

My First Bridge.

As a child, I learned that playing alone was the easiest way for me to live. Then, I learned that not talking to other kids also contributed significantly to my happiness.

I learned how to fight from an older boy who had watched me getting bullied on several occasions. Finally, I got into a fight with the boy bullying me and won.

I emerged from my first 18 years as a person who preferred to be alone because I had learned how easy life was that way. I was a happy young man who looked forward to each new day with optimism.

If asked how I was, I smiled and said, "I'm good! How about you?" And I tried to leave it at that.

Occasionally, I saw there was more to be had from the person I had met, either because they were in a position of authority or because there was another attraction, so I'd stay a little longer.

But I had come to understand that life was a bridge I needed to cross, so stopping for anything longer than a short time was unacceptable. My goal was to get across the bridge.

I had become a traveler in foreign countries. Not speaking the same language suited me- I didn't necessarily want to talk to people, and now I couldn't.

I was homeless by choice, and I was happy because each day was like being in a wonderland of choices, and none of them were terrible. Of course, I had already learned how to live outside the law, which basically meant I needed to be honest. I found refuge under bridges or in telephone kiosks when it rained and outside in the open whenever the weather permitted.

My life now was under my control and my choices.

Getting across my first bridge took 4 1/2 years, and I did it happily and with a deep curiosity about the mysteries of life.

One day, I decided I no longer wanted to be homeless. I walked into a store in Amsterdam called The Head Shop and asked the owner, Cheryl, if she'd take my macramé handbags, necklaces, wristbands, all that I had tied myself, and the hashish pipes I had hand-carved. After viewing them, she said she'd take them all. She then asked where I was living, and when I smiled, she said she had an empty, tiny barge on the canal just two blocks away. I went to look at it, and it was perfect. That tiny barge, on a canal in the middle of the Red Light District in Amsterdam, ended my homelessness. When I went back to tell her I'd take the barge, she handed me some cash to buy food and pay for a shower. She told me my macramé and pipes would quickly sell and that I should make more.

Those three attributes, happiness, optimism, and curiosity, are still attributes I nurture to this day.

Written by Peter Skeels © 5-5-2024