



LOVE AND LIGHT

-Jerry Ebert-

CONTENTS

Part I

Poems and Photos

page 2

Part II

My Crazy Life

page 49

Part III

Papa's Gift

page 91

**All photos taken in the Hudson Valley
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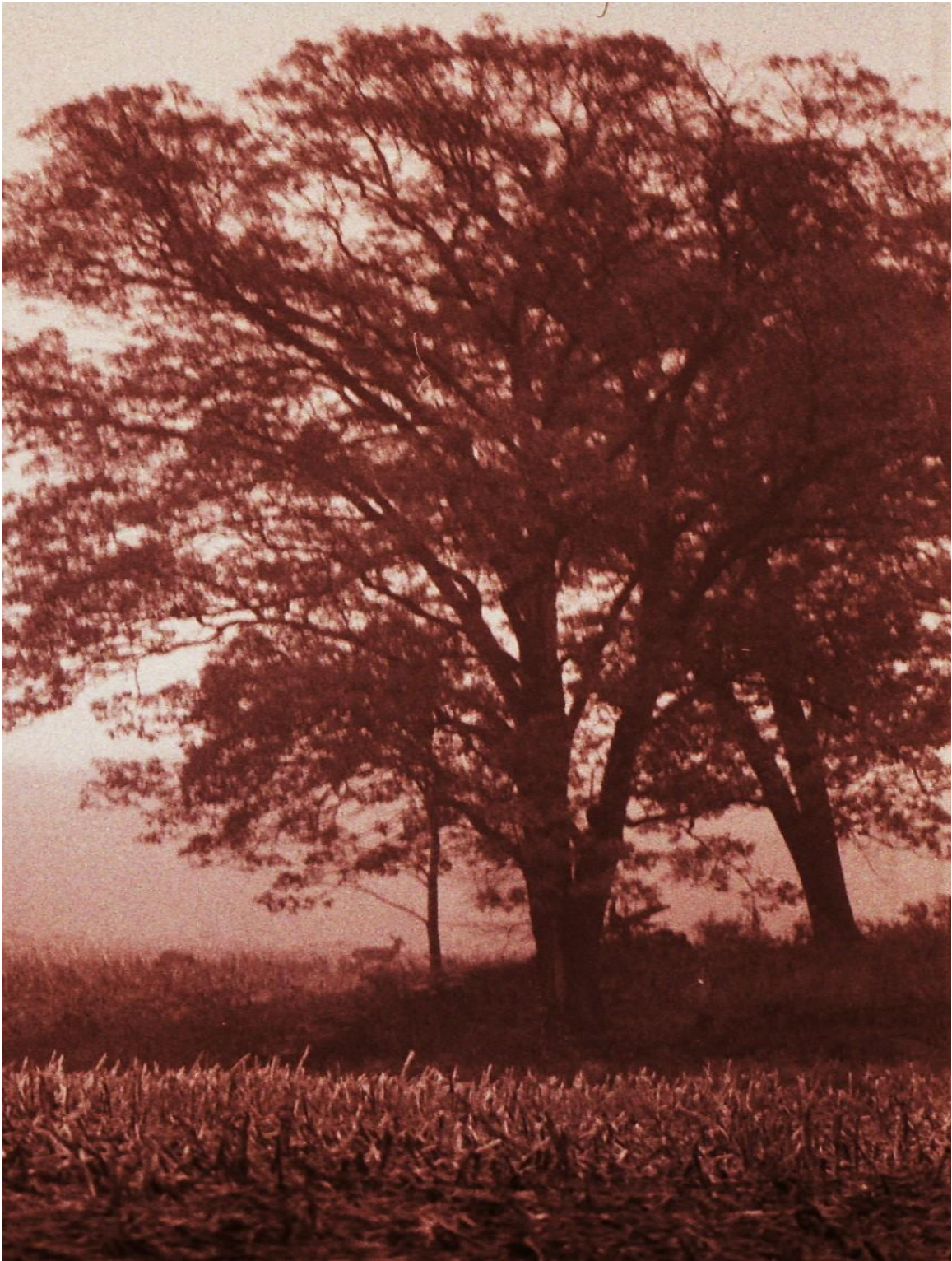
Part I

Poems And Photos

I am no one, I am everyone,
born from dirt on the summer solstice.

I own a view of the river
and the memory of your kiss.

This is dedicated to you,
our children and grandchildren.



Deer through the cornfield, Mountainville.

DEER RUNNING

Twilight.
Deer feeding below fog,
pawing the raw earth.

The stream is low,
the corn harvested.

The wind chants
the moon's welcoming.

The buck's head rises,
catching our human scent,

then spins
and leads the retreat
into woodlands.

I touch you,
our loneliness
blends.



Sunset over Loch Sheldrake.

THE TRUTH OF SOULS

We wander the fields
of our homeland,
longing to know
the truth of souls,
the place beyond tears.

You danced
through shadows
to find me last night,
to pull me
toward your light.

Who are you?
Just before waking,
you curled like a cat
around me,
murmuring
in another language

...and I wondered
where our souls go.



Ghost moon, Montgomery.

NOTHING IS SAFE

Mountains sculpted
by ruthless glaciers,
pushing like bones
through the skin
of the land.

Blood of the natives
crunched into the soil,
sweat of the slaves
dried on the stone walls,
fencing off
our obscene inheritance.

This earth was never ours.
Now it rebels against us;
now it disowns us.

The crazy moon rises.
A crow caws before the kill.
Savage ghosts prowl for victims.

The psychotic wind
frightens the trees,

warning us
to leave this place,
to find the truths
only leaving
can teach,

to go from this place,
for nothing is safe.

DRIVE

Let us drive then
down highways of obsessions
and merge with the flow of ants
into the corporate states of America,
the land of plenty if you'll slave for it,
where everything's for sale
and payday is our Sabbath,
where who you are
is what you have,

shackled to our jobs
like sharecroppers
to the harsh earth:
the world's a money farm.

Passing faces heavy
with the dread of collapse,
the paralysis of anxiety,
the traumas, the divisions,
the unsettled angers
and secret guilts.

Memories of love and light
blurring like drizzle
on the windshield.



Subway sleeper, Boston.



Mother and child, Newburgh.

FEAR'S EDGE

Dead afternoon,
sky stops crying,
street mother
waiting on fear's edge
for a ride that never comes.

She thinks of a lost son,
the night ahead,
food,

man sitting on cardboard
cradling an empty cup,
asking but not expecting.

Corner preacher pushing salvation
exclusively through
his organization.

Radio...toy songs,
nasty news,
latest leisure,
gods of money,
country
and pleasure.

A fly
incuriously buzzes.

OCTOBER

We wander the park
two fools in love,
autumn leaves
in oblivious descent.
An old man and woman
pass us, holding hands.
You wonder if they fear
the separation
that must soon come.

*What if death
is not death
but a whole new life
where memories intensify
like the bellowing
October hillside
below the radiant sky?*

*What if our bodies
are the bursting leaves
and our souls
the rooted trees?*



The Dennistons, Mountainville.

THE INFERNO

Nightfall downtown, cocaine moon,
 cops wail toward someone's apocalypse,
 dancers in rap,
 a man with a blue guitar
 on the outskirts of insanity.
 Young drunks stinking of self-importance,
 f-wording their delusions
 along the brain-dead concrete,
 puking obscenities into their smartphones.
 A pervert trolls the shadows
 for your sister.

Let me tell you of Dante,
 who overdosed below a urinal
 at The Inferno,
 leaving behind a drunk wife
 and their poor baby
 wheezing in a filthy apartment,
 terrified of the world's noise,
 the swearing, music pounding, TV blaring,
 starving on junk food
 and the lost dreams of ancestors...

*...and from the avenue
 of manic sorrow and thrill
 comes songs, rhythms,
 subconscious into beat
 mixed with many beats,
 building to building,
 street to street,
 a delirious chorus
 of disharmony harmonized,
 like chattering geese in flight.*



Inmate, former Mattewan Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

YOUR TRUTHS

Let us sing of the Sunset Diner,
windows along the boulevard of sleaze.

Two tables away, a guy wiggles
his pierced snake-tongue
for his girlfriend.

Her eyes have the glassy look
of one whose dream has been opiated.

Beyond them, a tableful of teens,
slaves to their screens,
tethered to the box,
condemned to indifference,
disbelieving in everything,
wary of the elders
who've bequeathed to them
a dangerous world,
sleepwalking,
image without substance,
motion without progress,
body unaware of soul,
real as a tattooed fantasy
or last year's texts.

*...and in this cheap elegance
patrolled by plastic
you reach for my hand,
your eyes open to your truths...
grandparents who cared,
a lover who hurt you,
your hopes and fears...
slowly you reveal your aloneness.*

*I listen,
watching you find your way,
finding myself,
losing the world.*

NEEDING

In the dreams I will remember,
in the memories of the future,
you are always there.

Te amo...I love you,
every moment more,
needing the sound
of your footsteps
on my stairway,
the scent of your hair
on my pillow,
your hand along my shoulder.

Needing to love you
as you desire to be loved,
the soothing balance
of body and soul transformed,
made sacred,
unified
like flames rising
into blue-white light,

needing to create
new memories,
to push away
yesterday's darkness.

Needing never to see you
sad or lonely.

Needing to steal you
from the season of shadows
approaching.

VULTURES AT THE CASKET

We cruise down corridors of crap
 into towns named for native Americans
 or the generals who slaughtered them,
 past suburban pre-fab beehives,
 rows of houses like prison colonies
 across the mortgaged landscape,
 where kids bred to consume
 soon spoil into caricatures
 of their barbequed parents
 or else morph into emotional mutants,
 wild and unloved,
 cynical of the spiritual
 because they see it nowhere,
 incapable of conscience or shame
 because no one had a conscience for them,
 no one was ashamed.

Things prosper here
 like a festering wound;
 even in death we're trained
 to smile and look holy
 as the vultures at the casket
 circle the inheritance.

*I want you holy
 but not in this place.
 We are Adam and Eve,
 consumed with our individuality,
 conflicted by free will,
 but the garden is torched:
 welcome to the killing machine,
 our obscene Gethsemane,
 the eternal age of the fanatics:
 Cain and Abel.*



Moving day, New Windsor.

THE SHALLOW PEOPLE

I want to sing
 of the high malls and online bazaars,
 our castles of crap,
 I want to howl
 for lives imprisoned
 by the craving to buy,
 a moment's thrill, then poof – gone
 'til the one to follow,
 suckered and contaminated
 by the masters of money,

 our innocent poisoned
 by the materialists,
 the narcissists
 and exhibitionists,
 the power-drunk and prejudiced,
 the violent and abusive,
 the phony pious
 with their ulterior motives,
 the circus-barker politicians
 and snake-oil influencers
 dog-whistling our ugliest primal instincts,
 those who expect everything yet give nothing,
 who take secret pleasure
 in the humiliation of others,
 the character assassins,
 the sick and dead souls
 vomiting their opinions
 and harshly judging
 everyone but themselves,
 those who don't need God
 because they ARE God,
 obese with pride
 of skin, country, money and religion:
 the shallow people.

SUPERSTORE BLUES

Supermarket, angels in the budget aisle,
 a single mother with three sweet kids,
 poor yet rich in heart, quietly voting on which cereal to buy.
 She knows they dwell on the edge of disaster,
 but tells no one.

Next aisle over, a battered zombie wife pushes a coffin cart
 as her white-trash Hitler husband hisses insults.

White boy in a long coat glides by, furtive eyes;
 is he a shooter?

Plagues lay in wait,
 immune to the lies we tell ourselves.

Even our food disassembles,
 delivering processed chemical obesity,
 toxic fat food and sweet poison water,
 plastic butter down our veins
 'til we keel with pain and pay or die,
 healthy food we're too poor to buy.

Meat from a place where
 they only kill cows too sick to give milk.
 We are fatted calves to the sacrifice,
 bloated and distended,
 bellies swollen with sugar-shit,
 limping toward cremation.

We have lost our grace; we have only icons now.
 We are locked into habits that ruin us.
 We are complicit in our own extinction,
 like the idiots of Easter Island.

Everything new is instantly old,
 our bodies slashed from our souls.
 Our indifference to suffering
 is camouflaged by our selective compassion,
 for even Hitler could weep.

MY AMERICA

Before Hitler there was us,
 my America,
 special-delivering holocausts to
 generations of Africans,
 Native Americans, Mexicans, Asians,
 even the short-memoryed Italians and Irish.
 My America freed the slaves
 but kept them caged.

Did you know Hitler as a child
 obsessed over stories of
 cowboys conquering the Wild West?
 Consider the horrible irony of my America,
 pollinated with racism during European colonialization,
 returning the favor by inspiring “living space” conquest
 in Adolf’s fetid imagination.

After Hitler there was us,
 my America, stupid us,
 incinerating Vietnam,
 throttling Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia,
 and other homelands cursed by our actions,
 importing Hitler’s men of killer-science
 to upscale our weapons of slaughter.
 And now just lately, our racists align
 with his Nazis: full fascist circle.

We the descendants
 of immigrants and invaders
 remember nothing.

Look in the mirror, my America;
 Heaven on our side
 cannot be
 without freedom
 and equality.

MESSAGE TO THE WORLD

World, do not gloat
 at my America tangling with our history,
 for you too have your moments of roaring hatred,
 this same freaking blood-lust we all share,
 to confront or else repeat.

We are all God's
 upper-class-monkey children
 jockeying for first banana,
 ten minutes out of the jungle,
 still hurling coconuts at each other,
 mismanaging the zoo
 as Heaven weeps at our cruelty.
 We are all wrong.

Hitler wasn't an aberration:
 he was the exaggeration
 of the primitive racism
 we all absorbed while fleeing
 ancient hordes of strange-eyed killer-invaders
 incinerating our villages and enslaving our families.
 From the truths and lies taught
 on our grandparents' knees,
 we learned to fear the stranger.
 Behold the children of rubble,
 the massacred innocents,
 look at their bloodied faces
 and see where our learning has led us,
 see what our instincts have wrought.

Given the proper circumstance
 and childhood instruction
 we are all capable of genocide and destruction.

Let other countries first judge themselves
 as harshly as they judge my America,
 and I'll then listen.

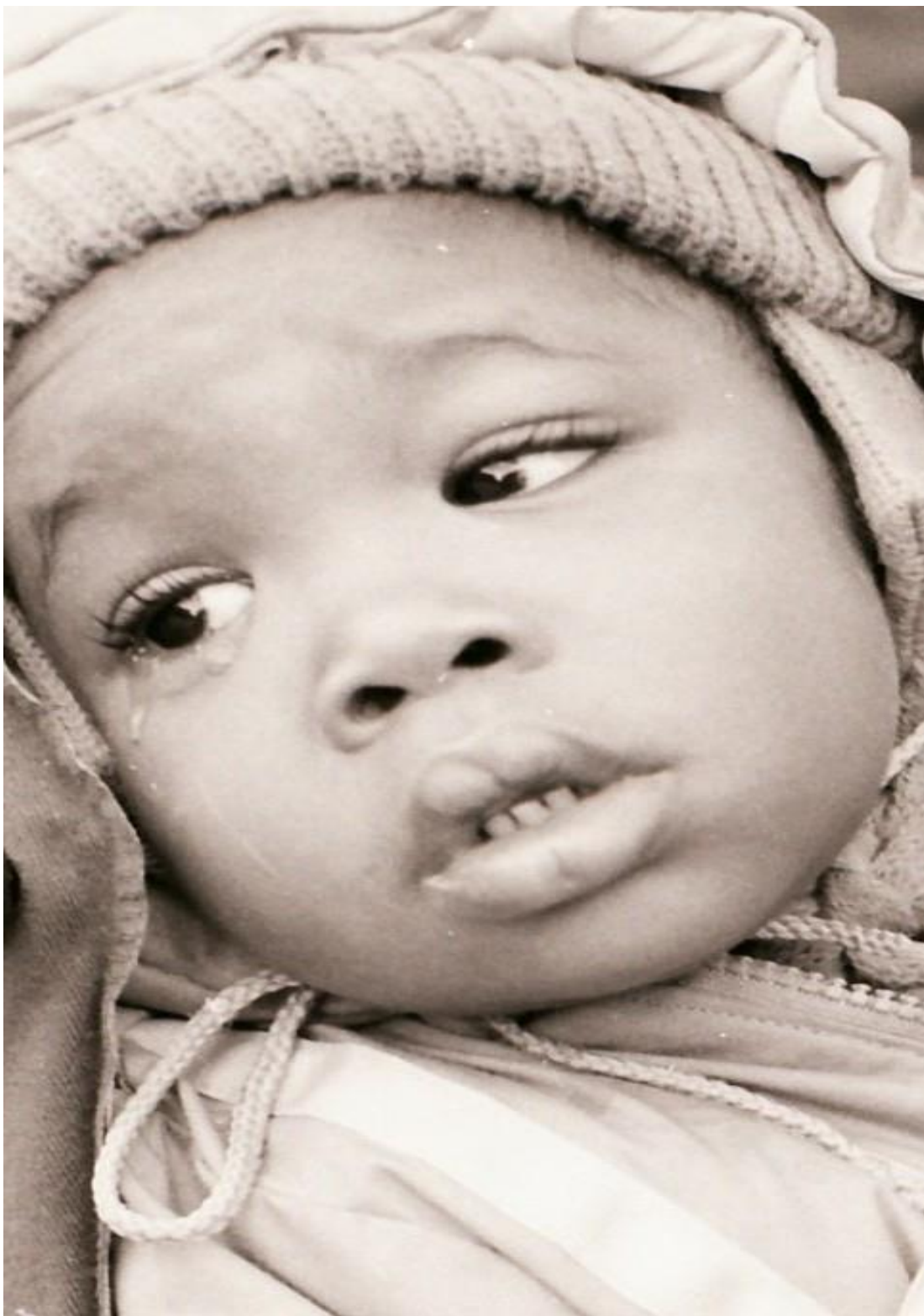
PERSONAL

We have come
to the Apocalypse
and it is personal,
the everyday holocausts
you see in the eyes
of the children
of catastrophe and trauma,
the women subdued,
the men self-imprisoned,
the needy abandoned.

On every continent,
in every land,
the end of the world
is our separation
from our souls,
the death of hope,
the rule of fear,
the poison of power,
the seduction of tyranny,
the nauseating obsessions
with skin, blood,
religion and country.

Armageddon
is the reason
that justifies
the killing
of the innocent
or a killing insult.

The death of the soul
Is the absence
of compassion.



Cold child, Brooklyn.



Sunlit path, Montgomery.

THE REALITY OF YOUR SOUL

To those who believe
there can be no science
to understanding your soul:

Nikola Tesla said
the secrets of the universe may be found
in energy, frequency and vibration.

Albert Einstein said
energy cannot create nor destroy itself,
and can only be displaced.

CS Lewis said
you have a body,
you are a soul.

I say our souls are conscious energy,
with form and substance,
their own physics and biology
beyond our present understanding,
trapped in the ancient tangle
between the countries of good and evil
(the only lands beyond death),
pawns in the fight over control
of whose souls shall live,
and whose shall perish.

There is no supernatural,
only unrevealed natural.
There is no metaphysics,
only undiscovered physics.

The most important real truth
Is the reality of your soul.



Rome Basilica.

THE LURID SWAMP

*Evil shapes
slowly but surely,
water-drops on stone over centuries,
persistent, unpersuadable,
fiercely loyal to its cause,
like a deadly fungus
creeping through corridors
sacred and profane,
into the hearts
of all who
eat their enemies,
all who covet
what is close to them,
all who seek power
in homes and kingdoms,
all who hold close
their anger.*

*The blood of our martyrs
is the wine of our revenge.*

*The center dissolves,
the abuse recycles,
the threatened go tribal,
massacres beget massacres,
the innocent are silenced,
the dream deferred is denied,
from the lurid swamp
mosquitoes rise.*

SURVIVAL

When the moon
reinvents itself
and empires collapse,

when our mirror cracks
and history
hits the ditch,

if we've saved our souls
then none of it
will matter,

for we survive
if our souls
survive.



Brother and sister, Rome.

THE MYSTIC ROAD

*I'm heading out...
drive with me.
Love will lead
us home.*

*We'll ride
the mystic road
along the river
to the sea
and cruise
into the depths
of our hearts,
on our journey
to the invisible land
beside us,
the only true reality.*

*All we own
is in our hearts.
It's time we made
a new start.*



Our Wedding Day.

THE ELEGANT DEPTHS

Come to the shoreline
of laughter and imagination,
the ocean of your truths.

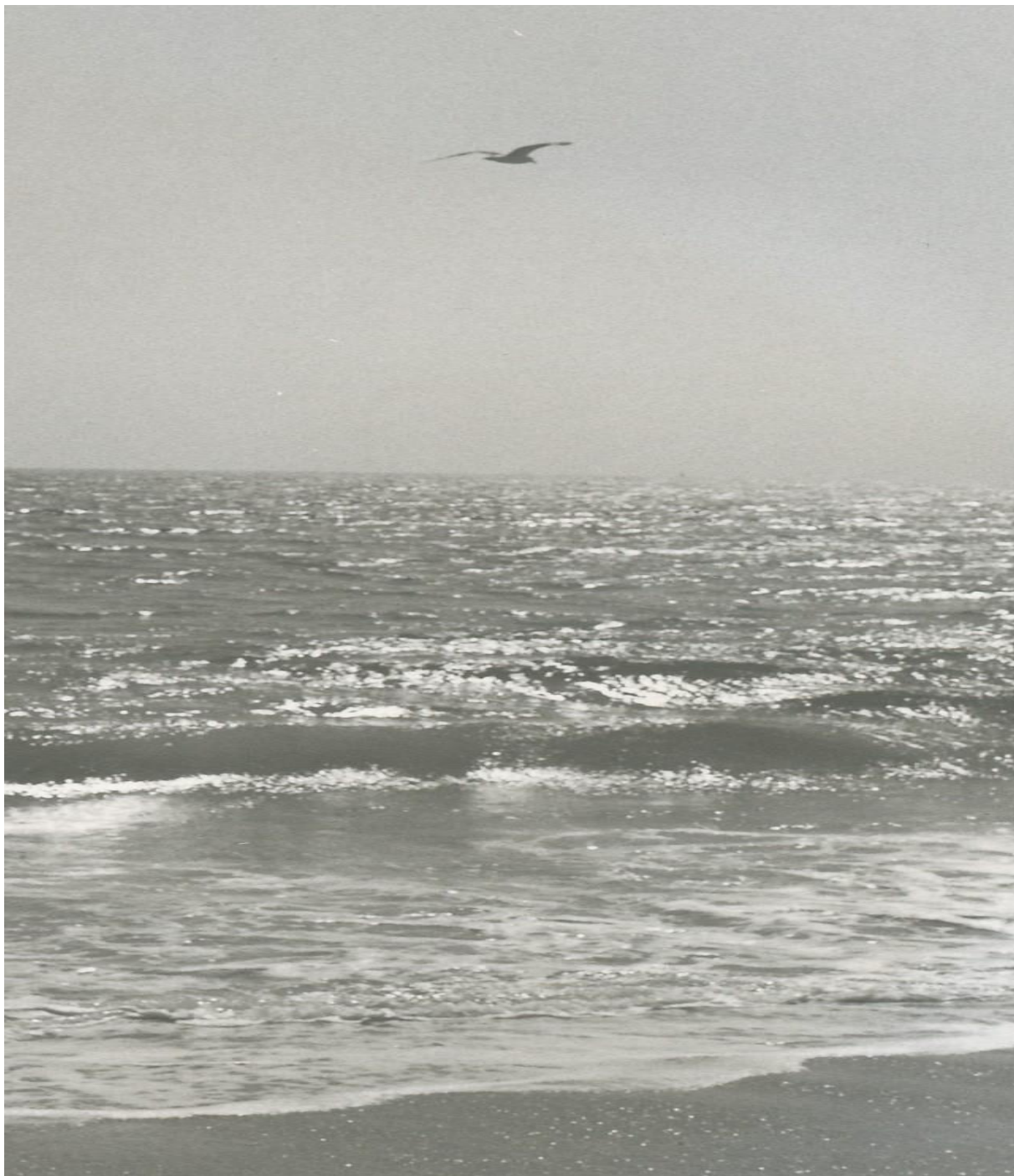
Listen to the music
of waves seducing sand.

I need you
when I least expect it.
Not in the danger
or storm,

but when the wind
is still,
tide pulling,
sun and moon
together yet apart.

Beauty is mystery
unaware of itself,
the elegant depths
never seen,

you,
a world hidden
below the sea,
waiting in
pristine silence
for the loneliness
to end.



Gull, Pacific Ocean.



Dogs playing, Portugal.

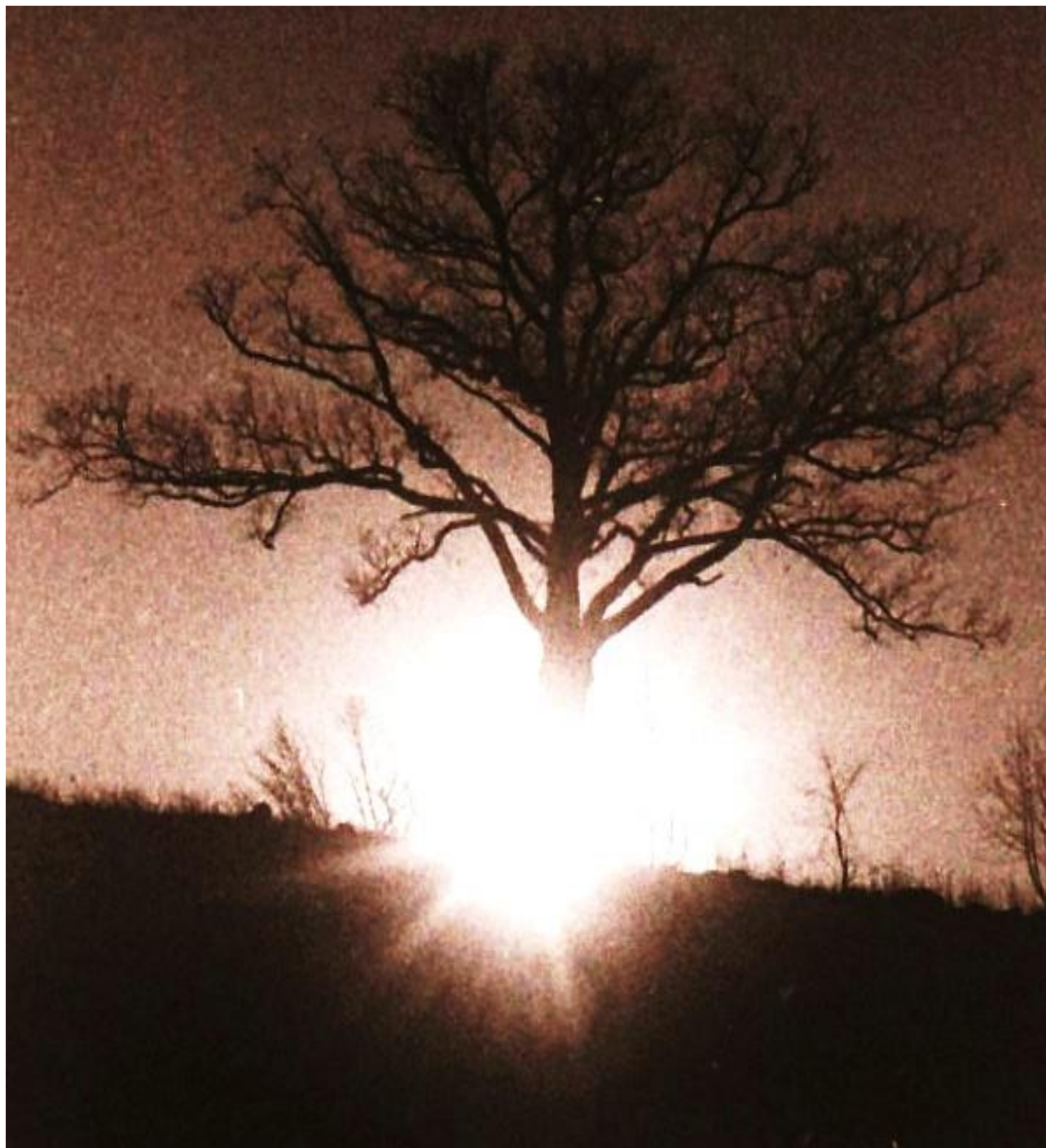
THE TRUEST TREASURES

Half-dreaming in my arms,
your face softens,

your cares give way
and I see you,
woman-child
wishing only
for laughter,
love, safety.

The truest treasures
you give me
are memories.

*I give you
all that I say and do.*



Sunset, Washingtonville.

SOMEDAY

Someday we'll sit
on the edge of the sun,
lost in awakening lightness.

*I'll wait for you past the shadows,
I'll step beyond death with you near,
spirit entering spirit
in a place of no time or tears,
a place where we know nothing
until everything.*



Balloon Day, Cornwall-on-the-Hudson.

REMEMBER

Remember child,
the smile
that was yours,
the eyes
that asked all
in the wonder
of innocence.

Remember laughter
if your cares close in,
how you played
when there was
no time.

*Carry your own light
into this world,
keep walking
toward the star
in the distance.*

Hold to nature,
the things
that are real,
nurture
the fire inside.

Hold to your soul,
don't let it go,
it's who
I'll love forever

*...and we'll
grow young
as the world
grows old.*



Two kids, Cornwall-on-the-Hudson NY.

Memories gain
in rhythm and meaning
with age.

Remember the light
of our souls.
Remember.

Part II

My Crazy Life



Chapter 1

Twelve Kids

I'm just a 65-year-old nobody, finishing this short bio in March 2019.

My father and other relatives have done county, state and federal jail time, and I've done a lot of visiting them.

I was kicked out of cub scouts for misbehaving, kicked out of church altar-boys for being a screw-up, almost expelled from a Jesuit college for printing in its student newspaper a centerfold of the school's president (a priest), kicked out of church again for playing unacceptable songs, and banned from West Point twice: once as a musician for over-exciting the cadets while singing "American Pie," and once as a union organizer for persuading the Mess Hall servers to vote for a strike.

I've been fired as a union organizer twice by two separate unions during my life, both times for insubordination. I received unemployment and food stamps until I found another job. I never could afford to own a home.

Yet I'm the happiest guy on the planet, because I have a ton of good memories and very few regrets.

There's an unexpected freedom to being 65. You see more clearly through the bull-crap, and you don't much care what anyone thinks except the grandkids. In three months I'll turn 66, and in September I'll retire from my union organizing job and pivot full-time into my music and writing career. Thankfully my Social Security and my union pensions will provide about as much money as if I was working. Don't ask me how I managed to pull that off; I guess God protects children and fools, and I'm both.

This book is my truths, as I saw and learned them. Mainly I want my grandkids to know where I came from and what I absorbed along the way, since we're so close. I even put in a few references they can

search online, so they know I'm not making this crazy stuff up. In case I pass away sooner rather than later, this little book tells my story. I don't deserve a big book because I ain't that important; these next 47 pages are plenty.

On a scale of one to ten, ten being great, I rate my life thus far as eight-plus, maybe nine. However, I had to step through some crap to get here.

I'm the third oldest of twelve kids, born June 21, 1953, on both Father's Day and the Summer Solstice, not far from the banks of the Passaic River, in working-class baby-boom northern New Jersey: Rutherford.

Ethnically I'm a crossbreed, a mutt. All four of my great-grandparents migrated from Europe around 1900, mixing German, Irish, North African (so cool!), Scottish, Scandanavian and Spanish. Supposedly we're related to Frederich Ebert, the first president of Germany after World War I, a socialist who tried to stop Hitler but died too soon. I just wish I had a little Asian and Native American DNA.



Bottom from left, John, Ray, Joan, Jerry, Jim, top row from left, Matt, Julie, Katie, Mary, Posie and Eddie, from a 1972 photo. My sister Judy's in Heaven.

My mother always wanted 12 kids. That's what she got: six boys and six girls, no twins, all born between 1951 and 1965.

She almost died giving birth to the tenth. When she finally came home, she told us all the doctor said she shouldn't have any more children.

"I told him I'm having *two more*," she laughed, holding up two fingers.

We all went along with it; having all those kids around was a riot, a real pisser. There was always someone who wanted to play. Each new child was a new adventure, a new perspective, a new world to experience. Most times it was very entertaining.

My mom was always affectionate. She loved to sing, and had us harmonizing before we could talk.

She made sure we wore clean clothes and ate decent meals, and taught us how to pray every night.

Even though there were so many of us, she mandated that we all sit at the same long dinner table together each night for dinner.

She split up the chores pretty equally, and insisted we finish them before we played. She also required that we play every day.

If she ever preferred one more than the other, she never showed it; she made a special point of balancing everything with each kid.

She encouraged us to be different from each other. She'd often say "I don't care if you want to be a garbage truck driver, just be the best garbage truck driver out there."

She was Catholic, but had big disagreements with the church over priests not being allowed to marry, and so-called sinners not being allowed to receive Communion. She thought all good religions were equal in God's eyes.

Every day you'd hear her quietly calling for St. Jude, St. Anthony, her baby-in-Heaven Judy or some other guardian angel or deceased relative to help her out. As she told the stories of Christmas and Easter, there was pure joy and wonder in her eyes.

She died in 1999, and I feel she's always just a prayer away. I don't really miss her terribly around holidays because I have a strong suspicion she's watching from Heaven.

My father drank, yelled and hit us too much, although he worked hard and paid the bills.

I couldn't figure out why he was so freaking tightly-wound. It might have been the spotted-red birthmark splattered on his face. My mom told me my father's mother once said (in anger) the birthmark was the work of the devil. When I was five, he and I were at a baseball game when a passing classmate pointed at him and said "Look Mom, a monster." At that moment his eyes flinched. He said nothing.



Mom and dad, 1987.

Far as I know he never hit my mom, but he used to beat the crap out of the first four boys, although none of us ever broke any bones.

He invented insulting nicknames for some of us, including me. Don't ever do that to your kids; they might forgive but will never forget.

Sometimes my mom tried to stop him, especially when he took off his belt to whip whoever of the first four boys was in trouble. She could be ferocious, but he was more ferocious.

At least she was able to protect the girls: he only whacked my older sister Mary once, and my mother wouldn't talk to him for weeks.

He eased up considerably on the last six kids. But he played favorites with them, which is another terrible thing to do, especially to the kids you're favoring.

He was 18 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. The Navy told him he could enlist, but because of his birthmark he couldn't expect to become an officer. So he joined the Merchant Marines, and rose to the rank of First Mate (just below Captain). After the war he went into the warehouse and trucking business.

In 1963 he was fired for overruling his warehouse boss and settling a grievance with Teamsters Union Local 445 over a truck driver's termination. The Teamsters then offered him a job as a union organizer. We moved 75 miles north to the very-rural Hudson Valley in New York, just over the mountain from West Point. I was 10.

He brought home workers he was trying to organize, including a factory two miles away where mostly Black and Spanish people worked. I loved hanging around them; they were funny and playful. I can still remember them all talking about how they needed to negotiate a contract with the factory boss.

My dad started fooling around with other woman in the 1970s, about the time he was elected an officer in the union. When my mom found out she was pretty broken up. She didn't leave him, probably because of all the kids. After a couple weeks of my mom's silence, he broke down crying and I guess they reconciled, but it was never the same between them...although it was ok.

If he cheated on her after that, no one knows. He did love her to the end, after she grew sick for five years with cancer.

In the summer of 1985 he went to jail for 13 months on accusations he took a bribe in his job with the Teamsters. He won the appeal and was released, but it cost him everything he had.

In federal prison he took Alcoholics Anonymous and it worked. He told me later everyone should go to jail at least once in their lives. Sometimes he'd say the damndest things, just when you thought he was a real idiot.

One good thing: I always hated drinking. In my whole life I've been drunk maybe five times, and hated each aftermath. I hate what drinking does to a family as much as I hate becoming nauseous and dizzy.

He died in 2011, and until the end he was mostly ornery, at least with me and some of the older ones.

All in all I liked him, but I never put him on a pedestal. Any man who financially supports 12 kids all by himself without running to the hills deserves the Congressional Medal of Honor. He and my mom made sure all of us went to college, and none of us so far is divorced. If I'm right about Heaven, he's fine now, and now's all that matters.

Chapter 2

Pissed Off

Back to my crazy life.

My mother's father Jerry, the grandfather for whom I was named, died when I was two. I missed the hell out of him, and had no freaking idea why he wasn't showing up any more. My mom said for the longest time after he died, I'd angrily whip all my toys out of the playpen.



Me at five.

Our elderly next-door neighbors Goldie and Emmett Atherton had no children, but treated us as their grandkids. Emmett took me under his wings. He taught me how to read by age three and onward, mostly by going through the NY Times every day with me, and reading historical novels by Kenneth Roberts. Goldie bought me all kinds of comic books to supplement my reading adventures. Emmett loved boxing, and made me learn different punches and defensive moves. They both chain-smoked

cigarettes, and started going downhill with emphysema when I was five. Still, they kept me reading, which was probably the most important tool anyone ever gave me.

When my mom mentioned that her baby doctor used to be the famous poet William Carlos Williams, I started reading his stuff too, and writing little poems.

There were only three TV stations in the late fifties, and they sucked. We hated boredom, so we invented all kinds of adventures and activities to keep ourselves entertained.

It was baby-boom time in America, and there were dozens of kids in each neighborhood. My mom allowed us a four-block orbit, which I often went beyond.

In 1959, when I was six, I organized a neighborhood newspaper, using crayons for headlines. It flopped after the first edition, mostly because I got tired of making them all by hand.

That same year my sister Judy died at nine months old of a heart disorder. She was such a little sweetheart. My older brother Ray saved her life a few times, when my mom couldn't get the oxygen tank going. Judy just couldn't make it. It hurt my mom and dad badly.

Then my up-the-street friend Roger was run over by a car. Almost decapitated. I didn't see it, but I heard the gory details.

Death was pissing me off, and I had no freaking idea how to deal with it. It caused a lot of unresolved anger in me, which affected my behavior.

Mercifully, death then took a long holiday. Emmett died when I was in my late teens, and Goldie a few years later. My Mom passed away in 1999 when I was 45, my sister Katie a year later (which ripped my soul in half), my Dad soon after that, and my brother Jimmy two years ago (which ripped the other half of my soul). I miss all of them and many other friends and relatives, but at least I was old enough to deal with it.

Still, as 1960 rolled around, things were happening that were bothering the hell out of me.

The neighborhood was vicious. There's a reason the classic HBO crime series *The Sopranos* is set in northern Jersey; lots of folks are aggressive,

crazy-paced and materialistic, although there's some really incredible people too. My dad always called it a rat race.

We lived a couple houses down from a bully two years older than me, a real psychopath who once hung a neighborhood dog for pooping in his backyard. He hated my guts because I was a wiseass who used to say crap back to him when he was threatening me and my kid brothers John and Jimmy.

My first-grade Catholic nun-bully of a teacher put me in the hospital for three days with a concussion after rapping my head on the blackboard for fooling around. She told my mom I bumped myself while we were practicing ducking under our desks in the event of a Russian nuclear attack. Nineteen-freaking-sixty.

I had a run-in with the cops that year, after I chopped down two long rows of tulips from a neighbor's garden (I thought they'd grow back), packed them in a used flower box, signed the box with an aqua-colored crayon, placed the box on the front porch of a girl up the street I wanted to marry, rang the bell and ran away. That was the beginning of my first great romance. Almost 33 years later she came to my one-and-only marriage to my wife Jeanette.

Also in first grade, I was kicked out of cub scouts for fooling around too much. I took up trumpet in the school band because I loved Louie Armstrong, but was dyslexic when it came to reading music. They kicked me out after the Memorial Day parade, because instead of playing the proper notated music I was hitting random notes and swaying like Satchmo.

From first to third grade I was in so many fights I used to bring a needle and thread to school in case I ripped my pants. I was paranoid a girl might see my underwear, a disorder that cured itself once I hit puberty. When my brothers were around they'd hop into the fight on my side, and vice-versa. More than once my older siblings Ray and Mary, and my year-younger brother John saved my ass from annihilation.

The summer after first grade I joined a band of white-kid shoplifters from a nearby street, and started amassing all the candy, toy soldiers and Hardy Boy detective books I could steal out of the many stores in downtown Rutherford. After a lucrative yearlong career, I was finally nabbed for stealing an expensive wallet for my dad for Father's Day. He didn't appreciate the effort, and beat the crap out of me when I wouldn't confess how I had acquired it.

They raided below my bed and found nearly all my loot, which was the most excruciating moment of my life. Even Emmett practically disowned me when he found out he was teaching literacy to a thief. He never looked at me the same after that. One of my punishments was I wasn't allowed to read for a freaking month.

That was the end of my stealing career. Shame and me just didn't get along. Shame was a ball-and-chain I never wanted to wear again.

Only one other time in my life was I ashamed. Long before I was married, I fooled around with a married woman. We weren't caught, but I still felt guilty that I did something to screw up her marriage. Don't ever do anything that'd make you ashamed if anyone found out. Don't do anything unless you consider the worst-case consequences and then ask yourself whether you're willing to live with them if they happen. A moment's pleasure can win you a shitload of aggravation and remorse.

In third grade I almost got myself killed for the first time. My best buddy and cousin Tommy Clare, who lived three blocks away, built a go-cart that we lugged to the top of a long driveway at the local high school. We both pushed off, but halfway down the hill Tommy pulled the break lever, and it came off in his hand. We raced out the driveway into the middle of a highly-trafficked avenue, and Tommy steered the go-cart for another two blocks down the double-yellow line. Cars and trucks honked in anger as we whizzed by them. I never told my mom that story, even when I was older.

In 1963 we moved to the countryside in the Hudson Valley, 60 miles north of Rutherford, five miles north of West Point: Cornwall NY. I felt free as Huckleberry Finn. I could actually feel the difference in pressure

between New Jersey and the valley. My father had bought cheap a big old unoccupied stone house and seven acres of land in the middle of nowhere.



That same year a kid from Tennessee named Dale Marsh moved a half-mile down the road, and we became fast friends after meeting on the school bus. He was an extreme nature-boy, and taught me and my brothers all about the forests and fields around us.

Once Dale sat in the middle of a field-nest of bees, and calm as Buddha let the bees land on his arms and legs. He was smiling the whole time. Not one bee stung him. That one incident forever changed my view of flying critters. I especially like moths. The only bugs I kill are flies and mosquitoes, sorry. The rest are funny and harmless.

Also in '63 my father won a guitar in a poker game and offered it to me. Before that, I didn't want to play guitar because my older brother Ray played folk guitar, and I wanted to do something different. However, this was not a folk guitar - it was an electric guitar, a shiny red one at that...so I tried it, and my brother showed me some chords.

I wrote a dumb song the first day, and three more within a week. I remember playing for hours on the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated: November 23, 1963. I haven't put a guitar down since. Just goes to prove you never know whether you'll like something unless you try it. I could've missed out on something really great by being an idiot. Stupid and stubborn start with the same three letters because there's a little of each in both. That red guitar changed my life.

My mom used to make us sing as a family in church, at a local nursing home for the blind, and big family gatherings. For about 15 years starting around 1971 we all performed at the Christmas Eve Midnight Mass at St. Thomas Church in Cornwall. We also performed a ton of folk masses, weddings, baptisms, parties, and even with Pete Seeger (he lived across the river from us, in Beacon).

We played a lot of music with our cousins too...the Owens, Cullens and Kennedys....music was in our genetics.

My five sisters Mary, Joan, Julie, Joann and Katie sang like a chorus of angels. Whenever we played churches, my brothers and I were amazed at how girls who normally wouldn't look at us suddenly were striking up conversations, treating us like we were celebrities. I should say three of my five brothers felt that way, because two of my younger brothers were gay.

I'll tell you this right now, gays are born gay; both of those brothers were always that way, although nobody admitted it until they were in their late teens. I don't see anything wrong with it, myself. If God makes someone a certain color, sexual preference or whatever, who are we to question God's judgment? It takes arrogance to judge someone, and you don't want to be arrogant. Thankfully, my parents accepted my two gay brothers after they came out. Ever notice how gay guys get along better with women than heterosexual men? That's because they don't think of women as sexual objects, and just listen to who they are and what they feel. In a lot of ways they're much more decent and loving than guys such as me around girls, especially when I was younger. In my opinion, as long

as love is pure, sincere and dedicated, Heaven is happy. People who think otherwise piss me off.

When I was 10 my dad started bringing me and my brothers to the Teamsters Union Hall to get us out of my mom's hair. I was thrilled at the crazy truck-driver mentality over there. Jimmy Hoffa was visiting two or three times a year, and he was a real clown with the kids; used to pick us up and throw us around and stuff.

The important thing I learned was that being in a union meant you had the right to negotiate a contract with the boss. That made a lot of sense to me, getting any agreements down on paper. I started doing it with my brothers and sisters every time we made a deal. My mom used to say "If it ain't on paper, it ain't."

She made me join the church altar-boys for awhile, but I was never any good at it. I used to fake-mumble the Latin prayers, saying stuff such as *domino nabisco fig newtoni-tutu-o*. We used to steal the communion hosts from the church sacristy (before they were officially transfigured into the body of Christ), and eat them with peanut butter.

Then during a funeral I accidentally overloaded the charcoal tablets into the incense-burner-on-a-chain that the priest walks around the casket shaking at the end. Everyone started choking; I smoked the whole funeral out. It was like a group asthma attack. My fellow altar-boys thought it hilarious, but I was mortified. The head priest kicked me off the altar-boy squad, which was a relief.

At least no priests ever molested me, thank God. I do know a couple of guys who were attacked, and there were always rumors. They say molesters target shy kids; I was not shy. My theory on that is anytime you put together a group of people to look after kids, there's going to be perverts in there attacking girls and boys, no matter what religion or club or anything; even the freaking boy scouts. There has to be strict monitoring. Perverts look for openings; let there be none. Some of the priests I knew were pretty cool with me, and didn't try to shove religion down my throat. My Aunt Katie, who just turned 90 this month, is a Sister with the Dominican Order, and she's always been full of love and

support. She introduced me to Sister Regina, a real nice nun who gave me my first harmonica when I was 10.

I finally had a decent elementary school teacher in seventh grade, Raymond Corelli. For once I wasn't in trouble every day. He inspired us to learn, and rarely yelled at us. He drew me into science, and for awhile I created a makeshift laboratory in the basement. I'd let dirty water sit for a few days and look into my microscope at all the amoebas and protozoa darting about like little maniacs. I even won the freaking grand prize at the science fair that year. Science is the art of curiosity.

Me, my brother John and buddy Joe Gross formed a band called *Owl* in 1967, and bluffed our way through our first gig at an eighth-grade dance. Afterwards, in the school parking lot, I fell in love with a seventh-grade ballerina from a different school. It took me a long time to shake that one. Her mother had died just before I met her. Onetime her dad took me to see her perform in *Nutcracker Suite*. I still get chills when I hear that music, and it ain't Christmas shivers. We'd spend hours and hours on the phone talking and laughing. She was deep yet light, and truthful. Two of her best friends became like sisters to me.

Went to high school for two years at an all-boy Christian Brothers academy in Newburgh named St. Patrick's, which I actually liked, even though they used to sometimes slap the shit out of us.

There, thanks to Brother Luke, I discovered Shakespeare, who was a real revelation for me. Shakespeare's big message is that human pride (hubris) is our ultimate downfall. We read out-loud the four great tragedies – Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello and King Lear. You have to hear that stuff out-loud to really understand it. Once you get it, it's deeper than anything else you ever heard. I acted the part of Othello in the class play...dark, dark, dark.

Learned Latin too, and debating. I scored 100 in the state World History state Regents test. For the first time in my life I understood math via geometry and a crazy-great teacher, Jim McTamaney. He made math magical and exciting. If I was a teacher, that's how I'd teach. Fun all the way. You can teach a kid anything if they think they're having fun.

Everyone knew Mr. McTamaney was sick with Multiple Sclerosis, but nobody thought he would die until he did just a few years later. Looking back, he taught that class with the energy of a person who really wanted to accomplish something. He did; our class had the highest-rated collective scores on that year's state regents exams.

After my sophomore year St. Pat's closed for a lack of money. I transferred to the public high school in Cornwall, and joined the school newspaper. I already knew a lot of the kids, and my brothers and sisters were around every corner, so it was an easy switch. Weekends and some nights I worked in a restaurant, a root-beer stand and a laundromat. Every night I was playing my guitar and writing songs.

Fell in love with a 15-year-old girl who started having an affair with a teacher. She swore me to secrecy, a promise I kept until she finally went public many years later after he had retired. That was the most painful friendship of my life; it broke my heart for four years straight. What pisses me off most is he ended up having a successful public life.

In the midst of all that personal drama, another girl came into my life, more as a friend than lover...she and her sister were being raised by their grandmother...she was quiet, and deep, and I wished I hadn't been so screwed up...she really loved me.

The school invited me to join the National Honor Society as a senior but I politely refused because I didn't like that kind of stuff. I got in surprisingly-big trouble; it was even reported in the local newspaper. They couldn't talk me out of it. The only reason I ever got high marks was Emmett taught me how to read when I was three. I could read everything fast and remember it, so tests were a cinch to me. I didn't feel smarter than the guy who was flunking out, who actually was trying harder than me to get decent marks. Those low-test-scoring guys were my friends, and in many ways were smarter than me. Often one of my buddies'd be all nervous he was gonna flunk the final test and be held back, and I'd find a way to help, even if it meant cheating by slipping him the answers. It wasn't right, but I'd do it again.

Around that same time I got a doctor's note to skip gym because of an ingrown toenail. Later in the day one of the school football linebackers made a joke about it as I was walking down the hall with a girl I was trying to romance. I told him he had an ingrown brain, and a huge fight commenced. Neither of us won, but the girl fled the scene. It really bugged me at the time, and was a big lesson about the futility of violence as a strategy for impressing women.

Had a crush on the girlfriend of a guy who tried to bully me a couple of years earlier (my brother Ray saved me). I wanted to ask her out, but my siblings convinced me it would result in my death or disfigurement.

David Petraeus, the top general during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and later the head of the C.I.A., was in my trigonometry class, and I liked him. When we had a big Vietnam protest that split the school in half, he didn't take a side, which I respected then and even more so now. Of course I was totally against that stupid war, although I thought it was horrible how some anti-war protesters would harass returning soldiers. The only modern war that ever made sense to me was World War II; we had to fight Hitler. Maybe Afghanistan too, although I think we should have pulled out as soon as we knocked them over, and let them fix their own damn mess.

Petraeus stepped into huge trouble in 2012 fooling around with a woman, but he paid too big a price, and in my opinion, our country paid too big a price, when he decided to retire. He reminds me of another great man, President Dwight Eisenhower, who also fooled around (as did John F. Kennedy) but never was caught.

Big-shots get more temptations such as that, because they're big-shots, and people are attracted to them, sometimes bad or screwed-up people. When they fall it's like watching Shakespeare all over. Be careful if you ever become a big-shot, even if it's at the local firehouse or school board. Power is intoxicating, and we all know how well we drive when we're intoxicated.

Jim Bouton was the toughest, nastiest teacher in the whole high school, and I thought he was great. He taught English, and would often

rip kids' opinions apart, including mine. My friend Alan Steglein and I used to skip library class just to run down to a nearby stream, smoke cigarettes and talk about what Bouton said that day. Once Bouton went into a rampage about fanatics, telling us it didn't matter whether you were a right-wing or left-wing fanatic: a fanatic was a fanatic and they're all crazy and should be ostracized. That stuck with me forever. In his way of thinking, there's no difference between the homegrown Oklahoma City terrorists, the Northern Ireland terrorists, the 9/11 terrorists, or the "lone wolves" who shoot up a school or public space. A fanatic is a fanatic. They're all shit, and whatever they're espousing should be shunned. That's a damn good point. It pisses me off when people blame law enforcement or the government when a terrorist strikes; that's rewarding the terrorist, and encouraging more of the same. How freaking stupid is that? Give no quarter to the violent. If making your point justifies murder, then screw your point.

On graduation night in 1971 I won the award for writing, probably because of some crap I composed for the school paper.

That summer the folksinger Pete Seeger took me and my brother John under his wings. He's the guy who wrote *We Shall Overcome*, *Turn! Turn! Turn, If I Had A Hammer*, *Guantanamera*, and a bunch of other great songs. He used to travel with Woodie Guthrie, and helped Guthrie write some verses in *This Land Is Your Land*. He fell in love with our family. He lived on a mountain just across the river from where we lived. He'd take me and John to his gigs. He had this habit of going to sleep under a table before or after the gig, and ask me and John to "guard" him from autograph-seekers. I learned a lot from him; he's the one who advised me to stay local, and not try to be a big-shot.



From left, Pete Seeger, my brothers Ray and Ed, and me.

Me and my brothers and sisters sometimes backed him up on guitar and harmonica. If you google Pete Seeger Jerry Ebert, there we are. He was truly a good person, and so freaking smart on a zillion subjects. He was the kindest man I ever met, a walking saint, a portable library of knowledge on many subjects.

Whenever a group of us'd sit down for a jam session at the Beacon Sloop Club, where he presided for many a first-Friday of the month after a meeting on environmental issues, he insisted we "trade" songs, going around the circle and offering each musician the chance to play one good song. Everybody sang along, and the musicians would accompany whoever was leading.

I'm not crazy about old-time folk music, and tend more toward folk-pop, country and spiritual, but I'd back that man up anytime on any old song he wanted to play. A few times he helped me write newer lyrics to old labor songs; he's a detail guy, and examines the meaning of every word. He wants to get every comma right. He'd hit my fingers with his pencil if I was writing sloppily (which I do). We really rocked on the old labor song *Which Side Are You On?*

I visited him just before his wonderful wife Toshi passed away, and he asked me to play one of my songs twice. I felt so freaking honored. It was a song I wrote after I almost got killed organizing in New Jersey, a song I'd want to sing to my wife if I died unexpectedly, called *Into The Light*. Going through what he was going through with his wife being sick, it meant a lot to him.

Onetime he and I were doing a labor seminar at the Meany Center in Washington D.C. and someone asked how do you define what makes a good song. We both looked at each other, and I blurted out "If it works when you play it in front of people." He liked that answer, which made me proud. He taught me the best songs are the ones where you get everyone singing.

Some folks thought he was a communist, but if he was, so what? I know he despised Josef Stalin, which is all I needed to know. Onetime a bunch of right-wingers pelted his car with rocks as he left a concert about 20 miles south of where he lived. He kept one of the rocks on his mantle. Another time about 90 miles north of us, a guy told Seeger after a show that he had come to kill Seeger because of his anti-Vietnam War stance, but that during the show he had been overcome by the love and beauty of the music. I'd freaking shit my pants if someone said that to me.

Blue Miller, and old black lady I knew, once told me there's only two kinds of people in the world, those with compassion and those without. My mom called 'em givers and takers. Everything else about people is bullcrap, such as whether they're liberal or conservative, religious or atheist, or whatever.

Pete was a tried-and-true giver, a man of the fullest compassion any soul could ever hold. When he died in 2014, it hit me hard.

Chapter 3

Words and Music

Canisius College in Buffalo N.Y. offered me a nice scholarship, and I took it in September 1971. It's a Catholic College run by the Jesuit Order, which is pretty cool. Pope Francis is a Jesuit; I like that guy a lot. Jesuits think deeply. They teach that to discern the truth you must look at all sides and let your thoughts "percolate" like a good cup of coffee.

If you've seen *That Seventies Show*, you get a decent idea of what the 70's were like.

Our English professor Dr. Richard Thompson told us the first day of class that most teenagers' poetry deserved to be written on toilet paper. That shocked me, because I wrote poems all the time. Looking back on those poems, he was right.

I got myself elected class vice-president in my freshman year, and president in my sophomore year. In my freshman year we started our own literary magazine and Big Brother-Big Sister program for poor kids in the neighborhood, and the next year we organized a Sophomore Ball. I like that stuff because it reminds me of growing up in a big family, and planning out the fun. Plus, you always feel differently afterwards, and you get to meet loads of people. That's a good thing.

In my second year the government conducted a lottery for the Vietnam War military draft, and it was broadcast live on TV. A bunch of us jammed into a dorm room that morning, and you could hardly see the screen for all the pot smoke. On the TV, some guy in a suit pulled a date of one bingo-type hopper, and a number between one and 365 out of the other hopper. If your birthday matched up to a number of 100 or less, you were probably going to Vietnam. My number was over 200, so I was safe, but one of my good friends, who was the pitcher on our softball team, got nailed with number 12. He was gone the next

year. I hated that stupid war, but had nothing against the poor soldiers sent there to fight, and was sickened when sometimes they were verbally assaulted by so-called hippies. Part of me thought the whole hippie era was pretty phony. Then again, I think lots of things are phony, including me sometimes.

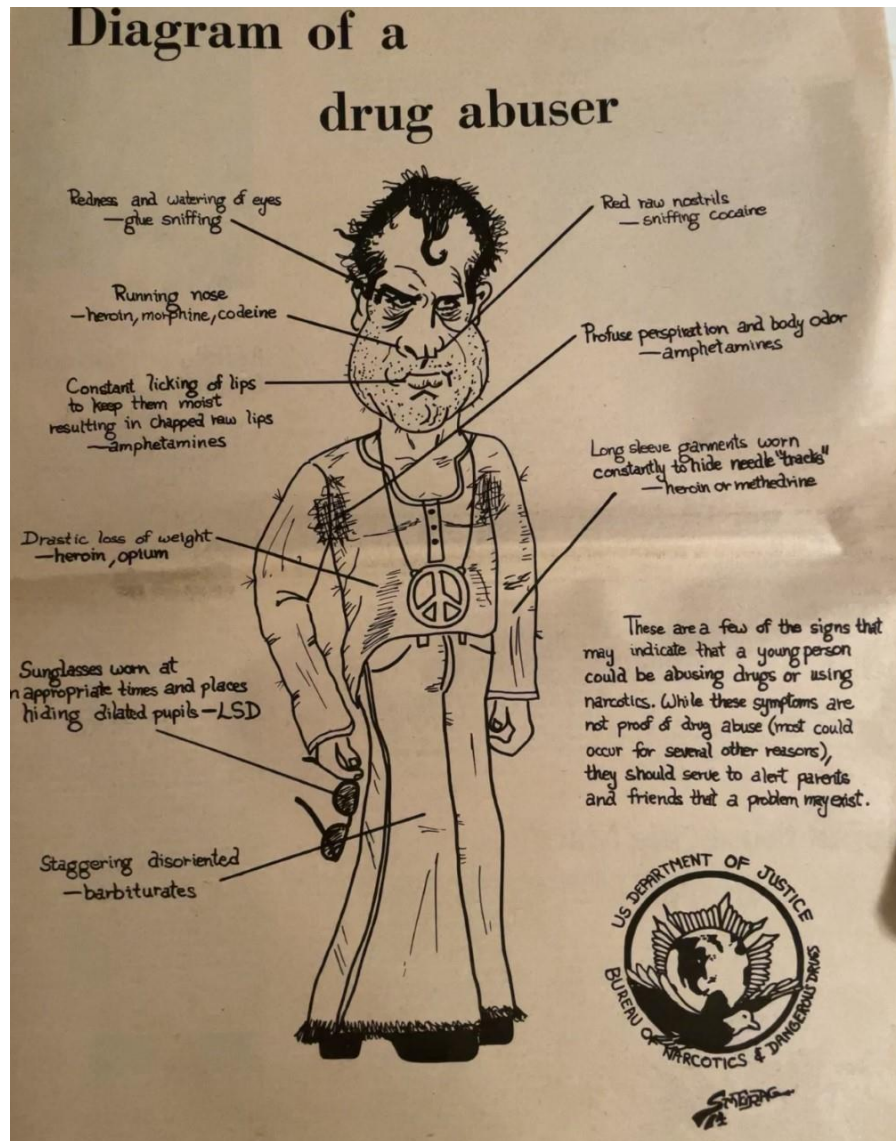
Also in my sophomore year I was named managing editor of the school newspaper. Looking for different stories, I joined the football team for a week; they stuck me in as quarterback at the end of the game, and I ran a few plays. I also rode all night with the Buffalo Police and did a cool story on it.

Then came 1973, my junior year: big trouble.

Me and my co-editor and college best friend Alfo Davis, a wild-and-deep Black man, gave the green light for our genius cartoonist Frank Smeraglio to do a detailed satirical centerfold drawing of our college president, nude and lying on a lambskin (his hand covering his privates). It didn't help that the president was a priest. I still think it was brilliant irony, and mischievous. The artwork itself was impeccable.

The college suspended the newspaper, and the wire services picked up on the controversy. I tried to hide the news from my mom, but relatives started sending newspaper clippings from all over the country, including an uncle in Dallas. It even made *Paris Match*. When Alfo and I gave the green-light to that centerfold, we never freaking imagined the mess we were creating.

After the suspension was lifted we immediately did another full-page satire. It was a rip-off of a pamphlet the Nixon Administration was distributing called "Diagram of a Drug Abuser." We figured Nixon was making fun of us longhairs, so we made fun of him. The local FBI then paid us a visit, which made us very nervous.



Our last issue was headlined “God Is Dead, Money Has No Mercy,” in reference to a story about special privileges given to the college’s famed basketball squad. We included a quote from Dylan’s song “It’s All Right Ma, I’m Only Bleeding.” (That was Alfo’s brainstorm.)

Understandably as I look back on it, lots of people were pissed to shit about it.

By the end of the school year there was a lot of pressure on us to resign. I got sick of the whole mess, and quit. I left behind a full scholarship, which was probably the dumbest thing I ever did. I also left

behind another great romance of my life, a woman from Pennsylvania. She was so deep, and fragile yet beautiful. I really screwed that one up. At least I learned what not to do in a relationship. I was totally in love with her, but flirting with a lot of other girls. Being around six sisters made it easy to talk with groups of girls in general, but sometimes that was a curse, turning into a freaking ego trip.

Eight months after I left Canisius, a Teamster oil truck driver named Bill Comicz convinced me to go back to college. He said if I didn't finish what I started, I would always regret it and maybe end up working a job such as his. So I transferred to another Jesuit college, LeMoyne, in Syracuse, because my brother John was going there and because my credits transferred easily.

We played all the bars around Syracuse University, doing songs by the Beatles, Neil Young, Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, James Taylor, all kinds of other stuff, and even some country banjo; Seeger had taught John to really pluck that thing. We did some original stuff too. In 1976, with help from our cousin Lawrence Cullen, we organized a huge Sloop Clearwater fundraiser featuring Seeger, Harry Chapin, David Bromberg, The Buffalo Gals, and others.

I had a deep poetry teacher, Barbara Clarkson, who asked me to be editor of the school literary magazine. She opened me to Pablo Neruda, my favorite poet to this day. She taught me how to crystallize images into one or two words, a simple image left alone...vivid in its simplicity.

Thanks to a school project I discovered I loved playing my guitar for mentally-challenged kids and adults, especially those with Downs Syndrome, or those who have gone through severe trauma. I grab their attention by doing unpredictable things, always with a big grin. One time I surprised them all by climbing through a window into the classroom with my guitar. One kid was so happily shocked he started talking, which was the first time he'd spoken in months.

I also do a great Donald Duck imitation, which most kids love but some freak out on, so I have to be careful. In 1991 my future wife Jeanette gave me a Donald Duck puppet, and I still use it.

In my college summers I worked variously as a warehouseman, a stringer on my hometown newspaper *The Cornwall Local*, and playing gigs two or three nights per week.

In the summer of 1974, I worked as a counselor at nearby Camp Redwood, helping lead all the kids in various activities, and watching over them at night as they slept. There I fell in love with the camp-owner's daughter. She was brilliant, and so hungry to learn and experience everything. She was soft, and lyrical. Her family is Jewish, and the most generous, intelligent and full-of-life people I ever met. She inspired me to write some of the prettiest music that ever came out of my wide-open imagination.

If you're prejudiced against Jews or any other race or creed, please accept this slap on your head. Snap out of it; you'll miss out on some of life's greatest people.

My own theory is no race is better than another. Call it Jerry's Rule Of Equal Good and Bad People: *There's an equal percentage of good, medium and bad people in every race, religion, country and organization.* To my grandkids especially, if you get nothing else from me, get that. Prejudice of any kind makes me spitting mad, whether it's based on race, religion, money, social status - whatever.

As a Catholic I'd sometimes hear kids saying the Jews killed Jesus. That's historical bullshit. The big-shot Roman and Jewish leaders killed Jesus, and the rest of the Jewish people acted as we would have acted: scared to shit. Don't forget all the Jews who placed palm branches in front of Jesus five days before he was tortured and killed; the common people loved the guy. Pontius Pilate was vicious if you study him, and his role in Christ's death was whitewashed when us Catholics created an unholy alliance with the Romans nearly 300 years after Christ was crucified. My own personal opinion is if Jesus ever came back, he'd visit a synagogue before a church. I'm Christian, but I know a ton of phony ones, including me sometimes. Christ said stuff such as if someone steals your coat, give them your shirt. Who the hell does that? Christ says turn the other cheek, and love your enemies. Most of us think that's bullshit,

right? Athiests, Jews and other faiths are sometimes better Christians that we are, because they *act* as Christ asks of us. Athi

Sorry, but prejudice really pisses me off. It's stupid. If you're going to dislike someone, don't be stupid about it. Dislike someone because they're nasty, not because they're a different religion or color.

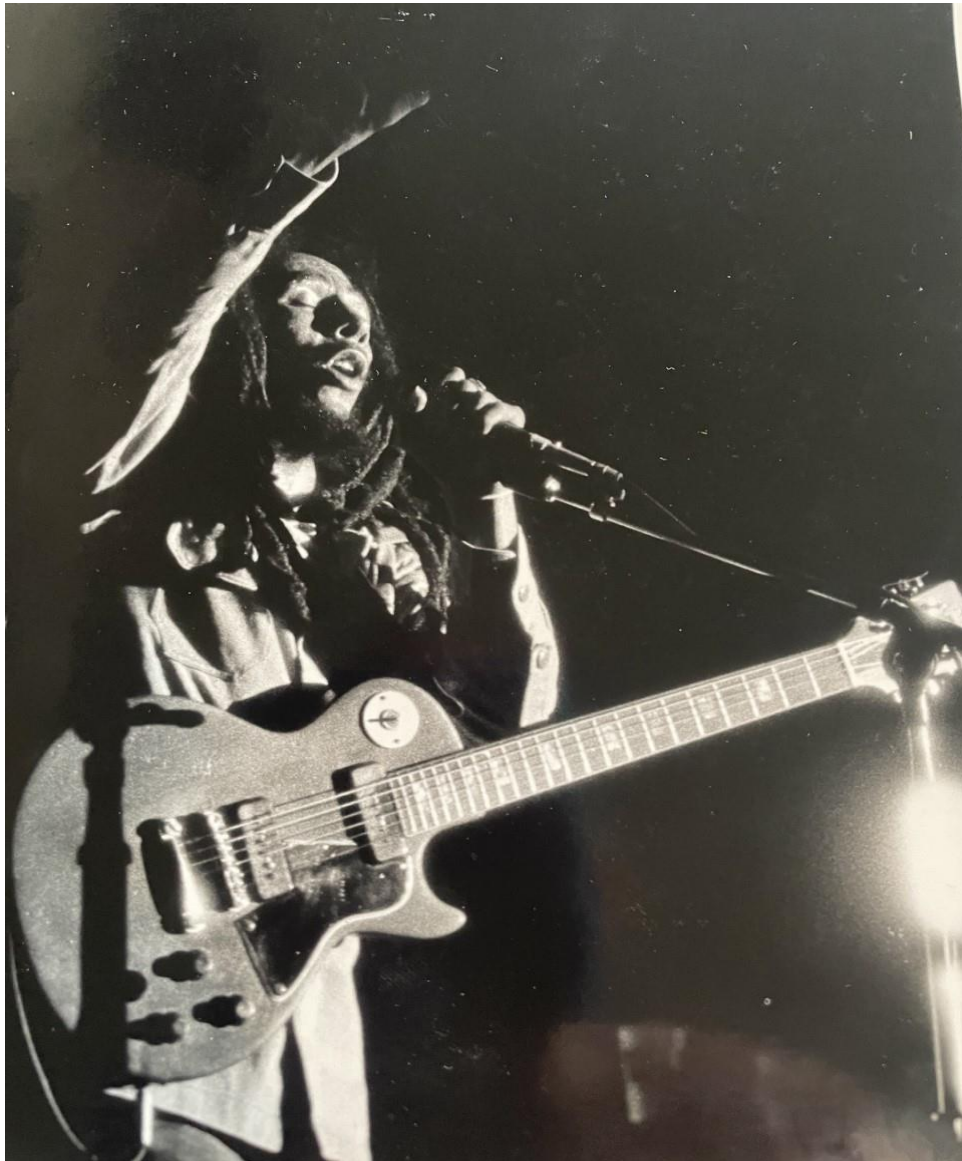
At Camp Redwood I learned yoga from a hippie counselor, and I still do it nearly every day. It's not a freaking religion, as some nut-case fanatics claim when they tell you to avoid it. It's a series of exercises that truly center and relax your body. I hum some of the traditional sounds such as *Aum* and *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* because the hum of those sounds through your body is very relaxing and centering. I also say the *Our Father* prayer from the New Testament, because I like it, and because the hum of it, the rhythm, is centering, at least to me. (It goes "*Our Father who art in Heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come they will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, amen.*") You should want to center your body every day. There's an old yoga saying: "The mind controls the body and emotions, but breathing controls the mind." Control your body as much as you can, in a healthy manner. Stay close to your soul that way. If you choose Christianity, know the Four Gospels if nothing else (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; each gospel takes about two hours to read.) Same with any other faith; study it if you're inclined that way. If you don't like organized religions, it's like telling me you don't like meat; fine, BUT find other ways to nourish and acknowledge your soul, or your soul will starve.

I graduated from LeMoyne in 1976 with a BA in English. I'm glad I did it, just to have that damn degree. I finished what I started. Around that time my father told me I'd always have a job somewhere, because most people can't write well.

My mom insisted I have a backup career to being a musician gigging at bars and restaurants. So after graduating college in 1976, I became a

reporter and then editor of the Cornwall Local, the weekly newspaper for my hometown, while still playing my guitar at nights.

I didn't just want to do normal boring stories, and tried to set up interviews with any celebrity visiting within a 20-mile radius of our sleepy town.



Took this of Bob Marley in Poughkeepsie.

Sometimes I hit the bulls-eye. I spent one hazy night interviewing and photographing Bob Marley when he played Poughkeepsie during his

Babylon By Bus tour. I also interviewed and photographed Peter Gabriel, Billy Joel and other famous people. What they said really hit me.

Marley talked about agitating for change through music and love rather than violence. Jamaica was exploding with political turmoil at the time, and he himself had just recovered from gun wounds. He said he tried to write songs that were universal, that anyone in any land could understand. He also smoked a joint with me and my buddy Rich Schisano, which was among the top ten best moments of my life.

Peter Gabriel said writing music was like painting pictures to him. He had just come out with *Sledgehammer* and his still-incredible album *SO*. He talked about the textures in music. He's a very humble person.

Billy Joel had been living in Highland Falls (just south of Cornwall) around that time writing *A New York State of Mind* and other songs. He said he tried to write melodies people could hum after they heard them, which is exactly what my mom used to say. I had slipped a new girlfriend into the interview (she didn't know it was coming), and he gave her a rose someone had thrown him. That night is probably among the top five most impressive first-dates in the history of civilization.

In 1979, the Sentinel weekly newspaper, based in nearby New Windsor and Newburgh, made me an offer I couldn't refuse, and I became its editor.

I love weeklies; unlike a daily newspaper, you're not in a big rush with the news, and you can dig deeper. In my memory are dozens of public meetings where the crowds were wild, explosive, nasty, funny, poignant...then there's a flood of memories taking photographs of school kids, beautiful Hudson Valley scenery, events at every house of worship...it's a great job, where you get to see the good, the bad, the ugly and the sublime in a community. The only problem is the pay generally sucks, and the work is so hard that when I came home I didn't feel like writing my own stuff.

Once I interviewed a homeless alcoholic in a rough section of Newburgh, hanging with him for a few days and taking photos. I'll never

forget him pointing to a stone in a vacant lot and saying "I lay on that rock for my pillow."

Another time I interviewed a full-fledged child molester who had been released from jail and was living in a public project with his school bus-driving wife. He was a scrawny character, and his new wife a burly, tough lady. He admitted he was still attracted to young girls. His wife then said in a strong, sharp voice "I keep my eagle eye on him, believe me." That lady deserved the Nobel Peace Prize in my opinion.

I convinced the former Mattewan State Prison for the Criminally Insane across the river to let me spend a week during the days hanging out on the wards with the inmates, writing about life in prison and taking photos. I can't believe they let me do that...I wrote a three-part story. The guy I spent the most time with, Charley, had killed his mother and grandmother, and was a schizophrenic drugged on thorazine. He'd be pointing at a blank prison wall and asking me "Don't you see that big spider?" There was no freaking spider. I met other guys who faked insanity to avoid the electric chair, and even played poker with them.

My dad had taught all of us to play poker, which is the only card-game where you can have a losing hand but still win. I always thought life was kind'ove like that. I know plenty of folks with bad luck who still end up happy, and lots of folks with good luck who are miserable.

Interviewing older folks was another great part of the job....you listen to all their wisdom, the lessons they learned, the love they hold. Some had their own brushes with history, surviving the Great Depression, fighting in important battles and wars or working with famous people. Everyone has a story to tell; you just have to gently ask the right simple questions, and have the patience to listen and take good notes. Their memories become part of my memories, my well of wisdom upon which I can forever draw.

In 1978 my dad was elected leader of the Teamsters in the Valley. I convinced him to hire me part-time as editor of the union newspaper.

I still held onto my music gigs, because they were the funnest and easiest way to make extra money. Starting in 1970 and continuing off-

and-on until about 2007, I played guitar in nearly every bar between Albany and White Plains, as well as lots of schools and churches. In the 80s I used to spend a month or two a year working as a street musician in Boston, Montreal, London, Lausanne (Switzerland) and Rome. In Italy while playing the streets I fell for an Italian woman who couldn't speak English who wrote beautiful poetry. That lasted two incredible years. The distance did us in; neither wanted to move.

My cousins Lawrence and Mary Jean Cullen formed a smart-rock band with me in the 80's called *The Insurgents*, and we did some playing and recording of original songs. I learned a lot from those two, along with my good friend Walter Williams, who played bass in the band. Walter and I were very close, and would travel to Montreal in search of beautiful French-Canadian women in the incredible dance clubs. We didn't know what we wanted to do with *The Insurgents* other than we didn't want to play weddings. Although we never went anywhere but fun, I learned a lot about recording and songwriting.



***The Insurgents*: drummer Mark Giammarco, me, bassist Walter Williams, singers Mary Jean Cullen and Margo Heroux, and guitarist Lawrence Cullen.**

The more I traveled, the more I realized how much I wanted to live in the Hudson Valley. To me it's one of the most beautiful places in the universe. There's all kinds of people, mostly nice. I live in a community half residential, half-farmlands...so beautiful, especially when the sun

falls a certain way or the clouds and atmosphere combine for a magnificent explosion of colors. There's mountains and waterfalls all over the place, and the landscape is ever-changing. I knew the Hudson Valley was my home when, one day driving through Switzerland, I longed for old Storm King Mountain north of West Point. In autumn the Hudson Valley is an everyday masterpiece of bursting colors.



Pete Seeger's house was on the mountain to the left. West Point is in the middle, beyond Bannerman's Island. My home is near Storm King Mountain on the right.

Although I still can't read music, I can play nearly any song on guitar just by hearing it. If you hum it I'll strum it, especially if you flip ten bucks on the table.

I love making people sing. One of my favorite songs is *Happy Birthday* because it gets everyone involved. Especially in a church, when you have a whole group of people singing...it's breathtaking. Most times the priests would let me play whatever, but once I ran into a new priest who insisted I only play the old-fogey church songs. When I disobeyed him, he walked to where I was standing on the altar, and loudly demanded I leave the church. I was embarrassed, especially because a girl I had been hoping to date was in the pews that morning. We met later that day, she too was upset at the priest, and we immediately fell in love. Forgive me, but I remember thinking at the time maybe Heaven sent her as a reward for defying the damn priest.

Sometimes the songs I sung got me in trouble. In the seventies I had a great-paying gig once a month entertaining the West Point cadets at a Saturday-Night beer-hall-type event. One night I got them all standing on

tables singing *American Pie*. The freaking officer-in-charge banned me from any further gigs. That was a shame, because I always got along well with the cadets. Most of them are really cool.

Then there were the amazing nights. Once I was playing a gig in Beacon just down the hill from Seeger's house with my brother John, and afterwards about 50 of us boys and girls went skinny-dipping in a nearby swimming hole (Seeger had gone home by then). It was pretty innocent, no sex on the shore or anything, but that was probably the best adventure I ever had at a gig, and I had a ton of them. Imagine, an hour earlier I'm performing for all these girls, and now they're all cavorting naked in front of me. Thankfully I was shocked into non-arousal; the cold water doused my passion but never my imagination.

Lawrence Cullen, my cousin and close buddy, jammed and wrote dozens of songs with me. He's a genius producer and guitarist. We He had a New Jersey manner of twisting words around; Dunkin Donuts became Drunken Blownuts, Burger King became Burger Barf, etc. . To this day we're best friends.

For extra money, I wrote a lot of freelance articles and edited a few union newspapers besides the Teamsters. The Laborers Union had me do a long series of interviews with old-timers, all of whom had gone through the Great Depression in the 1930s and World War II in the 1940s. We should all have a great appreciation for the incredible sacrifices they endured on our country's behalf. Especially our soldiers who fought against Hitler in Europe and the Japanese Imperial Army in Asia, those men and women truly gave their all. The suffering they endured watching close friends get killed still haunts their dreams.

My brother Ray's best man at his wedding was his college friend Glen Hughes, who later became the famous Leather/Motorcycle Man in *The Village People*. Glen took an interest in my songwriting, a few years before their song *YMCA* came out, and he lent me his PA system so I could play bars by myself. Once he took me all through NYC and Brooklyn, showing me places I could gig. He drove like a maniac, but he was really cool and encouraging. I got so scared by the drive I didn't want

to play down there anymore. Later I learned he was gay, but back then gays didn't reveal themselves to straight people, and I was flaming straight. It bothered me when he died so young.

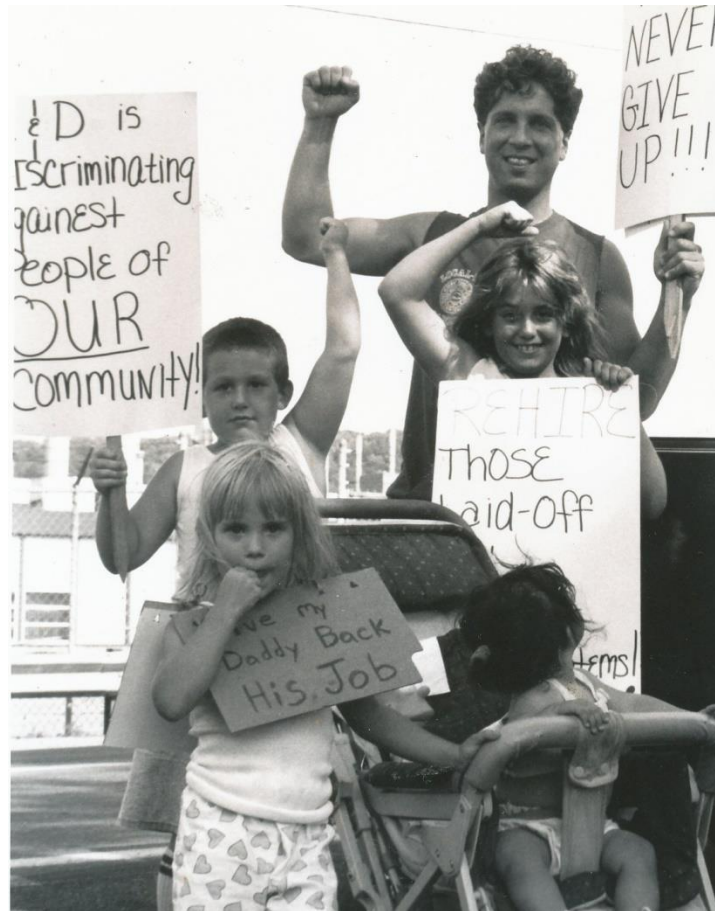


That's Glen, fourth from left, singing with some of my family at a wedding.

Met a girl from Utica at a gig in Albany, and she held my heart for quite a few years...I gave her a lot of space because she was still in college...part of her studies took her to California, and I actually flew out to visit her...I really thought she was the one...but I didn't realize another guy was also courting her, and he asked her to marry him first...for once I wished I hadn't been so damned patient...she loved to laugh, and she could go deep...part of me was hurt she never mentioned him to me, but maybe that was just her way of giving me a fair chance to win her heart.

In 1983 my dad organized about 500 nurses at St. Luke's Hospital in Newburgh into the Teamsters, and I fell in love with union organizing and one of the nurses. I quit the newspapers and became a full-time union organizer.

As mentioned earlier, my father went to jail in 1985. I stayed on with the Teamsters because I loved the work; it's the only job in the world where you get to yell at bosses. Pete Seeger was a huge part of that decision too...he kept advising me to stay local, stay local. He was big-time in favor of unions, and told all kinds of crazy stories about his union organizing experiences with Woody Guthrie.



On a picket-line in Port Jervis, with kids of factory workers I organized in 1985.

I love helping negotiate the union contracts, which involves improving the workers' wages, benefits, working conditions, protection against unfair discipline, and time off. After the contract is negotiated, the workers must vote to approve or reject the deal. I'm proud – very proud – that most times they approve the contracts I help them negotiate by a

unanimous vote (conducted by secret-ballot, and the workers count the ballots!).

What makes me proudest about my work is knowing if I die tomorrow, those contracts will still keep paying those workers all the extra money, benefits and protection I helped them win. I feel as though I did something good not just for them, but their families. Check out my book *Working Class Manifesto* for more details.

There are a lot of good bosses who are tough but fair. Fairness is what I look for. I believe the workers owe the boss a good day's work for a good day's pay. But I also believe that if workers don't have the legal mechanism to negotiate their raises, benefits, working conditions, job protections and time off, they'll always have to settle for less. The job of a boss is to make as much money as possible, and if that means squeezing the workers, so be it. We'd all probably do the same if we were in that position. Unless you have negotiations, you have nothing and get nowhere. And unless everything's down on paper, in contract form, it's a promise waiting to be broken.

To me, negotiating a contract is not an ideology: it's good business.

You might think your particular boss or supervisor will protect you, and they might for now. The day they're no longer there, your new superior may turn into Satan-Beelzebub, and out-the-window goes your security.

Sometimes a worker'll be in trouble for, say, drinking on the job. If I can get the boss to agree that if the worker goes to a dozen Alcoholics Anonymous meetings within a couple of months, and he keeps his job, that's good, right? When I help that guy, I also help his family. I might not always succeed, but I figure God only demands that a person try.

Whatever position life gives you, there are always opportunities to help someone within your orbit. Take them. Don't worry whether you succeed, and don't look for credit or appreciation, because that'll spoil all the good you did.

Chapter 4

True Love

It took me until 1987, at age 34, to meet my future wife Jeanette. She walked into the Teamsters Union Hall with a bunch of workers from a Stewart Airport toy warehouse for *Child World*, a one-time rival of *Toys-R-Us*. They had just been fired the day after I won an election to represent them. It took nine months of court action and store boycotts, but every one of them was offered reinstatement with full backpay.

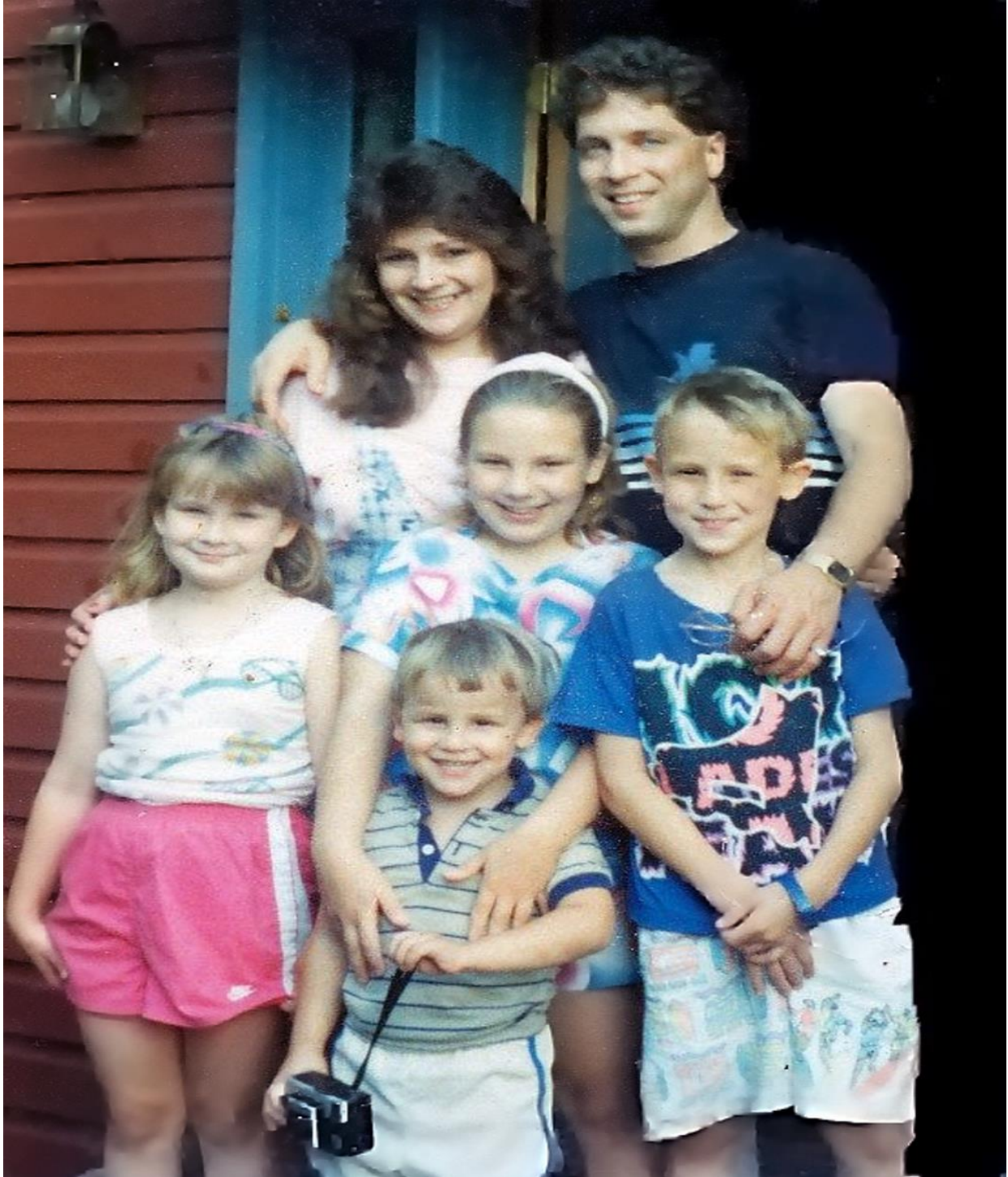
I was attracted to her as soon as I saw her, but found out after the meeting she was married, so that was that. Neither of us even flirted. During the boycott, picketlines and court-struggle that ensued, we became good friends but nothing more. I had already learned my lesson about fooling around with married women.

Three years later she came to the union hall to tell me she was leaving her husband because he was physically abusive.

Our friendship immediately renewed and intensified. Before the ink was dry on her divorce I proposed, for the first time in my life. We were crazy in love, and it stayed that way.

I never tire of talking with her. She has a great sense of humor, which makes life much easier than it actually is. She's Italian, and a professional chef by training, although she quit restaurant work because it takes away every holiday. In school she was a master violinist, and played with the All-County Band.

She had four beautiful little kids aged one, three, four and five from her first marriage, and I raised them as if they were mine. I loved her so much I wouldn't have cared if she had 20 kids. We didn't have a lot of money, but we never missed providing for the holidays, back-to-school, birthdays and other important stuff.



Jeanette and I in 1993, with (from left), Janelle, Alfie, Leeann and Michael.

We knew before we were married we couldn't have our own kids because of her medical situation. I seriously couldn't have cared less. If love is true, nothing can stand in its way. If it's not true, anything can

derail it. I figure all kids belong to God anyhow, and us parents just borrow them.



Jeanette and me on our wedding day, Sept. 12, 1993.

We always stayed close with our kids as they were growing up. Every once in awhile when one of them pissed me off, I'd catch myself about

to say something my father would have said. I didn't repeat his mistakes, although I made enough of my own.

Our kids eventually gave us seven grandkids as of this year, 2019: Madison, Abigail, Joseph, Andrew, Genevieve, McKenna and Judy. I love them beyond words.

The same year we were married, I was fired from the Teamsters for running with a dissident group against the boss of the union, because in my opinion he had turned into an egomaniacal bum. That was stupid on my part, but I'd probably do it again.

Then I was fired from the Laborers in 1997 after I told another union boss I didn't want to "listen to his shit." I probably shouldn't have said that.

My father-in-law Fred advised me thereafter, "The boss might not always be right, but he's always the boss." I haven't been fired since.

Around that time I started tangling with John Cardinal O'Connor from NYC while representing Catholic High School teachers in his archdiocese. You can search [jerry ebert archdiocese of ny](#), and there's a couple of articles about it from the NY Times and the Daily News. To me, the Cardinal was a phony with a real nasty side. Catholic teachers are paid crap in general, and worse, some of the principals are medieval idiots.

Me and my buddy Henry Kielkucki, a Catholic high school history teacher, disrupted the Cardinal's annual invitation-only Labor Day Mass in early September 1996 with big picketlines right in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in NYC. We managed to convince most of the dozens of parading unions not to enter the Cathedral, and instead join our demonstration. It was very embarrassing to the Cardinal. I always believed that, in a tough struggle for a decent raise, if the boss goes to bed with indigestion you're winning.

That night, my poor mother was shocked to see me on the local nightly news helping lead the rally in front of the Cathedral. That was the only thing I felt badly about. I wasn't ashamed because I knew it had to be done. It wasn't as though we were disrupting a Sunday church service;

it was freaking Labor Day, and this bum-of-a-boss Cardinal was putting on a phony Labor-Day show at the Cathedral that deserved to be disrupted. But I felt very badly my mom was so upset with me. I'd do it again if I had to, which drives me nuts about me.

After the teachers voted unanimously for their new contract just before Christmas, the Cardinal tried to renege on the agreed-upon deal. He was pissed because a NY Times story on the struggle quoted me as saying "We feel victorious." Reneging on an approved-contract is illegal under labor laws on negotiations, but he didn't care. So Henry and I put out a handbill saying that since the Cardinal was canceling the teachers' raises, we'd conduct a toy drive the next few Sundays in front of the Cathedral to try and obtain presents for our underpaid teachers to give their own children. Within a few days the freaking Cardinal backed down again, and the teachers received their raises.

A few years later one of my gay brothers, Matt, was with the group ActUp as they protested in front of the Cathedral, and I happily went with him and took some great photos. My mom never found out about that. Matt has become a real activist for gay rights, and even has written on the subject for the Huffington Post. Good for him; I'm freaking proud.

Cornell University used to run classes throughout the state on labor issues. They paid me to teach two semesters of classes in the 80s and 90s, on union organizing and union journalism. I learned more than I ever taught. They had a professor there, Kate Bronfenbrenner, who did this study that proved the most effective strategy you can use in organizing workers is to develop their contract proposal before the vote on joining the union. I do it all the time, but most unions don't. It works because it shows the people the most important thing they get out of a union: the right to negotiate a contract. That's what it's all about, not all the pie-in-the-sky brotherhood/solidarity stuff. It's a freaking business decision: do you think you'd be better off negotiating a contract to secure your wages, benefits, working conditions, job protections and time off? You'd be an idiot to say no. You can only say you're scared to do it. That's valid; I've seen bosses fire people the minute they found out there was talk of

negotiating a contract, even though technically that's forbidden by the National Labor Relations Act.

I was only offered bribes twice; once by a boss, and once in what I later learned was a FBI sting operation. Both times I said hell no. After that time I was caught stealing as a kid, never again. I try not to do anything where, if it goes wrong, I'm totally screwed. That policy has worked out well for me.

The FBI went after Teamsters Unions throughout the country starting in the 80s, and it was great because it sidelined a lot of bad people. Fortunately in the Hudson Valley, organized crime was never as organized as NYC or northern Jersey. Unions are like any other human organization, prone to screw-up if you don't stay on top of them. It's the same for lawyers, cops, religious leaders, car mechanics. Here's *Jerry's Rule of Human Organizations: Sooner or later every human organization turns to shit, at least for a time*. What I love about private-sector unions is union officials are required by law to run for office every three years. So if the union boss is an idiot or a crook, you can organize to kick him out.

At times I've naively tangled with companies and unions controlled by organized crime-type characters, and not just Italians. In one incident reported in the Times-Herald Record in 1991, I was described during a strike as "capering around the picket-line," blowing my harmonica in the face of a garbage company boss whose workers I was trying to organize. A year later he was indicted on all kinds of racketeering charges. That was nuts of me. Around that time, someone warned me "If you mess with trash, you end up in it." A few months later, Columbo crime family member Nicky Grancio ("Nicky Black") came to our Hudson Valley Teamster Union Hall asking that we share the workforce at a big nearby warehouse with a union he favored from New Jersey. No one at the union wanted to meet with him, so I did. I politely but firmly told him we wouldn't do it. A few weeks later he was killed in a feud with Carmine Persico. God protects children and fools, and I must be both. My dad once said (in anger) that I was too stupid to be scared. To paraphrase

Oscar Wilde, I've never wished anyone dead, but I've occasionally been relieved to read an obituary.

Around 1999 I was trying to organize undocumented Spanish and Polish workers unsafely and illegally removing asbestos from big projects throughout New Jersey. Think *The Sopranos meet the Yugoslavian mob*. I gave the Trenton Times the information but told it not to print my name. It did anyhow, at the end of a front-page expose on corruption within the industry. Three days later a worker told me the Yugoslavian boss knows my four kids go to Valley Central School in the Hudson Valley, 60 miles north. I quit organizing in New Jersey right then and there.

After that I wanted a break from union organizing. I returned to the Sentinel and ended up being editor again. Covering local-yokel news was the perfect remedy to the high stress of union work. It was a time of blissful writing/photography and un-blissful pay and benefits. Jeanette saved us financially; by then she was working as a supermarket deli manager, and we were able to pay the rent and take care of the kids.

In 2006 my old friend Doug McCauley, a construction truck driver, was elected head of the Teamsters. Dougie asked me to come back to organize workers and put out the union newspaper. I jumped; the Teamsters always felt like home to me. He died a year later after suffering a heart attack in the Union Hall. I still pray to that guy to give me strength.

I finally was elected an officer of the Teamsters in 2011. For the first time in my crazy life I didn't have to worry about anybody firing me except the voters in the union, and if I just worked hard and stayed dedicated to them, I'd earn their approval. Bosses are my problem, not workers. Right now our union leader - my boss - is truly great and dedicated, but even if he sucked he couldn't fire me because I'm freaking elected; it would be like a president firing a governor. That is cool. The pay is good, and the medical benefits and pension are free.

Besides the Catholic High School Teachers I mentioned earlier, the biggest group I've represented over the years are the West Point bus drivers, hospital custodian and Mess Hall servers and dishwashers. Also

I've taken care of over 500 Sullivan County Government Employees, including office staff, child protective officers, probation officers, social workers, nurse's aides, custodial workers, kitchen staff and more. Then there's the Dutchess County Mass Transit bus drivers, mechanics and office staff. I've negotiated for school bus drivers, highway department workers, police officers, sergeants and detectives in seven municipalities, factory workers, nurse case managers at the local hospital, and workers at about fifteen other locations.



Me with some of my West Point Mess Hall workers.

Working people complain about not getting ahead, but stupid us for thinking we can do it without negotiations. Nothing gets handed to anyone. We have no other viable option.

In 2017, West Point officials banned me from the Mess Hall because I was going to take a strike vote among all the servers, dishwashers and custodians I represented. So I had my employee shop stewards take the strike vote anyhow, which infuriated the officials. We finally won great raises, but it took Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney to convince West Point to lift the ban on me. Most of the Mess Hall workers are either Spanish or Haitian, and we sing a simple song that really pisses the Army bosses off when we get pissed. It's based on a lilting Haitian song that goes "*Pav-le, Pav-le, Pav-le Army*". The West Point officers overseeing the Mess Hall never figured out what it meant. (In Haitian slang *Pavle* means *Shame on you*.) Once we were meeting in the famous "Poop Deck" overlooking the Mess Hall where all the presidents and big-shots

eat when they visit West Point. There's a microphone there, and nobody was looking, so I turned it on and started singing "*Pav-le...Pavle...*" I got away with it, but I would have felt stupid if they banned me from the Mess Hall again. The workers thought it was hilarious, and it was good for their morale I guess. But I really don't want to get kicked out of West Point any more.

Starting in 2017 I helped lead my Sullivan County Government employees through two years of tough negotiations before winning a decent contract. Those people are so beautiful, humble and generous, and they don't even realize it. It's a farming county with two troubled cities (Liberty and Monticello). We conducted a wild campaign that included lots of songs and community outreach.



I'm in the middle back row, with my Sullivan County negotiating committee.

I want to stay in the Hudson Valley, and have absolutely no desire to be any more of a big-shot than I am. Being a big-shot leads to pride, trouble and temptation.

Over the years I've done newspaper articles from time to time on houses in the Hudson Valley rumored to be haunted. Most of the stories seemed phony, but every once in awhile I'd come across what I thought was real.

Then in the early 1990's I started a long series of interviews and meetings with someone who knew a lot about this subject, and what I

saw with my own two eyes scared the crap out of me. It made me a true believer not just in life-after-death, but a whole parallel life-alongside-life thing happening around us; spirits and stuff such as that. It really spooked me, and I'm finishing a book about it called *Secret Souls*.

This I'll tell you right now: death is not death. Death not at all what most people think it is. All things considered, death is rather wondrous, much like the caterpillar shedding its body into butterfly. Death no longer pisses me off.

For now, search *Long Island Medium* Theresa Caputo, and just watch a few episodes. She's telling the truth, and you can learn all you need to know by studying her.

In 2002 I wrote most the songs on a spiritual album by Debbie Major called *You Took Me In*. It's online somewhere, and pretty nice.

My college poetry teacher Barbara Clarkson once challenged me to write a book of poems and songs combined. I started then, which was 1976. I figured it'd take a couple of years. Finally around 2007 me, my brother Ed, cousin Larry and buddies Steve Morgan, Debbie Major and Lenny Underwood began recording the songs. It's called *Booksongs*, because every song is coupled with one of my books. It's almost done, and will be posted on the web under jerryebert.com.

In my life I've visited at least 15 prisons to see friends and relatives, many several times, and once played guitar with my brothers for the inmates at a federal prison. What kills me is how ineffective prisons are. Did you know that, in the United States, one in every 18 white men go to jail, *as do one in every four black men*. Our prisons are just an extension of our racism. We do prisons stupid.

In my 20s, a girlfriend had an abortion when I refused to get married. I don't hold the decision against her, and although I didn't recommend it, I paid for it and drove her to the place. To this day it rips me apart. As far as I know, that's the only girl I ever impregnated. I believe in my heart that someday in Heaven I'll meet that soul never-born.

My wife and I constantly traveled to Amish country in Lancaster Pennsylvania, a three-hour drive from our home. Over many years we've

made some friends among them, although I don't agree with some of their beliefs and practices (such as shunning).

When Jeanette and I first fell in love, I promised her I'd love her a little more every day of my life. She promised always to make our love feel new. We both kept those promises.

We loved doing things together...garage sales, putting on family parties, going to dinner (she preferred diners), and always talking and laughing. I loved her sense of humor...she'd find the joke in some of the darkest moments of our life together (such as the times I was fired!). I dug many gardens for her, and made sure they stayed weeded and beautiful. I regularly washed her car, and took care of its maintenance. She hated taking out the garbage; I did it without waiting to be asked, and never complained. She loved roses, and I made sure to help her plant them. Sometimes she'd get into a phase of watching sentimental movies every night, and I never complained; I just loved being with her so much, she could've taken me to an opera and I'd have enjoyed myself, although I loathe most opera (except Maria Callas!). And she loved me...she took such care of me, and worried about all the driving I had to do. Whenever I mowed the lawn or snow-shoveled, she'd sit in the window, afraid I'd fall and not be able to get up.

We celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary in September 2018, just six months ago, with a big party she organized at our home. During the ceremony I freaking started crying when we renewed our vows. We promised to love each other beyond time, beyond tears.

Ten weeks later, she helped organize a holiday party for the Pisano clan, and over a hundred relatives celebrated.

Two weeks later, my life was torn in half.

Jeanette had been diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2007. For 12 long years she struggled as it spread to other organs, and took out her adrenal glands. All this, plus the medications, weakened her. Just before Christmas 2018, I took her to the hospital after her cold turned to pneumonia. Neither of us realized the end was close.

She passed away on January 2, 2019. All four kids, me, her mom, brothers and sisters sat by her bedside as she took her last breath.

Eleven weeks have slowly gone by now; it's March 2019. Outside our porch the daffodils and hyacinths she planted last year are pushing through the earth. The visiting grandkids are downtown right now at a St. Patrick's Day parade. Our home is quiet.

Death doesn't anger me anymore...even though my heart is throbbing from the pain of missing her.

I feel her close to me...I sense she is happy for the life we had together. I understand now...death is part of life, and only a temporary separation from those we love.

My crazy life has been so full, thanks to her and all those who have blessed me with their love.

I wish the same for you.

Part III

Papa's Gift



To my sweet grandchildren, here are some photos to enjoy and ideas to consider. Most of the photos are of you and your friends!

In my other two books (Secret Souls and Working Class Manifesto) you'll also find photos and ideas I'm leaving as my legacy to you.

There's so much to tell you, especially about how to survive this sometimes-nasty, sometimes-beautiful world. Having knowledge without understanding is like having the sun above you without being warm. Let this book help you understand how life works. Sometimes I'll deliberately repeat ideas on different pages, because those ideas bear repeating.

Please feel my gratitude for the love, light and laughter you've shown me since your grandmother – my sweet wife Jeanette, the woman you call Nana - passed into Heaven on January 2, 2019. Much of what I write here was learned after conversations and experiences with her; in a very real sense we both wrote this book. She influenced my thinking more than anyone.

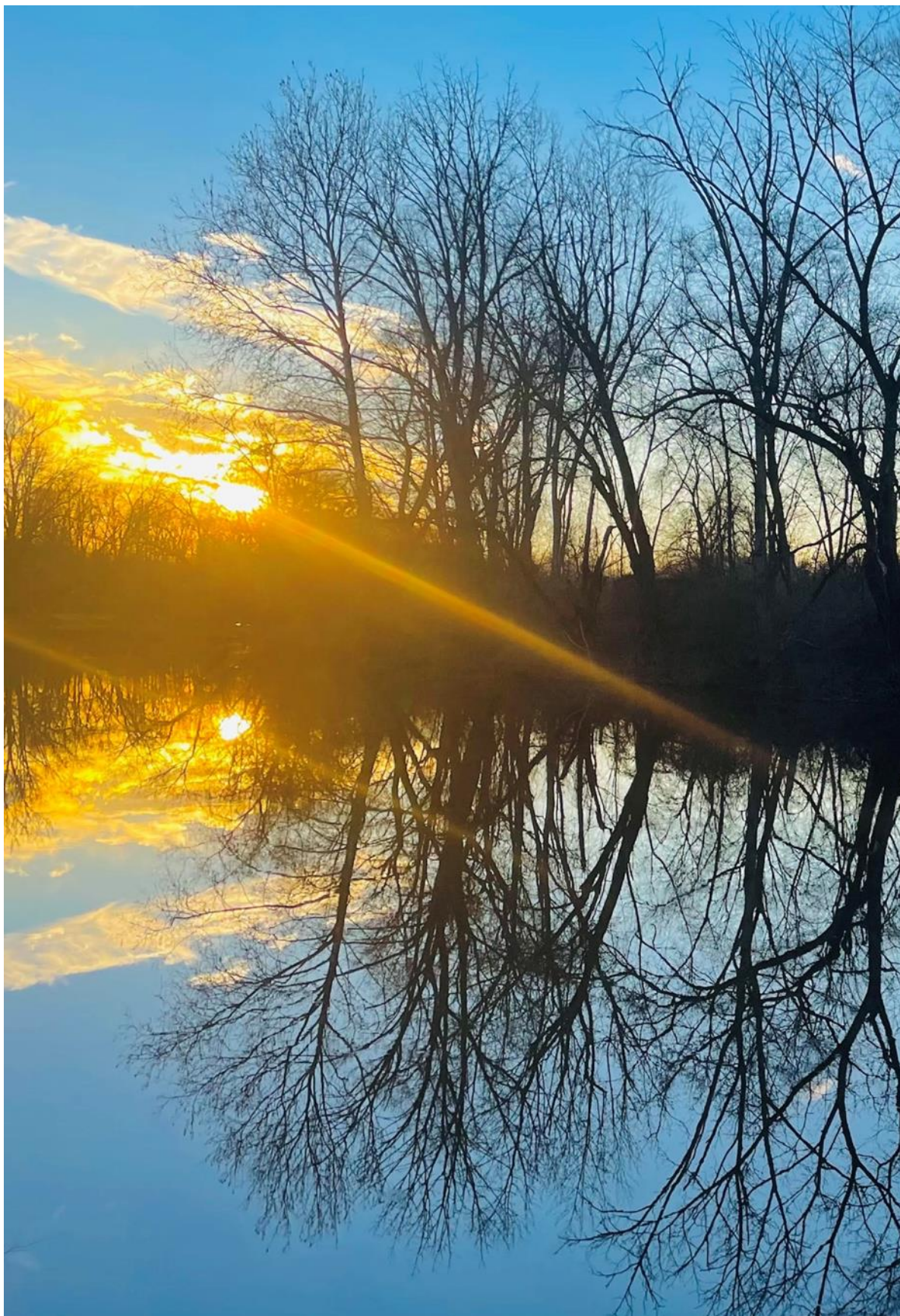
Since her passing, you've sustained me with your affection. May these words and photos someday help sustain you.

Papa Jerry

-January 2024



Kids, I have **good news and bad news**. They're the most important two things I'll ever tell you, so listen closely. I know them to be true because I've seen physical evidence (read my book *Secret Souls*). The good news: *death is not death, but temporary separation*. You're a soul that lives beyond This Side, a soul that continues to learn and evolve on The Other Side when your body dies. Someday science will prove your soul is conscious energy, with form, substance, memory, and its own physics and biology. Your soul is real, with its own body, and it survives when your body dies. However, here's the bad news: *there's good souls and evil souls fighting hard for control of The Other Side*. Think of good souls as shining with pure Light, and evil souls as dark and shadowy. Evil souls can't push you off a cliff, but they can convince you to jump. The evil souls on both sides always seeks two things: power and control. For a long time now, the good souls have been managing The Other Side. If this changes and the bad guys take over, it'll be a lot harder for us among the living to reach Heaven when our bodies die, and a lot easier for evil souls to be born into babies. The way the system of sorting souls works now, every child is born good; that includes you! You are a Child of the Light. We need to keep the system running that way. It's important you do your part. This little book will show you how you can help, and how you can protect and nourish your own soul.



The photo on the left is kind'ove like This Side and The Other Side; when you turn it upside down it looks the same! In real life, both sides reflect each other; what you do on This Side affects the energy of The Other Side, and vice versa. They're not separate; they interact at all times. So do your part to help the good souls, because you are one of them, and because your help is truly needed. However, I must strongly warn you **never try to connect with The Other Side** except in prayer. If you ever mess with Ouiji Boards, seances, or just some crazy crap you see on the internet, the evil ones over there could easily channel into you instead. They are perfectly capable of pretending to be whoever you're trying to contact. An evil one cannot push you off a cliff, but they can get inside your head and convince you to jump. You should suspect such influence if you're constantly flooded with violent urges, intense dissatisfaction (they magnify your legitimate grievances), and inappropriate sexual fantasies. There's a longstanding war going on over there, a war that seems to be intensifying in recent years. Any tangling with evil souls needs to be done by Heaven's trained warriors, not your sorry ass. Read on to learn what to do if you think an evil one has channeled into you. Kids, this is a deadly serious situation; be freaking careful, and aware.



Live by The Golden Rule: *treat others as you wish to be treated.* Make it your code-of-behavior every day of your life, and you'll survive whatever crap is thrown at you. You want to be treated with compassion, respect and honesty, right? That's how you must treat others, even if they don't return the favor. The Golden Rule has been around for thousands of years, and is the foundation of all good religions (search it on the internet). Although your grandmother and I are Christian, we both liked sifting through the best ideas from the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and the 400 other good religions throughout the world; you should too! We firmly believe all who practice The Golden Rule are welcome in God's Heaven, even Athiests, for they may not know God, but God will know them through their goodness. Jesus expressly says following The Golden Rule is the key to entering Heaven in his *Parable of The Good Samaritan*; he was even more specific in the *Parable of Sheep and The Goats* (look them up!). Let The Golden Rule be your guiding code of behavior. That way, no matter what happens to you in this life, you'll be fine in the longer and more-important next life.



Your grandmother often said this: **be a sifter**. Sift through different religions, politics, philosophies and other disciplines. Keep an open mind, never hesitating to change your opinion upon further information. Consider ideas from a wide variety of sources, from all angles, and allow those ideas to percolate through your mind as water percolates through coffee grains to create a delicious brew. When you sift that way, when you allow those ideas to percolate, you're in the best position to discern the truth. One time a hospital admissions nurse asked your grandmother what religion she was, and she answered with a smile "I'm a sifter." Looking down from Heaven, I'm sure she'd be proud if you too sifted.



Forgive me for wanting to talk about God, Heaven and The Evil Ones so much. I'm scared that in this crazy world you're born into, no one'll tell you about this stuff. I'm not a religious fanatic; I don't often go to church because I think most organized religions suck, especially those that claim to be the "only true" religion. Yet I know there are many many good people who truly gain spiritual nourishment by participating in the world's many religions. (The five biggest ones, in the order of when they developed, are Hindu, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikh). I also know that many religions have very good people performing wonderful acts of compassion and charity everyday, helping people. But kids, even though some religions have screwed up explaining the importance of God and Heaven, disappointed us with their leaders, ignored physical, psychological and sexual violence, or led us astray with their political or nationalistic beliefs, you truly need to have a strong understanding of what happens when we die, and what's at stake if you screw up your life. **Giving up religion is like giving up meat; it only works if you substitute something better.** Whatever you believe or don't believe, you need to develop and maintain a code of behavior that in its own way follows The Golden Rule. This stuff about the survival of your soul is real, and I need to keep you real.



Yep, that's **my family** to the left, in a photo from the mid-1980s. I'm standing back row, second from right. There's lots more about them in my short bio *My Crazy Life*. It's incredible being one of many. I learned everyone is different, that one person's ceiling is another person's floor, and that no matter our differences, we need to love each other. The world is that way too: that's its beauty. Everyone is different. Don't expect folks to agree with everything you think or say, and love them especially when they don't. At the dinnertable (where my parents insisted we all gather together every night around 5:30), I learned how to have fun conversations, just to keep it from being boring. Sometimes we'd argue about religious or social issues, and I'd think about it a day or two and then change my opinion at the next dinner session. I learned patience and kindness toward each other. From my mother I learned that Heaven was real, because she prayed so intensely to it that I figured it must be true. Every night my mom gathered us together for prayers, and I could sometimes even feel the positive energy of us all praying together, doing a lap around the rosary. We all had chores, and couldn't play until they were done, and you got used to it. We sang together all the time, even while we were doing our work, blending our voices on the latest Beatles and other songs. I learned the importance – the grace – of harmonizing not just in singing, but in living.



“I have a body, I am a soul,” wrote the author C.S. Lewis. Think of your soul as physical in its own way: a light-and-energy-filled, conscious being that lived before this life, and will continue to live when your body dies. Famed scientist Nicola Tesla once said the secrets of the universe may be found in “energy, frequency and vibration,” and this is true of your soul. Another famed scientist, Albert Einstein, proved energy cannot destroy itself. This means when your body dies, your soul – which is energy aware of itself – survives. Your body is important, but not nearly as important as your soul. Your soul has its own set of memories, its own consciousness and life beyond our definitions, its own form and substance, its own physics and biology. All your life you must nourish your soul as you nourish your body. Read holy books of ever religion, pray, meditate quietly, perform acts of kindness and compassion, treat everyone – I mean everyone, even those you dislike – with decency and respect. These daily habits and practices nourish your soul. Your soul is here to hopefully strengthen and educate itself, so that when it returns to Heaven it's even stronger and healthier than when it left. All life evolves, sometimes two steps forward and one step back, and your soul is here to evolve in a positive direction. Our lives on This Side are only half-lives when compared to our lives on The Other Side, for there's where our souls come alive!



Later I'll tell more about **the nature of evil souls**, but for now I need you to know their biggest weakness: they're torture-trained to avoid souls who shine with pure Light. (I capitalize Light when I'm referring to the same kind of pure Light as may be found in Heaven.) The nasty evil leaders train the souls they control this way, because pure Light might weaken their soldiers in battle by reminding them of a past pure love they experienced (such as their mother's love or the affection of a friend). Thus, they're trained to be nauseated in the presence of pure Light. It is their most important vulnerability, their Achilles' Heel. To avoid evil souls, simply surround yourself with pure light generated by positive activities. This includes positive play, prayers, exercise, meditation, a good book or movie, healthy laughter, helping people, friendships, pure love (either romantic or for friends, relatives and strangers), acts of compassion, playing music, exploring culture...you get the picture. Examples of dark, negative shadows or activities that influence a person's soul include abuse, trauma, bad memories, unaddressed mental illness, inappropriate sex, excessive gambling, over-materialism, gossiping, and any other negative, unhealthy behaviors. These habits create shadows within your soul that must be dissolved before you're allowed to enter the safety of Heaven. Evil souls cannot push you off a cliff, but they can invade your thoughts and convince you to jump. In a nutshell, if you stay light in this life, if you avoid the negative bullshit, your soul stays safe and healthy, and upon the death of your body you're relatively quickly ushered into Heaven. Here's the secret to your soul's survival: shine with pure inner light, even in the darkest times. Shine with love.



You can never convince someone to believe in God and Heaven. They have to find their own way.

Most people do, even if it's in the first fifteen minutes after so-called death. The best you can do is set a great example of living the way Heaven wants us to live. Other than that, everybody has their own path. For me it was easy; I always had strong faith, and was never one of those who ask Heaven to prove something to me. Then in 1990 I started researching my book *Secret Souls*. For the next six years I saw with my own eyes (sometimes with your grandmother present) all the physical proof I needed, all the external verification a person could hope to see, that life does not end at death. I'm not alone; I'd guesstimate about five percent of the population has experienced some external proof of the afterlife, even if only once. I had lots more than one, and most are in my book *Secret Souls*, which I ask you to read someday. My faith was transformed into true belief; I don't need faith anymore because I've seen proof. However, my proof could never be your proof, and my certainty could never be yours. Maybe you won't have your proof until you die; be happy with that. My best advice: don't need proof, and you'll probably get it. I sure did.



What's Heaven like? From what I've pieced together, it's peaceful, safe and light-filled, with families, friends and lovers reunited, laughter, celebrations, knowledge, wisdom...children playing with their favorite pets from the past...music, dancing, sacred prayers, respect for every living thing, a place where thoughts can become things...a place that's secure from the evil ones...and God, an embodiment of pure conscious good, the purest and most sacred of lights, the conscious collection of all the good we've fought through the ages to protect and preserve. So don't let death scare you...think of it as a major milestone in the life of your soul, but certainly not the only milestone. The revered 13th Century Persian/Muslim Poet Rumi wrote: *"This place is a dream. Only a sleeper considers it real. Then death comes like dawn, and you wake up laughing at what you thought was your grief."*



Your faith is important. When the resurrected Jesus showed his wounds to Doubting Thomas, he said "You have seen and so you believe. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." I take that to mean those who have not experienced evidence of life-beyond-death are blessed, for they need to rely on faith. People such as me who have seen proof have no damn excuse not to do what Heaven asks, and no longer need to rely on faith. (I don't have faith there's a Heaven; I freaking know it!) Some of your scientific friends might say there's no proof of God or Heaven, but they're mistaken; there's been plenty of proof shown, we just haven't put all the pieces together yet. I learned this: the soul has its own physics and biology, its own form and substance. I also know that consciousness has a life of its own, a life within energy, well beyond our present understanding. I do believe someday science'll catch up with what I just wrote. Even then, people'll still doubt; that's human nature! In your moments of doubt, pull out this book, and nurture your soul. Believe me kids, I would not deceive you or lead you down a false road; the only thing worse than no-hope is false-hope. I swear to you, the stuff I share about the life beyond this life is what I saw...and there is great hope. So keep your faith, whatever path it takes, and do what your faith asks of you. Your faith energizes your need for spiritual nourishment.



Actions speak louder than beliefs. I think God and His Helpers in Heaven aren't at all interested in what we believe so much as how we act. Don't worry about the differences between different religions, or even the differences within Christianity; it's all many rivers to the same sea. Some of the best Christians I've ever met actually practice other faiths or are Athiests, but live as Christ wants us to live: by following The Golden Rule. Organized Christianity has unfortunately done as much harm as good these past 2000 years, although it's also true that all of the world's 400-plus religions have at some time in their respective histories been screwed up. (That's because us humans are basically semi-intelligent monkeys, 10 minutes out of the jungle, still sparring over feeding grounds and mating privileges.) I sincerely believe if Jesus returned to earth, he'd head for a synagogue or mosque rather than a megachurch, especially if that megachurch preaches only Christians are allowed into Heaven. If you let The Golden Rule guide all of your actions, it doesn't matter what you believe or don't believe. Your actions will speak for themselves, and your path to Heaven will be easy. On your deathbed you might think there's no God or Heaven, but within five minutes of dying you'll have more awareness of God than any of the spiritual friends you may have left behind. And if you've led a decent, compassionate life, you'll quickly be reuniting with family and friends over there.



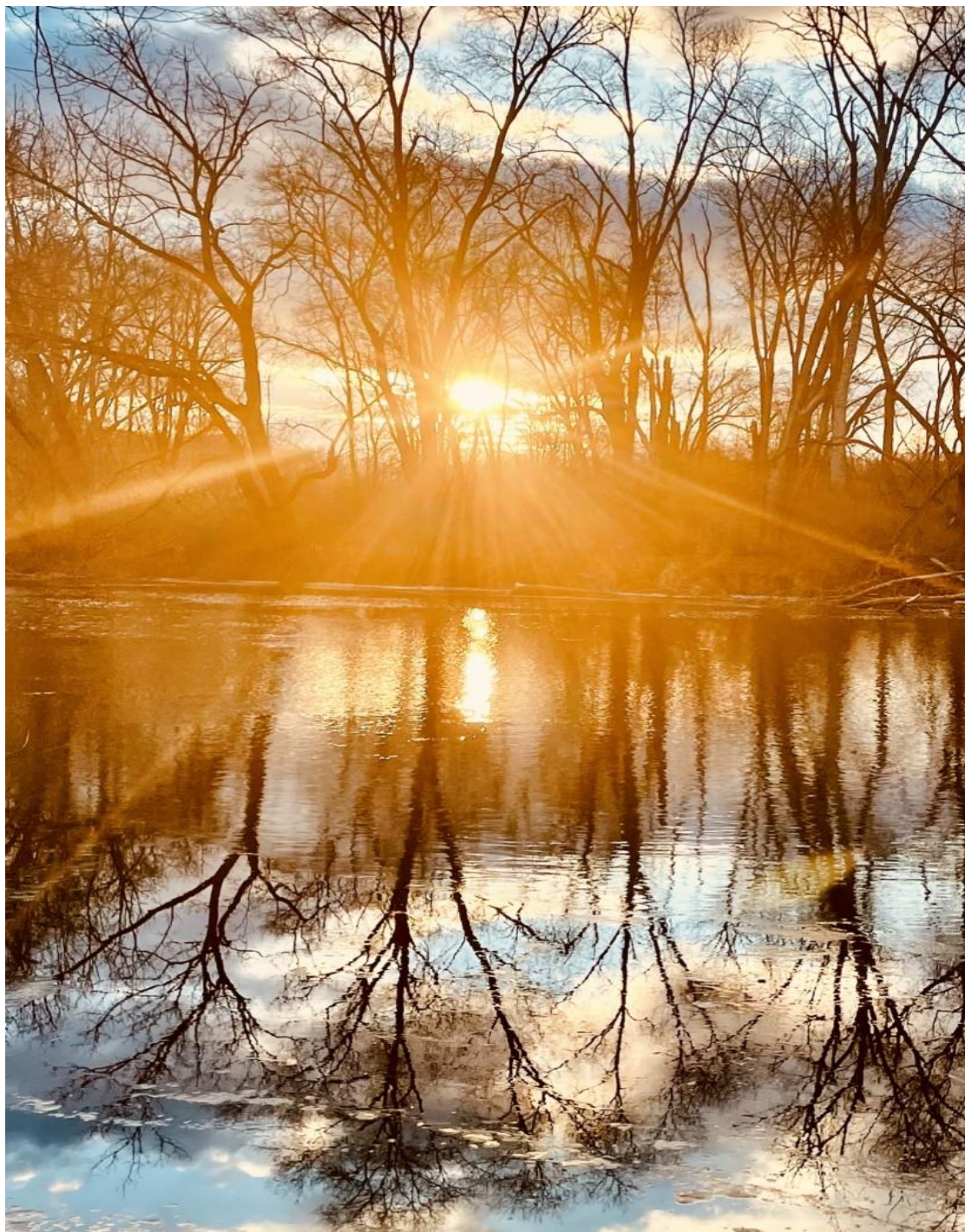
Work first, play second. Make a list of whatever you need to accomplish every day, and tackle most if not all of those things first. Then when you play, you'll be relaxed and enjoy your play more! Stop yourself if you find you're not doing your work, and instead are wasting valuable time watching your smartphone or TV...save that stuff for your play time. When there's something good or important you need to do, but you're paralyzed and can't talk yourself into doing it, give it this test: ask yourself if someone paid you a million dollars in cash to do the task, would you do it? If the answer comes back yes, then you can do whatever needs doing if you just motivate yourself. Remember that often we spend more time thinking about what needs to be done, than just making the damn time to do it. Here's your smartest motivation: save yourself time by tackling your work first, so you won't have to waste time worrying while you're playing about the work you need to do.



Take your sorrow in stride. There's a saying in *Secret Souls*: "The sorrowful music of this life is the joyful music of the next." That means your sadness will turn to happiness when you reach Heaven! So whenever you have a sad situation, remember that life is a long thing – it goes beyond this life – and keep your perspective.



Your biggest challenge in life (and there will be many) is to balance your physical with your spiritual: your body with your soul. When both are in harmony, you'll survive the bullshit coming your way. When the body overrules the soul, expect trouble, emptiness and unhappiness. Expect depression. Your body has real needs: to eat, to have fun, to drink clean water, to physically hold someone, to survive. However, if to fill those needs you steal, hurt people, or otherwise say and do bad things, then your body is not in touch with your soul, and you will suffer for it. If on the other hand you exude light and compassion in every damn thing you do from the biggest to the smallest, you'll be just fine in the end, and the end is what matters most. Many kids your age have no idea about their own souls, because no one explained it right to them. I'm telling you here and now: your body needs to live in harmony with your soul.



You have a physical and spiritual **consciousness** while you're alive, but when you die your spiritual consciousness takes over. Therefore, nourish it while you're alive, stay in touch with it, so it's in healthy shape when you die and come alive over there. Remember, when you "speak from your heart," as they say, you're really speaking from your soul. Consciousness is a form of energy, and your soul has its own consciousness and memory. Sometimes I wonder whether consciousness is, in itself, a form of life. We dumb humans are so full of ourselves, we can't imagine consciousness continuing beyond the death of our brains. Nor can we picture life being anything beyond ourselves and our consciousness. Like the folks before Galileo who thought the universe revolved around the earth, we think life revolves around our physical bodies. Have the right perspective on our lives: we are all just part of something much much bigger.



This discipline I learned while researching *Secret Souls: **The Twelve Virtues in the Three Areas***. The three areas are the mind, the body and the emotions. The twelve virtues are purity, sincerity, dedication, humility, self-belief, patience, lightness, honesty, balance, concentration, persistence, and hope. Each virtue must be practiced in the three areas; for example, purity of mind, body and emotions, sincerity of mind, body and emotions, etc. *True love is only true love if it contains the three virtues of purity, sincerity and dedication, in mind, body and emotions.* (This is not just true for romantic love, but true for friends, family and strangers.) The most important virtue is hope, which powers the energy of your soul. Kids, if you can think of these virtues every day and ask yourself whether you're following them, you'll be nourishing and strengthening your soul for its long journey to your real home, and you'll survive whatever crap slaps you in the face.



Pray every day. The Amish kids in the picture I took here are praying with their singing. (Your grandmother and I loved visiting them). You can choose already-written prayers, or make up your own. We liked the Christian "Our Father" (also called The Lord's Prayer), so whether or not you decide to be a Christian, use that one. Prayer strengthens you physically and spiritually. Any prayer you create by yourself should start with thanks and gratitude for your life, even if you're going through rough times. Gratitude and is one of the highest forms of consciousness (along with compassion). Don't pray for material things or events to happen, because God and His helpers in Heaven don't like doing that kind of stuff; they know if they granted your wish today but denied it tomorrow, you'd most likely grow angry and resentful, and turn against them. They also know if they did such a favor for your neighbor but not for you, you'd grow jealous. They don't like to do tricks just to prove to you they exist. So pray for inner peace, for good health, for God's sacred Light to fill your heart and soul.

Breathing slowly in and out, close your eyes and imagine wetless raindrops of light coming upon you from above.

You invite the Light by imagining it (the power of suggestion). Do that for five minutes or more per day, and feel your soul lighten! Pray for other people too; *everytime you hear an emergency siren go off, say a prayer for whoever is in trouble, and a prayer for the emergency workers racing to the problem*: pray they stay safe. Send your positive energy. Exercise your praying! Don't just wait for emergencies. *You stay connected to the pure Light of Heaven through prayer.* That Light is energy and strength for you.



You'll hear people talking about **the evil ones, the devil**, and such, so let's get this stuff straight. Read *Secret Souls* when you get older for the details. There's a group of angry, evil souls on The Other Side who have banded together in a kind of army. They're not monsters with freaking superpowers, just bad dead people, some more clever than others, and they've organized to try and overthrow the present system of the souls. They're obsessed with returning to life, and angry that God and the good souls have blocked them from entering babies' bodies. They despise Jesus, because after His death He figured out a better way of protecting the good sections from the bad over there. (I learned that in *Secret Souls*.) They want what all evil people want: power and control. Right now they have influence, but not power and control. So they work on us. If we give them an opening through depression or impure fantasies, they can enter our consciousness with their twisted telepathy, and send us thoughts that we think are our own, such as images of murderous or perverted acts. Their voices will be friendly and familiar rather than frightening; it will be the voices in your head fueling your anger, magnifying your grievances, enflaming your hatred. Their ultimate goal is to control your soul at your moment of death, for the raw energy of your soul translates into power for their army. They're energy parasites, looking to latch onto your soul by controlling your consciousness. The more souls they corral, the better their chances to overthrow the present system and replace it with their own. Some people have faith the evil ones will never win, but I don't believe the future is predetermined. Also, I firmly believe it's very dangerous to claim victory before you actually achieve it; it weakens you.



There's one more thing you need to practice, something I mentioned earlier: **how to avoid the evil ones.** It's easier than you might think. Have you seen horror movies where vampires are weakened by sunlight? The evil ones are weakened if your soul is shining with the light of love. They'll actually avoid you; as with all predators, they're hunting for weak prey, not strong (*unless* you directly challenge them, in which case all bets are off!). Surround yourself with the light of love by completely living The Golden Rule: loving everyone as you would want to be loved (even your enemies). Surround yourself with light in many other ways I mention in this little book, and ways you can learn from other spiritual disciplines. Never try to contact people on The Other Side with Ouija boards or other such tricks; you could easily channel into an evil one instead, and they'd try to latch themselves to your consciousness. They're energy parasites, so just as you would avoid getting a mosquito bite, avoid giving the evil ones a chance to channel into you. Likewise, as hinted above, never try to directly challenge the evil ones, or talk in any way to them; leave that to God's well-trained helpers on The Other Side. If you challenge them, they will find a way to turn your life miserable. They don't try to "possess" you as you might see in horror movies; that's physically very dangerous for them. Rather, they try to latch onto people's consciousness. Don't be all-afraid of them; they're not monsters with superpowers, just bad dead people who could overthrow the system if we don't smarten up and do the right things. Keep your souls shining with love, and you won't need to worry about any damn evil ones. Be aware of them, but ignore them.



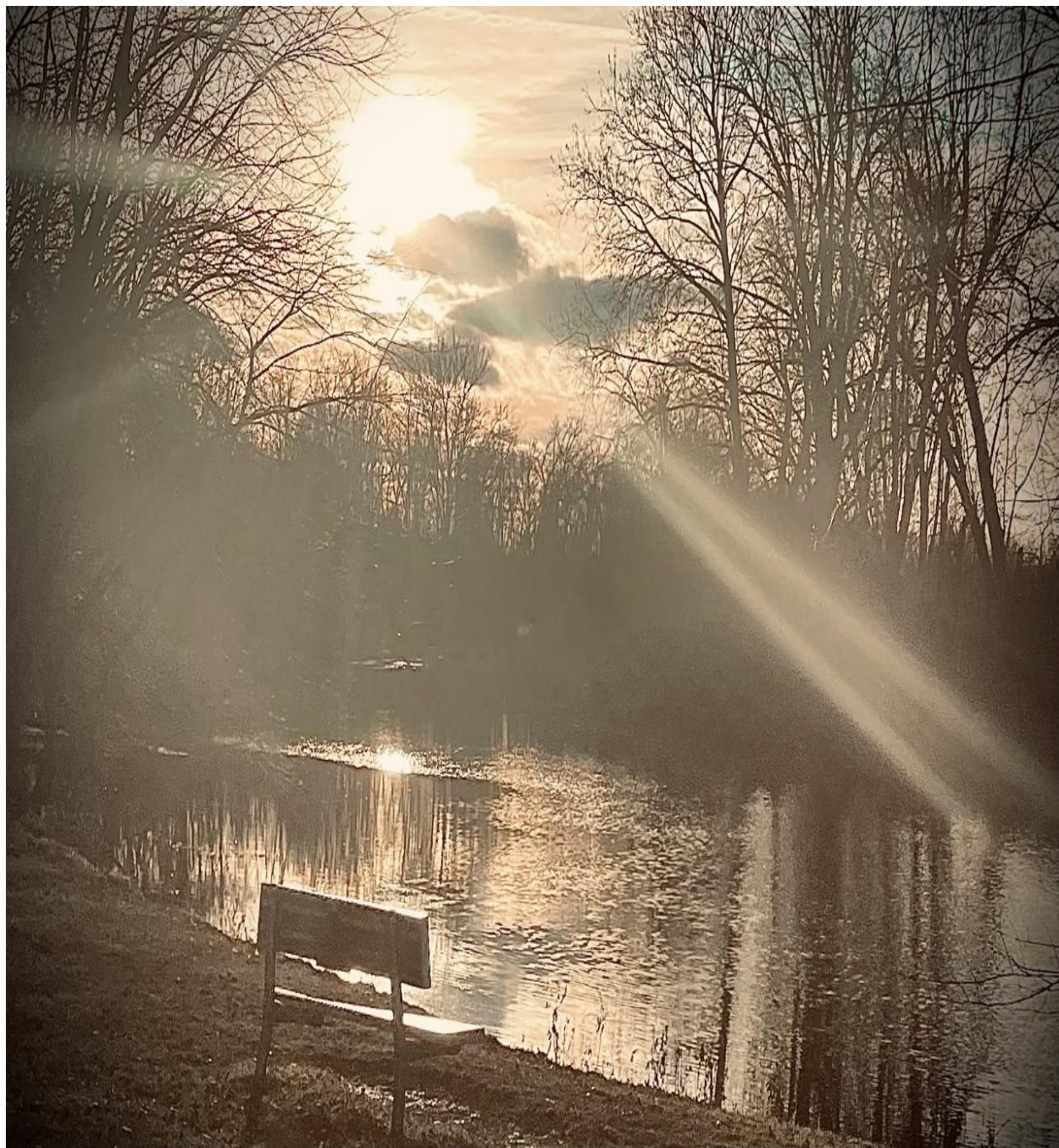
Although you'll meet a lot of crazy, bad people in your life, **judge no one**, or else you too will be judged. You judge people everytime you gossip about them or spread true or false rumors. In a way, you murder people when you do that. Of all the things you can do to disturb Heaven, hurting people's feelings is one of the worst. So don't ever talk badly about anyone. You need to develop the self-discipline to control what words come out of your mouth, for once you say them, it's nearly impossible to take them back. Judge no one, or your ass'll be judged as harshly.



Notice the beauty around you. Pull yourself out of yourself. This photo I took near your homes, along the Wallkill River. Just an ordinary day...I was coming to pick you up, and was early, so I took a little time to notice. You do the same. There's beautiful things happening around you at all times, if you open your eyes.



Don't be a White person telling jokes about Blacks or any other race; make jokes only about your own damn race. Likewise with religion, you'll hear me criticizing Christians for our stupidity, because I'm a Christian. But I won't criticize other religions even if I think they're equally stupid at times, which they all are. You could worship a rock in your backyard and I'll respect you, as long as you don't force it on me. Live and let live. It's the same with your country: feel free to debate the pros and cons of your own country, but be very damn careful giving opinions about other countries. The more you know what you're talking about, the less you need or want to venture opinions. The more you know, the more you realize you don't know.



This photo of a bench by the river is the place along the Wallkill I often meditate. Find the way to enter a place deep within you, a place you can call **your inner silence**, so you can retreat there whenever you need. This is a way of staying close to your soul. Your inner silence is a place inside you where you can turn off your brain and its constant chatter (as you would turn off your computer and let it rest). It's the place you can hide from the crazy noise and trouble of this world. It's the place you can calm down. The best way to clear your mind and find your silence is by a simple meditating breathing exercise for five minutes or more: breathe in slowly through your nose, letting your stomach and diaphragm fill up with air, hold it for five seconds, then slowly release it, again through your nose. While you're doing that, if thoughts keep intruding, repeat a favorite prayer. I like The aforementioned Our Father, or the Buddhist body-centering chants "Namyō-horenge-kyō" or "Aum". I love yoga stretch exercises because they relax me. Yoga teachers have a saying "The mind controls the body and the emotions, but breathing controls the mind." You can also find your inner silence by sitting quietly and imagining your favorite peaceful place to go, such as beside a river or in a field. If you visit your inner silence once or twice per day, or even more in times of great stress, it will keep you calm and center your mind. It's visiting your soul, which allows you to draw on the soul's strength. Find your own special place, so your mind can imagine it in times of need.



Keep yourself and your surroundings clean. This is hard while you're growing up, because your minds are still developing and can tolerate incredible disorganization if you let them do what they want! Shower once per day using lukewarm water, and try to use natural cleaners so you don't damage your hair and skin. Brush your damn teeth morning, afternoon and night; you're protecting them for your long years ahead, and you're protecting us from bad breath! Learn how to take care of your own laundry; always separate light and dark clothes (don't be lazy about that!). Learn how to fold clothes correctly so they're not all wrinkly when you need them (folding lessons are online; don't ask me, I never got that right). Change your damn sheets and pillowcases every week or so, unless you like dust mites crawling up your nose while you sleep. If your room becomes hugely messy, start in one corner and work your way out. Always, always work with a garbage bag (and always have a garbage pail in your room). Underclean: use a bucket of water with soap, clean rags, and a vacuum cleaner. (Replace the water in the bucket when it gets dirty...don't rinse your damn rags in dirty filthy water!) Clean right the first time. Make a mess, clean a mess! It's easier to clean a little every day and maintain your surroundings, than it is to let it all go to hell and be stuck a full day shovelling the garbage. Help your parents clean the rest of the house; don't leave it all to them. Kids shouldn't be allowed to play until the housework is done, right? Work first, play second! Once you're clean and organized, your disorganized mind will truly appreciate it. And so will your parents!



Create your own happiness in life by choosing the positive. You cannot depend on this world to make you happy, because it'll almost always disappoint you. (For the most part this world sucks, although there are moments of incredible beauty.) Depend only on yourself for happiness. Find the positive things in life that please you, and use them to create happiness inside you. Divide life into positive and negative things, and stick always to the positive. The more positive you are, the lighter and happier your soul will be. The more you allow negative things to take over your life, the darker and unhappier your soul will be. The choice is yours, and yours alone, so if you are unhappy, it is because you choose to be. Choose positive, shun negative, and you'll be happy. Creating good, positive memories is one of the most constructive things you can do for your life as well as those around you. Everytime you do something positive, you're creating a positive memory, and in the end, memories are all we have, the only things that can never be lost, given away or stolen. Choose to be happy, so that your memories are happy!



If you take a fool seriously, you're a fool.

Lots of people in life will say negative, ugly things to you; ignore them, even if it's someone supposedly close to you such as a relative or friend. One of the most damaging things you can ever allow yourself to do is to keep remembering and repeating to yourself something cruel that was once said to you. The TV psychologist Dr. Phil calls this a "neurological loop" that continually runs through the neurons of your brain. Don't allow this to happen! If it does and you can't shut it down, seek help from a professional counselor. Such thoughts will condemn you to a life where you don't believe in yourself. Protect your self-esteem, and let no one damage it. The opinion that matters most is Heaven's, so think that way. If you're doing right by God, don't worry what this dumb-ass, dark world says or thinks about you.



Whenever you're tempted to do something dangerous or risky, ask yourself this question: **"If this goes wrong, am I willing to pay the price?"** If the answer comes back no, then don't do it! The price may be that you get in an accident, get arrested, get seriously hurt, or in some other manner attract big trouble that's not worth it. Don't play Russian Roulette with your future. Avoid what my mom used to call "Accidents waiting to happen." Always remember Murphy's Law: if something can go wrong, it will go wrong. Don't take chances on your future, unless you're totally ok with what happens if things go sideways on you. And don't complain or call it bad luck if things do go wrong. I myself don't believe in luck; I believe you wait for the moment of perfected opportunity, and then go for it!



Be willing to work hard for what you want. The photo I took here is of a very-hard working group of people in a local factory. I believe it's built into our chromosomes to find satisfaction after working hard; it's probably an evolutionary prompt inside us. Work's a pain in the butt, BUT it makes us feel better. Try out different activities until you find the one you love the most, and concentrate on that. Leave yourself open to the possibility that once you try it out, you might not like it after all. You never know unless and until you try. Have the self-discipline to "put your nose to the grindstone" and work toward your goals. No one ever went far in life by sitting back on their butt and letting the world come to them. This world could care less whether you succeed or fail. You must put in the long hours if you want to achieve your dreams. You'll have to start at the bottom of whatever career or vocation you choose, but that's good; you'll learn all the ropes. Remember that the boss might not always be right, but he or she is always the boss. If you think the boss is doing something wrong, it's best to put your disagreement in the form of a question rather than a statement. If you work for a big company with a lot of money, consider calling a good union so that you can negotiate a contract with the boss; if you don't negotiate, you're not doing business. (Make sure to read my book *Working Class Manifesto*.) Don't just talk about your dreams, unless you've done something that day to move your dreams forward. Once you do start achieving success, don't let it go to your head or make you feel powerful, or it'll poison your soul. If you start making money, remember that if you don't save it, you never made it! Share your success with others, and be grateful to those who helped you along your way.



It's important to have a winning attitude, but beware of too much pride. **Believe in yourself, but at the same time stay humble**, and realize you're no better than anyone else in the eyes of God, and His are the only eyes that matter. Strive to succeed, but don't obsess over it. When you are in a contest, be careful not to claim victory before it is yours; many such contests have been lost at the last moment by those who thought they won before the competition was actually finished. When playing competitive games with your friends, do your best, but remember what I always tell you: "The one who has the most fun, wins." Don't worry about winning, and don't be too upset if you lose; worry about having fun! If you tried your best, be happy. If you didn't try your best, you just learned an important lesson.



If you make a mistake but gain insight from it, it's not a mistake: it's a learning experience. Often we learn more from our mistakes than our successes. As Bob Dylan wrote, "There's no success like failure." If you don't learn from your mistakes, you'll be condemned to repeat them until you do. Mistakes are free lessons. My favorite scientist Albert Einstein once said "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." Welcome your mistakes, and use them as a springboard to future success. Learn from other people's mistakes as well; save yourself the freaking aggravation.



Sometimes you find **beauty** in a rose, or the eyes of someone you're with, or the sound of their voice. Sometimes it's found when you take a long walk through nature to gather your thoughts and center yourself. The most beautiful things are unaware of their beauty. A beautiful soul is the most important goal you can achieve in your life. Don't worry about outer beauty; that kind of beauty doesn't last long, and fades with age. Nana always said that kind of beauty is superficial and shallow, and means nothing. She loved roses...maybe because for her, their beauty is a wondrous connection to the beauty that awaits us in Heaven. True beauty comes from the inside, not the outside. If your soul is beautiful, you're beautiful. People who are attracted to your soul's beauty make the best friends and lovers.



Forgive those who offend you in any way, even if they don't seek forgiveness. To hold a grudge or a bitterness toward someone is to hold onto a darkness inside your soul, a shadow that will keep you down, negative energy that sticks to your soul. Forgive people, not for their sake, but for yours. You may not repeat their mistakes, but you'll have enough of your own for which to answer. Most people make the same amount of mistakes as everyone else, just different kinds of mistakes. If you easily forgive, you will easily be forgiven. Forgive, or relive.



The Native Americans had a strong spiritual bond, **a connection with nature**, including the food they fished and hunted. They'd actually apologize to animals they had to kill to eat. Study their ways, and keep your own close bond with all life around you, for you are just one small part of the whole of life. Spend time in nature. Never take an animal's life unless it's for food. The Native Americans were in balance with nature around them, and respected nature as if it were a real person. You need to do the same, every day.



Respect everyone, even if they don't respect you. Some say respect must be earned, but I totally disagree with that. Treat everyone with respect, and you'll eventually if not sooner earn it from most everyone. It's the right way to treat people. If you're disrespected, you have options: ignore it, go silent, walk away, or in a concerned voice ask the person if they're ok. Whatever you do, don't answer with disrespect even if it's damn tempting. It would be a violation of the Golden Rule.



Practice compassion and empathy. Don't be afraid to be comforting and affectionate toward people. Practice compassion and empathy every day. Each one of us needs to be loved, a lot more than most realize or admit. Complement others when they show you something or share something they did or wrote. Pay attention to them. Appreciate and acknowledge people...remembering that the more love you give, the more love is returned to you. The opposite of compassion is indifference; catch yourself when the suffering of others no longer interests or bothers you. If you asked me for just one word to describe what's most important to Heaven, it would be compassion.



Purity of Intention means that when you do something good for someone or some cause, you do it because it's the right thing to do. If instead you're thinking of some personal advantage you might achieve (such as fluffing-up your reputation), your good deed loses its meaning, does nothing to nourish your soul, and gains you no credit in the eyes of Heaven. When doing good, let your intentions always be pure. And you should ALWAYS be doing good!



If I gave you \$20, you have three choices: save it, spend it on something worthwhile, or waste it on alcohol, drugs, etc. It's not the \$20 that's good or bad, it's what you do with it. In the same way, your smartphones aren't good or bad in-and-of themselves; it's what you do with your smartphones that determine whether they're good or bad for you. If you use smartphones for good, positive things, then great; they offer you a virtual complete library of the world's knowledge and creativity. However, if you use your smartphone to cause problems for others, to obsess for hours over your social life, to view pornography, to waste hours on video games, to obsess over the latest conspiracy theories, etc., then it's a negative force in your life, a negative habit that will cost you until you change. Good or bad: you choose. Do it wisely, protecting yourself and helping others. Rock artist Bruce Springsteen once said that everything in life is "a double-edged sword." How you wield that sword is the definition of your character. Your grandmother strongly believed your destiny is in your own hands at all times. So what decisions you make (or don't make) will define your future. **Choose wisely.**



Every child born is a child from God's arms. Please never believe that any one race or religion is superior to the others. All races and religions experience racism and prejudice in one form or another; it's one of the many dark areas of our human nature, probably dating to cave-man times when we had to worry about strange-looking barbarians wiping out our families. You must avoid prejudice of any kind, and if any of your friends or relatives are prejudiced, you must take a stand against them without insulting them. If you take a stand, others will follow.



My favorite Bible Old Testament story is **the Tower of Babel**, from the Book of Genesis. The king thought his people were so much better than everyone else that they could talk to God, so he figured they should build a huge tower to try to reach into Heaven and communicate directly with Heaven. (By the way, Heaven is NOT up in the sky!) They started building the tower, but God became very angry that they would think their religion was better than others. So God made all the people working on the tower speak different languages, and they couldn't talk with each other to finish the job, and the whole damn construction project fell apart. Then He made those people spread to the four corners of the world. Therefore, it's clear God WANTS us to be different from each other, in order that we too don't become arrogant, prejudiced and prideful. If he wanted people to look different, speak different languages and practice various religions, who the hell are we to question His call? It pisses me off every time I hear someone say his or her religion is the only way to Heaven. That's Babel talk! I know some Christians who think Hitler's Holocaust was horrible, but condemn non-Christians to the "lake of fire" upon death, which is a million times worse than Hitler's ovens! Nobody's better than anybody in God's eyes: we are all Heaven's children. In Heaven there are only two races of people: good and evil. See the world that way, for that's how God sees it. Don't you ever dare substitute your judgment for God's.



Search for your own sources of **spiritual inspiration**. For me, there's a wise Scottish pastor online who I sometimes follow, Alistair Begg; his website is TruthForLife.org. He's neither conservative nor liberal, but is smart, sincere and to-the-point. I don't agree with everything he believes (especially about who's eligible for Heaven), but I still follow him because most times he's right on target. Check him out, or find your own spiritual people to keep your faith inspired. There's another internet person you can search to see evidence that your soul doesn't die when your body dies: Teresa Caputo, the "Long Island Medium." I generally don't trust people who say they're in touch with spirits on The Other Side, but I believe she's for real. I think Heaven assigned her to Long Island because those folks are the most-toughest-to-fool inhabitants on earth, and they love her. One last guy whose words I respect: Pope Francis; check him out too. Find your own inspirations along the way!



If you celebrate Christmas as a believer in Christ, please do it right. It's not about Santa or expensive gifts. It's about a sacred moment in the history of our world when this special person was born among us. Christ was different not just because he healed people, taught us to follow the Golden Rule, and died on the cross. I found out while writing my book *Secret Souls* that he did something else very important: he organized Heaven right after he was killed. Before Christ, Heaven was a big mish-mosh, and wasn't so protected from the evil ones. Christ figured out how to set up boundaries over there, so that the evil ones couldn't enter Heaven any more. Thus, he cleared a path for all of us to safely enter Heaven, provided we follow The Golden Rule. Christ figured out a way to prevent evil souls from entering Heaven, hopefully forever. He taught us to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek if someone slaps you, to give someone your shirt if they steal your coat, to have compassion for the hungry, the imprisoned, the homeless, helpless and poor. There has never been a person like him before, and probably never will be one like him again. I believe he came directly from God, to help us sort out our crazy lives. I believe is still alive, in Heaven. So on his birthday of Christmas, honor him as if he was right there with you. For he is right there with you! Christ lives. Celebrate his birthday! Remember how every Christmas I lit candles for you to blow out on our cake or ice cream? Do that when I'm gone, as a way of wishing happy birthday to Jesus.



Santa and I had a long phone conversation after the holidays one year. "It can't keep going like this," he said. It bothered him that, once kids find out he has helpers all over the world, they often stop believing in the true magic of Christmas. I agreed, and said that some kids even started to have doubts about Jesus and the whole nativity story. "I have an idea," he said. "Why don't we celebrate **the 12 days of Christmas**, starting the day after Jesus's birthday?" I was puzzled, and asked him to explain. "I've been thinking about this awhile," he began. "Starting the day after Christmas, take the next 12 days to do something everyday in line with Christ's teachings. If you don't know what his teachings are, take the time to read through the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each gospel only takes a couple of hours to read, so it shouldn't be too hard to find the time. This would go until January 6, the Epiphany, when the Wise Men warned Jesus' parents Mary and Joseph to flee from Bethlehem," he added. "Everyone could continue to sing the holiday songs, and do other fun things. "But how will we get everyone to do this?" I asked, and he thought awhile. "Well, I was just old Saint Nick making sure poor kids got Christmas presents before I was discovered by the advertising execs about 200 years ago," he said. "Maybe you could take the idea to them, and they could publicize it." That's not a bad idea, I said, but I added most kids are influenced by online platforms, and maybe you should get some kids to spread videos about the idea.



As with Christmas, it's important to **celebrate Easter correctly**. It's not just about finding the Golden Egg (which is cool!), or feasting on a basket-full of candy that later gives you a bellyache. Holy Week, which is the seven days before Easter, is the most important and sacred holiday for Christians to understand. It starts on Palm Sunday, when all the common Jewish people in Jerusalem laid down palms as Jesus entered the holy city. A day later he caused a near-riot (but didn't involve his followers) when he overturned the tables of the merchants making money from the poor people required to buy animals to sacrifice at the Temple. This angered the Jewish High Priests and the Romans who ruled Jerusalem: they made a lot of money off those sacrifices. By Friday afternoon – Good Friday – they had him nailed to a cross, executed because he was considered a threat to the High Priests and the Romans. And the common people, who just a few days earlier had laid palms down for Jesus, ran scared because they were terrified of the power the Romans and the High Priests. Christ could've gotten out of it – he could've escaped – but he knew he had to allow himself to be killed so that we would always remember his sacrifice. I think he was trying to tell us that if he was willing to be crucified for his beliefs, we too should be willing to suffer when we follow his teachings. Then two days later he rose from the dead on Easter Sunday; I really believe this, and you should too. It was during this time and the next 40 days that he went between this life and the next, trying to straighten out the confusion of Heaven, to make it safe for our salvation. He then ascended into Heaven, once his job was done. He still lives. We should live for him, and act as he would act. That's the meaning of Easter.



Be careful about your patriotism. It's ok to love and celebrate your country, as long as you don't think your country is better than everyone else's. Remember that people feel the same way about their country as you do about yours; respect them for that (The Golden Rule!). Remember what I tell you about all of us being children of God, and therefore equal in His eyes. If you put your country above everything else, you've made a false idol of it. Your allegiance to God and the good must come first. Love your country, but don't idolize it, and realize that every country has an ugly side to its history that shouldn't be ignored lest it be repeated. In the end a country is just a bunch of people being led by other people, and whenever you put people together, things eventually screw up (*Papa's Rule of Human Behavior!*). Throughout history, countries (and religions) take turns being idiots. The only good country is God's Heaven, and the only two races of people over there are good and evil. Save your deepest patriotism for God's Kingdom. Jesus says for us to give to Rome what is Rome's, and to God what is God's. So give your country what it deserves and requires, but give God the same.



Learn a musical instrument. It helps keep your mind healthy, and is a great way to meet people. Scientists believe that the electrical impulses and connections that cause your mind to think – called synapses – grow a lot stronger and bigger when you're playing a musical instrument or singing. When you feel down, playing an instrument can help pull you out of any depression you may face. Remember, depression is always your enemy, because it causes you to think negatively. When you're playing an instrument, you can't help but feel positive! Try out different instruments until you find the one that fits you best. When I was a kid, I never wanted to play guitar because my older brother played an acoustic one, and I wanted to do something different. Then one day when I was 10 years old, my dad won a shiny red electric guitar in a poker game, and gave it to me. I figured since it wasn't an acoustic guitar, I'd try it out. Once I put my hands on that guitar, I knew it was perfect. I haven't put guitars down since, and have written thousands of songs and entertained crowds with it! But if I had listened to my emotions instead of having an open mind, and if my father hadn't won that poker game, I never would have picked up the instrument. Always trust your open mind over your dumb-ass emotions. Don't decide on any particular instrument until you try it.



Yes, family is important, but you need to be careful. If your family is healthy in spirit, great. However, if there's a lot of negativity around your family, not so great. My favorite author William Shakespeare wrote his four most important tragedies about how families can really hurt you (*Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and Othello*). In more modern times, the TV crime series *The Sopranos* is a perfect example of how things can go terribly wrong when a family conspires together to grow wealthy and powerful. Jesus has strong words about this in Matthew 10:34. Put God first, and let everything else follow. If there are times you think your parents are doing something wrong, be respectful in how you express it. Never have a discussion in the middle of an argument or at the moment they are correcting you. Wait until things calm down. Even if you disagree with what your parents say, listen calmly, and give them the respect they are owed as your parents. Consider what they are saying, out of respect. If after a time of consideration (at least a few hours or days!) you still think you're right, say so respectfully and with love. I'll always advise you to avoid negativity as much as possible, so if your family gets too negative, avoid it; shield yourself against anything negative in this life. If need be, you can love your family and still shield yourself against the bullshit. But don't estrange yourself; always call on birthdays, send holiday cards, and otherwise acknowledge their existence. It's never a good thing to estrange yourself from family; it causes a lot of dumb problems you'll have to fix after you die, so do it now and save yourself the trouble later. (My mom used to say "a stitch in time saves nine.")



Ever notice how kids tell the truth all the time until they reach a certain age? That's because lying is something we learn to do; no child is born a liar. In all things, **strive to be honest**. Once you lie and are caught, no one will believe you again for a long time. Better to just admit the truth, especially when you made a mistake or did something wrong. Your grandmother was so very truthful about everything, and over the 25 years we were married she showed me how it's done. Most importantly, don't lie to yourself. If you are forced to hear a tough truth about yourself or someone around you, always kiss truth on the forehead, no matter how difficult a truth it is. In my work as a union organizer I saw many times where employees were fired not for the mistake they made, but for lying about it. People lie because they think they're protecting themselves, when in truth they're leaving themselves vulnerable. The one exception is if telling the truth involves hurting someone's feelings. In such moments, have the grace to withhold comment, or if possible, word your response in such a way that it's not hurtful.



There are certain things we people do wrong, and we need to think about those things. Consider them **sins**, because they are offensive to God in every good religion that exists. Sins are very bad, because they divide us from God, and after we die they can be used against us by the enemies of our souls – the evil ones – to lure us toward their home and away from God's home. If you gossip, or spread rumors about a person, that's a sin. If you steal, or lie, those are sins. If you easily anger, or make a habit of being nasty, that's a sin. If you ignore the suffering of others, and turn a blind eye to the hungry, the poor, the prisoners, the elderly, the needy...that's a sin. If you have inappropriate thoughts about sex, that's a sin. If you worship false idols such as money, politicians, entertainers, or yourself, that's a sin. If you talk about God in a nasty way, that's a sin. If you are violent and/or abusive, that's a sin. If you have too much pride, or are arrogant, greedy, wasteful...these are all sins. Jesus is pretty strict about these things, advising us to cut off our hand or gouge out our eyes before we sin, because at least we'd stand a better chance of entering Heaven when we die. You can search the internet for the Ten Commandments; that's a good list. Some say we sin because ever since we were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, we've been screwed up. I believe it's part of our nature to be totally screwed-up because we're descended from animals that never knew any better. I believe in evolution, not just of our species, but evolution of our souls, and the evolution of Heaven. Our species is still very inclined toward dark thoughts and impulses. To walk in the Light of Heaven is to rise above our dumb-ass animal impulses and emotions.



When you get in trouble, your parents want to hear these magic words: "I'm sorry, I did it, and I won't do it again." Once you say words to that effect, your parents might still yell at you a bit longer, but they know in their minds they can relax, that you've learned your lesson from your mistake. When you admit you did something wrong, never say "I was wrong, but..." As soon as you say "but," you're making an excuse for yourself, and you're not admitting you were wrong. No excuses! The strongest person in the room is the one who admits he or she made a mistake. The smartest person in the room is the one who learns from the mistake. When you grow older, be the same way with your teachers and your employers. Believe me, they will respect and trust you for it, for the good ones know better than anyone that we all make mistakes.



There'll be moments in your life when you'll feel a sense of panic come over you. Fight that urge! Your great-great grandmother Sara had a saying: "**In times of panic, concentrate, focus, and notice details.**" Say that to yourself when you get scared. Calm down and do those three things. At my high school was a great wrestling coach, Frank Tschan, who taught his wrestlers this saying: "Don't panic. Adjust." So when you feel panic coming on, remember these things and calm yourself down! Your grandmother was always the calm in the eye of the storm...once when I was fired for insubordination, she just laughed, hugged me, and told me we'd figure it out. And we did. (Later when I spoke with her father Fred, he said to remember "The boss is not always right, but he's always the boss." I had been fired because I told a union boss he was full of, uh, crap.)



Get outside! Be very careful not to stay inside too much watching TV or playing video games. Outside air makes your body healthier, and clears your mind. Did you know an important vitamin you need, Vitamin D, can only be gained by getting some sun every day? (Not too much sun or you'll get burned, which can eventually cause skin cancer!!!). If you stay inside too much you'll tend to get slower and more depressed, more irritable. Force yourself to go outside, even if only to take a long walk. Don't let the weather stop you; there's an old saying that there's no bad weather, only bad clothing. Always have an umbrella! If it's cold, make sure to wear layers of clothing to keep you warm. Play, play, play outside as much as you can.



Become involved in school activities, whether it's a sport or a club - force yourself to become involved. As with a lot of things in life, you might not want to do it at first, but will be very glad you did it later on. Not only do these activities give you opportunities to build relationships among your classmates; they also set you up for possible scholarships for college. Most institutes of higher learning are looking for well-rounded people who aren't just book-smart, but people-smart. (I think it's because they figure these type students will eventually have great jobs and be in a position to contribute money to their alma-mater!) Both myself and your grandmother won big scholarships to college, not just because we got good marks, but especially because we were involved in various activities. Do that too!!!



Whether it's politics, religion, morality or anything else, **avoid extremes**. The world has been damaged many times by fanatics of all persuasions, who do radical things to screw everyone and everything up. Be reasonable and respectful. If someone has an opinion you don't accept, simply say "I respectfully disagree," or "Let's agree to disagree." Abraham Lincoln once said that a house divided against itself cannot stand. So when you avoid extremes that divide us, you're helping unite us. Don't be a damn fanatic about anything except following The Golden Rule.



It's important to **get your hands dirty** at times, and to play in the soil. This will give you a real feel for nature. When I was a kid, me and my brothers and sisters played a lot in the dirt, and now that I'm older there are days when I smell the fresh air and the scent of the earth and immediately remember my childhood closeness to nature. Being around nature calms you down, and makes you feel real. Also, scientists believe there are good germs in the soil that we need to get into our bodies, because they help us fight off infections later in life. So when you go out to play, don't come home until you're dirty!



Learn how to cook, and how to eat healthy foods (not just pizza all the time!) Especially be sure to eat a lot of green and other colored vegetables, because they help keep your body strong and healthy, and your body's PH acidity-alkaline level balanced (a very important and overlooked thing!). Remember that your grandmother was a chef, and she could be looking in on you, so do it right! You're living at a time when most people load up on chemically-processed foods, which are empty of any nutritional value for you. Avoid them like the plague! There's lots of information online about the right foods to eat; please do your research. When you're young it doesn't seem to be important, but in truth that's when it's most important, because you're setting your body up for the rest of your life. If you eat the wrong foods you could easily get Diabetes, which will make your later years miserable and will eventually kill you. You are what you eat, so eat healthy to be healthy.



Laugh as much as you can, at the right times!

There's an old saying that laughter is the best medicine; it's true! Experience the joy and fun of life every day. Look for the joy in life, and create it yourself, remembering that happiness is up to you to make happen. Laugh with people, but never at them. If you joke about someone and they don't laugh, it's not a joke anymore, it's ridicule, and that's evil! One of the worst things you can do in God's eyes is to laugh at people; if you see someone doing that to someone else, say something! Everyone deserves to be happy, and no one deserves to be picked on. Share your happiness and joy with other people; it's one of the greatest gifts you can give to others.



Be curious about things, and have a sense of wonder at the incredible mystery surrounding our human lives in this vast universe. Imagine you could put everything that is your life into a backpack; all your memories, all your thoughts, all your beliefs. Everything in that backpack is your little world, your life. Everything outside that backpack is reality, and it is vast and mostly unknowable. So don't be afraid to cut a hole in your backpack and peer out curiously at reality around you! Keep a very-open mind about everything except your belief in God and Heaven; let there be no room for doubt there! The dumbest words you can say are "I know," because it cuts you off from learning more. The smartest words you can say are "I don't know," because it opens you to learning. The more you learn, the more you realize how much there is to learn. That's the beginning of wisdom.



Always feel so **free in spirit** that you're not afraid to chase bubbles or dance in mud puddles. True freedom can only come from within; be free. Never allow the darkness of this world to darken your heart. Dance through life as much as you can, blowing bubbles along the way. The actress Sandra Bullock has a great practice where she has her kids dance every day just before they go out into the world. It sets them up for the day ahead! Keep dancing, kids.



Keep holy the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. As I already mentioned, I don't like practicing religions because most of them think theirs is the only way to Heaven; it pisses me off. However, just because I have arguments with most religions doesn't mean I can't keep God and Heaven uppermost in my mind and actions on Sunday or another day if Sunday doesn't work. In other words, at least once per week dedicate that day toward keeping God uppermost in your mind. (Truth is, every day you should keep holy.) Have a deep respect and awe of the sacred mysteries that are at work on The Other Side. You don't have to be religious to be spiritual. Keep yourself bound to holiness, to full and true love of God and Heaven. On that day you choose, spend time reading the Bible or other spiritual works, spend time thinking about the state of your spirituality, spend time absorbing the beauty of nature and the beauty of the people around you. Consider what Heaven wants and needs of you. Examine your conscience, and ask yourself if you're doing the right things, and if not, what can you correct. That's keeping holy the Sabbath.



I've already told you how terrible **racism** is, and asked you always to stand against it. The beauty of the idea of America is that we can all get along and learn from each other. I love the idea of celebrating the holidays of different cultures. Our diversity is our strength, but only if we channel it and not ignore it. Make sure you go out of your way to become friends with people different from you. You will learn so much, and it will enrich your soul. If anyone starts preaching white supremacy – or any race supremacy – around you, either shun the person, or ask a pointed question such as “Do you really think God plays favorites with His own children?” If they say something stupid, such in America “The blacks were set free in 1865, so what’s the big deal,” remind them that the Jim Crow laws after the Civil War allowed horrible atrocities and humiliations to continue to be dumped on our Black Americans. I personally believe our whole concept of races is a stupid but dangerous myth. Look, this whole life is about preparing our souls for what happens after we die. Racists will have to be retrained after they die to understand how evil racism is; their whole mindset will have to be altered before they’re allowed to enter Heaven. Why go through all that bullshit when they die, when they can rid themselves of racism here with a lot less aggravation?



Your grandmother's grandmother Sara (your great-grandmother) had a saying: **"Every day should have an accomplishment, a sacrifice and a contribution."** Think about that as the hours slip by. An accomplishment could be finishing a school project. A sacrifice could be giving something up so someone else in your family could have it. A contribution could be helping clean the house. Ask yourself every day whether you pulled these three things off. Honor your grandmother by honoring her code of living, and passing it along.



People need two things: **to be listened to, and to be validated.** So do it. When someone is talking, don't interrupt them or say things such as "Oh that reminds me of something in my life." Listen, truly listen. Validate them by loving and appreciating them. It's so simple yet so important.



On every birthday, be sure to thank your mother for going through all that work to birth you. Give her a gift, or write her a card; do something to acknowledge the great physical sacrifice she endured to bring you into this world. Remember that gratitude is one of the most important virtues you can bring into your life; be grateful to God for allowing your soul to come into your body. From Heaven, you chose to come forth into this life. Make sure to thank the woman who made it possible. Finally, if someone gives you a gift on your birthday or any other time, and you don't like it or need it, for Heaven's sake don't say that! Be graceful and appreciative of the effort the person made in giving you the gift. Their intentions were good; don't spoil things!



Celebrate life! Find the joy in every day, and celebrate it. Share your joy with those around you. Make your celebrations pure; don't get drunk or high on drugs during holiday celebrations; don't need substances to raise themselves into a state of happiness. You don't need a crutch to dance on a holiday, and you should be able to raise yourself without assistance from drugs or alcohol! Happiness when it's pure is the best kind of happiness.



Sometimes you'll try to help people in life, and it won't work out. That's ok. **God does not demand that you succeed, but that you try.** Put your heart into it, and don't be upset or bitter if your whole effort backfires or goes completely wrong. It's not the results that matter, but your intentions.



Love each other as God has loved you. Help each other as you would want to be helped. Play with each other, for true playing is true loving. Care for each other, and find in each other the sources of strength that will sustain you the rest of your lives. Don't hate anyone or anything, for hate is a negative emotion that drains your soul of Heaven's Light. Simply love each other, no matter what else is happening. My best memories of watching you is when I see you playing with each other.



Always keep hope alive. Hope will get you through any challenge you may face. Living without hope is like staying in a dark room with the windows closed and the curtains drawn. Don't allow this to happen to you. Hope is the energy that keeps you going when all else fails. To hope is to harness your internal Light from Heaven.



When the time comes for you to take care of a baby, whether you're babysitting or, later in life, if you're blessed with a child, there'll be moments when the baby is crying uncontrollably. When that happens, your grandmother taught me it can be one or more of the following four things that's bothering the child: 1) The child is sick. 2) The child needs a diaper change. 3) The child is hungry. 4) The child has something that's irritating him or her, such as a diaper or clothing that's too tight, or a room that's too hot or cold. Don't go crazy trying to deal with the crying; stay calm, narrow down the problem, and fix it! Babies love it when you quietly sing or hum to them, so do it. They hear all the noise around them, and can interpret the tones, so make sure to shield them from angry arguments or loud, obnoxious music or TV shows. The first three years of a baby's life are extremely important, so make them healthy and happy! Keep them away from TV and computer screens as much as possible, for the baby's brain is setting up its synapses, and those screens are not healthy for them. When you hold them, put their heart against your heart; this calms them, and bonds you to the child. Make sure to use a cloth against your shirt in case the baby spits-up! Every baby is a bundle of positive energy; feel that energy, let it give you strength, nourish it, and let it nourish you.



When you become a parent, **never fight with an adult in front of your kids**, especially if it's your spouse or partner. It scares the crap out of kids when that happens; they don't know how to handle it. Some damn fool argument you might settle two hours later with a fellow-adult will traumatize your kids for the rest of their lives; it's an ugly, scary, indelible memory you're leaving them. If you need to argue about something that might involve raised voices, take it somewhere else. Don't be stupid about this, and don't give me some crap about how kids need to learn how life works. If you say you care about your kids, prove it by shielding them from unnecessary adult bullshit.



Be smart about where you gather your information. There's so much misinformation online. If you want to be intelligent, act intelligent by seeking verifiable sources for your information. *Wikipedia* is a great starting point for any background information you may seek on every subject under the sun; I use it practically everyday. There are other online encyclopedias if you don't like *Wikipedia*. Appreciate the fact that, for the first time in human history, all the knowledge and creativity of the world is available at your fingertips; be grateful, and don't misuse it. Also, every day I read several online newspapers. I try to read liberal, moderate and conservative sources, including *The NY Times*, *The Washington Post*, *NPR*, *PBS*, *AP*, *Fox News*, *Al Jazeera*, *BBC*, *Politico*, *CNN*, *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*....I want to know what everyone is thinking and saying, so I can make up my own mind after hearing multiple takes on an issue. Do the same. It's a form of ignorance to share your opinion without understanding all sides. In high school on the debating team, they made us argue both sides of an issue, just to teach us how to see all the angles. Do the same in your mind....let thoughts percolate, and take your time in discerning your opinions. The more you know, the less you realize you know, and the wiser you become.



We humans are creatures of habit; it's a leftover vestige of our animal instincts for survival. So be very careful as to which habits you accrue. Strive to form good habits, such as regular exercise, a balanced diet, set sleeping times, and a clean living space. Avoid bad habits such as smoking, drugs, alcohol, laziness, and others. Our human bodies have primitive biological inclinations that effortlessly lure us into addiction to many of these substances. The mind knows it's wrong, the soul is screaming it's wrong, but the body's loud natural inclinations rule unless you stop them dead in their tracks. In a strange way, the body has its own consciousness separate from your brain, and your body can easily addict itself to dangerous substances that your mind can't control. The best way to stop is never to start. If you have started, seek help from the many professional organizations and programs available; very few addicts can cure themselves. Remember what I told you about seeking the positive and shunning the negative? This especially applies to whatever habits you form. Stick to positive habits and dump the negative ones. Control your habits by allowing only good, healthy, positive ones. To do anything else is to damage your soul.



Confusion plus doubt equals fear. Your grandmother said that more than once. You're born into a time of great confusion and doubt, and you'll see much fear. Defy this by carefully studying both sides of every argument, while identifying and ignoring simplistic appeals to your damn emotions. Our emotions lie all the time, and people use our emotions to lie to us. Let your mind control the facts, so there is no confusion or doubt.



If you decide to become a Christian, the most important sections of the Bible you should read are only 160 pages total: the New Testament **Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**. After you are very familiar with those four books of the gospel, then if you want you can explore the other books. Although there are some great stories and messages in the Old Testament, there's also a lot of craziness, and I'm not too keen on it. Likewise in the New Testament, a lot of the other stuff is good, although I have my disagreements with Paul, and I think John's Revelation (sometimes called The Apocalypse) has been insanely misinterpreted since the moment the ink dried on the scrolls. In my mind, the only words in the New Testament that I cannot and will not ever question are the words that came from the mouth of Christ, in those four books above. Other stuff can and should be debated, but not what Christ said. If you read his words, he's crystal clear. My favorite Christ parables are *The Good Samaritan* and *The Sheep and the Goats*. Check them out online, and know their place in your Bible. In those two stories, Christ tells all you need know about entering Heaven.



Your friends might sometimes need help, and you need to be careful. For example, if a friend is experiencing deep sadness and depression and mentions suicide or violence toward others, you must bring this information to a professional such as a teacher or a law enforcement officer. Your friend needs help that you are not trained to give, and by holding back on the information, you may be partially responsible if something terrible happens. Depression is repressed anger and anxiety, and its sources must be identified and tackled. Those who consider suicide need to know something important: After they die, their soul will have to undergo rigorous, tough training to remove that tendency from their consciousness, before they're allowed to enter Heaven. I have a friend who's an alcoholic. He has kids, siblings and friends that he has deeply offended in his drunken rages. He threatened suicide, before getting professional help. I told him this: if he stayed alive, we could heal up all the past problems with his loved ones in a good six months of work. However, if he killed himself, on The Other Side before he was allowed into Heaven he'd have to go through years of seeing the effect of his suicide on others...he'd have to suffer the pain they suffered upon his suicide, magnified. Why set yourself up for a tough afterlife, when you can just make up your mind to fix things while you're still alive? That's the beauty of life: it's much easier to fix ourselves here than in the afterlife. It's one of the big reasons souls over there want to come here. But realistically, if a friend is considering suicide, it's not the time to preach to them about Heaven. It's the time to get professional help.



If you're feeling down, immediately force yourself to do something physical such as a walk outside, or exercises inside your room. Your body will then start creating chemical reactions that will make you feel better. To avoid feeling depressed, do these five things every damn day: exercise, eat and drink healthy, show compassion, laugh, and meditate (deep breathing where you clear your mind for at least two five-minute sessions each day.) If you do that for a week or so straight and you're not feeling better, consider talking to a professional therapist who can help you identify what's blocking you. Don't just live with it, or make it your new normal. Resist. Everyone feels down from time to time, but if the feeling persists for more than a few weeks, you have a problem that needs addressing. Force yourself to seek help (hear me yelling that in your ear). Don't wallow in the mud: force yourself out. In the end your destiny is always in your hands (hear me and your grandmother shouting that too; she *always* said "Destiny is what you decide to do"). Decide to ask for help.



Evolution is constantly taking place throughout all life, including us, even on The Other Side. I'll always remind you that it wasn't too long ago we humans were throwing coconuts at each other and fighting for power and control of our little groups. For your information in case it comes up: The earth formed 4.5 billion years ago, life took shape 3.7 billion years ago, primates showed up 55 million years ago, and primates evolved into us humans 300,000 years ago (estimated figures). We haven't been around long at all compared to the rest of life! Although I'm not sure, sometimes I wonder if us humans are a kind of Heavenly experiment on whether souls can inhabit the bodies of upper-class monkeys such as us. Maybe it's an experiment, with the final results unknowable until they actually unfold. Will we someday become spiritually advanced peoples, living close to our souls, or will our primitive physical/animal instincts lead to our destruction and extinction on earth? I do believe if we drive ourselves to extinction, Heaven'll still exist. However, there'll be a lot of shaking of heads over there, mourning our stupidity, mourning the loss of innocent souls, mourning the unnecessary suffering.



Be persistent in life. Don't give up on your dreams. Think of obstacles as a rock in front of you; don't try to be a rock going through the rock, but rather be like water going around the rock. Hold to what you believe you need to do, no matter the obstacles. The Chinese have a saying: if you're trying to cross a stream, feel the rocks with your feet." So go slow...but keep moving forward, always persistent and relentless.



Don't submit to **the dulling of the soul** that this world forces on some of us. I could show you photos of people I know, who in their youth were shining and full of life, but who now appear worn and saddened by what's happened in their lives. Their souls are dulled by life's ever-present bullshit. Please don't ever lose the shine in your eyes. Don't ever let this world lessen your internal light, the light of your soul. Souls either evolve or devolve; always choose evolve, even in your darkest hours! Mother Theresa once said "The world breaks everyone, but the survivors are stronger in the broken places." I pray for your soul to survive whatever troubles and sorrows you may face, and to never be dulled by life's pain. Shine, kids, shine, shine, shine every day, for it is your best protection against evil.



Churches and religions, as with all human organizations, do some things right and some things wrong. The good things are a good reason to join them: most of them feed, clothe and comfort the needy, bring hope to the hopeless, and give folks a sense of community and belonging. I would advise you that it's ok to believe in whatever branch of whatever religion you choose, but it's NOT ok to believe your faith is better than others, a kind of stairway to Heaven like the Old Testament Tower of Babel, a channel to Heaven that non-believers are denied. It makes me spitting mad to hear people talk like that, as though they know the mind of God and the intent of Heaven. I've personally heard it from sincerely-mistaken people of every faith. So if your church believes it, just be aware that your Papa is telling you it's bullshit. Also, every religion we humans ever invented has gone through periods where they murdered non-believers and/or were murdered themselves for their beliefs. They've all played the part of the victim and the victimizer. That's evidence enough to prove our attempts to organize on God's behalf often yield tragic consequences that God would disown. One last note: if your church demands you pay them money to join or participate, dump them. God doesn't charge admission, and Heaven doesn't require a membership card.



There are **two kinds of problems**: avoidable and unavoidable. Avoid the avoidable, and adapt to the unavoidable. Every time something you do brings negative avoidable consequences, stop and ask your freaking-self did you learn anything? If you never repeat that mistake, it's not a mistake: it's a lesson.



History will probably judge my generation harshly, since we failed in so many ways to bring peace to the earth, to end discrimination, to save our environment from the damage we daily inflict, to create a moral, responsible society, etc. Give us credit for at least helping define the problems. However, how will history judge your generation? That's in your hands. I humbly suggest the motto of your generation should be "Let us have a civilization." God knows, my generation has failed to do that. I wish you all could negotiate a kind of "Peace of Nations" agreement. All languages, races, customs, sexual orientations, and religions should be protected and respected. Fair and honest trade equity should be achieved throughout the world, so that poorer nations have the opportunity to grow. I wish you all the best in tackling the problems we've left behind.



You miss your grandmother in Heaven as much as I do, I'm sure...I've seen the tears in your eyes. I took this black and white photo of her near the ocean in 1990, on the first night we ever spent together after knowing each other for four years. She and I first started as best friends, not even realizing we would eventually fall in love; what a great way to begin our 28 years as lovers together! You should be best friends with your partner, and should like as much as love him or her. Many of the lessons I teach you in this book I learned from her. When the time comes for you to fall in love, remember something she strongly believed: love must be pure and true. Pure love means you never cheat in your thoughts or actions on your partner, and you stay completely dedicated. Pure love means you say what you mean and mean what you say, never lying about anything, never hiding any truth about yourself or any trouble you may get yourself into. The relationship must be equal, a true partnership. If it's not these things, she would tell you to get out of it. She believed it's often a very good thing when relationships end, because it means it wasn't meant to be, and you can stop wasting time. Imagine you had to drive across America; who would you want sitting there, day after day? It should be someone you're completely comfortable with, someone who rarely gets on your nerves or you on theirs, someone who makes it easy to laugh and fun to explore. Staying with your partner is similar to driving across the country together; you're in close quarters for a long time. She would say to choose someone you enjoy, and someone who enjoys you!

I wrote the poem below for your grandmother.
Remember her always as a wonderful, beautiful person
who worked so hard to raise your parents.



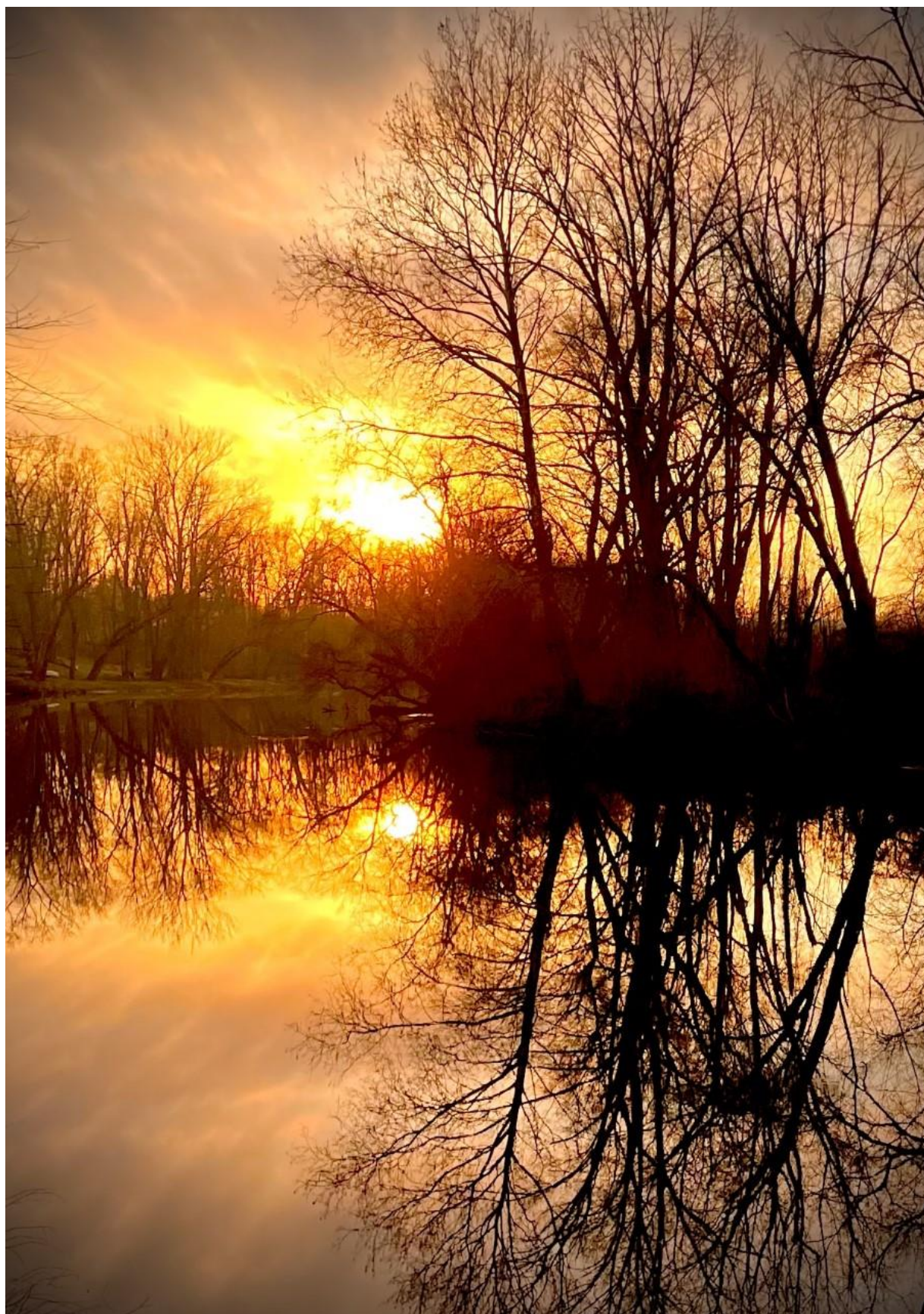
The Fragrance of Hyacinths

Long ago you planted hyacinths,
setting the bulbs so each spring
they'd sprout facing the sun.
Their scent was your favorite.

This Easter your hyacinths bloom late,
resurrecting from winter's graveyard
like Christ from the tomb
or me from buried grief,

remembering your garden.
Life blooms, fades, blooms again,
and the fragrance of hyacinths
will always be yours.

-Jerry Ebert



Finally, **don't miss me too much when I'm gone to Heaven**, for I'll be watching over you, and I'll feel sad if you get too sad! Do you see the photo on the opposite page, of the sunset? It's where I meditate, along the Wallkill River. If you turn the photo upside down, it still looks like a sunset! That's the way this world and the next world are; they are reflections of each other. And even though you won't be able to see me, I'll be able to see you, and your grandmother and I will always be watching over you. It's ok to cry for me a little when I leave for Heaven, but don't cry for a long time. I'm going to be in a very happy place, the only place we can truly call our home, among relatives and friends I haven't seen for a long time. I love you all so very much, and when I go to Heaven I will take your memories with me, as you will save the memories of your grandmother and me. Remember me always as the grandfather whose love for you has no end, beyond the moon and stars, beyond the furthest universe. Remember me as the one who told you death is not death, but a temporary separation, and how I can hardly wait to see your grandmother again! When you look at these photos, remember me as the one who took them, who was there with you that day. Someday we'll meet again in Heaven. Until then, cherish our memories, take heed of the lessons I've taught you, and smile. Thanks to Heaven's plan, we'll meet again. I love you all, and am so grateful you were born. Now live... shine every day...live!

-Papa Jerry



PRESENT TENSE

When finally I pierce the veil from this life to the next,
don't pretend that I've gone stale and now am in the past.

If some say "He was so funny" or other such refrain,
change the past to present please, for my soul still remains.

Death's not death, but just a fence until we meet again,
so don't use past but present tense when you say my name.