hell of isolation I was coming from and stopped going to meetings. She'd started using drugs again.

Around and around my mind went. This thinking was doing me no good, but god had told me what to do. So I sat down and I thought to myself, “Who do I know that knows Emma’s phone number?”

One night, months ago, I’d walked out of a meeting, and was talking to a guy named Rick. Emma came up to us and said hi. Before I walked away because I couldn’t stand and talk with her, Rick asked her for her number. I walked off watching him push buttons on his phone while she gave it to him.

So, I called Rick and asked for Emma's number. He said, “I deleted it, but I’ll call a couple of people and get it for you.” After making sure he had my number so he could call me back, I hung up.

Almost immediately, one of the people I’d given my number the day before called me and we started talking. Max's way into words, but I don’t hear the words anymore. He likes four- and five-syllable words, which makes them even harder to hear.

I could hear the feelings, and, having been down the hole Max's in, I could understand him. In his mind, he's sure that if he can figure out how he gets to a feeling, he can avoid going there. In my mind, I was thinking, “If he feels that feeling and survives, he won’t be afraid of it anymore.” Feelings won't hurt us.

So, Max would say his pages of long-syllable words, and I’d reply, “What I’m hearing you say is...” Only to have him reply, “No, you’re not listening to me,” and repeat his long-syllable words again. Then I’d repeat what he said with shorter words again.

Now, I’m not a therapist, I'm just a former junkie who's found a better way of life so I’m not really good at helping people explore their feelings. Much of the time I don't even want to feel my own feelings. But I’m practicing, and I'm learning how to use my life's experiences to lead people to better lives.

I guess I still need more practice because Max got pissed off at me. He yelled, ‘You’re not listening,’ and slammed down his phone. I got up to put my phone back on the cradle thinking to myself, “He just hung up on me!” I stood there after hanging up my phone and realized it was OK, “Good for him!”

I picked up the phone, and called Max back. My call went into voicemail, of course, because he didn't want to talk to me. So I left a message, “This is what we were talking about when you hung up... When you calm down, give me a call back. I’ll be here.”

Then I hung up the phone and went on with my life. Just a week before I would have been angry because he'd hung up on me, but instead, I was sad because I wasn't able to reach him.

Later on Tuesday afternoon, my friend Everett called me. I've known Everett for years. We talk often about everything and nothing.

Years ago, I talked to Everett a lot about arguments and fights I had with my dad. He knew my dad, and had even seen a few of the arguments as a bystander. He consistently encouraged me to stop getting upset with my dad, to stop fighting, and just enjoy being with him.

Talking with Everett helped me improve my friendship with my dad. The last few years with my dad were the best years we'd had together. When we buried my dad Everett was there, and the plant he sent is in my living room today.

Anyway, when Everett called me that day, he was upset. His mom has dementia and is in a care center. He started cursing about the damn nurses at the hospice. I asked him, “What are they doing?” He yelled out, “They’ve got her on antibiotics! They’re doing this and they’re doing that!”

Today I can hear feelings instead of the words. Listening to Everett rant about the nurses, I heard lots of anger, but I also heard pain. Mostly I heard loss and grief.

So I asked him, “What’s going on with your mom?” Everett said, “She’s dying. I had the priest come in yesterday to do the last rites.” Hmm, “What does it matter whether they give her antibiotics or not?” He said, “Well, they shouldn’t be doing that because it causes the germs to build up resistance.”

I said, “If she’s dying, it doesn’t matter if the germs get more resistant. That’s not a reason to be upset with the doctors and nurses.”

Everett said, “Well, I can’t get a straight answer out of the staff. Every time I talk to them, when I ask them a question, they don’t answer my question. They just say something else.”

I told him, “That’s called deflecting. It’s how we avoid talking about things we don’t want to talk about.” Hearing this he said, “Great! I learned a new word.”

We talked a little bit more, and then I asked him, “Everett, how come you’re not in the hospital room, sitting with your mom? Why are you in the hallway, screaming at the nurses?” He answered with, “I don’t know.” I replied, “Because you’re deflecting.” He said, “Oh,” and got quiet.

Into the silence I said, “You know what? I’ll come down. I’ll stand out in the hall and scream at the nurses for you. You go in and sit with your mom.”

Hearing my offer he said, “No, I think I can do it.” I told him, “Well, if you can’t, you call me. You know I can scream at people. You’ve seen me scream at people. I’ll come down, and scream at the nurses so you can sit in the room with your mother.”

When I got off the phone I realized I didn’t want to go to the hospital and scream at the nurses. I don’t want to scream at anyone, but I knew I would have gone. I would have screamed at the nurses for him.

[Here's another link so you can tell your Facebook Friends about this book.](#)

Wednesday, December 23rd

For the past few days, I'd been reaching out to my friends and eating with them. On Wednesday I had breakfast with John. You met John earlier when I went to his house on Thanksgiving. I'd met John last summer.

In June, I'd dragged an old Volkswagen camper out of a backyard in Apache Junction. The bus had been sitting for almost 10 years, and looked it. Since I bought it, I'd been going out most mornings to work on it. I'd work on the camper while thinking about how much fun it will be to just get in it and go somewhere.

Anyway back in July, I was making arrangements to borrow a motorcycle jack from my friend Joe so I could pull the motor. John was standing near us and offered to help. I was doing everything myself so I didn't pay much attention to him.

I didn't really need help, but I did want someone to be there in case something happened. When Joe and I were talking the night before he brought the jack over, he asked if I was going to call John. Figuring it wouldn't hurt to have two people standing around if the motor fell on me, I decided to invite John to the party.

When I called John he told me he had all kinds of tools, and asked if there was anything I needed. There was one screw I couldn't get out because I didn't have a screwdriver long enough so I asked him to bring a really long Phillips-head screwdriver with a square shaft.

The next morning John came roaring up on his loud motorcycle. He got off the bike, and then pulled the screwdriver I needed out of his saddle bags. I gave him a cup a coffee and showed him the vintage camper. He was enthusiastic about my beat up project.

When I started positioning the jack under the camper John jumped right in to help. We got the motor out that morning, and John made the work easier. A few weeks later, he came over to help me put the new motor in. Since then he's been over a few times a month to help me with the camper or the bug. In fact, I don't call Joe anymore when I need help, I call John now.

John is always eager to be helpful. He's become a part of my life by being helpful and welcoming. Looking at how he became my friend shows me a way to attract people into my life.

While thinking about the ways people fit into my life I realized that John's not the guy to call about weird shit like god talking to me. We don't have deep discussions. We don't talk about our feelings much, and when we do we don't talk about them for long. We hang out, work on the Volkswagens, and talk around the edges of what's going on in our lives. (I also feed his dog oysters, which is funny. I doubt the dog knows what oysters are, but he's always willing to eat one!)

Anyway, that Wednesday morning, we met at IHOP and had breakfast. This was the first time we'd just sat and talked. Every other time we'd either been working on something together, or been in a larger group of people.

While we ate, we talked about what's going on in John's life. That's his stuff so I'm not going to share it with you, but I learned more about him. We talked a bit about some of the things going on in my life. We got to know each other a little better.

After I left John to go home, I realized I could have deeper conversations with John. For me to expect John and I to talk like Everett and I do after knowing each other for decades is unrealistic. I realized as John and I spend more time working on things, we'll become more comfortable talking.

When I got home I sat down at the computer to research the seven motivational gifts Alan had told me about on Saturday. I found a website that explained the gifts, and read through the list of gifts.

While reading the list, I thought about the things that I'd done over the past couple of days and I realized, "I'm all of these things." But I'm two of these things more than anything else: I'm the guy that figures shit out and tells people. The gifts call these attributes "The Prophet" or "Perceiver," and "The Teacher."

In fact, I'm obsessive-compulsive. My obsession is to figure out how things work and fit together. My compulsion is to tell people what I've learned. It's not hard to see since I write books telling people how to do things.

As I dug deeper, I started thinking the seven motivational gifts are just cult crap. It's how the church directs its members into positions that best suit them, so they can serve the church and each other. It's how they enmesh people into the structure of the church.

At that point I almost shut off the computer and walked away, but I started thinking about the people in my life. Alan had told me to identify the gifts in the people around me.

For example one friend of mine is a people-pleaser. She just can't say no. According to the list she's a Giver. Maybe watching her I can learn to be a giving person. Maybe by watching her go too far, I can learn where the lines are. Maybe by hanging out with her, I can help her learn how to say no.

I thought about Steve getting people to do things together. The list calls this an Exhortationist.

As I looked at more of my friends I saw each of them in somewhere on the list. I knew people who matched all of the types on the list.

Thinking about my friends, I realized the recurring problems they have are because they go too far: not a just a giver, but a people pleaser; not just a teacher, but an arrogant lecturer.

Then I took the next step and looked at myself. I had all these people coming to me for advice because I spent years being nothing except the guy who gives advice. Someone who comes to me for advice is probably not the right person for me to ask for advice.

Thinking deeper, I saw I need to start identifying the people in my life so I know who to reach out to when I need advice, encouragement or anything. Mark and I had talked about seeking people with value, and now I saw exactly how to define the value each person offers me.

When I realized this, the way to having a better life became clearer. I needed only to identify the dominant motivational gift for each person in my life, and let them use their gift with me.

I also need to attract people into my life by displaying all the gifts. I can and should be the prophet/teacher, but need to be able to be everything. Thinking about this I realized over the past few weeks I am slowly becoming a man able to be everything as needed.

The other thing Alan told me about was the PSI Seminars. So I looked at them online to see what they are about. Based on comments I found on some forums, it's a big seminar where hundreds of people pay \$700 apiece to be yelled at by people who call themselves counselors. The goal of the counselors is to break attendees down by yelling and screaming at them. After destroying them, the counselors put them back together by giving them words of encouragement.

While reading this, I realized, "I don't need that. I can, and do, beat the shit out of myself all by myself."

But I do need help putting myself back together. I realized I had people to help. After all, I have many people in my life. If I reach out to the right ones, they'll help me figure this stuff out.

As for the PSI seminars, I really don't need an MLM-based cult. But, because I'm into marketing, I thought for a while about starting a cult. It sounds fascinating.

I decided rather than start a cult, I'll just research how cults market themselves just in case. I made a note to check this out later, and went on with my life.

Thinking about cults brought up an old memory. Years ago, I almost joined the Hare Krishna's. This was in 1986. At that time, I flew around the country never staying in any one town for more than two or three days, except when I went to Catalina Island where I'd spend 4 or 5 days in a row.

I flew around the country with \$30 a day to cover my meals and food. So I stayed in the cheapest motels you can find -- the ones in the red light districts. Right outside the room was a carnival.

I'd walk out into the carnival to meet people: the hookers, the pimps, and, of course, the drug dealers. I jumped right in, and ran around with people I'd probably - hopefully - never see again. Then get up in the morning, do the work I was there for before moving on to the next town.

The next town. . . The next carnival. . . The same people and situations. The only differences were the names and the faces.

I thought I was having fun. I thought I was cool. But underneath, I was lonely. I was miserable.

Back then, my life seemed manageable. Sure, I was lonely and miserable, but my life was manageable. I found myself spending a lot of time in airports, flying standby. At the airports I met people in orangish-gray-colored robes, with shaved heads, giving away books. I love books.

I'd walk by and they'd ask, "Want a book?" "Sure," I'd say, and take it without thinking. I'd end up in the bar, drinking a beer while reading the book while I waited for my plane.

After a while when these robed people would say, "Want a book?" and go to hand it to me I'd say, "I've got that book. What else you got?" So they'd dig around in their shopping carts and they'd give me a different book.

I used to go through John Wayne Airport almost every Friday. I'd fly standby, which meant that I'm going to be on the 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 8:00 or 9:00 flight from Orange County to Phoenix, depending on when they had the first seat open up, and when I got to the airport.

So, I'd see the same bald guy in the robe handing out books every week. After a while, we even came to know each other's names. He'd greet me, "Hey, how are you doing, Terry?" I'd reply, "Cool." Then he'd ask, "You want to talk about the book?"

We'd go and sit in the bar. I'd drink my beers, and we'd talk about the books. Talk about the message in them.

It's been 25 years, but as I remember it, the whole mythology was really weird, but still kind of neat. The whole thing is based on a chariot driver's dream as he drove his master into battle. The dream takes hundreds of pages in a book, but it's only a few seconds in the chariot driver's life.

In the dream, you learn how to live your life; how to associate with people; what your place is, and more. The dream is the basis of their paradigm.

Anyway, I spent hours sitting in the bar at the airport, talking to the Hare Krishna dude, and then the airlines would call my flight. I'd get up and I'd slam my beer, shake the Hare Krishna's hand, and say, "Got to go," and rush off.

Sometimes I think that if it wasn't for the airlines, I probably would have joined the Hare Krishnan. This was somebody doing something that nobody did for me, at that point in my life. He was sitting and talking to me.

Everybody else that I knew was either somebody that I worked for or the people running around in the carnivals. When I was in Arizona, I had paychecks and I had no bills. So basically, Phoenix was carnival time with a higher budget and without having to get up the next day to go to work.

Back then, the Krishnas were really the only people that just talked to me because they found me interesting. Then again, maybe they didn't. Maybe they get a commission for converting people?

Anyway, that's how the airlines kept me from becoming a Hare Krishna.

Now, let's get back to the story. . .

Actually, before I share with you the events of Christmas eve, let me stop and ask you a quick question. Am I doing a good job telling this story? I've never written a book like this before, and would like some feedback. I don't want a bunch of people calling me on the phone or sending me emails, so I've set up a page on Facebook where you can share your thoughts with me and the world.

If you are reading this book on a computer connected to the internet, you can use the link below to open the Facebook page. If you aren't on a computer, you can just type the url below into your browser.

<http://www.facebook.com/Searching4Intimacy>

Thursday, December 24th

I got up on Christmas Eve and started calling people. I was calling because I didn't have anywhere to go after I got done doing the Christmas Eve dinner at my stepmother's house.

Going to my dad and stepmother's home on Christmas Eve is a different than going to my mom's house. I've always liked doing the Christmas Eve thing, going back to when I was a little kid and we would go to my grandparents' - my father's parents' house, and they would lavish toys on us in the basement. We would sit up in the dining room and eat off the fine china that I have now, because I remember it so well and so fondly.

Us kids would fidget back and forth, knowing that down in the basement, there was a Christmas tree with wonderful toys under it.

We would eat and fidget. Fidget and eat, until we finished eating. Then we'd go downstairs, and my grandparents would hand out the presents; things like sets of blocks that cost hundreds of dollars. Anything we wanted, we just asked for it, and they gave it to us.

It was much different than in my family. Christmas morning, you got what you got. Not because my parents didn't have money to buy gifts, but because my parents didn't listen to us.

We got the toy that came to hand quickly. If they put any thought into it at all, we got what they thought we would like.

Going to Nana and Pop-Pop's was wonderful, and I still remember those nights fondly. My dad and his wife did this for my nieces. When my dad died, my stepmother, Fran, continued the tradition. We have the dinner. The kids fidget and eat knowing there are gifts under the tree. Then the kids get their gifts.

Anyway, I knew that when we got done, I'd have nowhere to go. I didn't want to go somewhere alone, so I figured I'd call a bunch of people, find out what they're doing, and tell them I'm going to go to the fellowship dance, and ask them to meet me. This way, I'd have people to be around. I know where the dance is held, so I can help people new to town get there.

After I made the calls, I got the garden implements I bought for Fran and I went to wrap them, but I had no wrapping paper.

I used to be the guy who wrapped presents perfectly. All the angles were perfect angles and mirrored each other, and I used the smallest pieces of tape that I could use. Everything was crisp and clean, and it was perfect.

Thinking of the time I spent wrapping presents in the past, I realized I was trying to make everything perfect. Today, I understood the wrapping paper wasn't important.

I did have paper that I use to pack the stuff I sell on eBay. It's just plain white paper, like they print the newspaper on. So I wrapped the presents up with the newsprint.

I wrote on the packages, "To Fran, Love Terry," in big letters with a colored marker, and threw them in the back of the car, because I realized that the packages weren't the gift. I got in the car and I went to get the money Alan owed me and to see his trains.

While driving I realized I have all of these trains because I like to share them with people. I like to find interesting, weird things, and show them to my friends that also find them interesting. I like to learn about them, and then tell others what I've learned.

That's one of my gifts, I guess.

I got to Alan's house before him, and ended up sitting outside waiting because his wife wasn't home either. I had a book I'd written earlier in the car so I started reading through it.

A few years ago, I wrote a motivational book, called "God Speaks To Everyone Everyday, But Only Those Who Listen Hear." The book contains quotes and sayings along with essays I'd written about how they'd helped me learn to interact better with the people in my life.

My plan was to get a publisher so I talked to a couple of people who know the right people. Then I approached a few publishers, only to hear, "We don't do quote books." Disappointed, I just tossed the project aside, and never looked back.

While reading the book, I realized, "If I had read this book 6 months ago, my life would be so much better." Then I thought to myself, "The third thing god's been telling me to do is tell people. Publishing this quote book is what god wants me to do."

Aside: These quotes and my essays about how they've improved my life have been placed online at: www.godspeaksdaily.com

I read the book until Alan showed up. Then we went into his house, and Alan started showing me this train layout. We walked around the layout as he shows me his creation. Repeatedly, I had to ask him, "What's that?" because it's right there.

You see, on my train layout, I've got things, that if you're paying attention, you have to ask about. Everyone asks about them. They are focal points for the visitor's attention. Watching him, I realized that, just like me, Alan's been practicing in his mind how to show people his train layout.

We walked around the room, and I did my best to keep the spotlight on him, to let him show me his trains without me getting sidetracked by telling him about my trains. It's always been very easy for me to talk and very hard for me to be a listener.

After looking at the layout, we started opening the display cases around the room. Alan handed me things and told me stories. He pointed at one item and said, "I've got this, but I don't know what it is." I knew so I told him.

While pointing at items on different shelves, I said, "You've got this and that. They go together." He replied, "Oh, I never knew that." In a short amount of time, we went from Alan sharing his trains with me to exploring and enjoying them together.

After a while, I remembered I wanted to talk to Fran before my sister, her husband and nieces and nephews show up so I said I had to leave.

We walked out of the house into a garage full of tools. Seeing the tools, I remembered Alan loves to work on cars. I said, "I'm fixing up a Volkswagen camper up with my friend John, and it's got some rust holes in it. How do we do repair them?"

Alan offered to help me, but I told him John and I were working on the camper together so he said, "I'll show you." I followed him to a workbench with a welder and he showed me exactly what to do. After watching Alan explain the process, I'm sure John and I can manage.

As Alan put his tools away I asked him about a big sheet of bent metal on a saw horse. "What are you doing here?" He said, "I'm making a fender." Really? "You're making a fender?" "Yeah. I've got this car I'm building into a hot rod. I need a fender and they don't sell them, so I got sheet steel, and I'm making a fender."

We ended up talking for a short while about making fenders and hot rods while I was thinking to myself, "I've got to get out of here! This is fun, but I've got to get out of here."

When my need to leave overcame my interest in Alan's projects, I got into my car and drove towards Fran's house, only a couple miles away. I knew I was running late, but I was happy I'd spent the extra time with Alan.

When I walked into Fran's place, the dogs were jumping up and down because they're so happy to see me. Watching them jump around I thought to myself, "I need to get a dog. It would be good to have someone welcome me home."

But, it wasn't just the dogs who were excited to see me. Everybody was excited to see me. Fran was just finishing making dinner. My 18-year-old niece Emily and my 17-year-old niece Ashley asked me to play a game. So we played a game called Candy Land. It says right on the box, "For age 3 and above." We were all over three so we started playing.

Candy Land is a simple game. You turn over cards to reveal colors, and then move ahead to the next square that color. Sometimes you turn a card with a picture of something, for example a woman eating candy. When you get a picture card you go to the square with the picture. If you've passed the square on the path, you've got to move back to it. Otherwise, you move forward to it.

As we played the game, my 13-year-old nephew John stood outside the circle around the game saying things like, "What are these people doing? They're crazy! It's a game for 3-year-olds."

We played the game while Fran transferred the food to the table, and finally I got all the way to the last square, the one where any card I turn over means I win, and the whole family was standing around. They wanted to see what would happen.

We were all laughing and smiling. Especially me because I'm going to win. I picked up a card and flipped it over to see a picture of a woman eating candy. I had to go all the way back, almost to the beginning.

Laughing, we gave up on the game, and went in to dinner. We never finished the game, but that wasn't the point. The idea was to have fun together, and we succeeded.

As I sat down at the table, my little 4-year-old niece Katie jumped up from her chair at the little people table, came over to me, and said , “Come on! Come on!” I asked, “What?” She said, “Come on!”

I got up, and Katie took me by the hand, led me out of the dining room, right past the kitchen, all the way down the hall, into the bar, right up to a little refrigerator. The cool little refrigerator that doesn't have food in it. All it's got is beer and sodas. To make it even better, it's little girl sized.

Katie pulled the door open while saying, “Take one! You can have one.” I asked her with an exaggerated curious look on my face, “I can really have one?” To which she said, “Yeah, you can have one. You can have anything you want.”

I reached in and took a Coke. I don't like soda because it gives me indigestion, but she wanted me to have one, and I've always got Roloids in my car, so I can deal with it.

I went back to the dining room and we sat down. I drank the Coke and, later, I did eat the Roloids. Katie was happy, and I didn't mind a bit of indigestion to see her smile.

After dinner, we went into the living room and did gifts. Fran's continued the tradition my grandparents started 40 some years ago, and she really gets into it.

The kids got all kinds of neat stuff. Clothes and toys. Books and games. I played Barbies with the little 2-year-old, and we ran around laughing and screaming with glee. I saw Ashley sitting there with her cell phone, doing some kind of text thing. I always see people doing that. I've never had a cell phone, never texted anyone.

Curious about how they work, I told her, “Let me see that. Does it take pictures?” She said, “Yeah.”

I said, “Let's take a picture and send it. We're having fun. Lets send your friend a photo of us having fun.”

Ashley said, “Oh, no. You don’t send pictures like that.” Hmm, “You can’t send a picture of us having fun on Christmas?” She replied, “No, we can’t do that.” Guessing I didn’t understand cell phones after all I said, “Okay, let’s send her a picture of the dog. Show me how you send a picture.”

We sent her friend a picture of the dog lying in the corner. Her friend sent a text message back that said, “Who’s dog is that?” Then Ashley and her friend went off texting about the dog and Christmas. Two friends 600 miles apart connecting with a phone on Christmas eve.

I looked at Ashley and said, “See, that’s how that works. You two are just staying in touch.”

I’d always thought people talking on cell phones and people looking at messages, were having shallow conversations. They were ignoring me, and didn’t want to be with me. They were doing something else, and they were just hanging out with me while they were talking to somebody else they’d rather talk to. Instead of being in the moment with the group, they were isolating by playing with their phones.

Watching Ashley, I realized cell phones are how they keep in touch with their friends.

My friends, they’re doing text messages, they’re taking phone calls and they’re keeping in touch with their friends. But, they’re sitting in the coffee shops, restaurants and at my house, with me, while they’re connecting with others.

That night I’d started to see cell phones a little differently. Maybe I’ll get one.

After all the gifts been opened, the girls wanted to play with the train. This year, Fran and I set up a train under the tree. There are so many toy trains in our lives, we rarely set one up under the tree, but this year Fran wanted a train under the tree so there was a train under the tree.

The girls tried to run the train, but they couldn’t get it to stay on the track, because they’re only three and four. So I said, “Fine, let’s go get another train.” We went into the train room, where there’s hundreds of trains, and while pointing at a section of shelves, I said, “Let’s build a train.

We're going to do it with these." The girls asked, "With these?" I said enthusiastically "yeah we're going to take one of these engines, and we'll pick out cars, and build a train to run under the tree."

Playing trains with the girls was different. Instead of the trains being a collection where I have one of every color and all the different variations my dad and I sought out, they were just toys little kids play with. We each grabbed a few, ran back to the tree and put them on the track. But the engine didn't run. So, we ran back to the train room and traded that engine for another one.

The second engine didn't run either because my father and I were collectors and didn't keep everything in operating condition. So back and forth we went until we got an engine that ran.

We started running the train we'd put together around the tree. The 13-year-old boy who thought it was so crazy for me to play a game for 3-year-olds with my 17- and 18-year-old nieces, came over to run it. We spent about 30 minutes running the train. Laughing and having fun. Just being together with the train as a focal point.

Then, my sister and her husband said to the kids, "Let's go! Gather up your stuff, let's go!" It took a while to gather up all the kid's gifts and load them in the car. We spent some time standing in the driveway talking, and then Jen's family drove away.

I'd missed talking with Fran before dinner because Jen and her family were there when I arrived. So after walking back into the house I turned to Fran and gave her my real gift. The garden tools were just something for her to open. Something for the others to see and share in.

This last gift was just for her. Something more special. I said, "Fran, I want to thank you for being the person in my life who listens to me because you care. I understand that you don't want anything from me, except for me to have a good life. And when I talk to you, that's how I let you know what's going on in my life."

Fran looked at me, then reached out and hugged me. Stepping back, I saw tears in her eyes through the tears in mine. The damned dogs were jumping up and down all over us, but that was ok too. We could touch the moment and then let the dogs pull us away.

So I let go of her and made sure she had stuff to do on Christmas Day because my dad isn't there anymore. She said she was looking forward to going and seeing her friends.

Knowing she'd be OK, I said goodbye, and went off to be with my friends.

December 25th

I went to a party on Christmas Day, a potluck event at a church with bunch of people standing around a fire outside smoking and more people inside eating food, playing games and hanging out together.

I walked in, went over to the fire, and saw it was burning down. I looked around, but there was no more wood. So I asked, "Is there any more wood?" One of the people by the fire told me, "Somebody went to get some." I said, "Okay," and finished my cigarette while talking with the people around the fire.

Then I went inside the church hall, and sat down with some people and we talked. We didn't talk about important things, and we didn't talk about our feelings. We talked about meaningless things like, "Why does the state of Arizona plant oranges along the freeway that you can't eat?" And other topics that have no meaning in our lives.

During the discussion about the ornamental oranges beside the freeways, Paul got up, and said, "Oranges? That sounds good!" He went and got a bunch of oranges from the food tables, and came back offering them to us. He gave me one, so I ate an orange.

MMMM.

I got up and went to look at all of the food spread out, and I didn't feel less than because I didn't bring any food to share. I just looked and thought to myself, "Ooh, I want some of this," and "MMM, that looks good."

I found a plate of Fairytale Brownies. I love Fairytale Brownies. So I picked up a brownie to eat, and, thinking about Paul giving me the orange, I picked another one up and shoved it into my pocket because sometime during the day I'm going to see somebody who needs a Fairytale Brownie.

I walked around with the brownie in my pocket, talking with different people, and I then I went outside for another smoke.

At the fire again, I saw someone I've known for years. Someone who sometimes I don't talk to at all. Sometimes I talk to him and I feel like he's attacking me and threatening me. Not physically threatening me, more like he's trying to beat down my ideas, my sense of self.

Sometimes we have good conversations though so I sat in a chair beside Jerry and we got to talking. As we talked, I realized Jerry's like me. He figures everything out and then tells everyone how he understands things.

Watching and listening to him while feeling my feelings from a third party perspective, I suddenly understood that when I felt attacked by Jerry, it was really just him pushing his understanding on me. When he caused me to question my ideas I felt less than. Because I didn't feel good about myself, my ideas were the basis for my self-esteem.

During our conversation, Jerry mentioned he was trying to learn how to listen. That's one of my problems too. I tend to get so excited about my discoveries, I steam-roll people, and don't stop to listen. So we sat by the fire, smoking while practicing listening to each other.

We alternated talking for a while, and then Jerry said, "This has been great. Why don't you call me? You got my number?" I said, "No, I don't have your number." He asked, "You want my

number?" I looked at him, and said, "No. I don't want your number. If I need to call you, I'll call David and get your number from him. That way, I'll get to talk to David, too."

When I said this he gave me a weird look and said, "That's kind of cool."

Thinking back, it was kind of weird. But my world was changing. When I was trying to get to Bob a week earlier, I'd had good conversations with a few people because I didn't have his number. I like talking to people, and having to ask people for simple things like phone numbers gives me an excuse, a reason, to talk to more people.

Possibly even more important, asking for a phone number, or other small things, lets people be a part of my life. Asking for these little favors allows my friends to feel they are helping me out. They get a chance to be part of my life.

After Jerry and I talked for a while, he got up and went inside. The fire was burning down and there was no firewood. So I turned to a guy standing next to me, and said, "Have you got a truck?" He said, "Truck?" I replied, "Yeah, I need something to get firewood in." He said, "I'll go borrow some keys," and walked into the church. I needed someone with a truck because I've got my little Volkswagen. I don't want firewood in the back of it leaving bark and debris on the seat that I'll have to vacuum up later.

He came out of the church and we got in his friend's truck. Pulling out of the parking lot he asked me, "Where do you get firewood?" Not knowing, I said, "Circle K? Safeway? I don't know." So we went to a Safeway down the street. Remember, we're in downtown Phoenix on Christmas Day. Safeway was closed, but there was a guard standing out front so nobody steals the stuff left out in front of the store.

I leaned out the window of the truck and yelled to the guard, "Where can we get firewood?" He said, "Try Circle K." The guy driving the car was looking at me with an expression that said, "What is this guy, an idiot?"

He shook his head at me, and got back on the road. I never met the guy with truck before and don't remember his name today. He didn't know me either. We were just two strangers driving the nearly empty roads of downtown Phoenix on Christmas day searching for firewood in a borrowed truck.

Even though there was almost no traffic on the roads, the driver found reasons to get upset at other drivers. They were too slow, didn't signal, didn't get moving soon enough when the lights turned green, and stopped when the lights turned yellow.

Looking at him I saw myself. I've done all that and more. With my newfound attitude, it was ok for him to be upset in traffic. It was also OK for me to have fun while he sits next to me being angry.

A few miles, and many comments about other drivers later, we pulled up to a Circle K. I ran in, and said, "Firewood? You got firewood?" because I hate to shop, and I know if you tell the clerks what you want, they'll tell you where it's at.

The guy behind the counter said, "We don't have any firewood." I said with disappointment, "You don't?" He told me, "They might have some down on Central and Virginia." Not wanting to drive around in circles with the resentful Mario Andretti, I politely asked, "Can you call them?"

The clerk looked at me as if I was weird. No one has probably ever asked him to call other stores to find out if they have firewood before - or since either. But, I had a big smile on my face, and he could surely tell I was having fun, so he replied, "Yeah,"

He called, and the other store had some wood. I had him tell the clerk to hold the wood for me, thanked him then left with a wave. I got back into the truck with my new friend who was pissed off because I'd spent 5 minutes in the store, but didn't get any wood.

I told him the clerk had called another Circle K to find out if they had wood. The one on Central has wood, so that's our next stop. I pointed out the directions and away we went.

When we turned into the second Circle K, an old man was walking across the parking lot, upsetting the driver because the guy didn't get out of the way fast enough. I listened to his anger at the slow walking man, and thought, "I want firewood. He can feel anyway he wants as long as I get firewood."

He parked the truck, and I ran in. The store had four bundles of firewood. I told the clerk, "I'll take it all," grabbed a bundle in each hand, and headed for the door. Thinking I'm stealing the wood, the clerk yelled at me to stop, so I stopped, reached in my pocket, and threw some money on the counter while saying, "Ring it up, I'll come back for the other two."

I put the two bundles in the back of the borrowed truck, and went back into the Circle K. The clerk said, "You didn't give me enough money." I gave him the extra money, grabbed the last two bundles, went out and threw them in the back of the truck. Then we headed back to the church.

On the way back to the church, I tried to find out who the driver was. I listened to him talk, and I asked him questions about his future. He only wanted to talk about his past, but I've been there. I wanted to know his future. I wanted to know where he was going, but he could only see his past.

While I sat in the truck listening to the driver talk about his past, I was thinking to myself, "I used to focus on my past."

Over the years I've regretted my past. I've glorified it, and sometimes I've even denied it. Today I realize I should have been concentrating on where I was, and where I was headed, instead of worrying about my past.

We got back to the potluck at the church, took the firewood in, and put it by the fire. The fire had burned down while we were chasing the wood, so people started throwing wood on.

In my mind I thought, "Don't burn it all up now, I want to hang out for a while and we can't get anymore wood because that's the last of it for miles."

But, rather than saying anything, I thought to myself, “No, they can burn it and do whatever they want.”

I turned around and Jerry, who I'd practiced listening with earlier, was sitting on his bicycle. It is one funky, weird bicycle. Jerry's got a bunch of bicycles, maybe one for every mood. I looked at his bike and realized this bike says, “Hi, come on over and talk to me.”

So I went over and said, “Jerry, what’s with this bicycle?” He started telling me about the bicycle. While he was talking I noticed his eyes were lighting up. Looking at Jerry's enthusiasm, I thought to myself, “Hey, this is just like me and Alan with the trains yesterday. This is just like me sharing my trains, or my little Volkswagen convertible with people.”

After listening to him describe the bicycle for a while, I asked, “Can I ride it?” Jerry quickly said, “Yeah.” After he dismounted, I got on it and it was a funky, weird bicycle. I probably didn't look very graceful, but I didn't hit any of the cars in the parking lot, and I did manage to ride it around with a big shit-eating grin on my face.

It was fun to ride the bike. The people who saw me ride the bike smiled and waved as I went by.

After a few trips around the church parking lot, I gave Jerry his bike back, and stood by while Jerry and his girlfriend got on their matching bikes and rode off.

At these holiday events, they have meetings in the back for the people who don't have anywhere to go and aren't comfortable in the social environment. These backroom meetings are an important part of my story because 22 years ago I didn't want to be in these rooms. Back then I didn't feel comfortable running around getting firewood because we needed it, taking rides on bicycles, or just sitting playing board games and eating oranges with others. But, I didn't want to be out there in the world sticking needles in my arms either.

22 years ago, I was living at my mom's. She told me I could move in if I didn't use drugs and went to meetings. Thinking living with her would be better than living on the streets, I moved in.

In my mind I told myself, “I’ll go to those meetings. And when I use, I won’t tell her.”

While I did use for the first few months I stayed at my mom's, as I attended meetings and started understanding the people in the rooms had been like me, I began to think I could have a better life. Wanting the better life others' had, I stopped using drugs, but the desire was still there.

At a much smaller party held 22 years ago on New Year’s Eve, I sat in the backroom, and talked about how I wanted to use, but I was there instead. I talked about how I wasn't comfortable out front with the rest of the people. Looking back, I didn't know then how to have fun, or even hang out with people, without drugs.

So there I was, at a New Year’s Party not doing drugs. I had about 80 days clean and sober, something like that, and I didn’t want to use but I didn’t know what else to do. I'd been talking about my desire to use, and that only made it worse.

After sitting in the back room for hours, finally at 3:00 in the morning, I said to myself, “I can’t stand this anymore. I don't belong here. I’m going to go use.”

So I got up and walked out of the room. As I was getting in my truck, I looked across the parking lot and there was a guy getting into his car. Just like me, he was going through his first New Year’s without drugs. He'd been sitting in the tiny back room with me sharing the same desires, the same thoughts.

He was as uncomfortable as me. Like me, he wanted to be out there doing drugs. Like me, he was practicing the thing that we call addiction without using drugs.

As I looked at him across the tops of the cars between us, he shrugged his shoulders with a look of failure. Seeing this, I said, “You go. I’m going to go back in there.”

He drove away to feed his desire for drugs, and I went back and sat there in the room until the sun came up. Then I went to breakfast with some of the people I'd met that night.

I finally got home about 9 o'clock in the morning and went right to bed. I woke up without the desire to use drugs. Even with everything that has happened in my life since that day, I have never had the desire to use drugs again.

Over the next 10 years I saw the guy who drove away to use many times, and he never managed to get more than 90 days clean. While my life improved, as I became a new person, he went round and round on the same treadmill of using, not using, using, not using, using.

Until, finally after 10 years of struggling and failing to overcome the desire to use, he died from an overdose.

Because of these memories the little meetings in the back rooms of the churches and rented halls on holidays are important to me. So important that even in the years when I wasn't going to meetings at all, I always went to one on New Year's.

So I decided to go to a meeting. I walked through the church and sat through a meeting. During the meeting we laughed and joked. We had fun.

At the end of the meeting, we say the Serenity Prayer together. In the fellowship I go to, we don't hold hands, we put our arms around each other. We also don't shake hands, instead we hug.

I found myself with this bubbly, red-headed woman with big green eyes and a wonderful smile under my right arm as we did the prayer. She seemed like somebody I wanted to get to know. After the prayer, I reached in my pocket and while taking out the meeting list with phone numbers, said to her, "Give me your phone number." She smiled, and wrote down her name and number. I told her I'd call, then shoved the list back in my pocket and walked out the door.

As I walked through the room with all the food and people playing games, I saw a woman I'd met months earlier, heading for the meeting room. Thinking back, I actually met her the same night I met Emma.

Anyway, I stopped her and said, "What's your name?" She said, "Rochelle." And asked me, "Do I know you?" I replied, "Yeah. We went to dinner after a meeting one night. You were with a tall girl, a big blonde Amazon."

Looking curiously at me she asked, "Amazon?" I said, "Yeah, the big girl." While holding my hands cupped before my chest, I continued, "big tits... looks like a warrior princess?" Rochelle figured out who I was talking about and said, "Oh, that's my friend Diana."

Hearing her friend's name I said "Yeah, that's her. I never can remember her name because I'm not attracted to Amazon girls." I looked Rochelle up and down while waving my hands along her outline, and said, "I'm more interested in little spindly girls, like you."

Rochelle looked at me from the corner of her eyes, as if thinking to herself, "Did he just call me spindly?" But, as I continued to look at her with a big smile on my face, she said, "I think that's a compliment," and then she kind of beamed a little bit as if my words had made her happy.

We talked for a few more minutes, but Rochelle's new to the rooms. She's just coming off of whatever her whack-out was, meaning she's not the woman for me. She's just somebody that I'm going to get to see in the meetings, hopefully smiling and having fun as her life improves. So I gave her a hug and said, "I've going to go hang out with my friends." I left her standing there, smiling and beaming.

For the next few hours I hung out and did more fun things. They aren't important here, so I won't include them. Let's just say I continued to talk with people and enjoy being a member of the group.

The last thing that we do on Christmas Day is have a meeting. A speaker meeting. This means somebody comes in and talks for about 45 minutes.

In the fellowship, we have a structure of things that we do to start each meeting. At speaker meetings, we read pages out of the book. Then one person shares about what it was like before

he came into the rooms, then talks about why he started going to meetings, and then finishes up by explaining about what's happened to him since.

As I sat in the meeting I looked down at my fingernails to see they're all dinged and dirty. So I leaned over to Jerry with the bicycle's girlfriend and asked, "Do you have an emery board?" She did, so I sat filing my fingernails with her emery board as I listened to the speaker share his story.

The speaker shared about his life, which is his story. Maybe sometime in the future, god will tell him to share his story with you. Until then, you'll have to make do with my story.

At the end of the big speaker meeting, we always do a countdown. During a countdown, the people who have been clean the longest stand up and move to the outside edge of the room. Then year by year, month by month, day by day, they count down through the crowd as the people line up based on their clean time. The guy who just staggered in drunk because it's cold outside and there's free food is the newest and stands up last.

Rather I should say, we used to do countdowns. Now, we're all older and we don't want to stand around for a half-hour while they do the countdown. So, today we do count-ups where the newest people move to the walls first, and then we go around the room adding people to the line along the wall based on longer and longer clean times.

Back when I first came around the fellowship, they would go around the room and there would be 2 or 3, or at a really big event maybe a dozen people with more than 5 years clean and sober. Today things are different. There are a lot of people like me who've been clean and sober members of the fellowship for decades.

So, there I was, sitting in the crowd as they formed the line around the wall. When they got to where we were sitting, we had to get up and move because we were in the way of the line. I went and sat with my friends. People I've known for 19, 20, 21, 22 years.

I sat with my friends and watched the line form around the room. The people we watched get up and join the line are the ones we've been watching as they go through the transformation from

active addiction to recovering people living better lives. People we've sponsored. People who call us up on the phone and hang up on us, but we call them back anyway. People just like us, but a little closer to the daily nightmare of active drug use.

As we sat watching, I'd poke my friend Tony, who hates to be touched, and point at different people we know. He'd say, "Stop poking me!" After doing this a few times, I looked him in the eye and said, "We're going to be 90 years old, in wheelchairs, and I'm going to poke you and say, "Look at that," and you're going to say, "Stop poking me!"

We laughed together, and watched the people line up around the room. While we watched, more of our friends joined us in our little group. The line moved across the side wall, then across the back, as the leader shouts out years. 5 years! 6 years! 7 years! 8 years! At each number people jumped up and ran to the wall to join their peers at the end of the line.

The line forms along the other side wall as the years count higher and higher. 13, 14, 15. The seats in the hall are mostly empty by the time the line gets into the middle teens. Small groups of long time friends were left sitting together watching as the people formed a long line.

The line got to the front of the room. 18 years! The stage starts filling. 19 years! 20 years!

The leader called out 21 years, and my friends and I all jumped up together. I said to Tony, "Hey, carry me up there!" He said, "I'm not carrying you up there." We ran up to the front of the room as a pack of hollering back-slapping idiots.

We joined our peers who weren't sitting with us. Our friends, the people that we've known all these years are on the stage. Twenty-two years is called, and the people who had a little more clean time when we came in join us.

Our sponsors came up. Then their sponsors came up. Until, finally, we were all around the room. I looked out across the room from me, and saw a woman with 5 years clean. Half of the 300-some people in the room had more than 5 years clean. That is just so powerful.

One of the organizers came around with a stack of books. During these events, we pass books around and we all write messages in them for the newcomers. Then the books are given to new people who don't already have books. Knowing what the books are for, I told him to give me one.

With the book in my hands, I ran over to a guy with 4 days clean and sober. A newcomer who just made it through his first Christmas without using. I asked him, "Got a book?" He said, "No." I handed him the book while saying, "You do now! Give me a hug!"

I grabbed him up in my arms and gave him a hug because I was so happy. The newcomer seemed a bit unsure of himself, but that's OK. I was like him once. Hopefully he'll keep coming back and remember the crazed guy shoving a book into his arms and then hugging him. I went through it, and I remember it fondly.

After giving the book away, I went back over to my friends and we did the ending prayer. Everybody in the room chanting a simple verse, except for those people with 4 or 5 or 10 days clean and sober, who hadn't learned the simple prayer yet.

I spent a few more hours hanging out with my friends. After most of the people had left, I helped clean up hall; then headed home for bed.

Saturday December 26th

The next morning, I got up and I went to a meeting. After the meeting, we stood around talking about where we were going to go for lunch. One of the people who had dragged us all off to The Grill Next Door a few weeks earlier was saying he wanted to go there again. I didn't want to go there for a \$12 hamburger.

The others didn't want to go there either, so we went to another place. We went to Chompies - a wonderful old New York deli place.

When we got there, the hostess sat us down at a large table. Then a waitress came up and started taking our orders. Catching her attention I said, “No, no, no. We came here to have a nice lunch. I don’t want to be yelling across the room, “Miss, I want more coffee!” So, what’s your name?” She introduced herself as Stacy.

After getting her name, I went around the table and introduced everyone so she knew our names. Based on the look on her face, she thought this was odd, but was OK with it.

Then, we ordered. Throughout the hour or so that we were at the restaurant, when somebody needed something, they said, “Stacy, could you get me this?”

Stacy gave us more attention than the girls at The Grill Next Door did. Of course, she didn’t bend over and show us her ass, or fake interest in a teasing way. But, she did make sure we had a good meal.

The guy who was so enthralled at The Grill Next Door was sitting across from me. During the meal I watched him. He sat with his eyes looking down at his plate. He’d look up when he joined our conversation, and then his eyes would drift back to his food. When the waitress came by his eyes immediately went down to his food. Watching him, I saw he didn’t even realize this wonderful young waitress was bouncing around eager to help us have a good lunch. I thought, “That’s sad.”

Watching him, I realized I used to be like that. I used to flirt with the women in the titty bars, but not make eye contact with women I met in social situations.

At lunch, a man named Ray was sitting next to me. I don’t remember how we got on the topic, but we talked about my dad's death.

I told Ray that while my dad was sick, I’d been dating a woman named Lisbeth who didn’t go to the funeral. She didn’t go any of the times that we sat in the hospital, when my dad had surgery, or even during the last 3 days while we sat around the hospital bed hoping he’d recover, but knowing in the backs of our minds he wouldn’t.

Talking with Ray, I realized I'd never even thought to share this part of my life with Lisbeth. It was a compartmentalized deal. I didn't think it was weird to not talk to her about it or not invite her to the funeral. It was just how our relationship was.

As I told Ray about my relationship, I saw a look of horror in his eyes. I was confused. It didn't make any sense that he would think it was weird.

After lunch I thought more about Ray's reaction to my keeping Lisbeth separate during my dad's fight with cancer and his death as I drove home. I realized I'd again refused to be a needy person. This time it hadn't even been a conscious choice. It was just how I lived my life.

Later that afternoon, I got a call from a someone I had called earlier in the week. Walter who had given me the book and welcomed me to a meeting 21 years ago. When I'd thought about him giving me the book, I had decided to call him, but he wasn't home. He was calling me back.

We talked for about an hour. At 56 years old, Walter had gotten married for the first time to a woman he met while doing volunteer work. He'd adopted her son, and was living a new life. A family life.

He said he had little dinner parties and the like, and I told him I was looking at houses and planned to have parties where people came over and ate food and played croquette in the backyard. He said to make sure I invited him.

At the end of the call I told him I wanted to thank him. I said I'd been thinking about the people I remembered from my earliest days in the rooms, and I remembered him. I refused to tell him specifically what he'd done because it sounded like nothing, but I told him he was a big reason I was still clean and sober, still alive today.

I think he was tearing up a bit on the other end of the phone, but that may have just been me assuming he was tearing up because I was.

On Saturday night, I went to another meeting, kind of a mini celebration of recovery. There was a woman named Linda who had started going to meetings a year earlier. Like most of us when we showed up at our first meeting, she didn't want to be there, but she didn't want to continue her life the way she was living.

I remember watching her sitting in the back of the room playing with text messages on her cell phone while kind of paying attention. After a few months, she moved up so she was actually in the circle with the rest of us.

About six months after she started going to meetings something clicked, and she wanted to be there. She wanted to be in the rooms. She wanted to be a clean and sober and be a part of the group. I love to watch people go through this transition.

On that Saturday night after Christmas, she had a year clean and sober. Celebrating your first year is a big deal. Celebrating a year means that she gets she gets a metal coin. A medallion. It means she speaks for a while about how she did it, and then others take turns congratulating her.

It's not a roast. With me, or my sponsor, and the people that have been around for a while, it's a roast. We tell stories about funny things and crazy moments the celebrant went through over the years. When someone celebrates their first year, it's how wonderful you've done and how much you've changed.

So, Linda shared for a few minutes about what her life was like before she came into the rooms and how her life had changed in the past year. Then different people shared about how wonderful it was to see her get a year clean and sober.

At the end of the meeting, I looked around, and I realized there was no card. It's a tradition to pass around a card that everyone signs when someone celebrates a year clean.

After birthday meetings there is a cake with candles representing each year clean. There was no cake for Linda either. This woman had been involved in the group, and was even chairing a meeting. Someone should have made sure there was a card and a cake for her.

My first thought was, “These bastards didn’t get her a cake!” My second thought was, “I didn’t, either.” I had gotten so caught up in the joy of Linda celebrating a year, that I didn’t think about it.

Driving home I realized I’d made a transition from “they screwed up” to “it didn’t get done because none of us thought about it.” I’d stopped blaming people for not doing the things that I wasn’t doing either.

Before I go on, a quick question for you? Are you seeing yourself in any of my behaviors? Do you identify with me? If you do, please take a minute now to tell a few friends about this book. Just send them an email with a few thoughts and a link to the website. Here’s a link:

www.SearchingForIntimacy.com

Sunday, December 27th

On Sunday afternoon, I called Mark again because was I was trying to find out Emma’s phone number. I thought maybe he’d talked with his girlfriend and asked her for the number. I’d been trying to just forget about Emma, but she kept returning to my thoughts.

Mark’s girlfriend didn’t know the number either. We got into talking, and Mark told me about men Emma had dated, and other gossip about who she hung out with. Listening to him fill me in on the gossip, I realized it wasn’t important and changed the subject.

So we talked about dating, and we talked a lot about values – the values that we present through our actions and the values that we look for in women. These ideas were starting to jell in my mind.

Simply put, we present our value to others through our actions. Character is simply acting consistently in all situations. By only presenting a few faces of myself to the people around me, I’d limited the people I attract into my life.

While talking to Mark I began to see my interactions with others as visual model. In the model, I stand at the center of a number of ever widening rings. It looks like a bull's-eye target with me at the center.

When I meet people, they are in the outer rings. As we get to know each other, get more comfortable, more intimate, they move inward across the rings. Some people like Deanna can move through my rings quickly. Others, like John, move more slowly.

In normal conversations we move back and forth among the rings. This is push/pull again. We pull people inward through our rings, and then push them outward again when we become uncomfortable.

I'd spent most of my life being uncomfortable having people in the inner rings. Even worse, because I was self-centered and lonely I tended to only see the outer rings.

As a self-centered person, I pushed my feelings and my ideas on others without giving them a chance to become comfortable with me. Because they weren't comfortable with me, they rebuffed me, and I went off dejected to repeat the cycle again.

The more Mark and I talked, the more I more I understood the model. For years I had only two states - detached and intimate. I either opened myself up fully, or, more commonly, I kept myself separated with shallow discussions.

By seeing my interactions with others as a series of rings, I could begin to change the way I interacted with others. Maybe, rather than pushing into other's inner rings, I should be expressing interest in them, then inviting them to get closer to me. Rather than dumping on people, I could put out breadcrumbs and entice them closer.

By living my life I'd meet people. By expressing interest in others, and inviting them to get to know me, some will come closer. Some of the people I meet will be women, and of them some will come even closer. If I do this consistently, I'll find one woman I can let all the way in.

Mark and I talked about this way of looking at relationships for a while, and then said goodbye.

After I got off the phone with Mark, I made a half-dozen calls asking different people for Emma's number. I got voicemail. I got "I don't have it, but so-and-so might have it, so I'll call them and tell them to call you." Nobody had it.

I worked that for a while and then I called the bubbly redhead I'd met on Christmas Day. We talked for a while, and it turned out she was married.

Just six months ago, I was afraid to go up to a woman and ask her out on a date, or even initiate a conversation, and now I'm meeting married women and walking away with their phone numbers. Something had certainly changed in my life.

She was working on her New Year's resolution when I called. I don't do New Year's resolutions. I think they're a waste of time, but I didn't feel the need to share my opinions with her. Instead I asked her what her resolutions were. She told me she wants to lose weight. I said I hadn't even noticed that she was overweight. Maybe that's just in her mind.

She mentioned she was thinking of doing something called Body For Life, which is a 12-week contest designed to get people in shape. Back when they did the first Body For Life contest, one of my friends helped design the contest. I'd watched it all unfold, and I've known people who've gone through the contest and came out the other side looking and feeling better about themselves.

So I told her that the Body For Life program is designed so in those moments when she feels discouraged and wants to give up, something hits. She'll get an email, or a package in the mail, that will lift her spirits and get her motivated to continue the contest.

This is a contest where they give away a money prize. She said, "I'm not really in it for the money, I just want to lose weight." I told her, "No, go for the money! If you're going to do this, go for the money, because it's all part of the process. You can say, 'Yeah, I might lose,' but go for it anyway."

I talked with her for another half hour encouraging her to do the contest, because I think the program works. I've seen it work for others, and I know it will work for her if she gives it a chance.

Then, we talked a little bit more about other things. She mentioned she was outreach chair within the fellowship a year ago. This means is she had to go to every single meeting in the valley during the course of a year. Hearing this, I realized she might have information I could use.

So I asked her, "If I want to go to a meeting that is small and the people go around the room and share until everyone has spoken, you'd know where that's at?" She said, "Yeah, I know where there's three or four meetings like that." "If I want to go to a meeting where everyone goes to coffee afterwards, you know where one is?" She told me yes, and then mentioned a few meetings where people go to coffee afterwards.

I told her, "Great! When I want to go to a meeting, a special type of meeting, I'm going to call you." Then we got off the phone.

I had made a decision a few weeks earlier to start changing my attitudes in meetings. One of the things I decided to do was show the newer people what it was like when I came into the rooms. I'd decided this because of Tyler, the enthusiastic guy who's into the jargon.

One night, while talking to Tyler, he mentioned he'd never been to a big meeting where, after the meeting, everybody walks out, stands outside and talks and then decides where to go hang out. Standing outside you'll hear things like "Oh, let's go to Gay Denny's." We call it Gay Denny's because there are a bunch of gay bars in the neighborhood, and there are always a few queens sitting around the restaurant.

Or, you'll hear "No! Let's go to IHOP." Anyway, everybody stands around after the meeting deciding where to go.

Then the people will start leaving to go to hang out in a restaurant. Sometimes, we'll all go to one restaurant, sometimes people will split off and go to two or three different restaurants.

Going out after meetings clowning around in Denny's and Coco's was a big part of my early recovery. I had nowhere else to be and very little confidence when it came to trying new things. So I'd go to a meeting, then go to coffee afterwards. After I'd been going to meetings for a while, sometimes I'd skip even the meeting itself, and just go to coffee.

Hanging out in the coffee shops allowed me to get to know people. I formed friendships that lasted for years and decades, and learned how to socialize without the use of drugs.

Tyler's never gone with a big crowd after a meeting to a coffee shop. I called Tyler, and left a message for him saying I was going to a meeting and then going to coffee afterwards. Tyler didn't get back to me in time, so I went alone.

I went to the meeting, sat in the back like I used to, and looked at the crowd. This is a big meeting with about a hundred people. As I listened to the speaker, I scanned the crowd looking for someone I could get Emma's telephone number from, but didn't see anyone. The speaker started quoting the damn book, and quickly lost my attention. Realizing there was nothing at the meeting for me, I got up and left.

I drove home with the same feeling of failure I'd felt before when I'd go somewhere and just turn around and go home without talking to anyone. I tried to blame the people in the meeting for being boring, for being blinded by the cult, but inside I knew it was me.

I couldn't blame others anymore. I could no longer tell myself I had other things to do, or even make rational sounding excuses for not interacting with people. I couldn't ignore my fears anymore.

I went to bed depressed and feeling alone. God didn't come to me, and I drifted off to sleep thinking something had to change. I had to change. I had to talk to Emma.

Monday, December 28th

When I got up Monday morning, I realized that I would have to go to a meeting Emma usually attends, and use my five minutes to ask for her phone number. I'd have to stand up in the meeting, and ask the people for her number. The whole idea of publicly revealing my obsession terrified me.

But, I had to do it. I couldn't not do it.

I took a shower and did my regular morning activities with the fear growing in my gut. I turned to god and told him I'd go ask for her number and asked him to help me. The fear eased a bit, but it was still there. Because I'd turned to god, I didn't have to look at the fear.

The meeting had already started when I got there so I couldn't get a chair in the back. The only chairs left were in the front of the room near the table where the chairpeople sit.

I sat down, and looked around the room. As I looked around the room, a man named Alberto who is friends with Emma got up and started walking out. Thinking it would be easier to get her number from him, than stand up before the group and ask for it, I followed him out.

I cornered him in the hallway by the bathroom, and said, "Alberto, do you have Emma's number?" He said, "Yes." I told him, "Great! Give it to me before you leave." Then he went into the bathroom, and I went and sat down. I was relieved to have avoided standing up and asking for Emma's number.

Alberto came out of the bathroom and sat down. He seemed a little sick to his stomach. Kind of anxious-looking. Trapped. He got up again, and I thought he was going to the bathroom again, but he left. I was pissed.

This opinionated fucker who is always jumping into other's conversations and spouting his crap, didn't have the balls to tell me to my face that he didn't feel comfortable giving me Emma's number.

Because Alberto was going to give me the number I needed so badly, I'd shared. I'd already used my 5 minutes. You don't share twice. I was pissed. Maybe he got sick. I didn't know what was going on with him, but he had just fucked me.

Maybe god was toying with me?

God wanted me to talk to Emma, but he wasn't making it easy for me. I'd called dozens of people on the phone looking for her number with no satisfaction. Dozens of people were certainly thinking I was some crazed lunatic.

I sat in the meeting not knowing what to do. I felt a compulsion to talk to Emma, but my only method of contact had walked out the door.

While I sat there fuming, a woman started sharing in the meeting. I think she was there to convert us to Christianity. She didn't seem to be one of us addicts. She seemed more like a person filled with the holy spirit and overflowing with the words of Christ.

These people aren't rare in the rooms. They don't last long because they aren't accepted, but there is a steady stream of new people coming to the rooms to carry the word of Christ. Once they go into their spiels, my mind closes, and I do something else.

I sat there ignoring the Bible thumper while squirming inside with the need to find Emma's phone number, and thinking about how Alberto had fucked me. Then god walked into the room.

When the Christian woman finished speaking, a guy got up and took a pink sheet of paper off a bulletin board. He went over and tried giving the paper to the missionary woman, but she refused it.

Turning away from her, he walked back to his seat. When he passed me, he laid the sheet of paper down in front of me on the table. It was a phone list with all of the women that belonged to that group. Quickly scanning it, I saw Emma's number.

I felt a sense of relief. I looked up from the phone list and looked around the room for god, but he was gone.

When I walked out of the meeting, I saw Wayne. He had introduced me to Emma six months earlier. For some reason I'd never thought to ask Wayne for her number. I'd even had lunch with Wayne a few days before god told me to talk to Emma, but hadn't associated him with her. I took the phone list over to him and asked, "Wayne, is that Emma's number?" He said, "Yeah."

I pushed the phone sheet into my pocket and walked around outside the meeting talking to people. I introduced myself to a newcomer, and asked him how he was doing. He said he'd been clean and sober for a few days, and had a job interview, but no way to get there.

I said to him, "If you need a ride, just ask." He was too afraid to speak out so I yelled at the top of my voice, "This guy needs a ride to Chandler. Anybody going that way?" Nobody answered.

After waiting a few minutes for someone else to offer the newcomer a ride, I told him I'd give him a ride. This allowed me to postpone calling Emma on the phone while helping him get to his interview. When I dropped him off, I gave him a few dollars so he could ride the bus home.

He didn't ask for the money, I offered it to him. I was practicing being a giving person.

When I got home, I had no idea what I was going to say to Emma. Over the past week, I'd been thinking I could say this, I could say that, and just obsessing on all of this shit in my mind.

This obsessive thinking hadn't helped. I still had no idea what to say when I called Emma.

Refusing to go through the whole internal dialog of what I'm going to say to her again, I picked up the phone and called her.

Remember, this is a woman that I have never talked to for more than 2 or 3 minutes, because I get anxious. These feelings come up when I'm around her, and I've got to get the hell away from her.

Anyway, I called her on the phone and I said, “Hi,” and I asked her if she knew who I was. She answered, “Yeah, I’ve had people telling me you were trying to call me.” Hearing this, I got pissed off, because I had worked to get this woman’s number, and she had blown me off. She had been trying to block me.

She said, “What do you want? Why are you calling me?” I said, “God told me to call you.” There was a long pause as we both thought about what I’d said, and then I just started talking.

I told her the story I had shared with Ray at the deli on Saturday, about how I’d been dating this woman and, how as my dad got sicker and sicker, I never thought to take the woman to the hospital with me. I never thought to call her or tell her any of that. How, even when my dad died, I didn’t take her to the funeral.

As I shared this story of how I kept myself away from people, that knot in my stomach I felt every time I was near her grew. The longer I talked, the more uncomfortable I felt.

She just listened. When I got done telling the story she said, “I don’t know how that relates to me.” I said, “I don’t know either,” and feeling even more uncomfortable, I went right into another story.

I shared with her about being at the meeting two days earlier, when Linda celebrated her first year, and how I got so excited and it was so much fun, but there was no card or cake. I explained how my first reaction was to blame others, but how instead I’d quickly realized blaming them for something I hadn’t done either was just a way to ignore my faults.

As I shared this second story with her, the feeling of dread grew inside me. I became very anxious until finally the thoughts associated with the feelings came cresting over me.

Looking back, I don’t know whether she understood anything I said. I don’t know if the stories I shared with her had any effect on her life. Truthfully, I don’t care.

You see, when the thoughts came up with the feelings, I understood why god had told me to talk to Emma. I was done. I had received god's message, and just wanted to get off the phone.

I quickly switched gears and blurted out, "I know you're going through a lot of stuff right now with your mom being sick and everything else. I hope to see you around with a smile on your face," She said something about she was sure to be smiling in the future, but I don't know exactly what she said because I wasn't listening. Then I said "I've got to go," and hung up on her.

Once I got off the phone, waves of shame and guilt washed over me. I was ashamed of my behavior. I felt guilty because of the harm I'd done to others. The harm I'd done to myself.

Seeing my actions in a new light, I was saddened by the years I'd wasted. Knowing why I'd turned away from people, from women, I felt despair.

I just sat there for a while, because all of those years ago, when I was in that bathroom putting that needle in my arm and I was thinking, "I can't live like this," there was a second, more powerful, thought.

It had taken me a year or so to admit that it wasn't an accidental overdose, but that I was really trying to commit suicide that night. It had taken me almost 22 years to find the second thought running through my mind as I pushed the needle in.

The real thought. The thought standing between me and the people around me. The thought driving me to refuse to express my feelings with others. The reason I had to keep myself away from others.

Actually, I never forgot the idea, because I surely acted on it. I had just pushed it so far back in my mind that I couldn't see it.

Wrapped around the feelings was this simple memory. When I was sticking that needle in my arm for what I thought would be the last time, I was telling myself, “This will help her. When I die with this needle in my arm, it will help Anna.”

I sat there with tears running down my face thinking about being willing to kill myself to help the woman I loved. All of a sudden, I understood why I was unwilling to let anyone get close to me.

Understanding my actions, I began to forgive myself. It is sad that we have to hurt ourselves to learn forgiveness. I'd hurt myself enough.

One of the things I learned over the years I'd been going to meetings was I can get out of my shit by picking up the phone. So, I picked up the phone and I called my friend John.

When John answered, I said, “I feel like shit because I just had weird phone conversation with a woman, and my car's broken.” After a short pause, John said, “What's wrong with the car?” which is exactly what I wanted him to say.

We talked about the car for a while, and then moved on to his frustration about finding a doctor he liked. I told him about how I found my doctor, and told him if he didn't want his doctor, he could call mine.

After a few more minutes, I looked up at the clock and I realized I was going to be late for dinner with my mom. So, John and I set a date to work on my car, and I hung up.

I realized, when I was getting ready to go meet my mom at the restaurant, that I hadn't gotten her a present. I hadn't even gotten her a card.

Now I know, from past experience, that you can't buy Christmas cards the week after Christmas. The stores pull them off the shelf, which is kind of stupid because I don't think I'm the only one that waits until after the holiday to buy cards.

The feelings of guilt and shame started to come up, but I'd had enough guilt and shame for the day so I told myself, "You know, the hell with it. Just like with Fran, with the presents wrapped in craft paper because I didn't have any wrapping paper, the cards and presents aren't the real gift. The gift is us spending time together."

When I showed up at the restaurant, I told my mom, "I was going to get you a card, but I got so caught up in my life that I forgot." She said, "That's okay, we're going to have dinner together." So we sat and talked.

It was interesting. I sat and watched my niece. She's 18 years old. My niece sees herself as a girl who doesn't have good people skills. She thinks she doesn't know how to communicate well.

We talked for a while, and it turned out that I have friends who are very involved in the business she wants to go into. I told her, "Call me, and I'll hook you up with them and you can talk to them."

The waitress came up, and asked if we'd like to get dessert. My 18-year-old niece said, "I'd like a piece of key lime pie, but I'm not hungry right now. Can you put one in a to-go box for me?" This is from a woman who doesn't know how to express her wants.

Listening to her, I wondered to myself how many times I had denied my abilities. How many times I'd minimized my accomplishments, minimized myself.

After dinner, I went home, crawled into my bed, and fell asleep. I slept. It was the first time I'd slept all night in over a month. I was exhausted.

Tuesday, December 29th

I woke up the next morning after sleeping for 15 hours. I walked into my kitchen to find a pile of unopened newspapers lying on the floor, and thought to myself about the time I'd spent reading about the politicians desire to ruin my life, and the anger I'd felt at them.

Looking at the unread newspapers, I realized I don't care what the politicians do. Sure, my taxes will go up, and my healthcare options will change. But I'm living my life, and their crap, their machinations, their desire for power and attention really have no effect on me.

I have better things to do than get wrapped up in the actions of a bunch of insecure people who think they have the right, the obligation to control the smallest details of my life. The politicians no longer had the power to distract me from my life. More importantly, I no longer wanted to be distracted.

I left the papers on the floor, and sat down with a cup of coffee. During the past month, I'd realized I have all of these wonderful people in my life, and I felt gratitude for them.

But even with all these wonderful friends, I don't have a woman. Mark and I had talked about the values we provide to others in our relationships, so I made a list. I listed all the values that make me who I am.

I had learned that I could present different sides of me. I could be a giving person. I could be a caring person. A teacher. A student, and many other different roles.

Finishing with my list, I started a list of what I wanted in a woman. The things she'd do for me, with me, not because she wanted to be accepted by me, but because her actions spring from the core of her being.

I wrote that I want her to be caring, nurturing, a woman who wants to stand beside me when I'm faced with troubles.

I wrote she needs to be encouraging, and knowing I tend to get down on myself she will need to sometimes exhort me to higher heights.

I wrote that I needed a woman with passion. Not merely passion to be with me, but an interest in life. Her life.

Thinking more, I realized if I was predominantly a teacher, I needed a woman who would be my student. A woman I could share the things I'd learned with. I added curiosity to my list.

Knowing I like to learn new things too, I added that I wanted a woman who would find and share new things with me.

Remembering going out with women and feeling like I was dragging a brick along behind me on a leash, I added that she needs to be able to lead in addition to following.

I wrote that I need someone in my life like my friend Sheila, who can egg me on when I'm telling jokes, but would also be comfortable standing aside as I'm in the midst of everything.

A woman who would say, "Hey, do you need a drink?" and get me one; someone who's going to laugh at my jokes, even though she's heard them 1,000 times.

I wrote down these different values and defined how this woman would act. As I looked at the list of my behaviors, my actions, my values I saw they defined who I was. I saw becoming a teacher wasn't really a choice I'd made. It was the path that allowed me to be happiest in my life.

Looking down at my list of the woman's attributes, I thought, "You know, if this is her dominant personality, if she's happy she's going to be working in a specific job."

So, I looked at the list and I started thinking about the different kinds of jobs a woman with these values would end up in. My first thought was a nurse, but decided nurses heal sick people, and I don't need healing.

Then I thought a bartender would be doing this kind of stuff, but "No, the bartender's on the other side of the bar."

Then I thought, "A Waitress?" "No, most of the waitresses are women doing things because they want to do something else, or they're waitresses because they can't do anything else. They all aren't happy in their lives."

“If not a waitress or a bartender, how about a woman who owns a restaurant, the hostess, the woman who makes sure everyone has a good time, makes sure the place runs smoothly and is comfortable as a part of the group or standing off to the side?”

BAMN!!! “I know a woman who does all that... Hailey!”

Jumping up from the table, I immediately called Hailey on the phone to make sure she was at her restaurant. She answered the phone, and when I said I wanted to come by and see her said, “Come down!” because she was excited. She’s always excited. That’s a part of her personality that appeals to me. I said I’d be down a little later, and got off the phone.

My friend Everett had told me a few weeks earlier that I smelled like a washcloth that had been used to clean out ashtrays. So I bought fabric softener sheets, and got some shampoo with fragrance. Until I can quit smoking, I can at least smell like an ashtray or a washcloth used to wipe out an ashtray that’s been soaking in applesauce or something sweet.

Anyway, I showered and shaved, but I didn’t get dressed up. I just wore the jeans and the shirt I would normally wear. On my way out the door, I saw a ratty, million-dollar bill I’ve had for 12 years. I use it as a bookmark. It’s creased, has coffee stains on it, and the corners are all frayed from me jamming it between my teeth, trying to pick food out of them.

Looking at the fake bill I thought, “Hailey will like this.” So, I picked up the million-dollar bill, and drove over to her restaurant.

When I got there, I walked in and said, “Here Hailey, this is for you. Merry Christmas,” as I handed her the million-dollar bill. She smiled and laughed, then went off around the restaurant showing it to all the different people in the restaurant saying things like, “This is the last time you’re going to eat here, because I’m rich. I’m going to close the restaurant and move to Tahiti,” and, “Look what Terry gave me for Christmas. Now I can get that fancy car I’ve always wanted.”

Back when I used to see Hailey regularly, I liked to sit in the corner so I could watch her work. So I went and sat at a corner table where I could look out over the whole restaurant and watched her run around entertaining her guests with the million-dollar bill.

After a few minutes she'd shared the bill with everyone in the place, so she came over and we got to talking. We hadn't talked in seven years, and had a bit of catching up to do.

We talked about what had happened over the years since we'd last seen each other.

We'd talk for a few minutes, and then she'd excuse herself to take care of another diner. Then she'd make her way back over to me and we'd start talking about another subject.

After a while, I asked her about her clothes. She told me that she's not into clothes, she's into outfits. She explained that she gets up and decides each morning that she's going to dress up as a flight attendant, a stewardess, a librarian, a school teacher or whatever else she thinks of based on her mood. She isn't interested in the clothes, it's the outfits that she likes.

That day Hailey was in a stewardess outfit. She told me how she put together the outfit she was wearing. Why she selected that color scarf instead of another one. Why the shoes were the right ones, and all the other little details,

After about seven minutes of explaining how she put together her outfit, Hailey stopped and looked up at me shyly. Just a little look from the corner of her eye as if to say, "Is he really listening to me talk about my outfit?"

When she stopped and gave me the questioning look, I realized this is like Alan showing me his trains. Like Jerry showing me his bicycle. This is like me sharing my collection with people. The only difference is she's wearing her collection.

Fascinating.

I looked up at Hailey, and, while waving my arms for emphasis, said, “Tell me more. Why that particular bracelet?” She lit up with a big smile and pointed out how the bracelet matched the color of the buttons on her vest.

Hailey wound down a bit so I asked her a question, “When I saw you a couple weeks ago you were wearing a jockey suit. . .” She interrupted me, and said, “No, it wasn’t a jockey suit, it was a polo outfit.”

Hearing this I immediately understood the difference, and said, “So jockey is it’s a race and you’re all going around the track competing and all that, whereas polo...” Again she interrupted me, and said, “Yeah, polo is we’re all on horses and we’re bouncing off each other and it’s the scrum.” I said, “Cool!” She looked at me as if she was thinking, “No one ever got that before.”

So, we talked for a while as I ate, and the people working in the restaurant remembered me – or at least some of them did – from years ago, when I used to hang out with Hailey.

Looking around the restaurant, I said, “You’ve remodeled the place!” The last time I was there, it was dark and there were street lamps inside. It looked like a street café in Paris.

Now the place is bright and open. Everything’s light-colored. Hailey grabbed me by the hand and while pulling me up from my chair said, “Come on, I’ll give you a tour.” She took me around and showed me how all the details fit together.

It was like her clothes becoming outfits in her mind as she selected them from her closet. Only with the restaurant it was the tables, the chairs, the floor tiles. Everything from the tablecloths to the little painted wallet-like things the dinner checks go in is designed to carry a subtle message. Together they set a mood.

By the front door of the restaurant is a wall of plaques. Many restaurants you go to have a plaque, or maybe two, on the wall proudly displayed. Plaques that say, "Best of Phoenix," etc. . . and are given away by newspapers and dining guides. Hailey’s got a bunch of these awards.

Oddly, she has them hidden behind the door. And when I asked about them, she didn't seem very proud of them.

Looking at the somewhat hidden awards, I realized it's not the need for recognition by newspapers and critics that drives her. It's the happiness she puts into her diner's lives for the time they come in to eat that makes Hailey happy.

After showing me the restaurant, we wandered into her office. Sitting there on her desk was the little silver Buddha I gave her all those years ago. Hailey saw me looking at it, and asked, "Oh, do you remember this?"

I picked it up, and, while looking at it, I told her, "Yeah, I remember this. I don't like it."

Hailey gave me a curious look and asked, "Why not?"

I said, "Because all of the other things I did for you -- sending you Elvis when you signed the contract on this place, helping you get the dog, the vases and everything else. . . I did that because I wanted you to be happy. Because it made me happy to put a smile on your face."

"But this little Buddha was different. I gave you this thing because I wanted you to like me." I put the statute down, and walked out of her office.

I walked over to the cash register and asked for the check. Hailey said, "No, you don't have to pay. It's on me. Merry Christmas."

I walked out the door of the restaurant amazed. I don't know if Hailey and I will end up as more than occasional friends. The truth is, it doesn't matter what happens between us because I know exactly where to find other women just like her.

Certainly there are other women like Hailey running restaurants. I know there are school teachers teaching, lawyers working on legal contracts, real estate agents helping people find the

homes of their dreams, writers entertaining and instructing their readers, artists creating artwork, and many other professions that fit my list.

The woman who will share my life is out there somewhere. She's working in a job that makes her happy. All I need to do is get out there into the world, and live my life while keeping my eyes open for her.

Maybe you know her?

Terry Gibbs

January 5, 2010

PS Thank you for reading my story. My work is done. I was told by god to share this story with others. He didn't tell me to actively market the story, so I won't. If you've enjoyed the story, you can tell others about it. I've made it easy for you to share this story with others by placing links on the website that will allow you to tell others about this book quickly.

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