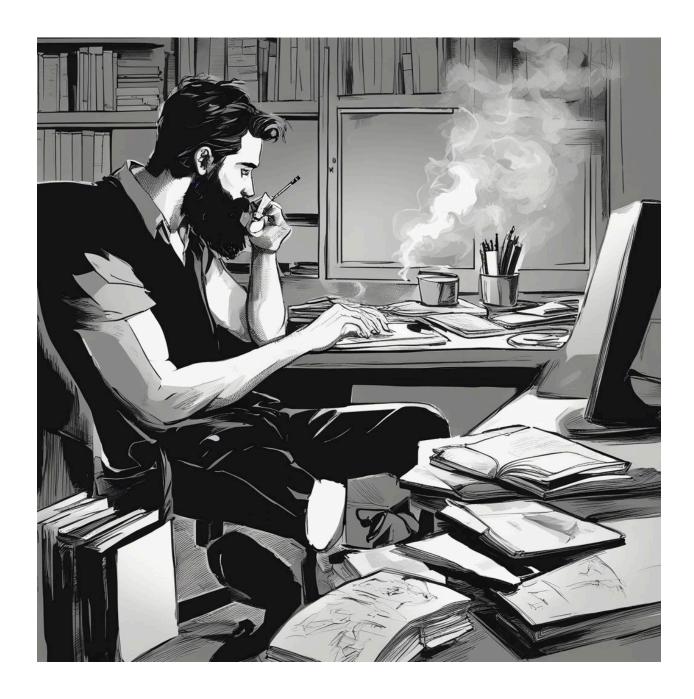
The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

JUSTIN E.G. FOY



PREFACE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

To put it bluntly, I am the worst kind of stereotype. I am a 33-year-old over evangelized and underutilized Christian white male who lives at home. I have no job. I have no car. And I have no woman. As such things come and go, fame and fortune, job or an unemployment check, I am the very result of societies failures and the stain of its rejection.

I am the classic case of a man (boy, really) creating and failing and tripping up stairs at finding fame in movie scripts and upside down half baked media pilots (completely supplemented by student loans and poker games of course), stretched out over years of meaningless higher education classes and painstakingly grueling internships that continually lead to a stream of failed independent entertainment projects. I have a Master's Degree in Biblical Studies and can't even walk into a Christian Church anymore... My longest relationships last about a year or so, in which I dream of re-entering society as a normal family man with a job and a house and a wife and a few kids, but always just end up somehow getting left in the dust with yet another empty canvas of space in order to fill up with yet another FANTASTICAL story to tell.

In a lot of ways, I am completely despicable. Like Louis C.K. says, "I have a lot of beliefs... And I live by none of them. That's just the way I am. They're just my beliefs. I just like believing them – I like that part. They're my little believies. They make me feel good about who I am. But if they get in the way of a thing I want, [then] I do that."

But then again, in a lot of ways I'm not like that at all. And probably like you, I'm a mixed bag of right and wrong, up and down, solid and weak, funny yet completely humiliated, happy but sad, and tragically disturbed about the future of my "self" let alone the future of mankind and the planet Earth. At the same time I am quietly optimistic for a better day, although I am not completely willing to do much about it. Except, maybe, write a book about the meaning of life so that some other poor sap can go and do all the work for me. Little did I know, that writing the *Interactive Guide* would actually change my own life so incredibly and so deeply, that many of my own shallow worldviews would fall at the way side. But before getting ahead of myself - - by talking about the countless hours writing, interviewing, searching for the answers to the meaning of life from thousands of people, who often times revealed the most intimate, sometimes tragic, sometimes romantic, sometimes horrific stories to me along the way - - I truly am excited for you, YES YOU, to read this book!

Now please, don't get me wrong... I am an extremely caring and empathetic guy who volunteers for youth groups, does my chores and whatnot; heck, I even help coach my nephew's little league football team, the Bellingham Yard Dawgs. So all in all being the stereotypical 33-year-old white male who lives at home, eats turkey sandwiches and watches The Big Lebowski all day long DOES have its advantages. Instead of paying bills, I rent a car and investigate life for a book idea. Instead of having a roommate pass out naked on my living room floor, my Mom still does my laundry. Instead of going out and clubbing downtown with my friends, I'm having a vice storm right in the middle of my house. You know what I'm saying?

The fact is we all have a messy way of life, a messy, imperfect, incomplete picture of what life *could be*. Yeah, I live at home. Yeah, I could go get a day job and my own small apartment or something. I wish I could, I really-really do, but that is the kind of stuff that is super hard for me; especially right now, as I am finishing the Degree and writing this book and just coming off of yet another die hard broken relationship. It's like the Dude says, "I'm not handling the money, driving the car and talking on the phone all at the same time, [dude]."

Anyway, this past year of finishing my Master's and writing this book has been a major culmination of a journey, a path, an entire failed and burdened and passionate life that finally gave birth to something genuine. No doubt child birth is very very painfull. No doubt about it. But birthing a dream, a vision, a belief into existence is painful on a cosmic level, my brotha's and sista's. Some say we speak things into existence, some say we pray and ask for things, some say we go and get it ourselves, some say like Nike, Just Do It, some say forget it, some say receive it, some say you get what you get so make the best of it - - I say give me birth or give me death.

In many ways, I am like a woman who has had many miscarriages. Kicked out of Churches I wanted to worship in, fired from jobs that I really cared about, rejected by women I have loved (even though I have also rejected ones that have loved me), written screenplays that go nowhere (a year out of my life each, 6 total), made short films, TV shows, documentaries, and commercial products that just aren't quite professional enough, and now I'm back at home, crushed yet again... So... Yup, I have been still born with dead dreams that never were, many times over. And such is life. And somehow it is a wonderful and beautiful thing, because here I am creating yet another thing.

After reading the first draft of the Interactive Guide To The Meaning of Life, an editor friend of mine asked me, "Who the hell are you? I mean, I know you, Foy Boy, you're an incredibly inspiring, funny and motivating, amazing, dude... but there are hundreds, thousands, millions of people who claim to know the answers. So who the hell are **YOU** to tell me that **YOU** know all the answers?"

I understood what he was trying to say, who could blame him for asking such a built in response? Especially about a guy like me?

Heck, I've been to the writing workshops and the "how to" book publishing classes; yes, yes, yes, it's the classic question of distributional intrigue. How and why would anyone want to read your book?

But when considering this response to the first draft of the *Interactive Guide* I realized that maybe this was a good thing. I might be seriously onto something here. The meaning of life has very little to do with me. In fact, now that I think of it, I would be a little bit weary of anyone who's own idyllic life looks so shiny and commercial enough that we all want to swallow it in one sugar coated pill. That is not what real life is like. Real life can be hard, and it's often ugly, sad, and mysterious. Yes, real life hinges upon the glory of physical and spiritual existence, but we are ALL alive and get a chance to experience this wonderfully dreadful comedy. It is a humbling and incredibly generous gift. But life is not easy, because it's not meant to be. And that's why it's funny. So laugh. Hard!

None of the thousands of people who responded to our inquiries concerning the meaning of life cared a lick about who I was. Okay, maybe a few people thought I had a cool IMDb page, or whatever, but nobody really cared. All they really wanted was a chance to share *their own* story to someone who would genuinely listen to them. The people have a real life story to share on their own, and they are hungry to share their lives to the world. That's what we humans do best. We share our own personal lives in order to fulfill our desperate need to sense that we are not alone in the world. We think, "If someone could hear my story, if I could share it to the world, then I can live on in a way my physical body never could."

Our own living lives give testimony to - and reason for - the suffering we all have endured in some way shape or form. The thing is... we all go through it... The down trends, the lonely times, the doldrums of life. I can imagine Jerry Seinfeld, or Jay Leno, or the great Robin Williams looking into my eyes right now, and saying something like, "Hey — Foy Boy, it's okay, man. We've all been there. We've all stunk up the joint from time to time, WAY more than we can even recall. Break a leg. Keep going, you'll make it!"

That's because we all NEED to be there... We all need to face the hardships and imperfections in our lives. If we were perfect, then there would be no reason to be here anymore. If I were perfect, then why would I ask the very question you are all asking yourselves each day, "why am I here?"

To find the meaning of life, your meaning of life, *my* meaning of life - - we ALL have to suffer. There is no other way around it. Suffering creates movement. Chaos begs for order. Loneliness and the fight against realizing your destiny, *my destiny*, often times releases us into our greatest and most passionate achievements. The *you*, and the *we*, and the *how*, and the *why*, all take a backseat to actually being alive. This book has been written out of the kind of desperate pain that we so often see in today's modern world – that just maybe it's now time that we got the answers that are truly needed from the pursuit of the meaning of life. Through a life so filled with broken dreams and blunders, warts and all, you and I can share this family restaurant we call life.

I am a broken, failed and often washed up comedian evangelizer who has some amazing and miraculous successes stories of his own. But these are the mountaintop experiences. They are few and far between.
---I don't do anything perfect, even when I try my best (which isn't very often), and I find that as I get older, I want to do even less and enjoy things even more. It's a never ending fact of the never ending story, to consume or die, and yet we all want to get skinnier. Metaphorically speaking, I am a conundrum of life created in the vast ordinance of life's imperfections. And so are you!

For a long time, this mystery of success vs. failure, right vs. wrong, truth in the midst of chaos, has consumed me, and driven me to the deepest levels of research any lazy man like myself could ever have gone before! Just before earning my Masters in Biblical Studies from a Christian University (which helped activate my mind, but also drove me completely nuts at times), I started writing the Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life.

I wrote and compiled and began my search for 7 individuals that could represent 7 different answers to the meaning of life. I felt like Willy Wonka sending out his golden tickets across the globe in search for a child to give a lifetime supply of chocolate. Only this wasn't child's play, and I hate chocolate.

There are many stories, some of which made it into this work, many of which did not, that entail great human suffering with often time's lackluster results. We are all a mess of complexity and false starts, complete with frightening endings and tales of great misfortune. You might argue if this truly is where we can find the answers to the meaning of life - - through the lives of brokenness and shame, victory AND defeat. I would argue that it is the ONLY place where we can find the answers to the meaning of life, because it is life.

Can we see truth and meaning in the shambled stories of other living lives, even if their individual answers are different from our own?

Yes, the master of a forsaken and forgiven life replies. For the answers may not be what you want them to be, or achieved through the methods you want them achieved. The way is hard. And just when you think you've got it, another one of life's conundrums rears its ugly head. You might have beaten cancer, only to have it come back! You might have gotten the new job, only to have the business go bankrupt. You might have married the love of your life, only to have them die in a war over seas. Or like me, you might be caught in the vastness of a meaningless life hardly lived with still born dreams. This is the mystery of life, one that eludes us all. By our own logic, there is no rhyme or reason for life. We can't completely solve it. Yet, somehow, just in some little way, our own lives, my own measly life, tells a story, and **THAT** gives it meaning. Purpose gives purpose. Meaning provides meaning.

The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life in and of itself **IS the meaning of life.** It is the riddle above all riddles: "What do you have, but is also everybody else's? It is completely beyond you, but you are also completely it? In and of itself it makes no sense, but provides you with the sense to ponder it?"

Life.

How to Play the Game:

The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life is self-explanatory, and quite alive! It is a guidebook and a handbook, as well as a journal of minds. It is a book of maneuvers and tactical activities along with true life stories that provide you with real life responses. Not just answers, but **responses** to the human comedy! LIFE itself will abound with more LIFE as you read this book and absorb its meaning and significance.

Much of what you receive from this book will come from how you want to play the game. It's the first basic law of life... Life is a farm, it is your starting point. You reap what you sow, cause and effect, karma, yin-yang, you name it. You live in a garden of matter and possibility. However, there are ways around this, of course. The game itself is alive and can move at incredible speeds.

Depending upon how you play the game, by interacting with this book you will discover the meaning of your life, and quite possibly, the meaning of life itself. Depending on how you play the game of course, you will experience a range of emotions and process various differing opinions as you journey through multiple life stages represented within these pages.

There are many ways to read *The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life*. One of the simplest and purest ways to read the *Interactive Guide* is by reading and discovering the **true life stories** of some very real and courageous human beings. There is much to share and much to learn. This is the never ending story. By reading about your fellow human beings (some of which might be in your very circumstance), you will have a meaningful revelation and a real life response. You will learn about yourself and the meaning of life as you and Falcor fly through these pages of inspiration and

perspiration. Like Willy Wonka says, "Invention, my dear friends, is 93% perspiration, 6% electricity, 4% evaporation, and 2% butterscotch ripple."

Each of the following seven character studies will inspire you with a resolution to respond to the meaning of life itself, and the purpose of your life as an individual. If you are willing, these stories can showcase to you the many curious and insightful views one has on the meaning of life through actually living it. To quote myself, "You gotta' live life like it's life like. You gotta' build things then destroy them."

From the extreme to the *normain*(normal), You will learn from their mistakes, as well as your own. You will learn from their successes, as well as your own. You will grow together along with this book and the characters you surround yourself with. And somehow, through the magic of sharing life's story, you can learn the absolute meaning of the whole darned human comedy.

Life has to be learned. It is not innate. We are all in a state of growth, constantly. From birth, we breathe our first breathe. Sometimes a slap on the back from the doctor forces us to engage.

Air?

I must breathe this...

Light?

I must blink my eyes...

Food?

I must cry like hell!

This is how we interact with life, it must be **engaged**. We cannot quit now. There is more ahead.

More books to read, more babies to make, more movies to be made, more stories to tell, more

homeruns to be hit, more touchdowns, a better job, a flying car, nations to be healed, wars to end, relationships restored, and for you to find the meaning of life.

Due to the vastness of life, and limited pages of a book (I mean, you wouldn't want to read my 10,000 page manuscript on the solar cycles of Xanadu 12 would ya?), we have been able to categorize the seven character study solutions to the meaning of life into these seven categories:

- 1. Nature
- 2. Pursuit of Happiness
- 3. Carpe Diem / Will Power
- 4. Love
- 5. Creation and The Art of Expression
- 6. Faith, The Spirit, and the Art of ChristianiChi
- 7. Meaningless, Meaningless, Meaningless

You are now ready to learn the next level of how to read *The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life*. Listen to your guide. Listen to your guide. Listen to your guide. Pinocchio, if you want to become a real human boy, then always let your conscience be your guide!

Your guide is written as prose, written as a conscience, written as your help mate throughout this magic carpet ride, and it will follow along with you and guide you into your real life **responses**. Your guide will interject metaphor, ancient scripture, proverbial sayings, limericks, similes, movies, music, epic true stories, and personal insights in order to nudge you along the path of interaction. He will take you (with a grain of salt and a peanut butter & jelly sandwich please) to the next level of thought, reflection, revelation, meditation, prayer, and autonomy.

Sometimes the guide will show up in little boxes, cut outs, different colored words, ALL CAPS, bold font, *Italics!*, <u>underlines</u>, and even formatting objects such as bullets:

• Hi

Sometimes the guide will accompany you through the activities and maneuvers that each chapter provides you.

Keep your heart and your eyes open. For if you look pure enough, if you see small enough, and if you listen carefully, then you will see the meaning of life in everything around you more and more each day. The Guide acts as a bridge to this type of interaction within the meaning of life. It is a bridge to inspire thoughts and deliver revelation.

"The fool looks at a finger that points at the sky." - - - (Amélie, Directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001)

The Guide is the finger pointing to the sky, not the sky itself. The sky itself is our forever journey and ultimate destination. Let the Guide be the wind in your sails, and the pat on your back ushering you towards the journey of discovering the purpose and meaning of life for you!

As a guide, and the second level of insight towards your ultimate goal in finding the meaning of life, use this book as a bridge to the final step and process towards this revelation: **Interaction.**

Remember, this is The *Interactive* Guide to the Meaning of Life. It is not the *inactive* guide, nor the Encyclopedia of Answers to the Meaning of Life. The final process to the guide book requires your interaction with it. Simply put, at the end of each chapter, you will be invited to take part in the process of enlightenment along with the character you are studying. Remember, each character takes on one of the varying seven study solutions, as previously listed. Call them little work outs, training drills, exercises, maneuvers, and other interactions laid out for you to do, *"for there is no try, do or do not."* - - - (Master Yoda, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back, 1980*)

Being that this book is a multi-layered book of revelation towards the meaning of life, you can very well skip everything and go straight to the exercises. Play the game fast if you want. Grab and do, and see where the activities take you. The maneuvers are exciting and very insightful. They will open the door into who you are, who we are, and the meaning of life as a whole. You will be a better and more adjusted person for it! However by skipping ahead you choose the path of complete self-effort, and while it can produce incredible results, it is a dangerous one indeed.

Just like in life, by skipping the story, and by going straight to the future, you will miss out on your childhood. You will miss out on the deepening of character that comes with living life and interacting with this book at the very deepest level possible. And in the end, when you have finished your tasks, and have accumulated all your wealth, and the calling on your life has been revealed, you will reflect on the journey of life, not the finished products you have created. In the end, you will return to the beginning of the game, and you will yearn to play again!

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The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

"Just like a good smart phone, even if your life gets turned upside down, you will still be facing right side up."

- Anonymous

Chapter 1

The Earth is Good

Let us begin. You have a beginning. You were begotten. As in life, and one of the very first keys you must learn, is that you have a beginning. You are not the creator of the game, or life for that matter. My friend, the sooner you accept this, the sooner you can live at peace. You get to play! You are not responsible for the rules or the timing and chance of life. You play with the cards you have been dealt. You did not choose your parents. You did not choose your cultural upbringing, or race, gender, strength or weakness of DNA, nor the time on the boardwalk of life in which you were born. So be free to be you, for you begin to play NOW!

"When we are alone on a starlit night, when by chance we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest and eat; when we see children in a moment when they are really children, when we know love in our own hearts; or when, like the Japanese poet, Basho, we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash - at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the "newness," the emptiness and the purity of vision that make themselves evident, all these provide a glimpse of the cosmic dance."

~Thomas Merton



Character Study #1

Jubal Sather

Age: 38

Bambooya'!

My friend, we are about to begin a journey! Say that with me, "I am about to begin a journey!" We are about to begin a journey together, and you are about to meet one spectacular dude.

Jubal Sather is a friend of the cosmos, the Earth, nature, animals, his fellow human being, and a great friend of mine. But nothing compares (enter Sinead O'Connor singing, "Nothing Compares To You"), to the love Jubal has for music and bamboo. In fact, this guy is so creatively in tune with himself and the meaning of life, his meaning to life, that he has combined his two loves for bamboo and music - - and actually makes amazingly hand crafted flutes out of the bamboo he farms near Mt. Baker, in Washington State. The Great Pacific Northwest, a place where peace and safety, the Emerald City (Seattle, WA), Vancouver & San

Juan Islands, along with Mt. Rainer and Mt. Baker, harness the precise natural abode for strong crops of rare types of bamboo - - along with the perfect and harmonious abode for the one and only Jubal Sather.

"History is history before you say the word," Jubal said to me over the phone even before I could totally explain to him what this interview and book was going to be all about. "It's like Adam and Eve man, they shoot up in pairs. Tall ones, short ones, they're like twins of each other. They're pairs in this world, an echo of itself. The bamboo, it wants to do it twice! That bamboo, just like in life, is in search for its pair, its twin!"

I wanted to interject and ask more questions but I knew better, best to just let him roll, see where it takes us; after all, this is what he loves and what he knows best. "That's how we need to look at life," he continued on. "What is your twin out there? How are you connected to the snail? And the clouds? And all the secrets they show us? Who or what is *your* twin? Who gave us the gift of seeing the clouds anyway? Wow."

A natural, and yet quiet, pause occurred in our discourse over the phone before I gently, and with a small sense of humor, asked Jubal, "What is the meaning of life, Jubesy?"

"Take physical matter out of the equation and then never open your eyes again. Answer the question that way," Jubal answered quickly and with ferocity towards this amazing concept and revelation. I think he amazed himself even more than he amazed me at the time he said it. "Strip away everything that is physical, and see yourself and life, and ask yourself, does it still mean the same? Am I not still alive? That is where you will find the meaning of life."

"Is that what happened to you?" I asked the Silver Fox. We call Jubal the Silver Fox sometimes because of his striking grey and white hair. He is a young man of 35, 38, or 40 something, nobody really knows. And because he sort of looks like Paul McCartney, the ladies think he's quite the foxy guy. "Is that how you found the bamboo, by releasing your connection to the world, only to find it again?" I asked him.

"Absolutely! Every day I go to work on the bamboo farm I feel privileged to be out there.

No other job has enlightened me and given me as much peace as working and harvesting the bamboo." He calls it *the* bamboo, as if it was his personal friend and is alive in a way only he knows. And indeed it may be so.

"The journey is a process and a discovery. It shows us not only the world, but our common purpose in it. Painted by our passions, our struggles, our beliefs, the journey brings us face to face with ourselves, our relationships, and God." - - Reflections.

Not everyone is like Jubal. In fact I don't know if anyone is like Jubal Sather in all the Earth. But it is people like this that showcase to us a long lost meaning of life. We are connected to this Earth and Cosmos (natural reality) in many different ways. The Sun gives us life, along with water, and oxygen, as we eat and drink its sustenance given freely to us all. This basic and most primordial natural connection binds us all and unites us all into one humanity and into one family, living as beings within her life bearing womb of existence. Restoring this connection is our main key and purpose to the deeper level of **Interaction** within this chapter and topic of the meaning of life.

Jubal Sather doesn't necessarily *interact* and dance the dance the same way as everyone else, but he loves to make the bamboo dance as he sings songs and play the guitar and his Bambooya flutes for his friends as often as he can. Human or bamboo, each get all of his heart and is a complete joy to be around.

You know that friend you have that just makes you forget about your troubles and the immediacy of the world around you? It's that friend that always has an open house and welcomes you to it no matter what. Someone you genuinely enjoy being around and makes even the worst day a little bit better. Do you have a friend like that? Yeah, me too, and that's Jubal Sather, the Silver Fox.

We met back during the production of American Rockstar, back in the summer of '09, when I was filming the real life mockumentary about the American rock star himself, Flann McMichael O'Malley. Jubal had at one time been a member of Styff Anyss, O'Malley's '80's hard-rock and ballad band. But due to an incident of some over-boiling Raman noodles and an on-fire kitchen oven, Jubal moved out on his own and continued to write and work on his own songs, as a one man band.

I absolutely fell in love with Jubal's melodramatic hit song, "1-800-IRISH", and decided to put him in the movie after all. But it was more than just singing songs and bamboo farming that intrigued me. This guy had an incredible optimism about life in a way that connected me back to being a child again. Jubal's songs, artwork, Bambooya flutes, and connection with the Earth spoke to me as an answer to the meaning of life. It was something that I had known deep down all along, but was just too afraid to actually live. No matter what religion or creed or cross that

we all bare, we are all connected as one and into one family. To borrow from the great Michael Jackson, "We are the world, we are the people. We are the ones who make a brighter day, so let's start giving."

Jubal's life is not without struggle. In fact, one could say that his life has been nothing but struggle. On the outside looking in, one could say that he has very little money, very little education, slipping into 40-years-old with no children, and a very small footprint in this world. He eats apples and pears off of the trees at the farm, and lives with his girlfriend in an aging house in Downtown Bellingham, Washington. From the outside looking in, there is not much to Jubal's life that would scream success.

But Jubal IS HAPPY! Extremely happy! He is the happiest guy I know. And that tells me he is a major success, especially if the pursuit of happiness is one of the keys to the meaning of life. People with riches and houses and boats and large families can be very VERY happy, and that is the hope and dream for many of us. But none of them are as happy as Jubal, none of them. He carries a light from within him that probably none of them have. He is living proof that those quantifiable things don't necessarily bring happiness... Or should I say, the lack of those quantifiable things, don't necessarily negate happiness either.

You can be happy in all things, for joy comes from within.

IF you happen to find yourself lost in thought, struggling with the depression and anxieties of self actualization, **THEN** many times it is the connection to the Earth that has been severed and lost. Many times the discovery process of life drags us down and inward towards

the self, rather than the natural discovery process of upward and outward. Your natural interaction should be towards one another and the spirit of God and of all living things.

Invite yourself to **respond**, and to engage in an exercise of your body, mind, and spirit as it connects with the goodness of this Earth.

PRACTICE TAI CHI

Activity #1

Tai Chi, or "slow-flow" as Chuck Norris calls it, is the absolute best practice one can do to re-obtain ones connection with the earth and its spiritual counterpart. Acting and performing the tai chi dance is likened unto bamboo swaying in the wind. Tai Chi mimics animals and nature. As it has been incorporated into Western society, tai chi is designed to be a daily practice of exercise for the body and the mind. Although for the Buddhist and others it has been used as a religious practice, a symbol of Yin and Yang, the daily practice of tai chi does not have to incorporate religious thoughts or beliefs. I have found that the art of tai chi is best used as a means for personal growth and as a daily breathing and stretching exercise.

While some from the Judeo-Christian world might fear and label the practice of tai chi as the dark arts, I have not found it to be that at all. When I was a young and naive zealot style Evangelistic "Born-Again" Christian, I feared the practice of Yoga and Tai Chi. It wasn't until I had the courage to speak with one very special old man, who helped me change that ignorant worldview. He was a great man by the name of Coach Bill Baker.

Coach Baker has lived a long time and even wrote my high school's original fight song (so were talking an old man, like living well into his 90's). The story of Coach Baker had been that of fables and war heroes but also had been mostly true. He was a major advocate for the practice of Yoga, as a means of health, both physically and spiritually. He often said that the practice of Yoga had saved his life after suffering a severe back injury that was supposed to have paralyzed him for life when he was a young collegiate athlete - - way back in the day.

However, I was a naïve young man at the time, and was mistakenly taught that Yoga was something to be feared. So one day, during a Western Washington University Basketball game, up in my home town of Bellingham, Washington, I approached an elderly Coach Baker and kindly asked him if he was a Christian and if Yoga was something Jesus would approve of?

The kind, and wonderful old man, who could still do more push-ups than any high school student at the time, gently looked me in the eyes and stretched out his arms as if he was on a cross.

"Who do you think was the world's first Yoga man?" He said and asked at the same time, looking directly at me, as if to burn the prejudice out of my soul that very instant. "Christ stretched out his arms for you, now you do the same little buddy!"

Needless to say I practice "slow-flow" as often as I can. In fact, while doing so I often pray the scriptures and meditate on the promises of God over my life through each individual movement of the dance.

For example, within the Tai Chi maneuver, "Dance of the Five Elements", the legendary six verse poem of King David, Psalms 23, can be used as a model for this type of healing exercise.



With your legs anchored apart and grounded into the earth as the roots of a tree, shoulder width, you stretch forward with your hands and arms as your branches to receive *fire*, the first element of life. Slowly reach out and pray or meditate on the song of King David in Psalm 23, verse one, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."* Life itself, and God if you have a faith based worldview, will provide you with energy, the *fire* needed to live a life here on Earth.

Then, slowly and steadily, breathing up and down from the diaphragm, retract your hands and arms and bring them down by your sides; relaxing, receiving *water*, the second element of life. Do this, and pray or meditate verses two and three, "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, and he refreshes my soul." Water cleanses us, sustains us, baptizes us, and refreshes a weary mind and body.

Next, reach your arms out to one side and gently hold your strength and energy in your hands as you receive *wood*, breathing and balancing the third element of life. Speak out verse four for strength through life's struggles, "...Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me..." Wood is your ally, your friend, your helper. We build houses with wood to protect us from the power of the elements, but also as a place of recovery and sanctuary. Think of your abode as Superman's Ice Palace, it helped him regenerate strength.

Slowly, and majestically as possible, swing your top hand towards the sky as you open up to *metal*, the fourth element of life. This action sets the table and puts you in your proper place as the receiver of life not its creator. Open up to the sky, arms wide open and pray out verse five, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows." It's okay to be a child, and a receiver of life. We all have parents, and ancestors before us, as well as a long standing planet that has nurtured as for a long time. Receive life, do not destroy it.

Now, return to a centered stance and reach out, bringing your hands together as if making a prayer like symbol. From top-down, breathing in and out, pull your hands, arms and energy from the heavens and into your heart. Accept your existence and inheritance as a simple and humble child of God and the Earth, as we receive *Earth*, the fifth element of life. Agree to and believe in the deepest part of your being, verse six of the most wonderful poem ever penned, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Breathe in and accept the Earth as being good. Yes, there are

perilous times on this planet, but you don't need to get mixed up with all that jazz right now. Be one with goodness and mercy for all the days of your life!

Slowly lean forward with a bow, practice saying the words "Thank You", and return to your daily existence refreshed and in balance with the natural and spiritual order of life.

LITTER de-BUG

Likewise, have you ever found yourself in the obsessive compulsive trap of picking up trash on the street? It usually starts when you drop something or try to shoot some trash into a garbage can and then miss. You say to yourself, "I should probably pick that up." So, being the good citizen that you are, you go and pick up your trash and place it neatly into the garbage can. But when you bend down to pick up your trash, you start to notice other people's trash lounging around within close proximity to your own, so you ponder, "Hmm... Maybe I should pick up this trash, too?"

So maybe you do, maybe you don't. But the question is do you *have* to? Some say yes, some say no; and as you continue to pick up other people's trash you notice more and more trash all around you. Eventually, everywhere you look you'll start to see trash. You try to pick up as much trash as you can, but eventually you have to just move on and let the world turn as it does. Unless picking up trash becomes your life long calling (and I hope it does for some of you, because there is a lot of trash in this world), integrity is the only key to defeat this predicament. If you do your part to not trash this world it will ease your conscience and just might impact

some others to keep this planet clean. All you really ever have to do in this human comedy is just do your part. Play your role, nobody else's, and detach from trying to control the spinning of the globe. It spins on its own.

30-Day Walkabout Challenge

On that note my friend; here is a very simple, yet effective first activity on your journey towards the meaning of life. Go to the park, do some tai chi, and then take a walkabout and pick up as many pieces of trash that you can. Allow yourself to breathe easily and freely, up and down, good cleansing breathes. Take the time, as an exercise, to cleanse the earth, and thus cleanse yourself with this 30-Day Walkabout Challenge. It's an opportunity for you to breathe again, rest, relax, and release back into the world. Remember that every inhaled breath is an invitation, and every exhaled breath is an expression. Like Jubal, and many others, this is your chance to reorient yourself to a new revelation in life. Get connected with life itself again, and begin to shine anew!

Take **one hour** for the next 30-days and shake off the old and make room for the new. It is impossible to fill your cup with new water and new opportunity if you are already full of junk from the past. The *30-Day Walkabout Challenge* is for you, no one else. No judgments, no past thoughts, no expectations, just pure air, pure nature, and a season of cleansing. Allow negative thoughts to pass you by, actually stand back and watch your own thoughts float past you, detaching from what torments you, and separate yourself... just for a season, in order to start again!

30-Day Walkabout Challenge!

I hereby accept the 30-Day Walkabout Challenge. I will spend the next 30-Day's, for at least one-hour each day, walking throughout the park, or city street, picking up trash when needed. During this time I will be focusing on cleansing my heart and soul with deep breathes, and hopeful thoughts.

yourself

cutting

out this

FREE

30-Day

Walkabout

Challenge

pass, and go on an adventure that you will remember for a lifetime! See yourself releasing negative thoughts as they float past you, picking up trash on the street in *symbiotic relationship* to the cleansing going on inside *your own heart*. You don't have to clean the whole world, just focus on your path and the cleansing power of actually walking it, step by step, and day by day. The 30-Day Walkabout Challenge will change your life for the good, and completely restore you and prepare you for the revelation of the meaning of life.





The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

"Some say that people cannot change. Some say you can't teach an old-dog new tricks. But you know that's not true, because you have changed. You have evolved into the person you are now. Through the fire, through the pain, you have grown and you have changed. For the better, for the worse, you have been transformed, so allow others to do so as well."

- Anonymous



The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

Let's relax, grab a cup of coffee and reeeeeeelaAAAx.

Begin to write in a brand new journal, NOW!

- How is your life so far?
- Have you figured out its' meaning?
- Have you figured out your meaning?
- Do you have it all figured out yet?!!!

Hmmm...

- If YES, then throw this book down and stand on top of it, literally, and say, "I know the meaning of life!"
- 2. If **NO**, then continue on...

"I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they are looking for the experience of being alive." - -

Joseph Campbell

Chapter 2

It's A Wonderful Life



Character Study #2
Jodi Nichols

Age: 38

The Pursuit of Happiness

We met at Suki's Bar & Restaurant beneath the Travelodge in Portland, Oregon. It was a far cry from the overly swanky martini lounges of The Nines Hotel I visited later that night. I liked the ambiance of the dive bar much better than The Nines. It provided for a comfortable conversation, where people can get real, and express their true feelings, unencumbered by the

shallow expectations of high society. Needless to say a cold beer was three dollars, vs. a ridiculous twelve at The Nines. We had a few and started getting down to the nitty-gritty.

Jodi Nichols was my first interview for the *Interactive Guide*. I traveled south from the *Lord of the Rings, Shire-like*, safe haven of Bellingham, Washington to meet her and a handful of people who seemed to have some great answers to the meaning of life. As interviews go, Jodi was a real peach! She was completely open about her life, and totally willing to express all of the dark truths that made her what she is today.

Jodi is in shape, tall, smiley, beautiful, lives a healthy life style, and is very happy. She currently works for a group of attorneys as a receptionist, makes good money, and has stabilized her life a great deal; but as she puts it, "I'm just working as a receptionist so I can play one on TV."

Miss Nichols is single, happy, strong, and venturing out on the new endeavor of starting an acting career at the great age of 38 years young. As of right now she is taking acting classes, auditioning when and where she can, and doing whatever is necessary to stay happy! When we first met she had just finished her first *full on* stage monologue recital. She was acting as Joanna Kramer, originally played by Meryl Streep in the movie *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the court scene, in which Streep's character has to defend her reasons why she left her son and husband high and dry to fend for themselves in life. It was a moment that **solidified everything** for Jodi. As a method actor, Jodi completely consumed herself with Streep's character, and when she finally gave her monologue portrayal, something from within the depths of Jodi's soul broke out in a

session of uncontrollable wailing. Precious sobbing tears flowed out of Jodi, and the entire class, including her acting coach, looked on in awe of her power and sincerity.

"It was like all the work I put in my life and all the victory over life's struggles just started pouring out. Playing Joanna Kramer unlocked something in me that had been kept secret for so long. Somehow I knew that by facing my fears of life by doing the complete opposite and putting myself on stage would help me grow and finally find true happiness. And it worked!"

Needless to say, Jodi is now well on her way at finding her path and achieving her absolute meaning to life, *The Pursuit of Happiness*.

However, this wasn't always the case for Jodi...

In her words, "most of my life I have suffered from depression, suicidal thoughts, loneliness, blackouts (from alcohol), drug use (marijuana, acid, mushrooms, cocaine - twice), self-destruction, and ultimately growth, joy, happiness, understanding, and self-worth."

Jodi grew up very depressed and suicidal, and for the rest of her days in this life all she wants now is to be happy. She knows that she has made major strides towards living a happy life, but also recognizes that the pain will always be there. In her mind, "to achieve ultimate happiness you must accept both, pain and happiness. In order to be happy you have to endure the pain and allow yourself to grow. To fail is not failure, and the sufferings of life act as our stepping stones towards finding your true self, thus achieving true happiness."

The suicidal thoughts and major bouts of depression started for Jodi when she was a teenager. She was put on all kinds of drugs, Adderall for her assumed ADHD, and Prozac for her depression. Conveniently enough, this was the time the thoughts of suicide crept in.

Unbeknownst to her and the entire medical community I presume, when she started on Prozac back in the early '90's nobody told her, or her parents, that this drug can cause suicidal thoughts. Who knows why these certain anti-depressants can cause suicidal thoughts, but they often do, and it hasn't been until recently that patients and doctors have revealed this fact to the larger community. When I asked Jodi if she realized the connection between the timing of her medication and her bouts with suicide, she remarked that detoxing off of the prescription medication was a major healing point in her life. "However," she reminded me, "that didn't change the fact that I had those thoughts and the damage it had done to my soul."

Jodi considers herself lucky, because she had experienced happiness at a young age, and had a great childhood. It wasn't until her teenage years, mixed with the prescription drugs that the dark cloud set in. To her, it's sad that some of those who also struggle with suicidal thoughts and depression never had a happy childhood, so there is no frame of reference to which one can lean on in order to grow.

The pain became so intense for Jodi that for a time, she forgot what it was like to be happy. She had forgotten her childhood. This darkness and depth of pain forced her and reminded her just how important happiness was for her. She was sick in the soul, and was in need of some serious help.

Around 27 or 28 years-young, Jodi was put on Paxil and still continued to use the Adderall. The pain of depression had gotten so bad, that she truly considered ending it all right then and there. It was at this point that something amazing happened. Call it luck, call it fate, call it pure happenstance, but Jodi ran out of her medication, and the doctors couldn't fill her new prescription until the following week. She was forced to detox.

While it's considered super dangerous to just stop completely using anti-depressants without tapering down for a period of time, Jodi had no choice. Somehow she had messed up the timing of her doctor's appointments and the prescription refill would have to wait. It was at this moment that Jodi looks back and thanks God.

As the coincidences of life would have it, Jodi was house-sitting for a friend when the prescriptions ran out. Her friends happened to be well-adjusted naturopathic doctors and the house was filled with books on how to detox. Jodi ran to the store and got gallons of juices, and organic breads, and vitamins, and broths, and took it back to the house. All she did for the next week was drink broths, take vitamins, sleep, drink juice, and just absolutely release it all.

"Physically I wasn't well, but I felt internally much better. Cleaner." Like the breaking of a hot fever, this was Jodi's first taste at being whole again. While many steps of growth were still to come for Jodi's happiness, ultimately found on stage (with a little help from Meryl Streep), this was the beginning of Jodi's life, her new life of happiness.

Finding joy again, and searching for the happiness that surrounded her during her childhood, was now the absolute purpose for Jodi's life. The pursuit of happiness had become the meaning of life for Jodi, and she began to write her own declaration of independence.

The Declaration of Your Own Independence

When it comes down to it, most people define the answer to the meaning of life as "the pursuit of happiness." It's even written in our own United States Declaration of Independence. Have you ever read it before? Here is a chance to Interact, Go Read it!

Like Jodi Nichols, the American colonists of long ago had suffered long enough.

The colonists needed to break away from the tyrannical rule of England and their

King, so they wrote a letter of resignation, and they proclaimed themselves free!

That is what Jodi Nichols did by getting off of her over prescribed drugs, facing her fears, and getting on the stage! She wrote out her own declaration of independence and has been free to pursue happiness ever since.

Let's join Jodi Nichols in our pursuit of happiness, by first reading the opening remarks of *The Declaration of Independence*, together again, right now:

IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America



hen in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one

people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

(The Declaration of Independence, 1776. http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/)

It basically means that we are all God's children and that we should all have a fair shake at pursuing happiness. Not everyone finds it. That is why it is our **pursuit** and our purpose and our meaning. How you get there is up to you.

No judgments. Be you. After all, it's your happiness. You are the only you. There is no other. Only you can do what you are called to do, so do it.

Even if your happiness looks completely different than Jodi's, or mine, or his, or hers, or your parents, or your friends, or teachers, or preachers, or movies, or the bleachers, ask yourself, WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY?

During our many wonderful and refreshing conversations, I asked Jodi Nichols to write out her own **Declaration of Independence**. After some time, and a period of self reflection, inventory, meditation and prayer, here is what Jodi came up with:

The Three Things That Make Me Most Happy:

- 1. Knowing that I enjoy the simplest things in life.
- 2. Animals
- 3. Good Healthy Food

JoRogueNess

Date: 5/29/2013

I, <u>Jodi Nichols</u> in the course of human events and the state of my life, do declare it has become necessary for me to continue the path of growth. No matter where I am at in life the most important thing for me is to grow. In recent events I have experienced both an ultimate high along with the rock bottom low. This is the Ying and Yang of not only my life, but the lives of all. In order to truly enjoy those highs, I believe all of us need to experience those rock bottom lows.

I hold these truths to be self-evident because I have personally experienced slight moments of this. How can one understand the emotions of a truth unless they themselves have experienced the opposite of that particular truth? I have suffered much in my life, but that suffering I allowed into my life shaped me into the strength I am today.

It is in my power and within my rites as a living human being to live the life the way I do. And although the things I say and do are not always agreed upon amongst most citizens living today, for me life is about experiencing happiness. I will continue to question, explore, live, grow, learn, love, create, etc.; however, I shall not take the time to worry about the thoughts of others, for that is time wasted. I live to love. Not waste.

SIGNED: Jodi L. Nichols

I was so happy for Jodi when she finally submitted her written copy of freedom back to me! It was not easy. And nor should it be. Going through the process of truly searching and proclaiming your independent rights towards freedom and happiness can take a life time. Heck, wars have been fought over such matters, and it's about time your personal war for identity and happiness come to an end.

So let's face our fears and proclaim our dreams!

The Three Things That Make Me Most Happy:

Like Jodi Nichols, it's your turn to write out your own personal Declaration of Independence. Begin, now:

1.)		

My Own Personal

<u>Declaration of Independence:</u>

	Title: Date:	
my life,	I, (write your name) do declare it has become necessary for	, in the course of human events and the state of
	I hold these truths to be self-evident,	
	It is in my power and within my rites as a living	g human being to

SIGNED:





The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

THE PAIN OF NOT BEING HEALED

~ Is this where you live? ~ Are you suffering through a pain that won't heal?

- Have you ever prayed for healing, and even in the moment of intense pain and suffering, you got nothing back? Did you have to live through that pain?
- Or, maybe you're still there?

~ Believe me when I say that I have felt your pain. We all have. ~

We humans suffer, every day and in every way. Whether it's by disease, accident, genetics, food poisoning, starvation, poverty, or by the hands of an oppressor, we will all suffer. That is a guarantee! You cannot and will not escape it. We've all heard the saying that there are only two guarantees in life: Death and Taxes. While taxes have been known to be eluded from time to time ③, show me a human that has escaped the pain and the suffering of this imperfect world. You can't, because he doesn't exist. Even Bill Gates has been reported of having seasons of depression, and I'm sure he's been sick and had to go see a doctor as well.

Yes, there are the rich and well off people out there who get to live in America, or any other modernized nation, that get to have the absolute best health care. They get all the best drugs and private attention from the world's best doctors. All of this is used in the pursuit of escaping the pain and suffering of our inevitable death. But they will not escape. They cannot escape, and neither will I and neither will you. The point is we are all the same and in pain.

If this demoralizes you, good!

- What's a little more disheartenment going to do to you?
- You are already in pain, right?

God understands. He knows we live in pain and suffering. He also knows that that's the human condition, nothing more, nothing less. Listen; press on, because this is where the **true healing begins**.

You might be thinking:

- "I'm only 23-years-old, why is this happening to me?"
- "I'm 40! Why are you doing this to me, God? I don't deserve this!"
- "Why have you taken away the very thing I love?"
- "If to die is to gain, then why not take me out now?"
- "Why, why, why so much pain? I don't understand!"



The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

Eventually, after rivers of tears and lonely, painful, confusing, disturbing nights, the questions that were once full of fear and doubt will slowly turn into prayers of solace and reconciliation. In the midst of your pain and suffering you will find a small moment of great oneness with yourself and God. In the midst of your absolute weakness is where you will find God and the meaning of your life.

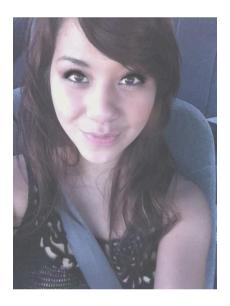
At some point in everyone's lives, things in this world will get stripped away. You will be brought to a point of no distraction ~ you will come face to face with your maker, just you and God. And your questions will be refined into concern for others, instead of desperate prayers of self.

Even after a short time of selfless prayers and social charity... you still might not see the healing. That's when the *bartering* begins. It starts by searching the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, and Deepak Chopra books through and through, desperately looking for scriptures and insights about healing. You read about every miraculous healing, and the ideas behind them. You have believed in Jesus and the power to heal. You have accepted dis-attachment to this body and this world as an illusion, a healing insight given to you by the Buddha. So you ask, in the name of Jesus. You put mud on your face. You tear your shirt. You shave your head. You try and try and try to get God's attention. You might have even fasted for a couple of days... But, still ~ ~ ~ nothing... as you continue to plead with God...

You begin to realize, even after a solid season of searching and praying and reading, that if you did get healed, the second you got healed, you know you wouldn't be perfect. You would still be an imperfect soul growing and making mistakes all over again. You know it and God knows it. That's when you finally brake down, and give it all up. Give it all up to God. It is a **rare moment** ~ and eventually, some **healing has come**.

Sometimes God and the meaning of life will take you through the fire. Sometimes you can avoid it, but mostly you are taken through it. Everything in your life has become so fast pace, go-go-go, and your body has had **enough.** You need to rest and rehabilitate your mind and soul for awhile. In fact, you will always need to rest and recover from life's struggles periodically throughout your life. This too shall pass, so give it up and rest through the ride of your life. Just because the airplane has some turbulence doesn't mean the plan is going down.

You see, suffering is inevitable. Whether it's by disease, accident, genetics, food poisoning, starvation, poverty, or by the hands of an oppressor, we will all suffer. We have no choice in that! But the one choice we do have is *why* we suffer. You can suffer for the empty sake of suffering, which leads us to our death, or, you can suffer for the rewarding sake of refinement and perfection. You might as well suffer for this greater good, because you are going to suffer anyway. Take aim, take charge, and take joy in the pain of not being healed. That is the true way of healing.



Character Study #3

Ilima

Age: 20

I Just Want To Be Normal

Portland, Oregon is a crazy town! So many bridges, tunnels, side streets, one way this way, the other way that. They got trains, trams, skyways, byways, petty cabs, real cabs, bikes, walkers, hitch-hikers, joggers, even people on segways. It's a town of community for every

community known to man. It's a gypsy town sprouting forth from the convergence of the massive Columbia river and the Willamette, bucketing itself at the cusp of the Washington and Oregon State border. Portland is a wonderful unique taste of freedom and business savvy folks, literally and figuratively setting itself in the middle of San Francisco and Seattle. It's a little mix of everything, but for a commuting journalist trying to chase down an interview it's a hodge-podge of byways and highways that nobody can abide. No wonder I was so discombobulated when I finally found Sozo's Café in the east part of town.

Meeting Ilima (that's *eye-lima*, not Lima, as I pronounced it, thinking her name just had two L's) was nothing like I had expected. Maybe that's because I was just so darned naïve. I am still shaking my head about it. Here is a girl, to put it frankly, who has been "stamped" at 30.

I asked her, "What do you mean, stamped?"

She replied, "Die. To die at 30... The doctors have told me that I will die by thirty."

I was shocked, I was stunned, she looked so happy, and was really super laid back. One could say that Ilima is a hippy, a real cool chick. She is a real special lady Lebowski, if you will.

Every ounce of me wanted to shake her, grab her, hold her, and ask, what are you gonna' do? What do the doctors say? What meds are you on? Are you seeking healing? Do you want to be healed? Do you believe in God? And I did ask those things... But none of it really truly mattered to her. For Ilima, well... She just wanted to be normal.

Who could blame her? To be told by doctors that you have a rare condition (Ilima doesn't like the word disease, she says, "It's not like I'm contagious or something.") called

"Friedreich's Ataxia" and that you will probably not live longer than 30-years young. How would you handle it?

According to The Friedreich's Ataxia Research Alliance (FARA), "Friedreich's ataxia (FA) is a debilitating, life-shortening, degenerative neuro-muscular disorder. About one in 50,000 people in the United States have Friedreich's ataxia. Onset of symptoms can vary from childhood to adulthood. Childhood onset of FA is usually between the ages of 5 and 15 and tends to be associated with a more rapid progression." Diagnosed around the age of 9, this is the type of Friedreich's Ilima has, vs. the late onset FA (LOFA). To put it as bluntly as her carefree friends who love her more than anything do, you basically will just continue to degenerate into immobility inside and out and just die....... How would you respond? I know I wouldn't respond as well and laid-back as Ilima does. I was so proud of her courage, wondering where she gets the strength to just take it easy and just abide. When I asked her all of those penetrating deep questions, searching for an answer, asking her what she was going to do, she just smiled and continued to reiterate, that she just wanted to be normal, man.

Well, what was I expecting? Can a 20-year old, really hip and down to earth chick have the answers to the meaning of life? Can she have found a major revelation into the meaning of life after facing such outstanding suffering? Possibly, but most likely no, not very likely...

Ilima is normal. She's cute, wants to hang out with her friends, drink some beers, laugh, and go to school, nothing more, nothing less. And she does those things. Presently her friends, and primarily her boyfriend Eric (whom everyone calls, Superman) carries her into restaurants, concerts, in and out of the car, you name it. She doesn't have her wheelchair yet but she's

getting one soon. It wasn't until the last few years that walking has become increasingly debilitating. The way she puts it is that, "if I walk, I will look like I'm really super drunk. Maybe that's why I used to drink a lot. It was an easy excuse to the way I was. If I look drunk all the time, then maybe I'll just **BE** drunk all the time."

Still, Ilima, doesn't let it get to her. She refuses to let her condition define her as a human being. Ilima just wants to be normal. I was too afraid to ask her if she had a "Bucket List", so I e-mailed her and asked her if she had seen the movie, The Bucket List, with Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. I'm still waiting to hear back. I hope she can help inspire all of us to write our own Bucket List, because you never know when the Big Guy Upstairs calls us all home to be the Saints and Angels that we really are inside.

I sit wondering... Is it possible, that this is the answer? That living life itself was the answer? Not by seeking miraculous healings, or life purpose epiphanies, or the striving after deeper meanings and answers, but by merely living and loving life? For Ilima, this was the meaning of life. Just by being normal and enjoying every minute made her shine like the sun! Although there was some fear of the unknown in Ilima's countenance, it wasn't much different than any other 20-year-old I had ever met, or myself even. She fit right in there, and like *The Dude's* rug in *The Big Lebowski*, she really tied the room together.

Like I was myself before meeting Ilima, we all can fantasize about how we would act if we got "stamped" at thirty. Oh sure we all would say, go bungee jumping, see the world, help others, make amends with everyone, and live everyday to the absolute fullest!!! However, that's exactly what it is, a fantasy. Although all of us are stamped to expire here on Earth at some point

in time, not many of us have to face this reality as blatantly and brutally as Ilima does. We can never truly know how we would respond unless we walked (or painfully sat, in Ilima's case) in Ilima's shoes (chair).

I presume the *Interactive Guide* and Ilima have taught us a great lesson here. We take being "normal" for granted. When the simplest things get stripped away, they become the most important things of all. The fundamental elements of life can not be forgotten. And we thank Ilima for that easy going long forgotten revelation. We thank her "for takin' her easy for all us sinners out there." (Sam Elliot, *The Big Lebowski*).

It took a lot of courage for Ilima to respond to the advertisements concerning the meaning of life and this here book. I remember being so overwhelmed and overjoyed with her survey responses, and the long conversations we would have over e-mail. Ilima was an early responder, and the very first person to inspire me to get going on this project. Her thirst to share her own story of victory and challenges within society's concept of "normality," is what really secured it in my mind that everyone has an importance piece to add to the puzzle of life. Not one of us is without a reason or purpose. We all have something to add to the meaning of life, and that is yet another *key* to the interactive guide.

- 1. Ask yourself, what do you have to offer?
- 2. What are your challenges to being "normal", or, feeling freely alive?
- 3. What do you want to do with your life, and how does that fit into the meaning of the bigger picture?

Take a step out of yourself and remember Ilima's story. When thinking about your own Bucket List, or pondering your biggest dreams, remember Ilima, and thank your lucky stars for what you already have! And if you look small enough, release big enough, and breathe in deep enough, you just might see that you have it all right there in front of you.

UPDATE

This just in!... We have Ilima's <u>Bucket List!</u>

After a few months of encouraging e-mails back and forth, discussions about facing her fears and challenges head on, we finally have Ilima's Bucket List. It took only a month or so, but knowing Ilima this meant a great deal to her, and she wasn't going to write up just any old thing. If Ilima was going to do something it had to have meaning and come straight from the heart. Now, trust me, it wasn't easy, and at times it was very hard for me to continually ask for something somebody just wasn't ready for or wanted to face at all. But I know Ilima is happy she finished it! This was a huge milestone for her! Nobody really wants to write a Bucket List when you actually know the bucket is about to be kicked over. It's much easier to write out a Bucket List when you can justify the bucket not being kicked over for years and years down the road. Even for Ilima, one of the strongest young women in her time and place, it's not always easy to face the facts and challenges of your own condition in life - - but, the steps Ilima is taking towards realizing her life goals right now, as we speak - - it's incredibly awe inspiring!

Let's read Ilima's Bucket List together, and then do one ourselves! We have A LOT to learn from this simple and beautiful Angel sent from above, and like most Angel's on assignment, they don't stay very long...

Ilima's BUCKET LIST:

- 1.) Travel to a different country to explore and learn another culture.
- 2) Start a family in the future.
- 3) Learn a different language so I am able to be bilingual and possibly communicate to more people.
- 4) Have my story be heard and possibly touch someone's life and make them more appreciative.
- 5) Be more open and accepting to the aid I need (such as a wheelchair) so I am able to lose my anxiety.
- 6) Graduate from college!
- 7) Be more independent than I am at the moment.
- 8) Start a charity to raise awareness of my condition (this is more broad).
- 9) Become a therapist.
- 10) Live the rest of my life to the fullest!



MY BUCKET LIST:

1.)

2.)

3.)

4.)

5.)

6.)

7.)

8.)

9.)

10.)



Chapter 3

Carpe Diem!

Seize the Day, Not the Dollar

Remember the Dad in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*? You know how he always sprayed Windex on everything, thinking that it would clean up anything, and make every-single-thing okay? "Ahh, just put some Windex on it," He'd say.

That is it. That is it right there! "Ahh, just put some Windex on it." Or, as Dr. Steve Brule would say, "If you're raking the leaves and it gets all over the driveway, just hose it off, dummy."

The people of our previous generations did not care about anything. Just put some Windex on it. They were less afraid then we are, less organized - less tantalized, less scrutinized - less sensationalized; yet, less afraid. We have everything, we live in the future, even ancient Scripture talks about the times of plenty that we live in today. I get frustrated off of a machine not turning on within the first 5 seconds of me pressing the power button. I literally can get anxious if my Internet goes down. I so badly want to say an expletive right NOW, Fox that shipped! "Cause I'm mad as Hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" (NAME THAT MOVIE _______)

"Have you ever been shot down in the middle of the beaches of Normandy?"

"Nah, it's just a flesh wound," they'd say. "I did it for love, I did it for the girl sitting by the Eiffel Tower waiting for me in Paris, screaming out, 'Go G.I. Joe, go!"

"Go Chargers! GO!" Arnold Schwarzenegger yells out before a San Diego Chargers game.

"Hey! Ronnie Lot, if you play one more down of football you might lose your finger!" The Trainer of the San Francisco 49ers said to Defensive Back and Hall of Famer, Ronnie Lot.

"Chop it off, then" Ronnie said, not even thinking twice.

Man on the moon? Fox that shipped! We haven't been back since, if at all.

"Carpe diem," says the old grey haired man walking by. He's got an angry sailor tattoo showing on his right shoulder, complete with a white T-shirt rolled up concealing a pack of Lucky Strikes.

"Carpe diem." says the old man walking by, "Fox that shipped, go out there and Foxin' do something with your life." He goes ahead and spits on the ground through his corn-cob pipe, scratching his rear end all the way down the road. Oh no, he never takes his one lazy eye off of ya' the whole time crossing the street.

That's the generation of Carpe Diem. That's the greatest generation. And out of all the blessings that have come from the past 100 years, from our forefathers hard and faith filled work, where has it all gone? What do we value now? **What do you**?

If you are asleep, like I was before starting the Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life, then it's time to wake up. Arise my little sleeper, time to live, time to shine! We have it all right here at our finger tips. There was a time when skipping stones by the lake, with your girl in your arm, and the chance of a bon-fire happening later was good enough to make the whole darn human comedy feel all right again. And for just the

slightest chance that you might be able to kiss her before the night was through gave you the heartbeat of a Hero that no force could ever destroy.

That's why people fight wars, man. That's what freedom is all about. But don't let it get you confused. We do live in a different time. We do live in the future. We're not in Kansas anymore, and Jack Ship just left town.

Carpe Diem, seize the day! Don't let the web of future sensationalism blind you to what life is all about. The sunlight on a river of gold just might make you go out prospecting again, but that doesn't mean you're gonna' find any actual gold out there. The joy is in getting dirty, knee deep in that river with your buddies, smoking cigars, laughing, crying, and being together living life each day for a better tomorrow. Heck yes - you might find ya' some gold out there, but don't be going and getting that *Gold Fever*, I've seen it take down the best of men.

Oh yes, plenty of men have gotten a hold for themselves gold nuggets that would destroy three or four families before it was all through. You ever seen Blood Diamond? All I'm saying is Carpe Diem, seize the day, not the dollar. And if you happen to fall down and scrape your little knee, well then, put some Windex on it and Go Chargers Go!

"To live is so startling it leaves little time for anything else."

~ Emily Dickinson

"Life is simple, it's just not easy."

~ Author Unknown

"The miracle is not to fly in the air, or to walk on the water, but to walk on the earth."

~ Chinese Proverb



Character Study #4

Maria Allinger

Age: 50

Rescue Haven

When Maria Allinger first replied to the *Interactive Guide*'s query for spectacular human beings with the answer to the meaning of life, I wasn't sure if her email reply was even *real* or not. For any of you Craigslister's out there, if you ever get a response that sounds weird, or the English is really ~ really bad, and some of the information they have is a bit off, it's an automatic red flag that it's a spam/scam response of some sort. I've seen 'em all! People fishing off the coast of Alaska, can't be in town to purchase something directly, people offering to make payments on things if you give them your banking and/or PayPal information, the guy in Africa, you know, the Prince from Umbakawa, that country you've never heard of before really needs your help!

Yeah, all kinds of crazy fake responses can show up through e-mails.

But something kept me reading Maria's response. It had a voice of strength and major honesty through suffering, albeit completely illegible and disheveled. It was worse than fifth grade level. However, there was something in there. The honesty, the strength of character, the bravado, the answers to the *Interactive Guide's* survey questions, and the seemingly horrific and redemptive tale of a woman's life you would have to see to believe. These were the qualities I somehow automatically knew about Maria. Maybe because that's just how strong she is! Even though my initial response was to not follow up on her e-mail, she willed it from miles away. Because that's the kind of will power this straight shooter has! She's sort of like a strong light skinned Mexican Kathy Bates character in a Steven King movie... you can read the e-mail here:

Mar 21 (11 days ago)

to me

Well Justin I really don't if you really want the hole truth but here it is. The only memories I have as a child is of this man I feared I remember him putting his penis in my privite area and once I remember him trying to sell me to a old man for a bottle of wiskey not tell I would have nightmares

and then one day I seen a picture of this man I asked my mother who was this person and my mother told me it was my father. Thats was when I relize

this ways no dream all the things I remembers were true. High school was tuff felt alone and angry but that was so long ago. I look back and it seems like someone else long story short went to mental hosipital for wanting to kill acouple people. Relized all the thing that happened to me were not my fault. I wasnt going to let my farther ruin my life or define the person I am . Ok and why the bible scares the shit out of me well I do beleive there his a God and he has always watch over me. God is a jealous god and with strick rules at this moment no person can truly follow. If you read the bible and all the crap his people have gone through not good for me in gods word I probly would do or say the wrong thing and would anger him. Thoughs shoes are to hard to fill. But I do pray and talk to my god but I don't go to church, whats a super hero theres no super heros life is what you make of it. Did you every see the movie sybal my life sucked like that but im always happy I let shit go I seen my bestfriend dye infront of me I deleivered my own grandson had my fingers in my daughters virgina NEVÉR IN MY LIFE DID I THINK I WOULD EXPERIENCE THAT!!!!!! Life no matter how you look at it its amazing you seem very educated and half the shit you ask had no clue what that meant. I never graduated can't write a paragraph but I had twelve homes at one time resprsented myself as attorney when I did evictions and did two loan modification without attorneys doing the paper work how does that work. Can't spell worth crap but i live on a farm wiith rescued animals and teach disabled children how to ride horses and building a enchanted forest and western town my goal is to open it up to the puplic and have 50% percent of our employess being young disable adults. I want to show that someone like me can try to make a difference then big corperate companies can perhaps hire one or two disable young adults. Justin have a talent scout comming to film me at the farm for portlandia or perhaps a reality show twice we were being looked at. But if that doesn't pan out I still love life regardless what comes my way. Would give you more on world views but they need to have a class for slow people to understand like 101 politic. I do beleive a have some answers on polution with all the waste but have to go to work I also work

fun 2 for 20 meals lol. Have to work as a server to old for a stripper pole :)

Would any of you immediately respond and drive on down to Vancouver, WA to ask this person the meaning of life? Well, I did, and I met one of the most beautiful,

vibrant, life giving characters this world has ever known! Just goes to show ya', *trust*your gut (a major key to the Carpe Diem lifestyle), and just freaking GO FOR IT! (one
of the most important keys to life at all!)

So I go for it. I drive down to the farm (about three hours south of Seattle, WA) and it's like the beginnings of *Neverland Ranch* meets an Enchanted Forrest, mixed with Pony Rides (pink ponies by the way), Little Play Houses, private duck ponds, healing tree's with faces (yeah), and all kinds of gnomes and squirrels and cartoon characters painted anywhere and everywhere as far as the eye could see. This freaking girl was Willy Wonka.















Maria Allinger likens her story and the meaning of life for people in her shoes to that of Michael Jackson, except she chose and continues to choose to take the brighter path. She is a Carpe Diem, choose your own adventure, reap what you sow kind of girl, who refuses to let her brutal past define her. She also likened her farm, properly called Horse Haven Farm, unto *Neverland Ranch* for disabled and autistic children. A great working ranch with pony rides, an enchanted forest trail walk, petting zoo, little play houses, two large horse pens, and little duck ponds where dogs and ducks actually play with each other. There even was a little ewe lamb that followed a black and white cow around everywhere she went. They were like the *Odd Couple*. Not only was this a farm that was enabling disabled and autistic children (and adults) to touch, feel, taste and see the world in a whole different light, but it was also a rescue haven for all kinds of abused, neglected, and abandoned animals. Sensing a metaphor here...

"You never know when the autistics are going to WAKE-UP!" Maria explained to me as we sat in the shade near the pony barn. "For years they can just be totally out of it and then *whoop*, a pink pony makes 'em smile and come to life for the first time right before your eyes!" Maria smiled, still very young and attractive at 50-years old, "And I put 'em to work too! I got me a ranch full of disabled people to prove to the corporate world it can be done!"

That's carpe diem, seize the day kind of stuff if you ask me!

"There are two roads that we can choose to follow," Maria added. "You can choose to go down the 'woe is me', 'my life sucks', victimized life; or, you can choose to go down the happy road and sleep well at night." It was a joy to listen to Maria speak, and you would never – ever guess she was basically illiterate.

"I've been a millionaire three times, and dirt poor four. Your victimizers can take your childhood, but they cannot take your soul." She said with a smile that only comes from actually choosing to walk down the happy road.

This is where one of the similarities to Maria and Michael Jackson ensue. She was molested as a child... Most likely the things she endured were very severe, and it completely robbed her of her childhood. They were so bad that (unbeknownst to her at the time) she developed *Emergency Blocking* in which she adapted the trauma into forced memory loss. At the age of 16, she was barely getting by in school (if at all). Most of the time she would sneak out of school and just go back home and hide under her bed. She couldn't remember information from past classes, and didn't even know how to order a soda at McDonalds.

The only memories that were strong in her mind were the nightmares she would have at night. They were always the same, and it always involved a man taking advantage of her. For years, she just thought they were nightmares...

It wasn't until she spotted the man from the nightmares in a photo album, that the memories started to come back. And they came back in a flood. Maria asked her mother who was in the picture, and needless to say, it was her own estranged father. The memories came flooding in, and they weren't the nostalgic youthful bliss kind. No, they were the living nightmare kind.

It didn't take long before Maria ended up in a mental hospital. At first glance, or hearing of anybody going to a mental hospital, you automatically think that this person must be a whacko. That is how we all think about certain things, we all have stereotypes whether we want to believe it or not. We all store memories and thoughts in our brains through stereotypes, or *schemas*. They are not always bad. The FreeDictionary.com describes a schema as:

- **1.** A diagrammatic representation; an outline or model.
- **2.** Psychology: A pattern imposed on complex reality or experience to assist in explaining it, mediate perception, or guide response.

[Latin schāma, schāmat-, form; see scheme.]

We as humans store thoughts into our brains and categorize them into certain paradigms that help us understand the meaning of life and the things that go on around us. It's totally acceptable to do so, so don't blame yourself when so doing. Just be cognizant of the fact that you are stereotyping something. Then try your absolute best to mentally move beyond it. In Maria's case, she broke the mold! Everything that

would stereotypically tell you something about this woman's psychoanalysis goes right out the window when you get the chance to see the finished product.

Many of us are stuck in the mud. We see and judge ourselves for whom we are now. We rarely see ourselves as the finished product we become after living the life of experience. We **all** endure this fact here on Earth. No one can totally escape it. So if you can, allow the destructive and judgmental thoughts of who you are **now** float across your mind and let them **go**. Detach yourself from these thoughts because they are not your own. They are just thoughts your brain uses to judge, determine, and categorize the facts of life. The future is undetermined, and you can carpe diem (just do it, seize the day) whenever you are ready to do so!

Maria was ready to do so the second she left the mental hospital. Immediately after a stay at the mental joint she realized she was not going to be a victim. She decided right then and there that she would never let her past effect whom should would become today. She decided to let go of all those rotten *schemas* and start a brand new bag!

Needless to say, Maria became an incredibly successful real estate entrepreneur and has made herself into quite the successful *mujer fuerte*, a strong successful woman. She is now ready to give back into the world she once knew. And that my friends, is the circle of life, it is the ultimate meaning to our destiny. We are to walk through the fire, go get it, and give it back. Don't judge yourself for the stage you are in. It's okay if you are in the fire, or in the go get it *carpe diem* stage, just never forget the end all be all is in giving it back all the way!

As Maria would tell us, we need to start by setting some goals. That's what she did right out of the loony bin, and that's what we are going to do right now. If Maria

can do it, YOU can do it too! Let's start seizing the day by setting some practical goals as well as our Willy Wonkian dreams held deep inside.

<u>1 – YEAR GOALS:</u>	
1.)	
2.)	
3.)	
5 – YEAR GOALS:	
1.)	
2.)	
3.)	

	10 – YEAR (Willy Wonkian) Dreams:	
	1.)	
		•
	2.)	
		•
;	3.)	
		•

Tell yourself and write to yourself who you are and who you want to be! Don't let another day go by without defining exactly who you are and what you want!

CARPE DIEM!

SIEZE THE DAY!





The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

- What have you learned so far from the people we have investigated?
- What are their mistakes?
- What are their successes?
- What can we learn from their worldview?
- How has life shaped their meaning and purpose as an individual?

"Humanity must continue to mourn and grow together through each other's sufferings. Then somehow, through the magic of sharing life's story, we will continue to learn the meaning of life."

Anonymous

"...The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity."

- Leo Tolstoy

Chapter 4

Love and Love Again

Roses are red, violets are blue.

Hi, can you love me?

No.

Okay, how about you?

GOD IS THRILLED BY YOU!

I believe YOU were made [designed, conceived in thought, born] to please God and be pleased BY God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers the question, "What is the chief end of man?" I.E. what is the human purpose? In which the mainstay answer was born: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

I believe the *enjoying* God part has been greatly missed throughout human history, and I believe the Spirit of God is 100% still absolutely IN LOVE with YOU! There is nothing you can do to earn this kind of love, <u>it just is</u>. By your nature alone, being that you are God's child, a human being fashioned [*shaped, molded, formed, evolved*] in the likeness of God itself, no matter how God may manifest [*reveal, or express*] itself to you; God is completely in love with you!

But, How Do We Know that God Even Exists?

I always remind folks of Gandhi's eloquent response to the question of how we know God even exists, by using his words to remind us that "Faith transcends reason."

So as reasonable as we can be in this book, how do you know that he **doesn't exist?**

The point is it's not a matter of exactly knowing 100% for sure if God exists or not. It's a matter of allowing the constructs of *peace*, *hope*, *and love* to permeate your very being. By taking that simple step of <u>surrender</u> - - to a higher calling or some sort of ultimate force - - <u>you</u> <u>will see God</u>. We know God exists in the tender mercies of a higher call towards mercy and love for one another. If God could just be that, for a moment, just the higher call towards love and peace, then the everlasting Spirit of love for all God's children will continue to reveal its purpose and identity more and more each day - - each lifetime - - each generation - - and each cycle of the entire cosmological system.

How do we know that we are God's children?

Because you are ALIVE! The mark [the fingerprint] of God is - - LIFE! Life itself cannot be explained, only explained away. It is the trademark of the existence of the Spirit, and it is yours! You possess it [hold it, meditate on it, enjoy it], and it enjoys you!

But, how do we know we are accepted as we are, with no religious requirements and no questions asked?

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Because. That's how we know: Because... You are the (be)cause of God. You are the

cause of God, the **be**-cause. You are God's child. You are its creation, descendant, its baby, its

suckling. Now suck on this:

Let's say you had a son, and he bears your name [your last name or family name], and he

repeatedly colored crayons all over your wall. Over and over you tell your son to not color

crayons on the wall. However, the child refuses [or is incapable] to stop. For years this goes on,

and you are at your wits end. At any point, does this child **not** become your son? At any point,

would you take away your child's given name? No matter how frustrated you are, or what that

kid might say or do, he will always be your son. Even if he changes his literal name, even if he

runs far-far-far away, he will always be your son or daughter, and you will always be God's.

God is stuck with you, and you are stuck with God. And, unlike our Earthly parents, God

is forever patient, forever kind, and forever for you, forever! You bear the mark of an eternal

being, and it cannot be removed. And the good news is: God is Love! So love, and be loved!

DEEPER INSIGHT: Isaiah 49:15-16:

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast

and have no compassion on the child she has borne?

Though she may forget,

I will not forget you!

See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;

your walls are ever before me."

A child cannot love more than the parent loves the child. It is not the order of life. The

child must receive love, and the parent must give love. Same goes for us in our relationship with

life and love and God himself. We here in the Western world are so fixated on doing, making,

giving, growing, and we lose so much of the natural way towards life and love and God himself.

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We are intended to receive sunlight; we did not earn it nor make it rise. We are intended to drink water; we did not earn it nor make it appear. No, we are meant to drink, and receive. Love is fully trusted and at peace when it is taken in the proper order. Take on the nature of a *steward* and a *shepherd* – that way you will receive love freely, and free love is the only true love. It has to take place in the context of free-will choice. Thus is the nature of life, and the cosmos, and your ever beating heart as it desperately seeks its soul mate. Trust me my friend, when you are seated and at rest with this fact in your own life, true love will come knocking on your door!

Believe all things good are gifts from God for life in the land of the living, and you will be called up! Do not be the guy who eats first, only to be cast down to the end of the line; but rather, be the servant who lets others eat first so that you can be called up and receive many gifts freely with thankfulness and joy! That is **the secret** to joy in life. You are not the head, God is, so don't make anymore judgments, just receive and be happy!

Let Go of the BIG Lebowski, and Just Abide

In my studies and research on the varying opinions of love and how it relates to the meaning of life, I have found that many people are broken and can scarcely maintain healthy relationships. Of the 1,000+ survey responses we have gathered about the meaning of life, **broken relationships**, along with the burden of money, ranks highest of all things meaningful. Yet, relationships and love still remain difficult for many of us to understand. All within varying degrees of successes and failures, victimizations and victimizers, we all have a story of brokenness to share. We have much to learn from others, *the golden rule*, and quite possibly the most secret hero of all time. I wouldn't say a hero, 'cause what's a

hero? But the *Dude*, played by Jeff Bridges in *The Big Lebowski*, a Coen Brother's film, can sure teach us a lot about how to love and love again through all of life's struggles. In the area of love and relationships, learn to be like the *Dude*, and just take it easy, man. Apply the golden rule again to your life and **it will not fail you**, no matter what religion or creed or code you follow.

Don't be like the *Big Lebowski*, the fake *Lebowski*, who forces his way to the top of everything, especially in love. Let's check in on a conversation The Dude, played by Jeff Bridges, in *The Big Lebowski*, has with the *Big* Lebowski, played by David Huddleston, striking at the very core of our manhood and ultimate purpose:

The Big Lebowski

What makes a man, Mr. Lebowski?

The Dude:

Dude...

The Big Lebowski:

Huh?

The Dude:

Uhh... I don't know sir.

The Big Lebowski:

Is it being prepared to do the right thing, whatever the cost?

Isn't that what makes a man?

The Dude:

Hmmm... Well, sure, that and a pair of testicles.

"Are you surprised at my tears, sir?" The Big Lebowski continues on, describing his foiled lot in life, as *The Dude* takes on a different approach, very simply answering life's biggest question with what he sees before him.

Sometimes in life, and especially in love, in order to love again and/or thrive in life we have to give it away, and set it free in order to truly receive it. The Big Lebowski is concerned with doing, and working, and striving, and fighting for what he happens to think is right, whatever the cost may be; whereas The Dude, and that's what you call him, or *el duderino* if you're not into the whole brevity thing, does not suffer life to such extremes. It's way too exhausting. Learn to take life, and the swirling waves of the deep ocean of love, with an open hand, not a closed fist. You will paddle through it, and make much more progress in life and love if you can do so.

How can we learn to love each other and love again after passed failures?

For now, let's take the first step together, and write out some of the things we have learned from our past so that we can heal, forgive, and try to get up again. **INTERACT** with me, and get a piece of paper out and follow along with me as we let go of past hurts, providing us with a template and example of how to apply the healing ointment of confession and release through free-flow writing.

First of all, write out that you have not always applied **the golden rule** to the ones you love. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Write that you have often failed in this area. You have held those close to you to a higher standard of expectation that *even you* cannot fulfill. You would never treat yourself as harshly as you

have treated the ones you love. When you fail, you expect forgiveness and understanding, after all you are just human and nobody is perfect, right? But when those close to you fail, you collapse under the temptation to judge and point out the flaws in other people's character. You take everything way too personally, and the attachment you show to how you think you should be loved vs. the way you love others is out of *balance*. You can admit and confess that now. You understand that healthy love accepts people for who they are. It does not pick out the specks of dust in your beloved's eyes, all the while walking around with a whole tree of judgment and error in your own eyes.

You understand and accept that love is a gift, and cannot be controlled or forced, so you write these statements down on sticky notes, or pieces of artwork, and place them all over your walls:

ACTIVITY: Place These Seven Statements On The FRONT of A Sticky Pad:

LOVE IS A GIFT	LOVE IS PATIENT	LOVE IS KIND	LOVE IS HUMBLE
LOVE COVERS ALL THING	GS LOVE HOPES ALL THING	SS LOVE ENDURES	S ALL THINGS

ACTIVITY: Place These Seven On The BACK of the Corresponding Sticky Pad:

I AM A GIFT	I AM PATIENT	I AM KIND	I AM HUMBLE	
I COVER ALL THINGS	I HOPE ALL	THINGS	I ENDURE ALL THINGS	

When a door closes, no matter how ugly it may be, many times the closed door is a gift, attempting to protect us from the hurt and suffering you may endure through an un-healthy relationship. You understand that now, you forgive yourself, and you thank God for this.

For the animal, sex is purely carnal. In the animal Kingdom, relationships rarely come with strings attached. And like some of us out in the world, this also goes on within human culture. We all know the divorce rate in America. We all know how many children are born into broken homes. Maybe you were one of them, or perhaps you caused one yourself. This is no time to give up. We must learn to love and love again!

If you struggle in this area and want to start again, let us learn about sex and relationships through the words of Maude Lebowski, played by Julianne Moore, as she broaches the subject with The Dude, played by Jeff Bridges, in *The Big Lebowski*:

Maude Lebowski:

Does the female form make you uncomfortable, Mr. Lebowski?

The Dude:

Uhhh, is that what this is a picture of?

Maude Lebowski:

In a sense, yes. My art has been commended as being strongly vaginal which bothers some men.

The word itself makes some men uncomfortable... Vagina.

The Dude:

Ohhh yeah?

Maude Lebowski:

Yes, they don't like hearing it and find it difficult to say whereas without batting an eye a man will refer to his dick or his rod or his Johnson.

The Dude:

Johnson?

Maude Lebowski:

Do you like sex, Mr. Lebowski?

The Dude:

'Scuse me?

Maude Lebowski:

Sex. The physical act of love. Coitus. Do you like it?

The Dude:

I was talking about my rug.

Maude Lebowski:

You're not interested in sex?

The Dude:

You mean coitus?

Maude Lebowski:

I like it too. It's a male myth about feminists that we hate sex. It can be a natural, zesty enterprise. But unfortunately there are some people--it is called satyriasis in men, nymphomania in women

The Dude:

Oh, no.

who engage in it compulsively and without joy.

Maude Lebowski:

Oh, Yes Mr. Lebowski, these unfortunate souls cannot love in the true sense of the word.

Our mutual acquaintance Bunny is one of these.

Maude is attempting to make the point that sex can be a natural, zesty enterprise, but that it needs to be tempered with mutual understanding and commitment - - protecting us from frivolous mistakes that can be made in the heat of the moment. We are called to be spiritual beings, possessing the very spirit of the living God within us. I know from the very depths of my own restored soul, that sex is an amazing thing that is designed to **unite human beings together**, not drive us apart by mere passion. The act of sex and relationships conducted in the way of pure consumption can never have enough and never be quenched. A great quote from the demon Screwtape's malicious point of view, found in *The Screwtape Letters*, written by C.S. Lewis, shows us how anything taken out of pure consumption will ultimately lead to our own personal destruction:

"Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better style. To get the

man's soul and give him nothing in return--that is what really gladdens our Father's heart." (The Screwtape Letters, Letter IX, C.S. Lewis)

Lust of any kind, whether it's sexual, or about food, or strong drink, it will always demand more, more, more, instead of the natural way of freely giving and receiving. If you are in this type of situation, ask yourself, how much is enough? Do you feel out of balance with "...an ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure?"

If this is the case, then it's time to surrender your will and practice a time of self-control.

Self-control is also a gift from God and a fruit of the Holy Spirit. You might not be able to summon the strength from within yourself, so all you need to do is ask. Ask God, or your higher power, to give you the gift of self control, who gives freely to all its children. The meaning of life includes all the gifts that come from within a relationship between one another. So take the time to learn how to love YOU, before freely giving yourself AWAY. That is the key to the golden rule. How can you love others if you can't love yourself first?

Give your "self" permission to be loved, treat your "self" well, and watch and see all the good pleasures of life become yours freely and effortlessly. Bad things are only good things that have been perverted. Darkness is only the absence of light. Darkness and perverted pleasures are not truly real within themselves; only a void of what could be - - gone wrong.

Therefore, take the time and read about our next interview, our Character Study #5, a duo campaign of love, explained to us through the passion that compels the love of Mother and Daughter. It is a tale on how to love and love again! This is a story of sacrifice, about how to start loving your "self" in order to give that love away in the truest sense of the word.



YASMINE & CARA

Mother & Daughter

AGES: 52 and 30, Respectively

Love and Love Again

Late in the process of developing and writing *The Interactive Guide To The Meaning of Life*, I met Cara. After reading her initial submission and survey results I was deeply moved by her passion and zeal for life! In one of her e-mails she pointed me to her blog at http://candidcara.wordpress.com/, and I was super impressed and extremely inspired by her post about her and her mother, entitled "I HOPE THE APPLE DOESN'T FALL FAR FROM THE TREE…"

The wonderful picture shown above as well as the welcoming writing style Cara showcases as an inspiring young author - - simply blew me away. Cara responded to one of many San Francisco Craigslist posts, as I was desperately looking for a quintessential love story for the book. What I ended up finding was nothing even close to quintessential, and details the heart of true love forged through the fires of life and set in stone through the influential bond only a Mother and Daughter relationship could ever endure. I highly recommend reading Cara's entire blog post, but I will grab a few quotes and place them here so you can get the gist of what I saw in this epic understanding towards the meaning of life:

"Prior to adolescence, I always viewed my mother as some sort of angel who nurtured and cared for me so perfectly that I swear she might as well have worn wings and a halo. She was strong and powerful, but gentle and kind. So beautiful too and glowed just like angels do. The spine of our family. I remember being about five years old and my parents asked me if I'd be okay with spending a full week at my cousins' house with my older brother and sister and I was so proud to be a big girl that I agreed. Three days into it, I was missing my mother, my angel, so much that I physically felt sick to my stomach and couldn't stop crying.

Then, when I was about seven years old I was separated from my mom and the rest of my family while she tried to build a foundation for a new life in the U.S. I lived with my amazing aunt and uncle who treated me so kindly like I was their own, but as a little girl, I felt so lost and alone without my mommy. What kept me going were the letters, cards, and little presents she would send me religiously. She always sent me little packages of things like Flintstones flavored vitamins or a whole set of markers with every color of the rainbow. But, what made me feel the most special was when she would refer to me as "Princess" in her letters. I still have every letter and card and will take them to my grave. Soon enough when my papers went through, we were all reunited and one of the most profound feelings I can remember is the feeling of true joy and love when I saw her at the airport upon my arrival."

Cara's story, and that of her mother Yasmine, is not completely unique, in that the Unites States is FULL of the wonderful tale of opportunity, built upon the story of immigrants finding the fulfillment of hope set upon her shores. However, to remind ourselves of the nature of this hope, and to see that it still takes place within the modern era, this type of story continues to be a monumental source of inspiration for us all!

Cara's mother, Yasmine, has been nicknamed "the meaning of life" by a few of her friends, due to her strength and faith in the big picture of love for what it takes to be free. For Yasmine, her strength and resolve rests in her children and the love she has to do whatever it takes to sustain a healthy and loving life for one another. While she is in no way perfect, Yasmine has made great sacrifices for the purpose of family love, and is now reaping the fruit of her hard work in the successful lives of her children here in the United States.

It wasn't always this way for Yasmine and her family, as things were much different back in the Philippines. She was a young bride at the age of 19 and had three children by the age of 24. According to Yasmine, life had become like a sinking ship, as her marital relationship left her feeling like she was in the movie, *Sleeping With The Enemy*, as the trapped bride played by Julia Roberts. She had known a very privileged life but found that her husband had plunged the family into perilous times. The ship continued to sink for young Yasmine as she found herself powerless and not allowed to live a normal life, trapped in a fearful state of paralysis and incapability. She could no longer love the family the way she knew she had to in order to save the sinking ship. Things continued to get worse as every move she made become like a walking prison of the inability to make personal decisions. And in order for Yasmine to find the balance she needed in her life to save her family, she decided that, "you can't find meaning and purpose and a healthy life of love without first learning how to love yourself."

Yasmine knew she had to make a drastic move in order to save the family, so she slipped away and ran to the shores of the United States of America. Finding work, getting an apartment, learning how to shop at the market, speak the local language, all of this Yasmine had to learn by herself, all over again, and quick! It took 2 years before

she was able to start and plan a way to get her children back. But that would not come easy...

During this time, in her childhood, Cara loved and missed her mommy oh so much! It was a nightmare for Yasmine during those years, dreaming about chasing and searching after her long lost children. She would write her children regularly, sending cards and letters, as Yasmine puts it, "I desperately wanted my children to know that I did NOT abandon them. I wanted to reassure them that's not why I left. I wanted them to believe in a day as it is TODAY! This day, independent, free to love and being together in a new place that's safe in America."

It was at this point, around 1992, that Yasmine and her Husband, the children's father, went to the negotiating table and discussed how the family could return to their mother, and start fresh in America. The two parents made their agreements, and eventually, one by one, all got back together, under one roof by 1993.

The following season of life was about getting the family back together, i.e. getting jobs, assimilating into the culture, maintaining ways for daily needs, and getting the kids into school. The first few years were a lot better for everyone! No more violence, less fighting, but as time went on the distance between the husband and Yasmine continued to grow, as their focus was about sustaining life, and less about loving one another. From Cara's and the other children's point of view, they always knew that their parents were not happy, and had always hoped for the best. But the children knew better, as they would often break into their mother's diary and read "Mom's secret journal of unhappiness".

About ten years later things continued to dissolve and Yasmine and Cara's father got a divorce in 2003. The kids were supportive of both their parents, even during an ugly separation, as Yasmine slept in Cara's room during the transition period. This was the reemerging turning point for Cara in her life, as she learned to love her mother again, like she once did as a child. Just like any child growing up in tumultuous times, it can be hard to understand how to love your parents when they are unhappy, fighting all the time, and separating from one another. Although it was hard, Cara realized this was the turning point to love and love again. The way Cara put it was like, "you know when you are younger, and your parents tell you, 'you'll understand when you're older'? Yeah, well, it was at this point that I became, 'older'?"

Cara went through the metamorphosis of child love into the mature love of finally seeing her mother as a person, who loved her and sacrificed everything for her family. No longer was she a child who needed only to be loved, but could now see the value of giving love away, and being strong for others in their time of need. It was like the embodiment of love came full circle, as a means to love and love again. From loving self, to loving others, it is a journey we all must take. And now, that Cara is an adult at the awesome young age of 29, she is jumping ship, and running the race of life on her own. She recently moved out to San Francisco from Washington, DC and is working hard at her new job. She has a wonderful career as an aspiring writer ahead of her, and looks forward to continuing the circle of the meaning of life as to love and love again.

I can assure you Cara, the apple did not fall far from the tree, as we all can learn a very positive lesson from the love story your mother has shared with us here today, summarized here in this book. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." (Romans 8:28)

All things work together for good: Bad things, hard things, luck, chance, death, life, and the cycle of love and love again. If you feel trapped, or depressed, or lazy, or stuck in the mud of life's current circumstances, consider Yasmine and Cara's story for a minute. All things work together for good. Yes, we might have to fight and sacrifice and work together in order to do our part as members of this life, but always remember and say it out loud, THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD! Do NOT be afraid! Go for it! Start fresh. Find a way for life and love to work out! You have nothing to lose but the loss you already feel.

ACTIVITY:

Go get a jigsaw puzzle... Get one according to the size of the problem you think you face. Get a small one for your little problems, a medium sized one for your medium sized problems, and one large one as a metaphor to the large grandiose conflict of your entire life story. Now, take a look at how many pieces are involved in each one. Obviously, the large more complex puzzles take a lot longer to solve then the smaller ones. The first thing we can learn from this is that you need to relax and allow the big problems to be solved over time. It takes time to fit the pieces all together, so do not judge your life for what it is right now, one day, it will all work out for GOOD!

Second, see how small the little puzzles are? Remember when you were a child and putting together a 15 piece puzzle was virtually impossible? Now, you can do that in 15 minutes, if that! 2 minutes according to the size of your small puzzle. These are the little things in your life. Take them one by one. Don't sweat the small stuff, and finish each puzzle according to the size and time it requires.

Thirdly, have fun with it. Remember that it will all work out in the end. Yes, it is hard, and yes it can get confusing. But remember, life is just a puzzle waiting to get solved. What good would life be without you participating in it? What good would life be if you already knew exactly how it ends and exactly where all the pieces go? That would not be life at all! We can see glimpses into the future, hidden within our desires and wishes and dreams and universal moral codes, but we cannot see it all! So play the game, and learn to love and love again, and again, and again, and again. "Never give up, Never surrender!" (What movie? Hint: Tim Allen says this, and it is not Toy Story)



The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

One thing to remember while reading the Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life, is that you don't have to know everything. In fact, one of the keys to the meaning of life is that **life** itself cannot be exhausted, or "fully-known". You have to interact with it, grow, learn and express it back in order for life to be *revealed* to you.

So we have learned a major insight into the meaning of life here today. The vastness of life cannot be fully known, only **lived**. This is the greatest of great news for all of us. It puts things into their proper perspective. We as humans are the receivers of life, the transceivers of life, and propagators of life, but we are not the creator of life itself. Therefore be free to be human. No judgments. We make mistakes, we build buildings, we go bowling, we have sex, we make babies, and we pray, we eat, we love and we die. That is who and what we are, so cherish it for everything it is worth!

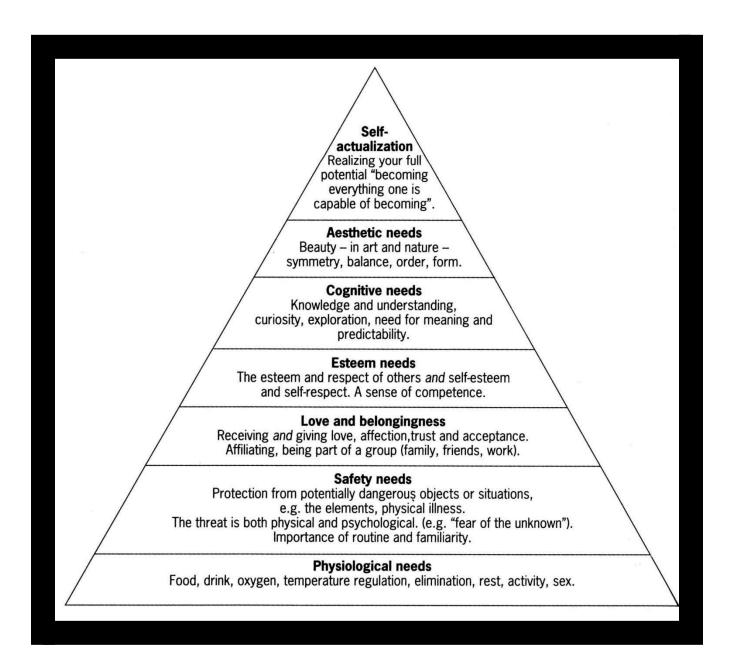
Chapter 5

Music, Movies, & The Arts

another day and I believe in miracles." ~ Audrey Hepburn

Movies as Life

For me personally, artistic expression is the ultimate purpose of life. It goes along with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in which our highest level of meaning comes from the actualization of our own selves and the fulfillment of our own personal dreams:



For many, catching a break, or getting your story told is the ultimate meaning to life. No doubt I have also felt this call since I was very young. I can remember doing stand-up comedy gigs at 16-years old for friend's birthday parties, and being snuck into bars and college parties just starting out. We were on fire back in those days, and the world was our oyster! Rain or shine, the meaning of life was make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh, there was always something powerful in performance, in adventure, in breaking through into the unknown zones of imagination and creativity. It drew us back into our childhood, all the movies we watched, the games we played, the dreams we had, the cartoons we watched as kids. They were all right there, free game to make fun of, reminisce upon, and joke about a childhood that was grounded upon the 1980's, where movies, music videos, video games, Garbage Pail Kids, Zelda maps, Ken Griffey JR's Chocolate Bar, Mr. T. Cereal, colored hair, roller scatting rinks, pinball machines, and enough HBO to set a kid's imagination on fire!

There isn't one kid from my generation who doesn't either want to make a movie, be in a band, swing for the fences in a major league ballpark, or score the winning touchdown on Monday Night Football! Why do you think fantasy football is so huge in America? We *are* the generation of the new world! We are the people who want to express our evolved artistic expression, symbolizing our hierarchy of evolutionary achievements. Better movies, faster music, snappier humor, cooler commercials, and more touchdowns through the airwaves then ever before!

I want you to think back to every movie you have ever seen. Think back to The Wizard of Oz, or Back to the Future, or Indiana Jones, Star Wars, Willy Wonka, Preditor, Batman, even heart wrenching movies like Schindler's List, Shawshank

Redemption, *Amélie*, Rocky, The Notebook, you name it; and tell me what do they all have in common? ...

... Figured it out yet?

Good wins in the end.

That is why we love movies! And that is why we have faith! And that is why we fight to live on! No matter how desperate things become, no matter what the odds, we all believe good will defeat evil in the end. The fight for life, which runs through all of us as thick and thin as the blood running through all of our veins, is typified most splendidly in the epic film, *The Last of the Mohicans*. When Hawkeye (Nathaniel Poe), played by the wonderful Daniel Day-Lewis, reaches out to assure his long lost love, Cora Munro played by Madeleine Stowe, the fight for life and belief in a better tomorrow will go on, no matter what the cost:

Cora Munro: You've done everything you can do. Save yourself. If the worst happens, and only one of us survives, something of the other does too.

Hawkeye: No. You stay alive. If they *don't* kill you, they'll take you north, up to Huron land. Submit, do you hear? You're strong, you survive. You stay alive, no matter what occurs! I *will* find you. No matter how long it takes, no matter how far, I will find you!

Every single movie will bring you to the edge of your seat, or at least tries to, in order for your faith and hope for that character or storyline to be almost utterly destroyed, before resurrecting that hope into one final climactic resolution. Movies are designed to operate this way, because they resemble life. And this is one of the major keys we have found to the meaning of life. You must believe that you will win in the end.

A movie is designed to follow a heartbeat. Up, down, thump, thump, up, down, thump, thump, until we reach our final up and down battle as our penultimate act and dénouement (a French term for conclusion, used in early Cinema VERITAS, in order to bring film story to a close), causes us to hold our breath. Movies as in life, suspends our disbelief for just long enough, until we gasp for our last breath of air, just before the hero, or cause, or healing, or miracle, or the meaning to your life comes and saves the day.

Jeff Who Lives at Home, starring Ed Helms and Jeff Siegel, is a remarkable tale of signs, and the workings of life having a meaning no matter what. I recommend you view this movie ASAP!

This notion of salvation and redemption is bread in all of mankind, and is the essence of story, and quite possibly the spark of life itself. To believe, no matter how bad the circumstances may seem to you at the time that you will win in the end.

Scripture tells us that, "All things work together for good," and that God himself is the author and perfector of our lives. God is the Director, and yes, he may bring you to the edge of your seat, through hard times, joy, and suffering, but only so you can enjoy the majesty and glory of the redeeming power of the hero **inside you**, the everlasting spirit of God living **inside you**, that cannot be quenched, a fire that cannot go out, and a life that will never die.

INSERT:

RYAN MCCANN INTERVIEW:

ACTOR/ARTIST/MUSICIAN/QUARTERBACK

Life as a Movie

As an exercise of seeing your life as a movie, and a movie as your life, let's write your life's story into a movie! This is your maneuver for this chapter! This is your exercise in order to bring your story and purpose back from the dead and into LIFE!

You become the superhero. You become the main character in a tale of ups and downs, thump, **thump**, achievements and failures, thump, **thump**, tell the world your story, your heartbeat on film!

Put yourself in space, in a galaxy like *Star Wars*. Put yourself as a comic book hero where anything goes! Become a time traveler, or shoot lazer beams out your eyes... What would your super mutant power be? How does it represent you?

How about a tale of commandeering a pirate ship, in search of lost treasure? Who would be your villain? Who would be your first mate?

The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life can provide you with the template, a character profile sheet if you will. But as in life, it is up to you to *engage!*

Your author, Justin Foy, has filled out his own superhero style Profile and can be read in the back of the book. However, I suggest to you that you only read it as a means of insight on how to do it on your own! Do not just use it as a means of understanding someone else's life. Write your own tale, so that you can understand your life from an outside perspective. Stand outside yourself; put your story in space, in a time long ago and a place far far away, so that you can be truly objective. You can have it here on Earth, like in X-Men, or a Superman / Batman kind of reality. Just remember to stretch the limits of this present reality so that you can truly shine! By doing this exercise you will see who you are, no matter how incredulous the circumstances may be.

Age: Height: Weight: Appearance:	
Occupation and/or Job Descriptions	
Occupation and/or Job Description:	

CHARACTER NAME (and/or) ALIAS:

Super Power(s): (i.e. flying, healing, teleport, laser beam eyes, mind reading,
force persuasion, super strength, etc.)
Character's special motto, actions, or phrase(s): (i.e. "Go-go gadget legs." Or
"Up, up and away." Or, "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry." etc)
Family background: (i.e. parents, siblings, single, married, etc.)
Origin and Present home: (i.e. from space, another planet, the ocean, and live
in ice cave, apartment, underground sewer, imperial starship, etc.)

Who is your Villain or Nemesis?
Why?
What is the state of the world, or time, or dimension you live in? (i.e. the
emotional, physical, and spiritual condition of the world around you? How can
you help?)
What is your weakness? (i.e. Kryptonite, or water, or a direct shot to the
heart, or specific vice? How do you overcome?)

Now begin writing your story. Let your imagination free-flow! This is for you, not Hollywood! Unless you write something amazing, which I am sure you can, do this at first to find out who you really are and why you are really here!

Where does your story begin? Is it at your immaculate birth, or when you first found your powers? --- Or, are you on a runaway smugglers spaceship with a stolen cargo supply of spice? Do people know about your powers, or do you keep them secret?

Think of the three Act structure of story. There is a beginning, middle, and an end. Where are you in this tale? Try to think back to the structure of story and how it acts like a heartbeat. If the scene starts up, it must end down. If the story is in a downward spiral, then pick it up!

Who do you need to fight, and what mystery is there for your special powers to solve?

Your destiny awaits you, and your world needs you. She is in distress and you are the only one that can help! - - - Or, are you in prison awaiting the help of another? What would you do then, *Count of Monte Cristo*?

We have set the stage. Now tell us your fantastic super story...

Chapter 6

Faith, Religion, and The Elephant Who Could Fly

"In order to lead a meaningful life, you need to cherish others, pay attention to human values and try to cultivate inner peace."

Dalai Lama XIV

The pillars of most religious faiths (if not all) have summed up the meaning of life through ancient proverbial scriptures and stories, much like our own *Interactive Guide*. Ancient scriptures across the globe and throughout time are filled with true life stories. They include historical record as well as *interactive* poetry, some of it fantastic, some of it gritty, some of it utterly meaningless... But from the perspective of the meaning of life, our quest is a less religious question indeed...

The meaning of life does not elude just one group of people and their faiths, it eludes us all! It is only through the collective consciousness and our mutual experience of life do we see how great life really is!

"Love God and love your neighbor as yourself," - - Jesus of Nazareth

The entire darned human comedy hangs upon this truth. As Yoda said, "Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size, do you? Hmm? Hmmm. And well you should not. For my ally is the Force, and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you; here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes. Even between the land and the ship"

That being said, the religious and spiritual practice of faith has so much to offer humanity. Faith based centers and humanity efforts reach far across mother Earth, manifesting herself in the form of hospitals, orphanages, shelters, counseling and employment centers, schools and universities, child care, churches, temples and much more. As living human beings, we tend to over emphasis all the things that are wrong about religious faiths. We remind ourselves and everyone around us about the wars and atrocities that have been done in the name of "God", or their own specific religious zeal. It's very easy to focus on the numerous cases of suffering religion has caused humanity.

However, if you sit back and widen your lens, you will see that it is the very fringe and the few oppressors that have usurped grievous amounts of peril on the Earth - - to our own brethren and throughout time. By far, and it's not even close, by far the majority of spirit filled and/or religious subscribing folks endorse ultimate peace and unconditional love. There will always be wolves in sheep's clothing. There will always be those who pursue power and love only

themselves. While clothing themselves in a deceptive cloud of religion, they seek to control the masses in order to monopolize truth and the "only" pathway to God. But don't let the wolves ruin the collective meaning and pursuit for truth and harmony that exists within the multitudes of the flock. There is a deep desire in most of humanity to seek the truth, understanding, and the meaning of life.

All religious faiths, all of the world religions and spiritual practices and scriptures can teach us about the meaning of life. They act as our school masters, as we mere children learn throughout the experiences of a collective lifetime. Collectively speaking, the world religions at the very least teach us that it is in human nature and/or design to want truth, understanding, and a spiritual relationship with God or spirit realm. Human beings desire to know and be known. This is the fingerprint of the spirit living within us all. It yearns to break free from our mortal shells and leave the body to connect with something higher, something supreme, something that is collectively good and provides the human soul the nirvana it so desperately desires.

It is by the mere fact that us human beings can be inspired and conceptualize such an everlasting notion, that we know it to be meaningful. No matter how different we all may seem at first, the actual quest itself demonstrates to us the importance and certainty of its valor. The spirit quest and search for ultimate reality is so deeply ingrained within mankind that the very fact the hunger is there provides us with a major layer of evidence towards

its' reality. We are all quite alive, and quite in tune with the realm of the spirit and the meaning it provides.

Although at first glance, one person's spirit quest (or faith) may look completely different than someone else's; let us begin by focusing on the common threads that tie us together. What harm can it do you? Even if you already believe your way is right, and another way is wrong, what harm does it do to consider and research and try to understand the faiths of your brother from another mother? At the very least you will be able to understand them and love them even more, which in doing so I am sure you will be fulfilling the destiny of your own personal faith - - by loving your neighbor as yourself.

The person who claims to already know everything knows nothing at all. Even Jesus Christ limited himself. Although he claimed to be the way the truth and the life, he also claimed to be unaware of a few certain facts. When asked about the timing of the end, Jesus said that he did not know. When pressed to go forward to the cross at Calvary, Jesus prayed for "this cup" or destiny to pass by him in the garden of Gasemane. Yet, "thy will be done," Jesus said, showcasing to us all that surrendering to the fragments of the unkown - - a higher power - - or Father as Jesus called it, is in fact the spirit quest we all must go through. None of us, not even Jesus, can absolutely know everything about everything. Questions and debates over Christ's divinity aside, it is within his *humanity* that we can learn the absolute truth about the spirit quest and the meaning of life. That is: we do not have to know to be known. Truth is

not in the knowing, but in the going. By walking the path of faith, with all its ups and downs, truth begets itself. True spiritual understanding is found in the journey not the destination. If we can all at least use this as a starting point towards the meaning of life, judgment falls by the way side. If even Jesus didn't know some stuff, then who are we to claim to know it all?

What we know for sure is that we do not fully know. Yet, it is in the pursuit of knowing, which is ingrained in all of us, that we know - that we know - that we know - that we know, something higher is out there. This yearning, like a baby crying out for her mother's breast, is somewhat proof enough that it exists.

At the very least, we can be sure that the spirit quest is a noble one. It is in all of us to some degree, and the *Interactive Guide* urges us all to read on and engage in a spirit quest of your own. The absence of proof is not the proof of absence. We see but through a tiny key whole into a doorway of the unknown. Yet it is with this small glimmer of hope that we all endeavor to be known and find the meaning of life.

With all that being said, let's examine a few pillars of the divine understanding, as we find out how the spirit journey of our great ancestors has brought meaning to our lives. We might just learn a thing or two about this human comedy we call life. The similarities between the ancient laws of all people groups and religious beliefs showcase to us the unique fingerprint of morality that exists within us all. Let's take a look at some of the most profound:

The Ten Commandments

- 1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
- 2. You shall not make unto thee any graven image.
- 3. You shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- 4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
- 5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
- 6. You shall not murder.
- 7. You shall not commit adultery.
- 8. You shall not steal.
- 9. You shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
- 10. You shall not covet anything that belongs to thy neighbor.

The Sermon on the Mount

- 1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- 5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- 6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Eight-Fold Path

 Right View Right Intention 	Wisdom (prajñā)
3. Right Speech4. Right Action	Ethical Conduct
5. Right Livelihood	(śīla)
6. Right Effort	Mental
7. Right Mindfulness	Development (samādhi)
8. Right Concentration	

Deepak Chopra's 7 steps to spirituality:

- 1. The law of pure potentiality
- 2. The Law of Giving
- 3. The law of karma or cause and effect
- 4. The law of least effort
- 5. The law of Intention and Desire
- 6. The law of Detachment
- 7. The law of dharma or purpose in life

The Abide Guide

- The Seven Spiritual Laws of Takin' 'Er Easy
- Dudeism Unanimous: A 12-Step Program for Personal Dudevolution.

Out of all the self help books out there, *The Abide Guide*, written by Oliver Benjamin and Dwayne Eutsey, is the absolute best. It's not for everyone, but for fans of *The Big Lebowski* and the pacifist easy going ways of the Dude, it's really the best!

If you can't find the humor in life, and truly be able to call our lives the human comedy vs. the human tragedy, then you need to read all these books and scriptures and of course all the stories within *The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life* again and again until you get it set deep within your heart! The story of love and divine inspiration permeates all of mankind - - in order to showcase to us the moral and living peace we all desire oh so much. I believe Gandhi puts it best and I suggest you go to the following link to hear Gandhi's **actual voice** on the matter, however this quote summarizes precisely what we are talking about here:

"[Faith and the work of God] ... is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within. Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself."

(http://www.gandhiserve.org/information/listen_to_gandhi/lec_1_on_g od/augven_spiritual_message.html)







The Art of ChristianiChi

The Art of ChristianiChi is a daily life practice that helps guide people on the pathway of peace, health and wholeness. Go visit our webpage at christianachi.bravesites.com, and send us a message of what you think!

By practicing ChristianiChi each day, your body, soul, and spirit will be restored into complete Shalom, Nirvana, Zen, Christ like harmony. Our original design was to be immortal. We were never meant to die! And ChristianiChi has a THREE-STEP process that will restore your life into complete joy and abundance in ALL walks of life.

The very first step of ChristianiChi is found in the experience of coming to know the love of God, or your own *Higher Power*. This pursuit is not just a "Christianity" thing, no it is a Christian' a' *Chi* thing, and everybody is welcome.

For me personally, the healing ministry of Jesus Christ is a wonderful path. Don't fixate on Christianity or **any** religion in the sense of rules and judgment or wars and conflicting worldviews, but rather consider the Christian' a' *Chi* of the living spirit of love free flowing into all of the hospitals, orphanages, food banks, universities, and cathedrals of peace that have been inspired by the passion, and healing ministry of faith. There are so many accounts across this wonderful world of people finding peace and healing and love and wholeness from the spirit of Christ's example of love - that it spans the globe, throughout all genders, races, religions, political structures, lifestyles, you name it, and JC is right there. (This is NOT a *salvation* issue we are discussing here! That is Christianity, not Christian' a' Chi. We are discussing a pathway. A

process that can open your heart and mind and deliver your body into ABUNDANT EVERLASTING HEALTH! And for me personally, it started by meeting Jesus.)

Jesus' disciples summarized his **healing** ministry in the book of Matthew saying that, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing **every** disease and sickness."

(Matthew 9:35)

From the point of view of Jesus' healing ministry, he healed the sick and proclaimed good news of hope and love, to **all people**, period... The healing ministry was not a salvation issue for Jesus, as it was freely given to all, so it shouldn't be a salvation issue for anyone else who practices ChristianiChi. The free gift of God is LOVE, and like Jesus we desire to hear and practice the good news that God loves us all! The good news of ChristianiChi is that it restores our true meaning in life (which is to be eternally united, whether in this temporary abode or the next), establishing in our hearts and minds that "God" is pure un-conditional love, and so are you unconditionally loved in your part to play in theater of the cosmos. God is **NOT** the crazy lightning bolt throwing God who hates us and punishes us if we do wrong. This is GOOD NEWS! The Kingdom of God, or Yahweh, or the Living Force, or Brahma, or the eight fold way of Buddhism, or whatever you call it, is good, and is **love**. If accepted, from deep inside, that the concept of God is the power of love, then this very fact alone can heal your body RIGHT NOW! Just like that, boom, believe and be healed!

The best example I can give you about the very first step of ChristianiChi, and the exemplar of the healing ministry of Jesus, is that of a set of keys. Keys open doors,

and they can also lock them. Most of the time, in order for us to be healed we need to open the doors of healing and close the doors of condemnation and pain.

But how can we find our way and open and close such doors? Especially if we are already sick, how can we open the door to understanding the meaning of life? How can we be healed through faith? Can faith really heal? Is there a God who can heal me, and show me my purpose?

It has been said that Jesus Christ holds the keys to life and death. However, I suggest you find out for yourself, and see if it may be true. For me personally I have absolutely found this to be true, and have personally seen the healing power of Christ in my life and in countless others. Needless to say, this is *your life* and *your path*, so set sail and search for truth with all your heart, whatever it may be.

Take a minute, my friend, and ponder *The*Light of the World painting by William Holman in 1853. It is a symbolic painting representing the person of Jesus, as he prepares to knock on a long-unopened door, illustrating that of



Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and I will have supper with him, and he with Me".

When criticized and asked why the door had no knob, William Hunt responded, "I painted the picture with what I thought, unworthy though I was, to be by Divine command, and not simply as a good Subject." Years later, Hunt described the

paintings symbolism in that the <u>door had no knob because it can only be opened from</u>
the **inside**.

This is precisely why the very first step in ChristianiChi is for <u>YOU</u> to open. The knob is on the inside and you must choose to open it! This is the only door that you have the free will power to open. It is the door to your heart and soul. Oh how wonderful the soul is! It is your center, your core, the container of the Holy Spirit. All other doors and pathways to life begin by the opening of your heart, and hanging out with your *Higher Power*. Your *Higher Power* holds the keys to the entire cosmos, including your destiny, your health, your finances, and your very breath.

Once the door of your heart is opened to your Higher Power of UN-CONDITIONAL LOVE, the healer will come and have *supper* with you no matter what. (*This can take a long time by the way - - a life-time even. Notice the overgrown bushes and thistles in front of William Hunt's painting. We all put up walls of fear and doubt, and many times these are the very things that cause us stress and sickness and disease. No judgments, we all have our own path towards health and healing and spiritual growth, it does not matter to Jesus.)*

How bizarre! Supper? That is all Jesus wants to do? Yes, come and have supper with him, and you will be healed, and given Shalom Peace! This is also the second step of ChristianiChi, offering you the elements for complete health and Zen, Nirvana like wholeness. Supper! Come, let us eat...

Life has been given freely to us ALL! No one needs to carry the burdens and frailties of life anymore. Grace is sufficient for you! Life, and the movements of nature, and the provision from the spirit (or chi, or breath), are sufficient for ALL of us to heal from within. We ALL posses this gift, like a river of living water welling up inside of us.

We ALL have been given this freedom if we only receive it, each day, by day, just like our breath, accepting in air and love and God and our daily bread. The Cross we ALL bear will be lifted off of our backs, when we let go, and receive the free flow energy of God's love and light!

This takes us to the SECOND step of ChristianiChi: Your Daily Bread.

For me personally, and for any soul who wants to freely partake, the Holy Communion is an act of **remembrance** and **thankfulness** through faith, and is the ultimate key to health and wholeness in one's daily life. The defining book that changed my life in this arena is *Health And Wholeness Through The Holy Communion*, by Pastor Joseph Prince, New Creation Church, Singapore.

It's a book that reminds us why and what the Holy Communion actually is, and why the Christ gave this simple act of humility to mankind. The Religious elements, such as Communion, the rosary, ritual prayer, lighting candles, worship, holy water, etlc. help us transcend from reason into faith, like Gandhi said, "Faith transcends reason," thus allowing us to use our "6th sense" or higher sense in order to deliver us from earthly perils. Just like the man who goes without food or water will starve his flesh, so the man who goes without spiritual practices will starve his soul.

Simply put, by breaking bread, and sipping the wine, we are **remembering**Christ's body, as it was physically torn apart and lifted up on a brutal Cross, so that we can be made whole in our own bodies in the here and the now. When we remember the sacrifice of one man, we gain the life of another. I reckon the dance that occurred on the cross of Calvary that day and every day since then, to an incident that happened in Superman II, with Christopher Reeves.

In this particular scene, Superman has led General Zod and his minions back to his ice cave in order to surrender his powers to the world, becoming a mortal man just like everyone else. In what has been reckoned as the "Divine Switch", Superman stepped into a sealed chamber and started the crystal molecular machine. On the inside, it appeared that Superman drained his powers from inside the chamber, while Zod and his minions retained their Cryptonian powers outside the chamber. But alas, the "Divine Switch" occurs from the other direction, as Superman reverse engineered the mechanism, thus absorbing the powers of Zod and his minions from outside the chamber, protecting him from within.

Similarly, each time you partake of the Holy Communion, and eat your daily bread with Christ inside your heart, the "Divine Switch" occurs inside of you: **You**become as Christ, and Christ becomes like you. A good scripture that promises the "Divine Switch" to anyone who believes comes to us in Ephesians 2:4-10:

"...Even when we were dead in our transgressions, God made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, so that in the ages to come He might show us the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in the gift of Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the free gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them..."

So, basically, while we were yet mortal human beings, the immortal being came and switched places with us. We experienced the "Divine Switch" as *Immanuel*, a name given to Jesus of Nazareth meaning "God with us", came as a man and allowed his body to be massively broken and bruised and killed, so that we can live forever!

Divine health is possible, and the broken body of the Messiah is here for you as a *KEY* into the process of the restoration and redemption of our mortal bodies into the immortal body prepared for us in advance. Just like when we exit our mother's womb into a world of sustaining oxygen and light, we exit this life of death into an ultra edifying reality of divinity. It's like Clement of Alexandria (150-215, A.D.) said, "The Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man [on] how man may become God." (Clement of Alexandria, "Chapter I", Exhortation to the Heathen, retrieved 2012-11-06)

By partaking in the Holy Communion, we are in fact transcending time and space and entering into our divine right as sons of God. It's also at this time that I take all my vitamins, supplements, and medications if need be. In no way am I saying that the Holy Communion is meant to replace our modern day medicine and health and dietary needs, but to use it as a daily practice for our spiritual health along with our bodily health. Remember what Gandhi said, "Faith transcends reason."

On the same token, when we take vitamins for our bodies we *believe* that they will do us some good. That small act of faith we partake in our everyday lives also exists in the spiritual realm. The Holy Communion is our chance to remember Christ's "*Divine Switch*" available to us all through his sacrifice as a man unto death in order for you to live forever! As it is written in Colossians 2:13-14, "When you were dead in your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us ALL our transgressions, having canceled out the charge of our legal indebtedness, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

No longer is there a God who counts your wrongs against you. No longer is there a universal moral code that condemns your flesh to Hell, or death, or disease or anything contrary to life eternal! The diseases and failures and deaths in this life are a SHADOW, not the reality. "Yeah though I walk through the SHADOW of the valley of death, I will fear no evil, because YOU are with me!"

The Spirit of God is for you, wants to dine with you, and continues to walk with you on the path towards complete restoration into your ultimate destiny as an accepted and approved son of God.

For more information on what the Holy Communion is and if it is something you believe can be a benefit to you, check out Pastor Joseph Prince's book, *Health And Wholeness Through The Holy Communion*, and see your life changed!

ACTIVITY!

Write Your Personal Testimony

This brings us to the THIRD step of ChristianiChi and every other spiritual step laid out for us throughout time... Engage in YOUR own living life story! What is your personal testimony and how are you acting on it? We have all heard the famously incriminating scripture that, "faith without works is dead." Well, what are your works? While your works are not what saves you, they are what define you!

- What do YOU believe?
- What do you *really* believe in??
- What is the story of your faith and spiritual life?

- What are your strengths and weaknesses that you are still progressing on along the path?
- How do you see faith and spirituality as it pertains to the meaning of life in general?
- How do you see faith and spirituality as it pertains to the meaning of YOUR life as an individual?

Write out your personal testimony and statement of faith. Don't worry about how it comes out, just make a journal entry and share it with the world! Give us your story of faith, or spirituality, or personal insight and revelation into the meaning of life. It's the only way we can ALL learn life's true meaning: If YOU share it!

For the purposes of this book, and as an example of a Personal Testimony, here is a sample of my own testimony from a journal entry dated 1999. I wrote this after a bad break up from a girl whom of course I was desperately in love with, but, of course life goes on man, and writing out your personal testimony during a time of brokenness is the absolute BEST time to vent and remember exactly who you are!

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Justin Foy

My Friend The Margin Man

1999

Their eyes watch you, but you do not see them. Their ears hear you, but you cannot hear them. Their hearts break, and lie open before the world. They wait, and wait, and wait for someone to help them pick up the pieces... But you do not see them.

If you do happen to capture their gaze, and perceive, you'll expose yourself and unveil the truth of a life richly blessed. *Their* eyes say, "I wish I looked like *her*," and, "I wish I had a car," and, "I wish I could play basketball" and, "I'm lost," and, "I'm hurt," and, "I wish I had a jacket like that," and, "My life sucks!"

When they see you in your glory, their pain makes its way deeper into the fabric of their lives, compelling them to ask life's toughest questions: "Why can't I have parents like that?" and, "How come I don't have any friends?" and, "How come I can't read good?" and, "Why do people hate me?" and, "Why did that happen to me?" and, most importantly, "Why do <u>you</u> ignore me?"

Not only was I the guy who ignored the needs of the Margin Man, I made it my obligation to go out of my way and harass the hell out of them. To me, they made great targets for perfecting my cruel, attention getting gift of wit. I constantly elevated myself over them, exploiting all of their weaknesses. As a young comic, I found myself imitating the handicap and the mentally challenged with ease and to perfection. Needless to say, I exponentially gained friends and fame from the masses, while I added to the countless lists of enemies and people I had destroyed.

There was this one girl, God bless her! Her name was Vanessa. I say was, because she eventually changed her own name, due to the pain it would bring, after I was finished with her. We went to the same grade schools and, man, could I imitate this girl. She was marginally mentally challenged and lived in "Never, Never Land". She would stare off into space and talk about animals that looked like Zebra's, but without the stripes. They were horses and I made sure she knew all about it.

"Helloooo, Vanessa." I would say in a voice that matched her flighty and broken pitch to a tee. It spread like wildfire. By high school, every student within a three year deviation knew all about the "Vanessa". In fact, by the time we were Junior's in high school I had started my own local TV show and had done my impression of her at least a thousand times.

That summer, the summer of 97', my life changed. I was preparing to drop out of school to go and pursue my dreams of becoming a movie star and prove to the world that I was a comic genius. I decided to go to a summer camp with my friends, as sort of a last hurrah, and of course to follow a girl up there that I thought was the love of my life. The camp turned out to be a Young Life Christian Camp and I was presented with the gospel for the first time ~ in a long time. I had known Christ, or at least I thought I did. I always felt comfortable with the fact that there was a God out there but I had thought of God as the lightning bolt throwing God in the sky who punished us if we were wrong.

Later that week, the camp took time out of the day for everyone to go and be alone with God, to lay it all on the line and ask God the big questions of your heart. So, I did. I asked God if I should drop out of high school and go down to Hollywood to try and make the Big-Time. I closed my eyes and tried to listen for an answer. Soon after I closed my eyes, I saw one of the scariest and most heartbreaking montages in movie history. My *mind's eye* saw myself lying on a Hollywood street corner, next to the stars imbedded in cement, clutching my bicep with a rubber tube, injecting some mind numbing drug into one of the many track marks that dominated my forearm. If that wasn't enough to change a man, I continued to see the broken and weeping face of every Margin Man and Woman I had ever demoralized.

I fell to the ground. "Why?" I shouted. "Oh Lord, I am so sorry. Forgive me. I never knew." I laid on the ground and looked up into the sky, amazed with all the signs and wonders I had seen. With tears pouring down my face in a weakness that I was feeling for the first time in my life, I searched deep into my heart, "What should I do?"

That is when God responded, and spoke directly into my life for the first time. "Justin," I heard in my heart, all in the form of a strong but small whisper. "Follow me."

At that point, I had no choice. I had been shown the error of my ways and how *my ways* were devastating the poor souls of helpless children left and right. Continuing with the theme of firsts, it was the first time I had ever seen the pain of others. It was the first time I had really seen *other people for who they really were*, let alone their pain. I was born-again. "Yes, Lord." I said. "Change me," and I was changed.

By the time the summer was over and I got back to school for my senior year, a year of forgiveness and penance, it was too late for many, including Vanessa. Much to my dismay and pleading, she had fallen deeper into, "Never Never Land," and had changed her name to Alexandra. You see, the name Vanessa had become so attached with my imitation that it completely transformed into a curse for her. While I don't blame myself entirely for her changing her name, I still pray for her forgiveness everyday and that is something I am going to have to live with for the rest of my life.

My eyes were opened, and I saw who I was and how much I really had. From that point on, I worked hard never to hurt anyone with my words again. The *EUCATASTROPHE* in my life caused my heart of stone to turn into a heart of *flesh*. I kept my eyes open for others who brought the pain, and for the first time, I became a defender of the Margin Man.

I never would have seen them, if I hadn't been refined like this. I never would have recognized the pain, the loneliness, the confusion, and the desperation these people posses - - unless I either felt that same pain -or- was the one *giving it out*. And when I was made ready, according to God's mercy and grace, I was made to be a friend to the friendless, and a friend to the Margin Man.

Years later I found myself asking questions like, "It wasn't always like this... How could it get

like this? How could it have gone this far? Where did I do wrong?" I was not a perfect man, nor a very good, quote un-quote "Christian," one might say. But how could all of this go so wrong?

Dumbo was on the television that night, I'll never forget it. It was like five in the morning and I had just brought my best friend, the Margin Man, home with me from one of the worst days in both of our lives. I felt like a kid all over again, helpless, scared, scarred, and the innocence of youth stripped away from me. Dumbo was on that night, and I'll never forget it.

Years after the summer of 97' I laid my life on the line for the Margin Man. The streets were my playing field and a variety of coffee shops was what I called home, especially Denny's and IHOP (or, wherever there was a smoking section). It was my Denistry, a ministry at Denny's.

③

The first Margin Man I gave my life to was a freshman kid by the name of Jeff. He smelled like an old shoe and almost always had on the same clothes. I quickly became aware that this was a common factor for the Margin Man and I tried my hardest to help, teach, and ignore the stench.

I first met Jeff when I offered to give him a ride, as he was walking up a long, steep hill leading to our high school. And as I have now figured out, when you offer a hand, the Margin Man will take the whole arm. Needless to say, I gave Jeff a ride **every day** after that.

Slowly, I lost some of my own friends as Jeff became attached to my side. Heck, Jeff was hanging out with the coolest senior of all time, Justin Foy, and suddenly his dreams of acceptance and popularity came true. While I know that my *fair-weather* friends at the time didn't understand why or even how I could be friend such a drab, I'm sure the annoyance and the stench of Jeff was just too much for them to

handle. In fact, it was too much for me to handle. Jeff's stench became my stench, and I was slowly marginalized right along with him.

After countless trips to McDonald's, church, football games, lunch times, break times, on the phone, and in my prayers, Jeff had become too heavy for me to bear on my own. But, the problem was, and still is, I was the only one who would care for the guy, because he was so marginal: too retarded for regular social circles, but not retarded enough for governmental support. While I do not blame the government for letting these Marginal Men slip through the cracks, due to the fact that there just isn't enough money and/or time to assist them, I do blame the Church and humanity for turning the other cheek.

As graduation came for me, and another year of public school came for Jeff, I slowly let Jeff go.

But believe me, it wasn't that easy. No. No. No. No. The words that once haunted a guy like Jeff, I now had to use to separate myself from him, so that I could grow and stand on my own two feet. For awhile, that is... My journey with the Margin Man had just begun.

Later that summer I met my best friend and the greatest Margin Man of them all, Matthew. He was also a stinky, same clothes wearing, awkward looking, friendless, social deviant; but, different in the ways of love, loyalty, genius, and most of all, the underappreciated gift of listening. I would not be the man I am today without the years spent rambling to the ever listening, never judging ear of my best friend, Matthew the Margin Man. We used to joke that one of us was not real (like in *Fight Club*) and that we were the other's *make-believe* friend... Hmm...

While he *never* looked at things the way I did, Matthew was my biggest supporter and the Margin Man's greatest friend. I'm sure he was just happy to have a *friend*, but we did do a lot of good for each other and for our surrounding community!

Together we hit the streets and spent the majority of the next three years listening and helping those with special needs. At the time, I believed that my charisma and openness would allow for change and healing in the lives of those that surrounded me. At times, it did. For example there was Biker Rob, Crazy Mike, Robatussin Kevin, Stephen Steven, Big Dave, Jerry Atricks, Blue-Man Bode (who's skin was actually turned blue after eating too much silver medication pills), and a whole bunch of other Margin Men that Matthew and I helped a great deal indeed! Throughout the years, these people weighed heavy on my heart as I would spend hours with them, being their friend, giving out rides, taking them to State Programs, DSHS, Food Banks, and buying them meals and tents and sleeping bags and stuff like that.

Living in Bellingham, WA, provided for some of the *most unique characters* this world has ever seen! You see, when people are running away in life they head West. And when they cannot go West anymore, they head North; thus, Bellingham, WA, completely Northwest from anything familiar. That is exactly what I found in many transient, homeless Margin Men who frequented the coffee shop's I called home.

With open arms and a warm plate of food, we offered all kinds of folks solace and company. I would pull out a new bible every week, due to the fact that I was always giving them away, and at the age of 19 years old began to share the love of Christ not only by deed, but also by the Word. It was a great time, and many of God's children were affected. But the greatest thing of all was when Matthew would relate to the Margin Man in a way I couldn't. Matthew was one of them, and they knew it. Matthew would listen to them, and they knew it. The greatest times were when I would buy the food, and Matthew would work the healing art of the listening ear...

But it did go wrong. There was *catastrophe*... And sometimes it's still hard to see the good in it.

We were young and had no accountability. From 18 to 21-years-old we threw ourselves in the hands of

the cruel world and it bit back. I remember the day I felt the sting of its bite, *Dumbo* was on the television that night, and I'll never forget it.

When the Stranger walked into Denny's that night, he looked like every other lonely man I had seen in my short three years of denistry (Denny's Ministry). He was a little drunk, a little stinky, a little too thin to eat and drink and smoke so much, wore a scruffy but short beard, and was dressed in used jeans, flannel shirt, and a brown zip up winter coat. So, naturally I approached the man and started in on the same old routine. But, something was different about this Stranger and I knew it from the start. He talked about working in Alaska, which was normal enough for a Bellingham, Washington Margin Man, but later on in the night, he went on to talk about winning the lottery a few years back and how it had completely derailed his life ever since he had won the money. We spent a few more hours with him, Matthew and I, talking about God, sharing some coffee, and he actually seemed to have accepted our kindness and words as truth. Satisfied with the night's work, I said goodbye, we prayed, and I went home... But Matthew stayed...

I went to bed early that night, which was rare for me in those years, until I was awakened by a distressing phone call from my best friend, Matthew. He wouldn't tell me what was wrong over the phone, so I got up and drove back to meet him at Denny's. When I arrived, he was standing outside, holding back his tears, and waiving me down like a lost puppy dog. I've had a lot of intense parked car discussions in my short life, but this one was way beyond intense, bordering on pure lunacy.

While I can't betray my friend and fully expose the content of our conversation, I will say that the *Stranger* we met that night took advantage of Matthew's loyal and naïve heart. He led Matt back to his hotel room and forced him to do some unthinkable things. I couldn't help but feel, at least partially, that I was at fault. I left Matthew alone with the man, to keep evangelizing! But he was alone and unprotected, and he was victimized.

I took Matthew home with me for some good sleep and some good food. It was the *least* I could do. We got to my place and *Dumbo* was on the television, I'll never forget that. It provided for a moment of peace and escape, from the horror of the night. I made some eggs and we both tried to find our innocence again within the colorful scenes of Dumbo. Matthew tried to **forget**, and I tried to **forgive** myself for leaving him alone.

Dumbo was deformed with big ears; he had lost his Mom, was enslaved into the circus, and was considered an outcast. His only friend was a small mouse, who provided the comic relief, which only added to the peculiar and marginal life of Dumbo -- aren't elephants supposed to be afraid of mice?

Dumbo had lost it! He was drunk and had hit rock bottom. He was sleeping on the streets and had nothing but strange pink elephants on parade to torment him. What could bring this poor elephant out of his dark and terrifying Technicolor nightmare? Who could save this Margin Man? The answer would come in the hope of numbers, and in a murder of faithful crows.

"You can fly," the crows sang. "Look at those ears."

"Have you ever seen an elephant fly?"

"Here, give it a try." The crows gave Dumbo one of their **feathers**, and miraculously, Dumbo flapped his ears and <u>flew!</u> And boy could he fly, as this Marginal Man became even more marginal. He was no longer marginal because he was an outcast, but because he was the envy of his kind. Dumbo became the most special, and the most famous elephant of all time!

Eventually the feather was taken away from Dumbo, and Dumbo had to use *faith* to fly. He had to believe in himself, because the feather was only an instrument of hope, not the actual means of achievement itself.

If you have been marginalized, victimized, or abandoned, like Dumbo and my friend Matthew, then you must learn to have **faith**, so you too can fly! Study and pray and read and learn everything you can about faith. For the things that make you unique, and the sufferings you have endured, have not been given to you for failure, they have been given to you for *success!*

Pray for a good and loyal friend, even if it is just a mouse (or someone you least expect). Find yourself a good family of friends and/or a church that can support you, like the flock of crows. Take advantage of the feathers given to you as a means to survive, such as social programs, food banks, thrift stores, inspirational books, community prayer groups, AA groups, education, etc., so that you can get on your feet again. Have faith in yourself and in God, then, and only then, will you truly fly. And if you don't necessarily feel like a Margin Man, and have already been given the gift of flight - - THEN GIVE your feathers away, like the crows did for Dumbo, and be a bearer of good news to those who need it most. Who knows, you might just see an elephant fly!

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The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

"A Work In Progress"

(According to over 1,000 surveys and interviews, "A Work In Progress," is the most frequent answer to the meaning of an individual of life.)

You are a work in progress; blessed to live the life you have been given. No matter how humble or how small your life may appear to you right now, always remember that you are a workmanship in progress and that the story is NOT over! Karma is real, no matter how you look at it and in what form it may take: you reap what you sow (Judeo/Christian), yin yang (Taoist), cause and effect (Naturalist), etc. So don't give up and keep sowing good seeds wherever you go! The Earth, your life, the cosmos, it all points to the Karmatic response as being the ultimate action into the meaning of life. Plant seeds, vegetables grow. Show love, hearts heal.

Invest your life into other human beings, and your life will start to thrive! Just like you, other people are also works in progress and they need your help! We all do. So let's start giving it all away in order to receive it all back, in even greater measure!

"The meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple. And yet, everybody rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves."

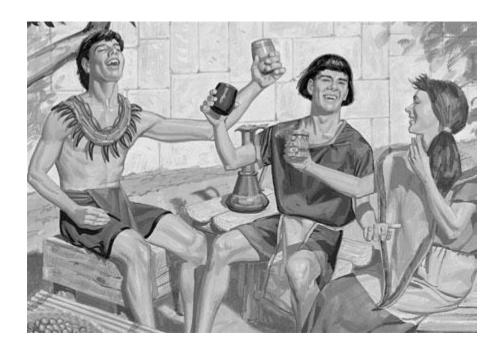
Alan Wilson Watts

"Through our eyes, the universe is perceiving itself. Through our ears, the universe is listening to its harmonies. We are the witnesses through which the universe becomes conscious of its glory, of its magnificence."

Alan Wilson Watts

Chapter 7

"Drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"



Spontaneous Generation

Can flies spontaneously generate from dust? That is the essential question to the meaning of life, scientifically speaking. Where do we come from? And thus, why are we here? Do nature, and the observable sciences, indicate a designer, or complete random chance? I genuinely asked an atheist friend of mine that very question (about flies), and he got really pissed off at me. It's funny how atheists can have more zeal and more blind faith (or anti faith) than any religious man.

So, can flies spontaneously generate? Can something be made out of nothing? At this point within the scientific community the answer is no. *Spontaneous generation* has been proven false. Without going too deep into quantum mechanics, neutrinos, axions, or quantum physics, the life force is just something else entirely. It is not measurable. We do not know how the Big Bang began, i.e. we do not understand the spark of life itself. Stephen Hawking has a hypothesis that at the sub particle level protons can spontaneously appear. However, this is a hypothesis that cannot be measured, and is especially impossible to prove in the absence of any type of existing energy in the first place. So I ask the question again, can something be made out of nothing? And at an even bigger scale, are we a product of design, or random chance? But what is random chance anyway with created material? It's a quagmire of debate and discovery that we humans are still searching for, and must continue to search for as we discover the meaning of life through the scientific method. As China's famous astrophysicist Fang Li Zhi said, "A question that has always been considered a topic of metaphysics or theology, the creation of the universe, has now become an idea of active research in physics."

I posed these very questions to the 84-year-old, wise-old-sage, friend of Berkeley,

California, and the spanning globe, the one and only, last but not least, happiest atheist on

Earth, his friends call him the rock, the great **Grant Flint**. Along with many other incredibly

brilliant question and answer sessions, cheerful wit and charm filled prose, Grant and I have

been actively writing each other concerning the meaning of life since the early dawn of the

Interactive Guide. His own authorship includes many different inspiring published titles such as,

"The Soul Scavenger," and "Waggles: A Boy and His Dog Survive the Great Depression," both

great reads and are all available on Amazon. Grant has also spent his life teaching writing

workshops on how to break writers block, detailing the standard and creative ways of getting published, and has set the mark on writers inspiration. According to Grant Flint, he sure hopes one day that science **can** and **will** prove that life can come from dust, and most assuredly the next generation will see it come to pass. At least that's his light hearted insightful hope.

"Allen Watt's said it so well, geesh, so much for my *mild* feelings of being original." Grant humorously responded to the observance of Allan Watt's quote's concerning the meaning of life.

"Last week I was equally surprised when my son and I watched a documentary about the life of Siddhartha the Buddha. In his last three days he came to see that *life itself is its meaning*." To Grant Flint there is no need to panic about life having more meaning than it already intrinsically does. "My hunch," says Grant, "is that it will become even more significant in your life time as science proves that dust can become life and similar new information which doesn't cause us to change the original question. All that jazz just makes it more complex. The answer, however, is right there in front of us."

The amazing thing about Grant Flint is that he really is one of the happiest, if not THE happiest man alive. This would make him hands down the happiest atheist I ever met, let alone the happiest one in the world. Not to bash atheists at all, in fact Grant has opened my eyes to a great deal of truth and happiness, but I'm sure you've heard of the famous two quotes about atheists: 1. "There are no atheist's in a foxhole," and 2. "Have you ever seen a happy atheist?"

Well Grant Flint has managed both of those things, and lives to joke about it. He tells me, "I don't like atheists. The few I've met were too much like 'Spock' on *Star Trek*... Aloof,

nerdy, dryly sarcastic, unkind, mean, paranoid, and sad. Always the sadness with these guys. Not someone you'd want to invite to dinner, or share a beer with now would ya? For myself I prefer the classification – if there must be one – of simply being 'non-religious'. Or better yet, a 'positive existentialist'. Not a negative existentialist like the Frenchmen, Sartre and Camus. They were sad. Just like most atheists are sad."

Grant Flint goes onto address the atheistic classification by agreeing slightly with the stereotypical atheist, "There are no atheists in the foxhole, huh? Close to true. True 98% of the time. The agnostics, and the - 'I'll think about the existence of God another day' - type of people are suddenly in a situation where they are like a child again, could be dead in minutes, helpless, damn well need a mama or daddy figure, and God is terrifically right for the role. I'd be in the other 2%, as I have been there, know that."

While at times Grant Flint's vernacular and studious philosophies can seem a bit arrogant (this is also true for **all** of us by the way), his breadth of knowledge and years of experience overflows from well within him. Grant Flint is a humble wise old sage and completely earns the respect of his peers, admitting that he knows his own way is not always popular. "However, I've earned it by 84 year's attention, idealism, constant searching, then re-searching, challenging my own conclusions more vigorously than others. I know others have not worked as hard as I have on the meaning of life. They have, somewhat - - mildly, accepted the beliefs and faiths of their parents, later on of their friends, and finally that of their spouse. It's totally understandable. I love them, mean no harm, and I will protect them, easily

shield them, love them, understand them, and never take away in any way the fabric which they have been given. They are innocent."



GRANT FLINT:

84, published 73 short stories, 8 E-books, atheist, positive existentialist, happiest man in world, say my family and friends, AND I know the meaning of life.

On my 84th birthday, a wonderful friend, Rosie, said to me:

"You've suffered more tragedies than anyone I know. And yet you're the happiest man I know! How do you do that? What's the secret?"

I just grinned. It would have been too much to say: "Because I know the meaning of life."

After searching a life time, writing 200 short stories, 8 novels, the meaning of life is clear to me.

The meaning of life is a child's smile. A rose is the meaning of life. The recent massacre of all those innocent school children is somehow also the meaning of life.

What's in your heart right now is the meaning of life.

LIFE is the meaning of life.

As Grant and my conversation grew into a wellspring of life itself, discussing ancient philosophy, scripture, faith, science, and from his point of view what it's like to be only a few years away from deaths door, Grant Flint keeps coming strong! He is one of the most detailed writers and seems to be using the *Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life* and the conversations we have had together over the past few months as almost a moment and pause in order to give us his last sentiment, and words, as the champion for happy atheists.

As sad as a thought like that could be towards many religious people, Grant continues to assert his joyful and unique atheistic ways by stating that, "Atheism, to me, is a religious-like appellation, connoting inflexibility, even 'faith' in an odd way."

He goes on to note that, "being an 'agnostic,' is attractive, but oh so lazy! No fun at all. Like an idiot savant who is very bright about a specific aspect of life, but rottenly lazy about everything else: Passive, a slug, a bore; safe, but idiotic. One becomes a slovenly, vague, indistinct, and lazy question-mark." Ironically enough, Grant Flint, in the likeness of Joseph Campbell, prefers religious folk to agnostics. He prefers people who care, dare, and know how much it matters to work constantly and fervently in finding the truth.

"I've always been attracted to true believers because of their energy, zest, <u>caring.</u> Many times, however, atheists and agnostics, aren't worth the interaction. No one there. No Spocks or lazy question marks for me. Faith people are much more interesting. But children..."

"Childishness is less attractive in adults," as Grant puts it, reiterating his purpose and meaning in life. "I respect clear-eyed perception. Hope that even in the pain-killing drugs of near-death, I will not betray my finest attribute, by wanting a doctor who sugar-coats my odds

of survival, or a god who, parent-like, will seductively promise Heaven if I but give up, give over, surrender, become a child again..."

Ironically, Grant seems to actually embody the heart of a child even as he speaks against its unending call upon us all. I am reminded of the dedication to Lucy, in C.S. Lewis's, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*:

TO LUCY BARFIELD

MyDearLucy,

I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take it down from some upper shelf, dust it, and tell me what you think of it. I shall probably be too deaf to hear, and too old to understand, a word you say, but I shall still be

Your affectionate Godfather, C. S. Lewis

I wonder what stage of life you are in my friend... Are you too old for fairy tales? Or perhaps, you are not yet old enough?

Do you want to be a child again? Do you want to let your imagination and childlike faith flourish again? Or, are you like Grant Flint, ready to imagine all the people, no heaven, no hell, and accept the beauty of the idiosyncrasies of life and try to do the best you can with what you've got?

Either way, the *Interactive Guide* sees no difference. This is your journey and your life. The philosophies of "child-like faith," or the atheistic views of "living life the best way you can with what you've got," are one in the same. Both views ask of us to go for it in life! To grow, build, love, and search for truth in the here and now! Grant Flint continues the good fight of understanding the meaning of life by re-affirming his own personal creed, saying that, "In every waking moment, every dream at night, in sickness and in health, I have from the age of reason studied diligently every aspect of religion, all religions, spirituality, cosmology, Freud, Jung, the holy books, evolution, the great religious teachers, the great skeptics — have done, always, my homework, do today with vigor, joy, study every thought, every new discovery, every news event, every human interaction, old, young, spiritual, non-believer...because I care above all things — about the meaning of life. Go to the grave complete, aware, happy, clear. Not a question mark, not a Spock, not a child."

It seems that Grant Flint may be seeing faith as a step backwards, as if the eternal hope set in the heart of mankind is some sort of limited evolution. However, most of mankind definitely sees faith as a step forward. It is a necessary step into the eternal abode that we all must make. We **enter** into this world as a child, naked, empty, needy, and full of wonder as to what is next; just as we **exit** this world, like a child, naked, empty, needy, and full of wonder as to what is next - - all the while grasping for yet another motherly and godlike helping hand into the newness of life. While I DO agree with Grant Flint that choosing to believe in something greater than yourself is a childlike maneuver, it is nevertheless the faith of a child that preserves the soul - - from the womb into this world, and from the tomb unto the next.

If LIFE itself is the meaning of life, as Grant Flint purports, then legacy and what you leave behind here on Earth is the most important thing anyone could ever treasure. How full and awesome was your life? While some focus entirely on the treasures in Heaven, what about the treasures and love we share here on Earth?

While Grant Flint may be the world's happiest atheist, even HE renders to the words and infamous wisdom of King Solomon in the book of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. When I asked Grant what he thought of Ecclesiastes 1:1-11, in which King Solomon explains to us that everything is meaningless, that life has no meaning - - so drink and be merry for tomorrow we die (a sort of strange atheistic plea even from within the very words of the Bible), Grant replies that, "I agree totally with everything Solomon said. But unlike him, the truth does not make me sad. I'm happy to have had the chance to live. My time is short, I have suffered passionately, enjoyed passionately, and it is nearly over, a year or two. Sure of the meaning of life -- LIFE-- I have no need to convince others there is no God nor Heaven nor Hell. When tragedy strikes, it is not "God's Will." Most folks cannot find my meaning to life and that's okay. If they could, I would preach it. When I see the disasters on the T.V., I understand that most folks need a god for succor and explanation. And I'm sorry they don't know the meaning of life, and may never find it, but I am glad that like a child they have a refuge, for hard times."

As if to summarize the meaningless meaning to life that Solomon purports in the opening chapters of Ecclesiastes, Solomon goes on to describe the famous "time and place for everything" proverbial statements in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes... "A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; A

time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance." ETC...

However something Solomon goes on to say in Chapter 3 verse 11 is very interesting to me, and a question I have for Grant and others like my friend out there in the world. Solomon goes on to say that after all these meaningless things of life, "Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted **eternity** in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end."

So I ask Grant, and I ask you, "Why was 'eternity' planted in the human heart? Why do you think faith in God is set in the majority of human hearts across the globe? While, it might look slightly different from place to place and person to person, why does faith even exist in the first place?

Forget which religion, or which interpretation the world perceives to be the truth of the matter, the real revelation is that we all (most all) believe in something greater than ourselves. It seems to be an inherent natural desire of all mankind to know God and to be known by God. So I would urge you, as does Grant and the likes of Joseph Campbell, to discover this truth for yourself! Don't just take another person's word for anything! Let alone your own personal faith! Search far and deep and wide so that you can die with a smile on your face, without feeling like the good Lord gypped ya.

For those of you that adhere to this a here philosophy, that LIFE itself is the answer to the meaning of life, then go live life like it's life like. Don't waste another day! With this answer to the meaning of life, you are your own G.O.D. Your very being and those of your community

and the greater cosmos are the meaning of life, so go be G.O.D. to them, yourself, and all living things. $\underline{\mathbf{G}}$ row something. $\underline{\mathbf{O}}$ rganize something. $\underline{\mathbf{D}}$ onate something.

From this point of view, LIFE is all you got. So GO make the best out of the soap opera of life. For *As The World Turns*, these are the *Days of Our Lives*! You've only got *One Life to Life*; so, before you end up in *General Hospital*, go *All My Children*, shake off the *Young and the Restless* and become the *Bold and the Beautiful*!



The Interactive Guide to the Meaning of Life

The G.O.D. Acronym Activity For A Happy Atheist:

Grow something:

Vegetables, Fruit, Fish, Brew Beer, Vineyard, Breed Dogs,
 Lizards, Cats (please don't), Make Babies ©, Plant a Tree,
 Tulips, Bamboo, Bee Hive, Milk a Cow, Grow a Beard, Grow
 Your Hair, Take a Poop, Shed a Tear, Sweat, Incubate Chicken
 Eggs, Plant Peanuts, Cotton, Shear a Sheep, Bake Bread,
 Recycle, Create a Statue, Build a House, Paint a Painting,
 Invent Something Brand New, Write A Book.

•	(Pick Three): _	 	

\mathbf{O} rganize something:

Build Water Filtration and Distribution Cells, Start a Recycling
Company, Be a Foster Parent, Adopt, Start a Wellness Center,
Raise Money for a Woman's Shelter, Build Houses in a Third
World Country, Give To The Red Cross, Take a CPR Class, Start
a Food Drive, Be a Big Brother, Coach Little League, Start a
Homeless Shelter, Throw a Gigantic Party, Get Married, Fill Out
Your Ancestry, Read To The Blind, Start A Daycare, Run For
Office, Create A Fundraising Golf Tournament, Write a Letter
to Your Local Congressman.

•	(Pick One or Two): _		
	, –		·

D_{onate} something.

Your Hair, Money, Time, Clothes, Furniture, Electronics,
 Cutlery, Appliances, Food ©, Water ©, Donate Your Expertise,

Teach Your Language, Babysit, Sing to the Birds, Pay Your
Taxes ©, Give Blood, Anything You No Longer Use, Old Text
Books, Shoes, Bikes, Old Cell Phones, Computers, Let Your
Family Or Neighbor Borrow the Car, the Lawnmower, A Cup of
Milk, Sugar, Old Video Games, Lights, Decorations, Bake
Cookies for the New Guy Next Door, Take Pictures for a Family,

• (Pick One Each <u>Month</u>):
•
"Life has no meaning. Each of us has meaning and we bring it to life. It is a waste to be asking the question when you are the answer."
– Joseph Campbell
"In the beginning, God created the earth, and he looked upon it in his cosmic loneliness.
And God said, "Let Us make living creatures out of mud, so the mud can see what We have done." And God created every living creature that now moveth, and one was man. Mud as man alone could speak. God leaned close to mud as man sat, looked around, and spoke. "What is the purpose of all this?" he asked politely.
"Everything must have a purpose?" asked God.
"Certainly," said man.
"Then I leave it to you to think of one for all this," said God.
And He went away."
- Kurt Vonnegut, Cat's Cradle

Chapter 8

The Answer

You're kidding, right?

PLAY AGAIN

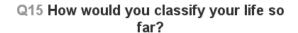
APPENDIX

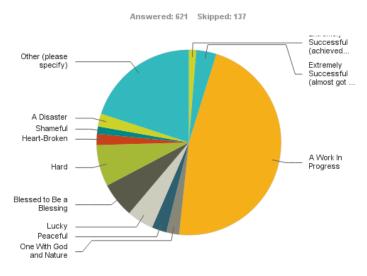
1. SURVEY SAMPLE RESULTS:

Here are a few graphs taken from the survey we used in order to find our key character interviews within The Interactive Guide, as well as for overall statistical information.

The Interactive Guide Survey Found at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/InteractiveGuide



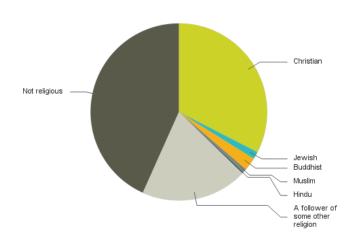


Answer Choices	Responses
Extremely Successful (achieved everything!)	1.29%
	8
Extremely Successful (almost got it all.)	3.54%
	22
A Work In Progress	46.86%

Answer Choices	Responses
	291
One With God and Nature	2.25%
	14
Peaceful	2.58%
	16
Lucky	4.67%
	29
Blessed to Be a Blessing	6.12%
	38
Hard	7.25%
	45
Heart-Broken	1.93%
	12
Shameful	1.29%
	8
A Disaster	2.25%
	14
Other (please specify) Responses	19.97%
	124
Total	621

Q6 Do you consider yourself Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, a follower of some other religion, or not religious?



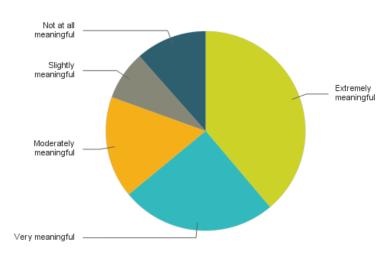


Answered: 723 Skipped: 35

	• Skipped: 35
Answer Choices	Responses
Christian	32.50%
	235
Jewish	1.38%
	10
Buddhist	2.35%
	17
Muslim	0.69%
	5
Hindu	0.28%
	2
A follower of some other religion	19.50%
	141
Not religious	43.29%
	313
Total	723

Q8 How meaningful is your work?

Answered: 703 Skipped: 55



Answered: 703

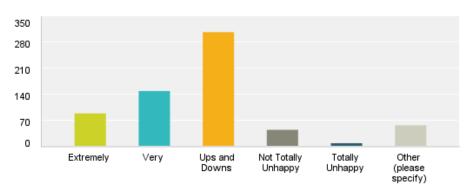
Skipped: 55

Answer Choices	Responses
Extremely meaningful	38.83%
	273
Very meaningful	25.18%
	177
Moderately meaningful	16.50%
	116
Slightly meaningful	7.97%
	56
Not at all meaningful	11.52%
	81
Total	703

Comments (562)

Q9 How happy are you?

Answered: 644 Skipped: 114

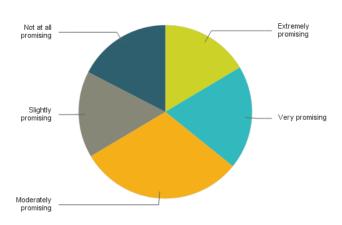


Answered: 644Skipped: 114

	Skipped: 114	
Answer Choices	Responses	
Extremely	13.	51%
		87
Very	22.	83%
		147
Ups and Downs	47.	36%
		305
Not Totally Unhappy	6.	68%
		43
Totally Unhappy	1.	.09%
		7
Other (please specify) Responses	8.	.54%
		55
Total		644

Q11 How promising is the future of The Earth?

Answered: 620 Skipped: 138



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Answered:	620
Skipped:	138

	• Skipped: 136
nswer Choices	Responses
Extremely promising	16.45%
	102
Very promising	19.35%
	120
Moderately promising	30.65%
	190
Slightly promising	16.13%
	100
Not at all promising	17.42%
	108
Total	620

BEST OF THE SHORT ANSWER SURVEY QUESTIONS:

1. What changes would most improve The Earth?

of life?
pose?

2. STAR WARS FAKE STORY EXAMPLE FOR CHAPTER 5 ACTIVITY!

The Jedi Justus Fox:

For many days I just sat and ate pasta before I wrote this down... Such a Jedi I am not.

"Even the dark side thinks it's so smart." Jedi Justus Fox said, lowering his lightsaber, accepting his fate.

"It's time... it's time to surrender to the force, Justineus." Adaramic said with a smile. A SMILE! Justus WAS SO HAPPY! Even in the midst of sure death, they were smiling.

That was the last memory Jedi Justus Fox had before submitting to the force. It was also the nightmare he had almost every night before he actually came face to face with his ultimate destiny. "Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them do not. Miss them do not. Attachment leads to jealously. The shadow of greed, that is," Master Yoda had always reminded him.

Jedi Justus Fox actually thought throughout his entire Jedi training at the Temple in Coruscant that he would never get the chance to fulfill his destiny. The Temple was so safe, so warm, so loving. Never in his life had he thought he would actually go to war. Only in his dreams did he face battle, dying at the hands of a hideous monster. No matter how hard he fought, no matter what force maneuvers he made, he saw his own death every single night...

Jedi Justus Fox was born in 44 BBY - - three years before Anakin Skywalker was born (44 years before the Battle of Yavin, in *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*, 0 ABY, in which the rebellion force took down the very first Death Star), and the Clone Wars weren't even a thought to any alien throughout the entire galaxy. That was the year Justus Fox was left on the doorstep of the Jedi Temple. A half humanoid: half Kaleesh reptilian from the planet Alderaan, distantly related to Senator Bail Organa, the surrogate father of Princess Leia. Ironically he also had a dissimilar twin, just like Leia Amidala Skywalker (later Leia Organa Solo) and Luke Skywalker. Although, this was a fact Justus Fox would not know until later in life, his destiny would forever be tied to the Living Force and he knew it his entire life.

When Justus arrived, abandoned on the Jedi Temple's doorstep (long as the staircase was in order to prove the worth of whoever approached the temple), Master Yoda was the one who found him first. Yoda found Justus after a long stretch of meditation time in **the room of a thousand fountains.** He had recently found himself called by the force to conduct more and more meditation alone in the room of a thousand fountains. It wasn't until this day that Yoda finally admitted to himself that it was just a selfish endeavor in order to get away from the youngling training trials that were coming up very soon. Yoda loved the trials, but sometimes Yoda felt old in the force and needed to get away. Even Yoda wandered in thought and perspective as he humorously lurched to the front gates of the massive temple mount. Was it

destiny? Was it coincidence? Or was it the way of the force that led Yoda to find this halfling baby lying helplessly on the front gates of the Jedi Temple?

In Yoda's great and powerful mind, always at peace was he, knew that this youngling was strong in the force. Not only did he sense the strength of force in the child, but somehow Master Yoda knew that one day he himself would learn from the child. "But for now," Yoda said out loud to himself, and maybe even to the force, "my student, and a youngling you will be."

No doubt Justus Fox was abandoned by his parents and was destined to be a Jedi. This was not the first time a baby was dropped off at the temple mount. In fact this was a common trait of the galaxy for many centuries. Mothers and Fathers of thousands of babies were left at the doorstep of the Jedi Temple mount. Some were blessed by a superior metachlorian count, some were not. Some had the force, some did not. Some were already dead, some were barely alive, some were abandoned as pure pieces of human and alien meat left for dead by dead beat creatures across the galaxy... But this one, "strong is he," Yoda thought. This one was destined to be a Jedi.

Justus Fox was named partially after the letter left in his abandoned baby carriage, and partially through the insight of his favorite Jedi Master, Qui-Gon Jinn, during his one diplomatic mission with Qui-Gon. However, Yoda resisted showing Justus the letter and the source of his true identity until much *much* later in life. "A mixed bag he will be, if read this he does." The little green sage said to Qui-Gon as he placed the child into his arms.

"What do you want me to do with him?" Qui-Gon said, noticing that little baby Justus had stopped crying the second he rested into Qui-Gon's arms. Qui-Gon was simply amazing with children, even though it didn't please him to be pointed out as such. His ability to evangelize and sense the metachlorian count in younglings was a major force ability for Qui-Gon, but with things heating up throughout the galactic senate and his new Padawon Learner Obi-won Kenobi on hand, Qui-Gon tried to return the child to Master Yoda.

"Eeek, no, no, no," Yoda shrieked, whapping Qui-Gon on the legs with his staff (which seemed to be almost as old as Yoda was). "Your Padawon he will be one day. But for now, to the nursery he shall go. The letter I will keep until the time is right."

Waddling away, Master Yoda always seemed to move more quickly from a conversation then towards one. Slow to anger and words was the little green sage, spiking white wispy hairs across his wide brimmed head and in between his larger than life ears; but quick was Yoda to walk away from confrontation, letting his well chosen words hang in the air with the power they deserved.

"Here," Qui-Gon said to Obi-Won, take him to the nursery.

While growing up, Justus felt like Yoda was the only one who approved of him. Nobody cared much for a Halfling baby that was dropped off at the temple doors. Most of the rich, high metachlorian kids were handed over by their parents. He had no memory of his parents, only a dark cloud that came in the form of dreams and nightmares. It was like living two lives. One life

was in the reality of matter and time and space; while the other life existed in subspace, dreamscapes, the subconscious state of the force, amongst the stars - - concerning a life he had yet to actually know.

It wouldn't be until the grips of the Clone Wars that life and the will of the force would bring Justus Fox face to face with his long lost twin brother, Adaramic, the great bounty hunter and spice smuggler. No... For now, Justus was meant to be in the classroom, while Adaramic spent his days feverously gaining wealth and gallivanting about the galaxy.

Being an abandoned Halfling baby never sat well with Justus. Maybe that's why he was so overtly sociable and flirtatious with his fellow Jedi *lady-folk*. Romantic relations were not encouraged nor openly tolerated between Jedi, as it stood opposed to the detachment one required to truly serve the galaxy as a servant of the force. Needles to say, Justus had relations with a few of his Jedi *special lady friends*, and it kept him from earning his rightful place as a Jedi Knight.

Relegated to studies and service in the master hall temple library, Justus watched as many of his fellow Jedi peers went off on glorious missions, took on Jedi Apprenticeships, saved lives, changed lives, and grew in stature and fame. Not so for Justus. Master Yoda had relegated Justus to Temple duties ever since his third strike with a fellow lady Jedi. All three of the lady Jedi left the order soon after Justus had broken their hearts.

It came as an extreme shock to Justus that he was not completely kicked out of the order, following each heart ache he had caused. After the third and final heart break with Jedi Anastasia Windu (a distant relative to Master Jedi Mace Windu) left the order because Justus decided to not keep their love a secret any longer, Justus was called into a meeting with Master Yoda and Master Windu in the room of a thousand fountains.

Justus was scared to death that Master Windu wouldn't just strike him dead the second he walked past the high tech Dantooine fountains concealing the two Master's who were sitting on a bench behind a set of lush, semi-tropical Wayland jungle ferns.

When it came to lightsaber skills, Justus was one of the absolute best. In fact, because of all of his time relegated to temple training Justus even picked up on Master Windu's secret seventh form of lightsaber combat, called Vaapad. Even more of a secret, it was Sora Bulq (the dark rogue Jedi), a former pupil of Windu's, that had helped Justus master its combat flow. Justus was 100% sure that Master Windu was unaware of this fact, although he had also been 100% sure that Master Windu was unaware of his relations with Anastasia. "Not that it really mattered," Justus thought. "Mace could cut me down with one flick of his wrist. I will just tell them the truth."

Justus turned the corner around the holy path between the fountains surrounding him, and bowed correctively towards Master Yoda and Master Windu.

Justus tried with all his might to return to an upright position, but could not find the strength and completely lost himself in tears, collapsing to the ground. Sobbing wailing tears

flowed out of Justus. All the years of pain and defeat came out, symbolically flowing out like the thousands fountains bursting forth with rivers of water. It was at this point, the year 21 BBY, after 23 straight years of temple service, evangelizing and working with younglings, mining the temple library for rich and rare secrets, serving dinner in the temple cafeteria, acting in the temple theater, and breaking hearts left and right that Justus Fox finally became a Jedi Knight.

"Hurt younglings, hurt younglings." Master Yoda said to both Mace and Justus as he rested his three pronged warty hand upon Justus's head.

Justus came clean and confessed all his wrongdoings to the force in front of Master Yoda and specifically to Master Windu, as his niece Anastasia Windu had recently resigned to the Agricultural Corps because of Justus. "I'm soo sorry. I'm soo sorry." Justus Fox continued to cry out as Master Windu finally lifted the young Jedi Knight to his feet.

"The dawn of night has come. Now is NOT the time for crying, Jedi Fox. You have got to FIGHT! It is now time!" Mace said while forcing Justus to maintain eye contact with him. The big burning eyes of Master Windu was piercing with fire, as if the battle of Geonosis was still raging forth within the low lit stage of his dark pupils. Even though Justus had so deeply desired to fight with his fellow Jedi on the sun dried planet of Geonosis, the stage play of destruction and slain Jedi that projected like a hologram from an R2 unit off the war worn stern face of Windu, was experience enough to cause the untested Justus to finally surrender to the will of the force.

"On a mission, you must go." Yoda added placing his three pronged hand on Windu's arm at just the right time before Windu squeezed the life out of newly ordained Jedi Justus Fox.

"On a mission?" Jedi Fox allowed, as he stretched his arms out and caught his breath.

"The War is raging on Jedi Fox, and we are calling all able bodied Jedi to be sent out for a final assault." Master Windu said with a heavy sigh. "Chancellor Palpatine has ordered for a final push against General Grievous and his minions, we're beginning to suspect the war could come to an end."

"Spread the Jedi out, it seems we are. Wondering at what end are we..." Yoda sighed as he spun his staff around in a circle on the ground. "Wondering if time it is, for you young Jedi Fox to find his true identity... The letter he must read."

"I'm not so certain that is the right thing to do Master Yoda." Windu added as Jedi Fox looked at both of them in dismay.

"What letter?" Jedi Fox stammered.

From a vortex on the ground created by the spinning of Master Yoda's staff, an envelope, tattered and many years old, 23 years old to be precise, with the name Justineus Organa appeared in its midst.

"Your birthright it is." Yoda said with a smile and the burgeoning of his bright bug eyes, aging as they were.

"I don't understand," Jedi Fox said, not quite yet picking up the envelope.

"Read it, son." Master Windu added, force floating it over and into Jedi Fox's hand.

To My Dear Son,

Born Justineus Archipelago Organa,

I am your Mother, Tia Organa, the daughter of Viceroy Prestor Organa, from the royal house of Alderaan.

Please do not hate me for giving you to the Jedi Temple. One day you will understand and thank me for doing so...

My life has been filled with scandal and misfortune. Your father, Qymaen jai Sheelal, a reptilian from the planet Kalee, kidnapped and impregnated me one year ago today. I birthed twins: You and your non-identical twin brother, and my son, Adaramic. After taking Adaramic away from me, and before he could get to you, I managed to escape in secret to Coruscant, and left you here at the feet of Master Yoda.

To avoid scandal, my dear, and for keeping you hidden away safe from Qymaen jai Sheelal, I have decided in secret to give you to the Jedi order.

Although I have no way of actually proving it, I know that you are strong in the force, and that one day you will become a Jedi!

This hope in the future of your destiny is what brings me the only joy I have ever known.

When the time comes, my dear boy, find me, find your brother, and complete your destiny.

Your Loving Mother,

~TIA ORGANA

Stamped with the seal of the royal house of Alderaan, and Tia Organ's own handwriting in Uralian ink (a rare Uralia chalk like bark tree found only on Alderaan, which produces the most vibrant royal purple color in the entire galaxy), the letter seemed to Jedi Fox that he was most certainly born a Prince of Alderaan. Even if a Halfling he was. Needless to say, his mission was starting to come clear.

After noticing that Jedi Fox had taken a deep breath and was beginning to accept his fate, Master Windu wasted no time in explaining to Jedi Fox the details of his mission. "All questions aside, and to be blunt, Jedi Fox, we do not have time to mourn or regress about the past. Your brother Adaramic is a sworn enemy of General Grievous. Albeit he is a sworn enemy of the Republic as well, his loyalties lie strong only for himself, and in this case, the enemy of our enemy is our friend. You must use the force and track down your brother, and join forces with him to capture and kill General Grievous, and end this war once and for all. It is your destiny."

Yoda gleamed with the smile of a Great-Great-Great-Great-(900 years great) Grandfather, "May the force be with you."

PART II

"Get your but back in the cockpit and do something about those rear deflector shields you lazy idiot!" Adaramic screamed at the top of his lungs to the little black and white furred

Ewok named Pignut. Adaramic was always screaming at Pignut. It didn't matter if it was his fault or not, Pignut was always to blame.

"Chak, Chak, Ee chee wa maa" Pignut let out in a furry. That translates from Ewokee's to Basic as, "Yes, Yes, wow take it easy man."

While Adaramic desperately wanted to argue with Pignut, he always wanted to argue, there just wasn't time to play his ordinary defacing games. They were in the middle of an intense star fight with General Grievous and there was no time to spare. As chance would have it, Adaramic's stolen Interdictor space craft had captured General Grievous's in a hyperspace lock and would not allow them to jump back into hyper-drive. The treasonous stolen data tapes that Adaramic had gained through a game of Sabacc against a group of Grievous's kin, had laid out the exact flight path for General Grievous's location and secret hideout somewhere deep within the outer rim. He had gotten there just in time, and had just set the Interdictor's hyper-drive lock right before Grievous's mini star fleet had appeared out of hyperspace. The coward that Grievous was, this time he could not escape, and both Adaramic and Grievous knew it to be true. This time they would have to fight. But as it seemed, General Grievous was much quicker on the trigger to fight than Adaramic was, as Grievous's Trade Federation cruiser, the *Invisible Hand*, got the jump on Adaramic and was now in hot pursuit.

Some might question Adaramic's star fighting tactics, Pignut sure did (although this time he was smart enough not to chirp anything out of his little tiny mouth); as Adaramic's stolen Corellian corvette was no match for the *Invisible Hand*. But unbeknownst to Pignut and General Grievous for that matter, this was no star fight, it was a kamikaze stage.

Adaramic had long given up on his purpose to live without killing General Grievous. It had been made known throughout the Galaxy that Adaramic was the sworn enemy to General Grievous, but nobody, except Adaramic and Pignut knew why.

Two, three, four laser blasts pummeled into the Corellian corvette's recently upgraded rear deflector shields. "Den Etke! Den Etke!" Pignut yelled out, indicating that the ship could not take another direct hit.

"Oh, don't you worry - - you miserable piece of fur mess. We won't have to spend time brushing out your fur mats underneath your armpits ever again. It's time to end this thing once and for all. We're taking the corvette straight into the *Invisible Hand*. I've got this whole ship rigged with thermal detonators, enough to blow Grievous and his ship into the depths of whatever hell he came from."

"Ee chee wa maa."

"You got that right, pig nose. Say goodbye to your miserable worthless life. It ends right now!" Just as Adaramic was about to reverse thrusters and set his ship and the *Invisible Hand* to total destruction, Jedi Fox and a convoy of Republic starships of various kinds jumped out of hyperspace and right into the middle of the battle.

"What the hell is this?" Adaramic said as he scrambled to maneuver the corvette free from the *Invisible Hand's* pursuit and into open space. The Republic convoy gave the *Invisible Hand* everything they had, sending her back on the run. "Nooooooo! I had him! I had him! There are too many starships in the quadrant for the Interdictor to constrain, you idiots! We're gonna' lose him you stupid Jedi scum!"

Just as Adaramic finished his outburst, poof, the *Invisible Hand* was gone, jumped out into hyperspace like it was never even there. "Lungee... Lungee azar iz zee," Pignut sighed in disbelief, trying to offer something to the conversation.

"Magic? This has nothing to do with magic you fur ball brained waste of a life. That's just a simple technological fact! Our Interdictor didn't stand a chance with all those Republic flag ships cruising around. Now we're completely screwed. Our hyper-drive is shot to scumbolian hell and we'll have no choice but to surrender." Adaramic finally submitted, as he dropped all shields and put out a distress signal. "You're taking the blame for this. I'm playing dumb."

"Yud ehda, yubnub," Pignut sang out in a hurry as all kinds of flashers and buttons and lights started continuously blinking off and on all over the cockpit of Adaramic's stolen Corillian corvette ship.

"Just as I thought, we're caught in their tractor beam... They're pulling us in..."

PART III

Deep inside the confinement chambers of the Republic starship *the Paradigm*, Adaramic and Pignut sat in a holding cell, dressed down in penal complex jumpsuit orange, complete with numbers on their back. Adaramic couldn't stand the fact that there were numbers on his back. Pignut didn't even know what they meant.

"Zoom in on Adaramic, number 2227." Jedi Fox asked the slider tech sitting at the security com panel inside the control room of the *Paradigm*.

"Yes, sir... what are you looking for, sir? If you don't mind me asking..." The com slider grunt asked the Jedi, desperately wanting his attention.

"That's my brother. Turn the microphone scanners off. I'm going in alone." Jedi Fox instructed the operator, all the while fashioning his lightsaber to his side and cloaking himself in his typical temple robe wardrobe.

Jedi Fox clicked the door open to the room and slipped himself into the holding cell, trying to conceal his face as much as possible.

"What the hell do you want, Jedi scum." Adaramic said to Jedi Fox as Pignut semi climbed, semi hugged Adaramic's leg.

"Do not be afraid. I mean you no harm. We mean you no harm. It's Grievous we want. Not you." Jedi Fox exclaimed.

"Go fly yourself into the Kessel whole, you hypocrite." Adaramic said, squeezing an assurance squeeze to the fearful and fragile Ewok. "What are you going to do with us?"

"I'm here to set you free, Adaramic. All we want is for you to tell the truth. Tell us how you are tracking Grievous and how we can find him, and the Republic will forget all about your own personal grievances." Jedi Justus Fox chose his words carefully, using the basic word *grievance* in order to associate Adaramic with General Grievous as much as possible.

"I'm not the bad guy here, Jedi. He is. And you are, for that matter."

"Why do you hate the Jedi so much? We stand for peace throughout the galaxy. We fight for the freedom of every quadrant, planet, and people everywhere. We spread hope in truth and peace. We have a common goal to capture General Grievous and put this war to an end. What have the Jedi ever done to harm you Adaramic?" Jedi Fox said, sincerely starting to show the hidden emotion he was so desperately trying to hide.

"The Jedi stole my brother and destroyed my family. If we had been kept together none of this would have ever happened." Adaramic said, standing straight up in the air, face to face with the concealed Jedi. It was at that moment Jedi Fox took down his royal cloak hood and revealed his face to Adaramic.

"I am your brother, Adaramic. I am Justineus."

Pignut looked more surprised than Adaramic did, tilting his fuzzy Ewok face to one side. "And there you are... Screwing things up just like I knew the Jedi would make you do. I had him. I had Grievous trapped in the Interdictor's lock, and you guys had to show up and break him free. What are you guys, complete idiots?" Adaramic said, putting his hands on his hips, showcasing a break in character only the Jedi could notice. Justus kept silent, allowing Adaramic to blow off his secret joyous surprise in seeing his brother for the very first time. The silence continued, neither brother willing to let go of their ingrained stubbornness. Adaramic finally shook his head and broke off the silence. "How's our mother? Have you seen her? Have you ever met her?"

"I have yet to meet her, but I do have this signet sealed letter from the royal line of Alderaan that showcases my identity, our identity, as brothers, and Princes of Alderaan." Justus said as he handed Adaramic the original document.

Not taking the letter in hand, Adaramic shrugged, "so that's great, we're on the same team. And if I deliver you Grievous my crimes are wiped clean. So why do you got us locked up in this holding cell with numbers on our back? I'm no number brother, I'm Adaramic. You probably have no idea what I've been through."

"No, I don't. And I want to know. I want to know everything. Tell me, where is our father? What happened to him? Is he alive? What happened to you all these years?" Jedi Justus Fox breathed out; holding back the tears a true Jedi should never show.

"You mean to tell me you don't know?" Adaramic said with a shock. "Grievous **IS** our Father!"

PART III

The cantina near the Shrupak temple on the sun scorched Planet of Kalee, was hidden underneath the clay baked base of the temple. It was hidden away from plainsight, known only to the very elite and higher-ups of the Kaleesh military. It was originally built as a bomb shelter during the Huk Wars long before the Clone Wars began, but had recently been turned into a secret cantina lounge for the Kaleesh junkies. The location for the cantina was mainly hidden away because the consumption of alcohol was forbidden on temple grounds, as well as the fact that ethanol based booze was slightly hallucinogenic for the Kaleesh. It was considered highly dangerous for the Kaleesh to consume too much of the stuff, thus the cantina attracted the most dangerous types of scum the deserted planet could provide. However, since both Adaramic and Jedi Justus Fox were only half Kaleesh, they were able to sip down the fire water with the best of them. Albeit Jedi Fox had never before tasted anything so repugnant, Adaramic was in love with the stuff.

The two brothers sat incognito towards the back of the cantina, keeping to themselves and trying to stay out of trouble. For Jedi Justus Fox, being a Halfling had always been a huge hindrance for him personally. He spent years blaming his heritage for the lack of progress he was making in becoming a real Jedi Knight. The kids at the Jedi Temple, the Masters on the council, and even most of the upper crest of Coruscant always seemed to prefer the presence of full blooded aliens. Until now, Jedi Fox never truly knew why he was the way he was; but as fate would have it, looking like a Kaleesh under heavy robes in the back of a low light cantina on the hostile planet of Kalee seemed to bring meaning to his entire life.

"This is why we were born, Justineus." Adaramic said to his brother, refusing to call him Jedi. "We're gonna kill that horrible cybernetic beast just as soon as our contact joins us for a drink or two, or three."

"Three? Geesh, I can barely handle one of these things." Jedi Fox said to his brother lifting his dusty glass filled with the brown muddy like poison. "We're here to get information on Grievous's whereabouts, not get wasted on this sludge, Adaramic."

"Yeah, yeah, well, once our little friend gets here and starts hammering a few of these bad boys he'll be hallucinating so hard he'd tell the whole Republic where Grievous is. That's my secret. You get the Kaleesh drunk on this stuff and there's nothing they won't tell, or sell if the price is right. Lucky for me I don't hallucinate on the stuff... Must be the human side..."

Adaramic set his drink down to pause and think about his words for a great length of time. That was the one thing the Jedi were excellent at. Waiting patiently while another person grieves, giving them space to think, unwind, before attempting any sort of counseling or practical

judgment. The Sith on the other hand were not that way. The Dark Side was steeped in this place, Justus thought. The Dark Side always called to you. It begged you to act quickly, and without remorse or consequence. The surge of fury that came from the Dark Side's beckoning was overwhelming at times for the Jedi, especially after hearing about Count Dooku during the battle of Geonosis. He was able to thwart Master Kenobi, Skywalker and Yoda. It didn't seem possible for one man to be that strong. But the Dark Side acted without penance. There was no conscience to deal with, no sense of right and wrong, just power, pure rotten power. Justus sat and wondered at this, meditated a little, but mostly wondered, how would he react if and when he got the chance to bring General Grievous to justice. Would he be filled with rage? Would he remember his training? Would he go to the Dark Side? Could he kill his father if he had too? His father... Justus still could not believe it, although he absolutely knew it to be true. Somehow he had always known... Maybe Master Yoda and Master Windu knew this as well. Maybe they were wise to keep his identity hidden from him. Maybe they too were afraid that Justus would go to the Dark Side and follow his father and Adaramic in the ways of treachery and evil. Justus could hear Master Yoda calming him down through the Force, "Be still young Jedi. Let the Force flow through you. Ponder these things a Jedi does not. Dwell on these things a Jedi does not. Let your thoughts pass by you, you will."

Adaramic broke the silence as soon as four large Kaleesh reptilian bipeds entered the cantina through the one and only secret entrance into the place. "Here he is."

"He? Looks like he brought some friends. Is there another way out of this place just in case things go wrong?" Jedi Justus Fox asked his brother.

"Yeah, right through em... HEY! Kartack, c'mon over and have yourself one of these warthogs! Bring your friends." Adaramic quickly said, standing to his feet, waiving the four Kaleesh warriors over to their table.

"What are you doing?" Justus tugged on Adaramic's cloak, begging him to sit down and not draw too much attention.

"Just being friendly," Adaramic said quietly through his teeth, "Hey-Hey! Sit on down, this here is my brother Justineus. He doesn't speak much, but we'll see how is after a few of these little chalices of hell, if you know what I'm saying, right Kartack?" Adaramic said reaching his arm around Kartack like they were old war buddies.

"You will sit down!" Kartack demanded as the three Kaleesh warriors drew out there laser staff's and pointed them directly at the two brothers. "Stay put. Don't move."

Jedi Fox slowly ran his fingers up his leg underneath his robe, and grasped his lightsaber, not quite ready to reveal his Jedi Knighthood quite yet.

"Hey – Hey – Hey, take it easy, Kartack, it's me, Adaramic, your favorite drinking buddy, c'mon put the laser staff's away, we're not packing. I thought this was a friendly conversation... friend." Adaramic slowed his speech, recognizing that it was doing no good. "Look, I thought we were here to do business. I got the credits for you."

"You blew it, Adaramic." Kartack growled towards him. "We gave you Grievous's location and you blew it! Now we are all wanted dead."

"It's not my fault, Kartack! The Jedi, I mean the Republic got in the way... I had him. It's not my fault." Jedi Justus Fox immediately felt the dark side approaching the second Kartack and the three other Kaleesh warriors let down their laser staffs. Entering the only way in and the only way out, through the doorway into the hidden cantina came a squad of battle droids followed by a tall reptilian biped cyborg, wearing one of the temple's holy robes.

"Grievous!" Adaramic yelled out slowly standing to his feet, while Jedi Fox remained seated, clutching his lightsaber, waiting for the right time to strike. "You traitor, Kartack! You sold us out!"

"We had no choice," Kartack begrudgingly said stepping back, along with everyone else, as General Grievous, coughing and gasping for air as he was, disrobed and approached Adaramic, slowly opening his robotic arms towards his rival and son.

"Adaramic, you should have killed me when you had the chance, son. Now [cough, cough], you will die!" Grievous ignited his double bladed crimson Sith blade and began thrusting towards a helpless Adaramic. Just as Grievous was about to strike Adaramic across the chest, Jedi Justus Fox force jumped over the cantina lounge table, ignited his blue-green lightsaber, and landed in front of Adaramic. Taking the balanced Jedi warrior stance of stillness and calm steady strength, Jedi Justus Fox reached out with the force crushing the small squadron of battle droids like a trash compactor, squeezing them together and thrusting the ball of metal into the only doorway in or out of the cantina.

"Nobody comes in, nobody goes out. It all ends here, Father, where you die and we die, together." Jedi Fox told, demanded, and ordered the situation under his control.

Laughing with cough's and cybernetic switches made into high tech breathing apparatus's, Grievous discharged his lightsaber and placed it back onto its sheath, revealing two or three or four other lightsabers across his belt. "Yes [cough] [deep breath], yes, my two sons, ready to conquer their Father, the dark side I feel in you. Strike me down, son, and become the true Kaleesh you were always meant to be. [cough] [cough] [deep breath] [growl...] Yes, your mother could not stop your destiny Justineus. Join me, and we will rule the galaxy as Father and son."

Adaramic had had enough, he pushed Jedi Justus Fox aside and dove in the air towards a disarmed Grievous. It was an utterly pointless and desperate move as Grievous was too quick, stepping back, igniting his crimson double bladed lightsaber, slashing Adaramic through the shoulder blade, completely searing the flesh together in burning saber heat, leaving his half human / half Kaleesh arm lying limp on the ground.

"Noooooo!" Jedi Justus Fox let out a scream that came from the depths of his living soul. He could feel the Dark Side rising up from within him. All the hate, anger, disappointment, judgment, and bloodlust vengeance came to a boiling point, as Jedi Fox unleashed a fury of

saber strikes against a back peddling Grievous and his double bladed defense. Never before had Justus yielded his blade with such strength, he could feel himself becoming lost in the abyss of the beckoning call into the oblivion of hate that the Dark Side willed upon him. In the bowels of the Shrupak temple, a Jedi was on the brink of being lost forever.

Kartack and his three Kaleesh warriors scurried to pick up Adaramic off of the floor and shuffled him over to the blockaded entrance as they began to try and peel back the metal cluster in order to escape. Adaramic struggled to keep his consciousness as Kartack propped him up against the wall. "Stay alive, Adaramic! Keep fighting! Stay alive!" Kartack yelled as he held Adaramic's face up in the air. "Breathe!"

Grievous sprang up off of the ground and clipped his robot legs into the red clay baked ceiling of the sunken in cantina just in time to evade Jedi Fox's jump thrust to the chest. Flipping back to the main floor behind a set of lounge tables, Grievous once again disengaged his crimson saber and coughed and breathed deep through his built in cybernetic lungs.

For Justineus, the dense fog continued to swell as Grievous hit the floor

"Your destiny [cough] [cough] [slow cough] is almost complete, Darth Justineus, my son." Grievous shook as he slumped against the wall, hardly breathing.

Justineus, barely remember his Jedi name and nature, whirled about in the air, steadily conducting the secret level of Vapaad saber force attack towards a sunken down General Grievous. All of Jedi Fox's Jedi Temple training was falling by the way side as Darth Justineus began to take over his entire identity. Vengeance and hatred consumed the Dark Jedi against the evil and mutilated General Grievous. Justineus hated him, hated that he descended from him, hated that he was exactly like him, easily consumed by hate, vengeance, and fear. The Dark Side the path those feelings are... Yoda... Yoda, Jedi Fox tried to recall. Why did he hide his identity from him? Was he afraid he would turn to the Dark Side so easily? Did he know what I would become?

"My Padawan, you are." Darth Justineus / Jedi Justus Fox could hear Yoda say, reaching out through the force from the garden of a thousand fountains. He was there, meditating / reaching out for Justus through the force. The man was torn in two, the Dark Jedi Justineus vs. Jedi Justus Fox. "Named you I did, not Grievous." Yoda's voice faded through the dense fog of the mind, of the force.

"You are Darth Justineus, my son, son of the great and mighty General Grievous. You are the master now. Let down your saber and I will follow you!" Grievous shrieked in full surrender as Darth Justineus twirled high above him and swung down with his saber in a flash of retribution.

The blue-green saber of Justineus swung with all its might towards General Grievous's neck, only to stop abruptly one "Basic" centimeter from slicing his jugular in two, ending the war for good and almost sealing Justineus's fate towards the path of the Dark Side forever.

"My name - - is Jedi Justus Fox! And you are hereby arrested by the Republic Galactic Army and by all that is good and holy! The war is over Grievous. You're coming with me."

From behind Jedi Fox, Adaramic shook off most of his temporary concussive coma and saw his brother standing over their father General Grievous, lightsaber blade held a blaze near his neck. "Strike him down, Justineus. Show no mercy for that monster!" Adaramic yelled at his long lost brother.

Turning towards his brother behind him, Jedi Fox reached out his humble hand towards Adaramic to stop. "No, Adaramic. It is not the way."

No sooner than when Jedi Fox took his eyes off of General Grievous, did he take advantage of his one moment of victory and ignited his crimson blade and swung with all his might towards the midsection of Jedi Justus Fox. In what seemed like an eternity, a dream, much more peaceful then the nightmares he had once had as a boy back at the Jedi Temple, did Jedi Justus Fox finally understand the meaning of the living force. Only full submission to the will of the force could ever truly bring peace to the galaxy. Not by wars, or by revenge, or by politics of the Republic... "No, if you live by the sword, you will die by the sword," Jedi Justus Fox thought to himself. "It's time to fully surrender and set the living force free."

All the while maintaining contact with Adaramic, and somehow suspending time into a slow-motion of an eternity of significant moments, Jedi Justus Fox sent out the last living message he could to his brother. "Run Adaramic, run."

Fully awake and conscience of his surroundings, Adaramic opened his eyes just in time to see the fading away body of his brother Justineus, Jedi Justus Fox. The body evaporated right before his eyes. It was like nothing anyone had ever seen. Not throughout all the known annals of time had anyone seen such a thing. He was gone... Not dead... but just gone... completely immersed into the Living Force.

"Run Adaramic, run." Shocked to the core of himself, Adaramic heard Justus's voice from within the living force dwelling inside of him for the very first time. Maybe it was his own mind, maybe it was the voice of his living brother, maybe he was in shock, maybe it was the hallucinogenic affect of the sludge booze, maybe... Either way, Adaramic knew his brother had sacrificed his life in order for him to live... In an instant all the hate, all the fear, all the judgment, regret, confusion, desperation, and the bloodlust completely left Adaramic's mind! It was at this moment, Adaramic also surrendered his own will to the living force for the very first time, and was finally free to love...

- ... Needless to say, Kartack and his men escaped, snatching an armless Adaramic to his feet, as they all turned and ran alongside Kartack's men through the blast whole into the open tunnel.
- ... The Clone Wars are about to come to an end... THE END