

# The Man

The man was living an externally quiet life, and that definition meant he lived alone, he never frequented bars or restaurants, and he was happy and optimistic. Yet his mind and heart were never quiet. In his teens he discovered writers who questioned the very same reasons for their existence as he did. These learned writer's conclusions however seemed odd to him, and their conclusions didn't seem to correspond with the facts they presented. To the young man these learned writers seemed to leap to conclusions. Their conclusions that God didn't exist seemed to be based on the fact that the God they were referring to was the personified God, and while the young man agreed with that, the leap to atheism seemed to him to not make any sense. Their writings however stimulated him and his questions began to reach new depths. The man had gotten hooked at a very early age into questioning nearly everything he heard and read, because so much of what he heard and read simply didn't make sense to him even at such an early age. As the man re-visited the memories of his youth, as he had so very many times, he would often laugh at how much he must have driven his parents crazy with his constant rebellion. But these writers, these learned men, these men who professed existentialism, left him questioning even more, and needing to learn much more about life.

The man however had learned very early on to keep his mouth shut. Sometimes he learned by the back of father's massive, bony hand landing on his face, which, by the way, he rarely if ever saw coming. Other times he learned through the corporal punishment dished out by his teachers, and other times the lessons he learned were through his peers; peers who were bullies and better fighters than he was, or peers who simply rejected him and then ignored him entirely. He had never known these types of behavior existed, and he didn't like them at all.

His questions about life kept going unanswered, and until he got valid answers to his questions he simply was not going to tag along with society, and society's conclusions about how and why someone was supposed to live. The earth, the planets, and the entire universe were all spectacular to him, and each day he was astonished by the beauty and the perfection of most everything around him. People, society, religion, politics, education, and many other things, did not impress him very much. The divisiveness these things caused troubled him deeply. As he witnessed man's inhumanity to man, through racism, war, gangs, meanness, hatred, and false supremacy, he kept comparing all of that dysfunctionality to his unconditional love of the orderly, harmonious, systematic universe he was also witnessing on a daily basis. He just couldn't accept the societies rules, nor could he remain within that sphere of influence without speaking out. Finally, his aversion to society and people won, and he opted out.

During all of the man's early years however the one thing he learned was he preferred the simplicity of being alone. He literally loved to be alone. Of course, his young girlfriend had charms about her that fascinated, allured, and delighted him in ways no other person did. But, when she couldn't come out to play, or when she needed to go home, or after his brief visits when she was babysitting, he would morph back into the loner, unaware of anyone else. His play routine included his entire neighborhood and the large, adjoining cemeteries, with their

lakes and ducks, abandoned buildings and freight trains running through them daily. His territory also included all the best hills to race his bicycle down at breakneck speeds, the huge underground drainage pipes that he would traverse during the dry summer months, the baseball diamonds where he would sometimes join his peers, or he would hike the six miles from his house out to the ocean's coast and back again simply because he could. He loved visiting the fig trees when their fruit was ripe, and he loved life.

No one ever asked him any questions about where he had been each day, or where he was going, and no one ever asked him how his day had been. He never thought about the lack of parental attention he received until much later in his life. Sure, there were still rules he was told to follow and he was punished harshly for disobedience, but as he later learned his parents were from a generation that believed if they punished a child harshly, the child would dislike the punishment so much they would immediately begin obeying. Unfortunately, their child was such a nonconformist that he decided he needed to get better at disobeying in order to avoid their punishment. And as a young, still-inexperienced person, he kept getting caught and punished, until he had learned many lessons. Most of the lessons he learned were learned the hard way; through trial, error, and punishment, and disobedience seemed to be ingrained into his decision making.

He considered spirituality as a form of private devotion, but he had also considered incorporating spirituality into his daily life during past periods of his life. The man believed that his relationship with god, a non-religious, non-personified god, meant that he had to give to god if in fact he wanted to have an actual relationship with god. Their relationship would not be a negotiated relationship, where either would ask something of the other and then if they received what they asked for they would in turn give something back. No, the relationship was not transactional at all. Both gave freely to the relationship because they wanted to. They both gave freely to the other out of love for the other, without ever considering receiving something in return. Theirs became a relationship of loyalty and love. The man did not however like drawing attention to himself, so he decided to keep his spirituality personal unless he was asked about it.

As the man would learn during his many decades of contemplation and introspection, there was really no other way for him to live or to be. He didn't know what or where the switch was that got turned on that told him you are now a rebel, and you are now who you are. His parents tried to beat the rebel out of him, and they tried other means of punishment to achieve their goal of getting their son to simply comply with their demands. In the end they simply gave up, much like their son had, though he had given up complying many years earlier. More years passed until finally his parents could legally kick him out of his home, and on that day, they did kick him out. An odd and funny thing immediately happened; the now young man began to comply to a lot of the rules and regulations which adults must comply to or face very stiff punishments. Getting caught now no longer meant a slap across his face, or being confined to his bedroom for weeks or months on end. He had thought those were severe punishments, but he quickly learned through the grapevine of his newly made friends that getting involved with the police, and jail or prison, was definitely to be avoided at all costs.

The still young man now began to glean and to eventually harvest the myriad experiences of his rebellious and non-conformist youth. He had learned a great deal, which until now he was only able to put to use by not getting caught for doing the same wrong thing again. But now, layers were added to his knowledge. For instance, he had learned that being alone was safe for him. He had learned that he was good at being alone, and he had learned he was happy being alone. He had also learned some people made him happier, and he had learned that some people hurt his feelings, and that those hurts took some time to recover from. Gradually the time spent alone grew, and his time spent with others shrank.

The man tried working for others, and while he was always a good and happy employee, inside he would become miserable very quickly, especially if his employer said anything negative to him or about his work. Negativity was his Achilles heel. Negativity was so damning to him that often, after experiencing negativity at work, he would simply not return. He would wait until lunchtime, and then leave for good. Or, he would wait until his shift was over and then never return. There was something about being personally attacked that repulsed him so much he would literally flee from it. The other thing he learned was that he was a goal-oriented person, and once he reached his goal, he became disinterested in continuing to do the same thing. Once he had mastered something he became bored.

His repulsion for how society set up people's lives became the propulsion for his life. He constantly moved from job to job and home to home. He moved from state to state, and eventually from country to country. His early learning was a constant source of information he could use as he slowly grew into this new life of his making. He made his way almost exclusively alone because he trusted himself the most to not make mistakes. Some things he did were illegal but he did them anyway. He did them alone because he had learned as a kid and as a teenager how to do them without getting caught. Getting caught doing illegal things as an adult had consequences he did not want to experience. He was finally living the happiest and most fulfilling time of his entire life.

And so, his life continued. He had many relationships, some superficial and others that penetrated to his heart, and he lived a happy, grateful, and gregarious life. He was not afraid of much of anything, and he didn't trust anyone. That is, he didn't trust anyone completely. He trusted different people to different degrees, but no one ever surprised him by being distrustful, because he expected people to fail, like he had failed so many times. He could see the shame in his parent's eyes when he failed to meet the level of trust they so desperately wanted him to achieve, and their shame became his shame. He had no idea he was living the life of a shamed person and he didn't care yet about that influence or other influences that either drove him along his path or halted his progress. He simply was who he was, he did what he did, and others either liked him or they didn't. He was strong, he was handsome, he was smart, and in many ways that offered him a life of plenty - plenty of friends and plenty of romance. He left old places and went to new places as and when he wanted, without caring about those he left behind. The man was simply engrossed in the classroom of his life, and the classroom of his life demanded his full and complete attention. Until, that is, he got bored. Boredom caused him to move on and to explore the planet that beckoned him.

As he grew older, and by older he was now in his early-thirties, is really when he first began to become contemplative. By his mid-thirties he was married and had children, and by his late-thirties he was divorced and a single parent. For him to find himself in the position he was now in was confusing, and he was ill-prepared to say the least. He had yet to experience empathy, and because of his upbringing there was no way for him to vicariously experience what he had never experienced himself. There was simply no common thread. He would tell his children to do something and they would do it. If they didn't do what they were supposed to do he would suddenly raise his voice, repeating loudly what he wanted them to do, and then they would do what he wanted them to do. Bedtime was never an issue- he would say "It's bedtime" and both his children would get up, give him hugs and kisses, and off to bed they would go. This simple and functional family unit went along until his children's teen years. He didn't understand his children's new behavior nor did he like it. The man often said to himself, *Damnit, if I had known this is how my children would be as teenagers, I wouldn't have fought so hard to be the primary parent. I could be the 'Santa Claus parent', and they would love me!* Of course, there were many factors that he could have used to mitigate their unexplainable behavior, but he only wanted them to listen to him. He wanted them to listen to him because he literally knew that what he was saying was correct, and that if they simply listened to him their lives would be so much better. The man who had never complied wanted his children to do what he could never do, and because they didn't comply the family unit completely fell apart, and his cherished family was no longer together by the time only several more years had passed. He still had his successful business. He still had his beautiful homes. He still had his beautiful sports car, new truck and fabulous boat, but he no longer had an intact heart. His heart was broken into pieces.

He still possessed many of his well-learned and deeply held traits, one of which was survival. For the man, survival had at times meant letting go of literally everything except for the most basic of his human needs, and then starting again from scratch. He had given up everything and lived the life of a traveller, or, as people referred to them now, a homeless person. He was a traveller for many years at one time, and when he grew tired of that life he changed it. This time, the now in his life, his response didn't need to be quite so dramatic. He didn't need to move and give up everything he had acquired over the past nearly twenty years. This time he kept his physical life intact, including his wealth and his possessions, but his emotional life suffered complete devastation. He divorced for the third time, and his relationships were purely for the physical enjoyment. Once someone wanted more than that from him, he would cut them off. He wanted their company and he wanted to be company for them, and once that always short meeting was accomplished, he wanted them to go or he wanted to go. Once again, he couldn't understand why the people he was in these relationships with simply didn't listen to him. He told people what he wanted from them and what he was capable of giving to them. At first, they agreed, but then they usually wanted more, and he had no more to give. He had already told them that.

The man was confused by people and he had been confused by people for most of his life. That was why he had withdrawn from people. His children of course were not a part of that equation, and he had given his life and his heart to his children who then had left him bereft of

hope. He felt as if his children had murdered his heart, and he was angry about that. He didn't understand how such a thing could happen to him after all he had done for them. That was when he began to learn about sympathy and its cousin, empathy. As he sat alone day and night, even feeling most alone when others were physically present, he so wanted and indeed hoped for sympathy and empathy from his children.

The man somehow managed to live through the pain of his loneliness, and the sheer agony of being so thoroughly humiliated by his children leaving him. The man retreated back into himself as he always did before having his family. His children were in fact the only time he had ever completely come out of himself and lived for two others. Now he needed to relearn how to once again live alone. He needed to learn how to stop caring for those who had left him. He needed to stop thinking about them every morning, every afternoon, every evening, and every night, because that's exactly the entirety of what he had been doing for the past eighteen plus years. Most of the clothes they had outgrown and some of the clothes they still wore they had left behind. Their toys were still in their rooms, their smells still permeated their bedrooms, their pictures were still stuck on the refrigerator's door and side, and the endless other artifacts constantly reminded of how much he had lost. Yet the man managed to live through the pain of his loneliness, and the sheer agony of having been and still being so thoroughly hurt and humiliated by his children leaving him.

Only once did he nearly succumb to his grief and his sadness, and though he came close to submitting, he did not. He rose again from the bottom of the pit of pain he was in to once again begin to regain his life. It did not happen quickly though. The man was now a decade or so older, and finally he was healing from the inside out. It was at this point in the man's life that he learned even more about empathy. He didn't learn empathy from anyone else because no one to his knowledge had ever shown him empathy. The man was adamant about that point. So instead of railing against those whom he felt had so completely betrayed him, the man made an attempt at empathy. He wanted to see if he could be empathetic to their reasons for their behavior. And, trying as hard as he could, he couldn't do it. The man was bereft of resources, and, if he was a car or truck he would have come to a halt because he was out of gas. He was out of gas for them, and he was out of gas for everyone. He had nothing to give to anybody. But each time they gave him something, a phone call or a text message, perhaps pictures of his grandchild, he would feel like he was no longer on empty and that there was a little something back in his tank. And then they would leave him alone again, and once again he was left without the consistency he longed for and needed.

As the years he might live grew less and less, the man simply stopped expecting anything from his children, or from anybody else. He really had stopped expecting anything a long time ago, but hope is a difficult flame to extinguish. The man had always hoped, yet his was a hope without any basis for him to expect fulfilment. This situation was why he never wanted to be in this position in the first place. He had wanted a family, but he had wanted a family unit. A unit with a husband, a wife, and two children, but that didn't work out and he was left with the children, and he never left them. He gave them all he could both physically and emotionally. The man literally believed in his heart that he had done the best he could.

The man admitted to himself and to his children that he had made mistakes, but he couldn't understand why his children let his mistakes define him. Surely, they should know that a person's mistakes do not define them.

So, as he grew older, he hoped that someday his children would realize he did the best he could, and that his best was really good. He wanted them to love him, and he wanted them to understand that raising them wasn't easy. He also hoped that someday someone would see through his veil of personal accomplishments and his veil of happiness with his life. The man was never going to remove his veils again, because he had done so for his children and they had crushed him. These veils were staying. And the most interesting part was that he was the only person who knew they were veils, and the reason he wore them was to protect his heart from further damage. His heart was once again intact though beating now with so much scar tissue its functionality was impacted; but it was beating to a good beat and it was beating strong again.

And so, as the man looked at where he was in his life, it was much like reading a good book. You can see the thickness of the parts you have read, and you can see the thinness of what you have left to read. And you can't have got to where you are in the book without having read all the preceding pages. Parts of every book are happy, parts of every book are not happy, and all books have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It was the same for him now. The thickest part of his life had already been experienced, and the thinnest part was still to come.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © May 6th, 2022