BORROWED EYES *and* FEET

Finding Enlightenment After Rage



T.E. CORNER

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After Rage

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This book was written for me and dedicated
to you—my parents and my brothers.
Always know that I love you!

A heartfelt thank-you to Dawn Corner for her gift.
Cover artwork created with love by artbydawncorner.com.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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Foreword

The painting took many iterations to capture Tom. From capturing the path he has traveled while contemplating dark times, I ultimately thought of the illuminating, giving, thoughtful path he has carved for himself. Shaking the past, a willingness to forgive and moving forward out of the forest, the painting portrays Tom with renewed strength, embracing truth, giving and receiving love with a full heart.

When Tom asked me to create a cover for his book I was first honored then worried about whether I could actually do it justice. I hope this cover portrays all that you are and shares your journey with the world. I am so grateful Tom that you have believed in me and my talent and allowed me to be part of your journey.

Peace, Love, & God Bless,

Dawn Corner

Preface

> We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.
>
> —*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

This work is a personal reflection on a life journey from anger and rage toward a higher awareness, or a state of enlightenment. The title of the book manifested during a morning meditation on December 2, 2016. I pondered the meaning of this idea for quite some time before deciding to capture it in words, and to this day I contemplate these words in search of a deeper meaning. When I think I have

it all figured out, something magical reveals itself and I return to a search for meaning once again. In my quest to understand the symbolism and the meaning of eyes and of feet, I found the following interpretations.

> For eyes and ears are senses without sense, and what they see and hear they but report. It is not they that hear and see, but you, who put together every jagged piece, each senseless scrap and shred of evidence, and made a witness to the world you want. Let not the body's ears and eyes perceive these countless fragments seen within the gap that you imagined, and let them persuade their maker his imaginings are real (*A Course in Miracles*).

Eyes

Louise Hay

> Known as one of the founders of the self-help movement, Hay published her first book, *Heal Your Body*, in 1976, long before it was fashionable to discuss the connection between the mind and the body.
>
> The eyes "represent the capacity to see clearly—past, present, and future" (Hay 1984).

Gautama Buddha

> Gautama is the primary figure in Buddhism. He is recognized by Buddhists as an enlightened teacher who attained full Buddhahood, and shared his insights to help sentient beings end rebirth and suffering. (www.Quora.com)
>
> Buddhists take the third eye as the symbol of spiritual awakening of knowledge and wisdom. While the Hindus have a belief of the third eye being a channel to the inner and hidden power, the

western symbolize the third eye as the symbol of second sight or clairvoyance. (www.buddha-heads.com)

Jesus

Jesus is the central figure of Christianity. Christians believe him to be the Son of God and the awaited Messiah (Christ) prophesied in the Old Testament. (https://en.wikipedia.org)

The eye symbolizes the omnipresence and omniscience of God, who watches over all things. (www.ReligionFacts.com)

The eye is inside a triangle, and surrounded by rays of light, with the triangle representing the holy trinity and the whole symbol meaning God's omnipresence and all-seeing eye watching over creation. (http://consciousreporter.com)

Feet

Louise Hay

The feet "represent our understanding—of ourselves, our life, of others" (Hay 1984).

Gautama Buddha

The footprints of Buddha are along the path from aniconic to iconic which starts at symbols like the wheel and moves to statues of Buddha. These footprints are meant to remind that Buddha was present on earth and left a spiritual "path" to be followed. (https://en.wikipedia.org/)

Symbolizing the grounding of the transcendent, feet have been objects of respect in India long before Buddhism. According to Buddhist legend, after the Buddha attained enlightenment,

his feet made an imprint in the stone where he stepped. (www.ReligionFacts.com)

Whoever looks upon the footprints of the Buddha "shall be freed from the bonds of error, and conducted upon the Way of Enlightenment" (www.ShaolinDisciplesUnion.com).

Jesus

The feet represent that phase of the understanding which connects one with the outer, or manifest, world and reveals the right relationship toward worldly conditions in general. The washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus therefore typifies a cleansing process, or a denial of personality and materiality. (www.truthunity.net)

You and I read this book with our eyes, but the message resonates on a vibrational level that can be experienced far beyond the limitations the physical body presents. We are in this physical, human realm for what feels like a long time, but it is a very brief experience in the eyes of eternity.

A recent TED Talk about the exploration of Mars revealed an interesting fact regarding time on that planet: a Martian day appears to be forty minutes longer than a day here on Earth. Nagin Cox, systems engineer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, explained this finding and commented that NASA engineers needed to create a Mars watch calibrated to reflect the nearly twenty-five-hour Martian day versus the twenty-four-hour Earth day (www.Ted.com).

This finding stuck with me and still teases me. How can a day on Mars be longer than a day on Earth? My next question: What time is it on Saturn or Neptune? Apparently a day on Saturn is approximately ten Earth hours. A day on Mercury is about fifty-nine Earth days.

We are taught about the concept of time from a very early age. Our lives are defined and based on this concept. The word *life* is often defined, or referred to, as a period of time. My daughters, who are happy and free, have a limited concept of time unless I bring it to

their attention. When it is time to go somewhere or to do something, we tend to become annoyed and downright angry if, or when, our children or other people make us late for appointments, work, school, or wherever it is we need to be.

Children live their lives in the moment but eventually grow up and somehow learn to live in a state of constant worry about what they did yesterday and what they will do tomorrow. We nudge the present moment to the side, making it something of an anomaly, until we return full circle later in life to try to recapture the gift of those moments.

The illusion of time correlates with the illusion of ourselves that we create. I have learned that although I have been blessed with eyes to see and with feet to travel, I do not need them to do these things. We have the ability to see and to travel beyond our physical limitations if we allow it.

As you read this book, please consider your level of awareness and your view of the world and of life. It took me quite a while, but I decided to change how I view the world, and now I embrace a knowing that all things are possible.

Introduction

> Reason will tell you that the only way to escape from misery is to recognize it and go the other way.
>
> —*A Course in Miracles*

The day we were born marked the moment when we allowed the fascinating and glorious blessing of life here on earth to become manifest. Who we are right now is defined by knowledge and experience, or learning, gathered over our lifetimes. I made a decision to stop using my past learning to define who I am now and who I will become.

This quote from *A Course in Miracles* sums it up best: "Remember nothing that you taught yourself, for you were badly taught. And who would keep a senseless message in his mind, when he can learn and preserve a better one? When ancient memories of hate appear, remember that their cause is gone."

As you read this book, I ask you to open your mind and to remove judgment so you can see a world where all things are possible. As Marianne Williamson wrote in her glorious book *A Return to Love*, "We are all meant to shine, as children do."

When we were children, all things were possible because we did not know much about resistance or fear. As children we did not allow our past to hold us hostage from the gift of joy in the present moment.

Before you embark on this journey in the following pages, I ask you to think about your past and to release whatever is holding you back from your dreams, your desires, and your ability to accomplish anything. We will walk together through anger, hatred, tears, and suffering on the way to forgiveness, self-acceptance, and an enlightened way of being.

For practically my entire life, anger was always close at hand. I was ashamed of it, afraid of it, and not even sure whether it was okay to express it. So what did I do? I suppressed it. I never acknowledged or accepted my anger or myself in light of my resilient and confident exterior. But one can hold back that rage for only so long before it erupts, revealing its ugly head. For the longest time self-deceit and the facade I maintained prevented me from going the other way.

Writing this book, I realized my life had become one of transformation for the good. I invested in the deliberate practice of meditation and of reciting affirmations hour upon hour, day upon day, over many years. Partnered with the positive influence of other people, the result was a life transformed.

Deliberate practice is a term attributed to K. Anders Ericsson, Conradi Eminent Scholar and professor of psychology at Florida State University. I became aware of the term when Malcolm Gladwell reflected on the ten-thousand-hour rule in his book *Outliers*.

In the past I never understood that I had a choice and could

go the other way. I lived an illusion of doubt, allowing my past to dictate my future. If these words sound absurd to you and you find yourself thinking, *This is silly* or *I don't need any of this peace, love, and enlightenment nonsense*, I am glad you are here and urge you to continue reading. These thoughts emanate from fear, not from peace and acceptance, dictating practically everything we do or don't do and ultimately defining who we are in this life we have been blessed with.

Happy and proud to be going the other way, I embrace the knowledge that all things are possible because I know who walks beside me on the path I have chosen. I had no other choice, because a life of anger was no longer a life worth living. I am honored that you are here with me as together we go the other way.

One

My Year of Enlightenment

Do not remain in conflict, for there *is* no war without attack.
The fear of God is fear of life, and not of death.

—*A Course in Miracles*

I call my forty-seventh year my year of enlightenment. This year was chosen for me. Don't ask how, but just know that my forty-seventh year has stood out in my mind for quite some time. I made a breakthrough in the 366 days of that leap year after a lifetime of struggle, anger, and self-doubt. I cannot pinpoint one moment or person responsible for this empowering change; it didn't happen

overnight but manifested itself after many years of practice, study, and introspection. I will reveal my motivation in the pages to come.

The title of this book, *Borrowed Eyes and Feet*, came to me during a morning meditation on December 2 of that year. The meaning was not clear to me at that moment, but the words were heavy and remained with me until I commenced writing the work you now hold in your hands.

You will be given a glimpse into a life of fear, doubt, and anger. This story, told in chronological order, is a recollection of experiences and events from my life that occurred during my year of enlightenment.

Before you read any further, I ask that you pick up this book, pull it to your chest, and hold it close to your heart. Wrap your arms around the cover as though you were hugging a loved one. If you feel resistance or embarrassment about the foolishness of this exercise, do it anyway. Your resistance and embarrassment are fear in disguise. Dr. Susan Jeffers revealed this in her book *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* (1988), showing how we can turn fear into personal power and action. Next, close your eyes and breathe deeply through your nose. As the air fills your lungs and belly, flowing through your body, feel the overwhelming sense of love and peace within you. Hold your breath for a few seconds, and then release it. Feel your body relax.

I am glad you are here. I am honored to be sharing this story with you and equally frightened about what I will reveal in these pages. Writing *Borrowed Eyes and Feet* brought to mind the far too many moments in my life when I did not pause to enjoy the miracles that surrounded me. As the protagonists in our own stories, we are subject to distractions that make us lose sight of the miracles of love, laughter, and abundance available to us each moment of every day.

Stepping back to capture my life provided me with the opportunity to see it clearly. I thank Dr. Wayne Dyer, my hero and mentor, author of *I Can See Clearly Now* (2014) and many other powerful books. In his classic book *Be Here Now* (2010), yogi and spiritual teacher Ram Dass captured the power of living 100 percent of the time in

the present moment. I am on a similar path and hope we reach the destination of now together.

The names of many people who have guided me on my journey appear throughout this book. My foundation has always been my parents and the role I played when I chose to show up in their lives. Please know that the return to love Marianne Williamson writes of often means walking through the fires of suffering, anger, and rage before reaching our destinations. I have accepted my path and have a clear understanding of the chapters in my life—past, present, and future. I am stronger because of where I have walked.

Two
The Day I Died—My New Beginning

> For miracles are merely change of purpose from hurt to healing.
>
> — *A Course in Miracles*

It's a quiet Tuesday morning just three days into the new year. I sit alone in my office with my legs crossed and my eyes closed. I am deep in meditation, so deep that what I envision appears to be reality. I see myself desperately grasping a shard of glass between my fingers. The tip of my thumbnail is white from the grip I maintain on the glass,

which is cemented to the edge of my forefinger. I observe dozens of scars hidden beneath the hair covering my arms. I stroke the hair of my left forearm to uncover the letters *DIE* carved into my flesh. For decades they have been sunk deep in my skin as a constant reminder of who I once was. For far too long I carried this past with me in anger and shame.

I continue inspecting my arms, rolling up the sleeve on my left arm to reveal a trail of scars appearing to be without end. The farther up I go, the less hair there is to cover up my past hurt, revealing my scars for all to see. *Thirty, thirty-one.* Releasing my sleeve, I focus on my opposite arm. *Thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four.* I continue counting until I pause to gaze at my initials, *TC*, carved into my right forearm, surrounded by scars—all the result of self-inflicted slashes from a razor long ago.

My scars glisten in the light while I replay past hurts in my mind. *Thirty-five, thirty-six* … I grasp the tender flesh on the inside of my bicep between my fingertips to see my skin bend with each squeeze. My scars are the exception. They are rigid, not as forgiving as the rest of my skin. The tighter I squeeze my skin together, the deeper the scars seem to dive into my flesh. My wounds seem to be reopening to reveal my past and to remind me of my self-hatred long ago. Even after all this time I still haven't quite landed on the exact number of scars; I usually lose count after seventy or so. I've worn them in shame for decades, keeping them hidden to avoid inquiries from acquaintances and friends, afraid to face my fears.

I have a lingering fantasy about a time of revelation when I feel safe enough to unveil my scars. I cling to a faint hope that someone will appear with an answer and with understanding. I imagine this person's hands lovingly placed upon my arms, caressing my scars and healing my pain. Angelic words arise from within, telling me all is well. But this fantasy has eluded me for far too long now.

I cannot keep my scars hidden forever. It's quite a task to do so, especially in the summer when wearing long-sleeve shirts in ninety-degree heat invites questions. Every now and again I field questions

from those who are curious, typically children. "Hey, where did those scars come from?" or "What happened to your arms?"

Even after all these years there is still that moment of awkward silence while I ponder the question in search of *the* answer, the one that will release me from the shame and judgment that are soon to come. "They are scratches from a dog" is my usual reply.

My white lie reply often becomes even more obtuse when I jokingly claim that I wrestled with a bear or a tiger. Then the conversation usually goes elsewhere or a parent interjects, telling the youngster not to ask such questions. Whew! I am off the hook again, still avoiding my truth.

Some youngsters press on, though, unable to resist their intense curiosity. This is the point in the dialogue when I feel a little bit of pressure, a sense of shame and embarrassment that will soon overwhelm me.

This strange power of innocent curiosity that a child wields amazes me and quite often intimidates adults. A child's natural persistence makes a conversation feel more like an interrogation—to the point where most grown-ups become visibly uncomfortable. They often reprimand children and tell them to stop their incessant questioning.

Even though this sort of questioning makes me uncomfortable, I am equally intrigued by it. Why do children ask so many questions with absolutely no fear? They have no ulterior motive and simply seek understanding. I wonder if there is a point in time when that curiosity deserts us. Do our fears repress it so much that it is silenced forever? What changes our view of the world from ease and acceptance to trepidation and judgment? Do children persist out of sincere curiosity and love while we adults resist because of our judgments and fears?

When a child's questioning endures, I am pushed into a corner, and my vulnerability leads to my next canned response. I might say, "They are scars from when I was a kid. I did the silly things most boys do. These were not the smartest moves, and I have these scars to show for them."

At that point, the dialogue typically ends awkwardly. I am

avoiding the truth, but I am not certain anyone is prepared to hear me say, "When I was younger, I didn't like myself much. As a matter of fact, I hated myself, so I found a way to release my hatred and anger by cutting myself with razors and burning myself with cigarettes."

Facing our fears and unearthing the truth can hurt on many levels. It can also be the breakthrough necessary for healing to begin. This is beautifully reflected in a line from *A Course in Miracles*: "For miracles are merely change of purpose from hurt to healing."

I cut myself under the delusion that I could avoid my pain. I created physical pain to mask my mental pain. All I wanted was an answer, something that would cut to the truth I was seeking. My anger festered during my youth, eventually infecting my adulthood.

I misperceived all of my parents' heartfelt expressions of love and concern as insincere garbage, especially because it came from people who couldn't understand and whom I held responsible for my pain in the first place.

Regrettably, the thousands of hugs, kisses, and "I love yous" my parents gave me fell short because of my inability to receive any of these things. My parents were in a predicament. Unable to understand my plight, how could they express any sort of empathy? No matter how much effort they put forth, I didn't allow myself to receive their love, their advice, or any attempt they made to understand my situation. I left them stranded in a place of helplessness and hopelessness. How in the world could I expect anyone to understand my insanity?

I had been running from the truth, fearing I could not share it with anyone because I would face ridicule and indifference. This inevitably changed the way I saw the world.

Still deep in meditation, I envision the piece of glass grasped tightly between my forefinger and thumb, causing my fingers to ache and tremble. Tears paint my cheeks in the sadness and suffering of my past married with the happiness of my new beginning.

I firmly press the razor-sharp glass into my wrist. Beginning just below the palm of my right hand, slicing through my flesh straight down the center of my wrist, the glass glides between the tendons surrounding the median nerve. The small indent formed by the

tendons in my wrist creates a runway to guide the glass through my flesh.

My delicate skin gives way to this intruder without resistance like a speedboat ripping through the water. The boat's wake affects everything in its path. Nearby vessels suddenly rock up and down and side to side. Then, just as suddenly as the water is torn apart, peace is restored and the ocean again becomes one.

Tendons and ligaments are now exposed, an image my eyes were never meant to see, and I wince from the pain. Blood soaks my fingers with the dark red hue of life. Or is this my death? Am I cutting through my harsh exterior to reveal my true self? For decades I have known who was underneath this exterior, but my anger and fear prevented me from revealing this identity. Relief soon follows the excruciating pain. This is the moment when peace is restored and I become one again. I have been awakened to my new beginning.

I snap out of my deep meditative silence, returning to consciousness. I feel free, as though a burden has been lifted. The storm clouds of my painful past have broken to reveal a shining light of love.

Three
I'm Bad

I no longer allow my past to hold me hostage from my future and from the gift of the present.

—*T. E. Corner*

It is February of the year of my enlightenment, my birthday month, and I am in elementary school standing at the front of the gymnasium, eagerly anticipating the crowd of students that will pack the place in just a moment. *Oh my gosh! What am I doing here? I will be in front of the entire school. I have to go to the bathroom. Is my zipper down? Are they going to laugh at me?* Random thoughts dart

about my mind. The room suddenly seems warmer and I feel myself starting to sweat.

I gaze outside from a window that protects me from the cold winter air. A piece of paper, maybe a student's lost homework assignment, dances in the wind, floating past my view and off into the horizon. Frost lines the edges of the windows like a matted picture frame, a gentle reminder that winter awaits those who venture outside.

The gymnasium remains quiet as I anticipate the arrival of the students, but my mind shouts with fear and doubt. These thoughts collide in my head like teenagers pushing and shoving around a mosh pit at a Godsmack concert. Around and around they go in a violent dance. Any attempts to leave the pit are futile, making the scene even more threatening.

People form a wall around the mosh pit, adding to the frenzy. Some watch in fascination at the insanity within, others try to drum up the courage to enter the pit, and some are there to push people back in. I try to force fear and doubt out of the mosh pit of my mind, but these feelings return to the center stronger than before. With deliberate practice I have learned how to concentrate and to shift my focus to affirmations that counter thoughts of fear and doubt.

But all too often fear and doubt overwhelm my affirmations, which eventually fade into the fray. Though most of us don't realize it, this is the way our minds operate. We unknowingly allow negativity, fear, to rule the day. When we attempt to throw affirmations into the mix and immediately experience failure, we give up and allow things to remain the same.

More than ever before, I find this an intriguing dance. I attempted the positive thought approach many times, and it didn't work. I never gave up, though, and now my awareness of my thoughts, both positive and negative, has been heightened. Negative thoughts still rear their ugly heads every so often, attempting to stomp around the mosh pit of my mind. But my awareness of them and how I deal with them are more like a game these days.

I know I can shift my focus from the bad to the good by allowing positive thoughts to overpower the negative. I acknowledge any fearful

thoughts entering the mosh pit of my mind, and then I introduce even stronger affirmations into the mix. This practice overwhelms ornery thoughts, which eventually dissipate into my vast array of affirmations.

I have altered the mosh pit of my mind over several years through the recitation of affirmations and a concentrated focus on my thoughts. My mind is now brimming with thoughts of a positive sort. Whenever fear and doubt attempt to intrude, affirmations quickly enter to nudge out the negativity.

If you saw a peaceful mosh pit, you might think it pretty lame and look elsewhere for fun. Those seeking peace and acceptance may stray from this path, fearing that without struggle, pain, and suffering their lives have no meaning. I once embraced this flawed approach, believing I must bleed, struggle, and suffer to be worthy of anything good. Eventually I tired of this approach to life and decided to go the other way toward a life of ease and allowing. Now a universe of amazing opportunities, happiness, and abundance has been revealed to me. It was there all along, but I didn't allow it to shine through.

Snapping back into the present moment, I am aware that in a matter of minutes I will be speaking to more than one hundred children at Hayshire Elementary School about my recent book, *Positive Thoughts, Positive Life!* Amid my thoughts and affirmations I rehearse my presentation in my head. I realize it may not go exactly as I planned, but if I get my message across I know the talk will be a success.

I float a smile toward a teacher who leads a group of students into the gymnasium. Boys and girls flow through the doorway single file. Watching the children enter in such an orderly fashion, I am reminded of a procession of ants heading toward a newly discovered treat. One by one they march forward. Arriving at their destination, they snatch a morsel of nourishment to haul back to the colony. This morsel will not only benefit an individual ant but will contribute to the growth and development of the ant colony.

Snapping out of my daydream, I see the gymnasium overflowing with kids. Wow! More than one hundred eager children are looking

at me, whispering to one another or sharing a giggle. The silence of the afternoon gives way to excitement throughout the school. I can see it, feel it, and hear it. The sheer joy only a child exudes fills the air.

Today the students will hear about Kylie, the protagonist in the children's book *Positive Thoughts, Positive Life!* The book focuses on how Kylie achieves all she desires by reciting affirmations each day and by chronicling her dreams and desires in her *List for Life* journal. On this special day each student will receive a morsel of personal development to share with friends and family.

The assembly kicks off, and moments later I am introduced by the vice principal. Now it is my time to inspire. Holy Toledo! There I stand in front of the entire school. This is it; my moment has arrived. I click the remote control to start the presentation. Nothing happens. Oh no! After all I did to ensure I was ready, the clicker does not work! I feel a slight panic as I check the computer connection and resync the Bluetooth connection between the computer and the remote clicker. Still nothing happens.

The children sit patiently and stare—at me! Fear and doubt creep into my mind, telling me that I am stupid and that this assembly will be a failure. Oh no! I begin to sweat again.

Fortunately, this is not the first time I have experienced things going sideways at a big moment. I know that no matter how awful things seemed to be, I always survived. Many obstacles and challenges have come my way over the years, but I have learned how to talk myself through them. Now I allow them to roll away like the proverbial water off a duck's back.

The first rule I have learned is that people don't know anything is wrong unless I clue them in. The second rule is that no matter how bad or painful things seem to be, they aren't as bad as I make them out to be and they always work themselves out.

My mental pep talk begins, and I walk through the potential disaster. *I cannot get it wrong. Things happen for a reason. This will work out. I don't need the presentation slides anyway.* I finally figure a way around the technical difficulty. Getting past my fear of

failure, I look up and gaze upon a sea of smiling faces. The assembly commences. Whew! Disaster averted!

Jumping into the assembly, I share the themes from my book and relate them to experiences and challenges my daughters recently encountered. After a few slides and laughs from the kids, I share a story about my daughter Jordan and the frustration she felt after a recent spelling test.

A week earlier Jordan was studying for the test in her first-grade class. She practiced the words each night, spelling them correctly with relative ease. The day of the test arrived and she felt good about it, as did her mother and I. When I arrived home from work, my wife urged me to ask Jordan about her day at school, in particular about the spelling test.

Jordan walked into the kitchen, and I greeted her with a big hug and a kiss. Peering into her beautiful brown eyes, I asked, "Jordan, how was your spelling test today?"

"Okay," she replied.

"Well, what happened? How did you do?"

In a quiet, sad tone, she replied, "I got one word wrong."

"Really? What was the word?"

"Nutrition."

"What? You misspelled *nutrition*?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"How many words were on the test?" I asked.

"Twenty."

"Wow! You got one word wrong out of twenty, and the word you misspelled was *nutrition*?"

"Yes, Daddy," Jordan said with a sigh and a roll of her eyes.

"I am very impressed with how well you did, but you seem so sad. Why?" All the while I listened and looked into her eyes, trying to figure out what she was thinking.

"Jane didn't get any words wrong, and I got one word wrong."

I could sense her disappointment and her illusion of failure. My heart dropped. "Oh, sweetie! Please don't be so hard on yourself. It's okay."

Jordan's eyes glistened with tears. They were tears of fear—fear that everyone, teachers, parents, and grandparents, would be disappointed with her. In her mind that one little word was the difference between success and failure.

"Well, sweetie, first of all you got just one word wrong out of twenty. That is pretty awesome. I have a hard time even saying the word *nutrition*, let alone spelling it. There is no need to be upset. You know, there is a reason you misspelled the word."

"What?" she replied in a sarcastic and slightly annoyed tone.

"You misspelled it so that you will never forget how to spell *nutrition* ever again."

Jordan looked at me puzzled, still berating herself for her mistake. Hugging her, I said, "Please focus on all your great work and all the words you spelled right. There is no need to beat yourself up over this. Remember—you misspelled that word so you will never forget how to spell it. I love you and am proud of you!"

She ran off to play in her bedroom, and I called out, "Nutrition! I love you, Jordan!"

After sharing the story about Jordan's spelling test, I ask the students a question. "After my daughter Jordan misspelled the word *nutrition*, what do you think her self-talk was? What was she saying to herself about getting the word wrong?"

Hands shoot up toward the sky like rockets. I look to a little boy sitting a few rows in front of me to my left. "Yes, what do you think she was saying to herself?" I ask him.

The boy shouts out, "I'm bad." I repeat his words to the students.

I point to a little girl. "What do you think she was saying to herself?"

"I'm stupid," she responds. I repeat her reply so the group can hear.

Suddenly the auditorium is filled with self-doubt and a sense of failure. Astonished by the responses, I wonder if most children berate themselves in this manner. How in the world do they learn self-doubt at such an early age? I'm shocked that the children in the auditorium feel the same way as my daughter. Sadly, this was how I felt when I was a first-grader, and I carried this negative self-talk into adulthood.

These amazing children have so much to teach me—although, when I heard the words "I'm bad," deep down I wept for myself, for many of these children, and even for my own. Still, I understand their self-doubt because I grew up carrying so much negative baggage myself. I keep calling on the children to hear their responses, and finally, to my delight, a little girl shouts out, "I did my best."

That is it. She has it. "I did my best!" I enthusiastically repeat the words for all to hear. "Yes! That is what Jordan learned to say to herself and exactly what Kylie, in the book *Positive Thoughts, Positive Life!*, would say to herself. 'I give my best, and my best is good enough. I'm worthy of the best.'"

This young lady has made my day. She has learned a simple little secret, which is to focus on the positive and not to chastise herself. I have delivered my message and have done what I came to do. I now know the assembly is a success.

At this moment the Amazing A's of awareness, accepting, allowing, affirmations, and abundance are born. After sharing a few laughs and several more stories with the students, I explain how they can live a life like Kylie's. "Becoming **a**ware of our thoughts and emotions is an important first step. **A**ccepting, or understanding, ourselves and our emotions is the next important step. Our **a**wareness and **a**cceptance of these feelings **a**llow them to flow, helping us to let go of negative thoughts and to replace them with **a**ffirmations. Even feeling angry is okay. It is a normal reaction, but holding on to anger can be hurtful over time. Sometimes we might even feel the urge to yell, which is okay as long as we are not yelling at someone else, like a teacher, a parent, or a fellow student. Once we accept our feelings and allow them to flow, we can introduce **a**ffirmations, or positive thoughts, to replace any negative self-talk. This will open the way to an **a**bundance of love and happiness.

"In the story *Positive Thoughts, Positive Life!*, Kylie experiences frustration, challenges, fears, and doubt, but she knows her happiness and success come from deep within through self-acceptance. So the next time you feel doubt or a sense of failure, pay attention to how you feel about yourself. If you are not being nice to yourself, be aware

of these feelings and try to replace this doubt with positive thoughts or affirmations."

Wrapping up the assembly, I flash examples of my own affirmations, as well as those from the book, on the screen for the students to see and to repeat out loud.

I give my best and my best is good enough.

Everything always seems to work out for me.

I am worthy of the best.

I know I can and I believe in myself.

I am proud of myself.

I attract happiness and abundance into my life.

The assembly has been an amazing and powerful experience for me. If we are honest and brave enough to look deep within and to listen to our inner chatter, we will realize that, more often than we'd like to admit, we sabotage ourselves with negative self-talk.

Thirty-three days later I am honored with an opportunity to speak to another group of students. This time I address the students at my daughters' school, Russell Elementary School. The kids are energetic and excited as they flow into the gymnasium single file, just like the students at Hayshire. This time I stand in the back of the gymnasium as the principal introduces me. I float through a sea of children toward the front of the gymnasium to kick off another amazing assembly, which will be strikingly similar to the prior month's gathering.

The gymnasium is alive with an energy and excitement only children seem to exude. As was the case a month earlier, technical difficulties arise, but I forge ahead with my presentation. The dialogue flows just as it did at Hayshire Elementary School, and I share the story about Jordan misspelling the word *nutrition*. This time, though, she is in the audience to hear me tell her story.

"After my daughter Jordan misspelled *nutrition*, what do you think her self-talk was? What was she saying to herself about getting the word wrong?" I ask the students. The replies are much the same as a month ago.

Hands shoot up. I call on a boy a few rows from the front on my left, just like the month before. "Yes, what do you think she said to herself?"

"I'm bad." He gives exactly the same response the young boy at last month's assembly gave. I am astounded. I repeat his words for the students to hear.

I point to another boy. "I'm stupid," he replies.

"I am no good," another youngster shouts out.

The gymnasium suddenly fills with self-doubt, just as it did at the prior month's assembly. Thankfully, a moment later, a little girl blurts out, "I gave it my best."

I enthusiastically repeat her words. "She gave it her best! Yes! That is exactly what Kylie from the book *Positive Thoughts, Positive Life!* would say." Once again, my message has been received. The assembly is a success.

In the days and weeks that follow I replay the dialogue in my head, sharing it with friends, family members, and colleagues. I am astonished by the children's replies and by the extent to which self-doubt controls their thoughts. Where does this come from? Why? How can I help children, even my children, remove this self-doubt and negative self-talk so they can live fulfilling lives?

This experience speaks to me on so many levels. Was I like these children? Did fear and doubt enter my life when I was a first-grader? After speaking at the elementary schools, I understand that because of the negative baggage I carried for far too long, I have not yet accomplished all I desire in life.

From my experiences at Hayshire and Russell elementary schools a new affirmation arose: "I no longer allow my past to hold me hostage from my future and from the gift of the present."

Gift for You

What do you say to yourself every moment of every day? If you find yourself in thoughts of fear or doubt, can you reframe these thoughts and create an affirmation instead? This will allow your positive thoughts to flow, and amazing things will happen! But you must pay attention and recite your affirmations morning and night and in between.

Four
Shadow

I take another step towards love. With each step forward I confidently walk past my fears, leaving them behind as I walk towards the light of love.

— *T. E. Corner*

Spring is officially upon us! The days are bright, the sun hovers above longer and longer with each passing day, and the warmth of the season creates a frenzy of activity. Some people are walking their dogs, while others are out for a jog or a stroll in the park. Flower blossoms paint a masterpiece on the canvas of this spring morning as dozens of birds perform a symphony, announcing a new season.

A cool breeze kisses my cheek as I take my morning walk. My attention is diverted by my shadow, created by the bright sun rising on the horizon. I am enthralled by this shadow, which seems to be many times taller than I stand. It makes me appear like a powerful giant roaming the earth. Depending on the direction I take, my shadow follows me, walks ahead of me to lead the way, or remains faithfully by my side.

Lost in the moment, I am mesmerized by every move my shadow makes. My shadow mirrors me as though it is mocking me, and my morning bliss is shattered by a sudden realization. For far too many years I ran from my fears, allowed them to lead me, or let them remain by my side, influencing every single thing I did, for the worse. Whether I walked, ran, or remained motionless, a shadow of fear and rage taunted me all those years.

Gazing at my shadow, I did not fear it, for I knew it could do no harm. So why would we spend our days running from a shadow? It doesn't exist physically. We can't touch it, hear it, smell it, or even taste it. However, our eyes allow us to see this illusion.

I ran from my fears and retaliated in rage based on what I perceived to be hatred and attacks against me. Lesson 135 from *A Course in Miracles* captures my flawed view with the following words, "If I defend myself I am attacked." Just like my shadow, my fears are an illusion. When the sun sets, our shadows no longer exist. If we could not see, would our shadows exist? In light there is no darkness. In darkness there is no light. How could I get lost in the darkness of my shadow while in the presence of light?

Day in and day out the sun is always there, lighting up our lives from ninety million miles away. It is a reminder of the abundance all around us. No matter the day or the time of year, the sun shines bright in the heavens. Storm clouds may mask its brilliance for a moment, but the sun is unchanged. If we can rise above the clouds we will always find the sun awaiting us. Like the enduring love of a mother and father, the sun's light never ceases. The sun remains steadfast, illuminating our lives.

Today on my walk outside I am greeted by the same beautiful

sun, and I am escorted by the same reliable shadow. Nothing about the sun or my shadow has changed, but my perception certainly has. I made a choice to change how I view my shadow and my life. For as long as the sun shines down upon me, my shadow will remain. Much like my shadow, my fears have prevailed, and traces of fear will most likely remain if I choose to see them. That is a natural part of human existence.

Nowadays when the shadow of fear looms over me, I face it with curiosity and wonderment. I have learned to do this through hours of deliberate practice. Like a curious child, I pose a multitude of questions about my fear and doubt. I ask myself, *Is any of this true?* and *Why am I feeling this particular fear at this moment?* After I have engaged in this relentless questioning and have recited affirmations, the brief grip that fear had over my life is replaced by a sense of peace, and I am at ease with myself and the world. When fear arises, I visualize it and recite this affirmation: "I take another step toward love. With each step forward I confidently walk past my fears, leaving them behind as I walk toward the light of love."

I stared fear, judgment, and doubt in the eyes and saw right through them, providing me with the light to see who I truly am. I changed how I see the world and my shadow. Now I walk with the shadow of peace, acceptance, and love. It follows me, leads me, and accompanies me everywhere I go.

Gift for You

Pay attention to your shadow, your fears, in your daily life. How do you act or react to people and events? Is your behavior based on the truth or on your perception of the truth? Is there another way to look at things?

Five
Carried It All Those Years

There is another way of looking at the world.

—*A Course in Miracles*

My parents divorced when I was around six. My mom did her best to provide for us and to rebuild her life, eventually finding another love whom she married years later. My future stepfather had a family of his own. His son, Evan, was a very strong presence and carried himself with confidence. I attributed this confidence and strong presence to his mastery of martial arts, in particular tae kwon do.

His martial arts prowess was impressive, but that skill combined with his anger made him very intimidating.

We may have shared the same illusions about life, but his became a reality. This young man carried great potential and appeared to have a wonderful life ahead of him. Twenty-five years ago, on what became a calamitous evening, Evan was with those who loved him dearly, his mother and father and his brothers and sisters. All were very concerned about him and about the threat he posed to himself and others. On this night they had gathered for dinner to celebrate family, sharing stories of days gone by and talking about days to come. Unfortunately the evening ended in an argument between Evan and his father, Alex. After a few heated remarks, Evan stormed out of the house in a rage.

His father soon followed, and a high-speed car chase ensued on the streets of Delaware County, Pennsylvania. Engines roared and tires screeched as they sped through the neighborhood. Alex blew through red lights and ignored stop signs as he tailed his son in a desperate effort to intercept him. It was imperative that he stop Evan, for he knew his son was a threat to himself and feared what Evan would do upon arriving home. Knowing his son's intentions were destructive, Alex had to do everything in his power to prevent dire results.

Evan turned into the driveway, maintaining his breakneck speed and leaving a cloud of dust behind him. Moments later his father hurtled down the same driveway, careening toward the house.

He slammed on the brakes, locking his wheels and sending the car skidding across the gravel before it came to a stop. Shifting the car into park, Alex opened the door and jumped out with the engine idling. The headlights allowed him to find his way in the dark. Alex sprinted into the house in search of his son, calling his name, "Evan! Evan!"

He heard a loud bang that shattered the tranquility of the evening.

"Evan!" Alex screamed in terror. Running into the bedroom, he found his son lifeless.

The anger Evan carried took him away that night. When I heard

the sad news, I wept. Although I did not know him very well, I was distraught because I knew how Evan felt. Questions plagued me. Did I shed tears for the pain and anger he carried, feelings we had in common? Was I happy for him, even relieved that his pain was now gone? Did I yearn for release from my own pain? Did I weep because I still carried it with me and Evan had found a way out?

I believe he was trying to find a way to convey his pain, and sadly on that fateful night the only way he knew was to leave it all behind. Was he doing his best to fit into a world that made no sense to him? Was he trying to send a message to his family? Was he unable to find the words to communicate that message? What could be more painful than a cry for help when that cry falls on deaf ears?

Evan hurt just as I did, and he found release just as I did. We both rid the world of that pain, but he created more questions and doubt while I am doing my best to provide answers and to remove that doubt.

Was Evan haunted by the illusion of anger and rage that ultimately contributed to his tragic death? Where is his shadow now? Where did it go when he died? Is there a bag of anger and rage sitting around waiting for someone to pick it up and carry it on life's journey? Not really. But it existed for Evan and was very real to him.

It is very difficult to see love through a storm of rage if you know of no other way. No matter how I handled it, whether through outbursts, fighting, cutting, or drinking, my pain and anger remained.

I continued to suppress these feelings for years until the pain of remaining the same with no improvement became greater than the pain of changing. At that point, I decided to go another way toward love. What could I lose at that point?

Gift for You

As you read further, ask yourself, Am I willing to risk change and a perceived vulnerability by going the other way toward love and acceptance?

Six
Wayward—Finding the Light

When I have forgiven myself and remembered Who I am, I will bless everyone and everything I see. There will be no past, and therefore no enemies. And I will look with love on all that I failed to see before.

—*A Course in Miracles*

I awake to a beautiful weekend morning in late April. More than a quarter century later, I am living with my wife and daughters in the house where Evan took his life. Outside our front door stands a beautiful pine tree that Evan's father planted soon after his son's

death. No more than five feet tall when planted, Evan's tree now rises into the heavens.

Although I am eager to get outside to enjoy the warmth of this spring day, I delay the satisfaction just a little while longer. In my tiny office I am comfortably seated on my meditation cushion, speaking on the phone with my life guide and coach, Bev Lenz. We were introduced two years ago while my wife attended a health retreat in Southern California. Pam was spending a week cleansing her body of toxins to attain a healthier lifestyle. I needed a way to cleanse my mind and spirit. Bev entered my life at precisely the right moment.

My conversations with her are never short on passion and include the full spectrum of emotions: anger, rage, fear, sadness, happiness, excitement, love, joy, and forgiveness. Bev has been a critical part of my transformation. Her usual reply when I thank her for her guidance and love is, "I am merely holding the focus for you, Tom. You are the one who is making things happen, who is inspiring others, who is changing lives."

Though Bev is more than two thousand miles away in California, she is always with me. Our conversations astonish me. I am particularly struck by how she connects with and channels my energy. Many of our conversations focus on releasing my anger and rage, which have been expressed in physical and mental self-destruction. Even more powerful are the moments when we tap into my inner peace and self-acceptance, revealing a world my eyes have never seen before. I am coming to realize it has been there all my life but I chose not to see it.

During our call this Saturday I reflect on the anger I carried throughout my youth into adulthood. We delve into deep-rooted memories that are plagued with anger and regret. As Bev guides me through the process of tapping (an emotional freedom technique) by reliving and relieving my past hurts and fears, my body quite unexpectedly begins to shudder. In an instant I am overwhelmed by a lightness that engulfs me in a wave of emotion—grief, sadness, fear, relief, and release.

An energy permeates the room, mysteriously influencing my body. Not knowing what it is, I instinctively struggle for control. Tears

gush from my eyes, making it difficult to see clearly. I desperately try to communicate to Bev what is happening.

My body trembles as tears race down my face. Everything is a blur; I can't wipe the tears from my eyes quickly enough. Still baffled by what is happening, I keep pleading with Bev to help. I try to stand, but my legs won't carry me. My body trembles with a strange sensation that I am relinquishing control to an energy other than mine. I am slightly panicked, but at the same time I feel safe and have an overwhelming sense of peace and bliss.

As I kneel on the floor, my eyes are drawn toward the ceiling. Although there is nothing physical in the room to see, I feel a presence floating in the corner where the white ceiling meets the Navajo yellow walls. An energy other than mine is in the room. I can't see it, but I feel it there with me. Then suddenly it vanishes as quickly as it arrived.

Once this altered state has passed, I feel as though a burden has been lifted, but I remain in somewhat of a daze. Bev guides me through this experience as though she is in the room with me. She does her best to explain what occurred and is talking me through the experience when my stepfather's son, Evan, suddenly comes to mind. I have never mentioned Evan to Bev before.

She continues explaining the occurrence and the strange sensation I felt. Now with Evan in the picture, everything makes more sense to me. While we were on the phone, prior to this happening, Bev talked me through the anger and rage I carried through my youth into adulthood, helping me to release these feelings and opening me up to the light of love and peace.

My energy was so strong that it aligned with the energy of anger and rage that Evan carried with him. I had fantasized about this dark energy of death and suicide far too often over the years. Although I never acted on these fantasies, I reveled in them. Evan departed this world while I remained, but at that moment our energies aligned.

I have always believed we are vibrational beings carrying an energy that is not seen but is sensed. You may call it an energy of life, source, soul, spirit, ghost, or you may not call it anything at all. Those

of you with dogs will understand this, although you may not be fully aware of it. I'll use my dog as an example. Whenever I was angry or frustrated, which happened more often than I'd like to admit, Mason, a Labrador retriever and German shepherd mix, would leave the room when I entered. I did not need to say or do anything. He could sense my anger and would slowly rise to his feet and saunter out of the room to escape by bad vibe.

My energy alignment with Evan was similar but on an entirely different level, one I had often heard of but had never witnessed. I certainly never thought I would be the one channeling the energy.

Gift for You

Try to be more present and aware. Pay attention to your energy and to how it affects you and those around you—people and pets. Try to be aware of the energy of others and of how it makes you feel or act.

Seven

Rabbit—Release from Fear, Finding the Light

You'll see it when you believe it.

—*Dr. Wayne Dyer*

Later in the day I finally find the time to step outside and enjoy the spring weather, although a slight haze clouds my mind. Still not exactly sure how to make sense of what transpired during my call with Bev, I continue to ponder the strange experience.

Thankfully the day remains bright and alive with the sights and sounds of the spring season. A bluebird perched in a tree flutters

to another branch as I walk by, appearing to accompany me on my stroll. All signs of the chilly morning have disappeared, and the afternoon heat hints at the summer days soon to come.

The sun beats down from the clear blue sky. I begin to sweat in the jeans that kept me warm in the cool morning not so long ago. I dash inside for a change of clothes, looking forward to the chance to break out my summer wardrobe.

Entering the house, my eyes go dark as I step out of the bright sunshine. It feels like someone suddenly flipped off a light switch. This happens all the time, but I become slightly annoyed whenever it does. "Hmph! I can't see!" I grumble to myself.

Unable to see, I stop to allow my eyes to adjust so I won't walk into a wall or stub my toe. I shut my eyelids and then quickly pop them open, and I can see clearly again. I walk into the bedroom for a change of garb. As I enter the room, my attention is drawn to something I spy on the carpet out of the corner of my eye. Stooping over, I see little tufts of gray hair, most likely from one of our dogs or cats.

Examining the hair piques my curiosity, and after further inspection I decide the hair may be from something other than our pets. I analyze the scene and retrace my steps. As I head back to the kitchen, my heart palpitates with each step and my imagination takes flight. Thoughts flit about my mind. *One of the dogs probably brought a dead animal into the house. But what was it? The dogs can't have done it. They are still outside basking in the afternoon sun. Ah! The cats!*

I cautiously circle the kitchen table, expecting to find a dead squirrel or chipmunk splayed across the floor. I pace deliberately around the kitchen in a Columbo-esque search for clues and stop at the doggie door. This door is a wonderful treat because it allows our cats and dogs to come and go freely year round. The downside is that it also provides access for creatures of all sorts; they may wander in or be escorted by our pets.

My inspection of the scene continues until, in front of the doggie door, I see bright red droplets of what is clearly blood. *How could I have missed this?* I wonder. *I walked right past it earlier! This is*

definitely blood. Is it from one of our cats or dogs or from another animal?

My inner Shawn Spencer from the television series *Psych* comes to life. Thoughts fire through my head. *The bathroom! It is probably in the bathroom, whatever it is.* Although I am not a comical police consultant solving crimes with acute powers of observation, I am fairly confident this is a trail of blood leading through our bedroom into the bathroom. Creeping through our house, I feel my teeth grinding in anticipation of a gruesome sight. Slowly I peer into the bathroom. I flick on the light switch. Seeing nothing on the bathroom floor, I feel a bit more courageous and inspect the shower. I come up empty.

The more I investigate the scene, the more I wish I could let this go and get on with my life, but it is one of those things I cannot drop. An intense curiosity bordering on an obsessive compulsion will not allow me to give up. I must find the source of this blood. What if there is a dead creature in the house and my wife or my daughter stumbles upon a rotting carcass under our bed or behind the couch? The stench would make their eyes water, quite possibly triggering the gag reflex, and we would have another mess on our hands! I'd rather this not happen, so I will not rest until I have solved this mystery.

I scour the house in a fruitless search for clues. "Oh well," I mutter to myself. "Whatever it is, it is not here."

Scenario after scenario plays out in my mind as I grab a drink of water in the kitchen and attempt to figure out what happened. I am glad my wife and the girls aren't here and won't accidentally stumble upon the gory mess I am imagining. *I checked the bedroom, the bathroom, the living room. The girls' bedroom doors are shut, so it cannot be in there,* I tell myself. *Maybe it's not inside the house.* After another gulp of cool water, it hits me. "That's it!" I shout. "The closet! It's probably in the bedroom closet."

Placing my glass on the kitchen counter, I make a beeline for the bedroom closet. Excitedly yet cautiously, I reach for the light switch just inside the closet. When I flip on the switch, the bulb flickers and

illuminates the closet. I see nothing on the floor, but I am not ready to give up, so I creep further inside.

"Oh crap!" I yell. My heart skips a beat or two when I see our cat, Andy, hunched over in the middle of the floor. Images from a National Geographic show come to mind. Andy looks like a lion hovering over a kill on the Serengeti. He stares in my direction, his eyes sending a message to stay away.

I tiptoe toward him, feeling my heart about to jump out of my chest as I attempt to get a closer look. Hundreds of chill bumps run across my body when I see the carcass of a recently slain rabbit. The rabbit is nearly the size of Andy, which astounds me!

He gazes downward once again at his prize, which lies in a ruby red puddle of blood. I can hear his teeth slice through the flesh and break the bones of this once-lively creature. Seconds tick away while I assess the situation and what action I should take. I step toward Andy to snatch him by the scruff, but I am not quick enough. As I reach for him, he crouches closer to the body, signaling me to stay away. I pause to rethink my plan. *How in the world am I going to get this dead rabbit out of the closet? Do I grab the rabbit or Andy or both?*

I play out a very strange scenario in my mind. I imagine myself carrying our cat out of the house, holding him firmly by the scruff of his neck. He clenches the rabbit by the throat between his teeth, choking any remaining life out of the poor thing. To make this scene even more macabre, while I'm walking through the house one of our dogs stumbles upon this chain of human, cat, and rabbit and decides to join in the fun. The dog grabs the rabbit between his teeth, and now we are all involved in a gruesome tug of war. I have to switch off this horrendous scenario in my mind.

Taking another calculated risk, I slowly reach for Andy and grab him by the scruff of his neck. I raise him in the air like an evacuee being saved from danger by a helicopter rescue team. As I lift Andy, he finally releases the rabbit from his razor-sharp teeth, and the lifeless body flops to the floor. My outstretched arm looks like a construction crane perched atop a high-rise building, moving precious cargo from

one location to another. The precious cargo happens to be our cat, who recently dragged in a slain rabbit for an afternoon snack.

Leaving the devastation behind, I hurry toward the front door to put Andy outside and away from the scene. Then I race to shut the doggy door, knowing he will attempt to sprint back into the house to reclaim his kill.

Next, I round up a trash bag, two plastic grocery bags, and several paper towels. Taking a deep breath, I reenter the closet. Chills again run through my body as I set my sights on the rabbit's carcass. This is quite a morbid scene, but there is a strange beauty in the deep red blood that saturates the carpet. This is the hue of life from a rabbit, which just moments ago basked outside in the sunlight of a new season and nibbled on grass.

Kneeling down for a closer look, I spot the open wound on its neck. The flesh is torn down to the bone, and blood oozes from the wound, seeping deep into the fibers of the carpet.

I have carefully planned the removal of the carcass. I place my right hand inside the two plastic grocery bags, holding a few paper towels on the outside. I want to ensure that none of the mess will touch my hands or stain my clothes. Lunging at the carcass, I turn my head slightly to the side, hoping to avoid the smell and the possibility of any blood spattering. Protected by the paper towels and the grocery bags, I seize the rabbit's neck. I still feel the warmth of life emanating from the lifeless body. Then the carcass unexpectedly slips through my fingers, flopping to the floor once again. "Oh crud! Gross!" I moan.

I lament the situation, but know I must clean up the mess. Turning away as though I can somehow avoid the sight and the smell, I take another deep breath and make a second attempt. This time, without the protective layer of paper towels, I grasp the rabbit securely. I can feel the soft fur and the delicate flesh on my fingertips. This sensation is enhanced when I feel the bumps of its spine and its curved ribs underneath the fur and the flesh.

"Sorry! I'm so sorry," I cry out with emotion. Firmly clutching the rabbit, I quickly turn the bags inside out and tie the top into a knot, ensuring the carcass is enclosed.

I have never experienced anything quite like this. The blood is a dark crimson and has soaked deep into the carpet. This is not the first time one of our pets has brought prey into our home, but in most instances the cleanup has been pretty easy. This time is quite different. A wet paper towel and a couple of squirts from a spray bottle won't be enough. This time around the cleanup will require a great deal of effort.

Abandoning the paper towels, I kneel down to scrub the carpet with a cloth towel. Putting some effort into the task, I transfer my weight from my shoulders through my arms and into my hands. I lunge forward, attempting to soak up the blood with the towel, but it seems the blood will never come out of the carpet.

Then, quite unexpectedly, the sensation I had earlier in the day when speaking on the phone with Bev engulfs me once again. Suddenly visions of Evan's death flash through my mind. *Is this where he ended his life? Right here in this room? In this spot? What is happening to me?* Thoughts of dread flitter about my mind.

I stop scrubbing. Still on my knees, I lean forward on my forearms, resting my forehead on the floor. That same energy I channeled earlier in the day has returned, evoking emotions, and tears flow once again.

Having experienced the intensity of Evan's anger, I feel as though a message was whispered in my ear. I sense a resentment toward me for finding the strength to remain here and to figure out life. Evan didn't have the strength to find and to receive love and forgiveness. His message is, "I wanted to be seen and heard just like you, asshole! But it never happened."

Evan is no longer here in the physical realm, but I am. I still have the power to do something, to help myself and possibly others. I have the power to be seen and heard by the world, for Evan and all the others who have gone before and for those who remain and who feel they have no choice. But this message will not be delivered if I continue to hold on to my anger and rage.

What if I were to awaken and realize I have the strength to let go of these feelings? Would the light of love shine through me? Could

I transform my life and the lives of others who, like Evan, feel they have no choice?

Replaying this somewhat strange but transforming moment, I realize I do have the power to change.

When Bev speaks with me about this the following day, she makes it clear that I channeled Evan's energy. The intensity of my energy aligned with Evan's, creating an ideal scenario for my body to become a channel, or conduit, for Evan's energy (spirit) to be released to the light.

Evan finally found a home with his father, my stepfather, in heaven. In the Catholic religion, his former state is called purgatory. Could it be that Evan's spirit was seeking release from guilt and sin? Only He would know.

I once was a little boy, happy and free. The world was my oyster, but one day my life took a dramatic turn. Fear, doubt, and anger moved in and resided with me for decades. Could this have been me? Should I have left this world as Evan did years ago? Why am I still here? Has a divine light been guiding me, keeping me on earth to inspire others? I am not quite ready to do this, because I still harbor anger and resentment, though I am not exactly sure why.

I question everything, even why a rabbit had to die. Is there some hidden meaning in this gruesome experience? I will let you decide. In folklore, religion, mysticism, shamanism, and other beliefs, rabbits carry great symbolism. The following paragraphs capture this symbolism.

Rabbit Symbolism and Meaning

Rabbits are often used as a symbol of fertility or rebirth. Rabbits are magical and mysterious and those relating with this animal totem are full of life and possess a deep connection with the sacred, eternal spirit of the earth. (www.whats-your-sign.com)

The rabbit spirit animal carries many complex meanings. It is associated with fear because of the rabbit's timid nature, but also with fertility and creativity. The rabbit totem is a symbol of luck in

many cultures, and is also a symbol of abundance. People who feel connected to the rabbit spirit animal are clever and creative, but may be working to overcome fear and anxiety. (www.spiritanimal.info)

Rabbit spirit animal carries strong energies of hope, renewal, new opportunities. (www.universeofsymbolism.com)

A Psychopomp is a god or goddess (energy form) that acts as a liaison, and guide, between the three worlds—the physical earthly level that we dwell upon, the Underworld and the Heavens.

Rabbit is also a Shape Shifter, to use the Native American Shamanic term. One moment he is benignly hidden in the grass, an innocuous little bunny rabbit … and the next he is a ferocious Monty-Pythonesque fracas of razor-sharp teeth, and splayed claws, spewing growls of anger. This is a symbolic allusion to "facing fears." (rabbit.org)

Rabbits are guides into the shadow world, where our personal fears lie. When the rabbit shows up it is time to examine those deep reflexive fears that hold you back from growing. (http://www.shamanicjourney.com)

Gift for You

Pay attention to the messages and messengers in your life. They are with us at every moment, and we need only choose to see them.

Dr. Wayne Dyer authored a book titled *You'll See It When You Believe It* (2009). Most of us disregard miracles and messages, or we prevent them from being manifested, because of limiting beliefs. I have seen many miracles because I chose to believe in them first. When you believe it, you will see it.

Eight
A New Season Begins

To overcome the world is no more difficult than to surmount your little wall.

—*A Course in Miracles*

It is the beginning of July, and summer officially arrived two weeks ago. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, filling my lungs with the crisp ocean air. The smell fills my senses. I am elated and it shows in the smile smeared across my face.

The town is alive with vacationers jogging, walking on the beach, or strolling to their favorite breakfast spot. The weekend has begun, and excitement permeates the air at the start of the summer season.

The beach is packed with people lounging in their Tommy Bahama beach chairs. Others play bocce ball, volleyball, beach soccer, and paddleball in the sun. The summer breeze carries the laughter for all to hear. Kids race to the water, letting out a roar as they jump into the waves that surge toward land. Smiles adorn the faces of boys and girls riding the waves atop their boogie boards. They glide on the ocean as far as they can, hoping the waves will carry them forever.

Every so often the shrill of a lifeguard's whistle splits the ocean breeze. The unabated excitement leads a few of the daring ones to venture a little too far from the surf into the ocean. All heads turn on cue toward the lifeguard stand as youngsters wonder if they are the target of the whistle. The culprit is quickly identified, and the frenzied fun resumes.

On the edge of the surf I am seated in my favorite beach chair mesmerized by the waves rising and crashing over and over again. The water lunges toward me, but each wave eventually runs out of momentum and retreats whence it came, and the ocean's ritual dance begins again.

Each wave arrives on shore with a thundering boom, crashing down on swimmers. Others ride the waves, becoming one with them. Waves attack the shore, overturning everything in their path before they are transformed into a gentle trickle caressing the sand. After an initial surge the water approaches me, seeping into the sand deep below my feet and then retreating back to the ocean. Wave after wave, the ocean delivers a gentle kiss to my toes.

Each wave delivers a collage of colors to our feet. Thousands of tiny pastel-colored coquina clams ride in with every wave, covering the beach in a beautiful array before disappearing as quickly as they appeared. When the waves retreat back to the ocean, the coquina clams remain stranded but only momentarily before burrowing out of sight deep in the sand.

Several sand crabs come in with the next wave, immediately seeking cover in the sand with the coquina clams. My mind drifts with the tide. *Where are they going? Are they hiding from a threat or*

are they seeking something deep within the sand? Have they discovered a secret world we are not aware of?

These marvels happen day in and day out without fail. Where does all the water come from? Don't the waves get tired and want to rest for the night? Time after time the coquina clams wash ashore and burrow deep into the sand. And the shells! There is a never-ending supply for kids and adults to collect. And above all there is the sun. Its rays shine down upon us, brightening our day and warming our hearts. Every day it brings its light and warmth to the world, never taking a break, a nap, or a vacation.

As the day heats up, so do our appetites. *Ding, ding, ding!* The clang of a bell cuts through the roar of the waves and wakes me from my daydream. The youngsters cheer and yell, "Ice cream. Let's get ice cream!"

The ice cream truck has arrived! Kids drop their shovels, buckets, and boogie boards and run across the hot sand toward the path leading to the truck. Before I realize it, my four-year-old daughter is already en route. Scurrying off toward the path, she shouts, "Ice cream. Dad, let's get ice cream. I want to get ice cream. Can I get a Popsicle?"

She is asking me and telling me at the same time. This is a magical power that children have. They ask, even though they already know what they want and expect to receive it. I hop to my feet, drop my book on the beach chair, and rush to grab several dollars out of the beach bag. "Zoey! Zoey! Wait! Wait for me."

Money in hand, I double-time it across the sand in pursuit of my daughter, who is laser focused on getting a Popsicle from the ice cream truck. Amazing! She has nothing with her other than the bathing suit and the sand adorning her body but fully intends to get a Popsicle. It's astonishing how children wield this power of intention and influence. She is confident in the knowledge that I will not only pursue her but will bring money so she can purchase a Popsicle.

I am halfway between our beach chairs and the trail that slices through the dunes toward the ice cream truck. "Ouch! Crud! The sand is hot!" I mutter to myself. I pause, digging my feet deep beneath the outer layer of scorching hot sand to get relief from the cool sand

below. The sand is so hot I feel as though I am stranded in the middle of the Sahara desert.

This is a moment for decisive action. I turn my head toward my beach chair, yearning for the protection of my flip-flops, which I have left behind. I briefly lose sight of Zoey, who continues on her journey. Finally reaching the path, she forges ahead toward the ice cream truck. Standing in the middle of what feels like a scorching desert, I have no choice but to carry on and to endure my suffering. *Oh my gosh! My feet are burning. This stinks! I can't even run back to get my flip-flops.*

I desperately fantasize about sticking my feet in the cool sand and about plunging them in the ocean waves. Unfortunately, my feet are sending messages to my brain, reminding me of how much they hurt. But there is no turning back now. As I attempt to shift my focus away from the pain, visions of Tony Robbins's fire walk pop into my head. I keep telling myself that I can do this, that the pain does not exist. This practice works but only momentarily. I have yet to train my mind to maintain this focus for long periods. My thoughts volley back and forth between *My feet are on fire!* and *The pain does not exist.*

Finally I reach the path, and to my relief the ground is so much cooler! With no time to stop, I continue on, keeping an eye on my daughter, who remains far ahead. I am so happy to escape the scorching hot sand. Then the ball of my foot lands on one of those beautiful round, pearly white stones scattered about the path. "Ouch! That freaking hurt," I mumble to myself, tap dancing around the stones until I catch up with Zoey.

Unfazed by all of this, she eagerly anticipates getting the ice cream. Finally, after patiently waiting in line, my daughter has her Popsicle and we begin the trek back to our spot on the beach. Zoey's pace is much slower than before. Her focus has shifted from getting the ice cream to enjoying the frozen treat. She is living entirely in this moment.

With each lick of the Popsicle, she hums a tune, missing out on most of her frozen treat because it is quickly melting. It streams over her fingertips and down her arm, melting away in the hot summer sun, but this doesn't faze her one bit. However, I am freaking out. Zoey's Popsicle is melting all over her hands and arms, creating a

mess. A seagull might swoop down and fly off with the Popsicle, though she does not express concern over this possible tragedy. And of course there is the sand. It is so hot! Zoey remains oblivious to it. She is clearly enjoying the moment, elated to have her ice cream. Nearing the end of the path, I cringe at the baking hot sand that awaits my feet, but I psyche myself up for another fire walk.

We venture across the scorching hot sand, which still does not seem to bother Zoey one bit. I still need to convince myself I can make it across the beach. How in the world did she walk across the same sand and down the same path I did and back again without making a peep? Is this another metaphor for my life and for how I see the world in my illusion of suffering? Is everything in the eyes (and the feet) of the beholder?

Having children has been a wonderful miracle and blessing. I seem to learn much more from them than I can teach them. Zoey lives in the moment, not concerned about the hot sand at the beach or about the messy ice cream melting down her hand and arm. Neither did she express worry over the threat of a seagull swooping down from the sky to take away her treat.

Through deliberate practice I have learned to tame (channel) these wild, chaotic thoughts, which have only created more fear and worry. I am now more aware of the present moment, doing my best not to lose sight of it because of what was or what will be.

I do my best to be here now as Ram Dass would advise.

Gift for You

Where are you? When things start going sideways, when life becomes difficult, ask yourself, your children, your spouse, your partner, or a friend, "Where are you?" and "Where am I?" Listen for the true answer.

This is something I do with our daughter Jordan when I see she is lost in her thoughts. I look her in the eyes, smile, and say, "Hey Jordan. Where are you?"

This breaks her chain of fearful thoughts, realigning her with the present moment.

Nine
My Independence Day

I'm not crying because the big bird pecked out my eye. I'm crying because I let him.

—*Jim Rohn*

Bang! Boom! Crack! Crack! Crack! Explosions fill the air, splintering our eardrums and setting the night sky ablaze in a rainbow of colors. *Crack! Kaboom! Kablooey!* The bright lights and dazzling colors high above reveal a sea of people below. All gaze toward the heavens with delight and amazement as they celebrate the birth of American independence on this day, the Fourth of July.

This breathtaking display is certainly an experience to treasure, but unfortunately I am not here. Every few seconds I glance at my iPhone screen. I surrender the joy and excitement of the moment, which cannot be replicated, to focus on capturing the event on video so I can preserve it in time—even though this video most likely will not be viewed more than once. (As I write this I fight back the urge to pick up my phone and find this long-lost video.)

No matter how many times I try to break away to view this amazing scene with my God-given sight, I resist. I chide myself for my elaborate effort to simultaneously enjoy this moment and to capture it forever. Thoughts flitter through my mind. *Am I making a video that will be a reminder of what I missed—a video I will most likely not watch? I need to put my phone down.*

All the while my daughters are prancing about, laughing and doing cartwheels with their friend. The moment slips further and further from my grasp. I berate myself for recording the fireworks instead of watching the show and enjoying it now.

My annoyance is fueled by the antics of my daughters' friend. I can hear her cries for attention even over the thundering fireworks and cannot hear much else. Her bellowing ruins the night for me. Each shout is like a grenade dropped down my ear canal. *Clank, clang, kaboom!* "Mom. Hey Mom. Mom! Did you see my cartwheel? Look at me. Did you see that?"

With yet another cartwheel she kicks sand into the air, peppering our faces and temporarily blinding us. I do my best to ignore her pleas for attention as the sand pelts my face. Over and over again she performs cartwheels, flinging more sand into our eyes.

At this point I am beyond furious, but I refrain from saying anything. I know my anger will force unintended words from my mouth, creating hurt and tears. To avoid a scene, I stand up, grab my chair, and move out of the way. My frustration grows because this is not the first time she has behaved this way. "Mom! Hey Mom, look at me! Mom!" she whines again.

I am already having a difficult time enjoying the fireworks, and my daughters' friend certainly has not made the event more

pleasurable for me. It seemed like the fireworks had just begun, but suddenly I am gazing at the dazzling finale. The beach is silent for a moment except for the crash of the waves. Then people begin to react. "Is that it?" "Is it over?" "Wow! That was amazing!" "Encore! Encore! Encore!"

Hundreds of people leave the show feeling elated, but I am mired in anger. I rise, fold my beach chair, and begin the walk home. My daughters are ecstatic over the display. "Daddy! That was awesome! Can we get ice cream? Yeah! Ice cream!"

Walking along the path between the dunes leading away from the beach, I see my daughters approaching their bikes up ahead. They are thrilled to ride their bikes because the wheels are adorned with dazzling lights that draw the attention of all those walking back from the beach. Kids and adults offer their compliments.

"Wow! Cool lights!" a passerby says.

"Thanks!" replies one of my daughters.

"Awesome lights!" shouts a little boy.

"Thanks!" my other daughter says with enthusiasm.

They are overwhelmed by the combination of the fireworks display and the praise for their bikes, feeling like stars at a movie premiere receiving cheers from adoring fans. I am still seething, though. Nearing the end of the path, I maneuver through the crowd to approach the girls. I see their friend with her head down, possibly upset because of all the attention my daughters are getting. She borrowed one of our bikes, but it was missing the dazzling display of twinkling lights. She makes it very apparent that she is disappointed and feels left out.

Before I add fuel to my rage, I pause. Setting aside my hostility, I listen to my heart. As I reflect on the events of the evening, compassion tugs at my conscience. *What are you doing?* I ask myself. *She is just a kid and she is lost! Help her.* I walk over to the bike and press the button for the flashers. The lights begin blinking, and although they are not as dazzling as the ones on the other bikes, she now has a light display to enjoy. Glancing at me, she floats the words "Thank you" into the air and rides off with my daughters.

I feel shame and disgust for allowing this situation to ruin my holiday. I berate myself. My indignation is spreading like a plague. I am pissed off at her mother, I am annoyed with my wife, and I am impatient with my kids. I ruined the Fourth of July! I missed the fireworks because I was pissed off. The night was ruined, but who ruined it? Did this child ruin it or did I allow it to be ruined?

For the remainder of that night into the following day, I replay the evening's events over and over again in my head. Who was I really mad at? Was I really mad at this young girl? Was I truly mad at her mom? Then a story flashes into my mind. It is a tale I heard long ago from one of my favorite mentors, Jim Rohn. Here is how he told it.

> Perhaps you've heard the story of the little bird. He had his wing over his eye and he was crying. The owl said to the bird, "You are crying."
>
> "Yes," said the little bird, and he pulled his wing away from his eye.
>
> "Oh, I see," said the owl. "You're crying because the big bird pecked out your eye."
>
> And the little bird said, "No, I'm not crying because the big bird pecked out my eye. I'm crying because I let him."

Then it finally hit me. Far too often and for far too long I had allowed my eye to be pecked out, and I was that child. I was just like my daughters' friend. The truth was staring me in the face all this time. How could I not have noticed?

I am the youngest in a family of four boys. My daughters' friend is the youngest in her family, with an older brother and sister. My parents went their separate ways when I was a young boy. Her parents went their separate ways when she was younger. My mom did her best to provide for and to care for me. Her mom was doing her best to provide for and to care for her. When I was her age my family was shattered. I was fighting for my life while my mother was trying to salvage hers. Her family was shattered, and her mother was trying to salvage her own life.

The affection I received from my mother was compromised when she shifted her focus to the man who would eventually become my stepfather. This young girl was trying desperately to hold on to all that she had, her mother. Life was quite a bit more difficult for her because she no longer had a father to rely on. He had vanished from her life. Whenever he made an appearance turmoil and friction followed.

As a young man, I was angry with myself for not being strong enough to stand up for myself, for feeling so weak and helpless. Eventually, I found the strength to stand up for myself, but unfortunately I expressed this strength in rage and retaliation. I found it far easier to reject and to attack others before they could reject and attack me.

I realized that the frustration I felt whenever I saw this young girl display weakness did not lie with her, for it resided deep within myself.

Looking at her, I saw a reflection of myself at a young age, yearning for the love and affection of a mother and father who went their separate ways. For most of my life I ran in fear or retaliated in rage, pretending I was strong and resilient. I was unaware that the more people I hurt, the weaker I became. I did not know of any other way to protect myself.

My independence day came when I realized I no longer needed to depend on others to define who I was or to define my happiness. From this lesson arose an affirmation that I often repeat: "Strength lies not in brute force, intimidation, anger, or retaliation. True strength lies in peace with yourself and in accepting your enemy, which all too often is yourself." I no longer allow the bird to peck out my eye.

The pain and suffering I endured as a child after my family fell apart produced anger and resentment in me that lasted far too long. In the following chapters I will reflect on how this affected my life and molded who I became, and I will delve deeper into how I saw my younger self reflected in my daughters' friend.

Living in the shadow of anger and rage, I convinced myself that this was who I was. I didn't know there was another way. Eventually

I grew tired of being pissed off all the time. The dreadful feelings springing from my repressed emotions were slowly taking my life away.

Having this higher awareness is a blessing and helps me understand myself and others. This is a good opportunity to reflect on the affirmation in chapter 3: "I no longer allow my past to hold me hostage from my future and from the gift of the present."

Gift for You

Think about how often a single moment, day, or week or even the trajectory of your life has been affected by what you did in the past. The reason most of us don't change is because we simply are not aware that we can change. If we allow our past to hold us hostage from the change we deeply desire, we are stuck. I found a way to release my past and to see existence in the present moment. There is no future and there is no past, only the gift of now.

Give it a try. When you are with friends, family, or by yourself, where are you really? Are you thinking about what you did yesterday or what you need to do tomorrow? Then you are missing the gift of the present moment. Take it a step further. How much do you allow your past to define who you are today? How much do you allow your past to prevent or restrict you from becoming who you desire to be?

Ten
Love Asunder

Love calls, but hate would have you stay.

—*A Course in Miracles*

After the experience of my independence day at the beach, I delved even further into memories from my childhood to uncover deep-rooted fears and resentment. I recalled standing between my mother and father, who towered above me like two giant skyscrapers, arguing in a rage. About what? I do not know, but the hatred spewing from their mouths told me, "This is what the world is really like. Your illusions of happiness are a fantasy. Wake up to the real world, son."

Out of nowhere my world came crashing down around me. This moment signaled the breakdown of the trust and safety I took for granted. Faith and love were transformed into doubt and fear. Our home, which had held so many wonderful memories, became a place of separation. My parents were divorcing and going their separate ways.

I was a six-year-old child who depended on the foundation of love and support only a mother and father can provide. Now I saw that foundation crumbling right before my eyes. Never before in my brief life had I endured such a traumatic and devastating experience. I felt as if I had been abandoned and left to fend for myself. Up to that point all I had known was the safety of love and acceptance from my family, and that was now imperiled. For the first time fear and doubt very visibly entered my life.

Decades later I still carried this burden with me, looking for a way to explain my parents' breakup and to release my painful past. I could not wrap my mind around it. How could my parents at one moment love and accept each other and at the next despise and reject each other? How the heck did this happen? This was not supposed to happen!

Although I have asked for an answer, my parents have not revealed to me exactly what occurred and why they divorced. I understand it must be quite difficult and emotionally painful on many levels for parents to divorce. Have they avoided the truth to protect me? Or have they remained silent out of shame and embarrassment? Either way, the answer still eludes me.

I questioned myself and who I became, wanting to know why I carried so much anger. Did these events from my childhood affect the trajectory of my life? Was my belief in myself undermined because the loss of love around me led to self-doubt and anger? Would I be the same man I am today if this had not happened?

As I delved into my past, seeking to understand why my parents went their separate ways, I peeled away the layers of pain that contributed to my anger, rage, and self-hatred. This introspection led to more questions.

If we cannot accept ourselves, how is it possible to accept anyone else?

What expectations do we set for ourselves? Are they realistic?

What expectations do we set for the people in our lives?

What happens when these expectations are not met?

Do we struggle to change others so they become just like us?

If people don't become who we think they should be, do we end up hating, rejecting, or judging them?

What expectations did my parents have of each other, and were they not met?

Is it easier to give up than to look deep within, past our fears, to see clearly through the eyes of acceptance and understanding?

Are we courageous enough to see the world through the eyes of forgiveness, allowing us to release the many false expectations we unintentionally impose on ourselves and on others?

Whether we like it or not, our entire existence is spent in what appears to be the same body. That said, how in the world can we despise ourselves or wish we were like someone other than ourselves? How can we lay a burden on others to be as we are? When people open up and are honest with themselves, they probably do not like what they see. Even the most beautiful despise how they look and feel, seeking acceptance and approval from outside sources, not from within. I have often heard Esther Hicks comment that when we live our lives seeking acceptance and approval from others, eventually someone is going to disappoint us.

My oldest daughter has frequently expressed self-doubt. She is not yet ready to accept who she is, but each day she gets closer. For far too long I couldn't find the strength to accept myself, which prevented me from accepting anyone else. My daughter and I have enlightening conversations that, more often than not, teach me something about myself as a father, husband, son, and brother. Grace has an awareness like no other, an awareness most people do not see and probably do not quite understand. Here is an excerpt about my daughter from my 2017 book *Mommy, Why Do You Have Two Birthdays?*

> Grace is divine love. Her spirit is so strong that it has yet to find comfort in the confines that her physical body presents. If she could fly, she would do it. If she could float above the earth like a beautiful butterfly floating freely in the clear blue sky above and Mother Earth below, she would. Her journey while here on earth will be one of wonder, as Grace discovers her true free spirit on her journey. She is passionate, she is kind, she is loving. She is rapidly figuring out this amazing world and embraces the power of love and light deep inside. She will move mountains.

When Grace experiences moments of frustration and doubt, causing her to berate herself, I try my best to truly hear her. I do my best to respond in a way she will understand, not with conjecture based on what I think is right. I am deliberate and considerate in my comments to her because what I say to her is also intended for me. Here is a comment I made to my daughter after one of our conversations that also resonated with me on many levels:

Look in the mirror. Do you see yourself? This is the same person, the same Grace, that you will have your entire life. No matter where you go, you will be there, so get used to it. You have got to love yourself and to accept who you are. Once you do that, your struggles and doubts will fade. Things will become much easier for you. But it's up to you.

Gift for You

This chapter explores my attempt to understand why my parents divorced and how their breakup affected the man, the husband, and the father I have become. The common thread I see is acceptance and forgiveness. The quote from *A Course in Miracles* in chapter 6 does a fantastic job of capturing this: "When I have forgiven myself and remembered Who I am, I will bless everyone and everything I see. There will be no past, and therefore no enemies. And I will look with love on all that I failed to see before."

If we accept and forgive ourselves, we have no need to seek approval and acceptance from outside sources. This will make it much easier to accept and to bless everyone and everything, no matter how different they appear to be.

Eleven
On the Sidelines

Forgive the past and let it go, for it is gone.

—*A Course in Miracles*

I grew up with three amazing brothers, each contributing to a life of fun and adventure, and with a mother and father who love me dearly. I lived in the moment and was carefree, as every child should be. We lived in a home like any other in the neighborhood, but when I was a child, it appeared to me that we lived like royalty in a mansion on an estate. The backyard seemed like a perfectly manicured football field for the star player I yearned to become. When not playing football

or baseball in the yard, I climbed the towering pine trees, wandered into the neighbors' yard to explore, or jumped a fence, looking for friends to play with.

Every moment with my brothers was magical. The days were full of wonder and fun. We introduced the first amusement park in the history of our town when my brother Chris devised elaborate plans for what he called the Corner Amusement Park. Located in our backyard, the park had a thrilling log flume that consisted of a plastic sled, used for snow sledding, a wooden ladder, and a baby pool. The ladder was propped up against one of the towering trees in the backyard. This would be our ramp for the sled to cruise down. We would climb awkwardly up the trunk of the tree, stopping at the point where the ladder met the tree. Then we would cautiously enter the sled, which was perched perilously atop the ladder. Once inside the sled, we would let go, and with a push we would roar down the slide toward earth. It felt like we were traveling at light speed from hundreds of feet above the world, surging to our destination in the ocean below.

Next was the zip line. Chris created it with our clothesline, which stretched across the vast expanse of our backyard. He took a seat from our swing set, fastened a pulley to the seat's rope, and threaded the clothesline through the pulley. Away we went! We zipped through the air high above the earth. Even though our toes dragged on the grass below us, our imaginations took flight, allowing us to soar with the eagles in the heavens above.

The final ride was a Ferris wheel elaborately designed from a gigantic wooden spool for power cable rope. I still wonder where in the world my brother got it from. To each side of this huge spool we fastened a twelve-foot-long two-by-four-inch board. The boards, which ran parallel to each other, stretched out over the ends of the spool just enough to allow room for a seat to be fastened on the ends. We inserted a metal post from an old clothesline through the hole in the center of the spool. It was a perfect fit, allowing the spool to rotate round and round. The branches from the many trees in our yard extended outward as though they were arms reaching out to

greet a neighbor. They were perfect. We perched the Ferris wheel in the crooks of the branches, and the whole contraption worked. Not very graciously, but it worked! To this day, I am still not sure how Chris did it.

Aside from the spectacular amusement park rides, football games were my favorite pastime. All four of us spent hours upon hours in the backyard making the greatest plays for the highlight reels, just like our favorite Philadelphia Eagles players: quarterback Ron Jaworski, wide receiver Harold Carmichael, running back Wilbert Montgomery, and my favorite player of all time, special teams captain and wide receiver Vince Papale.

My brothers were so much fun to be around. These are memories to be cherished, memories that remind me of the sheer bliss of my youth. But now I clung desperately to the illusion of a loving and happy family and yearned for things to return to the way they once were. Little did I know I was walking into a whirlwind of rejection and hatred.

My eager anticipation of fun and adventure with my brothers was transformed into angst and dread. Aside from divorcing, my parents had another difficult decision to make, one that would further divide us. In this situation every decision would be discouraging, no matter how my parents sliced it.

I dreamed of making the cut and playing football with the Philadelphia Eagles, but now a different sort of draft day was upon me. I am sure each of my brothers had his own pick for a parent to live with. I secretly desired to be with my dad, who was the head football coach and the athletic director at a local high school. With my dad, I could go to sleep every night and greet each day with sports, a dream come true for a young boy. At least this was what I thought I wanted.

On draft day I didn't go in the first round. My dreams were shattered when my parents announced I was to live with my mom and my oldest brother, Joe. I was exasperated. This was strike two! First came the divorce, and then my brothers and I were torn apart. Strike three was soon to come. This new life didn't make sense to me.

Where would my dad and my brothers Matt and Chris go? What would they do?

We said goodbye to the only home I knew, to the world's biggest yard, to the greatest football games, and to the Corner Amusement Park. We were closing the door on memories from a childhood filled with happiness, trust, and love. A new chapter in my life was beginning, one that wasn't supposed to be written and that would haunt me for decades.

For a brief time, my dad lived at a friend's house until he found a new home and a new love. I use that term loosely. I do not know where she came from, but I trusted in my father, so I trusted in this woman, who was now a part of his life.

I spent the weekends at my dad's house. These visits were quite difficult and uncomfortable, but I cherished game day. Since he was the head coach of the high school football team, I had sideline seats! This certainly was a highlight of each weekend. I left the world behind on game day to be right there in the action! My dad would bark plays to the players, who in my eyes were colossal gladiators battling it out on the football field to victory.

On the sidelines. Funny? Ironic? Although the football games were one of my favorite pastimes on the weekends, I was on the sidelines while my dad figured out his life. I was on the sidelines while my mom figured out her life as well. I wanted to figure out my new life because it certainly did not make sense to me and ultimately left me scarred.

My dad's new wife was the quintessential evil stepmom of movie melodramas. Matt and Chris did their best to accept their new life with this woman and to understand her, but eventually she displayed a rage that still rings in my ears and haunts my dreams. Once in a while I stir in my sleep, awakened by the dreadful memories of my past.

A turning point came the day my grandmother, an angel who lit up the world, was met by a devil. On a sunny Saturday morning, my grandmother was driving me to Dad's house so I could be with my brothers for the weekend. I eagerly peered over the dashboard through

the windshield of my grandmother's pine-tree green Oldsmobile Cutlass as we pulled up in front of the house. Excited to see my dad and my brothers, I opened the car door, jumped out, and sprinted up the brick sidewalk to the front door to be greeted by screams of rage from my stepmother from a second-floor window. "Frank! What is he doing here? Frank!"

My grandmother followed me, heading up the walkway toward the house to say hello to her grandsons, but was greeted with a violent verbal assault. "What are you doing here? Who the f--k said he could be here? What gives you the right to come here? Frank!" my stepmother shouted.

At this point in my life her ranting and raving were a somewhat regular occurrence. I ran upstairs to find my brother Matt, which was what I usually did when I showed up at Dad's. Then we scurried off to our favorite pizza shop, Pie in the Sky, to play video games, eat pizza, and drink lots of soda.

Leaving the calamity at home behind, I was glued to the screen as I played the latest video game, Popeye, eating cans of spinach that gave me the strength to fight the evil Brutus and to save my love, Olive Oyl. Matt was immersed in a game of Galaga, blasting away the enemy to save the planet. This was our safe place, a refuge of sorts, taking us away from the world for a while. Then our brother Chris walked in. *What the heck is he doing here?* I wondered. He hardly ever hung out and played video games with us.

"Hey, Chris. What's up?" I asked, my eyes never moving from the most important game ever in the history of video games. (Every game is the greatest and most important game in the eyes of a kid.)

"We have to go," Chris said.

"Sorry," I replied, "but we are not leaving. I am not going back to the house where that jerk is." My brothers had given this woman a nickname far worse than *jerk*. At first, I was unhappy that they referred to her by this name, and I would not use it. Unfortunately, weekend after weekend, we were the targets of her rage, and eventually I also succumbed to labeling her with this nickname.

"Guys. We have to go," Chris pleaded.

"No," we replied.

"Dad is outside waiting in the car. We are all going to meet with an attorney."

"What?"

"Dad is filing for divorce and he needs us to come with him."

Holy shit! That was it. Our stepmother's tirade against our grandmother earlier that day was the straw that broke the camel's back. Our dad had had enough of this abuse and would not put up with it any longer. We immediately left the pizza shop and later that afternoon found ourselves sitting in an attorney's office answering questions about our stepmother and the nonstop invective she rained down upon us.

Our dad faced another uncomfortable and difficult situation with yet another divorce. I continued to see him and my brothers on the weekends until they found another place to land. The entire scenario was quite strange. My dad and my brothers remained in the house with our stepmom, but they lived separate lives; she remained on the second floor, while my brothers and my dad lived on the third floor.

This was not ideal, but it was the only option they had at that point. When I walked the hallways of this house, the feeling was eerily similar to taking a haunted house tour on Halloween. I feared what lurked around the corners, and I crept around the house, trying not to make a peep in my effort to remain hidden from the monster. But no matter how gingerly I walked, the floor still creaked beneath my feet. I held my breath, hoping to remain silent so she wouldn't detect me.

I crept quietly up the first flight of stairs. Releasing my breath, I took another and held it. Reaching the second floor, I sneaked past the bedroom where my dad used to sleep with my stepmother. I tiptoed toward the next flight of stairs and skipped steps in an attempt to reach the third floor as quickly as possible without waking the beast. Approaching the third floor, I jumped onto the top step, letting out a huge sigh of relief once I knew I was now safe from harm.

My dad and my brothers shared a bedroom on the third floor. This was somewhat like a college dormitory or frat house, with the

guys living together. Absent the parties and the fun, however, it was more like a prison.

As a young boy I yearned for love and acceptance from the adult role models in my life, as any child does. When things go awry, from divorce, separation, or other events, the need for love and acceptance does not mysteriously disappear but becomes more imperative. My parents did their best to provide a loving environment in a world that was dividing around us.

Our family now became two separate families, eventually combining with other families that had previously been one. From one there became four. Our family divided like a cell in the human body. Cell division, specifically mitosis, is a fundamental process of life. The division of a family can be like a cell in the body dividing and contributing to the process of life. But more often than not, the division of a family produces fear, anger, rage, and other toxic feelings. These negative emotions can divide without stopping, like a cancer cell does, until the host dies or someone finds a cure.

Gift for You

I am here to tell you there is a cure. I carried rage and toxic feelings that spread uncontrollably for far too long until I found another way.

Pay attention to your behavior. How do you react to and treat people in your life—family members, friends, colleagues at work, strangers? Is your behavior different or the same? Why?

Twelve
I Was That Child

> Remember nothing that you taught yourself, for you were badly taught. And who would keep a senseless message in his mind, when he can learn and preserve a better one?
>
> —*A Course in Miracles*

At this point my mom, my oldest brother, and I were in our new home, a three-bedroom apartment unit on Philmar Court in Springfield, Pennsylvania. My new life required me to make adjustments. Our new home was much smaller than the house in which our family had previously lived, there were new people to meet, and I was officially a latchkey kid.

In the mornings my mom would head off to work while I rode the bus to school. At the end of the day I was on my own until she arrived home. When my brother was off doing his own thing, I stayed with a friend who lived in the apartment above us. His parents were amazing, always welcoming me and allowing me to hang out until Mom got home. Although I was still acclimating myself to all the new faces and places, the situation wasn't that bad. I was doing pretty much anything I wanted, growing up more quickly than anticipated.

Having both parents and my brothers together in one home had provided a reliable foundation, and losing that support took some getting used to. In my new environment I was on my own more than ever before, and I had to learn quickly to be self-sufficient.

School was surprisingly enjoyable. I was making friends and felt good about myself. Discovering I was a decent athlete made things even better. I enjoyed all sorts of sports with kids in the neighborhood—football in a roadside field (which was more like a patch of grass), baseball in the cul-de-sac, and street hockey in the driveway. Whatever the sport, we played it. My new neighborhood was full of great families, and there was always something fun to do.

On the weekends, when I wasn't at my dad's house, I would join the neighborhood kids and parents in the cul-de-sac to play baseball, which was quickly becoming my favorite sport. One sunny day we gathered for our usual game. Since we were surrounded by apartment buildings, we used a soft practice baseball. I strode to the plate to face one of the neighborhood dads on the pitcher's mound. He wound up and hurled the ball. Gripping the bat, I stepped toward the ball, giving it everything I had. *Thwack!* The ball thundered off the sweet spot of the bat back in the opposite direction, taking flight over the pitcher's head and then over the shortstop toward left-center field. Everyone watched in amazement as the ball soared through the air, reaching higher, flying further away, and showing no signs of stopping. I cringed. *Oh crap!* I thought. *The ball is going straight for that apartment! Oh no!*

The trajectory of the ball was directly in line with one of the apartment buildings at the end of the cul-de-sac. Our mouths were

agape as we watched the ball soar until…*crash!* It smashed dead center through the picture window of a first-floor unit. I closed my eyes to avoid the sight, but I couldn't ignore the sound of the glass shattering and crashing to the ground.

I slowly opened my eyes and peered at the apartment. *Holy crap! Man that was an awesome shot!* I thought. We all looked at each other in amazement, wondering what to do next. My thoughts shifted. *Oh man! I am dead. They are going to kill me. My mom is going to kill me!*

Recollecting that moment, I can't help but recall the hilarious scene from the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* in which Jeff Spicoli (Sean Penn) crashes Jefferson's (Forest Whitaker's) car. Jefferson's little brother freaks out, screaming at Spicoli, "My brother's gonna kill us! He's gonna kill us! He's gonna kill you and he's gonna kill me. He's gonna kill us!"

"Hey man, just be glad I had fast reflexes!" a stoned Spicoli replies in a matter-of-fact tone.

"My brother's gonna shit!" Jefferson's brother shrieks.

"Make up your mind, dude. Is he gonna shit or is he gonna kill us?" Spicoli replies.

"First he's gonna shit. Then he's gonna kill us!"

The situation wasn't comical at the time, but I felt like Jefferson's little brother awaiting his fate. My devastating hit signaled the end of the game. I never got to run around the bases—although it did cross my mind to run in the opposite direction.

A friend's dad escorted me to my fate. As we walked toward the apartment unit, my shoulders slumped and I cowered as I got closer and closer. I was terrified about what awaited me, and tears fell from my eyes. All I wanted to do was run and hide. What would they say to me? What would they do? I was a dead man walking, with my friend's father leading me to the executioner.

Once inside the building, I gazed up at the stairway leading to the apartment unit. I slowly ascended the steps toward my reckoning. Now standing at the door of the apartment unit, I feared the fate that awaited me, but at the same time I was very curious to see this huge picture window and the destruction created by my hit. Raising my

hand, I formed a fist to tap on the door, but there was no need to knock. The tenants were awaiting my arrival. It was game over!

The wonderful news is that I survived that day, but I don't recall playing another game of baseball in the cul-de-sac. The bad news, which seemed to be the trend with adults at that point in my life, was that the tenants were not very understanding. I didn't expect a warm greeting when I faced them. I had just shattered the front window of their home, probably scaring the life out if them. I understood that. But I didn't expect or deserve a rude and unforgiving encounter either. It wasn't like I purposely threw a rock through their window to create destruction—although plenty of time lay ahead for destruction of my own.

The baseball game was a good analogy for my life. Everything was fine until my parents went their separate ways. Just like the ball crashing through the picture window, my world was shattered.

With half of my family missing and with the weekends at my dad's house a dreadful experience, the time spent with my mom was more valuable than ever. When she arrived home from work in the evenings, I had an opportunity to get the love and affection I desired from her. We would hang out while she prepared dinner, watch television in the living room, or listen to a Phillies game on the radio.

This remaining foundation of safety and trust was compromised when my mom started dating the man who years later would become my stepfather. He was an intimidating, powerful man and a successful business owner. I suspect my mom was attracted to his rebellious demeanor. A bad boy of sorts, he was confident, had money, and did what he wanted. My mom needed to rebuild her life and to find a way to survive. I couldn't help her do this, but this man could.

With this new man in her life, I was now competing for my mother's affection. He came over in the evenings for dinner, jeopardizing the time I had with her. When he entered our home, any conversation with my mom abruptly ended. Her attention immediately shifted from me to this man, and she waited on him hand and foot.

"Hey, Alex," I would say when he arrived, hoping to connect.

"Hi, Tommy," he would reply. Yes, he acknowledged me, but that was the extent of it.

"Tommy, can you move off the couch so Alex can sit there?" Mom kindly commanded. "Please turn the channel so we can watch the news."

This was another tipping point fueling the anger and resentment I harbored. Alex was still married with a family of his own, so this nightly affair was more like a covert operation. Were my brother and I in the way? Would this man and my mom run away together if we weren't there? It sure seemed like it. Regardless, I persisted in trying to get him to express even the slightest indication of acceptance.

On the weekends at my dad's house I feared an onslaught from my stepmother, and the rest of the time I was neglected by a man who on multiple occasions hinted that I was in the way. What the heck was I supposed to do? Where could I go if I was being pushed to the sidelines in my own home and at my dad's house on the weekends? Never before had I experienced negative emotion like this. How could a child feel this way?

Time spent at my dad's house was nightmarish, and any stability left at home was in jeopardy as I had to compete with a grown man for my mom's attention. I attempted to connect with him, but any semblance of love from this man eluded me. If he harbored any empathy or caring, he had the strangest way of expressing it, and I sure as heck didn't see it.

I did my best to adjust and to open myself up to my new life, but after dealing with the angry outbursts from my stepmother and with the lack of an emotional response from my future stepfather, I began turning inward.

The remaining threads of stability and confidence were at risk and began to slip from my grasp. If my parents were no longer accepting of each other, and my stepparents couldn't accept me, how could I find acceptance for myself? The more I tried to connect with my stepparents, the more they seemed to push me away, denying any opportunity to let me in. None of this made sense to me.

My pleas for attention went unheeded, and self-destruction

eventually became my means of receiving the love and attention I desired. Although it made no sense to me, neglect and rejection by the people I loved appeared to be the way the world was intended. I responded in kind and eventually became very good at hating myself and the world, but deep down I knew this approach was flawed on many levels. Still, I didn't know of any other way. Regrettably, when the love, attention, and help did arrive I was too far gone, unable to receive or to accept any of it.

Good news was on the horizon, though, when my dad's divorce was finalized and he and my brothers moved out of the house of horrors. Eventually he remarried, and his new wife did her best to include us in her family. By then, however, disappointment and rage had all but snuffed out my capacity to give and receive love and acceptance. My new stepmother didn't stand a chance. There was absolutely no way I was letting her in. I had to protect myself, especially since adults seemed to be doing a pretty shitty job of it.

From that point forward, I kept any glimmer of hope that I would be a part of my new families to myself. After all I had endured, I was tired of struggling to earn their love and acceptance. Now they had to earn mine.

Would I grow up to become just like my stepmother and stepfather, spewing hatred and shutting out people? After my parents' separation and the constant rejection by the adults in my life, I was becoming jaded. I didn't want this to happen, but I didn't know of any other way.

The roots of survival through retaliation and rage sunk themselves in deep. It would take a lot of work to uproot this flawed approach to life and to plant the seeds of love and forgiveness. After much suffering and struggle over many years, I reached another tipping point when I discovered I had the awareness and strength to go the other way. I decided to make that change by taking one step at a time away from hatred and fear toward love. *A Course in Miracles* captures this point in my life with these lines: "Remember nothing that you taught yourself, for you were badly taught. And who would keep a senseless message in his mind, when he can learn and preserve a

better one? When ancient memories of hate appear, remember that their cause is gone."

I pondered my stepfather's behavior toward me. Did he find safety and acceptance when he was with my mom? When he visited our home was he looking for an escape? Was he uncomfortable revealing his true self to a child for fear he might appear weak and vulnerable? Did he carry himself with a harsh, confident exterior because that was all he knew?

Sadly I learned to push people to the sidelines. For many years I lived an illusion, believing the more people I pushed away and hurt, the more control I had and the stronger I became. I thought this would keep me safe. Boy, was I wrong!

Looking back on the path I had taken, who I had become, and how I had handled these events fueled my desire to know why. My three older brothers went through the same thing, but they seemed to have made it through unscathed. How? Why?

My oldest brother was a source of strength for me, and none of this appeared to faze him. He was a great role model—confident, popular, a great athlete—and girls were smitten with him. Although it was not explicitly stated, he was a rock of stability for me and my mom. In hindsight, it is easy to see why my parents decided it was best for me to live with my oldest brother.

With my world flipped on its head, I had to survive in any way possible. When I no longer received attention from the adults in my life, I had to come up with another way. My strategy was to act out and to plead for the attention of my parents and stepparents, but this tactic backfired and I became more of an annoyance.

I now understood how my daughters' friend felt on that Fourth of July evening. I felt abandoned as a child, and it seemed the only way to be heard was through cries for help and for the love and attention of my parents, who were doing their best to repair their broken world.

I recollect far too many times when I absolutely pissed off my parents and grandparents. The anger I carried toward my daughters' friend that day at the beach hit me hard. I understood her pain because it was mine as well. My anger with her was rooted in anger

and resentment directed at myself. I hated myself for being weak and unable to care for myself when I was a child. I was angry at my mother and father for abandoning me. I was lost. I felt helpless.

Like my daughters' friend, I yearned for my parents' love in order to survive. When I was a child, I often found the only way to get attention was through incessant whining and crying. I saw similar traits in this girl, and as in my case, her cries for love and acceptance had become an annoyance to others. I erroneously carried the blame for my parents' divorce, and I hope she doesn't carry that same burden. Underneath it all she is an angel looking for the opportunity to spread her wings with loving parents there to catch her when she falters.

My pleas for attention through whining and crying no longer had the intended results. Entering my teen years, I turned to self-mutilation and alcohol. My life went from "blissed to pissed" as Dr. Wayne Dyer so eloquently phrased it.

When I catch myself thinking of my past, which still happens every now and then, I do my best to recognize these thoughts and to let them fade. If they linger, I typically notice a change in my demeanor. Then I acknowledge these fearful, angry thoughts and let them go.

Gift for You

When you act or react in certain situations or to certain people, pay attention to how your mood and demeanor change. Can you smile at the situation, hug it in your mind, and move to a place of peace?

Thirteen
The Bee and Me

Safety is the complete relinquishment of attack.
The only way to have peace is to teach peace.

—*A Course in Miracles*

It is Labor Day weekend, one of the best times of the year. The evenings begin to cool down, hinting that autumn is upon us. The thrill of hot summer days begins to lose its grip on youngsters on this final weekend of summer break. A different kind of excitement fills the air as they eagerly anticipate a new school year. The buzz of cicadas accompanies the peaceful chirps of crickets, and the songs

from the multitude of birds come together to form a summer melody. A rainbow of beautiful colors saturates the canvas of a late summer day. The sights and sounds are like a Van Gogh masterpiece set to the music of Mozart.

After my morning meditation and affirmations, I sit outside basking in the sun. Beautiful rays of light emanate from the heavens, warming my body while I nourish my soul reading a favorite book. For some reason, not yet apparent to me, it has taken me quite some time to open this book. Nearly ten summers ago, soon after my daughter Grace was born, I found this treasure, and this is the year when I am finally reading it.

A cool breeze wakes the trees from their late-morning siesta, and the leaves magically come to life in a gentle dance. My open book flutters in the breeze, signaling me to turn the page and to continue reading. From the corner of my eye I spot a bee hovering nearby. Slightly startled, I look up from the page to focus on this bee. The little creature navigates around my head and suspends itself in the air before my eyes.

My reaction is instinctual, and I prepare to eliminate this supposed threat. This natural response does not provide much time to contemplate the situation. On the inside I am in a slight panic, but on the outside I maintain a cool demeanor. Adrenaline surges through my body, and I position myself to strike. Then I hesitate, losing myself in a brief moment of reverie. This negligible pause provides enough time to restore my calm and allows for curiosity and wonderment to enter in. Realizing I am about to retaliate against a perceived threat, I rethink my approach and my view of the situation. Thoughts buzz around my mind. *It's okay. What am I afraid of? It's just a bee. It has no reason to sting me unless I attack it. What would happen if I simply loved this tiny new friend?*

The bee continues hovering around my head and eventually glides to a landing on the upper left-hand corner of a page in my book. Any previous fear has been replaced by a sense of calm and peace. I gaze intently at my new friend, who walks across the page and back again. I study its features, admiring the beautiful colors and

intricate details. The bee's abdomen is painted with black and yellow stripes. Its alien-like eyes stare at me. They resemble aviation goggles perfectly tinted so observers see nothing but their own reflections staring back at them. I am mesmerized.

The movement of the bee's legs is quick and precise. The antenna on its head flit about, sensing the bee's surroundings as it scuttles across the page. I love it! I suppress my fear and my impulse to retaliate as I attempt to understand the bee and to look upon this supposed enemy with love. I remain lost in my thoughts. *What if it decided to land on me? Would it in fact sting me? Possibly, if I presented myself as a threat requiring the bee to defend itself. Would I die? Probably not. Yes, the sting would hurt, but that would be all. I know none of this will happen unless I allow it.*

The bee flies off, continuing on its journey. It returns moments later, landing in the same spot on the same page as if to make sure its message has been delivered. The message is now received, and my new friend goes on its way never to return.

I am fascinated and awed by this tiny creature. Hovering in front of me, the bee effortlessly flapped its wings, creating a mesmerizing buzz in my ears. Although very brief, this moment seemed like an eternity, and I am sure I will always remember it. I wonder how the bee perceives time or whether it senses time at all.

In the sixty seconds after it first appeared, the bee flapped its wings more than thirteen thousand times! That would be like me running six miles (more than twelve thousand steps) in a single minute! I perceived this encounter as being brief. Did the bee experience it as much longer, or was time nonexistent for this creature?

The bee did not appear concerned about its past. With no apparent awareness of its limitations, nothing prevented the bee from facing a creature more than sixteen hundred times larger than itself. Nor was it worried about its future. Whatever the reason, it appeared at that precise moment in time and left a message for me that would have a lasting effect.

I go about my day, but I replay the encounter over and over again in my mind. A few days pass before the message from my tiny friend

finally becomes clear. On that momentous day in September my friend landed on page one hundred of the book, *A Course in Miracles*. I watched him scurry across the page. He quickly departed but returned, landing on the same spot on the same page. Not once but twice! Was the energy of this bee aligned with mine? Were we on the same page? I hurry back to my office to grab the book, opening it to page one hundred. The words jump out at me.

"Safety is the complete relinquishment of attack."

"The only way to have peace is to teach peace."

Much of my life has been lived in retaliation behind my protective veil of anger and rage. I have spent every moment of every day in the past, preventing me from finding peace and happiness in the present moment. So many questions have plagued me, and the answers have eluded me.

Why did my parents divorce?

Was I to blame?

Why did my stepparents seem so unaccepting and unapproachable? Were they just as fearful as I was?

Why did I cut my body with razors and burn myself with cigarettes over and over again?

Why did I depend on alcohol? My obsession with alcohol only fueled my rage. I am lucky I am alive today given the many times I put my life in jeopardy. I haven't discussed my reliance on alcohol in this book because it seemed like such a cliché, plus it was a bullshit excuse.

Why did my stepbrother kill himself? Should it have been me?

Why was I so angry with my daughters' friend, who did nothing ill to anyone? Did I harbor hatred for her to spite myself?

The answers revealed themselves in the seventeen words found in that book—a message relayed to me by, of all things, a bee. Although my parents did their best to impart the message conveyed in those words, time and time again, it fell on deaf ears. I chose not to receive it, or I was not ready.

I have been awakened to receive many lessons from numerous teachers in various forms.

- I heard the words "I'm bad" and "I'm stupid" from the mouths of first-grade children, and this provided me a platform to share the power of affirmations for anyone at any age.
- I channeled the energy of a stepbrother who chose to depart this physical realm far too soon because the pain was too much and because his pleas for help weren't heard.
- I heard the cries of a young child seeking the love and acceptance she once knew, something I yearned for as a child.

In the coming chapters I will share additional stories received from some of the greatest teachers I have encountered in all my years: my daughters.

These answers came to me in my year of enlightenment, but I wonder whether they were always there and I simply chose not to receive them. Did my deliberate practice of meditation and the recitation of affirmations dozens, if not hundreds, of times a day contribute to a shift in my energy, allowing safety, peace, and love to flow to and through me? There is no record, no proof of how these miracles occurred, but I have all I need. This is all you need.

After this wonderful encounter with the bee, I wanted to learn more about the meaning and significance of my little messenger friend. Here are examples of the symbolism of bees.

Bee Symbolism

The bee was believed to be the sacred insect that bridged the natural world to the underworld. (www.en.wikipedia.org)

Totem symbolization: abundance, prosperity, royalty. (www.universeofsymbolism.com)

Spirit Animal Powers: love, cooperation, community. (www.universeofsymbolism.com)

Animal Magic: hidden wisdom, feminine powers, magic of believing. (www.universeofsymbolism.com)

Gift for You

I am still learning, and this learning will never cease for me or for you. I am proud of what I have accomplished and to have finally found peace. I hope you find yours. Once again I will share these lines from *A Course in Miracles*, which are taped to the wall of my office:

"When I have forgiven myself and remembered Who I am, I will bless everyone and everything I see. There will be no past, and therefore no enemies. And I will look with love on all that I failed to see before."

These words capture and reflect so much of my journey. What words have you found that capture and reflect your journey?

Fourteen
Sometimes I Think You Were Never a Kid

Don't forget Rule Number Six.

—*Benjamin Zander*

It has been a few weeks since my amazing encounter with the bee. Our daughters are in the third week of the school year, getting into the swing of things. Our oldest daughter is far from focused on school, still desperately clinging to memories of summer fun, which remain fresh in her mind. We allowed our daughters to disengage from

school during the summer, but unfortunately that has had adverse effects on Grace. Or has it?

In the first few weeks of fourth grade she has been experiencing quite a bit of difficulty. Grace seems to have regressed considerably from the prior year, especially in mathematics, a subject she mastered the year before.

On a weekend I am driving her to a friend's birthday party. Our destination is only five minutes away, but this feels like a five-hour trip. Grace chats away in her usual fashion with an onslaught of observations, complaints, whining, and jibber jabber. *Holy Toledo!* I think. She has an energy that is unmatched.

Her rapid-fire chatter is quite difficult to track, but for some unexplained reason I feel obliged to reply to every comment and to offer an answer to every query. This is an insane juggling act. Grace tosses her questions and observations into the air, and I fling my responses into the mix until I am overwhelmed and the conversation comes crashing down.

I am interested in practicing her multiplication on our short drive. I hurl math problems at her in an attempt to keep her mind sharp and to get her back into the academic groove. I quiz her with basic multiplication equations and expect her to rattle off the answers with ease. I persist, urging her on, but produce only frustration and tears.

"What is five times twenty-five?" I ask my daughter.

She pauses. "I don't know."

"Come on, Grace! What is five times twenty-five?"

"I don't know!" she cries out.

"All right. What is four times twenty-five?"

"I don't know!" she replies in frustration.

"Okay then. What is twenty-five plus twenty-five?"

"Fifty!" she says.

"Good! What is two times twenty-five?"

"I don't know! Daddy, why are you doing this?" she cries.

"Because I know you know the answers. Why in the world can't you get them?" I ask in frustration.

"I don't know!" she shouts.

Every time I throw out an equation she retaliates with an even louder and longer groan of angst and dissatisfaction. We wage mathematical war and I am exasperated. My patience gives way to frustration and anger. I sense the problem isn't that she doesn't know any of this but that she simply doesn't want to do any of it.

"Grace! Come on! I know you can do this," I roar at her.

"Dad! I can't."

"Yes, you can, Grace. These are the same math equations you learned last year, and you had no problem doing it! Cut it out! What is five times twenty-five!"

"I don't know!"

The more I press my daughter for the answers, the more I doubt my approach. I won't connect with her or with anyone else through anger and frustration. I should know this response is flawed, especially when I consider that my daughter is very much like me and that I would react in the same way. My assertive approach of hurling math equations at Grace only riles her. My daughter's retaliatory responses in turn create angst in me. Back and forth it goes until I raise my voice in an authoritative tone, putting an end to our mindless bickering. Silence ensues and I can feel a bad energy in the air. I feel guilty over the way I have reacted to such a wonderful child. I know there is no need for me to raise my voice, because I know there is nothing wrong with her. My anger is unwarranted. I just want her to snap out of the fog she is in.

After Grace pushes my buttons in this dialogue, I come to a startling realization. This is how wars start. Two sides do not understand each other, or they choose not to understand. Anger begets anger, and rage begets rage. War is the result, and it does not end until one side is defeated after devastation and death on both sides.

When I pressure my daughter to do her math, an invisible presence seems to taunt me, insisting I must force her to do this. At this point, my patience has vanished, and I sit in the front of the car

fuming until Grace blurts out, "Dad, sometimes I think you were never a kid!"

The world around me comes to a sudden halt, and silence quickly follows. Her comment hits me so hard that I pull over to collect my thoughts. I turn around to look at her sitting in the back seat. Although she is within arm's reach, we seem to be worlds apart. "Grace, what did you say?" I ask.

In a timid voice she repeats, "Sometimes I think you were never a kid."

I immediately unbuckle my seat belt and turn toward her so I can give her a hug. "Thank you," I tell her. "You are right. I once was a kid and I seem to have forgotten that. This is why you are here, to teach me. Thank you, Grace. I love you." She is so right. I seemed to have forgotten what it is like to be a kid.

A lesson from one of my mentors popped into my mind. This was the story about Rule Number Six, originally told by Benjamin Zander, that I heard years ago from Jim Rohn:

> Two prime ministers are sitting in a room discussing affairs of state. Suddenly a man bursts in, apoplectic with fury, shouting and stamping and banging his fist on the desk. The resident prime minister admonishes him: "Peter," he says, "kindly remember Rule Number 6," whereupon Peter is instantly restored to complete calm, apologizes, and withdraws. The politicians return to their conversation, only to be interrupted yet again twenty minutes later by an hysterical woman gesticulating wildly, her hair flying. Again the intruder is greeted with the words: "Marie, please remember Rule Number 6." Complete calm descends once more, and she too withdraws with a bow and an apology. When the scene is repeated for a third time, the visiting prime minister addresses his colleague: "My dear friend, I've seen many things in my life, but never anything as remarkable as this. Would you be willing to share with me the secret of Rule Number 6?" "Very simple," replies the resident prime minister. "Rule Number 6 is 'Don't take yourself so g—damn seriously.'" "Ah," says his visitor, "that is a fine rule."

> After a moment of pondering, he inquires, "And what, may I ask, are the other rules?"
>
> "There aren't any." (Zander and Zander 2000)

Gift for You

Don't forget we were all kids once, so don't take yourself so damn seriously.

Fifteen
Trick or Treat?

> Only perfect love exists. If there is fear, it produces a state that does not exist.
>
> —*A Course in Miracles*

Even after that enlightening moment with my daughter, her poor academic performance persisted. My wife and I shared our concerns with her teachers, the school counselor, and the principal. We considered the option of private schooling, which would provide the structure and attention needed for Grace to succeed.

We visited a highly regarded local private school that seemed

to be an ideal fit. It offered smaller class sizes and a comprehensive academic program tailored to meet each student's needs and level of learning. The school seemed to have been created specifically to help our daughter succeed. This was good! The environment resonated with me given the challenges I faced as a child. I wished I had had this type of education.

The emotional strain from Grace's struggles proved difficult for us. We were at a loss, seeking to help our daughter and not quite sure if the school system was capable of meeting her needs. This uncertainty strongly contributed to our decision to enroll her in the new school. All this happened relatively quickly, and I am still not quite sure if the school would have been best for her. Were we selfishly forcing this change upon our daughter because we did not know how to deal with the situation or because we did not want to face it?

We expressed our concerns to Grace, providing her with an opportunity to give us her thoughts about attending the new school. Initially she expressed excitement about the idea, something we did not anticipate.

Finding the school was the easy part of this process. After my wife made a series of calls and arranged a few meetings and an official school tour, we were ready for a meet-and-greet to allow Grace a chance to see the school and to meet the teachers. If all went well, we would be ready to take the next step. That next step would be a huge leap. Grace would be changing schools, finding new friends, meeting new teachers, and leaving the comfort of her current friends and teachers behind. Unbeknownst to us this would be a long, arduous, and life-shattering process.

After multiple meetings and conversations and stacks of paperwork, Grace was verbally accepted into the new school. All that remained was the formality of providing copies of her school transcript. Once the details were finalized our daughter would be on her way to a new beginning.

We maintained a dialogue with Grace's current teachers, counselor, and principal, all of whom were very understanding and accommodating. When we requested Grace's transcript, the school

complied. However, to our surprise, the school had no record of an intelligence test for our daughter.

Grace could not be admitted to the new school without results from an intelligence test such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) or the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales. The director of enrollment provided us with the names of people who could administer either test. After conversations with family, friends, Grace's teachers, her principal, and others, we scheduled her to be tested by a counselor who came highly recommended by the director of enrollment. Little did we know this would be a tremendous learning experience for all of us.

Grace's test took place on a warm autumn day in October, five days before Halloween. Time for a trick or a treat? I took the morning off from work to meet my wife, Pam, at the counselor's office in Media Borough where Grace would take the WISC test. I parked my car, slipped coins into the meter, and headed off. The town was busy with people hustling to work, grabbing coffee, or taking their dogs for a walk.

The autumn sky delivered an abundance of leaves. Many of the leaves lay scattered across the red-brick walkway, and acorns crunched beneath the soles of my shoes.

As I approached the counselor's office, I looked up to see the sky peppered with blackbirds on their autumn migration. Dozens of them stopped to perch on the branches high above. They made a great commotion and jostled loose even more leaves and acorns. *Clack, click, clack.* Acorn after acorn smacked onto the sidewalk and careened off car windshields and a few commuters' heads, making this morning walk a somewhat treacherous experience.

I took the brick path up the steps to the counselor's office. Pam greeted me with a kiss and briefed me on the morning thus far. The only notable event was a seriously intense game of Concentration she and Grace were playing while they waited for the counselor.

Grace was on her way to victory when she greeted me. Jumping up from her seat to give me a big hug, she shouted, "Daddy! Want to

play Concentration with us? I am about to beat Mom. You can play the next game!"

Pam rolled her eyes at Grace's premature celebration.

"Sure. I'd love to play and kick your butt!" I said with a smile.

"No way! I am going to destroy you!"

The game ended with Pam pulling out a victory. Grace again urged that we play another game. She shuffled the cards by scattering them all over the floor and mixing them up. Then we lined them up one by one across the carpet, forming a square. The square ended up looking more like the letter *Q* because of a few leftover cards and our faulty geometry.

"You're gonna lose, Dad!" Grace shouted.

"Not a chance," I replied.

The intense and raucous competition began. The floor of the waiting room was transformed into a collage of characters from the Nickelodeon show *SpongeBob SquarePants* with Mr. Crabs, Sandy the Squirrel, Patrick Starfish, Plankton, Mrs. Puff, and more. Grace flipped over two cards without a match. "Barnacles!" she shouted.

Pam flipped over cards with no luck. I followed suit. After a few misses, Grace found matching cards of SpongeBob chasing jellyfish with his jellyfish net. "Yes!" she roared, raising her fist toward the sky.

Her cheer was quickly followed by the frustration of another mismatch. Pam then flipped over two cards to find a match. "Yes! I am going to whip your butt," she told Grace with a smile.

Round and round we went until I ended up winning the game. "Let's play another one!" Grace implored.

We consented and a new game ensued with even more robust trash talking. "You stink," Grace moaned at me when I found a match.

"Oh yeah!" she cheered after flipping over two matches of her own.

"You're going down!" Pam said with her usual air of confidence.

The game went on and on until Grace secured the victory. She is magical, always looking for ways to liven things up and to bring us together. Spending this time with her and Pam was a blast. The

games continued as we waited patiently for the counselor. After an hour and a half, Pam suggested I leave so I could get some work done.

I headed home to do just that. Two hours passed before I heard Pam's car approaching the house. She was finally home, having dropped Grace off at school after the test.

I was immersed in work, staring intently at my computer screen when Pam gently tapped on the office door. My laser focus on my computer would have given a bystander the impression that something magical was about to jump out of the screen or that aliens had landed on Earth and I was watching the live streaming video on CNN. Opening the door, Pam simply said, "Hi."

"Hey. How was it?" I replied, maintaining my hypnotic gaze on the computer screen.

"Okay," she said quietly. My wife stood in the doorway with tears streaming down her cheeks, tears I neglected to notice due to my concentration on the computer screen.

"So how did she do?" I asked, finally looking up to see Pam's eyes. Jumping up from my chair, I embraced her. "What's wrong? Honey, why are you crying?"

She struggled to find the right words. "Something is wrong with Grace."

"What?"

"Her test. She failed it."

"What do you mean?" I asked, hugging her. "Sit down. Tell me what happened."

"She scored in the lowest percentile. The counselor said she has a learning disability."

Tears of fear and worry gushed from her eyes, and I grabbed a handful of tissues for her. We moved into the kitchen, and Pam sat down at the table. "Grace scored a fifty-nine on her WISC test," she said.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"It means she has a learning disorder and cannot go to the school." Her voice carried a tone of dread and helplessness. "The counselor said we should schedule a brain scan as soon as possible to rule out

the chance of Grace having a brain tumor. A brain tumor!" Pam sobbed, wanting to scream.

I stood across the kitchen table and saw the terror in my wife's eyes. We had entered the counselor's office that morning confident we had found an answer and were doing the right thing for our daughter, but my wife had walked away with a burden that would create great angst and suffering for our family.

"The counselor asked me if Grace had experienced any sort of trauma over the summer. She said this might explain the poor results on the test. I told her no. I said we had a great summer at the beach. That's when she advised that I schedule a CAT scan to rule out the possibility of a brain tumor!"

I listened to my wife agonize over the tragic news the counselor had given her and saw her world crumbling. I wanted to console her, but I couldn't find the words. I was reminded of how I struggled to connect with Grace as we drove to her friend's birthday party the month prior. Although Pam was only a few feet away, I felt like we were worlds apart and couldn't reach each other.

At that moment I felt a powerful energy flow through me. It was very similar to the sensation I experienced when I channeled Evan's energy several months earlier. Then these words came to me: "Grace is fine. There is nothing wrong with her. She is messing with you, with us."

Although the words arose from my vocal chords, they emanated from another source. I knew what I said was true, but I wasn't confident anyone was ready to hear it. Dr. Wayne Dyer's words perfectly encapsulated this moment: "You'll see it when you believe it." I believed it, I knew it, and I saw it. I had to trust that everyone else would believe it too in due time. But like most people, they would need to see it before they believed it.

I shed tears but they were different from Pam's. They were tears of elation because I felt peace and knew Grace was fine. In fact, she was more than fine; she was sending us a message. My concern was that she may have used the wrong platform to deliver her message

and that the message may have fallen on deaf ears and, even worse, have been misunderstood.

Grace did not want to be labeled or judged. She just wanted to be loved for who she was. Does our society too often put labels on things? Does it tend to categorize everything? When people don't conform to the norm, do we diagnose them as though something is wrong with them?

Would Grace's message backfire with an inappropriate reaction from the school or from society? Did we adults simply need to listen? Was this young child teaching the teachers? Somehow she figured out a way to mess with her parents and her teachers, even outsmarting a well-educated and highly regarded counselor.

This was the beginning of a higher awareness and of a deeper relationship with my daughter Grace. Unfortunately, the rest of the world wasn't prepared to receive her teaching. More conversations, meetings, and phone calls ensued as the school's principal, teachers, counselors, and psychiatrist as well as family members and friends tried to make sense of what was happening. Everyone needed to see that Grace was okay before believing it. I did not want to downplay the severity of the situation, but I was comforted by the knowledge that all was well with her. The question I pondered was whether all was well with the rest of us. Why can't children be who they are intended to be, not who everyone else thinks they should be?

Trick or treat? Nearly a week later, Halloween was upon us, and we were back at Grace's school for another meeting to discuss the recent turn of events and to figure out our next steps. Seated around the table were the principal, Grace's teachers, the school counselor, and the school psychiatrist. My wife detailed the chain of events that led up to this meeting. It was difficult for us to recount our experience with the counselor and the results of the WISC test. We found it especially hard to discuss her suggestion that our daughter may have been through some sort of trauma or that she be checked for a brain tumor.

The school psychiatrist immediately spoke up. "Have you ever seen a child with a score of fifty-nine?" she asked.

"No," we replied simultaneously, not sure why she was asking.

"Children with an intelligence score of fifty-nine cannot care for themselves. They cannot feed themselves; they cannot bathe themselves; they can't even dress themselves. They require full-time assistance."

Wiping a tear from her cheek, my wife said, "Before we left the office, I asked Grace to run down the street to my car to grab my checkbook so I could pay for the service. The counselor who administered the test saw my daughter run down the busy sidewalk, unlock my car, and grab my checkbook. Aware of where she was going and what she was doing, Grace then closed the door, locked the car, and returned with my checkbook in hand. The counselor witnessed this but then allowed me to leave her office thinking something was seriously wrong with my daughter."

All in attendance expressed a deep desire to do the best they could for our daughter. I was very grateful to the principal for expressing, and acting on, his sincere desire to do everything possible to ensure our daughter was properly supported.

We were at the doorstep of a new school and of a new beginning for our daughter, but our plans were derailed. In a strange turn of events, the exciting future we had planned for our daughter unexpectedly crumbled. The school that a few days earlier had all but enrolled Grace as a student would no longer welcome her because of an obviously flawed test result. We were chasing our tails, frantic, scared, and feeling helpless. Was the system failing us? Did it backfire on us, or did we present it with an unprecedented challenge?

Unfortunately, the counselor who administered the test was of little help other than allowing our daughter to unofficially retake the test as a formality to prove nothing was wrong with her. Otherwise, we could have her take a different intelligence test, such as the Stanford-Binet test. At this point, however, we had been through enough and were quite dismayed and baffled by how the issue was handled.

In my eyes, the counselor reacted based on the fear our society too often fosters, creating even greater fear with the suggestion that

Grace might have a brain tumor. A brain tumor! Could it be that society has a tumor of fear?

My wife could not quite grasp what was going on with our daughter, but I saw an elaborate plan by Grace to send a message to the world: "Let me be as intended. Please do not label me. Do not set expectations for me, especially expectations I do not want to fulfill. I am fine and will be fine, so just let me be. And don't forget Rule Number Six. All is well."

Fortunately, Grace's teachers, the counselor, and the school principal stepped up to provide the support she needed. As the days passed, our emotions settled and life returned almost to normal. Grace remained at her school, and we worked through her challenges together. However, Grace resisted doing much of her homework just as I did when I was her age.

One evening about a week later, Grace was in her room working on her homework when I walked in to have a chat with her, as I often do.

"Hey, Dad," Grace said in a low voice.

"Hey, sweetie! Whatcha doing?"

"Nothing," she replied, as most nine-year-olds do.

"Are you done having fun yet?" I asked.

"What?" She looked at me with surprise.

"Are you done having fun?"

"What do you mean?" she asked in a lame attempt at playing dumb.

"You know what I mean. Are you done? I know what you are doing," I firmly stated.

"You do? How?"

"I just know. So are you done?"

"Yes, Daddy. I don't want to see Mom cry anymore. I am sorry."

"Thank you. I love you!" We hugged.

"I don't want Mommy to be sad, so I will stop."

"Thank you, sweetie. I know how you feel."

"You do? Oh yeah, because I am just like you."

We chatted a little while longer about what had happened and

about the impact it had on everyone involved, in particular her mother. Her actions had sent shockwaves throughout the family and beyond. I understood she wanted to march to the beat of her own drummer, which was perfectly fine, but she needed to be aware of the effects her actions could have on people.

"But how did you know?" she asked me once again.

"I just know, sweetie. I understand and I love you very much."

After our conversation, the Grace we love and adore magically returned. For the remainder of the school year she performed just fine, as though nothing had happened. I found this episode endearing because I saw a child full of love, compassion, and caring trying to send a message that she was okay and wanted to be who she was intended to be. She did not want to be defined and confined by rules, tests, grades, or expectations placed upon her. She wanted to be happy and to enjoy her days. That is not too much for anyone to ask.

Grace made a statement early in life, and I am proud of her for being strong enough to do that. I am proud of myself for hearing her message. Others might chastise a child for thinking freely and for having fun as Grace did. I feel strongly that she would be a much different person today if we had decided to respond in anger to her actions and to squelch her voice. Allowing her to freely express who she is has made her a better person and has strengthened her belief in herself.

I need to be reminded every now and again to remember Rule Number Six and to listen to my daughters because they can teach me a great deal. Children embrace a view of the world and a way of learning that may seem different, even confrontational, to adults, but who's to say we know more than they do? They are trying their best to express themselves, and if we took the time to listen, we would see the world as intended.

Gift for You

Take the time to listen to the youngsters in your life. We were all once children, and the world most likely didn't understand us or listen to us. Replace judgment and fear with loving curiosity. Never forget we all were once kids.

Sixteen

Doing What He Intended—a Thanksgiving Awakening

> Your Father can no more forget the truth in you than you can fail to remember it.
>
> —*A Course in Miracles*

A chilly breeze turns our daughters' cheeks a rosy red, like the apples recently plucked from the trees during the fall harvest. Freshly fallen leaves blanket the grass, still a vibrant green underneath, and smoke from hickory wood burning in the fireplace rises up through the chimney. The scents of the autumn season fill my lungs, and I feel exhilaration.

It has been a few weeks since our daughter Grace had her fun with the world. On this day she delights in the sort of fun that brings happiness rather than heartache. Our daughters prance about in sweat pants, tank tops, and flip-flops. Their choice of a light wardrobe makes me yearn for the warm days of summer. I marvel at how children are perfectly comfortable wearing summer clothes in the chill of late autumn.

The delight in their eyes warms my heart and makes me appreciate the fact that our family is gathering in a shared expression of gratitude on this Thanksgiving Day. Aside from the Christmas holiday, there is probably no other time of year as amazing as this. Thanksgiving allows us an opportunity to reflect with gratitude on all the gifts bestowed on us over the past year.

The little ones run around giggling and chasing one another, completely lost in the joy of the moment. The older ones chat away with their eyes glued to their iPhones, sharing photos, social media posts, and more. It is amusing to see these youngsters engaged in conversation while staring down at their smartphones.

"Who wants to play Flip?" my uncle asks, corralling us around the table for a game of cards after the Thanksgiving feast.

"Yeah! I'm in!" shouts a cousin.

"What about I Doubt It?" one of my daughters yells.

"Can we play Kings in the Corner?" another asks.

"Let's try a new game today," my uncle says with his usual cool demeanor. "This one is called Chase the Ace."

"What? Never heard of it!" my brother shouts.

"What is this game?" a cousin asks.

Brothers, spouses, cousins, nieces, and nephews gather around the table, laughing until their sides ache and their eyes glisten with tears of happiness. My uncle's youthful exuberance is contagious. Love and laughter fill the house as we enjoy the oneness of family.

Taking a break from the card playing mania, I sit at the bar in the family room, watching a football game. I am seated on a barstool, and my feet dangle just above the floor, eliciting memories of my youth

when I was not tall enough for my feet to touch the floor regardless of what chair I sat in.

On the other side of the bar stands my eighteen-year-old nephew, who has an amazing gift. He lives in the moment and is keenly aware of everything going on although that is not quite apparent to the rest of the world. He has been labeled as autistic. Autism is defined as a "developmental disorder characterized by troubles with social interaction and communication" and as a "range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication, as well as by unique strengths and differences." (www.autismspeaks.org).

Recalling the experience my wife and I had with our daughter's intelligence test, and seeing my amazing nephew with his apparent affliction, I ponder what the terms *autism* and *learning disability* mean. I choose to see my daughter and my nephew through different eyes. The lessons I have learned from my daughter over the past few months have opened my mind to possibility of a different world.

Who's to say my daughter, my nephew, or any other child is learning disabled or autistic? Have we considered that they quite possibly might learn at a far more advanced level than we do? Are they outcasts in a world that is too basic for their advanced minds? Could it be that we are the ones who are disabled, unable to open our minds to see their brilliance? I choose not to judge, doing my best not to burden my nephew with my expectations and to see the pure divine love within him—the same love inherent in all of us.

On this day of giving thanks for our gifts, I learn another lesson, this time from my nephew. I watch him place a can of Sprite on the counter to quench his eternal thirst. Initially all I see is a child who is going to spill soda and make a mess. Then I free myself of judgment to see beyond the limits of my eyes, and I receive an eternal lesson from my nephew. This transcript, in the form of a text message to his mother, recounts what I capture this Thanksgiving Day.

> Your son was doing what He intended. Click! The can of Sprite popped open. Your son lifted the can off the counter.

The can was like a rocket ship taking off from a launch pad, reaching toward the unknown. With a slight tilt of the can, soda surged from the opening into a glass full of ice below. Tiny bubbles exploded, creating a foam of freedom attempting to escape the glass from the opening high above. The bubbles rose rapidly toward the heavens.

I looked at your son in amazement. He knew that chaos would be averted and that the soda would not flood over the lip of the glass. An unseen lid, a force, on the top of the glass seemed to prevent the soda bubbles from flooding over the brim. They retreated.

One last pour. Grasping the can between his fingertips, your son tilted it until it was upside down, allowing the final drops to escape into the glass. We foresaw soda surging over the lip of the glass and spilling across the countertop, over the edge, and onto the floor. Watching in panic as this scene unfolded, we wanted to shout, "What are you doing? Grab the paper towels! You are going to make a mess!"

If I had been the one doing the pouring, I would have doubted myself. In the end, I would probably have rejected the idea of pouring the soda into the glass of ice. But he knew. Your son knew it. This glass of Sprite would not create a mess, and there would be no anger or rage. An extraordinary yet gentle force was among us, knowing exactly what was to come. Your son knew.

He did not hold on to doubt. We were the ones who doubted him. I think about my life and about all the doubt I unwittingly carried with me. Where did it come from? Was this doubt placed upon me by those who saw me as different or by those who told me I couldn't accomplish what I desired? Who knows? But I heard your son's message loud and clear.

The soda hit the ice and surged forth, attempting yet another escape. Then it retreated. It appeared to have experienced an awakening, learning it was already home. There was no need to flee. Peace was already within and it was okay just to be. The beverage withdrew, returning to safety and comfort behind the glass walls and among the ice cubes.

> Your son raised the glass to his lips, glancing in our direction with a slight squint and a tiny grin. Nothing was said. Nothing needed to be said, for we felt his love and received his message: All is well. I knew, but you held on to fear. I am love, and you have no reason to experience the illusion of fear. Look at me through your eyes as intended. Please don't be afraid. Rejoice because I have a truth to share with you. All is well. I love you.

I look at my nephew in wonderment. Though he is seen as different, he has an awareness that eludes many.

Gift for You

Suspend judgment and let go of what you think you know to see things as they truly are.

"Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment." (Rumi).

Seventeen

One Thousand Years Later—December 23, 3016

> How will the world end? … The world will end when its thought system has been completely reversed.
>
> —*A Course in Miracles*

This morning after meditating and reciting affirmations, I take notes from my daily reading of *A Course in Miracles*. But I mistakenly enter the date as December 23, 3016, one thousand years from today. This typo sparks my curiosity. What will have happened to me? What will have happened to all my anger, rage, suffering, and struggles? Will

anyone remember or care? If no one will remember, why do I make such a big deal about this now?

What will happen if I try to go the other way toward love? At the core, the reason I haven't done this resides with my fears. I seem to accept the flawed view that being loving, kind, and accepting will somehow make me weak and vulnerable. I have no proof that this is so, but this irrational thinking has prevented me from becoming who I am intended to be.

On December 23, 3016, my fears, anger, and rage will not matter, so why do I allow them so much control over my fate today?

I have misled myself, failing to enjoy the moment because I was lost in the past and afraid of the future. I missed many opportunities for joy in the first half of my life. Where did I get the belief that I must suffer, sweat, and bleed to feel worthy of happiness and deserving of success? A thousand years from now whoever reads this will ponder the insanity of my flawed approach to life. The more I think about this, the more I am determined to change the way I see the world.

On far too many occasions when speaking with my guide and friend, Bev, I would roar in anger about how I was not going to "stand in line" to live a life of mediocrity. I lived in fear for far too long behind a veil of rage and retaliation, which was supposedly keeping me safe. I was tired.

Undeterred, I walked head first into the unknown of love whence I came and away from my delusion of safety in rage and retaliation. As a young boy, love was the only thing I knew. I was determined to return to love and would no longer live without finding all I desired and deserved.

I believe it and I now see it before my eyes. Dr. Wayne Dyer appeared in my life at just the right moment and will always remain. I heard Marianne Williamson at the ideal moment, and I opened the book *A Course in Miracles* after letting it sit on my shelf for nearly a decade. Another hero of mine, Tim Ferriss, introduced me to the reality that all things are possible when I read his book *The 4-Hour Workweek* a decade ago. Nearly twenty years ago, Jim Rohn began teaching me how to build a successful life.

These leaders, mentors, and guides showed me how they became successful based on their personal journeys. They, too, stepped out of line to find their paths and would not live lives of mediocrity. Today I step out of line away from fear and into the light of love.

"The world will wash away and yet this house will stand forever, for its strength lies not within itself alone" *(A Course in Miracles)*.

Gift for You

As difficult as it may seem, when you feel the need to defend, retaliate, or fight, try love instead. As I often ask my daughters, "Would you rather be right or happy?"

"If I defend myself I am attacked … Defense is frightening. It stems from fear, increasing fear as each defense is made. You think it offers safety. Yet it speaks of fear made real and terror justified" (*A Course in Miracles*).

Eighteen

Finding Enlightenment after Resistance—a New Beginning

> For from this lowest point will learning lead to heights of happiness, in which you see the purpose of the lesson shining clear, and perfectly within your learning grasp.
>
> —*A Course in Miracles*

I will end where I began, on a quiet Tuesday morning just three days into the new year. I sit alone in my office with my legs crossed and my eyes closed. I am deep in meditation, so deep that what I see appears to be reality. I envision myself grasping a shard of glass between my

fingertips. The tip of my thumbnail is white from the grip I maintain on the glass, which is cemented to the edge of my forefinger. I observe dozens of scars hidden beneath the hair covering my arms. I stroke the hair of my left forearm to uncover the letters *DIE* carved into my flesh. For decades they have been sunk deep in my skin as a constant reminder of who I once was. For far too long I carried this past with me in anger and shame.

Still deep in meditation, I envision the piece of glass grasped tightly between my forefinger and thumb, causing my fingers to ache and tremble. Tears paint my cheeks in the sadness and suffering of my past married with the happiness of my new beginning.

I firmly press the razor-sharp glass into my wrist. Beginning just below the palm of my right hand, slicing through my flesh straight down the center of my wrist, the glass glides between the tendons surrounding the median nerve. The small indent formed by the tendons in my wrist creates a runway to guide the glass through my flesh.

My delicate skin gives way to this intruder without resistance like a speedboat ripping through the water. The boat's wake affects everything in its path. Nearby vessels suddenly rock up and down and side to side. Then, just as suddenly as the water is torn apart, peace is restored and the ocean again becomes one.

Tendons and ligaments are now exposed, an image my eyes were never meant to see, and I wince from the pain. The blood paints my hands in a dark crimson; it is drying and becoming sticky, gluing my fingers to the shard of glass. Droplets of blood stream down my wrist and dot the floor. The droplets become a surge, creating a puddle of death below me.

I am cutting through my harsh exterior to reveal my true self. For decades I have known who was underneath this exterior, but my anger and fear prevented me from revealing this identity. Relief soon follows the excruciating pain. This is the moment when peace is restored and I become one again.

I snap out of my deep meditative silence and return to consciousness. I feel free, as though a burden has been lifted. The

storm clouds of my painful past have broken to reveal the shining light of love. I have been awakened to my new beginning.

After this morbid and shocking experience, I can't but help think of George Bailey from the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. George has given up all hope, wishing he were never born and contemplating suicide. Fortunately, he meets his guardian angel, who shows him what the world would be like without him. George prevails over his pain and fear and discovers that the world is a better place with him in it.

My end is my beginning. I have experienced great doubt and angst, fueling an intense desire to know who I truly am, why I am here, and what it all means. I have questioned thousands of times whether finding the answers has been worth the pain and suffering I endured or the pain and suffering my parents and loved ones endured. The answers will come someday—maybe today.

I have fantasized about my end too many times to count, but something has prevented me from making it happen. I am not sure why this something kept me here but allowed my stepbrother Evan to end his life. No matter what I did to myself through all the rage and self-inflicted suffering—the cutting, the cigarette burns, the excessive drinking, the altercations, and the lashing out—I always knew I would be okay.

I have lived my life carrying guilt and anger about my childhood and about my parents' divorce. I allowed these feelings to fester for far too long until I had no other choice but to understand, forgive, and go the other way toward love. I know my parents did their best. Their love never skipped a beat, even during the tumultuous times when I pushed them away before finally awakening and seeing that they held fast to love and forgiveness for their son. Through forgiveness I am able to see and to receive the many amazing gifts they have bestowed on me.

Now a father with three beautiful daughters and an amazing wife, I see the love I have for them in an even brighter light. I consider them my greatest teachers and look forward to the things I can learn from them as we continue to walk on this journey together. I do my best

not to place judgment on them, based on what I think I know, but instead allow them to be as intended. I try to see the world in a new light each and every day.

After immersing myself in *A Course in Miracles*, I have a clear view of my life and of the world. I know where my feet will take me. I am making a shift from a world of wanting to a universe of being and of allowing. When my ego produces the illusion of fear, I no longer fall for this lure. Illusions of judgment, anger, and retaliation still present themselves in the guise of protection and safety, but now I am aware that love keeps me safe. Through this eternal love I have seen that I can do all that He has done and even greater things.

I write this final chapter on the day I have decided to stare fear in the eyes and walk past it, stepping toward the light of love and my new beginning. For longer than I would like to acknowledge, I have been asking for a sign, an answer. Many signs and answers have appeared in various forms, but I have been unable to receive them until now, in my year of enlightenment.

A few hours earlier I had one of my weekly conversations with my friend and guide, Bev, who keeps me focused as I continue to learn. As usual, I talked about what I desired to do with my life and discussed the fears that have prevented me from taking that step toward love and becoming the man I was intended to be. I have been asking for a sign, someone or something to give me permission to take that step toward an enlightened, peaceful way of being.

The more we spoke about it, the more I knew I was ready, the more I knew I did not need anyone's permission, because it had been given to me long ago, on February 26, 1969. As Bev and I spoke, Eckhart Tolle's name kept finding its way into our conversation. The last few times Bev and I spoke, she mentioned his name and his story. Today I was ready to receive her message and Tolle's.

The more I wallowed in my fears and doubts and dwelled on my past, the more I heard his name. "Your stories are very similar," Bev said. "He had a similar experience with feelings of dread, and he could not live with himself any longer. You have to read his book."

"Yes, I have heard of him, and I have been seeing more of him

online and in my in-box," I replied. "So many spiritual leaders appear in my daily life, but I never looked at who he was. After our call is done, I am going to the bookstore to get his book."

I know all things are possible if we allow ourselves to see. Our physical being is a miracle in itself, but without true awareness, we are subject to resistance, judgment, and suffering. Today is the day I decide to allow all things. Today is the day I decide to walk on the path I have chosen and to see clearly with the eyes I have been blessed with.

When I complete the final page of this book, I will immediately find my way to the bookstore to pick up a copy of Tolle's book *The Power of Now* (2004), and I will open myself up to a world of even greater possibilities. I end with another quote from *A Course in Miracles* that captures my year of enlightenment: "From this lowest point will learning lead to heights of happiness, in which you see the purpose of the lesson shining clear, and perfectly within your learning grasp."

A Final Gift for You

Before you go, I have one last story to share with you. It's about my grandfather, whom we lovingly called Pop-Pop. We were gathered at the home where he had lived for nearly fifty years, the home where my mother grew up, the home where I spent much of my youth. This place held so many wonderful memories and stories. On that day nearly two decades ago, we were carrying the last items out of his home. We walked together down the redbrick path winding its way from the house to the driveway. Many of the bricks were uneven after decades of use, with some darker than others. A layer of moss covered many of the bricks, while others were bright fire red as though recently they'd been laid down. The orange-red color of the brick walkway was nicely complemented by the dark green ivy covering the ground alongside the walkway and stretching up the wall of the home.

On that June day in 1999 the rest of us cried for our past, mourning

our memories, but my grandfather found peace and happiness at that moment. As we walked down the steps, carrying the last few items from his home, my grandfather looked me in the eye and left a message that remains with me to this day. "Well, Tom," he said, "here's to new beginnings."

As you turn the final page of this book, keep it close, for love is within. Know that I love you and that you are not alone as we celebrate new beginnings.

Love and light.

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About the Author

T. E. Corner has been on a continual search for meaning, persisting through struggles with anger and self-hatred. For decades he made it his quest to understand who he was and why.

His effort to find another way toward love and forgiveness accelerated when he published his first children's book, *List for Santa, List for Life!*, in 2014. This was soon followed by *Positive Thoughts, Positive Life!* and *Life Is Fine When You Are Aligned!*

The tipping point came when he published the empowering and uplifting memoir *Mommy, Why Do You Have Two Birthdays?* This book was written to honor his wife, who triumphed over a life-threatening diagnosis of stage-four cancer in December 2013. Corner

wrote the book from a place of love, not of anger, avoiding the typical human desire to hold on to suffering and struggle.

After publishing the memoir honoring his wife and the thousands of men, women, and children who have been down a similar path, his own path became clearer. Interviews and conversations ensued, helping Corner realize that writing the memoir was a form of acceptance and of release, a cathartic experience.

Absorbing himself in *A Course in Miracles* and the teachings of many other guides and mentors, Corner knew love was the only way. This eventually led to the initial idea for *Borrowed Eyes and Feet*. The book captures the struggles and sufferings he now knows are unnecessary. He wrote his story for the thousands of people who have had similar experiences to show them there is another way.

Corner resides in Media, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Pam, and three beautiful daughters.

Love and light.