

Gabe's Veils

The boy was now an adult, and he now knew that the path before him was much shorter than the path he had taken to get to where he was now. He didn't really care about that, though sometimes he thought about it. Mostly though thinking about how much longer he might live was too indistinct and vague to spend much time on.

Oh, he wanted to live long enough to finish everything he had started, and he wanted to live long enough to finish the projects he hadn't started yet too. He didn't want to live long enough so he needed to be in a home where he needed around the clock care. No, the furthest his thinking really got was that he wanted to live longer than he had already, as long as he maintained his independence.

There was however one aspect of his life that Gabe hoped to resolve before his passing. That aspect of his longevity, the nature of his life from its beginning, through its duration, and towards its completion, was for him to hopefully and perhaps finally, answer the two recurring questions in his life. Finding out those answers had been described to him, earlier in his life, as similar to peeling an onion.

One day Gabe decided to peel an onion to get a better understanding of the analogy. He learned that an onion has many layers; they get incredibly thin the further towards the middle you get, and that once you get to the middle there is indeed a core; a core packed so closely together he couldn't separate the layers any longer. Once Gabe had literally peeled an onion, the analogy was no longer useful to him, except for the peeling apart part, and, at that, he laughed out loud.

Gabe did learn much during his lifetime of incessant introspection, and for the extrospection he devoted to the world around him. Gabe grew weary of asking the extrospection questions though, and, as time went by, he was able to relinquish his perceived and learned need for people and history, and how all of that might or might not influence his life. Gabe was now an adult with many learned behaviors, and the simple truth he found was that his layers were in fact veils. Gabe began to believe that each veil needed to be pulled away to get to the next veil, so as he delved deeper within himself, deeper past his theater-of-selves, deeper past the façade of society, deeper past education, government, and deeper on towards the core of all those things and more, he would need to keep pulling away veil after veil.

Gabe had been using analogies his entire life. He would try them and he would break them. Sometimes he stayed with an analogy for a long time, while other analogies he would dismiss right away. Gabe liked several analogies, and he liked some of those he read or heard from others. But Gabe understood that an analogy was him trying to understand something for which

there was, as far as he knew, no other way to literarily understand the conundrum. Life is like peeling an onion was a great analogy when he first heard it.

Gabe had a very restless mind. His mind was normally quite active, and much more active when he was around people. As he continually questioned who he was and why he was here, he drifted further into reclusiveness. Gabe began trying to calm his cerebral cortex during his daily meditations, and he did so by placing a mental image picture of a chair in his mind and sitting in it. He then watched the agitated, white-capped waves in the lake that was his mind, gradually begin to calm and then to become still. Gabe loved to see and feel stillness. He just loved sitting there sometimes, being a part of his own stillness. For Gabe, sitting in his own stillness was literally doing something. And sometimes out of his stillness would come the next veil he needed to pull away.

One particular aspect of the veils that Gabe noticed and liked, as he kept pulling away the learned or socially accepted veils which had so influenced his life, was that each part of his life's changing identity and their distinct time periods were veiled, and every veil hid something. Each veil hid one or more distinct secrets: a veil where diapers should have been during one time of his life, which hid his fear and shame of things, or the veil of pajamas during another time of his life, which hid the shame of his early childhood; the life-altering physical and sexual abuse and his near total loss of trust in people. Gabe had veils for every betrayal, both physical and emotional, that he had experienced by the time he was five years old. Gabe had veils to hide behind because who could he trust to tell the secrets of his life? Gabe had veils that served to cover, conceal, and disguise literally everything so the boy could keep himself safe from all those around him. The very people who were there to protect him were the people abusing him.

Gabe now understood that by peeling away those veils he was literally exposing himself. The fear he felt stopped him for a while. However, when he finally he took off his veils that were diapers, pajamas, and some of his other veils, he found he was still not exposed as he thought he would be. What Gabe found was that there were other veils beneath the ones he had taken off, and that he wore those without even knowing he was wearing them.

Apart from the mental image pictures Gabe saw of the veils he wore, Gabe soon realized that the veils, their style, and other either simple or descriptive aspects of what he saw, were worn to clearly keep secret the emotion or emotions he was hiding. As he realized this, he began to feel the emotions that were hidden behind the veils in each period of his life. These were quite powerful emotions surrounding the secrets of those periods of his life. Gabe's periods of life, defined by him as a portion of time determined by each recurring phenomenon, and when the recurring phenomenon ended, Gabe asked his two lifelong questions: who am I? and why am I here?

The more veils that he pulled away, revealing more of his life's secrets, drove Gabe to feel he needed to be alone. He wanted, in many ways, to be unseen by people. For instance, Gabe was talking with a person he had known for many years, and he used a word incorrectly. Gabe said photogenic instead of photographic. That's all he said, nothing serious or crazy. The acquaintance immediately, and before Gabe could correct his mistake, launched into a scathing

and personally hurtful rebuke of not only Gabe's innocent mistake in the word he had chosen, but also of Gabe himself. Gabe stood there as the words being aimed at him stuck into him like spears. Gabe walked away, allowing this incident to further propel him from not only the individual who castigated him so viciously, but also from people in general. Finally, Gabe found himself mostly alone, mostly happy, and mostly optimistic.

As Gabe lived his life, he learned to dress himself in an emotional veil that presented him as more normal than not, and as more social than not. For instance, Gabe would occasionally inform someone who was trying to move closer to him as a friend, that while he enjoyed a small amount of social interaction, he was in fact a loner. The other person would often protest to Gabe that they didn't see him like that, and that in fact he wasn't like that. Gabe would simply smile.

Gabe had a saying that went like this, "If you can find the door in, then you can come in. But good luck finding a door."

Gabe's search for the ultimate answers to his two lifelong questions of who am I? and why am I here? were still not answered. How could they be? Gabe was still pulling away the veils from all the times in his life when he was forced to hide the secrets that other people gave him to hide. And those times weren't only when he was too small to protect himself either. Peer pressure often dictated to Gabe what veil he should wear.

As Gabe removed the veil he wore where he gave in to peer pressure so people thought he was one of them, he felt relaxation and he felt relief. Later he felt a responsibility to be the most authentic person he could be. As he removed veils, he began to find the person he had been looking for all his life. He began to find the person he instinctively knew he was, but as of yet, had never met.

As Gabe removed veil after veil, and then became more authentic to himself, he began replacing those distortions of who he was with authenticity and kindness; the type of authenticity and kindness that does not diminish nor increase because of outside influences, but rather they are controlled by his own inner influences. He began to understand who he was in the world. Gabe realized consciously what he had known deep in his mind his whole life. Gabe was part of a group of people that didn't want to be part of a group of people. There was no bragging or ego involved in belonging to such a small group who, to the casual observer, were disparate people. However, to a more discerning observer, there were remarkable similarities between the people in the group. Gabe, and each member of this small group, flourished on their own yet suffocated as a group. Being in groups made it seem like there wasn't enough oxygen in the air for all of those present. And just because Gabe believed he had met someone who belonged to his group didn't necessarily make it so. No, they had to know it too. And even if they recognized Gabe as a member of their own very small group, that recognition did not bridge the natural differences they might have. The veils others had created sometimes made it seem as if they were so unlike that there was no basis for comparison, and at other times the veils created made it seem as if they were alike and there was a strong basis for comparison.

Gabe often felt that human relationships were not a part of the very small group he belonged to or with. The group he felt he belonged to was joined together more by spirit than earthly bonds. His group seemed held together by ethereal threads made from the spirit of creativity. Gabe knew that anyone could grab onto a thread but not everyone even knew the threads existed and even fewer knew what to do once they did grab ahold of a thread.

There were many veils Gabe had pulled away over his life. Fear and dishonesty were big ones. Needing to belong to a tribe or group were two more veils he had pulled away and discarded. Another veil was the need for a person or people to make him feel complete. Gabe had got so he felt complete within himself for two main reasons: one was that he got easily bored around others, and two was that he had emotionally been hurt by people and he had also hurt some people in his life, so living alone protected Gabe from others and others from Gabe.

Then a strange thing happened to Gabe; he had always known there had to be others like himself. And he occasionally thought he had met others and yet friendships had never worked out. Another saying that Gabe made up to describe the friendships Gabe had was this: "Finding friendship is like finding a nebulous needle in a mile-high haystack". Usually, Gabe identified the reason as him not being able to reciprocate the friendship required. Gabe was invited to parties, barbeques, events, and lunches, but he never went if he was meeting with more than one person. Gabe had yet to remove the veil which he hid behind, and from behind that veil lurked his total distrust of people. Gabe tried to explain to potential friends or in his intimate relationships with women, that he needed a small footprint from them. Most people seemed to want a large footprint though, and that footprint usually included taking up a lot of Gabe's time. For instance, the time when Gabe would sit in silence was often a time when others felt it was appropriate to speak. Or the footprint included sharing their daily drama, or their political and religious preferences, and the list went on and on. Many people he had met would state their opinions as if they were facts, and that those facts were also applicable, without discussion, to him. Gabe wasn't interested in most conversations; nor was he interested in most television programs or movies. A lot of the time Gabe spent with other people was time spent realizing he didn't want to spend time with those people again.

Years before, Gabe had left everyone and everything, including where he had spent the past twenty plus years, and he had moved to a new place hundreds of miles away. Gabe didn't mind moving, he didn't mind complete change, and he didn't fear it in the least. All he ever told people he met in this new location was that he had not moved there to make enemies. Gabe was always friendly and cordial, and when he met people who were not kind, he simply limited his time with them. Oh, he would still wave and offer a friendly hello, but he wouldn't stop to talk.

Gabe's only close neighbors were a man and woman who initially were extremely aggressive towards Gabe. There came to pass a few territorial encounters between the three of them, and they all exchanged insults, and expletives were shouted and traded back and forth. The men's fists were clenched, and one time the neighbor called the sheriff about Gabe's aggressive behavior. As their aggression increased there were several times the two men nearly engaged in a fistfight, but each time one or the other backed down and later apologized, and occasionally both men apologized after the fact. Over the course of time, they grew accustomed to each

other's moods and ways of thinking, and gradually each of them began accepting and respecting the other's differences, wants, and needs. That's all that really changed; an acceptance and a respect for the other. The reasons for their territorial encounters began to change as each man compromised. They didn't openly talk about compromise, nor did they talk about wanting a better friendship. Each man compromised a little without the other being told. Slowly the hostilities ceased and became events of their past, and in place of hostility their likeness's began to come to the forefront during the short times they spent together.

And then one day Gabe noticed they were friends. Gabe still wouldn't have gone to dinner if he had been asked, as his neighbor was married. Together she and Gabe had built a bridge over the gulf that separated them, and the bridge they built was one of not quarreling, because not quarreling was better than quarreling. His male neighbor finally felt comfortable dropping by anytime, and he would. They would talk about the reasons they loved living where they lived, from the sometimes near total quiet, to his neighbor's love of the deer he fed, and Gabe's love of the wildness where they lived. They both loved the tall trees and the nearby lake, and there was never a shortage of topics for them to talk about. They would sit in the sun smoking their cigarillos, and just talking and being friendly neighbors. It's true Gabe's neighbor would bring up politics, but now he would let Gabe change the subject without getting too angry and shouting for too long. Gone now were the arguments, and gone was trying to control each other, and in the place of arguments and control were respect and acceptance.

At first Gabe was leery and apprehensive that his neighbor would one day turn nasty again. First one afternoon went by when that did not happen, then a day went by, and quietly several days, weeks, months, and eventually years passed, and without any conversations about it, they each just let things be what they were. They stopped saying things to each other in anger, and the two neighbors became friends. It was odd for Gabe to accept this friendship yet easy for him to let it be. As Gabe saw it, there was no cost for this friendship but there was the benefit of stillness, and in stillness Gabe thrived.

Gabe realized he had a friend, and he laughed out loud as he thought that thought. His next thought proved to be his saving thought: *I can still walk away, or move away, anytime I want to.* Gabe knew in his heart that, for him, friends were not important. And then he laughed aloud again as he realized that his neighbor probably felt the same way. The oddest part though was that they would probably never talk about it. They would just let it be what it was.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © 2-25-22