

## Pick Up the Baby

I ate fried chicken and broke two fillings. It left a raw spot like torn flesh in the center of one molar. I had been watching Burt Lancaster in *The Swimmer*, and suddenly, I began to weep, or sob, or cry out. My body convulsed with fear. My arms went up like an infant. I wanted to be held, to be taken up and held close. I'd never felt that, before, only the need, but never the fulfillment, never knowing the feeling of being held tight by a parent, a person larger and stronger. Never knowing the reassurance of being cared for in the simple heart. I thought I would never be lifted up from my lonely fear and held tight. It was then I knew why I drank, then drank too much, then never enough, for so many years.

At first, alcohol fooled my body, like arms around me from the inside. Then my body stopped believing the ruse. I began to die backwards to the original abandonment. My body began to create, by destroying the illusion of safety, the old, original feelings. The worse I got, the closer I got to re-creating the terror. Now, four years sober, I'm learning the infant self of my soul, living in my small, frightened self. I said out loud, wrapping my arms around myself, "I will hold you. I will hold you."

When the day began, I had decided to call the publisher who has my book, like my child, a child I have faith in, a child I love. I wanted it to be loved and cared for, to grow and succeed. I didn't learn anything when I called. The book seems to have passed from one editor to another and disappeared. It seems to have fallen between the cracks, abandoned. But, not by me. I don't want to abandon my child. I went to the dentist, this morning, and he couldn't numb the pain. It was a condition he said he hadn't encountered in ten years. I got through it. And now I need to tell this story of catastrophic healing, not of pain, but of healing. I want to open up, admit my fear, and ride out the storm.

I climbed back into my original skin, and I found my small self, afraid, and my giant soul, strong. Nothing I can do can surpass or replace the journey to the center of my heart. It all belongs to my soul and not to this curious, passing dance of costume and circumstance that I call my life.

## I Feel Sane

Yesterday was one of the most powerful days I've ever experienced. Last night, I went to a recovery meeting. The meetings I go to are social and spiritual in nature, set up to allow each person to speak, in turn, about their own experience. As I drove to the meeting, I began to be aware that the intense grief I've been feeling, matches the stories I've heard about the first three months of my life. I've been told that I cried for three months, because my mother read Dr. Spock and put me on a feeding schedule. Unfortunately, I would cry until I was exhausted and fall asleep. Then I'd wake up, tired and hungry, and start to cry. Because it wasn't time for feeding, I'd keep crying, until it finally was time. I'd eat, and then, exhausted, fall asleep without enough food to last, over and over, on and on, for three months. Then my Swedish grandmother told my mother, "Feed him," and she did.

It seemed to be a feeding problem. But, it was more. It was abandonment. The night before last, I sat in my new apartment, watching a story of a man's emotional, psychological breakdown, and I began to cry. I lifted my arms up like a baby and said, "Please, pick me up. Please hold me." No one did. I felt as if it had always been my plight. I thought that the feeling, the feeling I had always had, would never end.

Last night, I was the leader of the meeting, and I was losing it fast. I spoke first. Through my tears, I told what was going on. I was finally able to feel my original feelings. Instead of mental images, I had the feelings to go with the stories. I had to leave the meeting. Outside, I stood in a doorway, in the rain, and I spoke to a power greater than myself, "I accept you as my father, and I accept you as my mother, too." Neither of my parents picked me up. Neither took care of me. "Please, take care of me," I prayed.

I was able to be inside the needs and fears I'd had at the beginning of my life. The immediate fear was lifted from me. I went back to the meeting, and everyone was great. It had been cathartic for several people to witness my grief. I got great hugs from men and women. We are all isolated, and we need to know the common truths of our lives. We've been taught it backwards. We have believed that such emotional times are insane, when, in fact, the suppression of feelings is insane. To feel is to be sane. It's true. I feel sane. It

is a curious redundancy. *I feel sane.* The true sanity is the understanding and acceptance of the feeling.

## Catastrophic Healing

Catastrophic healing is any healing that requires sustained time and effort. In the past, I've thought of catastrophic healing as something that happens to others, even when I knew I was in it, myself. But I couldn't see the end of the tunnel. I saw the light, long before the tunnel ended. I'm emerging, finally, so I can begin to talk about healing from the other side. I'm beginning to feel joyful. I've felt joy many times in my life, in glimpses and moments. I came to accept that brief glimpses of joy was my lot in life, the luck of the draw. Then I became ill with a life-threatening disease. It was time to heal, whether I liked it or not. So I liked it. Then I loved it. But I seemed stuck in another mire of humanity, great for confusion and poetry, with more pain and more glimpses of joy. I didn't know if there would ever be another kind of life, a life beyond pain and confusion.

I always believed that everyone had a secret. I discovered that my secret is feeling, long-held feelings, seemingly lost, like a capped well. My feelings, taken to the source, are the well-spring of my true life, my new life. I believe that having got back to the first feelings, I can move up to the moment that is all of life. This moment, unblocked, is no longer anchored to a secret, because the secret has been released. I've done the work that was not done, the work that had to be done. To heal is to remove whatever has infected the organism, to get rid of whatever inhibits the free growth and the full life of the organism. *Blocked feeling* is a tumor, a disease, a negative growth that thwarts the freedom of positive growth.

I'm exhausted. I'd like a vacation. But what I need is for my life to become what we imagine we'll get from a vacation, the way we reserve our deepest spiritual needs for a couple of hours on Sunday morning, if then. The recovery meetings I attend often focus on the need to remember how seriously ill we've been. I believe we can focus on how wonderfully healthy we can become. I may always want to attend meetings, to get

together with others, because I'll always be a spiritual being, and I'll always need to share the spirit with others. *That is healing beyond dependency, beyond the illness.*

## Original Worth

"Everything happens for a reason," is a hard pill to swallow when unwanted things happen. I sit here hoping to love my infant self and not give in to my insecurity. Insecurity has been in my life like an addiction. I know what its source is, and I need to separate from my insecurity. I only hurt myself when I allow insecurity, or encourage insecurity, or give in to insecurity. When it seems that all hell is breaking loose, it may be heaven instead. In the past, whenever I've been in the middle of a difficult transition, I hid from others. I felt like a pariah. I thought I might be useful as an example of someone who had done unhealthy things and survived. Now, I feel like an example of healthy possibilities. I feel different, softer, more vulnerable, but less afraid of it. I've been bold, and I've been boldly vulnerable, but there's no need for me to keep believing that being vulnerable is a dangerous risk.

I've always kept a part of my life where I felt I was worthy. Then I created other parts where I felt unworthy. In my family, worth was not freely given. It was not a given that I was worthy. Since I've met myself as an infant, I've been able to see that I'm worthy. There's no need to create unworthiness in my life. There's no need to create compartments of self-worth and self-denial. The action that may have stimulated this self-worth was a letter I sent to a charity I worked for, many years ago. I increased their revenues by ten thousand dollars, but I stole from them, by my guess, about fifty dollars. I wrote the priest in charge, and I told him. I enclosed a check for \$50. I found myself telling him that maybe one reason I stole was that he had something I wanted and didn't have. He was a good man, who had a true and working faith in God. I didn't. All my pretended self-worth felt empty beside his apparently genuine faith. I stole, so I could feel like a thief. I tried to feel good about it, but it only made me feel like a thief. I did that to fulfill my feelings of unworthiness. I can't love myself without admitting how I *don't* love myself. Perhaps, when Jesus said that *except you come as a child, you*

*cannot enter the kingdom of God*, he was saying, there is no original sin. Sin is losing touch with the original truth.

## Falling Awake

I've used sleep as escape, a retreat, a haven. I've felt protected and appreciated by the subconscious, by dreams, spirit, and imagination. I've never been afraid of dreams, ideas, images, or of the figures, voices, shapes, places, or feelings of dreams and imagination. Nightmares don't scare me in the same way that people have scared me. I'm scared in my nightmares, but it's exhilarating. There is some form to it that makes sense, in a perfect way. The scary monsters of dreams are fully met and fully felt. The ones in what's called real life are illusory. They play games, they trick and confuse, they pretend to be friendly. Everything in a dream is exactly what it is, because my feelings identify with it completely.

Since I have felt the truth of my waking life, back to when I was the most frightened and the most abandoned, as an infant, when the original nightmare was greatest, I can now be awake with the same awareness and acceptance I have when I'm asleep. I can accept my waking life as being exactly what *it* is, as well. The title of my graduate thesis, years ago, was *Fall Awake*. To fall awake implies a sense of safety, peacefulness, serenity. To fall awake is to enter the waking state with the same easy anticipation I have when I fall asleep. I'm beginning to live with no rigid schedule, with no demand on me to deal with a hostile and unfriendly world, or to take care of others' demands and needs. My time and my life are my own. Just as I've always felt they are, in my sleep, now they are, in my waking.

## My Dreams, My Nightmares

All of life is a dream that's no less frightening, no less complete, than sleep dreams are. I accept my dream. It's *my* dream. All the characters, images, and events are mine. There's intercourse between our dreams. We cross-fertilize each other, and we affect each other, in waking, no less than in dreams. *I'll be in your dream, if you'll be in mine.* I don't see this attitude, or belief, or faith, as an attempt to make life less real, but more real, by accepting how complete and wonderful it all is. We can change our dreams. We can alter them. We are not victim of our dreams. Parent, instead of telling your child, "It's only a dream," you can say, "It's your dream. You have powerful dreams. You're powerful in your dreams." We are participants.

I'm not a victim of my dreams, asleep or awake. I participate. It's my dream. My entire dream is mine. It doesn't mean I passively accept, without taking action. I'm not merely the observer of my dream. When my dream becomes a nightmare, it is still *my* nightmare. It is filled with *my* monsters, and it is *my* terror I feel. The more real I accept everything in my dream, the more I make it mine. The more I accept my life as a real dream, the stronger I become. I give up the false separations and the pretense that I thought protected me. Ultimately, I'm more alive, the more I accept my dream into all of my life.

My dreams speak to me of the unlimited resources available to me. They're limited only by my self-imposed limitations. My limitations are mine. They can serve my dream. The fullness of my dream is not determined by trying to eliminate my limitations but by accepting them, by owning them, by taking them into my confidence, by becoming friends with them. If a monster attacks me, I can say, "Hey, monster, how are you?" and then I can slay him, or I can offer him a partnership. It's my dream, my monster. There have been stubborn pockets of fear in my life. I want to dissolve that fear. I've met and loved my own infant self. I said to my infant self, "It's OK to cry. Everything is OK. I'll hold you and take care of you. Everything is going to be all right. I love you. I won't let you be harmed. I won't let you be unloved. You are my baby, and I love you. This is our dream now, yours and mine, and we're going to be just fine."

My tears are part of my dream. They're *my* tears. Dreams are feeling-based, not idea-based. I accept my feelings. If I'm frightened by my monsters, I'm truly frightened. The monster serves me, when I let myself feel just how terrified it makes me. I don't get rid of my terror by dismissing the monster. It's not just a dream. It's my dream. They're not **just** tears and fears, they are my tears and my fears. Then I can move on from the tears, after I've cried them. I can move on from the fears, after I've felt them. This is the love that I get to feel. It's my love. It's my dream. It's my life.

## The Abuser Abuses Himself

I've done abusive things to myself, and I've allowed myself to be abused. But I can't allow the abuse of my children. A few years ago, I said to my mother, "You can treat me like that, but I won't let you treat my children like that." And yet, I continued to abuse that child part of myself that's so critical to my life. So I didn't smoke last night, or this morning, or this afternoon. The image of putting smoke into the lungs of a child helped me better than any other image has. I compartmentalized good and bad into my life, I created myself as both worthy and unworthy. I found things to do that exemplify myself as both worthy and unworthy. When I allow abuse, I perpetuate child abuse. When I suppress my own feelings, I smother a child. When I love myself, I save a child from a life of neglect and denial.

Physician, heal thyself. Adult, parent thyself. Protect and care for the child that's in you and that is you. We are forever birthing our selves. We're new born, each day. The wonder and innocence, which are the intuitive connection to all life, are available to every one of us who has not been totally orphaned by abusive practices. Suicide is abortion. The spark of new-born life remains in all of us who survive. I've rediscovered my child self, and I'm charged with protecting it from abuse and giving it love. These are words I need to hear.

## At Ease in the Body

I wasn't able to live at ease in my body when I was a kid. The hormones of adolescence, the exertion of sports, then alcohol, partially, but effectively, introduced me to living in the body, sensually, and without fear. Now, after all, by reconnecting the lines back to my self as a baby, and as a kid, feeling the safety that I've come to as a matter of spiritual trust and hard emotional work, I can be the man I'm capable of being. We are so often, in this world, simultaneously out of touch with our spiritual self and our physical self. Everything we do, in an attempt to make the connections, fails, driving us farther and farther away from our true selves. I've wondered, on a deeper level, why I became an alcoholic. Alcoholism has taught me two things that I only understood intellectually before; humility and gratitude. Alcoholism has shown me my bond with the Great Spirit, a way of understanding God that I accept.

I've learned that areas of life aren't spiritual because we make them spiritual. They are already spiritual in their fullest reality, and I ignore that at the cost of my reality. Being physical is spiritual. It stops being spiritual when I'm blocking the truth of it. My *inner child*, my innate joy, my unbounded innocence, is part of me, and it's a source for me, unless I refuse to accept it. We're free to deny the spirit, and we're free to debase the body. Sometimes, debasing the body seems like the only solution to the pain that caused the separations in the first place.

Denial is that peculiar state of mind that takes over when one has lost direct experience with one's body and spirit. It is the disease that denies its own existence. When one has lost contact with one's own innate sense of spirit and body, because one has never known it, or when one has been frightened out of it, the whole system of being adjusts to an alternative reality. It begins to make new rules and adapts to the new reality with a drive, almost with a vengeance, that seems unlimited and unchallengeable, until it falls under its own weight.

When I could not trust the life I was born into, because it wasn't nurturing, I left it. In other words, since being a child was not safe, as soon as I was humanly capable, I became an adult, or a reasonable facsimile. I imitated an imitation, in order to survive. To get out of a cold crib, I got out of my childhood feelings. I looked around at the cold

world, and I made it beautiful. I painted it with imagination. I put my fears under lock and key. When I was an infant, a beginner, new to the experience, I was not nurtured along the path of natural growth, so I shifted gears. It was going nowhere to continue in spiritual and physical need.

I wanted to be loved and to be held. It didn't happen. Instead, I was offered the alternative, to recreate myself in my parents' image, to become an imitation of their image of what a child should be. I was bright, so I did what was required of me. It was an example of the Stockholm Syndrome. That is, when hostages are taken, and fear for their safety, they adopt the beliefs of their captors and come to believe and trust, support, and finally, adore their captors. This is a reality common to children of all ages and all societies. Once that process has begun, there's no turning back. The trauma that began the process is powerful, and comes without alternative. The prisoner, the hostage, and the ordinary child, do the only thing they can do, within the range of their imagination. They adapt, and they accept. They learn.

There are alternatives. Insanity, suicide, and murder are alternatives. A slow, insane suicide is more common. We slowly, insanelly squelch the life that was in us, as pure spirit in brand-new bodies. Or we bury it, exactly as deep as it is necessary to conceal it, and hopefully, to protect it. The more successful we are at burying our truth, the more difficult it may be to retrieve it. Our best examples of successful people may be the worst examples of their own true selves. On the other hand, the violent failures at this adaptation may have harmed themselves too greatly to be retrieved, at all. A friend of mine once said, looking at a bum passed out in the gutter, "We envy the drunk his selfish freedom." Yes, but what a mockery of freedom that is.

It's not easy work to pick up a child that may have been locked in a box in the cellar of the heart for decades and give it the love and care and the *time* it needs to grow and flourish. But the power of light and love is amazing. Sometimes, it's as if the child has been waiting, in suspended animation, and needs only a few words, a brief prayer, a glance, a touch, a moment's opening, to spring to life. But everything conspires against that happening in the denial of a lifetime. It's amazing how impenetrable the denial is, and then, as if by magic, it can be reduced to a ghost. It is a demon that runs us, and then it is a shadow that evaporates in the light. It ruins lives, and then, in a moment of grace, it

drops, like a rag on a stick, in a heap on the floor. It owes its life to fear and bad magic. Those are not easy things to eradicate, because they institute themselves into a lifetime of habits that don't go away willingly, but they lose hold eventually, and the true baby gets to have its true life back.

## Enough

I'm going to get enough. I've lived under the delusion that I could never get enough. I've believed that I'll never get enough of anything. I felt justified in saying, "All I want out of life is more." It seemed like a wonderful, passionate cry, until you see the emptiness behind it. A sense of deprivation had locked me into a cycle of feast *and* famine. I wanted what was in my brother's bowl, and I needed to make my bowl empty, to justify the desire. It's a simple thing, really. I took a basic condition, as I saw it, and I analogized it into every facet of my life. To start to eat was to be immediately full, but all the rest was never enough. What masquerades as envy and greed is actually fear of starvation, and what masquerades as altruism and sacrifice is only trying to control deprivation. As I come to believe in my self-worth, neither condition applies. Neither indulgence nor deprivation serves the worthy.

To come to believe is not the adoption of an idea or philosophy. To come to believe is to accept the truth. Each of us is worthy. Every one of us is worthy. To believe in one's worth is to feel the truth of that reality. It's a simple truth. To believe is to feel it in the flesh. That's tricky, because it's not superficial. It's not rubbing fancy oils on the skin of my life. It is a rumbling at the core that makes it all the way to the surface. Willingness and acceptance establish a truth. And it takes time. Truths are already in place. The work is to get rid of the untruths that cling like parasites to a truth. The trick is to recognize the parasites for their nature, to stop being misled by their approximation to a truth, to get a long enough look at the truth to trust it, and then, to feel the truth of it. It takes clear eyes and a clean mirror. It takes honesty to name a truth. It takes courage to feel the truth. It takes time to live the truth. I am worthy. It is the truth. I name it. I feel it. I live it.

## I Get Respect

I've been sitting with one feeling for five days now. I feel terribly sad. It's the sadness I've always felt, and I've always called it loneliness. In the past, I have absolved the loneliness, but never the sadness, by finding a woman. This time, I don't want to do that. It feels good to stay inside the loneliness, feel the sadness, and get down to the roots of it. What's brought this up is my newly alive sense of self-respect. I have sought and demanded respect from others, never thinking that my own self-respect was an answer to my quest.

I've awakened, every morning, feeling wonderful. I've begun to think in a new way about respect. And about love, as I've known it, felt it, and understood it. I've sought love, when it was respect I needed. I've forsaken respect to gain a small measure of love. I've judged my relationships by the question, "Is there love in it?" By and large, there's always been a degree of love, or something I called love, and, feeling that love, I tried to be satisfied. But I was using color to describe sound. I've been trying to fill the need for food with clothing. It's like apples and oranges. No amount of apples will give me the taste and texture of oranges. I may be wealthy with apples and starving for a single orange. I've loved, and I've been loved; by people I didn't respect, who didn't respect me. I've loved myself, when I needed to respect myself.

When any need is unmet at the beginning of life, it tends to remain unmet, and an endless attempt to fulfill it continues throughout one's life. Without the actual, real knowledge of it, the seeker tries to fill the need in the area he knows, which doesn't include the area of the never known. Of course, we can't fill the need for respect with love. I can't feel self-respect by loving myself. Self-love is inadequate when self-respect is still unfelt. I think it's a failing of love, but it isn't. We all need a sense of self-respect, and we need to feel that there's someone else we respect. We need standards by which we can sense how much we respect ourselves and others. I need to let this sense of self-respect take root and give it evidence, make it manifest. That's what's been happening. Because I've taken steps to clear out the things I've done to destroy my own self-respect, to clean up the past and the present, I've begun to feel simple self-respect, which is my inborn right and truth, as it is everyone's. Since I've begun to

feel that, the instances of disrespect from others, and from myself, stand out like sore thumbs.

I'm beginning to notice how easily I've accepted disrespect in the past. At times, I accepted it as if I deserved it, and at other times, I accepted it whether I felt I deserved it or not, as if it was a given, as if disrespect was to be expected, like rain. I acted as if disrespect was normal and acceptable, as if it was a condition to be tolerated, almost appreciated. I often judged myself by the degree of disrespect I engendered. If there wasn't any, I was confused. I behaved as if respect was the absence of disrespect. I created disrespect in my life, because I knew about it, and I could gauge myself against it. My self-respect was clear to me only by the degree of my outrage at the disrespect I felt.

I'm beginning to feel a positive awareness of real respect. Respect is becoming the standard by which I gauge myself in the world and in my self-image. I'm beginning to feel myself defined by my truth and not by its shadow. What a marvelous phenomenon. Respect is a subtle phenomenon. I only barely noticed the difference, as it begins to change my life. I don't have to be so busy occupying my space, because it's no longer defined by shadow. As I become more at home in my body, more at ease with myself, more true to my nature, more accepting of the life given me, I can relax. I can let go of the frantic shadow boxing. I can sit still and be still.

## All Is Well in My Town

I feel that all is well. I say, *I feel*, because it's different from, *I think*. It's true. My gut feels good about life. I feel like a kid who is truly making it on his own. I feel like I'm doing that. I'm reluctant to use the word *feel*, because it's a loaded word, pejorative, tainted, and abused. It carries the old Sixties sense of touchy-feely, sappy emotion, *If it feels good, do it!* When I say *feeling*, *I feel*, *it feels*, I mean, *to know something in the deepest part of my life*.

*I feel angry, doesn't mean, I think angry, or, I'm ticked off. It means, I feel anger in my body. I feel safe doesn't mean, I hope I'm safe, or I wish I was safe, or I'm blind to danger. It means I feel peace in the deepest, quietest cells of my body. It's as if my body is a city, and the awareness is in every house. It's not only on the radio, or in the mayor's house, it's in the alleys and back streets, and in the heart of every citizen. When the city of the body is united, it's easy to feel the energies of revolt and the energies of harm. When I open all the doors of all the houses, when I meet the residents of all the houses, when I come to a common understanding with them all, that is, when they listen to me, and I listen to them, then, whenever a new energy enters the city limits, I can take an instant poll of the people, and I can trust any message I get.*

If there's an intruder in any home in my city, I can know it. If there's an angel or a demon visiting any house, I can know it. That's what's possible, when all the doors have been opened and the welcome mat is out everywhere. Some of the doors have been locked in darkness for a long time. Rumors and long-standing fears had barred the doors of some of my houses, and even of whole districts. Right now, my town is a good place to live. I don't mind being the mayor, the garbage collector, the nursery child, and the town crier. Five o'clock, and all is well in Mytown.

## Hitchhiking Soul

I had a dream in which I was supposed to perform a play with another actor. I wasn't able to do it. I couldn't remember my lines. I broke down, crying on stage, humiliating myself. Some people left, but some didn't. I began to talk. I began to speak what I was feeling, and it worked. Then I tried to be satirical, and it didn't work. I had to talk straight. When I talked from the heart, I was at peace, and my audience was happy. I've been peaceful. It's very quiet, right now. "This day belongs to you, God, I give this day to you. I recognize that this day is yours. Thy day, be mine. Thy day, be done." I've been a kid, lately, but also older, wiser, and calmer. I feel like I'm leading a fascinating life. And it keeps being fascinating. The newest fun is to accept the ride.

## My Own Life

I feel a sense of anticipation. I've done everything I needed to do to be at this transition point. I have a right to be alive. Living full. The fear of my living in the world has always been about the corruptions of ego and of power. The secret is to be true to my true self, a child in the heart, guided by God. The dream I had, the other night, about performing, has cleared the way for me as a day-to-day person. It said, *Don't worry about the script or the satire. Be yourself.* This is what I feel as a miracle. The final obstacles to my fulfillment have been cleared. I believe that. I like that word, *fulfillment*. To be filled full, with no holes, no hollow no emptiness, no hiding in the rafters or the cellar. I think I finally have my life. Thank you, God. Almost 47 years old, and I finally have my own life.

## Minnie the Mermaid

And then this story came out of my subconscious:

A boy, with the innocence, clarity, and wisdom of the ageless, is assaulted by a boozy, weepy woman, a friend of his parents. He is trapped in a room in her house, while she pours out her sad story of neglect and abuse, telling him how beautiful and wonderful he is, seducing him into receiving her lamentations, her wants, needs, and desires, as if he is a lover, a trusted friend, a confidant. She's caught up in her own misery, and she assumes his company and his understanding. She's drunk, and she covets his innocence. She wants, for herself, the clean heart that she sees in him. She shoves her way into his empathetic feelings. She gropes about, pulling on him. She tells him about her marriage, her childhood, her lost dreams, her secret ambitions, her sexual needs. She tells him about the places in town she loves to visit, about the little things she does around the house, all the pathetic, painful, mundane habits that come from neglect and denial.

This is a woman who's trapped in her own prison. She is a victim who victimizes, a prisoner who imprisons, the abused who abuses. Unable to speak soberly of her feelings or to feel her own feelings, she gets drunk and assaults the boy. Her tears gush, her face contorts, and her features blur. Her hands go all over the boy's face and his hands, arms,

his chest and back, his skinny legs. She talks through her sobs. Her stories pour out, wet and sloppy. No matter how long she cries, no matter how much she weeps, no matter what sad, untold story she tells, she doesn't get any better. Her tone never changes. She gets no relief.

The boy is in panic. He wishes he could help her. When she was sober, he liked her fine. She was shy and friendly, entertaining, and funny. Now, she's frightening. He's afraid she's never going to let him go. She acts toward him in a way no one has ever acted toward him. She looks at him in a way he doesn't understand. He doesn't know what she wants, but he knows he can't help. He feels trapped. He wants to hit her. He's never felt that, before. He thinks he's going crazy.

She doesn't see anything that's happening to him. She's totally self-involved. She's blind drunk. Her eyes are wide and watery. She stares at him. She looks long and deep into his frightened, transfixed eyes, but she sees only herself. She tells him things about himself, but they only serve her belief that he's the perfect listener to her awful story. Her weeping goes on and on. The inward spiral of her self-pity threatens to suck him down with her. His head is swimming. He breaks free, finally, and runs out of the room. She screams, then hates herself, then collapses, then passes out. He hides and shakes. He's terrified. He has nowhere to run. He gets hard and angry. He vows never to cry again.

## Two Parts of Me

What I wrote, yesterday, was an attempt to describe the feelings I had and the pictures I got, during a phone call from a woman who admitted to me that she has always denigrated men. Before the call, I had become depressed, and I fought against it. I went to a meeting, and I talked about feeling depressed, and I talked about the difficulties of healing. People I respect, who have more years of recovery than I do, talked about the hard work to heal the root causes of their disease. The awareness of these symptomatic diseases has grown by leaps and bounds, in the last few years, but there's still a myth that it should be done quickly. *Name the disease, commit to its cure, and be cured.* But it takes time, and it takes effort to overcome, not only one's own denial, but to do so in a subtly hostile world, still stuck in the reaction to symptoms and the treatment of symptoms.

I'm still in the process. Healing is feeling. I have opened up to a whole new level of feeling, first of pain and fear, then of self-love and self-respect. Then I felt a wonderful release. I soared on a high, a sense of peace, serenity, and acceptance. But habitually, and imperceptibly, I began to protect myself from feeling, afraid of the return of hurt and fear. Once I realized that, I became like a safe child, again. After the meeting, I went to the grocery store and picked up a few things. I felt great. When I got home, I spoke on the phone to my last girlfriend. She came on the phone in a disturbed state of mind. I told her what I was learning.

Then I listened to her, for almost an hour, as she cried out her grief and sadness about the way her heart had been shut down, first by her abuser, then later by her husband, who cheated on her only three months after her marriage, to which she said she had given 100% of her hopeful heart. Two people who, among others that she had loved and trusted, betrayed that love and trust, and hurt her. She withdrew and became distrusting and denigrating toward men. She wept how much she had hurt herself and others. She wept, and she said how freed she finally felt. She said she wished that I could understand how much she was feeling and how great her relief was.

Two parts of me were listening. One part was quiet, and one part was understanding, appreciative and knowing. I heard her tears of release, I thought it was good, I was glad to witness her breakthrough. I knew that she was my friend and I was her friend. I thought I was witnessing a powerful healing release. But it also felt like a horror. My body convulsed with revulsion. My arms shook off the waves of abuse. My eyes shot daggers of lightening. My mouth spit silent curses. My fists clenched in rage. I banged on the cushions of my couch. The fingers of my right hand worked the smooth surfaces of the telephone, incessantly, frantically, wiping and cleaning, wiping and cleaning, over and over, the smooth, black surfaces. It was amazing to me that she never noticed or seemed to feel any of my fear, revulsion, and rage. Not once did she show any fear or hesitancy in telling me what was happening to her. And never once did I show any rage toward her. I was able to be in two places at once. I was able to feel my own horrifying revulsion, and at the same time, be supportive of her.

I was able to do that for myself as well. A part of me was transfixed in horror, and another part was caring and supportive of my own process and release. These are the

fruits of my own catastrophic healing. I didn't have to go through that, alone, stranded and helpless. I was able to be a father to my own inner self. As I went through it, I knew I was guided and protected by a father I could trust and count on. I don't know if everyone needs to experience the same process in the same way. I suspect that those who were raised in a healthy environment are able to go through life more smoothly than I have. But I can say, that for those who are in need of healing, healing is possible. It's not easy, but without it, life is a more and more complicated, and less and less successful, series of stopgap measures, of faulty and inadequate mechanisms, of avoidance and collision, of confusion and separation.

I once held dear all those things I tried to accept and depend on, as if they mattered and were necessary. Instead, I've found that a life of pain and separation is not necessary, and it matters to talk about it, because not talking about it blocks the fuller life that is possible. I'm back in acceptance, trusting the process. It comes in waves. When I think I'm done, I'm only resting. I can see now that I know how to feel. The trick is to *keep* feeling. The circumstances for growth never stop coming. The challenge is to stay with it, to get in tune with the cycles and trust the entirety, to trust the year and not get stuck in any one season. There is no endless summer, and there is no eternal winter. It's a challenge to habituate this in my life, not to do it once and be done with it, but to do it over and over, until prayer is like kneading dough, and trust is like baking bread. The simple way is the only way.

## The Inertia of Fear

I'm feeling scared and doubtful. I'm feeling some loss of faith in myself and my work. I feel like I've been a semi-invalid. I had another bear dream. In the dream, I said, *I used to be scared of him, but I'm not, anymore*, and I played with a huge, sandy-colored bear like he was a puppy. I tossed a blanket over him and pulled it off, tossed it on, and pulled it off. The bear was playful, like a cat or a puppy. Just before I woke up, I dreamed I was saying something to my daughter, who is staying with me while she looks for an apartment of her own. I was showing her a picture of herself when she was a baby, and I said, "This is the most important thing I can tell you. This little child is the

source of all your strength. At the age of this child, the soul is closest to the surface. After this, the soul can become buried, and we often lose touch." When she woke up this morning, I told her the dream, and then I told her about meeting my true child. She was receptive. I love telling her what I've learned.

I still don't know whether I should write out the story about the boy and the boozy woman. Part of me is afraid. I hear that voice of fear tell me, *It's not important. You've already felt it. That's good enough.* Words of discouragement usually come from fear and the inertia of fear. There is an *inertia* of fear. Fear is like a big dull beast who sits on my chest, and tells me to give up, it's not worth it, it's not possible. It says, *If I get up off you, you'll only be in pain.*

I don't have to figure anything out. All I have to do is keep feeling, trust in God, and let go. And, I have to *let* people help me. I have to *let* God help me. I think that by *wanting* help, I've done that, but it isn't the same. To think about people helping me is to try to control the need. To trust people to help me is to let go of the need. If God is going to answer my needs, then I have to let go of them. If I am being needy, then I'm still trying to control my life.

I'm getting better at acclimating myself to my true feelings. I'm learning to become familiar with my feelings, and I'm learning to keep true to my feelings. I'm in a little confusion and doubt, right now. In the past, whenever my children were around, I would drop my receptivity, start to play parent, act like my mother taught me by her example, and give free rein to my codependency. It's important to give oneself up to raising one's children when they are very young, but my daughter is almost 19, about to get her own apartment for the first time, and she doesn't need me to take care of her every need. This is a real challenge for me. Not to take care of her and not to let her take care of me.

There is purpose in this doubt and insecurity, beyond my wants and desires, beyond my fears and controls. And, it's no cause for smugness or complacency to trust in God. I think it's a good sign. To trust and be just a little scared, at the same time. If it's a sign of giving up the controls, then, yes, I think it's a very good sign.

## The Warmth Around the Heart

I've begun to imagine that women are warm. This is a change in my thinking. Despite my experience, I never thought that way, when I imagined being with women. A few days ago, I did think that, without anyone suggesting it to me. My mind had always blocked the idea from my awareness. It's as if the primary message was, *Women are cold*. No matter how much experience I had to the contrary, the original message never changed. Something broke the code. I finally became aware that women are not cold. Women are warm. I imagined a new, good, healthy truth and not the old wrong, unhealthy message, the lie. The lie had been so powerful that I believed it, despite knowing the truth. The lie had been so powerful that I believed it, despite knowing the truth. I knew the truth, and yet I believed the lie. I'm inclined to repeat any new revelation. The abandonment I felt as a child has come to me as cold. I felt cold around my heart. I couldn't imagine myself warm. Now that I feel whole and filled, I feel warm. Now that I feel warm, in my body, around my heart, I can more easily imagine that others are warm. I feel the love in my heart, and I can receive the love of others, and especially the love of the spirit of the universe.

## Just Plain Scared

I woke up scared, again. I don't like this kind of scared. It's little-kid scared. I've felt it before. It's the fear of being known. It's the fear of being exposed. It isn't being scared of starting something new. It's not good-and-scared. It's bad-scared. It's the fear of a bad thing happening. I've been dodging the writing of the story of the boozy woman and the innocent boy. I know the source of the story is my own feelings. In order to write the story, I need to imagine the feelings of both the boy and the woman. I'm afraid of the feelings. I know better than to be afraid, but I'm still scared.

## Flying Free

I had a flying dream. I've had them before, but in the past, I had to deal with obstructions like tree branches or power lines. This time I had complete freedom of the skies. I made noises like some kind of bird, and then like a coyote or a wolf. A band of wolves came over a hill, in response to my calls. One wolf leaped twenty feet in the air to growl at my hand, not to bite it, but as if to talk to it. I landed on a high roof. A crowd gathered below. They wanted me to talk to them. I told them I wasn't ready to join with the wolves. The wolves saw me as one of them. I saw them as somewhat frightening energy beasts. It was a wonderful dream, and I felt good being among the wolves and talking to the people.

Then I had a disturbing dream. I spent hours, in the dream, trying to persuade two mock armies of teenage boys not to go to war with each other. Their adult leader wanted them to fight a real war, I knew many of them would die. They wouldn't listen to me. Finally, they listened, and the fight didn't happen. I was exhausted by the second dream. I think it shows me that my feelings affect how I feel in the world. I dream I'm a public speaker who talks to wolves, and I feel great. I dream I'm responsible for ending wars and abuse, and I feel beat up and tired. I feel safe at home, and at meetings, but I feel too sensitive for the world, right now. I'm vulnerable, because my life has no theme these days. I don't know what I'm about. I don't know what I'm doing or saying. What's been happening to me, in the course of this awakening, is not familiar in my external world.

I still haven't gotten into the meat of the feelings in the story of the boy and the woman. As I've gotten a few days away from the writing, and a week away from the first feelings, I feel some relief at not being able to access the feelings. It's happened to me, before, after a disturbing dream. If I ignore it for a while, it recedes, until all I have left is a vague uneasiness and not the primary feelings. I don't like these times of vague uneasiness. I prefer the stark feelings of the event, or the other side, the sense of engagement, outside myself, of work or activity. I feel half-in and half-out of this stuff, today. But it doesn't pay to force it one way or the other. It's time, once again, to let go and trust.

When the feelings are intensely upon me, I have no choice - it's just what it is, but when I get away from the feelings, I become afraid of them. I'm afraid of feeling the woman's drunkenness, and I'm afraid of feeling the boy's terror. I know I can do it, but I'm letting externals keep me from it. I'm thinking I have too many worries to get to it. I need to find another way into the story. If I don't do it, I'm stuck. When I'm stuck, I'm in limbo, and all I feel is a vague uneasiness. It's avoidance. I'm waiting for work, in order to write. It's no good. I don't need to be working, in order to write. Work isn't my way of writing. It's my way of avoiding the feelings. It's the same as booze. Booze didn't help me write. It helped me avoid writing. I was able to write while drinking, only by writing the sort of thing that avoided the feelings I was avoiding by drinking. Dear Friend, I must finish what has been started.

## Still Struggling

I feel pitiful. I feel like I've been saying, for 15 years, that I was going to give up everything else and do my real work. I had a headache, yesterday, that lasted ten hours. I don't usually get headaches. I think my life is wonderful, in every way, except for money. It's always been money. I've had a good and a fascinating life, a productive life, but always without money. Whenever anybody has asked me about my situation, I talk about money. I believe in myself, people believe in me, and still, I struggle.

## It Begins

I've begun the story of the boy and the woman. It's great. I've become a true writer, again. And I'm still struggling. Of course, even the totally, 100%, committed writers have to struggle. The mere fact of commitment doesn't make it automatically easier. I've made commitments to my work before, but it's felt as if God failed to keep up his end of the commitment. I want to believe that doing God's will ought to include some

security. I've been through so many highs and lows, and they're all illusory. The highs are illusory, and so are the lows, but the rent comes due on the first of every month. I have always wanted one year, to write without money worries. I'm certain, that at the end of that mythical, magical, long-awaited year, I'd feel the same as I do now. I still think the idea that I have the right to be an artist and be supported in that, is ridiculous.

I suppose I have the right, but this is the land of *Who cares?* That's what passes for rights in this day and age. The way the society, and nearly everyone in it, supports the rights of others is to say, *Who cares?* We show our tolerance in the form of indifference. Indifference masquerades as tolerance. It feels like a great wall of indifference. *Sure, Steve, do whatever the fuck you want. Be a poet, be a painter, be a novelist, be any fucking thing you want, because we don't give a shit what you do.* I've been honestly enthusiastic about my own work and about the work of others, in my own life and toward the lives of others, and still there's a wall of indifference around everything and everyone. It is the *American Curtain; The Stone Wall of Indifference.*

Now it occurs to me that what I'm saying and feeling is a projection of the state of my process. It's probably where my little kid is at, in the development of my new heart. I want to include the writing of the story in sync with this journal. Last week, I wrote in my journal, and it opened up the story, so I could jump into it. It's possible, now, for this kind of writing to support the other kind. But I don't want to lose the feeling that I deserve my own enthusiasm and my own support. Instead of trying to explain my struggle, I want to speak about it with support and respect.

Yes, I'm having a rough time of it, trying to pay my bills and still spend my energies on my writing and on my heart, which is the source of my writing. I feel a little ruthless at the moment. My eyes get cold, hard, and clear. I like that feeling. It's the strength of instinct, of granite dreams. I feel at peace with my heart, but I'm not content in my life. I'm angry. In the story, the boy is about to betray his innocence. I'm sure a part of me is anticipating that, and I'm afraid, protective, and angry. I've been in an extremely agitated state for several days. It seems to get relieved, and then it comes back, full force. I write, or I go to a meeting, or I sleep. I'm OK for a while, and then the feeling, a feeling of sickness, comes back. I try to think of something to do to feel better, and there's nothing. The only way out is through.

## Healing Junky

I just bolted awake, while trying to sleep. My son told me that his higher power, his spiritual force, is a black, hardbound notebook, with blank pages, that he writes in, every day. In part, that's who I'm talking to in these entries. *Dear Reader* is also *Dear God*. I'm having a hard time sleeping, until, I'm exhausted. Then I wake up, scared again. I know this is childhood stuff. Earlier tonight, I wrote six pages of tormenting, frightening material. It was hard to start, but it was easy to stay with it, once it was going. My house feels like a jail. It has never felt that way, until I got to this point in the story, where the boy feels trapped. I know I'm learning to support myself, emotionally and spiritually. Tonight, I heard some guy (it's always a guy) complain about people who get into the reasons for their dysfunction, their histories, their emotional lives, and their feelings, calling them *process junkies*.

When I quit drinking, I got rid of a lot of problems. And I uncovered the problems I had covered up with all the problems created by drinking, the problems I no longer had. So, yeah, it's great to feel free of the problems created by drunkenness, but sobriety made it clear I had other shit I had to deal with, that I hadn't dealt with over the years of my drinking. I suppose I'm a process junkie, if being committed to healing makes me a process junkie. Being a process junkie is not the same as being a hypochondriac. That's like saying to someone in the hospital, *You're a healing junkie*. So, OK, I'm a healing junkie. I like this healing, even though, sometimes, it feels awful. I still like it a lot. I've been defending my healing, in the face of very little to show for it. I don't know why I should have to struggle against this negative evidence, except that it's what I've always struggled against. Serenity amidst the sorrow, joy in the middle of pain, thank you, Joseph Campbell.

## I Finished the Story

I woke up at 4AM, and began to write. I wrote until 6:30 and stayed up for two hours. I fell asleep, finally, content that I had done it. Now I'm crazy again. I woke at 3PM, and I felt the same. I feel vulnerable, but not from the outside, from the inside. It's still the same as it was the last few days. I thought when I finished the story, it would go away, but that's not it. I feel like I'm having a nervous breakdown, but it seems to be the breakdown of my defenses. I am going to have to rely on God, because I'm not capable of taking care of myself in the old ways. I'm in a kind of dazed state. I'm not in my body. I don't have any interest in things. My apartment feels like a prison of cold fears. It used to comfort me. It was a haven. It isn't my secret cave anymore.

I don't feel safe anywhere. I watched *The Young Lions* last night, barely able to see it. The only part that enticed me was watching Montgomery Clift fist-fight. I wanted to do that. I wanted to get in a fight, get my nose busted, laugh, go crazy, and then beat the shit out of everybody who wanted to fight, finally having everyone, including me, realize I'm an invincible, gleeful, fighting machine. I want to feel the freedom of not caring about being hurt, and not caring about hurting others who fight me willingly. I'm not sure where this puts me, in my renewed child, but I'm going through it, there's no doubt of that. I may have to lose everything to rebuild this life so that I'm free to live and feel as much as I'm capable of feeling. I'm willing, and I'm scared.

This process of letting go of my defenses, of shedding defenses, is scary. For over two months, I haven't reverted to the protective safety of any of my familiar patterns, no women, no booze, no work. I go to meetings, and I speak in unfamiliar ways about unfamiliar feelings. I have this journal, but I've cracked open a frightening story in the middle of it. This is a new level of healing that requires new awareness and a new degree of support. I believe the family-of-origin awareness that's spreading now may eventually change all our institutions and all our lives, but right now, it's changing my life.

## Changing Relationships

I feel peaceful at home with my daughter. We were up until 8AM, talking about family. It's good that we get to have this time together. It's becoming what happened with her brother, last summer. It's been slower with her, but good. We needed this time, and it's gradually happening. I'm able to feel it, now. She's coming to accept me, in a different way than being a daughter who worships, despises, fears, and wonders at her distant father. We're getting to know each other and to accept each other as normal parts of our lives. It takes time. I'm glad we've had the time.

## Avoid and Pacify

Sometimes, when I'm scared, I become arrogant, hard and angry. Then I'm reminded of the power of humility. I remember it's OK to be scared. When I remember to honor my true feelings, I feel free. I'm a scared nine-year-old, in the process of my re-growth. I have been talking about going for my passion and quitting my pacifiers. I'm scared. I don't feel safe anywhere, and yet I feel right in my heart and my gut. I need to cut off the escape routes. I need to do something I've always needed to do, even if it doesn't work. I need to let myself trust God, but I avoid it, at almost all costs. This is important to me. It's the big other shoe of my life. I've always slipped out of this one, one way or another. It seems apparent that it's now or never. I need to find out what happens on the other side of this. I've come up to this point before, and I've sidestepped it. Fear is an addiction and a pacifier. I use fear to stop my passion. Fear leads to a job, which pays the bills and pacifies the fear. There's a committee of advice-givers in my head that tells me to strive harder and don't let go. It is the committee of fear.

## The Imitation of Will

I'm happiest when I realize that, by doing exactly what it is I *am* doing, I'm doing what I *should* be doing. That's a tricky concept. It means that when I *accept* myself exactly as I am, I begin to *be* who I am. It could be used to justify any destructive behavior, and maybe it does, but it is tempered by the truth of a just and loving spirit. By being tuned in to a just and loving spirit, and by acting exactly as that spirit wants and not as I want, I may freely act in a just and loving way toward myself and others.

Back when I thought that I *chose* to drink, at the will of my desires, I thought I was doing right by my true-self, but I was only *imitating* my parents' will, or God's will as I wanted it to be. My true-parent would have answered my needs when I was an infant. That's what I was trying to re-create by willfully trying to fill my own needs. I can fulfill the original need, more directly, by letting God take care of my true needs, instead of willfully trying to do it myself. Whenever I was thirsty or hungry, I gave myself the bottle. It seems so patently obvious and so foolish, but I did it unconsciously, and I was telling myself, in as simple a way as I could, what my needs were.

I'm a willful person. I am a tough little baby who didn't trust that he would be cared for. I thought I had to care for myself. Babies aren't supposed to care for themselves. They aren't equipped for it. Babies come up with infantile solutions. God is my true parent. God's solutions are better than mine. It is best that I let go and let God be the parent. A man, playing god, is like a child playing parent. By being truly childlike in this question of will, I am truly free. Drinking was as good a way as I could come up with to satisfy my needs. It seemed to work for a long time, and I wasn't about to give it up for nothing. I didn't understand my true needs, and I didn't have another way to satisfy them. I needed to learn that I had legitimate needs and that it was possible to fulfill them.

Drink is a destructive element that seems to fill one's needs. It will eventually stop doing that. Then it will kill. Such is the pattern of all addiction. Faith will fill my needs, and will do so, better and better, and will finally free me. Such is the pattern of surrender. A simple child, I didn't have faith in my parents, so I came to distrust faith. Drink gave me faith. It was ersatz faith that I would have recognized, if I'd known the real thing. Talk about a leap of faith. Twice-burned by placing my faith in the wrong places, I

had no choice but to trust, first a recovery group, then God, and now myself. The pack, the Great Spirit, and the individual; just like a wolf, all three, not one, not two.

## I Need to Play

I want to take a bicycle ride in the afternoon. Metaphorically. Actually, I want to get a motorcycle and go on a journey. Specifically, I've given myself permission, once again, to be a poet and play in the spirit. I called my son to ask him about motorcycle riding on the highways. I told him the sense I have of following the signs of a spiritual journey, without any destination or time limit. It's what I did best as a boy, walking, or on my bicycle. It's time to move on. I'm shedding skins. I dream of riding free, I dream of choosing my freedom, I want no ties that don't come from the heart. I have a renewed sense, like an old sense renewed, of spirit that's free from fear. It would be a crime if I didn't accept my freedom. I was born to be free. I'm not equipped for anything else. It's only logical. You do what you do best, and you stop pretending you're anything else.

I've gotten stronger, and I don't need pacifiers. I don't need my cocoon anymore. My larva days are over. I can handle the real world, I have wings, I can fly. I don't need the safe prison of pacifiers, of comfort foods. I finally, honestly, feel ready to accept myself for what I am. I don't have to apologize for it. I don't have to explain it to anyone. This is where I am, this is what I am, this is who I am. This is even when I am. That's more than Popeye ever said, although it's probably the same.

*I am what I am, and that's what I am.*

*I am who I am, and that's who I am.*

*I am where I am, and that's where I am.*

*I am when I am, and that's when I am.*

*I am why I am, and that's why I am.*

The deeply philosophical Popeye lives!

## The Prison Ship of Life

*What gives me the right to be free? How come I think I can play like a kid all my life? When did I decide that the world owed me a living? What gives me the idea that I'm special? What makes me think I deserve any different from anybody else?* Well, nothing. I made it up. Everybody says, "Let go and trust God." I want to find out if it's true. Why, I think, does God protect drunks? I think God protects everybody, but the sober ones don't act like it. We sober people are running around trying to run things our way. It's as if being drunk is a good idea, and it's the damn booze that fucks it up. The reason that living a spiritual life appeals to me, is because it's so much like what I was trying to do when I was drinking. There's no good in throwing out the baby with the bath water. Drunks are like beautiful babies, awash in the bath water of booze.

I'm debating the sense of alcoholics as grandiose, foolish dreamers. I'm a dreamer, and I don't want to spend the rest of my life pretending I'm not. This is a phase I must go through. I have to find out what's on the other side of doing nothing. I want to stop doing all of those things I think I need to do to be acceptable to my fellow inmates on the prison ship of life. I think I must be up against another wall of feelings. The prison metaphor is strong for me, right now. I feel imprisoned, unfree. I want to break out, to be free, and I'll bet that's an analogy for a new level of expression from the inside out. I can't hide in bed. I'm yawning all the time, and not especially tired. Yawning is feeling, trying to get out.

Carl Jung said the poet thinks he's swimming, when in fact he's being swept along by the flow. The poet's conviction that he is creating in absolute freedom is an illusion. He fancies he is swimming, but in reality, an unseen current sweeps him along. The life I've always wanted is still the life I seek. I drank so I could carry my dreams into the next day. I don't need to be rich, or drunk, to walk my dreams into the street. First is to love the boy who dreams. *I love you, boy who dreams.*

## The Fall Awake

I found the passage from Carl Jung I was looking for. Jung talks about the life-force that occurs in art and religion. I had missed the religion part, when I read it first, fifteen years ago. Jung calls it an *autonomous complex*. It is what happens when something comes alive through a person, which cannot be explained psychologically. It is a spiritual phenomenon. Something is born in the spirit and takes shape through the person of art or religion. The artist may appear to be neurotic, even psychotic, and will subordinate his other, normal concerns to the autonomous creation, as would a mother. For the first time, I understand that seeking through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, asking for his will for me and the power to carry it out, describes, for me, the act of writing.

In order to write, I've always gone into a meditative state, letting go of ego, becoming ready to receive the creative will of a higher power. I used to call that higher power *the muse*. A friend looked at me, one day, as I was beginning to write, and she said, "Wow. Did you know that when you start to write, you become spiritual?" I looked up, surprised. I thought about it, and I realized she was right. I thought of her, earlier today, and that's why I did. I thought, until last night, despite my wishing it weren't true, that true spirituality applied only to my life apart from being a writer, that it applied to me only *if I adjusted my life to it*, and that I needed to change myself in order to comply with any spirituality. What I am coming to realize is that I need only accept who I am, and what I do, to be truly spiritual.

Years ago, in San Francisco, I was invited by a Korean friend to join him at a dance club, where he was learning American dances. There were 150 people in a big dance hall with an instructor, teaching us a step I couldn't get. I tried and tried, I felt clumsy and stupid. Finally, I looked around, and I watched what everyone was doing. They were doing a simple jitterbug step that I had been doing since I was fourteen. I already knew how to dance. I was trying to fit myself to the step, when I'd been doing it for twenty-five years.

## The St. Francis Prayer

*Make me a channel of thy peace, that where there is hatred, I may bring love, that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness, that where there is discord, I may bring harmony, that where there is error, I may bring truth, that where there is doubt, I may bring faith, that where there is despair, I may bring hope, that where there are shadows, I may bring light, that where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Grant that I may seek to comfort rather than to be comforted, to understand rather than to be understood, to love rather than to be loved. For it is by self-forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.*

I always thought I didn't fit that prayer. I thought the meaning applied to other, kinder, more selfless people than I am, and therefore, I was a washout as a truly spiritual worker in God's fields. Last night, I listened to that prayer as if it described what I do when I'm writing, and it's exactly what I do. As a writer, I practice my spirituality. The problem comes when I *think about* my writing. When I think about it, I'm egocentric, fearful, and grandiose. But when I practice it, those things fall away. God supports me as a writer. That's like saying that God supports me as someone who prays. I'm on the verge of giving my life entirely over to my spiritual life, that is, to my writing. I feel it as a moment of true spiritual commitment. The fears I have about taking this commitment as a writer are the same as the fears one would have about choosing the spiritual life.

I thought God's will might be that I shouldn't be a writer. But, by committing myself to my life as a writer, I am asking for God's will, in the best way I know how. Not being a writer, completely, is avoiding God's will and hanging onto Steve's fear. When I let go and let God enter my life, it's through my writing that the autonomous work is done. The autonomous work is also called God's will. I already know how to dance. This is truly my spiritual awakening. I'm no longer asleep, spiritually. My bed is not for hiding. I don't need to try to learn these steps. I already know how. All I have to do is let the unseen current sweep me along. I keep getting out of the river to sit on the rocks, and think about swimming. I fancied I was a swimmer in God's will, but it's God's will that's propelling me and has been all along. I needed to talk to someone I really love and tell them what it

is I really love. And that is now possible. I'm able to make my commitment, out loud, in a spiritual circle, to release it to God and to the world, without fear of condemnation or reprisal. A true spiritual awakening comes from letting go. The fall awake is a fall, not from grace, but toward it.

## Mother's Will

This is my first day out in the world without recourse. There's no food in the house. I feel released to God's will because of the work I've done to clean out the old pockets of pain in my heart, my guts, and my head. You can't let God in if the old pain is still there. Old pain runs the show. Old pain forces me into personal will power, and personal will precludes God's will. I couldn't fully allow God's will, until I could be safe enough to give up my own will. I've already been to the well of fear today. I need to let go of the habits of fear. I've used the feeling that you can't be what you want to be, you have to get a job, as a way to avoid doing what I wanted and needed to do. In this country, money is the last refuge of willpower. *I'll let God be in charge of everything except where the money comes from.* That's what I imagine almost everyone thinks.

As long as it's my will, on any level, then I can't tell what's God's will. I need to know. It's amazing how powerful the forces of denial are, in one's life, in my life. No one has dissuaded me from pursuing God's will in my life. No one has prevented me. No one has denied me. No one has stopped me. I have. The voices inside of me have been screaming at me, all my life, that I could not be who I truly am, that I had to be somebody or something else. I've taken those voices so much to heart, that all of my attempts to go against those voices have felt false and doomed to failure. I wanted God's will to answer the question for me, without ever putting my own will at risk. By giving up my debate, I'm giving up my will. I thought that wanting to be who I truly am was my will, when it's been my will to avoid acceptance. It's as if I've been waiting for more evidence to persuade me, but it's an internal debate, and the voice of denial has been locked in at the core. Nothing I did could dislodge the thorn in my inside.

My mother has been an overwhelming presence in my life. I felt as if I'd grown up the cub of a she-wolf with terrifying teeth. I've seen her as the teeth-mother, incarnate. Something interesting is happening to me, as I write this. I'm declaring myself the victor. I'm releasing myself from her grip. I'm releasing her from my grip. This has been a long fight. My mother's dominance began before my birth, and my father, brothers, education, separation, willpower, talent, knowledge, and success were not strong enough to get the teeth out of my neck. I had to go back to my birth and rescue myself from her grasp, even if the grasp is only symbolic and only in my own mind. On the conscious level, my mother wouldn't have a clue what I'm talking about. It's true that I defeat her power by saving me. She loses her grip, as I take myself up from its grasp. I lift up the baby to my own arms. I hold the baby. I nourish the baby. I offer the baby to God's care.

## Coming Home

There's a long, narrative poem by Wordsworth, called *Michael* that says if you remember the time and the place of love, God will strengthen you. The image that comes to mind is the Indian Monument, west of McCook, Nebraska, where I was a kid. I don't remember what happened there, or when it was, exactly, but it is an icon that, when I think of it, I feel strength. I need to return to it. In Wordsworth's story, the traveling son falls into sin, hides across the ocean, and fails to return to the father, mother, home, and they all wither and pass. The war between my will and my mother's will is over. God wins. I'm a baby, and God is my mother and father. I declare my freedom. I declared that my life is God's will, not mine. To pray for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out is finally to come to *know* God's will and to *feel* the power to carry it out. It isn't all in the future. It becomes the present reality.

I've been thinking about feeling in a new way. I want to speak from feeling, more than I have. There can be no argument about the truth of the heart. When I speak the truth of the heart, it's unarguable. When I speak from my head, the message becomes contrary, garbled, forced, or confused. The brain is a support organ and must be in

service to the heart, spirit, or soul. The gut is power and also secondary. It too must be in service to the simple, singular truth of the spirit in the heart. I want to trust God to carry me through to the other side. I'm committed to finding out what's on the other side of this mountain. I climbed faithfully to the tree line. Then, in the barren rocks, to the summit. Now I'm on the down slope, still in barren rocks, hoping for the protection of the far tree line. I want to know the valley and the river below.

## The Tight Pockets in the Spirit

Powerlessness is like a small stream. God's will is the snow in the mountains above. To ask for God's will and the power to carry it out is to let the snow melt and feel the surge of power swelling the stream into a torrent. I've gotten to the point where it simply can't be any other way. Getting to a point where I can live that simple truth has been scary, but it's becoming less and less so. I'm glad it's happening, that I have had to sustain myself on this journey, that it hasn't been an easier, softer path. I tried it that way. Years ago, I thought it would be easy. I was certain it was easy. And maybe it is, when one finally accepts whatever happens. In my young life, I thought I was blessed.

And so it went, until fear, alcohol, and self-will took over. Then it was increasingly insane, with moments of acceptance. It seems that, at first, my acceptance was innocent and total, then I came upon experience, knowledge, and will, and it became cloudy and broken. Then I began to practice acceptance, and I have been able to re-experience innocence and acceptance. When we grow up, we put away childish things. Unfortunately, we also put away child-like things. Living by my own will results in my giving up my childlike faith and hustling the world for an existence. It's quite simple, really. Hustling for a living is something I'm not good at. It's something I learned how to do, like learning how to tell lies. It doesn't come naturally, but given the talent, one can adapt.

I feel serene. I feel peaceful, since I've begun to give up hustling for a living. I've been smart enough to pass for a successful housepainter. I tried, for twenty-five years,

to follow my passion and to make a living, like everyone else. I mean that faith gives strength that fills out the tight pockets in the spirit; the tight pockets of stinginess that comes from being without resources. Having full pockets is wealth. Prosperity is a state of mind, and even more so, a state of being. I don't feel empty or false, so I don't feel poor. I feel full and true, so I feel rich. By the laws of energy and cosmic balance, this should draw prosperity to me, but that's not the point. Nor is it a given. What I am drawing to me is whatever I need to continue on my path. All I need to do is be alert to the action that's called for.

I'm feeling peaceful and serene, and, at the same time, I'm feeling hungry, scared, and insecure. I've begun to think about the book I sent out to the world. My book is my baby. The things I make from my life and my spirit are my babies. The fear is still there. It's the core fear of my career, the career fear. It isn't the terror that I felt two months ago, or six months ago, but it exists, and it's a good gauge of where my heart is. I'm not frantic or terrified. I keep feeling waves of fear, waves of feeling, rising from the bottom to the top. I think we keep hitting bottom, until we hit the one true bottom, whatever that might be. There are so many people trying to survive, so many souls in this difficult world, it's all I can do to let go and trust that my path is mine. That's all I have, and today is the only day I have to be on my path. I think I'm at a rest point. I need to trust, right now. This moment feels pregnant. It's the moment when things begin.

I've always felt the pull of mythologies. At the same time, I resented Henry Miller for mythologizing his own life. I misunderstood the difference. To accept that one's life is mythological is not to single out and exalt oneself, but to accept that one's life is a small part of a larger whole, that the mythology of my life is identical to the mythology of your life. The shaman/poet does not listen to himself for the message, he listens to the unseen powers, and then he gives the message to others. My alcoholism seemed to negate that path, as if my life as a poet was only the deluded fantasies of a drunk, but in fact alcoholism taught me even more of what I needed to know. I needed to learn that there are demons that will gladly become my higher power, if I'm not clear about them. I stopped drinking when I finally realized I was being killed by that demon. I thought I was stronger than it was, but I was wrong about that. The unseen powers are many, and I needed to learn that. Nearly losing my life has given me great respect for the power of demons. Demons and angels, in some form, are around us all the time, metaphorically,

and it's a kind of myopic self-absorption that we don't respect that presence. I need to pay attention, give thanks, and show respect to the unseen powers. And when I don't know what to do, it's time to meditate, to listen, and to do nothing.

I remember the other times when I felt free and poems were all around me. It was when I was unburdened of having to be something I didn't want to be. I've always wondered how I could achieve and sustain that state of freedom. It is by declaring it so.

### Off the Path of Sanity.

I gave another poet a ride home from a meeting, and we talked about the recovery of our poet-lives. We are both in active recovery for our lives, and we recognize what feels like the responsibilities of continuing our work. It felt good to talk with another poet who is doing the same work, sorting out the differences between compelling work and compulsive habits. It's a world of difference to be driven by the needs of real work, and being driven by self-destructive addictions. To hold to a calling, is freedom. To be addicted, is bondage. I woke up this morning with the old, take-care-of-business attitude, wherein I hitch up my belt, put on my mother's face, get busy, and stop my foolish dreaming. It's easy to slip back from clarity and resolve. I didn't like it that I had food in the house. Worse, I didn't like it that I ate it. I thought I needed to be broke to get on with this work, but I don't want that to be true. I got scared and hungry, yesterday, when I thought about the success of my work. I get in my deepest trouble when I look to my fellow beings for the description of my work. When I do that, I hear too many voices and too little truth. The source of the direction is from higher spirit than mine. I need to practice and hold onto the things that enhance my listening to, and following, higher and clearer guidance than the advice that comes from my neighbors.

I was able to stay in some clarity and work well in the early to mid-70s, and the effects of my alcoholism, willpower, and the state of unrecovered fear knocked me from the path. Fear and willpower engender an endless disease of thinking, a kind of

perpetual nonsanity. The path of spirit and creativity is my sanity. These concerns and doubts are old ones for me.

What the other poet and I were talking about last night is the acceptance that our *poetness* is genuine. Being a poet is not an example of my insanity, as I have sometimes believed. The insanity is anything that blocks or prohibits that true sanity. As a poet, I'm the willing channel of spirit. My personal baggage of fear is the insanity that would have sabotaged my acceptance and therefore my fulfillment. Thank heavens for my habits of recovering my spirit, from the earliest days of writing to my later days of active recovery. My instincts have been good, and they are supported and reinforced by my recovery.

When I drank, I muddied the channels. Drink opened up my channels, but it destroyed any healthy choices I could make about what I let in and what I didn't. A man I didn't like very much, once said to me, "Steve, you're the most open guy I've ever met, but you're open to all the wrong people." He was right, but I thought it was only *people* that I needed to be concerned about. It was also other energies I should have been concerned about, but I hadn't learned that alcohol made me powerless to protect myself from harmful realities as well as harmful people. I felt unprotected, powerless, and misused as a child. And then I was unprotected, powerless, and misused as an out-of-control drunk-poet.

Since I've been able to go back and rescue my child self, he doesn't have to feel unprotected, powerless and misused. Since I've recovered my spirit as an adult, my mature self doesn't need to feel unprotected, powerless and misused. I can feel protected, powerful, and useful. If I didn't believe this, I would give up the sense of my life being anything other than a delusion, populated by fantasies, a pathetic zoo of bad habits and bad advice, or a charade of pretense and manufactured intentions. I have been restored to sanity, not because I was insane, but because I was kept from my sanity. The working of my recovery restores me to the sanity that existed before alcoholism and to the sanity that existed before any dysfunction, and to the sanity that exists in my true self, my true spirit. I'm no more insane because it's occurred in my particular life, than the universe is insane because it contains the same potentials for light and dark victories. The ground of existence is continuously at risk, as I am, but my life can serve to promote balance between the seen and the unseen.

It's important to be in the body. The trick of all this is not to leave the body and seek refuge in the spirit, safe from bodily harm. The trick is to bring spirit into the body, so it's safe from spiritual harm. The body is a good gauge of spiritual harm, by cleaning up the body and by bringing the heart, the emotions, and the senses into harmony, but if the body has been damaged, or if it exists in disharmony with itself, then the risk of bad spirit is there. That means that we can't count on spirit alone to clean up our lives. We have to do it by working to break through the damage done to us and the damage done by us.

This is a world of pain and hurt. Pain and hurt are to be felt, but not to be held. Anyone who is keeping or holding pain and hurt continues at further risk from harmful people and harmful spirit. I can't wish away old pain. It must be felt and released. Blood has to flow through blocked arteries, despite the pain. There is no spiritual bypass. There is no anesthesia. One must let go of the grip that fear has on the veins. Then, the grip is loosened, the clot breaks apart, the blood flows, the body breathes in fresh spirit.

## Hunger Warrior

I woke up from my dreams this morning with resolve. I decided not to turn on the TV. I have used TV to adjust my behavior to the outside world. Adjusting my behavior to others is my first defense against feeling at risk and separate. I did it as an infant with my mother. I identified her expressions and feelings, aped them, and mirrored them, to get her to accept me. Then, as I grew up, I developed my ability to identify with others into an instantaneous adjustment to anyone and anything, to keep myself safe in an unsafe world. Now that I'm re-creating myself, it's important that I risk my true self in the world. That's as simple as coming from my dreams, out into the world, without altering my natural rhythms. I want to repeat this. I spent my life using my gift to sense and mirror the lives of others. Poetry kept me from the abyss of that particular suicide, and recovery has helped me to this point. I still need to risk the primary truth of my life. I

need to nurture and nourish the growth of my true self. That means letting go of my highly polished skills of feigning or feeling any sense of instant intimacy.

As a child, I learned not to feel or accept the intimacy of others but to adapt to and mirror others so well and so quickly, that it seemed as if I had been intimate with them forever. Right now, I'm feeling what it's like when every day is the first day of the rest of your life. This is the way I live in the moment. To live in the true self is to stop adjusting my rhythms to others. I'm a very slow being, on a social level. I've adjusted my personal rhythm, my clock, and my timetable to others. When the world said to go faster, I did. Years ago, I prided myself in being the fastest worker on any job. The rule was, the faster the better. So I went as fast as I could. Then I adjusted back so as not to offend my co-workers. It occurred to me one day that *fast* was the boss's word, not mine. I began to slow down. I needed to stop, entirely.

I decided not to eat any food this morning. It's time I find out what's on the other side of hunger. I've been afraid of hunger. It was my first need that paralleled the abandonment I felt as a child-soul. I need to let the feelings of hunger come into my belly. I had the feeling, as a kid, that my brother's bowl had more in it than mine did. I had to empty his bowl even after mine was empty, and even after I was full. I've never been hungry, except for short periods between meals. My fear is in my belly. I need to let go of the feeling of emptiness, fear, and abandonment. I need to let myself feel hunger. What I eat, to fill out the fear, doesn't work.

I choose to not eat. I choose to feel hungry. I choose to feel whatever I feel when I'm hungry. I choose not to stuff my feelings by stuffing my face. I want to slow down. Always. The slower I go, the better I go. None of this stuff is going away. It is my challenge to continue to do my work, to be myself, to listen to my child-soul, and not readjust my behavior. I'm on the right track. I'm OK. This is scary stuff. I've tried for years to get to this point, but I haven't been ready, much to my disappointment, disgust, or sadness. It's time to be a hunger warrior. I've been a soldier and a pretty good one, but it's time to become a warrior. My soul has always wanted to come into this body at full strength, but I've had to deal with so many obstructions.

## On the Shoulders of my Soul

*Get in touch with your feelings.* That's the perfect horoscope. I'm out of balance. It's an old pattern. I set myself up, yesterday. I bit off more than I can chew alone. I planted a tree, grew it, climbed onto a branch, and sawed it off. I need to be more appreciative of the steps I'm taking. I woke up angry this morning. It's a sign that I was unhappy with my actions. I set several new goals yesterday, and last night I couldn't hold to them. I ate a little, and I watched TV. I couldn't give a thought to this new level of commitment. I went on a break. I took a vacation. I got a little overwhelmed. I'm apprehensive. And so it goes. I need to accept today as its own day. I've been feeling sexual lately. It's good to feel this desire.

I'm still clearing out my mother stuff. I've lived, seemingly forever, under the invisible electro-magnetic umbrella of her will, wit, wisdom, women's intuition, whatever you want to call it. The separation from my girlfriend has helped me to see how I transferred to her the same powers I gave to my mother. As I get closer and closer to my true independence, the old habits click in. Old habits don't want to die. The habits of dependence, of believing that some person has power over me, is being replaced by giving that power to God, where it belongs. God knows my process. It doesn't cause me any resentment to believe that God is the one orchestrating my process from his lofty aerie of psychic wisdom.

My confusion is clearing up. When I felt my anger (and my anger is a sign of my fear) this morning, I immediately began to pray. It was awkward prayer, because I needed it. I was not close to feeling it, so I had to work at it. First comes the feelings, then the awareness of the feelings, then the decision, then the action. I am in the middle of a process that is moving me. I'm closer to fear of the unknown than I've ever been. I'm down to one bag of Top Ramen, some chocolate powder, a quarter jar of ketchup, a bottle of cooking oil, and a quarter bottle of syrup. One of the good feelings I have is that I can no longer borrow money because borrowing implies repaying. Without a source of income, I can't carry through with that kind of agreement.

My mind, the repository of my fears, is racing to scam some money. I only scam when I'm scared. I'm only scared when I don't trust. I used to trust (or want to trust)

people, but my trust is better placed in God and letting God decide how people can work in my life and how I can work in their lives. I need to say this to myself, all day. If experience is a teacher, I'll think of ways to get money. I'll think of schemes, plans, old jobs, new jobs. I'll think of prayerful exchanges, as if God will reward me if only I take the right attitude. A little courier will scurry from cell to cell in my brain, trying to get an answer. He'll ring all the doorbells, with his hat in his hand. I say to you, now, little man, *Take the day off. You're not needed. You can't solve this problem. The answer to your quest is that your quest is over.*

I woke up angry, and I want something good to happen. Something big. I keep getting nickel and dime rescues. I want something big to happen. Then I prayed, "God, give me what I need. If it's only a dollar for coffee and a dollar for gas, that's enough, if that's what I need. I want what I need. When I want more than what I need, I get confused." I think that what I need is the barest minimum to survive. My soul carries different needs than I do. I feel more clear now. I was able for a moment to see the beauty of the guy cleaning the windows of this bakery-cafe, where I sit writing, his pane-size squeegee working the glass. My mind thinks I have needs. I think God has needs beyond my comprehension. But, when I think about my soul's needs, I feel good. I don't feel overwhelmed by the sheer incomprehensibility of the ultimate. My petty concerns are a muddle, and the universe is too big. My soul mediates. My soul is receptive to God's will, and I'm receptive to my soul. My soul is the spirit in my body. I'm closer and closer to letting my soul all the way in. I still have work to do.

That's how I understand God. I can understand God through my soul. I'm willing to let my soul make the decisions for my actions. My soul knows how to orchestrate the power it feels. I don't. My soul, when I give it complete residence in my life, knows what to do and how to do it. I am the child. I'm willing to be raised, taught, guided, counseled, and loved. I'm like a little kid riding on the shoulders of my soul. Sometimes, I think, because my head is higher up, that I'm in charge. I'm sitting on top of the world, but the world is being held aloft by a greater spirit. How can I be in charge?

## Spicy Tomato Soup

Well, I'm in deep shit now. I'm dazed. I ate the last of everything. I heated the half bottle of ketchup with water. Not bad spicy tomato soup. That was dinner. I just got home from a meeting and made chocolate water. Then I finished the last coffee with syrup. All that's left is half a bottle of oil. I dumped the coffee. It was terrible. I'm slowly disintegrating. So far it's not emotional.

I've acted, these many years, as if I had to compromise my passion. Whenever I brought anyone else into this ruse, I used them as my enablers. I encouraged others to help me perpetuate my addiction to compromise, to help me put off embracing my passion. The devil on my left has told me that I cannot be in my passion, that I must compromise, that I must drain off the energy from my passion, that I cannot survive without selling off my time and energy, and I've grudgingly believed that. I'm in a kind of trance-like state. I don't feel physically normal. I'm not sick. I'm not drugged. I'm short of breath and a little gaseous. My stomach feels a little bloated, and my throat is tight. I feel like I do when I'm stuffed. A voice in my head is telling me I'm full of shit. This voice comes alive, whenever I risk. There are those who are obsessively artistic and refuse to work for a living. That hasn't been my problem. I've obsessively worked for a living and refused to be an artist. At any rate, I need to shove on through this time.

I'm operating on junk brains, right now, eating salt and looking half-interested at the oil. I feel frightened in my forehead, around and above my eyes. There's a kind of crazed feeling from not eating. I'm in food withdrawal, I guess. I feel like I do when I go without sleep. I'm putting myself through some real stress. I hope I'm fine. I don't think I've ever allowed myself to feel this hungry, this deprived, except when I was going through withdrawal, but that was when I was sick with alcohol, and withdrawal was not worse than that. This is worse than I felt earlier. I'm starting to feel scared for the next hours. I hasten to say that I will not do worse to stay hungry. (While all this is going on, I'm defrosting the refrigerator.)

## Gibberish Speaks

I feel pretty good. I have a lot of energy. I've been on such a high, lately, that it feels weird to be weird and scared. I trust my practiced ability with words to cover for me as my brain turns to mush. Gibberish would be more accurate. I slept 4 hours, and I thought I was pretty normal when I woke up, but I used to feel that for half an hour after sleeping off a drunk. My language is falling apart. So far, I don't recognize any emotion, except feeling out of it, a little lost, scared, feeling like a bad little boy, wishing I wasn't sickly, feeling apologetic, like I brought this on myself, which I did.

This is the first day I've needed help. That's different. I'm so used to relying on myself to get through hard times. When I'm alone, I'm OK, but when I'm alone and needy, I feel bad. I feel panicky. I felt guilty. I don't think I have a right to be needy. I'm moving real slow. I think about doing something, like changing the channel on the TV, and my finger will hang in the air for a long time, before it finally makes up its mind. This is dumb. My mind is spitting up. My dreams were pleasant. I'm OK. Not crazy. Not brilliant. I feel like a stupid kid who's sick with the mumps or something.

Joseph Campbell said that God wants to come into the body. I like that a lot, although, it seems hard to feel God in my body right now. It feels like a car wreck in here right now. When I feel God in my body, I don't feel spacey, I feel warm and full. Now, I feel cool and empty, like a room with no furniture and no heat, like an empty room in an empty house, when you have to imagine what it's like when people live there. I feel like an empty house. It doesn't matter that it's a nice house, it doesn't feel like a home. I'm going to turn on the heat. That may help. A TV preacher is talking about agape, the selfless love of others. It's been hard for me to understand that my writing isn't only a selfish thing I do for myself. I know, from my reading, the gratitude I feel for the writing of others. I think the act of writing is an act of sharing. I carry, in my writing, a sense of communication, a kind of compassion of shared spirit.

I tell you, that's a whole lot of philosophy, right now. I don't feel it. I feel unable to give anything, right now. I don't feel any energy going out from me. I feel like a drain. I feel guilty when I'm a drain. I felt like this as a drunk. Being a drunk was a way for me to recreate my own self-hatred and self-love, in unhealing ways. I acted out, as a drunk,

the extremes of the feelings that were at war in me for all my life. Six years ago, I was the most drunk I've ever been, and I am now, in healthy ways, living out the things I tried to act out then, when I was using my drunkenness as courage. Back then, I declared myself a poet, and I declared I didn't want to do anything else. I tried to rely on my friends to support me and my dreams. I became verbally abusive, and they told me to go away. I hit bottom, and I quit drinking, deeply ashamed of my behavior. This situation is bringing up all the remorse and guilt, the pain of that time. It confused the issues for me to be drunk at the same time that I finally spoke the dream of my life, to live as a free soul. My drunkenness served to drive me back away from my own truth.

I feel like I did when I was in toxic withdrawal. It's hard for me to justify my life when I'm not able to give anything. Maybe all that this will do, is to help me clear the last grief away from my heart. I need to believe my life is worthy, in and of itself. When I got drunk, I tried to cry out what I'm saying now. Drunkenness recreated my sense of self-hatred, and then I would cry out a protestation of self-love. Eventually, unhealed self-hatred will drown out the feeble cries for self-love. I'm not drunk, and I'm healing the self-hatred I assumed from the beginning, but I feel just like I did when I was a drunk. I feel helpless to take care of myself, and I can't turn to anyone else for help. I feel like I'm out in the wilderness of the soul again, broke and scared. This scary feeling is a common one. I think I can't rely on anyone, other than myself, to get through this life. When I was a baby, it must have felt like this. Physical deprivation is great for low self-esteem. Maybe I'm making this more difficult than it has to be, but nothing else has ever worked. I can't go on compromising my self-esteem. I only hope I'm not sabotaging myself.

## Time Passes

The last two nights, I had wonderful dreams, too numerous to describe. I slept twelve and a half hours last night. When I started this fast I thought it'd bring up a lot of unresolved stuff. Not so far. Maybe I'm clean. Tonight, I felt alone, again. Yesterday, I thought I was in a kind of withdrawal, no different from withdrawal from booze.

## A Strange and Remarkable Day

What a strange and remarkable day. I got up, stressed, scared, stupid, lost, confused. Then it crossed my mind to have my ashes scattered at the Indian Monument in Nebraska that meant so much to me when I was a kid. I normally never think about my death. It was a reassuring ceremony to think about. I feel reassured by the spiritual images I get from my unconscious spiritual heritage, without my seeking it or inheriting it, despite my embarrassed hesitance to embrace it. Tonight was a night for me to, once again, face my history of compromise. I was a painter in college, and I went to graduate school in art. I was planning to move to Chicago and paint. My future wife said she'd love to stretch my canvasses for me, but when we decided to get married, I gave up my dreams as easily as one gives up a seat on the bus.

I got a job teaching school in California. It was a nice job, but it was a compromise of my dreams. Worse, it was a denial of my dreams. I said, *Oh, well*, and I gave up my dreams. I was unable to follow my heart. I was afraid. I was trying to be normal. I was trying to be my father. I sold out. That's the cliché, but rather, I rented out my dreams, without a whimper. I didn't even know I was doing it. The message I had always heard, believed, absorbed, and practiced, was that I could never have what I wanted without pleasing someone else first.

I believed I could be true to myself with half of my energy and pay my dues, pay my bills, and pay my guilt with the other half. So I drank to drown out the half that was meant for pleasing others. Instead of putting all my energy in being true to myself, I split myself, and I then tried to drown the other half, hoping to free the true half. Of course, it didn't work. As I heard someone say, "I traded in a vision for an illusion." By thinking I was paying an unselfish debt to others, I betrayed the gift that should have been offered freely and totally. The very thing I have to give was sacrificed. I'm trying to unlearn many years of self-betrayal, of spiritual betrayal, of social betrayal. This is a painful awareness, and it is a tough nut to swallow. At the same time, it's so obviously the truth, I feel relieved to say it. I'm set free by this truth. At 23, I sold off my dreams. I didn't sell my dreams to alcohol. Alcohol wasn't my undoing. It was only the vehicle for it. Alcohol was there for me. It was a friend who said, "It's OK, Steve, let's put the dreams in

a bottle for a while." Because the dreams were accessible every time I opened the bottle, I thought they were safe.

I had gifts and dreams, and I had no trust I could pursue them. I denied them. I denied my heart. It was easy. I just said, *Nevermind*. It's scary to pursue, as Campbell says, *one's deepest bliss*. I'm lucky I felt my deepest bliss in painting and performing and then in writing. I don't have to find it. I found it early, and I know it. I tried to give it away. I was led to believe that it was improper to feel bliss. My rich aunt told me to practice my bliss as a hobby. My mother told me I was *wasting my life*, practicing my bliss. Alcohol said, *Poor boy, have a drink*. The bottom line is, I gave it away. I pretended I didn't give it away. I pretended I didn't have it. I pretended I didn't deserve it. I pretended I had to buy it back. My father gave away his bliss. His gold. His gift. I emulated my father, even though my bliss was more pronounced, more obvious, even though I was told by my times and by my contemporaries that I should pursue it. I came of age amid the rebellion of the Sixties, and even with that encouragement, I refused to join in. Instead, I did my duty - my duty being to sacrifice my dreams.

So, finally, in '75, I went for it, and I used a lot of alcohol to bolster my nerve. It didn't work. I had the best year of my creative life, and still I didn't believe in my own bliss. My bliss was drowned in fear and booze. I needed to be sober, and I needed to pray for strength, and I needed to give thanks. I'll need to be praying a lot to follow through on this singular life-saving act of my small life. I am not just being facetious. My life is small, but the life of my soul is huge. My details are small, but my spirit is great.

Three years ago, I played the infamous Reverend Jim Jones on stage in Oakland. I had to show some dark energy. It's clear to me that all energies are accessible to all human beings. Most people deny it, or fear it so greatly they've suppressed all but a very narrow range of feeling. The first night of playing Jim Jones came out of the pained and dark heart of my alcoholism. The second night, I had to work very hard to recreate the character. I'd been able to exorcise a lot of the darkness from my soul. I was able to let it go.

I don't believe alcohol created the darkness in my human heart. The darkness exists. Alcohol opened me to the dark. It unprotected me. It's good to accept that each

of us is all of us. But alcohol lets the dark side throw the balance. I'm glad I understand how accessible we all are to the dark side, but I'd rather not have nearly died to know that.

## Last Day of the Fast

This is the beginning of the last day of my fast. I have very little energy left to do this. I want to finish a week, but I don't see what the point is, other than that I'll be able to say I did it. Oh, well, I get to find out. I thought some great cathartic apotheosis epiphany would take place. Instead, I've had diarrhea and lost a few pounds, which is great, but I put pepper in my chicken broth, and my diarrhea burned like hell last night. Things have been happening to me the last couple of days, but now I'm so out of it, I can't feel much of anything. I hoped that some magic might come out of this fast, but perhaps the magic awareness is that magic comes from sanguine health, not from deprivation. If I kept this up, I'd only be dried up, dried out, and dead, just like I'd have been as a drunk. I'm ready to enjoy food and life.

## Nothing Left But Tea

This is the last day of my fast. Last night, before sleep, I did something I heard a woman say she did. She said she prayed simply, every night, that the next day she be shown God's will. She said she seemed to remember that when she woke up. I liked the idea of planting that feeling in my heart each night, so I said that prayer. I woke up feeling calm and positive. I'm watching a guy on TV say that nothing can ever give the little kid in him what he missed, even though his father loves him now, as an adult. I don't agree. I think my little boy can be loved. By me, if not by others. I can love my little baby and my little boy. And he can feel it. And believe it.

## The Baby in the Road

I feel exactly like I did when these feelings first came back. It's the abandonment again. My fast has turned into will-power. I'm over the fast. Now, there's no strength left. I feel alone and helpless. I feel like I'll never be taken care of on any level that fills the emptiness in my heart. This is the hardest time, to trust God when all is dark. In my heart, I've always felt like a baby abandoned in the middle of a road in the middle of the night, in the cold and dark, in danger and alone, helpless and at risk. My feelings have come back full force, and I haven't felt these fears since January. Maybe I've been living in a fool's paradise, like I did when I was a kid, wanting to believe that my life was good and safe, full of love and comfort. I think about Job, who, after losing everything, for years and years, still loved God. After God had abandoned him and treated him abominably, he still loved God. It reminds me how I still love my parents. And I still love God. Partly, I think, because I'm scared not to. I was afraid that if I didn't love them, God and my parents would take away even the illusion of love.

*God, I don't love you, if you don't love me.* That's an absurd joke. I still love my parents. I want to run away. But there's nowhere to run. I want to call someone, but there's no one to call. I put my arms around my chest, and I cry. I go to the mirror, and I look in my eyes, and all I can say is, "I want you to feel safe. I want you to feel loved. I want you to be taken care of. I don't want you to feel alone and cold and scared and hungry." I haven't been able to trust any words of faith. I'm so hungry in my mouth, in my heart, in my body. I don't know about my soul. My soul is disconnected, when I'm feeling so deprived. I feel guilty about this. There's an angry voice in my head that tells me it's all my fault. If I wanted so much, I should just go out and get it. Nobody is going to do it for me.

When I was drinking and suffering from it, I knew instinctively that only a vision could carry past the emptiness, the drowning, the dying. My feeling is sadness, so much sadness, so much grief. So I guess I have to release even more darkness. I am hurt-angry, abandoned-angry. I could have sworn I was through anger. There's old anger, old grief. Help me, God. I think what's happening now is that I've gone out of my body again. I couldn't stand the emptiness in my body. I feel numb. But, the feelings very close. It's odd, but I can't suppress an odd twinkle in my eyes. I feel drained of anger.

*I give up*, seems to be the only appropriate expression. I couldn't give up when I was a kid. I could only try harder. Trying harder is obsessive. It's like taking a drink. One effort begins it, and there's never enough. I've been trying hard all my life. I want to stop trying so hard. It makes me cry. I feel so bad. I can't ever be good enough. I think I failed. Again. I can't please God. Supposedly, God loves me, no matter what. I've gone into recovery with the same heritage of trying hard. It's been a battle of hard work and letting go. This all comes down to simple love. Can I just love my self, and can I let God love me? And can I keep loving others, and let others love me? All I can do right this minute is continue to love that little boy, who's still there, inside.

*I love you, little Stephen. I love you, little Stephen.* I got my stuffed mountain goat from the bedroom, that my girlfriend gave me. It's like me. It's a baby mountain goat, with soft fur and big, curly horns. It has a nice, soft smile and dark, gentle eyes. It smells good. His name is Dakota. I'm letting go of trying so hard. I'm just a kid. When I hold Dakota real tight against my chest, it feels good. I hold him real tight, and I feel good. I had a teddy bear when I was little. My son had a teddy called *Ted Bear*, and I loved him, too. My son is coming here tonight, and I used to hold him, too. He made me feel good. It's good to hold Dakota real tight, because he doesn't mind at all. He likes me to hold him tight. He waits, when I don't hold him. He wants me to hold him. I can even write and hold Dakota at the same time. It's my heart that needs to be held. My heart feels cold around it.

I'm starting to love holding Dakota, under my chin, over my heart, and to hold my face against him. I've never been one of those guys who kept a teddy bear, but I could, maybe. I can breathe better when I have Dakota with me. I'm not so cold. I need to fill the hole in my heart with love. I need to find the love in my own heart. If I hold Dakota and love little Stephen, he feels better, and if he feels better, I get to be stronger. This is what this is all about. I'm saving my life. I need to let little Stephen have the day. I have been nickel and diming this basic need all my life, hoping that it would all just work out.

It seems to me that healing is viewed as something to be done on the side, to be gotten over with, to be gotten out of the way. At least, that's my personal history and my perspective. I have never had the time to heal. I've had to fit it all together. I've had to do everything at the same time. I've never been able to pull it off. It does feel good to

give up the dreams of pleasing others. It doesn't feel good to give up the dreams of being myself. My dreams are not of writing journals. My dreams are of being allowed to do the creative work that's fed by the will of God.

## Changing Gears

I feel better. I called a friend, who's a painter. Talking to someone who shares the same sense of things always helps. The only way to do it is to get out of the way and let it happen. I think I'm just changing gears. I think it's time to take action.

## Bursting the Bubble of Grace

It's easy to trust God when one is living in a bubble of grace, as I have been for a long time. This last week, I felt deserted by God. I've been trying to be angry at God, but my habit, as always, is to blame myself. In a way, it feels good, to be where I am. The thing that scares me is what happens when I have no food. I become deprived, and I'm useless. I have one goal. When I hear any contrary voices, I feel even more determined. I don't want self-pity. I'm choosing this. I'll take it. This is between me and God. My problem of the last few days is that I thought it was over, because I wanted it to be over. It's not over. This is bigger and wiser than I am. I got my Bible down and began reading the book of Job. Job, despite his miseries, refuses to cut himself off from the roots. I'm doing this so that I can embrace my deepest bliss in my heart and in my soul.

## No More Pacifiers

The last pacifier I have to let go of, is my habit of creating the illusion that all is well, no matter what the circumstance. I used my imagination to create trust where none existed, to feel love where none existed. It is the thing I depended on, more than anything. I was able to see what I wanted to see, no matter what the truth was. I've peeled away layer after layer of illusion. It's good that I want to love everything and everyone, but what if I don't have to love? What if I can feel true love without the effort? Without the compulsion? I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I took it out and saw that it was an illusion, but I was used to sucking on it, so I put it back in. I've been sucking on air, on an empty nipple. This is my opportunity to let the true love out, and can the rest.

## In Control and Out of Control

All I want is perfect freedom in my heart. I accept the addiction of God's will. It's perfect, because it's never predictable. I chose alcohol in order to control my life. I chose alcohol to be in control, and it controlled me. I chose God's will to be controlled by it, and it doesn't control.

## To Parent Myself

I love my parents unconditionally. They gave me some things and denied me others, and yet I continued to love them. Should I love God any less? I love God unconditionally. I love God. It doesn't matter if God loves me, or treats me badly, or treats me well in some areas, badly in other areas, and not at all in other areas. I love God. God lives in me, in my body, in the life of a man. I love my children, in their being other than me. I'm in my

children, but I don't control them. I recognize them and honor them. I love them, and my love goes toward them, but they're separate from me, and I can't control their lives. I'm the child of a God who doesn't need me to fulfill his needs. He doesn't depend on me. God's love is ready to fill me. That power is ready to fill me. But God doesn't need me to fulfill a lack in him. No matter if I try to fulfill the needs of God, he doesn't need me. My efforts are fruitless and unnecessary.

I tried to fill the needs of my parents. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't succeed. They can fill their own needs. God's needs are already filled by the nature of his being. God is complete. God is my parent who has no needs. I don't need to fill God's needs. No matter how hard I try, it's fruitless and unnecessary. God provides love and strength, because that's the nature of his being. I may receive God's love and strength, if I'm able to. If I had the same experience with my parents, I wouldn't have such a hard time understanding the simple fact of its occurrence. My history has not prepared me for such unconditional, uncontroled gifts. Love and strength are not listed in events or material things. My parents gave conditionally, and I believed that the things I received from them were predicated on certain behaviors. God doesn't operate like most human parents.

This is part of my process of re-parenting. I'm beginning to feel the feelings of protection and support for my true self. I've always been shy and apologetic about my true self, because I felt no support for it, like a child on his own in the big, bad world. There's a fierceness that comes when a child is threatened. I'm beginning to feel that fierceness. I'm beginning to feel the unconditional love that comes from God. I am beginning to offer the unconditional love to my true self that a loved parent feels for its loved child.

## Confidence

Today, I felt a sort of fierceness against illusion. The fierceness comes when I believe I don't need to act on the illusion, that all is well, when all is not well. That comes

from a protectiveness over the innate goodness of my true self. And that is to love the child that is the source. To thine own self be true. And that is to accept God's will. The bottom line is to accept and embrace my own life, regardless of the contraries. I'm able to do that from a place in my heart. It seems amazing that I should have difficulty doing this, after all the bold and outrageous things I've done in my life, but this comes, not from bravado, but from inherent faith. Not much has changed, but everything has changed. I used to do similar things, but my insides are different. I'm more at peace with my actions. I've been bold in my actions before, but the wraparound energy of life is important to all bold action. Confidence is becoming a part of my life. I respond to action that is backed by confidence. I trust action that's grounded in the confidence that comes from being at peace with oneself.

## The Life-Force

The hardest challenge is to live without illusion. Ten years of hard-eyed drinking didn't change that. It's one thing to be beaten down. It's another thing to see clearly. This is a big day. If this day had ended at noon, it would still have been a big day. I had a wonderful time yesterday and today, just being myself, without my internal hype machine. My son is visiting. I noticed his wonderful life-force. I must have had the same thing when I was his age. I still have it, but it's different. Age has changed it. I can't remember it, because it was just the way I was. I assumed everybody felt it, because I felt it. As I got older, I tried consciously to tone it down. It existed before alcohol. It existed in school, where I was safe. It's an innate vitality that ought not be squelched. A lot of kids have it. I'm the father of my innocence. I've been the mother, and now I'm the father. Some day, I'll be the old man in this world, but I'm here now. My soul is pleased. I used to call my soul *the poet*. I'm opening the internal doors to allow my poet-soul into my poet-self.

## The No-Mask Face

I need an image to hold for myself in this business of seeing the world without illusion. Four years ago, on a visit to *Esalen* in Big Sur, a group of us came upon a father and his baby. The baby was riding high, in a back-pack. He was the most immediate baby I'd ever seen. His face was like a speeded up, time-lapse photo map of changing atmospheric conditions. It went from dark and stormy to overcast to cloudy to broken clouds to partly sunny to brilliant sun, in a matter of milliseconds, back and forth, constantly changing, depending on his feeling of the moment. There was not one instance of hesitation or falsity. His face was a true expression of his heart.

I have an expressive face. The problem is in the willingness to stay connected to my feelings. I have used my face to mask my feelings, to imitate the feelings of others, and to show feelings other than the true ones. The challenge, then, is simple; to let this mobile, expressive face, express the feelings of my true self. I don't have to have a blank mask. I've used a blank mask, in the past, to break free from the false expressions of imitation. But it, too, is a mask. There is another face, that I saw on the baby at *Esalen*. It's the face at rest, at peace. It is to be open to the feeling and not prepare the expression, but allow it.

This process of masking has been so developed in me, that it's almost instantaneous. My reaction-expression is highly developed and habitually ingrained. The response to my own true feelings is still awkward and unpracticed. That's why I need an image to reinforce the change. The baby, with his father, on the gravel road, going down toward *Esalen*, is a good one for me. I need to reverse my habitual flow. Not from the external in, but from the internal out. The baby was reacting to the world, and all babies learn by mimicking those around them. But, they're learning *ways* of expression, not *laws* of expression. Some message, in the teachers of my baby life, said to me, *Don't learn from me, learn me. Don't use my ways to express your truth, learn my ways to learn me!* I was good at learning, and the message was overpowering.

The new message is, Let go of the old ways. They served you well, in their time. You did what you could. Now, it's time to learn the new ways. Take the new tools and practice the new ways. Poetry served me in the process of allowing feeling to occur, but

it was always an event, not common, almost rare. Now, I can believe, from evidence, that it is the way of truth, and not just the occasion for it. That Esalen baby was living 24 hours a day in his truth, not in helpless need but in free communication, in openness, willingness, and honesty. That baby was a teacher.

## Going Back to Work

And God said to Job, *Look, pal, the things that are done to you are neither punishment nor reward. Get it straight, it's just life. I am the source of life. Punishment and reward are your concepts, not mine. Guilt and pride are yours, too. I offer life. You can receive it or deny it. It's your choice. Let me know when you reach a decision.* I went to work this morning and worked for three hours, doing very little real work. It wasn't my idea. There was very little to do. I did spill part of a gallon of paint on new tiles. Someone didn't put the lid on tight, the day before. My boss gave me a small advance. There were too many workers, stumbling over each other.

I felt removed from the usual banter and byplay. Talking to my friends on the job, I told them what I was doing. I said, indicating the work-place, "I know this. I know how to do this, and I'm just learning how to do the other. In the past, I'd do this all day, and then go spend two hours trying to do the work I love. I would spend an hour and a half coming down from this to do a half-hour's work. And that half an hour would be affected, or infected, by all this."

I told them it was as if I'd just gotten out of a treatment center, and I'd come straight to a very toxic environment, like a dry alcoholic in a bar. I know how to act in the bars of my life, but I'm just learning how to live differently. It's only been a couple of months that I've been in this full recovery. I'm not ready to take on the toxicity. The key to full recovery is for me to keep doing what I love. I need to nurture and protect the baby. I picked up my baby, and now I don't want to drop him. I felt a real, strong sense of the baby. I don't want to drop it.

Last night, when I accepted the offer of work, I was afraid I would go to work and give it all up, like I have before, but it turned out to be impossible for me to give it all up. I felt so good this morning, when I drove off to work. I accepted the possibility that this could all be a joke, and I could give up the ghost without so much as a whimper, that this journey was only piss and moan to kill a winter's day. It was scary to feel so good, like the cheerfulness of the condemned man. *Ha. Ha! What's death?* A little relief and resignation, like giving up the hard work of sobriety for the *fuck-it* of drinking, *I'm not worth it. It isn't worth it. Nothing is worth it.* It's hard work to stop addictive behavior that has functioned in one's life for a long time.

With others, last night, I said, "I may not look like I'm doing well, but I am. I may not have anything to show for it, but I'm on the path, and I'm in for the duration." I felt a burst of victory over the negative voices, inside and out, that might wish me to stop. Today, one of my fellow workers said, "At least *you're* doing something! Go home, *right now!*" My true child beamed, and my eyes went bright. When I quit drinking, one of the first things I had to deal with was all the people who liked me as a drunk. And those who were afraid of change. If I changed, they might have to look at their own lives in a new way.

When I went back into the bar where I'd been a regular, after I quit, four years ago, I was met by three reactions. At first, I heard, *You look great. I'm glad you quit. Good for you!* Then it was, *I'm probably going to have to quit. I'm having problems with booze, myself.* And then I was met by strained, polite silence, as if to say, *Shit, what're you doing here? Your sobriety is making my life unpleasant. Go away.*

If I continue to stay away from the addiction of avoidance, I may push the same buttons. One friend said to me, last night, "You still selling off your life?" He came up to me later and said he was sorry he'd said it. I shouldn't be surprised if I hear remarks similar to that; strained, polite sarcasm, or silence, weighted down with fear. The proximity of change is threatening. I need to support myself in the process, before I can expect support from anyone else. The process of letting go of the addiction of familiar behavior and embracing the sober life of one's deepest bliss, is even more threatening than not drinking is. It requires a firm resolve and the company of equally committed people. I used booze to come to the same conclusions, years ago, but I couldn't practice what my heart was preaching. I'm trying to find a word for the life we lead when we don't

pursue our deepest bliss. *Normalcy* is not the word. It could be *Avoidance, Denial, Sublimation, Slavery, Fear, Hiding Out, Living in Potential, Waiting, or Killing Time*. I don't want to kill time. I want to nurture it.

## Developing An Aversion

I got a letter yesterday from an old friend, a guy I knew thirty years ago, in high school. A couple of months ago, I called him and we talked. It was a terrific reunion. I felt I was talking to an equal, a compatriot. He said he was prosperous, after years of poverty. I wrote him, a while later, and asked him about the possibility of financial assistance. He wrote back, saying that he couldn't offer any finances. He said that it reduced to God's distinction between belief and faith. "Belief accepts his word. Faith puts yourself at risk on it. I believed all you said, still do. But one conversation isn't enough for faith - loaning money. I know who you were, I don't know who you are now. Sure hope your book comes out. Let me know how things are going, if you can."

It's one of the best letters I've ever received. It's the kind of letter I hope I would write. I called him on the phone and told him so. I said I always felt good about him, and I was right. He was happy to get my call. He'd been worried about his letter. He told me his first impulse had been to send the money, but something made him stop. I told him I'd been almost happy he hadn't sent the money, because I needed to feel my own process, and the money might have provided a way to avoid that. He said that maybe I had told him not to send the money. I said I wouldn't be surprised if that were true.

My addiction to financial insecurity has kept me from pursuing my dreams, my true path. It's an inherited habit. My father told me many times, in different ways, that he had to give up his dreams in order to make a living. So I created financial needs that I met by working at things I didn't love. I never made enough money to get as entrenched as my father got. I learned from him. He has professed bankruptcy ever since I was in college. I think he needed the fear of poverty to keep him working at false work.

I came home from a meeting and called my boss and told him I couldn't do it anymore. He said, "Oh, you've developed an aversion." I like that. Then he said that, even as deep as he was in his own denial, he could appreciate what I was doing. Amazing. I woke up this morning, like the dawn of a new day. I feel a new peacefulness. I did it. I turned down work. Last year, at this time, I worked fifty hours straight for a man I found repulsive, so that I could pay my rent on time. I remember driving down the street on the last day, and thinking, "This isn't so bad. I can do this." A wave of revulsion shook my body like a California earthquake. I used to pride myself in seeing how much abuse I could take. I could have made a great Marine.

One of the things my high school friend remembered about me, was the negative way I was treated by my classmates. His feeling was that they despised me for my intelligence and my talent. He said they dealt with it by acting superior to me. I remember those days, when I tried very hard to act dumber and clumsier than I was. I remember learning to mumble, slur my words, and swear. I remember acting and feeling the same way with my father. He thought it was my mother's influence. He put me down, and I felt like an egg-head sissy. So I became an athlete and then a bold drunk. I've never been able to completely change my true colors, or to completely squelch my gifts.

My friend reminded me that the qualities that were given to me, are admired by most, but are equally despised by them. I remember a poet friend, years ago, who was exceptional with words and music. We were sitting around, and the talk turned to discrimination against minorities. He suddenly became incensed. *Minorities, minorities, I'm a fucking minority! I'm a fucking genius, and everybody treats me like a leper,* or words to that effect. I was amused and moved to hear the truth. It is widely assumed that gifted people have it made. The very assumption points out the ignorance and the prejudice.

We talked about *the free man*. I want to be a free man. I feel capable of being a free man. My friend said the world admires the free man, but it will try to kill, him at the same time. Martin Luther King, Jr. comes to mind. He was a free man. When he said he had been to the mountain, I believed him. I had never believed anyone who ever said that. And he was dead, within the course of twenty-four hours. It's not an absolute. I don't want to die as soon as I'm free, but it requires some care. I would hope that my recovery

would keep me grounded in my connection to others. It's not *being gifted* that frees us, it's accepting the gift of freedom, a gift that's freely given to the gifted and the ungifted. I want to be able to accept my true nature. If that means acknowledging my gifts, then that's what I want, but I also want to acknowledge, and accept, the gift of spiritual freedom that is offered to all of us.

I'm exactly the same as everyone else. There's not a dime's worth of difference between us in God's eyes. I don't need to fight my fellow man or woman, or my father, to accept myself. I need to remember the common link and accept the dark struggle of others, as I have my own. My mother's resentment was not that I was gifted. She expected me to be gifted. I think her resentment was that I was male and gifted. She had to squelch her gifts for all the reasons I felt, plus the fact that she is female. She resented me for the advantage I have in being male in a male-dominant society. And I'm white, and I'm nice-looking. None of which is under my control. What I've done all my life is try to be less white, less attractive, less intelligent, less talented, less knowledgeable, and less male. And less female. Less is more, when it comes to pleasing the expectations of others. The less I am, the more selfish I become. The less I am, the more resentful I become.

I'm a gifted human being, and I've been trying to hide that fact, or deny it, or apologize for it. Or, and here's a kicker, I've tried to reshape it into some socially acceptable and/or commercial form, all my life. I've heard every kind of advice about what to do with my gifts. Rarely, if ever, have I heard. *Let it grow, let it become whatever it's supposed to become.* I've tried to give myself that advice by reading and identifying with the biographies of Keats, Gauguin, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Dylan Thomas, D.H. Lawrence, and any other artist I can find who could serve as an example. And I drank. When I drank, I let out the free man. That's probably why the guy said, "You're the freest man I've ever known." But I didn't feel free. I was imprisoned by the very thing I used to help free me.

My friend from back home said, "He must have caught a glimpse of the free man." My life was caught up in glimpses and sightings. Poetry and alcohol allowed me to feel, in odd moments, the nature of my true spirit. I was able to trick down my defenses, occasionally, until finally it became the only thing I desired, and the way became ever

more narrow, and the path more and more treacherous. It became a question of life and death. Literally, I could choose either the life of my soul, or the death of my soul. I chose the life of my soul, and gradually, all that I had, has been restored, and now I'm on the brink of having my dreams fulfilled. Perhaps, I'm already over the brink.

## The Captain of the Wind

I'm stepping into the role of healthy example, or at least, a healthy example of someone who became himself, who was, to his own self, true. I don't see how I can do otherwise. I could fall short of others' example, but I can't fall short of myself. Prayer is the ultimate act of the individual. It's the only way one person can talk to, and listen to, the power that informs the universe, without direction or inhibition from anyone or anything else. And poetry is the codification of prayer. I just made that up.

*Is this a real poem, or did you just make it up?* someone once said. *Is that a real prayer, or did you just make it up?* Both, my child. Both, my father. I need to disengage from the delusion that I was never worthy of my parents' acceptance. I couldn't gain their acceptance, *despite* my worthiness, not *because of* some imagined unworthiness. It's the dominating dysfunction in my heart. I believe in myself, but my faith is easily shaken, and when it is, I become defensive and offensive. This is not easy work, to disengage from one's protective dysfunction.

I talked about my mother and father, last night, with my kids, and I found myself telling stories of praise and recognition about them both, especially my mother. Both my children have now seen me when I wouldn't and couldn't pretend that I was safely ashore, when in fact, I'm lashed to the mast in a perilous sea. My craft is sturdy, and my journey is destined, but the risks are real. I'm the captain of my ship, but I'm not the Captain of the Wind.

## All at Once, In Moving, I Am Still

It's Saturday, the day before Easter Sunday. Today is the day between the crucifixion and the resurrection. I'm in my own cave, with the rock in the doorway. Death and rebirth is a strong myth in my life. I'm back in the eye of the storm. I feel protected, again. I did something nice for myself last night. I did nothing. I slept twelve hours. I hadn't slept much in three days. I knew I was tired. I didn't listen to my thinking. I knew my thinking was toxic. I watched TV, read a little, ate dinner, went to bed, and I slept. Sleep is important to my well-being. I need food, sleep, and affection.

If I don't get them, I go into the kind of deprivation that triggers my addictive impulses. I need to feed the baby, not the addiction. I need to reassure and rest the baby, not the addiction. I need to love the baby, not the addiction. In our history, children are reconnecting with their parents. For a while there, the connections were severed. For the salvation of the human heart, it was necessary. My parents' generation seems lost. They seem, with some exceptions, to be of another time and unable to make the transition to re-birth. They seem to be walking relics of a failed era, the Industrial Revolution finally come to an end. It's time to rejoin with our ancestors of the pre-industrial time, to forgive our recent fathers and mothers, to be reborn in the heart, to be at peace with the planet. It's a little of the back-to-earth idea, but it's more the *back-to-one's-true-nature* idea.

For hundreds of years, we ran the planet on self-will and willpower, and it's been a botch, just like the self-will of an alcoholic. It's time to sober up from our three-hundred-year drunk, take inventory, make amends, make peace with that power greater than ourselves, and come to a spiritual awakening. It's easy. It's hard work. It may require an ugly bottom. Maybe humanity has one last drunk in it, and it will either die or be reborn. You can't convince a drunk he's sick. The voices of reform sound preachy and full of self-righteousness. This is the external/internal war of change.

It's the question of my days to no longer compromise, but to do so for life and not for death. I have the willingness to give up compromises that I have always thought were necessary to live in an unsupportive world. I'm a creative spirit, but I have an addictive fear and a compulsion to give up my true nature, in order to get along with

others. I don't want to do that anymore. It's my codependency, and it'll kill my spirit if I let it. I need those who love me for who I am, not for what I do. If what I do comes from who I am, then I've done all I can.

I'm sitting here in this busy café, with my free hand covering my eyes. I've touched a truth. I can't pursue life, or love, or myself, in compromise. I must have what is true, true work, true love, true self. Illusions have kept me from my truth. I accepted illusions and practiced illusion. No more.

*I am permeated by an unaccustomed sense of well-being, a peacefulness in the midst of a warring climate. This time, the eye of the hurricane is not an emptiness at the center of turbulence, but a calm, an identification in the senses with all that is. I think to make some metaphor of the world, yet the sense is not of the world, but of the ease and warmth of that blooded animal that walks in it. I am that man who breathes, whose heart holds the limbs in embrace, unbroken by thought. All at once, in moving, I am still.*

## Let the Baby Speak

When I do such a simple thing as say, "Thy will, not mine, be done," or when I say, "God, this day belongs to you," then I wonder what the day has in store, instead of wondering what I'm going to do. It's Easter Sunday, a day like any other day. The sun comes up every morning, whereas the *son* came up, this particular morning. A little religion joke. There are musicians playing in the café. It's an old-timey country trio of bass, guitar and fiddle. And, it's not as crowded as I anticipated. I slept very little. I was filled with anticipation. It is the end of this journal, and winter is over, and today is the day of resurrection. I could talk about all the wonderful feelings and revelations I had last night, but the energy is moving somewhere else. It's time, once again, to have no purpose. Keats said that discontent with half-knowledge causes us to let go of the truth and beauty that exists in mystery, uncertainty, and doubt. The need to know everything there is to know drowns out the innocence of the moment. It's time for me to be innocent

again and let go of my knowledge. I'm safer now, to be innocent, of mind, of heart, of being. It is the true home of poetry. Let the baby speak.

## Completely Begun

It's been a week since I thought I was complete with this journal. Of course, the idea of completing the journal meant being complete with the work of the journal. I'm sure now that that's true. I didn't know until last night. Until then, it felt complete, and yet it didn't. Events began to shift. Events have a way of showing me where my energy is. The most significant event came Friday morning. Thursday night, I went to the play that a friend was in. After the play, he introduced me to a woman who, is well-known in the literary world and acts as a literary agent. By agreement, I gave her a copy of the story of the boy and the drunken woman, and she said she'd get to it next week. I've come so clearly to accept that I have no control over life as I wish it, that I let go of her response. She called me the next morning and told me she thought it was very good. She agreed to represent me as my literary agent.

My landlord called and agreed to have me paint the building I'm living in. So my rent is paid up, retroactively, currently, and into the future. I realize, apart from these events, how love is defining me. Since December 10th, when I rented my apartment, I've been on a self-defined myth-journey. It felt as if I have been to the dungeon of a great, bleak, dark castle, ruled over by a dark queen. I went on a perilous journey to rescue a baby, my baby, me. I've completed the journey. I saved the child. I brought the child out. And, I did it by concentrating on the baby, not on the dark queen. She had power over me for forty-seven years. I tried to slay the witch. I'd slain her, over and over, again and again, and I had never saved the child. Finally, by thinking only of the baby, I overcame the power of the dark queen.

Friday night, I went to bed at 2AM, hoping to sleep until 9, and then go play soccer. I woke up at 3AM. Wide awake. So much for my plans. I thought about prayer. I was afraid. I was afraid because my dreams are coming true. I have the approval and

support of someone, a woman, not coincidentally, whose opinion and support could affect my life. I was afraid to believe it. And yet, I knew it was genuine. I needed to tell my true child that he will be allowed to be himself. I may not be able to be what I want, but I can be what I am. I reached for Dakota, my stuffed baby mountain goat, my little Stephen, and I held it to my chest. I hugged it, and held it tight, and I did something I've never done before. I said, out loud, "I love you, Stephen." I got choked up with tears. It felt great. I lay in bed, and I said it over and over. I said it so that I could hear my voice, by talking into the pillow, or toward Dakota, or into my hand, cupped for my ear to hear.

## I Love You, Stephen

Stephen is the name I was called as a child. I never use it. Whenever I say *Stephen*, I hear my mother's voice in my voice. I feel her presence. In the past, whenever I heard her voice, I said to the presence in the room, *Go away, get lost, go to hell*, or words to that effect. Instead of saying that, this time, I simply repeated, "I love you, Stephen," and I heard my voice. I heard me say it, and I heard it said to me. I said it to the baby. Each time I said it, my mother's voice lost control of my spirit, and my voice filled out the spirit. The spirit of Stephen filled the space of my heart, completely.

I felt a surge of love and recognition. I said my whole name. I had said it over and over, emphasizing different words. *I* and *Love* and *You* and *Stephen*. I said it in different voices, different tones. As I told the story, I realized that the journey had been completed. I went on a journey to find the child, I found him, I brought him back, and he's here with me now. I won out over the dark queen by concentrating on the baby. It's so simple and so amazing. The dark queen lived in my mind. The witch kept her power by making me think she was the problem, by my believing she was the problem. She may have been the problem, but she was not the solution. The solution was not to be found by dwelling on her. The solution is not in the problem. It's like it was when I faced the demon of alcohol. Even after I had cut it out of my life, it wanted back in. It had been in charge for a long time, and it didn't want to give up control either. But, in both cases, the

demon loses, when I concentrate on love of my true self, in God's love and in my own love. I had only switched demons. Both had said they loved me. Both promised me everything. Both told me how wonderful I was, and both demanded total allegiance to their needs.

After the meeting, last night, several men came up to me and thanked me for saying what I did, because they're trying to do the same kind of work. Nobody's journey is exactly the same. I hope my journey helps others accept the challenge of their own journeys. It's possible to rescue the lost child. One man said to me, "My kid is afraid. I've ignored him for so long. He doesn't trust me. He keeps poking his head out, to see if it's OK to come out, but he still doesn't trust me. It keeps getting better and better, though."

Just keep talking to him. Keep telling him and showing him that you love him. Listen to him. Listen to the things he's been unable to tell anyone else, in the way that he's been unable to speak to anyone else. He wants to talk to you, and he wants you to talk to him and listen to him. He wants to come home. And he will, if you keep your heart open to him. Show him he's loved. *I love you, little one. I love you, whoever you are.*

I was wide awake at 3:30AM, so I read Jack London's *Call of the Wild*, the whole thing, some of it, out loud. My kid loved it. So did I. It's a great story.