

## A Deeper Meaning.

Jacob was hanging out with a guy he knew whose name was Mark, and while he hadn't known this person very long, and by very long, it had been less than three years, they had become friends. Three years could seem like a long time, but the two men rarely saw each other. They first met when Jacob hurt his shoulder and needed someone to stack his winter wood supply. They were an odd mix, with an unlikely combination of pasts to have become close. Their extraordinary differences ranged from education to finance to the condition of their vehicles and how they cared for themselves and their properties. Their biggest similarities were that their hearts and minds were both good, mostly untouched by the meanness that often surrounded them or the meanness they had survived. Both had lived outside the closet of safety and comfort, and neither had feared living their life to the fullest. Their lack of fear had taken them literally from the safety of family and friends and out into a world of competition, deceit, betrayal, and treachery.

Jacob was older than Mark by a decade. Once each had left the safety of their family and the friends they had partially grown up with, and because they were both from broken, dysfunctional homes, they found a world of more disharmony. Interspersed in the world they had stepped into were also many good people. Still, these two lived in the company of people whose realities were often fuelled by illegal drugs and copious amounts of alcohol. So, because of the company they kept, their social orbits were limited. As they grew older, Jacob went to college and earned a degree in Computer Science, and he also obtained his certification as a Life Coach. He moved on from the hard work of laboring for his wages and made much more money. Mark also bought a home and worked in the forests he dearly loved being in. His main business was selling firewood to the people in the surrounding counties. Mark also worked as a handyman because

the forest became inaccessible during the winter due to the accumulated deep snow. Mark was a good worker, and he was honest. Mark wasn't always on time, but Jacob didn't care about that. As they talked, worked together, and got to know each other, they found they had the same propensity towards people.

The older man had changed his social orbit many decades earlier after the birth of his children. The change left Jacob alone and confused for many years. He indeed stopped his carousing, and his life became tame. But he was undeterred because he wanted to give his children a life they would love. It was as if Jacob felt compelled to sacrifice his life for the sake of his children. Jacob did very well for many years and did everything he could to make his children's lives happy. Every day, Jacob intended to do what his children wanted and needed. His children grew up away from him, and even more, Jacob grew to prefer calm, minimally stimulating people and environments. Jacob often felt drained after socializing; to reenergize, he needed to spend time alone.

The first inclination of these two men was to treat everyone they met as if they, too, possessed good, honest hearts and minds, and despite being disappointed time after time after time, each of them kept the same optimism and hoped that they would meet people who were the same as they were in heart and mind. But Mark had problems with the people he was meeting, and Jacob had problems with the people he was meeting, so the stalemate and frustration continued throughout the many years of their lives. They met several people they loved and became actual friends with; still, each had moved on for personal reasons, leaving those friendships behind.

Mark seemed to be much more of an extrovert and seemingly sought out people every day, or they sought him out. This was a significant difference between them as Mark had kept his socialization open and thriving while Jacob had not. Jacob had become very limited socially, so

their meeting was by chance. And really, all they did was act as gregariously as they always did. Still, one little-known aspect of a person acting gregarious is that often, they are only looking for a particular characteristic, or characteristics, in the people they meet. Once they know the answer as to whether a person has or doesn't have the type of character or attributes they are looking for, they decide what to do.

Jacob was more prone to and able to be alone than Mark. And while Jacob was constantly being gregarious during his rare social outings, his reason for even talking to people was that he was always optimistic about finding people of his ilk. But most of what Jacob found were people living without deep meaning or only interested in transactional relationships. Neither of those relationships was terrible or harmful in any way, but Jacob refused to settle for less than he wanted. By not settling for less than he wanted, he would navigate his life mostly alone.

Mark hadn't gotten to Jacob's place of preferring solitude over pretense. And so, Mark's life still consisted of having the same shallow, mostly non-nurturing relationships over and over while he was still hoping for and expecting a different result. He often would help people who had already let him down, only to experience the same outcome. The older man began suggesting and teaching him to say the word no. "Just say no," the older man would tell him, but old habits are difficult to change, especially in small towns where friendships are often based on needs. Those who have more than those with little or nothing are frequently asked to give. Even if it's simply their time so they can mend a neighbor's fence, carry in firewood, or remove snow, once you've done it for someone, they come to ask again, and others think it's fair to ask you to do it for them too. For Mark, his habits of helping others became subconscious to him, and helping people became an acceptable pattern of behavior for him. Mark liked helping others. Many of the people he was helping took his help for granted, and that behavior wasn't good for

Mark. he would often complain about those people in his life. Mark would get so busy helping others that his own life suffered. His home, property, cars, trucks, and even his business began to fail because there wasn't enough time for him to do his maintenance and repairs.

And so, the times these two odd fellows spent together would range from happy-go-lucky times to times of deeper conversations and working together. Jacob's injured shoulder had healed considerably, and he could work more, but still, he needed Mark to help him with many of the jobs around his half-acre property. Weeks would often go by without them seeing each other, but an occasional phone call or text message kept them updated on each other.

Jacob, prone to profound ideas, often wrote stories about a happier world. Stories that contained characters willing to ask and answer his two most compelling questions- who am I, and why am I here? And stories about people who had good hearts and minds, or, if their hearts and minds weren't good, the stories told of how they went about a life of introspection that would make their hearts and minds better until they finally lived with happiness. Jacob wrote about good people and people becoming good people, which was the sole reason for Jacob's social gregariousness, for those were the people Jacob sought. Jacob had graduated from many grades in the school of life, and he was still graduating from post-school of life classes by learning the ever-changing curriculum of life.

Jacob had finally, for the most part, more than half a year earlier, turned his television off. He had not watched the news since then, and while he tried to watch a few shows that interested him, the commercials became too egregious and went on too long for him to bear. Jacob wanted to control what was coming into his mind, and he couldn't do that while watching television, especially the news. He couldn't pick the content or the quality of the content because others

decided all of that. Jacob grew content to sit in the quiet of his home in the forest where he lived.

One evening, he had this thought:

*As my mind empties the daily trivia that society wants to clutter it with, I become free to think my thoughts.*

The next day, Jacob sat down and wrote this to nobody in particular:

*I'm not sure you remember me telling you this, but I dropped out at 17 years old after a tough first 17 years. I loved finally being free. Of course, we're never really free, are we? There will always be rules and laws, some written which are legal laws, while others are written in religions, and while they're not legal, they are punishable because of the peer pressure of the faith you belong to. But trying to conform by getting a steady job or a steady anything always led to boredom and frustration for me. Once I had mastered the thing I was doing, whether that was my marriage or working as an auto mechanic, I didn't see the point in doing it any longer, and I didn't want to do it again. It wasn't as pleasurable as doing a new thing. And so, I wandered and drifted. Looking back would have contained responsibility and potential pain for doing what I wanted and needed to do, and that meant having to hurt others, so I tried not to look back. The pleasure of going forward was too good even to consider stopping.*

*Not too many years ago, maybe a decade ago, I decided my life was without deep meaning.*

*I had chosen a life of pleasure to escape the pit of pain I lived with when I wasn't distracted by pleasure.*

*I began the long and challenging path of extricating myself from that situation and developed a physical problem that almost killed me. Or maybe it was the other way around? But I didn't die,*

*and my plan to drop out of the rat race again came to fruition.*

*It took a longer time than I thought.*

*I've paid much voluntary self-punishment for my wrongs and apologized to those I hurt without expectations. I've forgiven the wrongs done to me without expectations, too. Receiving nothing in return was more difficult than I had presumed. I was surprised that no one else felt the need to apologize for their part in the dysfunctional relationships for which I was apologizing.*

*I'm living a life of meaning now, and while I'm occasionally lonely, I'm generally happy and optimistic. Sometimes, I'll meet someone to hang out with, and then I'm happier.*

*I'm like this now:*

*I pay attention*

*I'm astonished by life.*

*I am writing about it.*

*These are the Commandments I wrote and that I try to live by:*

*My 9 Commandments*

- 1- Your relationship with god should be first in your life.*
- 2- The relationship with yourself should be your number one human relationship*
- 3- You should strive to have the highest moral character*
- 4- Neither gender should try to dominate the other, or each other, in any way*
- 5- Marriage should be between consenting adults*
- 6- Always do the next right thing*
- 7- You should not join a tribe or a gang to dominate others*
- 8- Forgiveness of others and yourself should be a priority*
- 9- These commandments are intended for the consenting adult in you*

*And to clarify, I write god in lowercase to differentiate from the God referred to in religions.*

*My commandments are not burdensome to follow, and the only enforcement is from yourself or not.*

*And finally, as your mind empties the daily trivia that society wants to clutter it with, you become free to think and hear your thoughts.*

Jacob wanted to teach Mark his two lifelong questions; however, there were still too many rudimentary topics to go over. But the time was coming for Mark to graduate, just as it had been for Jacob. Jacob felt his *Who am I? and Why am I here?* questions had kept him on course for him to where he was today, and he thought that where he was today was a good and honorable place. To Jacob, it was evident that the answers to those two questions would change as one lived one's life, and yet he always felt he needed to remind people of that fact and those questions.

For instance, when his first child was born, the answers to those two questions changed; when his second child was born, the answers were reinforced, and when he became a single parent, the answers became far more complex. Jacob wasn't ready nor prepared to be a single parent. Jacob was mostly ignored as a child, so he didn't have the requisite knowledge to be a parent. Jacob raised his children mainly in the opposite way he had been raised, and he did well for many years as a single parent, but he didn't understand what happened when his children became teenagers. They seemed dissatisfied and rebellious toward him, and try as he did, his family seemed unhappy. He kept asking his two questions and was disappointed with the answers. Jacob had lived his adult life in a way that always allowed him to leave whenever he got bored or unsatisfied. He would leave wherever or whomever he was with. But he couldn't do that here or now. Jacob was stuck. Intellectually, he knew that failure to lead a life of deep meaning would

sometimes cause a person to live a life of pleasure because pleasure was the most incredible escape mechanism.

He loved his beautiful cars, fabulous ocean boat, and the Pacific Ocean. His many new hobbies, from crabbing to salmon fishing, kept him occupied and distracted from the pain he was hiding from. When his children were finally gone, Jacob, once again, forgot to ask his two basic existential questions, and he got so caught up in the pleasure he was finding that he failed to ask his two questions for nearly two decades. Finally, several seemingly random and seemingly unconnected events reminded him to ask his two questions again. As he once again asked and answered those two questions, he was deeply embarrassed for who he had let himself become, for his actions, and for forgetting who he was and why he was here.

This time, answering those two simple questions caused a major, life-altering transition. The change was radical and took almost a year to complete, but that time was packed with change after change after change. Every change was significant; he sold his home, luxury cars, beloved boat, and business, and he even left his girlfriend to move from the city to a cabin in the woods where he had few close neighbors.

Jacob knew there was too much meanness in the media, on the news, everywhere it seemed, and too much nastiness in many people. He'd lost several dear friends of twenty or more years because their hearts got mean. It appeared to Jacob that many people had put a cap on their intelligence and ability to behave in a caring and considerate manner. Jacob's heart wasn't mean, and he knew he needed to protect it. He hadn't watched the news in 6 months at least, and he began to love the calming effect he experienced.

Jacob decided he didn't want new friends, and he didn't want to make enemies. Jacob wanted a rest from the outside world, and everything was the outside world to Jacob. Of course, he needed some of the outside world, but he wanted it on his terms this time. Diminishing his need for the outside world was much easier than he thought. The change was as easy as not watching television, and while it required some getting used to, it was also quite natural for him. For instance, he turned off all notifications from his smartphone so those weren't interrupting him. The text messages could wait until he wanted to check if there were any. The only noise his phone made was if he received a telephone call, but he turned off the notifications when someone left him a voicemail. Jacob wanted to be left alone by the world, including the electronic world.

Mark understood Jacob's need to be left alone while at the same time understanding that Jacob liked him. Mark also understood that Jacob understood him, too. Thus, the two men could talk, laugh, work together, hang out, and be friends because their understanding of each other was based on facts and reliable evidence.

It's a strange but actual fact that many people know what they don't want or don't like rather than what they want and do like. And probably that fact helped them get to know each other. Jacob's gregariousness was purely an act to determine if a person could be allowed into his world. Usually, it didn't take but several minutes to ascertain that answer. Probably, each of them saying to the other what they meant repeatedly produced acceptance and trust in the other. Perhaps each person consistently doing what they said they would do created acceptance and trust in the other. And perhaps choosing to laugh about the things that could have divided them also produced acceptance and trust in the other. Whatever the combination was, it worked, and each man was freed from the shackles that usually thwarted a meaningful friendship.

And, of course, the one trait they both shared and kept was their getaway trait. Their getaway trait was that if things were to go wrong for whatever reason, either one or both could walk away. Walking away would be nothing new, and it would be natural for both men. Both men had left so many friends and family members that moving left them unfazed or fazed for only a short time.

Mark would tell Jacob how his goal was to visit his father before his father's death, so Jacob figured if Mark ever left, that's where he would go. Jacob, for his part, didn't care where he went next. Well, he cared, but his caring was pragmatic and not about the family at all. Jacob wanted a place with plenty of water, an area with a low threat of wildfire, an area with little to no crime, and an area either near the ocean or on a high hill overlooking a river. This difference in where they wanted to go next was where the two men's paths split.

The two men could stay or go, and it wasn't odd to them that there was such a lack of anxiety or emotion as to their choice. They sometimes alluded to their innate need to go somewhere new after a time. Then they would laugh, shake hands, fist bump, and laugh again. Mark had moved to his little town eight years prior, and Jacob, while he had owned his cabin for two decades plus, had only lived there full-time six years ago. For now, they were both doing good. Life was good for Jacob, but Mark was showing signs of unrest. Unrest in people was always a good sign to Jacob. Neither man was hiding from anyone or anything, neither was carrying another person's load like a wife or girlfriend, and neither had an anchor thrown out.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © June 11th, 2022