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Introduction

The purpose of writing my memoirs is twofold; 1) To record important snapshots of my life for my family and others to better know the real me and perhaps gain something of lasting value from my past joys, sorrows and life lessons, and 2) To help remind me of my life purpose, my fond and not-sofond memories so far. Writing down my memoirs also helps expose my hidden shadow self which can reduce or remove its power over me.

Saint Augustine said, "Know thyself." To invest time reflecting upon what is most important to me in life can be healing. My life review also helps me resolve any fractured relationships, bitterness or lack of forgiveness of which I may not have let go.

Our precious children, grandchildren and greatgrandchildren need true elders who will help teach them how to overcome adverse circumstances by learning more about how we overcame them.

Lastly, understanding *why* what has happened in my small life *matters* helps me focus on my larger, true life purpose: *Practicing unconditional love towards everyone and everything*. I hope to be remembered for this when my life on earth ends.

1. When I grow up

As a youngster, my first recollection of what I would like to do was influenced heavily by my favorite TV shows like; Gilligan's Island, which brought to mind notions of learning how to survive living on a beautiful deserted island relying only on nature and my wits.

TV shows like Leave it to Beaver seemed to illustrate that being mischievous was both fun and had consequences.



Andy of Mayberry, which starred my fellow elementary schoolmate Ron Howard. The show gave me the desire to live in a small town, rather than a suburb of LA. It seemed like a simpler lifestyle less stressful and always a happy ending.

My favorite show was The Man from UNCLE because it had lots of intrigue. I imagined living life as an international secret agent, like Napoleon Solo, who seemed the most exciting of all. I got my brother Kevin to play my perfect sidekick Illya Kuryakin, complete with his blonde hair he played a supportive role on all of our secret missions. I remember spending hours cooking up missions that would take us from throwing dirt clods in empty lots to shooting at phantom enemies with plastic guns in abandoned buildings. We would, of course, always emerge as the victors and then head back home before dark and get ready to watch another episode on television.

I had several childhood jobs like mowing lawns and occasional babysitting, but those didn't seem to be jobs that would be in my future, they just allowed me to make a little extra money.

So far school failed to inspire me regarding what vocation I might be best suited for. It wasn't until my 13th birthday, when I was given my first guitar, that I began to dream of becoming a famous musician in a rock band. So I then set off to teach myself to play some of the popular songs of the mid-1960s like Pipeline, House of the Rising Sun and Michelle by the Beatles.

It would be a decade later before I played well enough to help lead music worship in small groups at church, but my lifelong love affair with making music was off and running. Five years later, at age 18, I accepted a job selling magazine subscriptions door-to-door. This was my introduction into the challenging world of direct sales.

I enjoyed meeting a variety of new people and trying to figure out which magazines best suited their hobbies. My success in sales led me to believe the whole world could be my oyster. I enjoyed finding new and creative ways to overcome objections. I learned the value of time management early on and the value of hard work - lifelong lessons that would serve me well.

2. David: does my name fit?

I, Michael David Bradshaw was born in Sacramento California on February 22, 1953. My given birth names seemed to be a good fit with my unfolding personality.

Michael means "one who resembles God" and David means, "beloved or favored." As the first born child, my Mom Virginia and father Cecil did love me very much and perhaps thought I had reminded them in some way of the innocence of God.



As a toddler I remember being pretty clumsy, so I'm sure they may have questioned how I would turn out later. I was also a pretty busy baby and remember hearing a harsh corrective "Michael!" when I misbehaved or broke something.

About age 5, I asked Mom if I could change my name to David Michael due to the fact that there were a couple other boys named Michael in the neighborhood. She agreed and thereafter I was David, which is what all of my school records and Social Security card say.

Ironically, it was not until I moved to Florida in 2021 that the state required that my drivers license match the name on my birth certificate. Thus I'm officially back to Michael David or M. David as I now prefer.

To be honest, I'm honored and humbled if anyone might think of me as either beloved, or resembling God. This represents the sum goal of my life. I believe that prior to birth we all come from a place of pure, unconditional love and union with God.

Despite the many self-absorbed distractions we face in childhood and adulthood, I believe we begin our journey back to unconditional love and union with God upon our death.

What name are we called after we enter eternity? I have no idea, but I know that it will be a further amplification of beloved and a further resemblance of God. What an amazing journey this life has become and will continue to be in the age to come. All glory and thanks to God!

3. Virginia: mother memories.

From my first day on earth to her last day, it's difficult to express how critical our mother's love is. Among my first mother memories is being held tight by this beautiful, redheaded woman who was the first to teach me how much a loving, accepting smile could do to warm my heart.

Virginia (from the latin *virgo* means "maid, virgin") was an outstanding women in every way; beautiful to look at, hard-working, passionate about public service and yet always compassionate, loving and forgiving toward those closest to her.



I appreciated my time together with Mom because a good part of her week was spent working as an operator for Ma Bell in Sacramento. I remember the joy of being rescued from my caregiver's playpen regularly when she got home.

I don't remember much about my caregivers except that I was in a familiar home setting and would blissfully play the day away with blocks and other toys. About the time I began to walk along came baby brother, Kevin Arthur, given the same middle name as Dad, Cecil Arthur.

Life seemed pretty stable in Sacramento, punctuated by frequent visits to Virginia's parents, Hazel and Joseph Alvaro and my uncles Mark and Ward. On Christmas Eve we all gathered at grandma's house for dinner and a group celebration. I loved spending time with my cousins.

About age 3 an abrupt change occurred when my Mom and Dad divorced and step-Dad Keith entered my life. Within months we were packing up and moving to La Mirada California, due to a job transfer and promotion for Keith. I remember some trauma over losing contact with Cecil and my loving grandparents, but I also remember the adventure of a new neighborhood and perspective. Mom continued working with Ma Bell as a supervisor and then my school life began. I remember mostly seeing Mom at breakfast, after work and on weekends.

One of my favorite memories was listening to Mom's music on the stereo lull me to sleep each night. She would leave my bedroom door open a crack so that I could hear this mixture of Johnny Mathis, Chet Atkins, the Ray Conniff singers and the Tijuana Brass. I remember rocking back-andforth in bed to the music to help me go to sleep, a habit I kept up until about age 10.

No doubt my early love of music would influence me for a lifetime. Thanks Mom! Other good times include going out for ice cream after dinner and playing croquet and badminton in the backyard.

In the summertime my brother and I were allowed to climb up on the roof to watch the spectacle of the nightly Disneyland fireworks display in Anaheim, clearly visible in the distance.

On occasion I got into some trouble at school and Mom would need to come in for a meeting with my teacher. I remember being tested to see if my hyperactivity needed medical treatment, or if it was just the result of a very busy mind. The testing showed that I had an above average IQ and sometimes I would act out in class due to sheer boredom.

Regardless, I could always count on Mom to be there, full of unconditional love and acceptance, as well as a protective buffer between step-Dad Keith and I. Keith and I never really formed a loving bond, resulting in my fear of a constant threat of punishment if I broke his rules.

In 2016, thanks to the providence of God and wise planning by my brother Kevin, I was able to tell Mom one last time how much her life and love meant to me.

Just days later Virginia was transported from earthly into eternal life while at rest on September 24, 2016. The years of struggling with dementia were finally over and she was ready to graduate to the next step of growth – which is the birthright and death-right each of us will one day face.

As my brother and I sat with Mom in her small room at Cenoma House, a hospice home in Twin Falls, Idaho, we both sensed she was entering a new realm of consciousness beyond this world. After hours of talking to Mom, reading and singing a few songs to her, I left hopeful she would give me a sign that I had truly connected with her. In my heart I was unsure. Was it already too late to express my deepest feelings of gratitude to Mom?

Thankfully, the next morning when I visited, she recognized me and reached out immediately. We hugged. As I looked into her eyes I believe she understood this would be our final goodbye. But our love would go on forever.

As I leaned forward gently kissed her and whispered "Thank you Mom." She smiled with her beautiful eyes as if to say "You're welcome son." Perhaps she needed to hear me tell her how much I loved her one very last time in recognition of her life well-lived.

It was the benevolence of God to witness the awesome majesty of Mom's nearing death experience. I felt a strong sense of her letting go – a peace. It was the end of her struggle. I saw God's grace unfold.

I believe the last bond a dying person has to bodily life is love. My love for Mom was forever sealed with my kiss on her forehead. Not a "goodbye" kiss, but rather a "see you later" kiss. When we face circumstances in life which we cannot change, the circumstances change us. Mom's life and death has forever changed me - inspiring me to be the best parent, grandparent, friend and brother I can be with God's grace.

This, I believe, is what dying has to do with living. A beloved's death reminds us that our time on earth is limited – there is an urgency to fully live in each moment.

What lives on of Mom is not engraved on a headstone, but rather in the memories she engraved upon the hearts and minds of those she loved and who loved her.

Virginia: A Mother Like No Other

Virginia, a woman so fair... Virginia, beautiful red hair.

Virginia, a woman of great love... Firm, yet gentle as a dove.



Virginia, a mother like no other...You taught us how to love one another.

Virginia, a woman of great faith... Today your family declares "you're great!" *Virginia, a woman always there... Virginia, always ready to share.*

Virginia, a mother like no other... You taught us how to love one another.

Virginia, is now at rest - Shalom... in your heavenly home - Shalom.

Virginia, may your love live on thru me... Until we are again united in eternity.

Thank you, dear mother ... We thank you, dearest Virginia.

We're sure gonna miss ya! Yes, we're sure gonna miss ya!

4. Cecil: father memories.

I'm afraid memories of my father are few and far between. My happiest memory is sitting on Cecil's lap steering the Studebaker station wagon down the road, which gave me a sense of power and control. I was quickly transported from



being a toddler to a grown up. I felt secure and protected.

Most of my memories of our three-year father-son relationship consist of the image seeing him come home at night in his white Crystal Dairy uniform with a tired smile on his face. Cecil had a friendly face which perfectly fit his persona as the neighborhood ice cream delivery man.

He started me off young collecting the paper caps on the glass milk bottles featuring the heads of the United States presidents. The company even provided a free scrapbook to fill up with all 32 presidents. Collecting bottle tops would later lead me into collecting both stamps and coins.

After Mom and Cecil divorced, we moved to Southern California and I would only see Cecil for a week or so in the summer. He would soon remarry a couple times. I remember step-Mom Mary Lou, she did not seem too interested in my brother or I during our annual vacation visits.

After a few years, Cecil had to cancel one of our trips to visit them, which was a big inconvenience for Mom and a great disappointment to us. Thereafter, our visits become more infrequent and eventually nonexistent. I briefly visited Cecil in Sacramento when I came into town for a concert at age 16 to see Jethro Tull. Cecil still worked at the same job, smoked a lot and drank a fair amount of beer. That was to be the last time I saw him for decades.

In 1997, I sat at Cecil's bedside at the Phoenix Heart Hospital knowing this might be the last time I saw him alive after his heart attack. We talked about my life. We talked about my children's lives. We talked how God had graciously helped me become a better man over time. We prayed. We hugged. We said our goodbyes.

5. Keith: step-father memories.

H. Keith Byram was a man who loved defending the law, having served in the navy, as a police officer, CII Special Agent, ultimately a lawyer and a judge.

The first 20 years of my life I found myself at odds with Keith most of the time. He stood for the strong moral values that characterized the



Greatest Generation. But I was a child of the 60s, challenging committed to "question authority" as the bumper sticker put it.

Keith was a man's man, standing 6'6" with a booming voice which put the fear of God in me. Yet, during the height of my rebellion, after I had fled home for the Haight-Ashbury scene, it was Keith who flew from our home in Los Angeles to San Francisco to beg me to come back home. He let me know just how much it hurt my mother. Sadly, at the time my foolish pride caused me to refused his offer.

In 1973 my life underwent a spiritual transformation. Now it was I who thirsted for strong, moral values. Like the Prodigal Son, I felt compelled to return home to beg forgiveness.

In 2003, Keith passed away at the age of 78. As I reflect upon Keith's life, it taught me three lessons: 1) children should love and obey their parents, 2) wives should stand by their husband, and 3) Christians should pray for our family and friends..

6. My brother Kevin.

My brother and I were close as young playmates, but as his older brother I could be pretty mean. Although we were just 18 months apart, I was bigger and I could bully him if I was in the mood. I shunned Kevin when I was playing with my older friends. Nonetheless, when no one was looking we did have fun playing together.

Kevin managed stay within parental boundaries and as we grew older he got along better with Keith.

During our teenage years we spent less time together. I gravitated toward fellow musicians and



"hippie types," while he focused on his school studies and his hobby of photography.

When I left home, the chasm between us grew even wider. Once I made it through my turbulent teen years, we reconnected.

Over the years we have stayed in contact, but it was not until Mom moved to Twin Falls, Idaho in 2004 that I made a visit to see him and Irene and met their daughter Annie. Meanwhile, Kevin had become a successful homebuilder in Twin Falls and built a home for Mom. It was a beautiful home on a small lake in a nice neighborhood. I was so glad Mom was getting settled in the community and that she found a nice church and some volunteer activities.

Kevin became very involved in the Rotary Club serving as their photographer and videographer. I visited Mom and Kevin every year or so to stay in touch with their new developments.

In 2014 at age 89, Mom's memory began to fail her and she injured herself in a fall. Kevin built an addition onto his home and Mom moved in with his family. Within another year her condition deteriorated and Kevin found a comfortable assisted living home for her.

The first time I visited her I was immediately struck by the loneliness I sensed inside the facility. I would bring my guitar to sing songs which she and many of her friends would enjoy. It seemed for many residents family visits were very infrequent.

I was so proud of how well Kevin looked after Mom and attended to all of her needs. Eventually Mom moved into a hospice home as her condition worsened. My esteem for my brother Kevin only grew only as I witnessed his extraordinary lovingkindness toward our aging mother.

Today Kevin is very active in the with Rotary and with his two granddaughters. I have some regrets Kevin and I were not closer over the years. We remain friends and stay in touch several times a year. In spite of the different paths our lives have taken, I am proud to be called his brother.

7. Favorite childhood home

This is a tough one because we moved what seemed like every few years due to Keith's work relocations. First, we moved from Sacramento in Norther California to La Mirada in Southern California. I have good memories of making new friends and learning to ride a bike there around age 5. Our next move was to Glendale, California where I began elementary school. According the teacher notes I've read on my old report cards, I was a good student, but at times overly talkative in class. It would be decades before I became a better listener.

Our next we move was to an apartment in Panorama City. I remember Montgomery Wards was right across the street. For me, this was the time of building model cars and airplanes. This was also my first run in with the law.

I very much wanted a particular model airplane, but I was shy the money needed to buy it. So I shoplifted it from Wards. Out the door I went with it tucked into my coat, thinking I was scot-free, until a plain clothes security officer stopped me in the parking lot. Busted!

I was taken into the back office and told to sit there until they could reach my parents, which seemed like the longest 90-minutes in my life. Eventually Keith showed up, flashed his police credentials and luckily I got off with just a warning. Not surprisingly, I was asked not to shop at Wards any longer without a parent. When we got home I faced considerable parental disappointment and was grounded.

This was a good life lesson about restraint against the temptation to steal, which faces everyone from time to time.

From Panorama City we moved into a house in Granada Hills with a pool. As a teenager one my chores was to maintain the pool among other chores as a teenager. In Granada Hills my most vivid memory in was having my first romantic encounter with a girl next-door. After school she and I would hang out together after school. Her parents also were working which gave us the opportunity for sexual discovery. This relationship lasted for the school year and ended when I headed to San Francisco for the summer.

8. 50s & 60s movie memories

I have very fond memories of going to the movie theater with my brother Kevin in the late 1950s and early 60s. We could see a matinee



double-feature for just \$.25 and for another \$.25 get popcorn and a Coke.

I remember enjoying Roy Rogers movies, horror movies and murder mysteries. Although occasionally, I would end up with scary dreams, but it was such a treat to get out of the house. Later in life I developed a fascination with interesting story plots and classic movies. I love old movies such as Sargent York starring Jimmy Stewart. I notice that spirituality was portrayed in a positive light back in those days. Filmmakers did not rely so heavily upon sex and violence as primary film attractions.

Years later my brother and I produced our own short films. Kevin did a great job on his "Yes, ALZ" documentary designed to inform friends and family how to compassionately interact with loved one suffering from dementia.

I produced a documentary addressing the yea Preparing Wisely for the 21st-Century and a onehour TV special with Pat Boone entitled Rediscovering Gold in the 21st Century which offered a free companion book.

Who knows what Kevin an I may produce in the future - our best work may still lay ahead!

9. Family dogs.

Sugar, our first family pet was a beautiful Sheepdog. Sugar was very energetic and would usually take us for walks instead of vise-versa. She often slept in bed with me. On one occasion, Keith was reprimanding me loudly, Sugar became scared and jumped in bed with me, which angered him. He picked up Sugar and dragged her out of the room, with her nails scratching the floor. Poor Sugar, I thought, she did nothing wrong yet was being punished on my behalf. She sought to protect me from the wrath of Dad, which only endeared me to her further.

It was a sad day when Sugar passed away of old age. Within a year or so Mom decided to get a small poodle, who we named Sugar Although endearing Sugar II could never fill the shoes of this big, frumpy Sheepdog who could bowl you over and fill your face with slobbery kisses.

Over the years, I have adopted many rescue dogs including: a German Shepherd, Golden Retriever, Black Labrador, Beagle, Chihuahua, Australian Shepherd and most recently Blu, a rescue Springer Spaniel mix. I love animals and view their love as pure and



unconditional. Although I am currently without my own dog, I often spend time with my daughter Grace's Corgi named Choncho, who lives to chase his ball and often lays on his back hoping I will rub his tummy.

My granddaughter Bella and hubby Cody recently opened their own pet grooming salon in Sarasota, Florida, so if I ever need more dog affection and interaction, I just stop by Bella's Grooming!

10. Religious beliefs

As a young child I remember getting picked up by a Sunday School bus on occasion. Kevin and I would hear lessons from the Bible and often colored pictures to take home and show Mom and Dad who seemed to have no particular desire to be involved in church. Likely they cherished Sunday as a well-deserved break from their busy work and home responsibilities.

It would be many years later, that I would begin my spiritual journey in earnest and lifetime quest toward union with God – a journey which would take me to mountain tops and deep valleys in pursuit of spiritual growth. It seems there's no shortcut to building a relationship with either our fellow man or with our Creator. We learn how to do it better most often by doing it wrong it first.

Much of my early Christian life was spent focused on seeking right doctrines instead practicing right actions.

In the past decade, I've come to believe that every soul on this earth will be eventually be joined in union with God. The older we get the greater is our need for deeper relationships both with others and with God.

2023 marks fifty years since I first invited the Spirit of God to take over my mind, heart and life. I'm very grateful for that!

11. Favorite foods

My all time favorite food growing up was Mom's legendary Ranger cookies. These were oatmeal cookies full of cornflakes and walnuts with a chewy middle and crunchy edges. Yum! I remember



gorging on a pile of them with a big glass of milk and suddenly all was well with the world again.

My other favorite foods included Mom's cornbread muffins, homemade meatloaf and fresh green beans. Mom worked full-time so often we would have to settle for TV dinners or pot pies. When she did have time to cook it was a real treat.

Another of my favorites was barbecued hamburgers and ribs that Kieth would grill. When dinner was announced my brother and I gathered around the dinner table with glee.

Some of my least favorite foods, which have remained to this day include: asparagus, liver, sauerkraut, Borsch, lima beans, and coleslaw. I remember being forced to eat these under the threat of "or no dessert." That was a tough situation.

My favorite breakfast foods were those little cereal boxes you could eat with milk directly from the box. Each morning I would ponder which of the 6 or 8 cereals sounded the best to start off the day with. I also liked the fact that I could do it all myself - no need for Mom to prepare anything. To this day I usually alternate between dry cereal and a danish or croissant for breakfast. As I'm aging I try to eat healthier. I frequent enjoy fruit smoothies and salads, but I'm still a meat eater at least once a day. One year I cooked my own big batch of granola with lots of nuts and seeds in it. I ended up giving it as Christmas gifts and even made up my own label: *Food for Thought*.

12. Childhood money

Being brought up in a middle-class family in the 1950s /60s meant living within a modest weekly allowance. I learned to balance my wants and my needs while seeking new supplemental income.

One of the first ways I did this was by searching through trash cans for empty soda bottles, which at

the time were worth between three and five cents each, depending on their size. My search took me deep into trash bins and dumpsters of every size, shape and smell.



Once I accumulated a shopping bag or box full of pop bottles, I would rush to the nearest grocery

store to cash them in for between \$.50 and \$1.00, which today is about the equivalent of \$10-\$20. Remember, until 1965 our coinage was still made out of 90% silver, which is worth about twenty times their face value today.

By working a few days a week scavenging I could earn enough to buy a good supply of candy, a model car/airplane or a Mad magazine. In addition, I'd sometimes pick up a few local jobs like mowing a neighbor's lawn or yard cleanup.

Collecting pop bottles was my first discovery that one man's trash can be another man's treasure. In the process of trash-digging, I was also delighted to find other knickknacks of value along the way.

This experience also taught me that in both sales and in life, we often need to weed through a fair amount of junk to find the pearl of great price, or make the sale. I learned that I must be willing to hear a lot of No's to finally get to a Yes. The principles of persistence and overcoming adversity are important life lessons.

My next official job was having a daily paper route for the Herald Examiner. This required being responsible and keeping a consistent schedule, another important life lesson.

13. Most fun grandparent memories

A highlight of my childhood memories was our annual family vacations to see my Mom's parents, Joseph and Hazel Alvaro in Sacramento, CA.

The journey by car from Southern California was a tedious 8-hour drive up the central valley. I remember well the smell of cattle as we traveled through Bakersfield, Fresno, Tulare, and Turlock.

We arrived in Sacramento and were always greeted by big hugs and a treasure trove of sweets baked by Grandma. It was always a welcomed break from school and the usual routine. The Alvaro's lived in the historic part of town next to beautiful Land Park. I remember wide tree-lined streets and colorful leaf piles along the streets.

Grandpa Joseph, a stout Portuguese man with a big smile generally smelled of cigar smoke. We played croquet in the backyard and I often watched grandpa repair household items in his garage workshop and allowed me to help him.

Grandpa Joe would frequently take my brother and I to Land Park Zoo, which was an unhurried adventure which included feeding the animals. My fondest Grandpa Joe memory was serving as his golf caddie. We would walk to the nearby golf course where I learned to give him the right numbered clubs. We walked and talked during the entire 18-hole course. My reward was twofold; alone time with Grandpa and a shiny half dollar as payment for my services.

During our visits at Christmastime we were reunited with my Mom's brothers and a few cousins. This was the one time we would spent with our extended family, which I am grateful for, but I wish we had visited more frequently.

14. The hardest part of growing up

The hardest part of growing up was not having an actively engaged father role model. I needed a dad who would take an interest in my life, my interests and my future. But in a modern era where both parents worked full-time, I'm not alone on this.

I remember wanting to learn from step-Dad Keith, but it seemed like everything I tried to do, whether trying to help him repair something around the house or building something new, I was told to "stay back and out of the way." I don't think injuring my self-confidence was always intentional, but it hurt nonetheless. Over the years I stopped asking to be his helper with school projects or homework assignments. This also carried forward into other activities, sports and other normal father-son



activities I saw most of my friends engaging in.

I would come up with other activities to fill the Dad void, but my primary take away was that he was just too busy and/or too important to invest time in fathering me.

I began to think the best way to cope with life without a father's love or guiding hand was to simply do whatever I felt was best. I also resolved that when that I became a father, I was going to be very involved with my children's lives.

In retrospect, I now have more compassion for Keith, knowing how difficult it can be for a young man to juggle work, play, family priorities and furthering their education.

I believe Keith inherited his hands-off perspective of child-rearing from his father Harry Byram, who was also a pretty big drinker. I think Keith did the best he could, given his own lacking father model.

Sadly is a truism that the sins of the father are often passed on to their children, unless we undergo a spiritual transformation and allow a Heavenly Father to re-model our thinking and actions.

15. Adolescence

Overall as a child of the 60s, my adolescence was a time of questioning all forms of authority and seeking my own identity.

I struggled with teenage acne, which made me selfconscious and shy around everyone, but especially girls. After a bad flareup I just wanted to be alone and often turned to playing my guitar for comfort.

I often retreated with fellow musicians into garage jam sessions, enhanced with pot smoking. What better way to forget about my problems, both within and at home, right? Loud music was my way to tune out the world and negative thoughts.

In school I managed to avoid most conflicts between the various San Fernando Valley clique groups such as: the tough guys, the Hispanic gangs, and the nerds. I most comfortably fit in with other hippie types, surfers or loners.

I did not excel in any particular subjects at school. I enjoyed music and science, but by junior high school I was more interested in cutting school to listen/play music or hitchhiking to Malibu or Santa Monica beach. I often hitched a ride westward down Sepulveda Boulevard or through Topanga Canyon, known as hippie central.

On several occasions I was hit while hitching through West Hollywood, but thankfully I was never sexually assaulted. I would just politely refuse their offer and asked to be let out of the car.

During this era, there was never a dull moment. Each potential hitched ride might lead me to another new adventure, a new friend or even an occasional party. Looking back on this era of my life I needed more parental help navigating life, but because I was unwilling to compromise I drifted along without much clear direction.

16. Memorable historical events

The first major historical event I clearly remember was the assassination of president John Kennedy in 1963. Prior to that I think I was living in an age of innocence, assuming the world's problems would have a happy ending, like on TV and in movies.

How could such the beloved leader of the free world be gunned down in broad daylight, I wondered? This senseless, brutal act meant the world was no longer a safe place and seemed to usher in a new era of violence in America.

Two years later I witnessed the Watts Riots. A few years later Martin Luther King's assassination, along with daily images of the Vietnam war beamed into every American TV along with bloody daily newspaper headlines.

I've always been in favor of non-violence and was easily drawn into the so-called Peace Movement. I dressed more and more like a hippie as I hit my teenagers years. I found myself constantly at odds with my stepfather over my attraction to rock music, hippie attire and long hair.

When I decided to begin experimenting with pot this was the last straw at home. In 1969, at age 16



I decided to run away for the summer and headed to San Francisco with my backpack and guitar in search of a more peaceful existence, free of strict rules and curfews.

Life in the "Haight" was not exactly as I had imagined. Sure, I enjoyed going to the frequent concerts at the Fillmore West and publicly smoking pot in Golden Gate park's "Hippie Hill." But I also had my guitar stolen out of my hands and a life of panhandling on Market Street and living at "Huckleberry's for Runaways" was far less glamorous than I expected.

I had proven I could survive on my own, but felt guilty over breaking my loving mother's heart. When I finally realized this, I returned home and promised Mom I would never be so thoughtless again. However, within a year by mutual agreement I ended up leaving home for good.

17. Independence and responsibility

As a teenager, I learned to become increasingly independent as a so-called latchkey child. I soon discovered I could more or less do as I wished during the day as long as I received passing grades and did not break the law, with the exception of pot smoking. After arriving home from my SF trip to the Haight my parents decided a military summer school might help correct my rebellious ways. So off I went to Army Navy Academy in Carlsbad, CA.

Although the Academy was much less strict than during the regular school year, I still faced a very scheduled



lifestyle with set times for meals, recreation and bedtime. It was a new experience which I grudgingly adapted to. The goal was to teach me to live within boundaries and be more responsible.

Although it did not feel especially like a form of heavy punishment, it definitely clipped my wings by requiring I stay within the school walls for month. I learned to play pool and surf, the most fun activities at this camp built on Carlsbad beach.

I made a few friends who, like myself, were in the school as a form of discipline for misbehaving at home. Being surrounded by other "bad boys" meant discussing how to bend the rules and mentally escape the rigidity imposed on me and my fellow inmates. I don't think the Academy experience changed me very much, except that I learned how to follow the rules and then figured out how to break them.

One Sunday a friend invited me to go AWOL for the day. His friend with a car picked us up and we headed to his parents home in nearby La Jolla. His parents were out of town so we enjoyed a day of leisurely swimming, getting high and then made it back for dinner roll call. We beat the system!

Upon arriving home my parents decided a private school might be more challenging academically, so I was enrolled in The Buckley School in Sherman Oaks for ninth grade. This was another new experience which required wearing navy slacks, tie, blazer, wing tip shoes and had a much tougher curriculum than public school.

I gravitated to other students with longer hair and hippie tendencies but did not feel like I fit in very well with this mostly pre-Ivy League crowd.

One day at lunchtime, I went off-campus to smoke some pot and upon my return being promptly sent to the vice-principal's office and was immediately expelled from the school. This was a major disappointment to Mom and Dad, who were once again near their wits end with how to control my behavior. It was at this point that I convinced them we would all be better off if we took a break indefinitely.

I proposed moving in with a friend with his mother becoming my Foster parent. Mom and Dad agreed and this arrangement which worked for almost a year. But, due to some infraction of the Foster Mom's strict rules, I ended up needing to move into another Foster home.

This was a much more difficult environment without having a friend in-house. I was also thrust into a new high school. Still, my stubborn pride preferred this arrangement rather than agreeing to live within my step-Dad's rigid rules.

This situation continued until I decided to take my Foster parents car out for a short joyride in the neighborhood. Upon my return a few hours later, I was strongly reprimanded and given a ticket by the police.

Soon thereafter, I decided that my stay at this less than amiable Foster home was over. This led to the next chapter of my life that would take me from Southern Cal to Phoenix, AZ.

18. Leaving home

At the ripe old age of seventeen I decided it was time to explore new territory, so I hitchhiked eastward to Arizona. When I arrived in Phoenix, I met a young woman along the journey who graciously invited me to stay with her.

I soon found a job working for a solar heating company. I quickly learned their presentation and how to give interested prospects a price quote on installing solar panels on the roof to help cut their hot water and swimming pool heating costs.

At the time California and Arizona had a 55% tax credit on solar purchases, which made them much more cost-effective for people with electric heaters.

We would canvas the neighborhood around our current solar installations to find new perspective buyers during the day and then schedule appointments to speak with both husband and wife that evening.

I did fairly well and was able to buy my first car - a maroon 1967 Volkswagen bus for \$1800. This was the perfect hippie car, with room for five passengers plus storage for bags. After a year I decided to quit solar for and moved to Flagstaff for cooler, more beautiful scenery. I remember having two jobs: selling men's suit at a local men's shop and giving guitar lessons at a local music store.



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I lived with a hippie

couple who encouraged me to begin on a spiritual path. They practiced Hinduism and suggested I read the Bhagavad-Gita. This set me on a journey toward the truth which continues to this day.

I was curious about their Hindu beliefs. All of the people I met of this belief seemed peaceful, happy and loving. Having never been involved in religion or church, I'd liked the freedom to believe whatever I liked rather than lots of rules or laws.

I also remember reading some of the writings of Buddha, as he explained his Noble Eightfold Path of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. I could see the value of practicing these right intentions to achieve a more spiritual life.

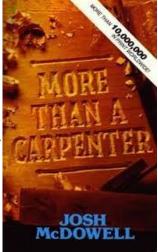
Meanwhile, I would soon meet another group of spiritual young people on the campus of an NAU.

I was befriended by an outspoken Christian, John McGovern, who would sit next to me as I played my guitar in the dormitory hallway, where the acoustics were best. John would look me straight in the eye, play his guitar and sing words of praise and thanks to God and Jesus. I remember being struck by his directness and persistent invitations for me to have a personal relationship with Christ.

John was a bit overwhelming at first, but over a few months I grew curious about his source of joy, which seemed otherworldly. I remember his

constant challenge to discover why Christianity was the truest path to spiritual fulfillment.

One night I went with John to hear a special speaker Josh McDowell, who is speaking on the topic "Jesus: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?"



Josh began systematically explaining why, based on the words of Jesus recorded in the Bible, He could not be considered just another prophet or holy man like Buddha, Krishna or Muhammad.

Now this was getting interesting. Josh challenged attendees to read what Jesus said about himself, and then conclude that He must either be either a liar, a lunatic, or in fact the Lord - an incarnation of God sent to reveal the truth.

I went home, pondering all I had heard, but unwilling to make any major confession of faith. It would be another month or so when I stumbled into a friend's dorm room who was hosting a Bible study that I took my next step.

On March 12, 1973, I joined in with their group prayer for to dedicate my life to God and invited Christ into my life. I did not feel greatly changed after at first, but decided to buy a Bible and begin reading it. I started reading the book of John and soon thereafter prayed the Holy Spirit would fill me up and turn my life toward the things of God.

I joined a weekly meeting hosted by Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa on Sundays, which featured dynamic worship music and a simple Bible message. For the first time in my life I finally felt like I belonged to a loving community. It felt good.

I began reading classic Christian books by authors such as Watchmen Nee and Oswald Chambers while discovering the new world of Contemporary Christian rock music. Artists like Phil Keaggy were using their world-class talent to glorify God, both in their lyrics and with their instruments.

A whole new world opened to me and inspired me onward. I had found an accepting family of God who loved me just as I am, like Mom did!

In my jubilation, I decided to tell the world I was now officially a Christian. I painted a large finger pointing upward with the words "One Way" on my spare tire mounted in the front of my VW bus as well as several bumper stickers. I was an official Jesus People driving billboard.

Frequently as I drove down the road other cars honked in approval. Occasionally, someone would be hostile at my Jesus-mobile and would flip me off. My response was to smile and pray for them.

Meanwhile, I began to learn how to play worship songs on the guitar and would sometimes help with worship-leading in small groups. My next big adventure would soon begin after visiting Peoples Church in Scottsdale with John McGovern. My journey would lead me back to Southern California to begin formal seminary training and reconciliation with my parents.

19. Coming of age

Looking back at my process of coming to age, I believe it began when I began taking responsibility for my life as a new creation in Christ. It was my rite of passage from a life without a larger purpose to beginning a purpose-driven life.

I slowly began to grasp how and why the Kingdom of God was an entirely revolutionary way of thinking, acting and being.

I met with my Mom and step-Dad at their new home in Santa Clarita after moving from Flagstaff to Anaheim to attend Melodyland School of Theology. I asked their forgiveness for all the stress and pain I caused during my rebellious teen years.

Mom was quick to forgive me, as she had been my entire life, but Keith was unconvinced I had really changed. I remember him asking me if this "Jesus Freak" persona was just my latest phase and suggesting it might not last very long. I understood his skepticism. This confirmed that I would need to "walk my talk" before he'd accept my conversion as genuine. It would be several years following my marriage and having children before we could mend our fractured relationship.

In retrospect, I sometimes envy those born into a family which celebrates a man's coming of age with ritual ceremonies that serve as lifelong markers of maturing from childhood to manhood.

Sadly, the majority of American teens, including myself, seem to suffer from a lack of direction or any rite of passage into adulthood.

It's been said the number one issue at the root of our modern cultural decline is "the lack of effective, functioning fathers." I think this is true.

My hope is that Christians will someday establish a coming-of-age ceremony and/or ritual to help prepare the next generation to become spirituallydriven men and women, to help them become better husbands, fathers, wives and mothers.

20. Educational advice

As an elementary school student I was eager to learn, but I often talked out of turn, therefore my best advice is: "talk less and listen more." This is a genuinely good rule in all of life.

A book a recently read entitled *Just Listen* which explains how we can get more agreement with others by first listening very closely to them, asking a few additional prompting questions and then listening. Even those who diametrically disagree with us on a subject will become more open to reconsideration if we make an earnest effort to truly listen and understand their position.

Next, we must "read to lead." In an audio/video entertainment-driven culture, we need to set aside quiet time to read, study, reflect and to make new personal discoveries by reading more.



I have found that writing a book review after finishing a good non-fiction book helps me digest the contents and refer back to as a refresher.

Regardless of your field of work or endeavor, reading keeps you on the cutting edge of our rapidly changing world and of technology. I'm a lifelong learner by choice and necessity. Another key is to maintain a "beginners mind," which simply means being open to return to square-one to relearn something we may think we already understand. The goal being to gain further understanding from a new perspective.

A beginner's mind requires humility, a willingness to admit being wrong and jettison our immature ideas if needed, which we otherwise might be prone to hang onto for a lifetime.

This ranges from a hypothesis in science to our worldview or life philosophy. Our understanding often grows over time. If we keep all of our options open, we may discover new truth.

As for schooling during the early years, I've become a fan of the Montessori method of teaching children how to be creative, yet orderly, selfmotivated yet community-oriented.

Once a Montessori preschool student masters a skill, whether tying shoelaces or building a house of blocks, students this new skill. This reinforces the joy of learning and teaching from a young age.

Parents who have the time, skill and patience for home schooling are able to choose the curriculum and worldview they want reinforced in their child. As for post high school education and college, my advice is to closely examine all available options. Some adolescence are motivated toward a specific career path, others are unsure and might consider a break from school to work or explore a vocation.

I think the notion that every high school student should jump directly into four years of college is not always the best path, unless a scholarship is offered, given the high cost of college debt.

A two-year, junior college may be a wise and frugal way to start off, which allows time for pondering the best career path. Sometimes finding an apprenticeship job can help determine if you're serious about entering a particular career path.

21. Dating philosophy

I grew up without much parental guidelines or philosophy on dating. When it came to girls, I have always been pretty shy. I knew that I was not bad looking, but being a pimply-faced teenager did make me very self-conscious.

I thought as soon as my skin cleared up, I'm going to approach a pretty girl I was attracted to in class. But the weeks turned into months and then years. At one point I was so desperate to improve my complexion that I sat under my Mom's sun lamp about five times longer than I should have.

The result was a catastrophic burn on my face, lips and my eyes, so bad I ended up in the hospital with my eyes swollen shut. I was very lucky not to end up being blind. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.

This episode only made further deflated my self image. Somehow I managed to find a few shortterm girlfriends, but nothing serious until meeting my future wife Barbara many years later.

Later, as a father of four daughters, I did develop a dating philosophy for them: No dates until age 15!

This was difficult to enforce given how beautiful my girls were and mature appearance.

Jenny was



very involved with school and drama which helped to keep her interest in academics, but Beth and Grace were a bit more boy-crazy in their teenage years.

Unfortunately I was very busy at work and not as present as I should or could have been during their teenage years. This situation also damaged our marriage and left everyone frustrated and isolated.

I believe a father's involvement in a daughter's life, especially between the ages of 12-18, is vital. Aa father a daughter's first example of love from the opposite sex and can serve as an important model of how a young man should treat a young woman.

22. My career overview

My journey into the world of sales, marketing and copy writing continued advanced via a summer job selling Bible study books door-to-door with the Southwestern Company of Nashville, TN.

In the Fall, I took a part-time position with Quality Books, selling and servicing major grocery and drugstores with inspirational paperback books. I viewed this job as a both a mission and a business as I helped bring the Christian message into the marketplace. The business seemed to flourish during the 1970s in Southern Cal, but upon moving to Northern Cal in 1976 it was a different story. I covered the territory of Oregon, Washington, as well as Northern Cal, but sadly, with rare exception, the success up north was very spotty. Instead of books selling off the racks like they did in So. Cal, the majority of the books just sat there. Eventually store managers decided to remove the racks in favor of faster selling items.

Next I took a position selling life insurance with Penn Mutual insurance Co. I thought this would be a good opportunity to build a long-term career.

The program I specialized in was selling life insurance to married graduate law and medical students at Stanford who could buy now, pay later.

It was a great program for students, but not so much for the insurance agents who would lose their new clients once they graduated and moved elsewhere. So it was a temporary way to earn an income, but not to build a long-term clientele.

Next I decided to accept an offer to serve in music ministry in Ukiah, CA. This ministry position paid little, so I found a job with the local heating and air-conditioning firm selling solar heating systems. Thanks to a 55% tax credit, the economics worked well for those with electric water and pool heaters. I created a promotion to pay one-monthly utility bill if prospects agreed to a solar cost analysis by Solarman, my new identity. About 30% of the people who requested a free analysis would buy, so it turned out to be a very popular promotion. Solarman could be seen all over town sporting an orange outfit, giving estimates and delivering free utility bill checks on my little power scooter.

My solar career was cut short by the decision to relocate back to San Francisco Bay Area, largely due to a disagreement with the pastor.

Once back in the East Bay, I took a job with a Danish firm to promote expanding the franchise of Midnight Sun indoor tanning salons.

My job was to present the business opportunity to potential franchise buyers throughout the U.S., as well as selling their Silver



Solariums to health clubs and beauty salons. During the rise of indoor tanning in the early 1980s you couldn't be "too rich, too thin, or too tan." After a successful year of sales, including setting up The Sports Connection, the largest Southern Cal health club with an in-house tanning salon, I was offered a position heading up to New York City office located on Madison Avenue and 66th Street.

I worked out of the glamorous Midnight Sun salon to further expand the existing three NYC locations, as well as entrepreneurs interested in solariums, but preferring to use their own business name.

I successfully promoted Silver Solarium for two years then launched out on my own with other equipment. I worked with a German manufacturer, which worked well at first until I received an entire container of equipment which was defective.

Suddenly, I went from a successful entrepreneur to an equipment serviceman. I attempted to repair equipment promised for new salons with advertised grand openings. The pressure eventually got to me, so I decided to fold up Future Sun and move to Phoenix, Arizona. One of my solarium distributors offered me a partnership, but after a few months it did not work out.

I then accepted a position designing custom A/V entertainment centers for Buzz Jensen Sound Advice. I worked for about a year with home builders and homeowners helping them to create high-quality entertainment centers. Meanwhile, my wife Barbara worked for Swiss America as a gold and silver broker. She had great success during her first six months, so I met with the owner of the firm and we hit it off. I began working as a broker and helping expand his marketing efforts. This job was a major learning experience. I quickly dug into understanding the fundamentals of both precious metals and collectible/numismatic coins sales/marketing.

We immediately launched a newsletter and expanded a daily interview segment on Christian radio station WCVO in Columbus, Ohio. What began as a 5-10 minute live interview Monday



through Friday grew into a 30-minute weekly *World Economic Perspective* radio program. The show featured the latest market news as well as a discussion of economic trends from a biblical perspective. I served as the producer and co-host.

In 1987, as the stock market took a big hit, we found audiences even more receptive to alternative investments such as gold and silver, so we

expanded our weekly program from one to eventually over 60 Christian stations coast to coast.

Our program aired Saturdays live at 9 AM, but delayed shows aired until 1-2 PM. The payoff was a large volume of phone calls requesting our free information, averaging 100-300 calls per Saturday. This soon became our primary source of new prospects and opened yet another new door: live events in the cities airing our radio show.

We developed an *Economic Solutions* seminar and took it on the road several times a year, visiting 3-4 cities in a week. To my knowledge, Craig and I conducted the only traveling seminar discussing biblical economics in the 1980s and 90s.

The highlight event was when my alma mater Melodyland Christian Center hosted our 2-day program in 1989. We explained why physical gold and silver were true wealth which would stand the test of time over the years and decades to follow.

In the 1990's we transitioned to sponsoring other national radio and television programs so we only needed to



work five days a week instead of six. My job shifted again to writing and producing radio and television commercials for our various celebrity spokes people such as; Pat Boone, G. Gordon Liddy, Michael Savage and Mark Levin. I also developed our website, daily blog, podcast and published eight books on economic topics.

My job duties also included securing media interviews to discuss the books we published. The books included titles such as: <u>Don't Bank On It: The</u> <u>Unsafe World of 21st-Century Banking</u> and <u>Rediscovering Gold in the 21st Century</u>. I enjoyed working closely with veteran journalist Lowell Ponte as we also published many special reports.

My expertise then expanded to include editing, publishing and media relations. The bulk of my education has been on the job as I learned the emerging world of digital publishing and promotion.

In 2020, founder/owner Craig Smith decided to retire after 38 years . He sold the firm to his CEO Dean Heskin and his wife Bronwin who had served as managers and administrators for many years. The COVID-19 pandemic also transformed the firm, sending 90% of the brokers home to work. In June 2020, I switched from full-time to part-time consulting for Swiss America. I worked from home until deciding to move to Florida in June 2021.

Since then, due to my illness and eventual lung transplant in May 2022, my daily duties for Swiss America have become less and less demanding, allowing me more time for physical recovery, writing and volunteering in the community.

23. Financial advice

"Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can," said John Wesley. This may be the best financial advice you'll ever hear. Wesley balances our Christian calling to work hard, live frugally and to give liberally to those in need.

I wish someone had given me this sage advice as a young person, but like so many young people I tended to live and spend money on the cusp of my earning ability.

I suddenly shifted from a single seminary student to a husband and father by age 21, which was a very abrupt financial transition.

I was taught to trust that God would provide, but despite having a strong work ethic I also gravitated

low or non-paying ministry opportunities. I can see the conflict clearly now, but as a fervent young believer I must admit to confusing my priorities.

The local church did not help matters that by demanding a 10% tithe I felt guilt and shame when I was unable to live up to this standard of giving. I failed to consider that more than 10% of my time was devoted to ministry.

I think the biggest obstacle to achieving financial stability is having the discipline to live below your means, rather than living at or above your means.

When it comes to investment, the best advice I've found in Scripture is: "Cast your bread upon the waters, give to seven or eight, for you do not know what disaster may come on earth." -Eccl. 11:1-2.

This is the first rule of wise asset diversification ever recorded: that is, do not put all of your assets in any one area, such as stocks, bonds, real estate commodities or cash. But rather, spread surplus wealth in a several areas which offers a natural protection from market and economic cycles.

Having worked with a physical gold and silver brokerage for over 35 years, I found it encouraging that the first biblical definition of wealth is given in Genesis 13, which says Abraham was rich in "livestock, gold and silver."

Precious metals served as the world's most trustworthy form of currency until the 20th century when the U.S. officially abandoned both the gold and silver standard as official money for a debt-based currency. But that's a very long story.

Savings and investment plans, which include gold and silver, tend to appreciate over time as debtbased paper money tends to decline in value due to inflation and government debasement.

The classic European investment formula is: 25% cash/gold, 25% stocks, 25% bonds and 25% real estate. This is the most basic diversification model.

Regardless, of which investment strategy you follow, it all begins with saving money and deferring your wants.

The purpose of preparing a nest egg is so you're not a burden on anyone and are in a position to help family, friends, neighbors and even strangers when the opportunity arises.

Scripture promotes a free market which is undergirded by a Good Samaritan form of love for all mankind. Christ demonstrated we are all connected in the Kingdom of God and to one another. "The Kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," says Romans, 14:17.

24. Family values

It is difficult to think of two words which have undergone a more radical re-definition in the last two generations than "family values."

We all inherit some type of values system from our parents or grandparents, which we either continue believing in, question, or reject. Our views sometimes evolve as we mature. In my case, my parents divorced at age 3, so most of my family value memories are with my Mom and step-Dad.

Because my parents worked full-time my brother Kevin and I had daycare a lot until we entered school. I have strong memories of being loved by Mom, but no fond memories of other loving caregivers. Mostly just memories of being disciplined for wrongdoing by my step-Dad.

I knew Mom and Dad loved each other, but it seemed like Keith just put up with Kevin and I. I always felt like a nuisance, in his way, so my selfvalue took a beating from Dad, but thankfully was nurtured by Mom.

Keith was a Korean War Vet turned police officer, which accounts for his tough persona in many ways. The situation only got worse when I hit my rebellious teen years..

I finally beginning to see life from Keith's perspective in 1973 after I attended a three-day seminar on Basic Life Principles by Bill Gothard Institute. I understood that he was the "bad cop" in my life, just doing his best to help me.

Once I confronted my own bitterness over the past, I called him to ask for forgiveness. This was a major turning point in our relationship. I was trying to demonstrate that a major transformation was taking root in my life.

Although Kieth and I never became best friends, we were at least cordial and respectful of each other in a new way. Meanwhile, my understanding of Christian family values was evolving and growing as I studied the Bible and had three daughters of my own.

As a new father I attempted to be patient, affirming and loving as best I could. You could say I decided to become a "good cop" which I now understood very often would put my wife Barbara in the role of "bad cop".

I now see more clearly why children need both parents to at times function as both good and bad cops to keep the family in balance.

Psychologists say children appreciate the good cop parent when they're young and gradually come to appreciate the bad cop parent later in life. This resonates as true. Too bad that by the time it all starts to make sense we're already grandparents.

I made a lot of mistakes in demonstrating Christian family values over the years, but thankfully I believe the qualities I tried to personify: patience, kindness, affirmation and love have been planted in all four of my daughters and helped them to



establish their family values to pass on.

As a grandfather and now great-grandfather, I have a new role, to reflect the character of God to my family with more clarity and wisdom.

25. Marriage relationships.

Some marriages, or significant other relationships, are able to last a lifetime, while others last for a season of life. The later has been the case for me.

My first teenage girlfriend, Lisa, was a beautiful girl I met at a weekly drum circle at Griffith Park back in the summer of 1967 at age 14. I was swept off my feet by her self-confidence. She danced in total abandonment to the throbbing drumbeats. She was 16 and more mature, yet she accepted me as a friend. I fantasized she might also fall in love.

We lived a few miles apart and attended different schools, so our only contact was on Sundays in the park. Our first and last kiss was when she bid me farewell and moved away. My crush was crushed. During my post high school and early college days, I had a few relationships, but nothing long-term.

I first met Barbara Toscas in 1974 at age 21. I was a student in Melodyland School of Theology and worked part time as a Fuller Brush salesman in the city of Tustin. Barb and I first met when I knocked on her parents door



and her Mom decided to order a new hairbrush. I was impressed with their friendliness and interest in my studies and I could tell they were Christians. Barb had a big, beautiful smile and long brown hair. I found her attractive immediately.

About a week later I delivered their products and Barb happened to be visiting her mom again. We chatted further. They were impressed with the reputation of Melodyland, which was the epicenter of a Charismatic renewal sweeping the country.

I invited Barb to visit church with me the following Sunday and this began a very serious dating relationship which included her two-year-old daughter, Jennifer.

Jenny was an adorable, smart and very inquisitive child from a mixed ethnic background; part Greek, part Scandinavian and part African-American, which resulted from a previous relationship.

Her parents, Joyce and Richard (Dick) were frequent babysitters as Barb worked full-time at the City of Orange in accounting. This was my first serious relationship,



which quickly developed into a proposal and wedding engagement, in part a bit hurried due to Jennifer's need for a father in her life as well as our rapidly growing affection and connection.

On December 12, 1975, Barb and I were married at the Melodyland Christian Center by Dr. Rodman Williams, a professor and MST president.

Our first home together was on Citrus Street in Orange, a small two bedroom historic home two doors down from Barb's sister Georgia and daughter Christine.

Within a year Barb was pregnant with Elizabeth Hope, who was born in Tustin, California on November 3, 1976. Beth was a beautiful baby girl with a thick blonde hair and a contagious smile. Jenny was thrilled to be a big sister at age 3 1/2 and was a big help teaching Beth the basics of eating, walking, talking and good behavior.

In 1977, I was invited to move to the San Francisco Bay area to help plant a church with one of my professors Dr. Jim Hayford, a Foursquare church pastor/teacher who taught at Melodyland.

Thankfully, my employer Quality Books was open to expanding my territory to include the Bay Area, so I had a base of income, since my work helping plant the church was as a volunteer.

Our move to San Ramon, California was an exciting new adventure which also allowed Barb and I to live close to her brother Greg, wife Susan and daughter Janie age 2.

On May 13, 1978, daughter three, Grace Helene was born. She was very nearly born in the backyard as Barb was gardening. I was called the rush home and take her to the hospital in Walnut Creek, CA. No sooner did the doctor arrive and boom, she was born within minutes.

Grace was a mini-mom, with the same eyes, mouth and dark brown hair. This was utter joy for both Jenny, now five and Beth, now 18 months.

Meanwhile, lacking books sales in the much less Christian-oriented Bay Area and Pacific Northwest lead to another career change; selling life insurance with Penn Mutual. This job involved very long hours and often evening appointments which kept me away from home quite a bit.

My life at home and in the church was becoming more stressful due to financial pressures. The rapidly rising cost of living was taking a toll on everyone, but struggling young families and marriages were hit the hardest. Barb and I tried to keep the romance alive, but the cares of children and money worries did at times pull us apart.

A few years later after an attempt at a music ministry in Ukiah, CA I accepted a job back in San Francisco selling indoor tanning equipment. This proved to be fairly stable and within a year I was accepted a position in NYC.

In 1983, I moved there and six months later found a suitable home in Woodmere, Long Island. This was a huge culture shock for all of us. I ended up working 12+ hours a day including Saturdays, placing further stress on our marriage and family. After a year we were enjoying some relief from the financial pressures, but Barb and I were still drifting apart.

At one point I thought perhaps a separation would be the answer, so I moved in a friend in Brooklyn for a few months and within a short time of going out at night I met someone and had an affair.

I soon realized this was a big mistake and asked Barb's forgiveness and made a re-commitment to our marriage. By 1986, the New York pressures had taken a big toll on us, which lead to a move to Scottsdale, AZ. Our marriage relationship was rocky at times, but despite the busyness of work and church involvement we did our best to stick together.

This lasted until about 1992 just as daughters Beth and Grace hit their rebellious teen years. At ages 14 and 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ Grace and Beth were beautiful young women with many older friends. This was a constant source of worry, especially for Barb.

I remember our frequent arguments over curfew violations and other teen-parent disagreements about dress codes and experimenting with alcohol and pot. Over the course of a year or so things escalated. Barb and I often grounded the girls.

They responded by staying out all night. On several occasions, I remember Barb telling them they must either live by the house rules or leave. Their response was to leave, staying with older friends or boyfriends for up to a week at a time.

As peacemaker, I tried to negotiate a compromise, but often this served as a wedge between Barb and I. She wanted my full support. Our disagreement on the strictness of house rules and other issues eventually brought our marriage to an end in 1995. In reflecting back, if I knew then what I know now our marriage likely could've been salvaged, but alas, we both moved on. In the following years Barb remarried.

For me this period was a time of midlife crisis, of accepting my own failures and yet pressing ahead to find new happiness.

About a year later I met Micki Ahokas, a beautiful, younger woman while dining at a favorite local restaurant. Micki had been divorced for a year.

On our first meeting I asked her to dance without noticing that one



foot was in a cast. Ha! We laughed and started chatting. Although we didn't have a lot in common I was happy she enjoyed my company and we began to date.

Micki was an animal lover of every type, having raised exotic birds and owning a pet raccoon. She had three Chihuahuas, CeCe, Girly and Poco which were mother, daughter, and son. Within a year we got married and moved into our home in historic downtown Phoenix.

We soon embarked on several home-improvement projects and were getting along pretty well. My only complaint was her drinking wine daily, often to excess. Over time it became clear she was a functioning alcoholic and not incapable of change without professional help.

I did my best to overlook this issue for many years as we stayed busy selling one house and moving into a triplex fixer-upper. By 2003, Micki decided she wanted a child. She was aware I could not be a biological father due to getting a vasectomy, so she arranged to artificially inseminate herself.

On February 10, 2004, Braida Zoe was born and what a little doll she was! By then I was already a grandfather six times, (Cole, Christian, Jake, Noah, Rheya, and Bella). Little Braida now had three big sisters and six nieces and nephews to also love her.

As a so-called "do-over dad," I had more free time to invest with Braida than I ever had, so we did lots of things together as she grew up. Thankfully, Micki was able to curtail her drinking during the pregnancy, but then resumed drinking after Braida was born, but promised to get some help "soon." As the years passed, our relationship continued to decline despite our mutual love for Braida. I tried to get Micki into rehab for years without success.

In January 2012, our relationship came to an abrupt end when Micki accused me of molesting Braida. It would not be until February 2019, seven years later that she realized she was wrong to make these accusations. Only then could Braida and I resume our loving father-daughter relationship.

My conclusion about marriage is that for those blessed they can last a lifetime, given a mutual desire and commitment to ride out all of the storms of life together. But in many other cases, as people change over time, their love and commitment can fade, leaving one or both in a place of deep unhappiness and counter-productivity.

In my remaining years, I hope to find another partner to love and cherish. Meanwhile, I am content to focus on understanding myself better, and doing the best to be there for my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Thanks to online dating, I have entered a couple relationships over the last decade. I enjoyed a 2-3 year relationship with a beautiful, Christian woman Shelley, who remains a dear friend to this day. I also had a wonderful relationship with an amazing, fun and beautiful Persian woman, Suzanne for over a year, until moving to Florida.

Online dating can be very serendipity, but I remain a hopeful optimist that I may meet someone with whom to share the rest of my life.

26. Favorite things about my four girls

1. **Jennifer Christine –** Born March 22, 1973, my oldest daughter Jenny has always been a bright and curious soul. As young child she was always right in the middle of adult conversations, listening

and participating wherever possible.

I adopted Jen at about age 4 after we moved to Northern Cal. It was a joyous occasion to make our relationship official. I now had three little munchkins to call me dad.

Jen was always very

athletic and strong in both gymnastics and dance. In school she attracted lots of friends because she had her own personality and learned to speak her mind. I think she got that trait from her Mom Barb.

Once her sisters Elizabeth and Grace came along she happily took on her new role as the protective Big Sis. At times she could be bossy, but she was usually defending Mom's rules and boundaries.

As the girls reached their teenage years Jen kept her studies up and balanced her personal life very well. She loved drama and performed frequently. Sadly, I missed her high school graduation, but I always rejoiced in both her ability and resilience. Jen met her future husband, Scott Setter in high school and once they were married moved to Dewey, AZ and visited often.

Jen and Scott promptly began having a family. First came Christian, then Noah, Harrison and lastly Sophie. I have many fond memories celebrating birthdays, holidays and attending lots of



football games. All three boys played football and

Scott coached. They were a football-centric family, Jenny was scorekeeper, Sophie was cheerleader.

Continuing our family tradition of starting families young, Jen became a grandmother in 2022 twice before reaching her 50th birthday! Both Christian and Noah had beautiful sons, Zyaire and Emryn, promoting me great-grandfather at age 69!

Jen excelled at home schooling all four children, a major feat for anyone. Now she is thriving as a new Grandma, passing on her mothering skills to the next generation.

Both Jen and Sophie are very involved in dance, with Jen serving as teacher and Sophie competing on the dance team. I've enjoyed many a dance recital and watching their team win awards.

She and Scott have had their ups and downs, but I'm very proud of how they have held their family together while also helping care for Scott's dear father and mother, Al and Charlene Setter.

2. Elizabeth Hope - Elizabeth was born on Nov. 3, 1976 in Tustin, CA. At the time I was a student and Barbara was working full-time. Beth was a beautiful, blonde-haired very active child who learned quickly how do use her charm to get her

way. At times, she could be stubborn and difficult, but she could melt almost any opposition with her smile and bubbly laugh. She did well in school and quickly became popular.

We had a very memorable seventh birthday together. I had moved to New York City and was looking for a house for the family and decided to have Beth fly from San Francisco to NYC to celebrate her seventh birthday.

I rented a limo to pick her up at the airport and then took her to the Hard Rock Cafe. She looked and behaved like a young princess. We even caught a glimpse of Barbara Streisand that night!

The following day we walked around Central



Park and went to see the Broadway show *Little Shop of Horrors.* I remember Beth screaming as this giant man-eating plant lunged toward us in the front row. What magic! What fun!

Our move to New York proved to be challenging, but also a culturally-enriched three years for the family. By the time we relocated to Scottsdale, Arizona in 1986, Beth was 13, but looked 16.

All three girls matured quickly because they looked older, which can sometimes be a curse. Within two years Beth and younger sister Grace were exploring teenage temptations and put their education on the back burner.

Barb and I tried to keep them involved at the black sheep, due to their attractiveness and desire to have fun and ignore boundaries. They soon felt unwelcome at church and opted non-participation.

Feeling misunderstood and hurt they gravitated to older friends which offered them options to living within house rules. Before long Beth was venturing out with friends we'd never met to unknown places for days and weeks at a time.

Beth became pregnant at age 20 with Rheya Hope and was busy pursuing her passion for yoga, which was to become her career path.



Over the next decade she married twice, to Kurt and then Ryan and had two more children, Skyler and Pearl. Beth expanded her expertise to include becoming: a Shaman, recording artist, Reiki master and crusader for a more loving, sustainable world.

Beth thinks big and loves teaching others what she has learned along the way. When it comes to health and healing she is full of alternative ideas and practices. I call her my East-meets-West daughter who is like myself, for good and bad.

I love the special memories with my oldest granddaughter Rheya. In 2019, we drove to Tucson to see For King and Country concert, a top Christian group from



Australia. We ended up with front section seats. We saw the band up close as they paraded back and forth from the main stage to a nearby audience stage. Between the amazing light show and dancebeat music it was really a night to remember!

3. Grace Helene - Grace was born on May 13, 1978, in Walnut Creek, CA. Grace was a mini-mom. As the youngest she enjoyed a life of pampering, as well as a fair amount of hand-me-down clothes.

Like Jen, she was very athletic and did well in gymnastics. She would happily tag along with her big sisters for almost anything they wanted to do.

She was a very happy child and so cute that she could bring a smile to even the grumpiest soul. She loved climbing like a monkey on the jungle gym. She would often follow sister Beth and frequently got into mischief together.

When we moved to Scottsdale her Mom and I thought home schooling for the sixth grade might be a good idea to improve her academic skills. Well, we barely made it through the year and decided this was not a good match for



a girl who thrived on social interaction.

Grace could be very sweet and very independent as she hit her teenage years. It did not help that she looked a lot like Cindy Crawford by the age of 14. Beth and Grace continued as partners in crime and in were in constant disagreements with their Mom.

In 1996, Grace became pregnant with Cole at age 18. She married the father, Jeron Dunn, and had

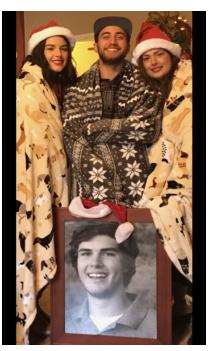
another son, Jacob within two years. They were happy for several years until Jeron's drug issues drove them apart.

Within a year Grace remarried Tim Wilt and a year later Bella was born. Grace, Tim and the three kids seemed to be happy whenever I would visit, but Tim's issues with drinking and drugs would eventually cause them to divorce in 2009.

Grace proved her resilience as a single mom, raising her kids and working full-time in Flagstaff, AZ. Cole got his GED and Jake graduated from an accelerated learning high school called Basis.

In the spring of 2016, our family faced the biggest tragedy imaginable, which hit Grace, Jake and Bella the hardest. Her oldest son Cole decided to experiment by mixing dangerous drugs and died suddenly from an overdose.

I'll never forget the day we got the heart wrenching phone call



from the Flagstaff police with the news. Grace, Jake, Bella and I were in Southern Cal at the time celebrating Jake's full scholarship to USC for creative writing.

We checked out the USC campus dorm and were all set to head to the beach. We got a phone call suddenly followed by a bloodcurdling scream: "NOOOOOOOO!!!!" Grace screamed after hearing the tragic news.

We all collapsed into tears, grief and despair as the reality sunk in: we would never again see our handsome Colie boy's smiling face. It hit us all like a freight train. Grace needed to ID Cole's body so we immediately headed back to Arizona.

In the months and years to follow Grace has learned to cope with this grievous twist of fate as best any mother could. We all miss him dearly everyday. On Christmas Eve, Cole's birthday, it is especially hard on Grace.

In 2021, Grace moved to Sarasota, Florida after RVing around the U.S. for a year since the pandemic shut down her job selling vacation properties with Wyndham resorts. Months later her daughter, Bella and fiance Cody also moved to Sarasota to pursue their career as pet groomers. In the summer of 2021, after receiving my diagnosis of terminal lung disease, I decided to make a fresh start in Sarasota to explore my



options. I came to visit Grace in June and she graciously took care of me as my condition worsened and I became bed-bound.

By August I was well enough to move into an independent living group home, DeSoto Beach Club. I was the youngest resident and quickly befriended one of the oldest. At age 99, Raymond Grandle lived quite a life as broadcaster and writer with the Chicago Tribune and fellow guitarist. He was forever interviewing new residents (inmates) and together we wrote several songs like "Ode to Desoto" and "Overcoming the Covid-19 Blues."

By May 2022, after getting approval for my double lung transplant, the call came at 10:00 PM on May 16th saying I needed to arrive at Tampa General Hospital within two hours with my caregivers Grace and Bella. The surgery was initially 12 hours long then another six hours for an emergency blood transfusion. Grace and Bella stayed at a hotel awaiting word from the surgeon Dr. Katlap on the final outcome. Thankfully, he called Grace about 3 AM to say the surgery was complete. All was well.

Once I got out of the ICU Grace and Bella came to visit often to hang out, talk and watch TV. It was a very challenging six weeks in the hospital, but finally I got discharged and they helped by cooking meals, doing household chores and checking my vitals and medications daily.

A highlight of my daily recovery regiment was making my way in a wheelchair and then walking over to Grace's house nightly for a delicious dinner and movie. Grace has such a giving heart. My fast recovery was accelerated by her nurturing TLC.

4. Braida Zoe - Braida was born on February 10, 2004, in Phoenix, AZ. She was a healthy, active and happy child. She loved her bouncy baby chair and quickly began walking as we moved from a triplex downtown to a larger home in Moon Valley, PHX.

Her big sisters, nieces and nephews all loved spending time with her as a baby. She was now the youngest aunt on the block. After she began walking I would take her almost daily for wilderness walks on the nearby trails. She enjoyed collecting rocks and varous items along the way.

At 18 months, I took her to a swim safety class where she learned to "swim like a fish and float like a boat" in just three months. Soon



thereafter she began at the Neighborhood Montessori school with Miss Janet. She quickly learned to read within the first year.

I remember reading to her at night, then she would tell the story back to me from the pictures at first, then eventually started reading stories to me.

Braida and I have so many good memories of our father-daughter excursions to parks, learning to rollerskate, riding a bike, going to County Fairs and occasional out-of-town trips to visit sisters Jen in Dewey, Grace in Flagstaff as well as summer trips to cool off in Southern Cal.

Braida represented my second chance to be a more present father, which was difficult during my

younger days with my older girls. I think they all understood that, but rather than being envious or bitter, they were all very loving and supportive of the special bond I have with Braida.

Despite the painful disruption of our relationship between the ages of 9-15, the strength and resilience of our relationship resumed on her 15th birthday. It was as though nothing was really lost. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Since then we've created lots of new memories including: teaching her to drive, taking road trips and spending time with my girlfriends and I. while In June 2022, while in the hospital, I was able to watch her high school graduation live via Facebook thanks to her boyfriend Derek.

I'm very proud of the young lady she's become and I know my relationship with Braida, like Jen, Beth and Grace, is forever. I'm very grateful for my new lease on life thanks to my lung transplant. By the grace of God I will be able to



see how my girls stories unfold in the years and decades ahead.

27. A memorable family vacation

One of my favorite vacation memories was our family trips in the summers of 1988/1989 from Phoenix to La Jolla, CA. We rented a beach house within blocks of the ocean and stayed there a week to cool off from the brutal Arizona summer heat.

La Jolla is an upscale community with lots of great restaurants and shopping. Our day would begin early with the three girls wanting to hit the beach with rafts and boogie boards. The weather was an ideal 75-80 degrees in the day, 65 degrees at night.

We would pack up a lunch, towels, umbrella and were set for the day. The beach offered endless activities including: Frisbee, volleyball, shell collecting, people watching and an occasional craft show. At night we feasted on burgers or pizza.

Sometimes we would take a drive through Torrey Pines wilderness area, with a popular jumping off cliff for hang glidering. Fun day trips included visiting the Scripps Institute Aquarium, the San Diego Zoo, Balboa Park, San Diego Wildlife Park and Old Town San Diego. Our favorite nighttime activities included going out for ice cream and watching DVDs before collapsing to rest up to do it all over again the next day. These summer vacations were a much needed break from extreme Arizona summers.

Vacations were also one of the rare moments all three girls seemed able to get along without any major disagreements. Barb and I were also able to recharge our batteries before heading back into triple-digit heat for the balance of the summer.

28. Child rearing do-over

Reflecting on my early years as a father leaves me wishing I had invested more time with each of my daughters, Jen, Beth and Grace individually, which I was able to do three decades later with Braida.

The first decade was a very challenging time for Barb and I. Discovering who I was in my early 20s, while supporting a family and pursuing ministry at the same time was a major juggling act.

While in the midst of it, my time was so splintered that I was not as attentive to my girls need for quality time. Having all three girls in the first four years meant having less available free time for each. So I if a do-over was possible, I would have spread out having Beth and Grace over 6-8 years, which would've allowed more time with each child before the next one arrived.

Another change I would've made is committing to less outside ministry duties and more family time. I remember working all day then dashing out at night to help out at the Crossroads Coffeehouse, coordinating an upcoming concert or doing a weekly Sunday night radio program.

All of my busyness at the time seemed more important than doing fun things with my girls. Of course, none of us are permitted a do over in real life, so at best I can invest as much time as possible with my grandchildren and great grandchildren now.

I can encourage them that good relationships are more important than achieving things. Time is more valuable than money when it comes to raising children. By the time I learned this lesson much water had passed under the bridge.

29. Confessions of a "bookman"

My career in sales and marketing expanded after I was recruited in Flagstaff by the Southwestern Company to sell Bible study books door-to-door in the summer of 1973. As a young believer, I viewed this job as both a mission and an job opportunity. In June I drove from Flagstaff to Nashville TN, which itself was an adventure since I'd never traveled east of Arizona.

I was recruited by Brad, a successful former SW "bookman" who became my team leader. Brad and his wife were



excited about all I would learn in the process of working 75-80 hours a week for 12 weeks, as well as the potential of earning \$6,000-\$12,000.

We arrived at the Nashville headquarters for an intensive week of training. I listened to speaker after speaker singing the praises of Southwestern's positive influence upon student's lives.

Trainees learned the secret of knocking on doors without being intimidating. We memorized and practiced our presentations over and over. We discovered how to overcome objections and most important of all we learned "If you want to *be* enthusiastic, you've got to *act* enthusiastic!"

The sales training also prepared us to hear about 28 no's per day to reach hearing two yes's. This

required extreme mental disciple and a high degree of persistence. Why? Because we never knew whether the first two presentations would result in a yes or the last two.

Next, we were assigned to a territory that we would work for the entire summer. My location was Pontiac, MI. Our product was called the *Family Bible Library*, a 10-volume devotional set designed for all ages with 365 daily lessons, lots of color illustrations and discussion questions. It was bound similar to a set of encyclopedias, which were very popular prior to the Google-era.

I also sold a <u>*Pictorial Bible Dictionary*</u> as an add-on or alternative if they did not have children or grandchildren. Armed with these two great products and plenty of enthusiasm our team arrived at a local Catholic Church in Pontiac, which had agreed to provide SW "bookmen" with modest lodging at a very low cost, given that we would be working 12 hours a day, six days a week promoting gospel study.

Sundays, our only day off, consisted of a regional group meeting for lunch, recreation and discussing our personal experiences of success and challenges of the week. Walking 5+ miles, knocking on over 100 doors a day pushed me far outside of my comfort zone. The job brought both agony and ecstasy. Walking back to a prospect's home in the evening meant being prepared for a spouse to nix the deal, or perhaps to become one my two yes's per day.

This experience prepared me to look beyond the no's in life to visualize the next yes, a lesson which I have carried for a lifetime.

I remember how impressed I was with families of modest income who would sacrifice to invest \$80 for a set of books to help their children understand the Bible. I also remember families with ample money, but very little time or interest in investing anything toward a family study of Scripture.

All in all, I learned more about life and interacting with people by knocking on doors than I ever learned in any classroom. I ended up earning about \$7,000 my first summer, which at the time was a small fortune. I ended up returning for two more summers to sell books with my own team.

This experience also taught me some valuable leadership and management skills. It's rather a shame that 50 years later the era of door-to-door sales is a bygone era. After I returned from the summer, I worked as a part-time Fuller Brush man.

30. Year 2000 crisis averted

One of the more interesting chapters of my career with Swiss America, which began in 1987 and continues to this day, was between 1997 and the year 2000. In late 1997 news was spreading fast that a major problem might develop in our increasingly computer-dependent culture.

As we neared the year 2,000, the so-called Y2K bug could shut down computers, from the smallest to the



largest, as the century rolled over on Dec. 31, 1999.

Computer experts warned it was a monumental task to get a fix done in time and if not completed by 1.1.2000 we could witness a global computer crisis, shutting down everything from alarm clocks to the national power grid.

Unless the entire world suddenly made fixing this bug a top priority we should prepare for the worst. Seeing this as an opportunity to do some good and promote personal preparedness, I convinced Swiss America to spearhead an effort to network with local and national leaders to form the Year 2000 National Educational Taskforce, Y2KNET.

We worked closely with the American Red Cross, local, state and national emergency preparedness professionals to create a Y2KCPR handbook and one-hour educational video, which was distributed at Blockbuster Video and via the American Red Cross. As a public service Y2KCPR was featured on countless U.S. radio and television programs.

This was a very successful promotion for Swiss America. As a primary sponsor this positioned our products as a wise inclusion into an emergency preparedness plan. We suggested financial prepared should include alternative forms of money, such as gold and silver, just in case banks and ATMs might not function on January 1, 2000.

We hosted a major public event in Phoenix with Pat Boone and several noted Y2K authors in 1999. During 1998 and 1999 this campaign brought in over 100,000 new incoming calls to the firm and resulted in a huge spike in precious metals sales.

By late December 1999, it became clear that all of the national efforts at public awareness and corporate corrective action was going to pay off. As it turned out Y2K was just another day. Meanwhile, Americans became more aware of the value of preparedness for any emergency whether natural or man-made.

31. Learning while working

Another fond memory during my three decades with Swiss America was the fulfillment of learning while working. For example, I became a writer by being given writing deadlines which forced me to grow and sharpen my skills by doing it until I got it right. The same was true of producing and cohosting our weekly radio shows *World Economic Perspective* and *Worldview Perspectives*.

I learned to prepare and conduct interesting interviews with scores of authors, scholars and experts over the years. In the process, I was expanding my own understanding and our listener's of how free market economics, Christian ideas on finance and government worked and offered suggested steps to improve the culture.

Virtually all our interview guests were well known experts who were supportive of personal gold ownership as a wise step of financial protection from our ongoing economic and political decline. We argued that since our federal government likely would never go back onto a Gold Standard, as we had been from 1792 to 1971, we as individuals could put ourselves and family back on a Personal Gold Standard.

One of my fondest memories was taking our message on the road with Craig Smith. In the late 80's and early 90s we traveled to about 20 or more of the cities our weekly radio program aired on. By promoting the events a month in advance we would usually draw between 50-300 attendees.

Sometimes we invite dother Christian speakers to join us such as: Dr. John Avanzini, Dr. Jim Spillman, Bruce McCarthy, Howard Freeman and Dr. Warren Heller of Veribank. This added credibility and public interest in the events. We videotaped our "Economic Solutions" events so we could then share the message in the years to come.

Craig and I had a strong sense that we were advancing the Kingdom of God in the process of educating others about the biblical wisdom of asset diversification. This has been a win-win situation for the firm to this day.

Many of the principles we taught are being now being further advanced by other national ministries, such as Brandon Howse's *Worldview Weekend* TV shows and events.

32. Thanks to my mentors

Several men and one women served as mentors in my lifetime, although often unofficially.

My first mentor was my mother Virginia, who showed me what unconditional love looked like in all circumstances. She accepted me no matter whether I was right or wrong, good or bad, obedient or rebellious. In an uncertain and often unforgiving world she was my safe harbor, my refuge from the storms of life.

My next mentor was John McGovern, a young man who boldly stood up for his faith and ultimately I joined him in a prayer to invite Christ into my life in 1973. John then invited me to visit his home church in Scottsdale, which would later facilitate my enrolling at Melodyland School of Theology.

John's love for the gospel and musical artists dedicated to glorifying God encouraged me to do the same. Over the five decades since then, it has been a joy to witness countless lives that John's worldwide church -planting ministry has touched.

My next mentor helped me to enter the world of direct sales. Brad and his wife recruited me into Southwestern book sales. He and his wife were about 8-10 years older and very persuasive and passionate about this unique job which also incorporated ministry. Entering up to 30 complete strangers homes every day presented challenges and potentially big rewards . He was a pro who willingly shared his secrets to success. Thanks to Brad I made it through the toughest sales Boot Camp I could ever imagine with flying colors.

My next mentors were Dr. Jack and Dr. Jim Hayford who did team teaching at Meoldyland. Dr. Jack and Jim were both living examples of how to bring the Kingdom of God alive, both from Scripture and their experience.

I later followed Jim and wife Betsy to the Bay Area to help plant a church in their home. Both Jack and Jim were humble leaders who spoke softly, but with great authority about the present dimensions of the Kingdom at a time when most pastors reserved Kingdom living to some distant future.

"Kingdom now, but not yet," was their theme. This would set my sail for a lifetime of exploration and embracing paradox in pursuit of the Kingdom lifestyle in the present dimensions.

Next I discovered a dynamic teacher by the name of Dennis Peacocke, who founded Strategic Christian Services in Santa Rosa CA. Dennis is a pastor, Bible teacher and global outreach strategist with a gift for helping others think and live strategically. His explained clearly the political and economic implications of Kingdom living.

Dennis' seminars and teaching tapes were like a deep fountain of wisdom in a barren, dry land for me. He explained to the world why economics and geopolitics should matter and how to restore selfgovernment in our broken, fragmented world.

The next major mentor to dramatically impact my life has been Richard Rohr, a Franciscan teacher, author and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, NM. His 2012 book <u>Falling Upward</u> was a breath of fresh air regarding the spiritual steps to maturity by



connecting the first and the second half of life. He explained clearly spiritual inclusivity, universal salvation and the value of silent contemplation.

Rohr challenged my fundamentalist views on many key topics. His books <u>Everything Belongs</u> and Christian mysticism helped me begin to view all circumstances as providential and purposeful in my life. He explained persuasively why Christian mystics bring together all of the other wisdom traditions with a focus on experiencing and modeling the presence of God. He taught me to see things in wholes, rather than in parts. And how to be gracious and compassionate toward those without the same spiritual understanding, rather than demanding complete doctrinal agreement.

33. What if I was never born?

After watching *It's a Wonderful Life* this past Christmas for the umpteenth time, it prompted me to think about the wisdom of reflecting upon such great Christmas classic movies like this and *It Happened on Fifth Avenue* and *The Bishops Wife*.

Each of these movies had a different message, but this year I could see a common thread I had

previously missed. *They all sought to help the audience see life from a very different perspective.*

It's a Wonderful Life helps us imagine a world without our life in it, reminding us of all of the thousands of lives we each touch in our lifetime.



The unknown influence we all have had and that even in our darkest hour God makes provision to turn our suffering into joy.

It Happened on Fifth Avenue reveals a view of life from the bottom, from the perspective of a homeless, yet very happy man who brings needy hearts and souls together. His powerlessness somehow transforms the needy, the unhappy and those blinded by their own power and wealth.

The Bishops Wife sends us the message that true spirituality is more about helping the less fortunate than about religious posturing to build grand cathedrals. Relationships and mercy should never be sacrificed for the sake of temporal temples.

All three classic Christmas movies seek to help explain why my small story is important, but that it must be connected somehow to a bigger story.

To personalize the message of *It's a Wonderful Life* is to try and imagine a world without you in it, something our ego could never fathom, until we finally reach the threshold of life and death.

The very thought of our life fading to black is perhaps the scariest thing our ego could imagine, yet our eventual death is a fact of life which can be gradually embraced with deep reflection and spiritual practices such as sitting in silence and embracing the love which permeates the universe.

Like a golden thread, this indwelling love has seen me through childhood, marriage, family, career, and now semi-retirement. I have tried to make a positive impact in the lives whom I have touched, as George Bailey unknowingly did in *It's a Wonderful Life*. For that I'm eternally grateful!

34. I can't live without...

...my guitar. Ever since I first picked up a guitar at age 13 it has served as my primary creative expression, reflecting my deep love of music.

I was heavily influenced by group such as the Moody Blues, Buffalo Springfield, the Beatles, Led

Zeppelin and many others. During my junior and senior high school years I played in a garage band with fellow longhair musicians for fun.

In 1973, I first began to discover a new world of contemporary Christian music. I began to enjoy



leading groups in worship, which I continued doing for the next decade. Leading worship was my way of giving back and expressing a growing love for God and His Word.

During my middle-age years I played guitar sporadically. Then in my 60s I began to write my own songs, now that I had more time to share new truths I was learning. Now I often volunteer to play in nursing homes, coffee houses and open mic venues. In the future I may volunteer to do jail visitation again, as I enjoyed doing 30 years ago.

Music is the language of the soul and it often reaches many hearts and minds which have grown cold or cold to gospel messages which demand full agreement with their particular beliefs.

35. What I want more of

I want more companionship, friendship, romance, shared memories, doing little things and a few big things together with someone special.

My recent experience seeking new friends and a potential partner since moving to Florida has been challenging. Chemistry is so serendipity and then it needs to flow in both directions. Further challenging me has been my lung transplant recovery this past year. Most women stay in shape with activities that I'm not yet able to resume. I have made a few friends at Meetup groups and at church. I hope to find someone I want to be around most of the time, that I find myself missing when we're apart.

On this journey of online dating I am finding both the joy of hopefulness and the suffering of disappointment.

If I delight myself in union with God, the desires of my heart will ultimately arrive. *God does not always do things soon, but often does things suddenly!*

"Two are better than one," says Scripture. Meanwhile, I am surrendering my search one day at a time and hoping to find my last first date soon.

36. An ideal day in the life

An ideal day in my life begins with a good cup of coffee, a devotional reading and a quiet time of reflection, prayer and meditation. Then a light breakfast, a swim, walk, or bike ride. Then some music listening, conversation, reading or writing.

Next I might check email or social media for the latest family/friend news, or practice playing my

music, songwriting, arranging the next musical event or watching a movie or streaming program.

I also love inviting friends and family over for a shared meal, like a yummy barbecued steak dinner. Then perhaps shopping for the ingredients to prepare the meal. Serving the food and relaxing with a movie, card or board game. Lastly, I head off to bed about 10 PM for a good nights sleep and prepare for the next day.

An alternative ideal evening would be a date with a special woman, which might include dinner out at a nice restaurant, listening to live music or a local show or concert. The evening might end with a romantic walk along the Gulf or dancing under the stars in each others arms. I'm hoping more of these ideal days lie ahead.

37. How am I unique?

Each one of us is a very unique human being. No two life experiences are exactly the same. This fact should prompt us to practice extreme compassion toward our fellow man. Yet our human nature still nudges us toward judging and comparing ourselves with everyone else.

What makes me unique is the sum total of my upbringing, gifts or talents of intelligence,

curiosity, creativity, actions, life choices as well as my deepest held convictions.

I am unique in having chosen a spiritual path young. At age 20, I chose to follow my heart and soul, to answer a calling to seek first the Kingdom of God, rather than seeking first educational degrees or maximum monetary compensation.

Between the ages of 21-30 I viewed my work as a means to the end of ministry, but eventually the financial pressures of life, marriage and family motivated me to more seriously apply myself to a career in sales and marketing for the next 40 years.

Thankfully, working for a spiritually-driven firm like Swiss America allowed me a rather unique opportunity of blending work and ministry. A lasting legacy of Swiss America is helping explain that true wealth is both physical and spiritual.

In 2023, our company prayer/Bible study group celebrates its 30th year. The group started as a twice a week 8am meeting led by the founder and Chairman Craig. R. Smith. The group now continues online due to the major changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020.

Since moving into semi retirement, I have chosen new ways to serve and volunteer. Another somewhat unique gift I have developed is condensing inspired books into song lyrics and then putting them to music to share truths I've learned with others.

In many ways we're all very ordinary people with much in common. We are living ordinary lives which eventually lead us to an ordinary death. We are also extraordinary people, special and unique.

38. VIP conversations

Over the years, it's been my privilege to interview a great variety of historians, authors, leaders and scholars while producing national radio programs, which I later distilled into recorded resources.

In *The Future Church* and *The Big Picture* I explored spiritual, economic and political trends in search of deeper truth and solutions to the growing cultural divide. I interviewed a wide diversity of Christian leaders, ranging from house church leaders such

as: Ern Baxter, Christian Smith, John Zens and Wolfgang Simpson to megachurch pastors and teachers such as Tommy Barnett, Dr. Jack Hayford and Dr. Tony Evans.



This was my golden opportunity to explore spiritual answers to big questions about why the church was so divided and what could be done to bring healing and restoration. The topics of interviews included how spiritual people could become more involved in shaping the culture with leaders such as: Zig Ziglar, Dr. Ted Baehr, Stephen McDowell, Jim Rutz and Dennis Peacocke.

One startling conclusion was the amount of agreement between all of the various Christian circles about how and why the message of Christ needed to be simplified and lived out in our daily lives, versus just better sermons or more programs.

The recurring theme was that a Christian worldview must be central in our thinking. The sad truth was that too many Christians may confess a belief in Christ, but have bought into anti-Christian lifestyles, which has left a huge disconnect. Journalists like Carl Thomas and reformers like Dr. George Grant have written about this extensively.

Too few believers have practiced Christ's central message of becoming salt and light to our surrounding society. Thus, an anything goes philosophy dominates modern culture. Scientist tell us that every cell in our body has two DNA codes, one code to bring each cell to maturity and reproduction, and the other code to bring each cell into integration with the entire body.

As in the natural realm, so it is in the spiritual realm. God has placed within everyone an individual destiny of maturity and reproduction, and a corporate destiny to integrate with the entire human race. The world yearns for people who can demonstrate the superiority of the Kingdom of God to the world system's self-centered thinking.

Jesus' monumental prayer in John chapter 17 sums up the high calling to pursue unity with one another and union with God. Without this fundamental shift in how we live, I fear the future of the church will sink into further irrelevancy amid our desperately hurting culture.

To read the transcript of these classic interviews visit: www.myideafactory.net/future church.

39. Community service

Starting in 2015, after visiting Mom in Twin Falls at an assisted living facility due to her dementia, I was moved to begin volunteering at a local nursing home in Phoenix. I hosted a weekly Bible study using a booklet entitled *Letters from God*, a series of letters of affirmation written by Doug Sherman.

It was fulfilling to see residents study their Bible and then discuss what each letter meant to them personally. I brought a simple church service to them, including a few worship songs and group prayer. I enjoyed the fellowship each week and on occasion my daughters Braida, Elizabeth and grandson Cole would join me.

After nearly a year, I turned the meeting over to a local church and began a new volunteer project with the Alice Cooper Teen Center, giving weekly guitar lessons to several students. This was challenging in a different way, requiring that I learn new songs the students wanted to be taught. I did this for eight months and enjoyed getting close with several students, some of which attended a church connected with the teen center.

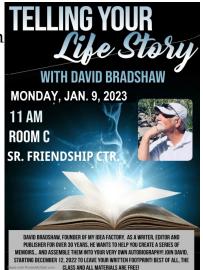
In the Fall of 2016 after Mom's passing, I decided to volunteer with Hospice of the Valley, a large Phoenix-based organization. After a four-week training class I took assignments to meet weekly with hospice patients, either in their home or in group homes. These assignments varied both in duration and content. Sometimes I would come to just spend 3-4 hours with a patient to relieve the caregiver or sit and talk, go for a hike or sing. One patient, John was a former athlete with pretty severe dementia. He always wanted to go hiking in the nearby foothills. John loved riding in my convertible with the top down along with his dog. We would check out various local hiking trails.

During the course of our hike, he would ask me no less than 5-6 times if I had a girlfriend and what her name was. Each time I would tell him her name and the same details. This was a patiencebuilding exercise for me which gave me a better foundation of understanding the disease.

About the same time my brother Kevin put together a short film "Yes, ALZ" which he produced with friends offering some valuable tips on care giving for a loved one with dementia. The key is to agree with those suffering memory loss

and then to redirect the conversation, rather than arguing, which make them become very upset.

Since moving to Sarasota Florida in the summer of 2021 I've decided to volunteer at the local Senior Friendship Center. I'm really enjoying helping seniors to write



their life story via 50+ memoirs, because it is so valuable for both their loved ones and to them.

40. Personality evolution.

I have always had a pretty laid-back personality, despite being diagnosed with hyperactivity as a young child, and later ADD. But my personality gradually evolved during my teen years from introvert to extrovert as I entered the workplace.

My first job selling magazine subscriptions doorto-door involved putting on a new personality as a salesman, which followed through the rest of my life. I learned from books, such as <u>The Greatest</u> <u>Salesman on Earth</u> that action proceeds thought, one of my mantras during the three summers I sold books door-to-door.

Living my way into a new way of thinking has stuck with me for a lifetime. Most friends and family would agree say my primary personality type is that of a peacemaker, being patient and easy-going as well as creative and expressive.

The shadow side of my personality is my tendency to procrastinate and avoid difficult confrontations. In recent years I have tried to recognize this negative trait and address it. On the whole, most people find I'm pretty easy to get along with. I have decided to avoid divisive arguments on topics such as politics and religion.

Over the years I have found the chances of changing someone's mind on strongly held beliefs is usually an exercise in futility. It is best to just agree to amiably disagree and move on to more beneficial conversation topics. This would be my interpretation of turning the other cheek.

41. I want to be remembered for...

... being more of a giver than a taker in life, as a reflection of God's giving nature.

The older and wiser we become, the more we understand that when our time on earth is done we take nothing with us except our spiritual consciousness. What is most important to leave behind are good memories of loving relationships and shared activities, rather than stuff.

This reality has prompted me to become a stuff minimalist and a relationship maximalist over the last decade. For example, when I moved to Florida in the summer of 2021, I decided to empty my storage unit and give away my furniture, bike, kayak and other stuff to my daughters and grandchildren. I took only what I could fit in the back of my convertible car on this new adventure: two guitars, amp, my clothes, a few pictures and memorabilia.

It was a very liberating and reminded me of the freedom I felt as a teenager hitchhiking up the California coast with only a backpack, guitar and a few changes of clothes. Somehow detachment from things promotes a greater trust/union with God.

I also hope to be remembered as a patient soul, willing to pause before speaking or acting impulsively. For much of my life I was pretty selfcentered, but gradually over the years by the grace of God, I've learned to shed my ego layer by layer.

Learning patience to me means being able to say *it's all good, even when it's not.* Being able to hold a paradox of unresolved issues and still maintain peace of mind and heart.

Lastly, I hope to be remembered as a loving father and grandfather, willing to invest time and money into the lives of my amazing family. In my younger days, at times I failed them and caused some painful memories, which I hope have faded over time and been replaced with better memories that will last a lifetime. In my professional and ministry life I hope to be remembered as a connector, communicator, and distiller of truth. Although truth is unchanging, our understanding of it evolves over time. This has been the case with me. The older I get, the less sure I am that I fully understand the great mysteries of life and God, and the more sure I am this is how it should be.

Sitting in silence can be my greatest teacher of who I am, rather than seeking more information. The fruit of knowing the truth is being set free from the cares of life, regrets about the past and fears of the future.

42. Reinspirement plans

Today another 10,000 Baby Boomers turn age 65. That's over 3 million Boomers a year entering a new stage of life over the next decade. Their thoughts usually turn toward retirement plans.

Retirement is presently undergoing a widespread re-definition - from retreating and withdrawing to redirecting and expanding, thanks to longer lifespans and healthier lifestyles.

Many retirees are deciding to redefine, rewire and prepare themselves for an "encore" career after leaving the workforce, either by expanding their skills, volunteering or pursuing a new creative expression.

Author and founder of Encore.org. Mark Friedman in his book <u>*How to Live Forever*</u> reminds us that many of the greatest contributions in history have come from those in their 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond.

My plans are to explore new and fulfilling ways to give back during my next stage of life. About 70% of Boomers like myself, are not 100% financially independent and will continue working part-time.

Thankfully, I still continue serving as a consultant with Swiss America. I also plan to make myself available to help others interested in writing, editing and publishing their own autobiography. Who knows what other new doors may open.

I also enjoy sharing my <u>*Blissful Ballads*</u> songs in nursing homes, coffee houses and open mics. I enjoy plays, concerts, museums and traveling.

As my health normalizes in 2023, I expect to again become more active and outgoing. These past two years of facing major health challenges have taught me to appreciate living life to the fullest each day.

I also plan to explore Florida and the surrounding states with more short trips. I plan to expand my

activities beyond walking and swimming to include Pilates, biking, kayaking and pickleball. I will continue reading and writing new book reviews and songs. I may publish another book with more book reviews and songs. I also enjoy watching movies I find educational and inspiring.

43. A memorable travel story

In July 2018, I embarked on a two-week vacation with my old girlfriend, Shelley to France and Italy. This was my first trip to Paris and there is so much to see, we must have walked over 5-6 miles a day.

We left on the Fourth of July from LA and stayed at a nice hotel with a bakery on a nearby corner. We decided to begin our Paris exploration by visiting Notre Dame and Saint Chapelle, which has the most amazing floor to ceiling stained glass windows depicting all the major Bible stories to help illiterate members understand Scripture.

Next we walked several miles to the Arc de Triumph and ending up at the Eiffel Tower, which is an amazing structure, especially at night. The following day we visited several major museums, including the Musée de Orsay to see the works of Picasso and Renoir. As an artist and art teacher, Shelley was really in her element. We ended with a dinner cruise up and down the Seine river. It was an enchanted evening to witness the locals dancing along the Left Bank.

The next day we took a short train ride to visit the Palace of Versailles. We marveled at the amazing gardens, fountains and goldplated everything inside.

The following day we were up early to visit the Louvre Museum. After hours of gazing at the master works of art,



including the amazingly small, but famous Mona Lisa. We then headed to Monte Mart to see Basilica Si Coeur and the artist courtyard to have lunch.

We then flew to Rome for the next leg of our adventure. We decided to splurge and stayed at a five-star hotel in the Villa Borgese Park, which included a very comfortable bed and heated swimming pool. We were able to bike to the famous Musso Galleria Borgese, which included amazing ceiling frescos and sculptures.

Then we visited the famous Trevi Fountain, tossed our wishful coins in and headed to the Pantheon. The next day we headed for the Roman Colosseum ruins. It was so amazing to see the catacombs and imagine persecuted Christians hiding from Roman authorities.

The next major stop was Saint Peter's Basilica the home of the Catholic Church and Pope Francis. I was so vast, lavish and historic. The Sistine Chapel was the most amazing.

The following morning we hopped a train to Assisi, hometown of Saint Francis. We stayed at a small hotel at the base of town in Santa Maria and caught a bus up to Assisi to visit the Basilica and walk around the historic streets.

Back in Santa Maria we visited the Basilica of Saint



Mary, which contains one of the original tiny churches that Francis restored, which only seated about a dozen people.

That night we enjoyed a nice Italian dinner and music by a local band playing Pink Floyd songs in the plaza near the Basilica, complete with a light show, truly a night to remember. The following day it was back on the train to Florence. What a beautiful city! We headed for the Uffizi Museum and Galleria de Academia to see Michelangelo's David sculpture, among many other classics. We stopped by the beautiful Florence Cathedral, which was being renovated.

Next stop was Venice, the land of canals, tourist shops and gondola rides. We hit as many sights as possible during our two-day stay. The San Marco Cathedral was beautiful and of course we enjoyed a romantic gondola ride and dinner.

The last stop was back to Paris for a farewell day of



window shopping before catching our flight back home. Wow, so many good memories! My only regret is that we did not have more time to visit other locations, but there's always next time.

44. A major life transition

In 2020, I switched from full-time to part-time writing and marketing for Swiss America, due to a combination of a change in ownership of the firm and the onset of strict COVID-19 mandates. This freed up my schedule to begin doing some new things, such as compiling some of my book reviews into my first book and a music album in November 2020 entitled <u>*Blissful Books and Ballads.*</u>

This unique project included combining 10 book reviews into a single book and then writing and recording 10 songs inspired by the 10 reviews. I recorded the songs at my daughter Beth's condo in north Phoenix and then I did the final mix and mastering at a studio in Mesa, AZ.

In April 2021, it became clear that my case of COVID-19 was taking a turn for the worst. Following a two-month stay with my daughter Beth in Mission Viejo, CA which included a twoweek stay in the hospital, I was officially diagnosed with Pulmonary Fibrosis.

I then returned to Phoenix and decided to visit my daughter Grace in Florida. So I cleared out my storage unit and headed towards Sarasota,



Florida in early June 2021 with my oldest grandson. Christian, now age 23. We had some good heart-to-heart talks on our three-day road trip. Christian was hoping to make a fresh start. When we arrived in Florida, I developed a terrible case of thrush from taking high doses of steroids. What a lousy way to greet beautiful Sarasota. I was able to get some medication and thankfully within three weeks the thrush mouth pain dissipated.

My daughter Grace took great care of me, providing my own room and cooking all of my meals while I was trying to recover and remain as active as possible, given my worsening health.

The next step was getting into see a local pulmonologist to explore my options for treatment, which took almost 2 months. I did my best to get limited exercise using oxygen, like water aerobics and walking around in the swimming pool.

By August, I finally got in to see a local pulmonologist who was not overly encouraging, but referred me to Tampa General Hospital (TGH) for testing to see if I was healthy enough to qualify for a double lung transplant. He candidly told my daughter that unless I improved soon she should start planning for hospice care. Yikes!

After waiting two months for a call back from TGH I decided to reach out to The Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida. To my amazement within a week I got a call back from Mayo saying the doctors had reviewed my case and felt I might be a good transplant candidate and scheduled me for 10-days of intensive testing in February 2022.

I needed to bring a caregiver along, so I invited an old school buddy Scott McKinney to make the four hour trip to Jacksonville, after he arrived from Phoenix, AZ. Visiting the Mayo Clinic was an interesting adventure which involved an average of 4 to 6 Dr. appointments a day for two solid weeks. I was tested from head to toe to see if I was healthy enough to survive such a major surgery. Thankfully, I passed all the tests and by March I was qualified to be put on their transplant list.

Meanwhile, Tampa General Hospital contacted me after they finally had a chance to review my case. So I met with their transplant team and they accepted my testing at Mayo. On May 12, 2022, I was finally approved for their transplant list.

Miraculously, just four days later on May 16th at 10 PM I received a call from Tampa General saying they had my lungs and I needed to arrive there within two hours for surgery with my caregiver, daughter Grace. That was miracle #1.

45. My near-death experience

Contracting Pulmonary Fibrosis in 2021 marked the began the biggest health challenge of my life. I went from being very active to a couch potato between April 2021 and May 2022. I tried to stay active, but having a degenerative lung disease meant I required oxygen for doing anything active.

Finally, after months of testing at both the Mayo Clinic and Tampa General Hospital I got on the list for the double lung transplant in May 2022. Within four days a series of miracles led to receiving my double lung transplant on May 17, 2022.

I remember thinking this is the biggest leap of faith I've ever taken, but if I am to have a future, this was my only real option for both quality and quantity of life.

My daughter, Grace and granddaughter Bella accompanied me to the hospital that fateful night.

The surgeon, Dr. Katlap, a tall muscular Russian surgeon, had explained in an earlier meeting how the transplant surgery was done using a power saw cutting across my rib cage to open the chest like a clamshell to do the operation. Ouch!



As I lay in the operating table, I had no sense of fear, but rather confidence that my fate was in the hands of God and my well-credentialed surgeon.

As the anesthesia took affect, I remember simply praying God's will be done, whatever that was. The transplant surgery, which was typically a 6-8 hour procedure, required Dr. Katlap to fly across the country to inspect the donor lungs, then transport them back ASAP for surgery.

In my case, the surgery had several complications taking initially 12 hours to complete, then requiring I be re-opened for an additional 6 hours to complete a blood transfusion. It was during this emergency re-opening I'm told my heart stopped for almost 3 minutes!

In between the surgeries I briefly regained semiconsciousness before they upped the anesthesia. My memory of this experience was a sense that there was some type of shift in consciousness.

I did not find the experience fearful in any way, it was more of a sense of surrender, like peacefully floating down a river without any control or concern about my destination. It was blissful.

I felt safe, but it was a total mystery what would come next. I lost all concept of time. It could've been minutes, hours or days. At the end of my 18hour surgery when I regained consciousness, I felt very grateful to still be alive and breathing, although I was on intubation and could not talk.

A few hours later when the surgeon looked in on me I asked him on paper if perchance I had died and was then revived on the operating table? He was amazed I remembered anything, saying "*Not on my watch*!" He confirmed I had a miraculous recovery after flat-lining for nearly three minutes. I tried to express my extreme gratitude, but in moments like this how could I say thanks enough?

My near-death experience confirmed my deepest convictions: death is not to be feared and that when my time does come I can face it with full assurance that I will return to the place of love from which I came where my spirit can soar unencumbered by a physical body.

46. The 9 lowest points in my life

The nine lowest points in my life which come to mind chronologically are; First, being expelled from school for smoking pot. Second, realizing I hurt my mom by running away from home. Third, being involved in a church split. Fourth, divorce number one. Fifth, divorce number two. Sixth, the loss of my oldest grandson Cole in 2016. Seventh, the loss of my mother Virginia in 2016. Eighth, the separation from daughter Braida from 2013-2019. Ninth, my 2021 diagnosis of pulmonary fibrosis.

Sometimes life deals us unexpected challenges which can change the course of our life forever. The best example is the circumstances leading to my divorce from Micki in 2012.

In January 2012 I got a call from Micki at work to come home immediately. It seems our daughter Braida age 7 was caught playing doctor/nurse with a neighbor girl age 4. Her parents accused Braida of inappropriate behavior and called Child Protective Services to investigate.

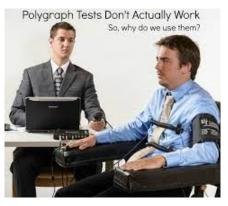
As upsetting as the accusation sounded, the truth is, because they were friends and this was the first time for such an incident, CPS determined this was an innocent case of curious child-play.

However, this conclusion was not shared by Micki. She was 100% convinced Braida would never have done such a thing unless she had been previously molested herself, just as Micki had been as a child.

She then accused me of being the perpetrator. I was flabbergasted that she could even think this, let alone accuse me of such a terrible thing.

It mattered not to Micki that Braida denied I ever exhibited any such inappropriate behavior. Micki then insisted I take a "lie detector" test, to which I agreed, to hopefully put her fears to rest. Little did I know Micki met with an unprofessional polygraph tester to whom she explained what she suspected and was "knew" the test would "prove."

Thinking there's no way I would not pass, given that the allegations were 100% false, I scheduled the polygraph test. The day of the test I had my suspicions about the credibility of this



polygraph tester, but I took the test - which was filled with disgusting questions and quasiallegations. Still, I felt confident of a good test result, thinking polygraphs were 90% accurate. I was innocent, so how could it show otherwise?

The following day I was greeted at the door after work by Micki demanding I pack up my stuff and move out immediately. The results of the polygraph showed that I failed. I now felt like I entered *The Twilight Zone* where unreal, untrue accusations were confirmed by an unreal, untrue polygraph test. Nevertheless, I moved out and began attempting to prove my innocence by meeting with another highly respected, polygraph firm and retesting. In the process I learned of several complaints against AAA Polygraphs for improper testing.

Despite showing Micki a volume of complaints and passing a second polygraph test, she refused to accept the truth and got a Restraining Order to prevent me from seeing Braida!

Never mind the embarrassment of having the police show up at my place of business, the larger issue was the damage to Braida, having her loving father suddenly ripped out of her life.

After checking with an attorney, I was amazed to discover that because I was not Braida's biological father and had not legally adopted her (due to the Micki did not want Braida to know I was not her biological father) I had zero legal rights to see Braida. This was the most difficult, unfair situation I ever faced in my life.

Out of frustration and confusion I met with a Life Coach for counseling, who empathized with my situation. He suggested I would need to have extreme patience, saying that in time our relationship would be restored. But when? She was now eight years old, and in need of a father now, not later.

Over the next couple years, I continued to attempt to see her on birthdays and holidays, but now Micki said Braida did not want any contact. Talk about adding insult to injury.

Nevertheless, I held onto the promise that the love I poured into Braida over her lifetime had taken root and would grow over time, despite my absence. My goal was to continue dripping love on her, waiting on God to do a miracle of restoration.

On Father's Day 2015, Micki announced that she felt Braida was feeling emotional stress as a result of seeing me occasionally, so she cut me off completely, despite



allowing Braida to visit me over the last three years, but never withdrawing accusations of abuse.

The next 4 years were the most painful in my life. Without any contact with Braida and being unable to change or correct this adverse circumstance in my life forced me to accept it as part of my spiritual journey. Somehow I even learned how to embrace it over time. Our separation continued until February 2019 on Braida's 15th birthday. Finally Micki decided to allow Braida to choose if she wanted to spend time with me or not. And of course she did!

I will never forget our joyous reunion. I took her out to The Olive Garden for a birthday lunch. We had so much ground to cover. We talked for hours, but mostly our connection was heart to heart. We were so grateful to be back in relationship and determined to make up for all of the lost years.

Since then we have become closer than ever! We talk weekly and maintain a closer father-daughter connection as a result of our forced separation. As they say, you don't appreciate what you have until you lose it. What was one of the lowest points in my life will forever be a reminder that great joy often follows great suffering.



47. Physical fitness, or else

Staying in good physical shape is important to me as I age because it is so closely related to both

quality of life and longevity. Since my lung transplant surgery it has become even more vital.

My daily routine includes walking 1-3 miles, swimming laps in the community pool. I find swimming both relaxing and refreshing. One of my habits is to recite the Beatitudes, the Lords Prayer and the 23rd Psalm while swimming to keep my mind focused vs. simply counting the laps.

In addition to swimming I plan to start biking again as my upper body strength increases with weight training and Pilates. Some other new activities on my list are pickleball and kayaking. These two sports are

popular in Florida and can be done solo or with a partner. Long walks on the Gulf beaches are also high on my list of physical activities, especially with a significant other.

48. Strengths and weaknesses

"When I am weak, then I am strong," said the Apostle Paul. So strengths and weaknesses can be very different to the spiritual person than they appear to most.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) remind us that poverty, mourning, meekness, mercy, purity of

heart, peacemaking and persecution are qualities highly valued in God's Kingdom, yet they mostly shunned in our modern world system.

That being the case, I've always sought to be strong in Spirit and weak in the flesh. Still, we all fight certain temptations and make some bad choices.

One of my biggest weaknesses is procrastination. It's gotten me into trouble on many occasions, whether putting off paying a bill, asking for forgiveness, or telling the truth about something wrong that I did. After every incident I kick myself for doing or not doing the right thing, yet procrastination can become a bad habit. I have become better at overcoming my procrastination as I age by taking action in the moment more often.

As for my greatest strength, I think it's maintaining a positive attitude in the face of major negative obstacles and attitudes. I believe faith, hope and love can overcome even the darkest of circumstances in the long run.

I have learned the value of letting go of short-term appearances and adversities which are out of my control and simply resting in the knowledge that everything in my life belongs there. There is no upside to dwelling on downside possibilities and threats. Fear and love cannot both occupy the same space. Love always wins in the end.

Living in a positive and present reality serves to lift the spirits of those around me, which creates an upward spiral of mutual encouragement. Over the years I've learned that my best default response to circumstance is to say yes. If I begin with a no, it's very difficult to ever get back to yes, as the movie *Yes Man* with Jim Carrey humorously illustrates. Sure, occasionally I might say yes to the wrong thing, but I'd rather risk that possibility than miss out by habitually saying no.

49. What's new in 2022?

2022 was a most transformational year for me. COVID-19 in 2021 became Pulmonary Fibrosis and turned me into a couch potato overnight.

It's hard to imagine how vital our breath is until facing a struggle like this. My recovery has been a roller coaster, but the trajectory is upward. I could not have made it without the support and prayers of my family and friends especially my daughter, Grace, who has been my primary caregiver.

In December 2022, after living down the street from each other since May 2021, Grace and I found

a larger Villa on a small lake. I'm happy to be getting out to church and meeting new friends.

I am also enjoying leading our prayer group in a study of the Sermon on the Mount in 2023. Many find these teachings nearly impossible to follow because Jesus replaces



conventional wisdom with a radical new vision of a union of heaven and earth.

Christ exemplifies this inner and outer journey from seeking power and privilege to seeking powerlessness and inclusivity. Jesus reveals in the Sermon on the Mount a benevolent universe/God, not a hostile or indifferent universe/God.

My goal is to reconnect my little story with the bigger story of life. Christ invites us to move beyond worship of God to imitation of Christ. He calls us to both personal and institutional transformation, from the bottom up and from the inside out.

50. Dear lung donor family,

Greetings from Sarasota, Florida! My name is M. David Bradshaw and I was the fortunate recipient of your relative's gracious gift of both of his healthy lungs on May 17, 2022.

Without this amazing surgery I was given a 2-3 year life expectancy. After contracting Covid-19 in January of 2021, Pulmonary Fibrosis, a degenerative lung disease, was brought on.

As a father of four daughters, grandfather of ten, and this year great grandfather of two, I would like to express my own and my family's gratitude for your relative's sacrificial gift.

Your loss of a loved one has made it possible for my life to be extended for perhaps decades!

If possible, I would like to speak with you or perhaps meet in person to give you a big hug of appreciation. The breath of life is such a gift that we usually take for granted.

As a writer/songwriter I plan to share the miracle of this gift with others – both to encourage new organ donors as well as to salute the miracle of modern medicine and all the selfless doctors, nurses and caregivers who make transplant operations possible.

Prior to my transplant I stumbled onto an excellent movie "2 Hearts" which presents the story of both the lung donor and recipient, who just happens to be the son of the famed Baccardi's Rum.

I was so inspired seeing on screen the eventual meeting of the two families in an outburst of tears of grief and joy, knowing that part of their relative lives on despite their tragic loss.

Every morning I wake up and place my hands on my chest and thank God for my new set of healthy lungs and pray I will use them wisely – inhaling grace and love and exhaling gracious love - to everyone I speak with this day.

I have served as a hospice volunteer over the last five years since my mother passed in 2017. A book that helped me to deal with the grief of losing my best friend and biggest supporter in life is "The Grace in Dying" by Kathleen Dowling Singh.

Kathrine served as a hospice nurse for 30 years, sitting bedside with patients and families during thousands of deaths. Her heartfelt conclusion: "Dying is safe... there is nothing to fear." We are born into this world in love and that is where we return upon passing. My book review of this amazing volume as well as the song it inspired are posted at <u>www.blissfull.org</u>.

If you are willing to reach out and make contact with me, I would love to know more about the donor and perhaps include a chapter or article about him as a tribute to encourage others. *-David Bradshaw*, July 30, 2022

51. Making space for grace

This is a song I wrote which was inspired by the classic book, *<u>The Grace in Dying</u>* by Kathleen Dowling Singh.

May we all find the inner joy of surrender, making space for grace in both life and death.

Death is a mirror, reflecting all of life, from perceived tragedy, to experienced grace.

We're all ordinary people, facing an ordinary death, Selflessly born into this world, we shall selflessly die.

Living is fragile, and dying is safe. Giving is healing, crying myself awake.

Our journey into ego, births notions of time and space, our journey out of ego, helps us make space for grace.

The key to happiness in life, is compassion and attention, The key to happiness in death, is acceptance and surrender.

Life's task: transforming our suffering into joy, Death's task: transcending body, mind and spirit.

Knowing ourselves to be planted in Divine Love, we seamlessly merge from earthly to heavenly love.

Like an ice cube, melting back into water, warmed by God's love, we ascent as heavenly steam.

May we all find the inner joy of surrender, making space for grace in both life and death.

Within every tragedy are the seeds of grace, unless a seed falls to the ground, it shall never bear fruit.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Grace and peace follows suffering and pain.

Living is fragile, and dying is safe. Giving is healing, crying myself awake.

In life may we see our body as God's temple, a holy place awakened to God's amazing grace.

We give thanks for every breath we take. Inspired lives, until the last breath we take.

Life's task; transforming our suffering into joy, Death's task; transcending body, mind and spirit.

The highest spiritual values in this life, begin with thoughtful reflection upon death.

Like stained glass windows, we sparkle in the sun, but true beauty, is revealed from the light within.

Living is fragile, and dying is safe. giving is healing, crying myself awake.

All traces of fear of death are now lost, as space for grace and joy is now found.

Love's our last connection with this world, Love's our natural condition leaving this world.

May we all find the inner joy of surrender, making space for grace in both life and death.



Telling The Story of Your Life

A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Writing Your Memoirs and Autobiography in 8 Weeks!

Hello, my name is David Bradshaw, founder of My Idea Factory. As a writer, editor and publisher for over 30 years, I want to help you create a series of memoirs... and then assemble them into an autobiography.

We all have at least one book inside us, my goal is to help pry it out of you!

To help you think and write about your life with a new purpose.

In this class you will be prompted to write about one aspect of your life at a time, thus reducing the complexity and stress of trying to create one long continuous story.

You'll discover answers to questions you never knew to ask ... about the real you, your family and social history, to share with your descendants and the world.

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Ideaman@MyIdeaFactory.net