

The Calling

“Wait! Everyone be quiet. Turn the sound down on the television. Can anyone else hear that?” the man shouted out loud. Perhaps it was the noise from his clothes dryer he was talking to, or maybe the sound of the announcers on his television that he was calling out to, yet he distinctly heard a voice calling his name from somewhere close, yet it was muffled as if it came from someone behind a door. The voice was clearly saying, “Michael, where are you? Michael, you’re supposed to be here.”

This was not the first time Michael had been startled by hearing his name called out like this, and Michael, upon hearing his name being called on earlier occasions, had searched his house looking for whomever it was who was calling out his name. His search turned up nothing and nobody, and as time went on, Michael had heard his name being called an inordinate number of times, and then he would hear the two questions repeated each time. Michael finally began to pay attention to the calling, and Michael finally began to question the why and the what of the calling seriously.

The calling began after his divorce. His divorce had been an extremely angry affair for three main reasons; the first and most important was his unhappiness. The second reason was his wife’s inability to control her anger, and the third reason was that he and his wife were still living under the same roof, and the situation was untenable for Michael. He was guilty of being excruciatingly unhappy; his marriage was broken by his wife’s inability to control her anger, he had devastated his wife by asking for a divorce, and all the contrition in the universe would not make this situation right. The situation he was now in was but one of the darkest times in his life. It was not the first or the only time he had made a wrong decision, and the staggering

challenge was that even he did not understand the how or the why that contributed to him making such a decision.

Michael was sitting in his big easy chair when his girlfriend jumped onto his lap. “Will you marry me?” she asked, and then she handed him a manila folder saying, “You need to fill in these forms in triplicate and get them back to me.” She then smiled and kissed him. For Michael, he had gone along with her proposal. But this wasn’t about which movie to watch or which restaurant to eat at; this was about the rest of his life.

Michael had often reflected on his life, from his early memories to his life so far. He noticed a peculiarity about his personality, which pinpointed a defining feature of his that he could not clearly define yet. The peculiarity was still somewhat out-of-focus rather than clear and definable.

He had used many adjectives to describe himself as he traversed through his life, words like interloper, loner, and avoidant, and while those words helped, they never clearly defined who he was. Michael cared that he didn’t fit in. But Michael chose to be alone rather than invite someone over or to attend any of the many invitations he received. Michael still tried to have friendships, but usually, he gave up on people or people gave up on him. He cared that he didn’t fit in because he thought he was supposed to. Michael was occasionally lonely while alone, but often he was lonelier in company. Michael’s inability to keep relationships was his lifelong quandary.

His impending divorce didn’t surprise him. His wife’s continuing unabashed anger surprised him because he believed that his love and friendship for her would make her happier. Their marriage had become a facade. One night Michael was watching television when his wife came

into the room. Michael could see the rage and the hatred on her face, and she walked over to his big easy chair, grabbed the two remotes sitting there, and violently threw them at his face. Michael stood up, walked over to her, and sternly said, “You have got to control yourself! You can’t throw things at my head!” His wife reacted with rage and yelled in her stern and challenging voice, “Oh yeah! Oh yeah!” She hurried into the beautiful, Victorian-inspired room Michael had built for her and returned, pointing her loaded forty caliber, semi-automatic Glock at him. When she got nearer, she pointed it at his face. Michael lowered his forehead to the barrel and said, “I’m not afraid of dying. I am afraid of living sometimes. I won’t even hear the hammer drop.” With that, he pressed his forehead harder onto the end of the gun’s barrel and waited.

Michael and a friend of his had planned, months earlier, to drive the Rubicon in his friend’s custom Jeep. Michael didn’t want to go with everything going on, yet he thought it might help diffuse the situation. The trip took them five days, and Michael, during the first night away, woke in his sleeping bag feeling something was very wrong. But there was no cell phone service, and he could only wait. His anxiety mostly ruined his ability to enjoy the trip, but he still had many good moments. Swimming in the fresh yet cold mountain lakes was good for him, as were the bonfires and dinners cooked over an open fire. Finally, he returned home and was full of dread about what he would find. And what he saw confirmed the anxiety he had been feeling. His wife had emptied their home of all the beautiful antique furniture, his wine collection was gone, and she had taken everything of value she could fit into the U-Haul truck she had rented. She took it all despite a court order stating the contents would be shared according to a legal document they had both signed. When he phoned friends, he found all their mutual friends had stopped speaking to him, and while that didn’t surprise him, it hurt his

feelings. Michael never disagreed that his decision had hurt his wife, and he never disagreed with anyone for hating him or refusing to maintain a friendship with him, for, after all, they were his wife's friends when he met them.

Michael pulled an invisible shell-like outer garment he donned tighter during these seemingly deranged and tiring times. Somehow the act of doing that always made him smile. There was no outward sympathy for Michael, and Michael stopped expecting any.

Years went by, and one day, Michael told the empty room he stood in that he was sorry for hurting his wife. He had apologized many times before, of course, not only in person to his wife but also in writing and when leaving voicemails. Michael was hurt the most by seeing his wife's complete sadness when she learned of his unhappiness. Her tears broke him. Michael hadn't become unhappy so he could hurt his wife; he had become unhappy because his wife was so angry. At first, Michael thought he could hide his unhappiness and no one would ever find out. The despair Michael lived with was meant to be a secret Michael would take to his grave. The inability of the marriage to bring him anything but sadness was something he thought he could handle, but his life became too unbearable to continue. The decision to end his marriage he took to make two people eventually happier.

Michael had drifted through his life. He was intelligent and learned quickly; whether that was manual tasks or survival didn't matter. Michael consumed knowledge in a way that often hindered him because once he understood something, he often became bored and wanted to move on to something new. Of course, moving on from one job to a different job or moving from a city, state, or country to an unknown destination was one thing he could always do without adverse consequences. But, when his boredom affected his relationships, it became quite different.

Michael had often visited his past during his lifetime, but now, after his divorce, he began questioning the how and the why of some of his decisions. As a child, he was a loner and preferred being alone for a reason he never understood. But there again loomed his terrible decision-making. Michael's stepmother never allowed him to be in the house alone, a decision Michael never understood, and her distrust of him began his burglary career. Michael decided, at age 10, to burglarize homes in his neighborhood. Michael had practiced first at his father and stepmother's house, and he had gotten good at entering and leaving their home undetected when he wasn't supposed to be there.

One day Michael went to a neighbor's home and rang the doorbell to see if anyone was home. When no one answered, he got onto the porch railing and pulled himself up and onto the roof. He lifted a window, slid it open, and climbed into the house. He had found a jar and was stealing the silver dollars when he heard a shower being turned off. He stole several more silver dollars and quickly made his way out and onto the street, where he ran away as fast as possible. Later that day, his sister came to get him, telling him he was in big trouble. A police car was waiting at his house, and Michael was arrested for burglary. At his court arraignment, the judge called him a juvenile delinquent and threatened to send him to Juvenile Hall until he was eighteen if Michael came before his court again. Michael was young and inexperienced and was caught by a neighbor who saw him running away after burglarizing her home.

Michael wanted to fit into society, and yet Michael didn't know how to fit in. He tried, and he tried, but his every decision seemed to take him further away from fitting in with anything or anyone. His every decision was usually on how to combat his insatiable quest to find something, or someone, that didn't bore him. Michael had a lot of energy too, and Michael either didn't understand fear or wasn't afraid of the things most people fear. So being homeless for Michael

was a time to consume knowledge once again, and for him being homeless was not difficult. He was a good and crafty thief and a good fighter, and he learned the ways of the homeless people he met enthusiastically and optimistically. However, while Michael was homeless because he chose to be, the others he met were homeless because they were victims of something they couldn't control. After several years of living the life of a broke traveler; sleeping under bridges, running from police sweeps of encampments, stealing food on occasion, and fighting off other homeless people for various reasons; Michael got bored with the life he had been living, and he decided he wanted a change. Immediately, on that very day, he was picked up while hitchhiking, and his life changed just like that.

The day was rainy, and Michael stood in the rain with his thumb out when a young woman driving a Mini picked him up. She drove him to a hostel in Amsterdam and said she would come back tomorrow to show him around. The next day she returned, she took him home, where she lived with her parents.

There was a small apartment she said he could stay in for a while, and Michael accepted the offer. He got cleaned up, and soon he got a job. The job was at a chocolate factory, and his job was removing forty-five-gallon drums full of chocolate powder from a conveyor belt and replacing them with empty forty-five-gallon drums, but Michael only lasted one hour. Michael quit on the job, and the entire assembly line was shut down until another person could be brought in to replace him. Michael spent the rest of his shift in the lunchroom. Michael had gotten bored with his new job after one hour.

Michael would get another job, and Michael would move from the kind stranger's apartment within a week. Michael would continue to drift along, becoming excited each day by life, and he

let his optimism run free, so he often smiled and was happy. And even when he became bored, he was still happy and optimistic because he could see many prospects for happiness.

Michael began reading again, and he remembered nuggets of wisdom he had previously read. He would then read nearly the same nuggets somewhere else, and that repetition gave credence to the knowledge he felt was contained in the books he read.

One day Michael came across a sentence in a book he was reading that said, "Some people are not meant to follow, but they are meant to lead." Later he would read nearly the same line in another book and then another. Michael continued reading and discovering. Reading never seemed to bore Michael, but some books did, so he put those down and picked up others.

Michael's early experiences with Catholicism and parochial high school had soured him on religion. He had met countless people and talked to them about their beliefs. His almost insatiable appetite for information led him to know intellectuals, spiritualists, bible thumpers, atheists, artists, and people from all walks of life. Michael was a social misfit, and he chose to remain on his own because he had hurt his wife so badly, yet he remained stubbornly true to his goal of finding out who he was and why he was here.

He wasn't interested in talking about people when meeting someone or a small group. He would, of course, for a short time, but then it got boring. He wasn't interested in talking about events, but he would, of course, for a short time, but that too would quickly get boring for him. What Michael truly liked talking about was ideas. Talking about ideas was like planting seeds in a garden and then having the time to watch them grow. This was when Michael first realized he was not here to follow but to create change. Michael almost always tried to change shallow conversations about people or events to talking about ideas with the people he spoke with, but he

failed more than he succeeded. People seemed to be on deadlines in their lives, and his questions seemed too deep to talk about with a stranger.

By this time, it had been a decade since his divorce and a decade since his self-imposed sentence for hurting his wife so badly. Michael met a new woman, and together they began a relationship that Michael found satisfying and fun. They met during the week, and often it was simply for excellent sex. The woman had two teenage daughters, so Michael understood why she could not stay longer and why he was never invited to her house. Then one day, he texted her, and a man replied. Michael was stunned to learn that the woman was married and was having an affair with him.

The next decision he made was to keep seeing her. He concluded, after talking it over with her, that he was happier with her than he was when she wasn't in his life, and she, too, was also happier with him in her life.

Michael kept trying to find out what the calling he heard was about. Michael had learned much by now but was still confused about his place in society. Michael was not a leader, and neither was he a follower. Michael had tried leading, and he had gotten bored almost immediately. Michael had tried being a follower, and the same result occurred. Michael was confused. Yet, for Michael, there was an inner happiness and optimism that had never left him.

He had what was described as an emotional breakdown and was diagnosed with severe depression. What Michael called God was the intervention that made every significant, adverse event into something that Michael took goodness from. Michael aligned himself with god, a god he spelled with a small g because he could not align himself with the religious God.

Michael's most remarkable trait was his curiosity to learn everything he could about a topic, and his greatest failure was looking for happiness outside of himself. Michael sat thinking on this day, thinking about following and leading. Michael didn't like either choice. Michael heard the calling again, and it was coming from inside himself. It was emanating from his chest, and he could hear it clearly, and what he heard was the voice asking, "Michael, where are you? Michael, you're supposed to be here." While hearing the question and answer, the intersection of his thoughts brought a smile to Michael's face because he knew what he had not known only a minute ago. At this moment, he knew there were two questions about whether to lead or follow, but he had overlooked a third alternative. As he smiled, he finally understood that, yes, he was not a follower and that, yes, he was not a leader of people. His answer was that he was supposed to lead, but only one person, himself. That is the person Michael was qualified to lead. Michael had always been his leader but was never told that that was an option. His learning taught him who leads or which religion should lead us, and it also taught him that education should lead us and that the rules of the authorities around us lead us.

That was what Michael rebelled against so often. Michael rebelled against following anything unless he was personally represented. It seemed to Michael that, until now, none of the choices he was ever offered met that criterion. Neither his home life, his church, his education, the military, nor his options for working ever met what Michael needed or wanted.

The calling Michael heard seemed to be for him to understand why he was born on a planet with a moon and sun, within a most spectacular galaxy, with the infinite beauty of nature. Yet, he believed he wasn't allowed to participate freely. With this new revelation, he was no longer an interloper nor a misfit but now a man who had found his purpose: experiencing freely without guilt in everything he chose to do.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © December 6th, 2022