

Spiritual Autobiography

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When Anne asked me to do this I did it with some reluctance due to the fact that as I stand here I realize that everyone has a story to tell and in a perfect world we would all get a chance to tell our stories and we could all be in the audience to hear them. I am much more interested in hearing your stories than telling mine. It would also have been shorter and easier on you if I was 35 doing my spiritual autobiography as opposed to being 62 years old and having to listen to that much more of someone's life. Sorry for that!

The readings today for me seize on two things that are so important. In my life. The Reading from Acts, we must obey God and not human beings and yet we look to certain people to lead us to God and by their actions inspire us to be better in the eyes of God. The second reading that stood out for me is the reading from John about the "Doubting Thomas". Do we need to see to believe? I love that challenge every day!

The beginnings of my spiritual journey start with two parents from different religious backgrounds trying to find a religious place of compromise. The Unitarian Church was that church. We were infrequent attendees.

My Parents divorced when I was 11 and this sent me on my need for a spiritual foundation to cope with the breaking up of our family unit and it was found in the people I met through sports. My best friends' father was a tremendous mentor and also challenged me at a young age as to who I was and wanted to become. Life was more than just being the best athlete in your sport. It was about being the best person in the community and having a relationship with God.

My Mother married someone that appeared to provide her financial security, but it was a mirage. He was not a good man and was not very nice to my mother. As her son I got involved with creating safety for her in her life. She has spent some of her life, not all of it! With regrets and I have reassured her without those decisions she made good or bad I would not be the person that I am today.

Excelsior a great place to grow up and at that time. Trinity was a conduit for all the youth in Excelsior through gatherings in the old parish hall and had a very welcome feeling to it regardless of where you were at with your spirituality. I would walk to school, shortcut through the bakery, had the amusement park with the Honeywell, Minneapolis Moline picnics and the tickets for good grades. Humiliation for the poor performers. Smart students got lots of tickets and the ones who struggled in school got just a few and never enough to ride the roller coaster.

Our house overlooked the commons on which I played my chosen sports of football, baseball and hockey. In this house to make ends meet, we rented the upstairs and basement at various times. We had Bob Williams Jr. live upstairs for a time and this was the beginnings of a lifelong connection with the Williams family.

A few houses down from me lived an incredible woman named Maude Johnson. She was widowed at a young age and was a health food and exercise advocate before it was in vogue to do so. She was also a woman of tremendous faith. She would host Bible Studies in her home every Monday night. The struggles and reformation that was in her house every Monday was very moving. On any given Monday I was in the midst of the same type of people Jesus had surrounded himself with at times. Terribly addicted addicts, prostitutes, criminals and a few of us boring believers with our own struggles.

Maude also made sure I was baptized and did so down at Bryant Lake with others who did the full immersion baptism. This made for an interesting validation when Sue and I decided to get married!

I continued to have faith as my compass and sports as my release as I went through the struggles and challenges of life.

In high school besides the sports that were so important to me, I also sang in the choir. Our choir director was Ray Minkler and he did something for us everyday before we were sent back into the halls and to our next classes and the challenges of high school life. We sang the choral benediction at the end of class. A great comfort to leave with that moving hymn. "The Lord bless you and keeeep you. The Lord make his face to shine upooooon you and be gracious and be gracious the Lord be gracious gracious unto you. Probably can do that in the public schools now but it sure was meaningful to me then.

Because of my high school choir experience I was asked to sing in the choir for the Billy Graham crusade which was at the State Fair Grandstand that year. I remember how moving that was to hear Billy speak and see the people come down to accept Christ as their savior. As a person interested in history, he has touched so many lives and has ben influential in so many of our leaders' lives. The other thing I remember about that Crusade was how hot it was on the stage. This was when polyester was fashionable, cheap and good looking. It was not however cooperative with a sweating body. It started to smell like a barn up there!!

I met my wife Sue as a senior at Minnetonka High School. She was introduced to me by one of my teammates on the hockey team. She had transferred to Minnetonka from Hopkins so she did not know much about me other than the sports and friends that I had in school. My first date with her was an experience I will never forget. I approached her very steep driveway and had second thoughts about the date. Not my misgivings about her but the fact that my car did not have park and needed a brick placed under the front tire to stop it from rolling. As I stopped my car and attempted to place the brick, I looked down and there was a wing tipped shoe and the person on the other end her father the former Marine told me he was not letting his daughter ride with me in that car! Sue's parents were not about to let their daughter go out with someone in an unsafe car, broken home and from Excelsior!

From that point to prove to my father in law my worthiness, I was his tieless laborer doing anything he asked of me. My father in law and I became very close as his very humble beginnings as the son of mechanic and mine were similar. It also helped me as I would also show up to pick Sue up in a mail jeep with the only seat on the wrong side of the vehicle for the driver and she had to sit where the special delivery mail went. No seat, no seat belts but lots of fun!

Sue attended St. David's growing up as an Episcopalian which made convincing her to go to Trinity easier. That is where she had a connection with the Barnes family and me with Mr. Barnes. He was the

umpire in baseball, smallest strike zone I have ever seen when I was pitching and the biggest strike zone ever when I was batting. He was also the referee in football and in the way when I was trying to complete a pass to my receiver! He also was the announcer for the high school hockey games and he always had an added comment to anything I did on the ice to the audience. I also had the privilege of singing with him in the choir here at Trinity. He was a selfless man of faith. Also, a prankster. Andrew like to do the aspersion with the pine wisp. He came to the choir section and begin his aspersion and Jhn Barnes pulled out a squirt gun and squirted him back!

I went to St. Cloud to play hockey and baseball and realized that I would be there 6-7 years to graduate so my sophomore year transferred to the University of Minnesota where I roomed with Jay McDougal whose family were very invested in Trinity. Jay's father Bob was another mentor of mine. He worked at the Bank in Excelsior and always had time to spend with you and was another reason I am here at Trinity.

Sue and I were married at Trinity in 1981.

Joined the choir and served on the vestry and search community for Jim Jenkins and hosted an interview dinner for Andrew Waldo whom I really, really enjoyed, almost as much as Devon, Anne and Chip!

Met Rollin Child in 1983 and he was my competitor in the tile business. He was very involved in his church and community in Hopkins. My faith was one of the key elements of him gaining confidence in making the decision to sell his business to such a young person at the time. I was a humble 27-year-old with lots of enthusiasm, willingness to listen and learn and no money!!

Faith, fairness, compassion and accountability were the tenants I have in place running the business and remain with me in the other business ventures I have become involved with since 1984.

Lost my father in 1992 when I was 36. He was a kind man and I was very close to him and hope I am carrying some of that kindness, curiosity and selflessness with me as I live my life.

With the loss of my father, my father in law became an even more important part of my life. He was a man with a tremendously positive attitude and enjoyed meeting and learning about others. His optimism sometimes worked against him but he never lost the zest for life because of it. We were blessed to have him in our house the last months of his life in hospice care. Andrew Waldo would come by most everyday and spend time with Doug and the with all of us. This could have been a traumatic experience for our children at ages 17, 13 and 9 but he was so wonderful. He never showed pain or angst and never wanted the kids to think he may die. He finally gathered the kids individually to tell them he "might" not make it. Gave each one of them a special message to carry with them for the rest of their lives. God was in our presence when he passed away. His remains are with us in the Columbarium along with my wonderful mother in law who passed away this past summer. She too was a special lady that was always more concerned about being interested more than interesting. She loved being here at Trinity and gained strength in her faith and enjoyed the fellowship from the community here.

Like most families we have experienced loss and heartache and thank goodness had faith as a backstop for our trials. I do not define my family by blood line but who is part of it for support and unconditional love. I have an older brother who still lives in the house I grew up in, a sister who lives in Colorado, and a sister who was blessed with 3 wonderful children one of which is a sweet boy my buddy Blake who

has Down Syndrome. My sister Julie has lived with us prior to her getting married and I have always remained close to her. She is a woman with a great faith and has raised her family to have that same joy. She has shown me such great courage in the decisions she has made and continues to make regarding Blake.

Along this journey of life and the faith you need to walk it, our close friends who appeared to have it all from a monetary measurement standpoint lost it all, lost a son to cancer at 8 years old and have a daughter currently fighting for her life with cancer as well and through it all we share their pain and try and comfort them as we all do when people are suffering.

My sister and brother in law lost their son, our nephew when he was killed in Honduras while revisiting a host family. I spoke to Michael the day before he died and was so glad as I told him how much I loved him. Their reliance on faith through all this was very inspiring. The other part of this story which is so amazing was and is their son Gabriel. Sue and I have been involved with being host parents for three wonderful girls from Colombia. They have all made such great contributions to our community. They came to stay with us at age 16, went to high school at Benilde and to give our daughter Marissa who was born in Colombia a continued connection to her culture. So, our connection to the Hispanic community has been strong. Sue got a call informing her that a baby was being born and she called me and asked if I would be interested in adding to our family. I reminded her of our conversation a few days earlier that our kids were driving her crazy! Also, Sue and I knew my sister and brother in law were interested in adding to their family. With their loss of their first son, it is a blessing that has been theirs for the past 16 years and so special through the loss of their oldest son.

Another person who has been an inspiration and a model of faith for me has been Father Dennis Dease who was the past President of St. Thomas. I have helped him with mentoring projects over the years and in particular for the Ugandan students and their culture. As some of you know I have travelled there and witnessed the true test of faith when the people have nothing but are happy and at peace. We try and meet once a month and I am always so impressed with his kindness, the way people respect and cherish him and the presence of God in his life.

I also wanted to mention the wonderful blessing my wife and three children, wonderful daughter in law from Russia whom my son met when he lived there for 4 years ago and my two grandchildren who live in California. Too far away. My family has given much joy, challenged me and give me a reason to stay healthy and always praying!!

I am inspired by the beauty that surrounds me in both God's people and the world he has created, I am challenged to find peace and joy in the moment and give thanks for all God's glory. I believe that God answers our prayers, challenges us to do better and when we do not, forgives us but also hopes for repentance at the same time. I am but a very small part of this world but hope I can make a difference in someone's life as others have done for me and make a difference in the world in which we live.