



# Welcome to The Ultimate Relationship Solution

# **The Ultimate Relationship Solution:**

## **Near Death Experience Reveals Relationship Secrets**

**To Help You Ignite Passion And Joy  
In All Your Relationships**

**by**

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formerly titled, "All About Relationships"

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**For**

**my family, friends, co-workers and care givers, who gave me their enthusiastic and steadfast support during my darkest hour.**

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## **Welcome:**

In December of 2003, I experienced an excruciating near death experience. It was an experience that changed my life in fundamental ways. Not only did I gain a new appreciation for life, and the ability to enjoy it to the fullest extent, but I gained a new way of looking at relationships.

My near death experience (NDE) taught me that relationships are *infinitely* more important to our health and well being than we could ever imagine.

And I discovered that great relationships have the power to change lives for the better, forever! Successful relationships help us to reach our potential for happiness and joy in providing the foundation for a meaningful, purpose-driven life.

Sure, before my NDE, I had good relationships. Perhaps even real good ones (after all, I am a relationship therapist).

But not good enough.

One, I tended to think of my relationships in terms of the negative, rather than positive, aspects of those relationships. Two, I was too quick to leave a relationship that wasn't working the way I wanted. Three, I had no idea how easy and satisfying it is to repair broken relationships, nor did I realize the dire importance of doing so! Four, I did not grasp the full essence of the ultimate relationship solution. That came home to me as a direct result of my NDE.

Since leaving the hospital, things have changed. I have built stronger, happier relationships, which, in turn, have transformed my life. Because of my experience with death, I have learned to put my relationships first, and allow them to work their incredible magic in all that I do.

In addition, I have learned to conquer the fear that held me back in all of my endeavors. Fear that kept me from reaching my potential and having more fun in my life.

The decision to give more to my relationships has given me the happiest, most satisfying days of my life. Quite literally, it has made me a new person.

I have written this book to show you how the revelations I gained from my NDE can help you to put your relationships first, solve your relationship problems and enjoy the best

darn relationships you could ever imagine . . . besides helping you to find true happiness, success and joy in everything you do.

### **A Good Day To Die: A Fateful Day In December**

December 07, 2003. It was a beautiful day, bright, sunny and warm, and a splendid blue sky floated from ridge to horizon. The pastures were still and green. It was a good day to die.

But an equally fine day to live, or to try.

While playing basketball at my home in the country, a searing pain ripped through my chest. The pain felt like nothing I had ever known, but reminded me of a bad muscle pull. It came in two short, knifing bursts. Falling to my knees, then all-fours, I rolled onto the pavement, groaning.

Alarmed, my two Belgian Sheepdogs ran to my side. One laid on top of me, as if trying to comfort me, and the other repeatedly licked me. I had never seen them behave like this. They knew instinctively that something was terribly wrong.

Since I was alone, I hobbled into the house to call for help. But first, I took an aspirin, in case it was a heart attack. Then, I called my mother to ask if she could give me a ride to the hospital. I was afraid to drive myself, fearing I might not be able to operate my vehicle. I did not want to call 911 because I was afraid they might get lost trying to find our house.

While I waited, I tried to keep calm. Mom arrived in 15 to 20 minutes. I got in the backseat, in case I needed to lie down, and we took off. Feeling somewhat better, I was able to discuss the situation with her. She feared it was a heart attack. I did, too, but hoped it might be a severe muscle pull in my chest. Wishful thinking.

We discussed whether I should go to Urgent Care or the emergency room. Mom suggested the latter since it was possibly a heart attack.

Something told me I was in for an ordeal. And something told me to remain as calm as possible.

### **A Harrowing Drive**

Mom drove as fast as the speed limit would allow but, when we got to town, everything changed. Road construction blocked our route!

The drive became perilous and slow. A long line of slow-moving vehicles jammed in front of us.

“Oh, no, now what do we do?” mom said.

“Maybe it won’t be a long delay.”

“Let’s hope not.”

So we waited. The afternoon sun splashed on the highway and a jagged line of red brake lights blurred my vision. We waited for the flag man to wave us through.

I felt like we did not have time to spare, so I began to consider our options, if we had any. I tried to think clearly, but part of me wanted to scream. So I concentrated on my breathing and tried to relax.

The traffic was not moving. “Mom,” I said, “I’m afraid you’re just going to have to go around. I don’t think I can wait this long. Put your flashers on, and we’ll tell the flag man we have an emergency . . . and we have to get through now.”

“Okay,” she said, taking a deep breath and preparing to pull out of line.

Just then, incredibly, the construction worker waved us on, and the entire line began to move. Slowly. Too slowly.

We made it through the construction area, and a sense of relief flowed through my body. I stared out the window and made an effort to settle my nerves.

Maybe we’ll make it, I thought. Maybe we won’t.

A new pain stabbed my chest.

As we drove across town, a big white truck pulled in front of us. It was a slow-moving monster – a big, tortoise-like vehicle, which made my anxiety soar.

“Can you believe it?” I said.

“Let’s just hope he turns off soon,” mom said, trying to remain positive. “But let me see if I can do something.”

Mom veered into the center of the lane, and stepped on the gas. But oncoming traffic appeared just around the bend, so Mom had to slow down and get back behind the truck.

Over the next few minutes, she tried and tried to pass, but could not get around the truck. I was beginning to feel more and more anxious in the backseat, wondering if I had made a mistake by not calling 911. We had been in the car almost a half an hour.

Mom turned down a side street to get rid of the truck. She speeded through a residential area and wound her way back to the main drag. Soon we were in the vicinity of the small town hospital. It was a comfort to see the sprawling white building partly hidden among the trees.

My mother remained remarkably calm, perhaps because she knew she had to or we wouldn’t make it to the emergency room. I thought of what exact words I would use to explain my symptoms to the emergency room personnel.

We stopped at the red light in front of the hospital. Mom turned and sped to the emergency room entrance.

Somehow, by the grace of God, we were there, safe and sound. She went in first to explain the situation, as I slowly got out of the car.

“I’ll be right behind you,” I told her. But I took my time crossing the parking lot.

The hospital staff wanted to send a wheelchair for me.

Mom said, “No, he wants to walk in. He’s already told me that.”

“Is he able to walk?” the nurse asked.

“Yes. There he is. He’s coming.”

I opened the door and found myself in a sanctuary. We made it, I thought.

For the moment, I felt fine, and walked in a casual but brisk way into the emergency room. A nurse holding a clipboard stood at the front of the examination room and showed me in.



“Hello,” I said.

“Hello. Please have a seat on the examination table.”

I walked straight to the cot and sat down.

And that was it.

Within seconds, I blacked out and coded. In medical terminology, I experienced a severe Myocardial Infarction due to a clogged left anterior descending artery.

I, a person who had always been healthy and athletic and, to many, a picture of vibrant youthfulness, had suffered a deadly heart attack. The deadliest of heart attacks.

### **Emergency!**

Organized chaos ensued. Several hospital employees rushed to my room and administered CPR. But I was gone.

They switched to the defibrilator and used it. They paddled me again and again, trying to bring me back.

My mother had gone out to move the car. When she returned, a nurse and the social worker demanded to speak with her. They led her to a small room. My mother’s heart sank because she recognized the room as, “the one they take you to when someone dies.”

Back in the small room where a medical team huddled over my lifeless body, seconds were slipping away, as I battled for my life.

Seconds became minutes . . . and I was not responding.

My memory of those moments is sketchy today, but I recall in the most vivid way lying on my back and gasping for air. I came to as they paddled me one last time. With great force I sucked every ounce of oxygen into my body.

Seconds later, I was out again. And the battle resumed.

The social worker told my mother what had happened. I had suffered a severe and likely fatal heart attack. “He has quit breathing a couple of times,” the nurse said. “But he’s

breathing now. I'm sorry to say, we don't know for how long. Can you get in touch with his wife? We can't reach her. She needs to get here as fast as she can. This may be the last time she ever sees him."

"It's that bad?"

"I'm afraid you should call the in family."

Mom began to panic . . . and pray silently, as she tried to reach my wife, who had been out shopping. She had just gotten home and mom was able to reach her. She explained what had happened. My wife drove to the hospital.

In the meantime, the doctor went into the small room where my mother waited. He told her how serious my condition was, and prepared her for the likelihood that I would not make it.

My mother was devastated. It seemed so final. They had all but given up hope. But she did not give up hope. She kept praying.

Over the course of the next hour, the doctor made other reports, all of them bleak. Mom was in a state of shock. She couldn't believe this was happening. She called three of her friends, who immediately came to the hospital to support her. My wife arrived shortly thereafter. She was allowed to go into the emergency room to see me.

But, finally, the doctor told my mother, "There may be a tiny ray of hope. He's fighting, and trying to respond. But don't get your hopes up."

All in all, I was gone for so long, so many times, that they were afraid I might have brain damage, should I survive.

They had paddled me 17 times before finally getting a heartbeat. **The medical team had worked on me for hours, attempting to stabilize my condition.**

I had suffered a severe type of heart attack which they refer to as the "widow maker." A type of massive heart attack which kills thousands of people in the United States every year. I teetered on the brink of becoming a statistic, the spaceship that was my life prematurely crashing, my mission abruptly ending.

Calls were made to other family members. My father and step-mother boarded a plane in Florida and flew to Kentucky. My sister flew in from New York and my niece from New

York City.

At last the doctor gave my mother good news, shaking his head. “Somehow . . . I don’t know how . . . he keeps hanging on.”

### **More Progress Reports**

Today I still remember seeing the many men and women who labored to save my life, as they huddled around my hospital-issue bed. I can still see them, rather darkly though, their concerned heads waving above me in a murky dance. I can hear their voices as they discussed their strategy.

Each progress report on my condition grew a little more hopeful than the last. There were many reports, as the doctors tried to keep my mother apprised of my changing condition.

Ultimately, the doctor announced I had progressed enough to be flown to a bigger, better-equipped hospital in Lexington. A hospital with a specialized cardiac unit. My mother wept for joy.

They began preparing me for the trip.

Monitoring the life support equipment closely, they took no chances. Hastily, a breathing tube was inserted down my throat and taped to my mouth. They had to make sure there was no interruption to my oxygen supply. They administered various therapies and drugs. Mobile life support systems were poised to help me survive the flight.

### **A Foggy Helicopter Ride**

Tired, anxious and frightened, my mother and wife watched them wheel me to the helicopter.

“You couldn’t even see a body there,” my mother later confessed, “all you could see was a tangle of wires and various and sundry medical devices.”

As the helicopter blades began to spin and the bird lifted above the concrete pad, my head was spinning, and the sensations of sudden flight sent waves of fear through my chest. I felt as though I was leaving my body.

Only snippets of my flight to the hospital remain in memory. I was in and out of consciousness, moving from one reality to the next at breakneck speed. Swirls of color

and a whooshing sound plugged my head. A frightening sense of sudden movement, of pressing into the noisy air and circling about in a mad, herky-jerky motion engulfed me.

I do not remember much of the helicopter ride, which my cardiologist said was a gift from God.

We flew over the University of Kentucky football stadium, and came to the big hospital, its buildings sprawling like those of a small city. Upon arrival, I was taken to the heart cath lab where they injected dye in my arteries and found the exact location of my blockage. They learned that my artery was unusually narrow, which had made my condition all the more deadly.

The cardiologist gave me an angioplasty and kept me alive – for the moment.

### **The First Night In ICU**

But there was more to do, and a big struggle lay ahead; I had a traumatic couple of nights ahead of me in the intensive care unit, where I could always be watched, before the worst would be over. Still, the staff told my family I was in danger of dying.

A special nurse would spend the night by my bed, monitoring the Code Blue cart, which sat next to my bed. All the machines and medical apparatus, which regulated and monitored my functions, were her responsibility. Prepared to act quickly, she watched for any signs of trouble. She kept my wife company, as I whirled about in the unfathomable realms of unconsciousness.

It was a nervous night filled with suspense and close calls.

Somehow I made it through. The next day, family members kept vigil at my bedside, sending me their healing thoughts, although I am not sure I understood this.

The terrible, agonizingly slow hours slipped by, and I mostly slept – and dreamed. I think.

At some point, I regained consciousness in time for a visit from the cardiologist. One of the most unsettling and frightening visits of a lifetime. No one could have anticipated what happened next.

### **A Revelation**

The doctor and an attending nurse came to see me just minutes after I had awakened.

They stood by my bed, just a foot or two away. I could see them, these two strangers, and I could hear them. The nurse was tall and stern-faced. The doctor was of moderate height, and he was inquisitive.

I was basically aware of my surroundings, but could not see as well as usual. I wasn't sure why my vision was limited. I wasn't sure what was happening.

Confused about why I was there, no one had been able to tell me anything about what had happened. I had simply ended up in this strange bed in a strange place, and two strangers were now standing at the foot of my bed.

I could see nor hear anyone I recognized. I had lost time. My sense of reality and time seemed warped.

My cardiologist turned to the nurse, "Has the paralytic worn off yet?"

"Yes," she said. "He's fine."

He nodded. "Good."

I thought, "Paralytic? What paralytic?"

The doctor inched closer and studied my face.

I thought, so that explains it . . . I can't move, I really can't. That explains why.

What a revelation. Now I was really scared. I tried to move my arm, then a leg. I tried to wiggle my fingers. I could not move any part of my body. I could not salivate or blink. I could not twitch. I could not speak or clear my throat.

The cardiologist, who appeared to be a kind and caring man, possessed a gentle manner. "How are you doing?"

I tried to move my lips. Nothing happened.

"How are you doing?"

I willed myself to speak. Still no sound emerged. All I could do was to stare at the poor man. He looked at me somewhat quizzically, as though I were a bit of a mystery.

The nurse kept a sour expression on her face, as if she thought I was deliberately refusing to answer the question. She appeared cold and distant, and her steely stare sent a shiver down my spine.

The doctor felt my pulse and looked into my eyes, lingering by my bed. “Doing okay?”

I wanted to say, “No, I am not! My mouth is killing me, my throat is on fire and I can’t seem to breathe. My nose hurts and I feel like my head is going to explode!”

Although I was paralyzed, I could still feel pain. That came as a bit of a revelation. Oh, could I feel pain!

Little did I know that they had taped the mouth piece of the ventilator to my mouth with duct tape, mangling my lips underneath several layers of tight tape. My nose had been packed with heavy gauze, to stop it from bleeding. Little did I realize that the gauze had expanded inside my nasal passages, and was engorged with blood.

My entire body ached. My chest and ribs were sore and I was bruised in several places.

And I was sore afraid. I thought I might die if they didn’t fix my breathing problem. Little did I know that they were doing the breathing for me. I just felt as though it wasn’t right.

If only I could get the doctor’s attention, I thought, I would tell him all this. And just **maybe I would be able to survive this ordeal**. I really thought I might die if I wasn’t able to communicate with him and let him know about my problems. I was sure he didn’t know.

And I was afraid that the drug they had used might never wear off. It seemed that something had gone wrong, and I didn’t think they realized it.

Anxiety swelled in my chest. I thought, of course, they don’t know. I’ve got to find a way to speak. I must think, and fast! How can I get their attention?

Again, I tried to speak. *I tried commanding my body to move*. I concentrated all my attention on speaking.

But nothing helped.

I tried wiggling my fingers to suggest that I wanted to write them a note. I could barely see my fingers with my peripheral vision, and I could see they were not moving. Come

on, fingers, move. Please!

“We’ll check on you later,” Dr. Ruk said.

“No, don’t go!” I screamed inside my head.

He and the nurse turned their backs and left the room.

I almost went into a panic. “Don’t leave me!”

I was truly alone.

Alone with a bunch of gleaming, metallic machines.

Alone with my thoughts . . . alone in a narrow sliver of consciousness, my only chance of communicating with the doctor having evaporated in thin air.

I continued to fear I might die, that something was terribly wrong. I did not understand all that had happened to me, and I wanted someone to explain what was going on. All I knew was that I was strapped to a hospital bed and couldn’t move a muscle.

And no one but me realized that I was paralyzed.

Then I remembered something. I thought about an article I had recently read about a woman who had awakened during a painful operation, only to find herself paralyzed. The anesthesia had not worked, and she had to endure the pain of the entire operation without the benefit of any numbing. There was no way for her to let the doctors know she had awakened and was feeling the pain of the scalpel.

It confirmed my theory that I hadn’t had enough time for the drug to wear off. And it gave me hope. For now I thought it might only be a temporary paralysis.

### **A Lonely Ordeal**

The loneliest, most frightening ordeal of my life began. It started with a burgeoning sense of anxiety jerking through my chest, a chest whose bruised muscles I could not move or control in any way. It occurred to me that I was afraid – afraid I might have a panic attack. And what would I do if I had a panic attack and could not move?

I began to wonder how long I might suffer from paralysis, or if I could survive not being

able to move for long. My irrational fear was mounting, and my heart rate quickening.

Then . . . I thought, What if I have a panic attack and it precipitates another heart attack? The next one would surely kill me!

My anxiety mounted. Now I was *really* afraid. How can I stop this dreadful sense of panic that is sweeping over me? How can I make myself feel better? How can I stop this speeding bullet of panic and fear?

I began to counsel myself. “Come on, you can do it. Stay calm. Relax! Just don’t give in to this!”

It got worse.

“Take a deep breath,” I told myself. “You’ll feel better.” I tried to inhale slowly and deeply, but I couldn’t. I had no control over my lungs. For the first time in my life, I could not take a deep breath.

The amount of oxygen I consumed was out of my control. Like a cold wind, a nervous twinge ripped through me. I experienced a subjective sense of great trembling. I felt like I was about to teeter out of control.

Now I am dying!

But I made every effort to think positively, to tell myself everything would be all right. But I wasn’t doing too well. No matter how I tried to convince myself, part of me continued to believe that I was done for.

In the middle of this psychological battle, a gift floated my way. A most welcome gift. The gift of sleep. Yes, blessed sleep. Eventually I fell asleep and the battle was over. It was the most welcome sleep of my life.

But only a temporary solution.

### **A New Day**

When I awakened the next day, I felt a bit better. More alert and aware. But I still couldn’t move much.

The paralytic had begun to wear off, and I was beginning to feel a sense of pain or



pleasure through the thick veil of numbness. It was spotty, at first, but there was hope.

Gradually, I regained movement in my hands and feet. It didn't come quickly or easily. *I motioned with my right hand that I wanted to write something on a piece of paper*, since I could not yet talk. My wife and the nurse figured out what I was trying to say with my impromptu sign language. They handed me paper and pen.

I was strapped to the bed, a plethora of wires and tubes attached to my body. I could not turn over or sit up. There was a Butterfly IV stuck in my neck, an IV in my arm and ugly purple bruises all over my body.

I looked like the victim of a beating.

But at least I could move my fingers. I tried to write, but no one could read what I wrote.

Not yet any way.

My condition gradually stabilized. I regained the ability to move in my entire body within the day. I became stronger over the next few days.

A large number of nurses and doctors, and other medical staff, monitored my progress. Someone was constantly looking in on me.

Marveling at their good teamwork, I observed their habits closely. I listened to conversations and made notes on the importance of each person's bedside manner. Almost everyone was upbeat and positive, which, I observed, meant a great deal to the patients, including me.

As I lie in my ICU bed paying attention to the interactions, and listening to a steady stream of conversations ebbing from the nurses' station, I gained a new respect for the work these professionals do. *And I began to realize that no one ever recovers from a serious illness in a vacuum.*

Caring individuals spun a healing web around me. There was a well-coordinated healing network.

Kind words were spoken, and I observed how much they meant to me. Every caring touch was therapeutic.

**I saw how a pleasant attitude on the part of the care-giver goes a long way toward lifting**

the spirits of the patient.

For me, every second of the day was a jittery adventure. I wasn't sure what would happen to me next.

Nor did I know if I would live or die!

I was still in the woods. The dark and somber woods.

My body had suffered a terrible shock, and it was no longer the healthy body I had been used to, but my mind was in tact. Every person who came in my room mattered to me. I appreciated everyone's help. The arrival of each new guest was a shot of medicine. How they lifted my spirits. Every visit made a difference. Even visits from doctors.

Heck, I had never had much use for doctors . . . and I certainly did not put them on a pedestal. Still, I saw my cardiologist once or twice a day. And I couldn't wait for those visits. He was always in a good humor, and he had a positive impact upon me.

Every day I would ask my wife what time she thought he would come to see me.

**Yet, while lying there in that lonely bed, unable to turn over or shift positions, I was surprised to see how much influence other people had on my mental health.**

There was a janitor who came in and removed the trash. He always spoke to me, and I enjoyed talking with him.

"Is it snowing out there?" I asked one night.

"Sure is! We've got a heap of snow. And I've got to drive home in it."

"Wish I could see it."

"Why, you can. Just picture this. It's fluffy and white and it clings to everything, the sidewalks and streets, the signs and the trees. And it's a real mess, that's what it is, a big, white mess! I mean, you know snow, don't you?"

"Okay, I think I've got it. I can see it clearly."

"That's the spirit. Take care, buddy."

And he was gone. But our conversation would linger . . . and it kept me smiling.

### **The Terrible Power of A Smile or Frown**

No way could I have anticipated how much it mattered whether someone entered the room with a smile or scowl on his face. But it mattered in the worst way!

When you are sick and vulnerable, in a strange way, you notice everything. Every pain. Every comment. You're sensitive. And you need all the optimism you can get.

I kept watching and evaluating. It gave me something to do with the time. Something to do between blood tests and breathing exercises.

The days went by and, very slowly, I regained my strength. The hospital staff would come into my room and tell me how fortunate I was to have survived the widow maker. They kept calling me "the miracle man" and laughing about how I had given everyone such a scare. Every day someone came in my room, sat down beside my bed and told me how remarkable and mysterious my comeback had been.

"What was it like?" they would ask. "What was death like?"

I just smiled and said, "It's hard to explain," preferring, at the time, to keep my secrets to myself.

Yet I thought about death . . . and life. It occurred to me that should I die, I would be okay with it. Strangely enough, I felt differently about death.

What, I thought, could be more natural?

Instead of watching the news and the usual television channels, I asked the nurse to turn my TV to an arts channel, which played classical music, theater, dance and opera productions. Some of the music I heard was so beautiful I thought I was going to float away.

At times angelic, the music had a big impact on how I was feeling. It was agonizingly beautiful. I felt like it played a role in my healing.

And another major factor in my improvement was the role played by two very special family members.

My niece and nephew spent several nights with me, keeping an eye on me and making sure nothing went wrong. Those two clowns, Myles and Aubrey, kept me in good spirits and gave me some of their surplus energy. With their help my room metamorphosed from a torture chamber in a dark and weary dungeon of cataclysmic worries to an airy domicile of light and joy.

The hospital staff made sure they were comfortable enough, and the two took up nightly residence in my room, now that I was no longer in ICU.

It was great not having to be alone. And somehow, with those two by my side, I felt safe and secure.

It was clear to me that I wasn't alone, and didn't have to recover alone. No, I had plenty of family support and help from my friends, and I took advantage of it.

It was a great comfort to have Aubrey and Myles by my side. They told humorous stories and their slapstick antics kept me in stitches. There was only one problem. They sometimes made me laugh too hard. And it hurt!

It was a nice problem to have.

If not for my heart attack, I never would have known how important my family was to me.

They were extremely important to my recovery.

It came as quite a surprise to realize how much I wanted to be surrounded by loved ones. I had never really had an experience like this, and I could not have anticipated my need for love and human contact.

My wife, mother and father, siblings and other loved ones kept me company during the days. **All made my hospital experience more bearable, more comfortable, and more inspirational.**

Seeing my family assembled again right before my very eyes was an amazing experience. The family that nourished me in my youth, the one that reared and protected me during my early days, my parents and sisters all together in the same room, and all for me and my recovery.

That was a stupendous, mind-boggling experience.

Their presence meant the WORLD to me. But how could I have known this? How could I have known?

I, like you, have one family. And it materialized in my sleepy, misty-eyed journey to the end of the world and back. From life to death and back to life again, they were there with me, holding my hand, keeping the faith, pushing me to get well.

What a gift.

What a gift of love. How fortunate I was. Just to see everyone again, and to feel their healing touch, which truly became . . .

**an unspeakable joy.**

As the members of my family exerted their influence, and sent me their love, I floated above them, lifted into the human ionosphere, on clouds of hope and faith.

Their presence in that room, in that hospital, was nothing short of cosmic divination for me. It was extraordinarily uplifting and REASSURING.

Nothing in this world can ever replace the family. It is in one's genes, in one's mind and soul. That celestial imprint is unique, and utterly amazing in its ability to release our hidden potential for happiness, anguish or joy.

While I lie on the narrow bed in the ICU, wired to a dozen machines, my eyes saw something they had never seen. Maybe I couldn't move or speak. Maybe I couldn't say what was on my mind, but my thoughts were crystal clear. Thoughts of my family and the power of love.

Every smiling face and kind gesture was intoxicating.

More than the modern medical devices, and more than the medicine, these relationships were my medicine. They were my healing tonic.

My family gathered around my bed and gave me their strength. Their strength became my resolve. And my resolve became reality.

Perhaps the greatest thing they did for me was to **believe in me, and to will me to get well.** By believing in me they deepened my faith in myself and all the world around me. I wasn't alone. We were one family united by one set of hopes and dreams.

All for one and one for all.

My family was behind me all the way. And I felt their will power. It stirred me to the core. It was my lifeline.

### **Never Alone**

There were times when I was alone in the hospital, *interludes between treatments and visits, times when I was alone with my thoughts.*

*But I never felt alone.* My family's presence was always something I felt. A soft, warm blanket that kept me from getting cold . . . a cocoon.

Their approval, their love touched me inwardly and physically. It made a big difference in the way I handled every minute of the day. The way I defined myself.

I could enjoy being alone because I knew I was loved. Love gave me self-confidence, and a high of life. It powered my flight beyond and guided me home like radar. My family helped to make my week in the hospital bearable.

In a strange way, I even enjoyed the week. It was an incredible experience. A discovery. I had encountered many new realities. I had met many new people. It had caused me to question.

To seek answers in new places.

To stretch my inner being.

It brought me closer to my loved ones. It allowed me to build bridges of strength and hope, to reunite family, and share quiet moments . . .

with special souls.

### **FEELING BETTER AND GETTING STRONGER**

The hours seemed like days, but I was on the mend. Toward the end of the week, I started to think about going home. Every day, around 5:00 o'clock, I asked my cardiologist if I could go home.

Every day he gave me the same answer. "No, it isn't safe yet."

I didn't understand. I was feeling better. Why couldn't I go?

"No," he said. "We can't take the chance. Your heart isn't stable yet."

Every day I worked harder to win my release. I did everything they asked and more to facilitate my healing.

Then the happy day came when Dr. Ruk said, "Yes, you may go home tomorrow."

Hurray! I had licked it. I had overcome a horrendous, life threatening experience, and now I was ready to return to my life. My new life. My post-near death experience life.

After a week of confinement, I was ready to go. I could not have been more pleased. The happiest day of my life was rapidly approaching . . . the day of my departure. And I was psyched!

### **Homeward Bound**

The day of my discharge came, and it was sunny and cold. Less than a couple of weeks from Christmas.

All the tubes and wires had been disconnected from my various body parts, some of which we won't mention here, my nose had been laboriously unpacked (ouch!), the ventilator removed (that hurt, believe me!), and all my IVs removed, thank God!

I could only rejoice.

And rejoice is the only word to describe it. I was wearing new, especially comfortable clothes, which my wife had bought for me, just for the special occasion. I had kissed my seemingly endless parade of hospital gowns good bye! I couldn't wait to go home.

It was about to happen. The doctor had signed my discharge papers and I was waiting on the wheelchair to come up the elevator and take me out of the building.

Bye, bye big hospital!

Wouldn't you know it? For some odd reason, **the wheelchair was late.**

I stood in the hall and eagerly watched for the elevator doors to open. Come on, wheelchair! Please come and release me from my prison.

No one knew where the orderly with the wheelchair was. He was on his way, they said, on his way.

The nurse at the main desk tried to locate him. “What’s keeping him?”

My step-mother suggested I sit down in my room and wait. That was hard for me, to wait. I was ready to go!

As I waited, feeling better than ever, I felt an odd sensation in my head, and I told my step-mother about it, and she informed the nurse.

“It’s like I was traveling up a mountain in a car, and my ears popped,” I explained.

The nurse called Dr. Ruk and asked if that was anything to be concerned about, and he said it wasn’t.

So, I sat in the most comfortable chair I could find, and my step-mother and my father stayed in the room with me, sharing the happy moment, and trying to help me relax. Meanwhile, back at home, my mother was preparing for the party we were going to have – the party of a lifetime. There would be a feast. Only it was a surprise.

I tried to be patient, I really did. But I was ready to move on. Dad understood, and he was happy to share in my excitement.

I walked out to the hall, where the nurse was sitting. “Is there any sign of the wheelchair?”

“No,” the nurse said. “I’ll let you know the second it gets here.”

“Okay.” I went back into my room, where I forced myself to sit in the chair, rather than to pace nervously.

My dad said something, I believe, but I wasn’t sure what. Then I gasped.

It was sudden and unexpected, but my head fell back on the chair.

My step-mother yelled, “Nurse! Help! He’s passed out!”

The alarm sounded.



“Oh, no, we’ve lost him again!” the nurse is reported to have said.

Like I had done in the first hospital, I simply walked into the room, sat down and coded. Only this time, it was a different kind of heart attack. It was Sudden Cardiac Death.

And, like they had done in the first hospital, the emergency personnel came running. In a matter of seconds, they were busy paddling my confused and sporadic heart.

This time, they got it going again . . . faster than last time.

As it turned out, we would be thankful the wheelchair had not arrived on time. Had I coded in the elevator, things might have turned out differently.

My heart had fallen into an erratic rhythm and straight to another ICU I went.

Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200.

A different ICU, but an ICU nevertheless. Not my favorite place. *A noisy and chaotic room where the lights never go out and where people sometimes die.* But I didn’t know I was going there. I didn’t know diddly.

### **Shock and Disbelief**

Some time later . . . when I regained consciousness, I was in a near state of mental shock. What has happened? Where am I? Who are these nurses running around?

Am I still in the hospital? I thought I was well. Wasn’t I just leaving?

My body was chained to the bed again. I felt like I was imprisoned. I could have cried. I could only lie on my back, barely able to move. More blood work and tests were coming. More wires and plastic tubing, more IVs and other delightful contraptions were being attached. Hospital personnel were assigned to me, 24-7.

I could not believe it. Now I began to wonder if I would ever leave the hospital, if I would ever live a normal life again. Would my heart ever recover? My hopes were dashed. My head was filled with doubts and questions, worries and fears. I was stunned.

More seemingly endless nights awaited me.

A new nurse stood by my bed. “Richard, you’ve had another heart attack . . . and you’re

in ICU. I'm your new nurse and I'll be taking care of you."

I grabbed her hand and squeezed tightly. "But . . . am I going to be all right?"

"Don't you worry. We'll figure this out."

She was calm and reassuring, and she gave me hope. She let me hold her hand for as long as I wanted. Believe me, I held onto it. Fear jerked through my body. I could not face it.

I could not deal with being right back from where I started.

But after a few minutes, I felt reassured, and I let go of her hand. Yes, I was petrified, but I would have to deal with it.

The kind, caring nurse had made a big difference. She seemed so strong. And her calm demeanor gave me hope. She had taken the extra time to comfort me. Just maybe life in the new ICU would be tolerable.

**I formed new relationships with the medical staff. The new nurses were great.**

Especially the one who had let me hold her hand. Whenever she was on duty, I felt better. I knew I was okay in her care.

And there was Tom, the evening nurse. He had such a winning personality I hoped and prayed he would be on duty every night. He was self-confident, witty and full of energy. He imparted good feelings and created a healing atmosphere by sheer force of his attitude and his delightful bedside manner.

Tom had a very pleasant voice, and he had a gentle way of reassuring his patients that things were going to go well on his shift. He was friendly and witty. He *made you believe* you could get better.

My relationships with all hospital employees were incredibly important to me. I felt like they really cared about me.

Those relationships kept me from feeling so alone. And it was comforting to know competent, caring professionals were ready to meet my needs. Those trustworthy relationships were **absolutely indispensable to the healing process.**

The hospital can be a lonely and fearful place. Each night in the hospital could seem like a week at home. I could only sleep for a few hours at a time, before being awakened for

the next round of blood letting, temperature taking and the like. Breathing exercises, IV changes and medication routines were always coming at me like split-fingered fast balls.

No self-proclaimed, self-made man will ever convince me that relationships are not critical to our functioning and survival. I know better. Without my relationships, I would not be here.

I would be six feet under.

And so would you, really. Everyone would be. No one can make it alone. It's a shame more of us don't realize it.

Ironically, sometimes I think the first step to self-realization is to realize the self was not made to be alone.

### **Another Week In The Hospital**

My mind was in turmoil. I was confused. I wanted answers, but the days passed and I had work to do. There were more procedures to endure.

And I had more observations to make, more hours to spend in meditation and prayer, and *more insights to write in my notebook*, which I kept on the side of my bed.

Upon reflecting on the second heart attack, and the timing of the events of that day, I felt a sense of unspeakable gratitude. If that orderly had brought the wheelchair on time, and I had had the heart attack while in the slow-moving hospital elevator, I might not have gotten help soon enough.

Like the first heart attack, when I had gotten to the hospital in the nick of time, the second heart attack had been most fortuitous to have happened right there in my room, within close proximity to all the emergency resources.

It all seemed incredible.

Reflecting on the latest turn of events, I decided, if I was going to remain hospitalized for a while longer, I would take advantage of the situation somehow. I would learn more. I would find a way to grow from this experience.

Another week in the hospital would give me more time to observe the hospital staff and my visitors, my loved ones and myself, **and to ponder the mysterious workings of the**

**universe, as only one who has died (and come back) can do.**

I spent hours watching and listening to the arts station, which aired the most beautiful classical music. I spent hours watching and listening. The music put me into a deep state of relaxation on several occasions. Lullabies so lovely they sounded angelic.

I listened with my entire being, and allowed the music to fill me with a sense of reverence for life, and helped me to relax and lower my blood pressure, all of which no doubt hastened my recovery.

I began to feel like I was on top of the world. Somehow I knew I was going to beat my medical problems and grab another chance at life. I would do everything in my power to make it happen.

My attitude continued to improve, as the week went on, and more friends and wonderful hospital employees came into my room (I was moved into a private room by the end of the week).

Even today certain kinds of beautiful music, all little children and cloudy days, gentle breezes and perfumed flowers . . . stir me to tears and remind me of the hospital days.

Ever since my near death experience I have seen things differently – I am more open to my experiences, more acutely aware of the beauty around me, and LESS afraid of experiencing my emotions and of expressing them.

**Strong feelings don't scare me anymore.** In fact, not much does. I left the hospital with a real sense of **fearlessness.**

And I have put it to good use in my life. What is there to fear? Certainly not death – we're all going to die, as billions before us have. It's as natural as being born. It's the way of things.

There was nothing for me to fear on the other side – nothing. There was complete bliss.

It was impeccably peaceful. I was in a realm of pure, joyful essence. It was ineffable – peace, serenity, a perfect freedom, and ephemeral tranquility.

In many ways, my NDE was **an exorcism of fear.**

When I was back in my life, I understood more than ever that fear was no way to live life.

Being afraid all the time. Afraid of dying. Afraid to live. Fear, fear, fear.

Some people seemed blinded by fear.

Yet there is nothing to fear in dying or living. Nothing!

*I fought, tooth and nail, not to die.* I could have stayed on the other side, but I wanted to come back and live my life. I had so many things to accomplish. I wasn't done yet.

Life is beautiful and it's meaningful. Every life has a purpose and a goal. It is wonderful to get a second chance to fulfill your purposes and dreams.

Back in the hospital, I kept thinking about what had happened, reflecting on my experience. I enjoyed spending time with my sisters, my niece and nephew, my parents, and my friends, and I enjoyed all my hospital staff visitors.

I spent a great deal of my time, day and night, pondering and reflecting, meditating and observing. It was a week of tremendous insights and ideas. Thoughts on my NDE, and how it could help me to lead a better life.

Thoughts on how I could help others more effectively, drawing upon the inspiration of my incredible two weeks at Central Baptist Hospital.

By the end of the week, my cardiologist permitted me to go home. This time, I hoped, it would be the real deal. There would be no false alarms and no more abrupt trips to the ICU!

### **The Unbelievable Ride Home**

The ride home was one of the most thrilling, mind-bending rides of my life. My wife drove, and I sat in the front passenger seat. The world outside my window was, in a word, beautiful!

I had not laid eyes on it for a full two weeks. I had forgotten how incredibly beautiful it truly was.

As we drove past villages and shopping centers, parks and homes, I was overjoyed. It was like looking through a polarizing lens – a lens that made the colors deeper and brighter and highlighted the natural beauty of the sky and water and the total environment.

The world outside my window seemed magical. Even commonplace objects glittered with energy and shimmered with beauty. No thing was dull or commonplace. Nothing was dead or lifeless. All shimmered with a newfound energy.

There are no words.

Imagine feeling that way! I had never felt that way before, or seen the world through the same eyes.

The sunlight was different than I remembered it. *How spectacular and radiant.* How it transformed the landscape. How it transformed itself in a thousand different ways, depending on what it illuminated. How it sparkled on water and languished in the shade.

The world came to life before my hungry eyes.

I was alive and the world around me was alive in a visceral way. Nothing escaped my attention, nor did I take anything for granted. I asked my wife to drive slowly so I could relish it all. So I wouldn't have to miss anything. So I could allow my eyes to linger on a tapestry of sunlit leaves or swim in the emotions of a sleepy brook.

Even today, years later, I am fond of driving slower than most drivers, so I can take in the beauty that is all around me. After all, I have promised myself that I will never forget the majesty I saw and felt on that drive from the hospital. That I will never go back to the old way of seeing things or not seeing!

No, I'll never think of the world as a drab or uninteresting place. It will always remain a remarkable realm because I have trained my eyes to seek and find the hidden beauty in it.

A gift from my NDE.

How many times had I taken rides on those same Lexington streets without seeing a magnificent and radiant world? **How often had I traversed the same routes and not sensed the magical nature of reality?** How could I have not seen it?

Dying for a brief amount of time had changed me for *good*. How paradoxical it seems. The entire experience had opened my eyes to a new reality, and to new ways of seeing. The doors of perception had been cleansed. I had been reborn. I had received an education in enlightenment.

A new remarkable opportunity had flown my way.

*Anyone can feel this way if he wants.* You don't have to go to the brink. You can just begin to look for the invisible and not so invisible beauty in all of life. You can sit in the silence and reflect on the unseen power in your life. You can open your eyes and senses wider and go beyond normal thoughts and expectations.

Every minute of the 40-minute ride home was **nirvana**.

I could hardly speak, but when I did say something I could only describe feelings of excitement and wonder.

Never had I been so acutely aware of the gift of life. Never had I enjoyed EVERYTHING so much. Nor had I felt so intimately connected and involved with every facet of life.

I felt extremely close to every person, creature and pet in the environment. We drove by a fenced yard where two heavily coated Samoyeds pranced, their white coats whiter than the snow in the yard. Strangers seemed to be my friends. Everyone in my field of vision beamed with interest. I felt as though I knew them all.

A grey squirrel balanced on an overhead telephone wire, racing from one side of the road to another. Watching him fly over the seesaw traffic with his tail pulsing gave me a thrill. My life was opening. My mind was on the equivalent of natural steroids.

I realized all creatures, great and small, were all closely and hopelessly intertwined and inter-connected. There was one great, big family of life, a magnificent web, of which I was a small part.

Not unlike the squirrel, I balanced precariously on the thinnest wire.

To think that I existed outside that sphere would have been a delusion. No longer could I imagine being deluded in that way.

But I hadn't necessarily understood that before my NDE.

**Now . . . all my relationships were of dire importance to me.** How could I express what I was feeling? How would I ever let people know? How could I begin to fully honor my relationships? How could I enact the changes in my life which I envisioned?

Where would I begin?

How would I reconstruct relationships that needed changing?

Surely I had a new role to play and a new life to live. I wanted to make the most of every moment. I wanted to go on capturing such beauty and excitement in my everyday life.

I was no longer the person I used to be, since the experience of the past two weeks had **altered my sense of identity and my perceptual framework**. I felt an extraordinary kinship with all of life. I was on top of the world. I had the unmistakable sense that I was moving forward, no, jumping forward in my life.

I was reinventing my existence.

Now I felt like I belonged to this world and another one – a world belonging to the great beyond. I felt at home in both, at peace with myself, in and out of consciousness.

Death no longer scared me and life now filled me with wonder and excitement. A pretty darn good combination.

As we drove through the countryside, my eyes remained wide-open. I could not see enough. I only wished I could grab and hold onto it all. I wanted to devour life, to live it with a newfound gusto, to miss nothing . . .

to fail to appreciate nothing.  
NOTHING!

And what was this profound sense of gratitude I was feeling? It was new and a bit alarming. I glanced at my wife who was doing her best to drive safely and get me home without incident. How fortunate I was to have her. How fortunate I was, period.

Gratitude led me to a new appreciation for my life. And for the mysteries that lay beyond life.

My experience had not given me a sense of religiosity or churchly fervor, but a universal sense of spirituality, a deep reverence for all of life, along with a glimpse of something so complex and monumental that it resisted comprehension by men and women.

I celebrated my new lease on life through a quiet gladness of the heart. The seeds of *qualitative change* had been planted in me. I was in union with myself and the universe. I was connected to something far greater than any man-made concept could even



contemplate.

There was no anger for the world. I was not sore at anyone. No ill-will plagued me, no desire to do harm. Nothing hurtful or spiteful entered my mind.

I felt and knew only *love* . . .

an all-encompassing, all-embracing unconditional love. A love which I extended to everyone, friend and foe, the familiar and unfamiliar. The only good reason for living was living **deliberately.**

**Why waste my time with any form of misery or malcontent when I could choose to be free from any form of mental slavery?**

The 40-minute ride home in the family car was one of the high points of my life.

No ride in a \$110,000 Porsche could have been better! No stretch limo could have made me happier. This was the ultimate ride. A genteel cruise into a brave, new world. I floated in an altered reality, cradled in the love of an unseen cosmic father, beyond the boundaries of dogmas and creeds and pious, self-limiting notions of existence.

As we glided into the garage of our country residence, I found home to be a veritable oasis.

The second I got out of the car, with the help of my wife, I was ready to explode with excitement. Although I had to be led into the house, I was in heaven. Something told me that my journey of personal transformation, which would accurately describe the last two weeks of my life, was just beginning.

DEEPLY AND SPLENDIDLY BLESSED

My new life possessed possibilities that seemed endless. **Every object in my field of vision vibrated with a sense of discovery and awe, and struck me as delightful, no matter how familiar it might be.** A sense of pure delight squirmed in my being.

My two dogs were introduced to me slowly – so they wouldn't jump up and hurt me. I sat on the bed in the guest bedroom and the dogs were let in the room, one at a time. Their tails wagged for what seemed like an hour, and I petted those two loyal and devoted sheepdogs/companions for who-knows-how-long.

It was a wonderful and unforgettable reunion. One that remains sharp and vivid in my mind even today. What those dogs expressed was beyond me. It was not a tail wagging, “Well, we’re glad you’re home” kind of thing. It was MORE, much more.

Those dogs went into a kind of ecstasy and they stayed there!

I thought about the day of my first heart attack and how the dogs had reacted. How they had known something terrible was up, and how they had tried to comfort or help me in their own way.

As I hugged and petted Rue and Caleb, tears edged down my cheeks.

The history of sheepdogs and their shepherd masters is one of close ties and deep relationships. I fully recognized the capacity to feel and respond was etched in their DNA.

My emotions were ragged and deep. I felt blessed to have known these two canine friends, to have spent a single day in their company.

Yet I felt so undeserving. Even of canine companionship. I felt as though I could never match their devotion or loyalty. Their steadfast, unswayed commitment.

What wonderful relationships of all kinds I had been given over the years.

I just kept thinking, How could anyone be so blessed? And to be so loved by so many? Later, as I cat-napped in my easy chair, I could only marvel at the miracle of life I had been given.

All life was miraculous. I promised myself I would never, ever forget these days. Meditating by the fire, I felt an other worldly sense of awareness. Floating above my life, I was filled with gratitude and humility –

a crystal clear vision of my life emerged.

Coming back from death had altered my world view and reorganized the atoms of consciousness.

### **Time To Recuperate**

The upcoming weeks became a continuation of my time in the hospital, only I was mobile, and much more comfortable. Every day I took a walk with my mother or mother-

in-law.

Both of my mothers kept an eye on me and helped to steady me, if necessary. I had to wear a mask and bundle up to keep the cold air out of my throat, since my throat was almost raw from the ventilator tube, which had been a part of my anatomy for several days.

I was able to devote my time and energy to contemplation, reading and working inside myself. My mind was consumed with thoughts of the afterlife, of multi-faceted existential horizons. I revisited my assumptions and reexamined my beliefs. I listened to the voice within.

My life, for a while, would not be an easy one. Someone had to always be with me, then I gradually moved up to being alone for short periods of time. I did not drive or operate any dangerous machinery. I had to be extremely careful to follow the doctor's orders, or I could have ended up right back in the hospital.

**It was during this period of recovery that I began to formulate new ways of working with relationships**, and ways of openly allowing them to inform and enrich my daily life. Every day I wrote my thoughts in my trusty notebook. As I reflected on the events of the past few weeks, new ideas and insights flooded into consciousness, as I attempted to learn all I could from my experience, to use it as a stepping stone.

Every day, cards and phone calls came in from my trusted colleagues, and from friends, old and new. Steve, a great friend from work, kept everyone informed of my progress and kept visits to a minimum, which served to keep me from being overwhelmed. He stayed in close contact with my family, and relayed information about my progress to my network of friends and associates.

In time, a new understanding confronted me. A change had taken place in the core of my being. A change I acknowledged and embraced. As I had laid on my back in the hospital, thinking and feeling, and counting ceiling tiles, a powerful revelation had begun to dawn on me, a revelation which caused me to revise my view of how we should conduct relationships.

Old illusions had been peeled away, a layer at a time, and others had been shattered. How I saw myself, my life and others had changed. And now, weeks later, that vision was continuing to materialize.

### **The Essence of My New Conviction**

The crux of the matter seemed to be that other people had vaulted to the center of my attention, and now occupied a central place in my thinking – and my life. Much of my rapid recovery from a heart attack, which had nearly claimed my life, I attributed to the kindness and love of others.

√Expert medical staff had given me caring, skilled and timely attention.

√**Every person who had walked into my hospital room had wished me well or tried to lift my spirits.**

√Many had prayed and sent me their generous thoughts.

√Countless people had helped me in countless ways.

√My family had rallied around me.

They had touched me deeply with their collective healing light. Their energy and spirit had entered my very veins, their healing aura had enveloped me. Their words of love, devotion and encouragement had inspired me to keep fighting. *They had touched me in a way I can never remember being touched.*

My family had proven their faith in me, their trust and loyalty. All past difficulties had been laid to rest. They had come to me with nothing in their hearts but love. Each and everyone had peered into my dazed eyes and given me nothing but pure, unconditional love. Their outpouring of affection had worked with the hospital's medicines and treatments to restore my cardiac function.

**In my darkest hour I had found the brightest light.** And the light had given me a glow I could not have imagined. Yet it would take time for it all to flower, and for me to recognize the full extent of my newfound awareness.

## HOVERING ABOVE DEATH

There was more, too. I could not stop thinking about the time I had spent on the other side. That experience had been remarkable. It seemed that I had hovered above death in my dreams. I had become so accustomed to being in an altered state that when I was awake I often felt like I was dreaming. I couldn't always tell what reality I was in.

Yet I had not told anyone about those secretive forays into the unknown. There had not been enough time . . . and there were not enough words. Besides, how would I dare talk

about those experiences? Who would listen? Who would understand? *Words could only vaguely touch the subject.*

What I had seen, felt and encountered was quite different than what I might have expected, and conformed to none of my previous belief or philosophical systems or ways of making meaning.

**People are meaning makers**, and I wanted to find meaning in what had happened to me without feeling pressured to make it conform to previously held expectations. I wanted to be open to my experiences and not burden the process of acceptance and understanding by trying to interpret it. Or trying to make it fit into my previous ontological belief system.

I had read a little about other people's near death experiences. But mine did not follow some of the common patterns. A few had claimed to go to heaven or hell briefly, but that is not what happened for me.

What happened was different. And no one could tell me what had happened because only I knew. Although I knew, I did not fully understand. That is still taking some sorting out, these years and months later.

Yet I knew something powerful had happened, and my impression of death had been so positive and sanguine, so incredibly pleasant and peaceful, I dared not tell anyone.

I could only sound like a romantic fool, an idiot who had been blinded by some exotic celestial light.

Although any near death experience carries an element of subjectivity, as they all do, there was an obvious objective aspect to mine. Somehow I carried a new knowledge in my gut, a concrete awareness of something above and beyond. Something I *knew* to be true.

***When people asked me about my near death experience***, I was always cautious in trying to describe it to them. And I always stopped short of saying it all. Caution and discretion guided me. Yet I wanted to let them know how excited I was about it. How thrilled I had been to make certain discoveries within myself, but not necessarily those which conformed to any school of earthly thought of which I was aware.

### **An Interesting Conversation In The Doctor's Office**

Some months after my discharge from the hospital, a physician's assistant asked me if I had seen a bright light and met a heavenly being like so many others had done in their NDEs.

"Did you go through a tunnel with a light at the end?" she asked.

"No, that's not how it worked for me."

Kindly she said, "May I ask, what happened?"

"Well, I will say this, my foray into death left me with an incredible feeling of bliss. I believe there is nothing to be afraid of in dying, nothing whatsoever to fear in going from this life to the next one, or to whatever."

"How interesting," she said. "Do you mind if I ask, is there more that you learned?"

"There is one other really big conviction which I came back with . . . it involves the way we live our lives. I believe that our relationships are infinitely more meaningful and important than we think them to be. They are our sacred responsibility. And we should do our very best to do right by people . . . by everyone who crosses our path . . . that there is no excuse for not doing our very best to make our relationships truly special and everything they can be."

She mused and nodded. We sat in the silence together. And she said, "That is something I can certainly agree with. Thank you for sharing it with me."

### **The Hardest Part**

In the evenings, I loved sitting by a roaring fire and contemplating. Sometimes I fell asleep and awakened, unsure of my whereabouts. Was I at home, at the hospital or in another reality? It often took several seconds for me to be sure.

By the fire, I read poetry, fiction and non-fiction, amazed at the variety of ways people had constructed to view the universe, and thinking about how my own views were evolving. My glimpse of truth had included both a bold vision of the afterlife and the world in which I lived. The realization I had developed over the past several weeks amounted to an exciting yet humbling perception. It had begun to electrify every conceivable area of my life, and life carried hauntingly beautiful possibilities.

The hardest part lay ahead. How would I interpret my visions and apply them to my day-

to-day life? How would I share my experience with others?

As soon as I felt better, I began planning and making changes in my professional life and personal life. **I reevaluated all my relationships and made efforts to give more to all the people in my life. I became more positive and upbeat in all my dealings with others.** I wanted to be more inspirational and less critical. More open and accepting, and certainly more forgiving.

I wanted to overcome my weaknesses and make every moment count. I willed myself to become more accepting of others, and to see our differences more constructively.

**In the next section, I will reveal a series of insights** which came to me as a result of my NDE, and show you the model I developed for conducting relationships and interacting with others in meaningful and compelling ways. I'll tell you how my relationships were improved and how you can improve yours.

## THE REVELATIONS AND INSIGHTS

As you have seen, my NDE put me in the hospital for roughly two weeks. Much of that time was spent in observation and reflection. I seemed to drift in and out of consciousness and, when I was awake, I spent much of the time in a meditative state.

An overwhelming sense of **gratitude** took me even higher, and was more potent than a mind-bending drug.

Even though I struggled physically, and my body was in pain, my inner life soared. I experienced an awakening.

**New ideas bombarded me.** I wrote as much down as I could, keeping paper and pen near my pillow. When I went home I read my notes over and over, and more ideas came. It was as if the NDE wasn't through with me yet. There was more to learn.

My family's **outpouring of love** in regular installments continued to pour in.

That love had as much to do with my awakening as anything else.

**Of all my thoughts and memories, there were five – five major realizations – which did not need to be written.** I knew them so well I could never forget them. And each came to me while I was in the hospital, not afterwards.

These five revelations made a major impression on me, and eclipsed all the other insights I eventually achieved. These were the most fundamental, the broadest strokes of paint. The insights offered specific information on how to make the revelations work.

## NO LETTING GO

There was no letting go of these ideas. These simple but powerful revelations really stayed with me, and comprised the “big picture” of living a better life. Although I often tried not to think about the ideas, they demanded my attention and bugged me until I kept them in mind night and day!

From these basic revelations, everything else, all the other insights, flowed.

**I like to think of the five revelations as forming a solid foundation for living.**

Listed below are the five revelations, in the order in which I recall receiving them.



### **The First Revelation: *It's All About Relationships***

Never stop *investing* in your relationships.

Relationships are pivotal to success and happiness. Do right by everyone. Friend or foe, all people are to be loved and respected.

If you live this way, honoring your relationships and seeing them as sacred, people will be far more likely to do right by you! Good things will come your way.

### **The Second Revelation: *Real Change Begins With Me***

We often think the answer to our problems is to get the people in our lives to change. We tend to think, if only others would change, if only the world would change, I could be happy!

My NDE revealed a different truth. If you want to change something, begin with yourself. This is especially true of relationships. Waiting on others to change is a royal waste of time. Likewise, demanding that others change is counter-productive.

Waste no time in pointing your finger at others. Instead, get busy asking what you can do to make things different. Other people will become inspired by you and they will change, too – in time.

### **The Third Revelation: *Stop The Seriousness – Lighten Up And Enjoy Life***

*We need to stop being so serious and take more time for having fun.* Finding time to enjoy life is critical to our happiness and peace of mind.

Play is vital to our relationships and their longevity. Entertaining one another is great sport, and it keeps us young. A sense of humor is an asset we should cultivate in our relationships. If we do this, our relationships will be more likely to prosper!

Relationships do not do well when exposed to an onslaught of seriousness. The more problematic your relationship, the more damaged it will be by continuing attempts to . . .

work at it and work at it and work at it.

### **The Fourth Revelation: *There Is Nothing To Fear In Life Or Death***

Nothing could be more natural than dying, but we have made it into something unnatural. There is no reason to be afraid, other than fear. My experience allowed me to get a glimpse of the other side, and a great and profound peace, which awaits us. It is certainly not what some people fear it will be!

Many people are plagued by fear in life. Yet I saw that many of life's fears are unfounded and unnecessary. Fear keeps us from living well.

Life and death are but two sides of the same coin. Live fearlessly and die fearlessly. Life will be sweeter . . . and you will accomplish much, much more by kicking the fear habit.

### ***The Fifth Revelation: Rx For The Woes Of A Spastic, Knee-jerk, Whirlwind Modern Life***

*More than an anecdote for modern life's hectic schedule and steady diet of stress, contemplation changes everything.*

Leading a simple, contemplative life can bring more joy than having millions in the bank. And it's exactly what millions of people are longing for.

This section includes simple suggestions for simplifying your life and finding the quiet, beautiful truth which lies within.

#### HOW THE REVELATIONS WORK TOGETHER

The main thrust of my NDE was the relationship piece, the first revelation. It opened my eyes to the essential nature of relationships and the critical role they play in our lives. And it dawned on me that to waste or ruin a relationship needlessly is one of the biggest mistakes we can ever make.

That's why the first revelation is about relationships: It's all about relationships!  
***Everything in life hinges upon the success of our relationships.***

As for the second revelation, a big part of my vision involved shifting the focus of change from outside the self to the self. In some ways, success in life is synonymous with change. We're much happier and more fulfilled when we are bringing about needed changes.

Combining the first two revelations is easy. When we attempt to improve a relationship by demanding the other person be the one who improves, we are making a critical mistake. It is better for us to step forward and be the first to improve.

Another powerful change technique for relationships is having more fun with people (the third revelation). Being playful will make a big difference in all areas of your life, even your career. When you try to follow the first two revelations, if you will do so in a playful spirit, you will be more successful!

The first three revelations work together splendidly. When we begin to see our relationships for what they truly are, we become more responsible to our relationships by making necessary changes in ourselves, and we start enjoying one another more, our lives will change for the better.

The fourth revelation adds an important twist. Living fearlessly will not only improve your relationships but allow you to let go, play and have fun. Some people are too tight to play. Too tense, too inhibited, too prim and proper.

If you can get past fear and dedicate yourself to having more fun, your relationships will FEEL the difference! And your life will change.

Last but not least, the fifth revelation speaks to the need for slowing down and tuning in to the inner life, which so many of us have neglected.

Cultivating a more contemplative life will benefit your relationships in major ways. It will help you to create a larger space in which to enjoy and celebrate your relationships. And it will enable you to see your relationships and all aspects of your life more clearly.

You'll gain penetrating insight into your own life through the regular practice of contemplative activities and receive the guidance you need to succeed.

Along with each revelation came a variety of insights. I have grouped them under the five corresponding revelations. Naturally the insights overlap a little, and each makes the others more meaningful.

## **Fifteen Insights**

My excursion with death was a real eye-opener. Not only did it change my awareness of the world, but it opened doors, within and without. It showed me how relationships can and do help us heal from traumatic events. And it widened my understanding of how critical it is to keep our relationships strong. Without good relationships we are not protected. We stand vulnerable against the storms of life.

This difficult, complicated and powerful experience became the single most important experience of my life, and I grew to see it as a tremendous gift.

A gift that gave me a new lease on life.

My “near death gift” led to a number of insights, which have changed my relationship to the world and to others, as well as to myself.

I hope these insights will help you to rethink your relationships and to re-envision your life. They may help you to better imagine the possibilities for your marriage or committed relationship, possibilities for the two of you and your future together. Or your relationships with family members and business contacts. They will guide you in improving your interactions with all people.

Try the techniques you’ll find in this section, and see if they don’t help you and your relationships in surprising ways.

**One remarkable way in which my NDE changed my life was to help me gain more pleasure from my relationships.** Now I willingly devote more time to my relationships and enjoy them more than ever.

Where I might have labored in some of my relationships in the past, I soon found myself enjoying a new unbridled success in even the most trying of relationships.

Now I look forward to dealing with everyone, even the most challenging people.

If you’d like to rediscover the pleasure of your relationships – you’ll find all kinds of help for your ailing relationships – keep reading.

After reading . . . take a drive in the country . . . a stroll by the water or spend some time in the woods or mountains, and reflect on these insights and revelations. Maybe you’ll want to try just one before going on to the next.

Talk about the points you find most inspirational with a friend. Have fun, relax and focus your thoughts on the beauty around you. The insights will seem sharper and clearer.

Take your time with the insights. Each one is simple, but wrapping your mind around it isn't always easy. Give yourself some time. Mull each one over and think about how you can apply the insights to your relationships, opening yourself to the possibilities that may flow into awareness.

**These insights have helped me to enjoy greater satisfaction in all areas of my life. They have given my career a big boost . . .** and opened new doors of satisfaction in my personal life. I'm sure some of the insights will interest you more than others, and may prove more applicable to your situation.

I hope you'll let me know which ones you find most helpful.

## **THE FIRST REVELATION: IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS**

For many people, relationships appear to rank near the bottom of their priority list. How easily we become preoccupied with a thousand things, and forget our relationships. Or we focus on one or two relationships to the exclusion of the others.

I was among the worst offenders. I got busy and didn't make time for my relationships. Work projects would take all my time, or a writing project, and I just couldn't bother myself with anything else.

I suppose that still happens to me on occasion, but not nearly as often as it used to happen.

**Now I fully realize my relationships are:**

- ✘ my lifeline to health and happiness**
- ✘ the doorway to greater purpose and meaning**
- ✘ the conduit to success (whatever one's definition)**
- ✘ my ticket to peace of mind**

**Now I understand it isn't wise to ignore relationships. Now I see my relationships as something to embrace and TREASURE, not to avoid.**

FURTHERMORE:

- ✓To turn my back on the people I love is a losing proposition for all, including myself!
- ✓Relationships are not an obligation, but a pleasure.
- ✓They are the primary and most precise method of delivering joy to anyone's life.

So why would I want to let them go?

**Remember, relationships . . . that's what makes the world go 'round.**

## **The First Insight: Realize The Importance Of Your Relationships**

While I was in the hospital, and for a few weeks afterwards, thoughts about the nature of life and death, and the cosmic nature of life, dominated my thinking.

But what was the essence of my realization? **I realized that life is all about relationships.**

Yes, all of life.

Where would we be without relationships? What could we do without them? How would we find happiness if completely alone?

A very religious-minded colleague of mine said, “No, it’s not about relationships. It’s about God. God has to be everything.”

And I replied, “And where would you be without your **relationship** with God?”

We cannot thrive or survive alone. We are **SOCIAL** animals. Our families are all important. Our social networks define our place in life. They make meaning and purpose possible. Relationships comprise the foundation and framework of culture. Our castle in life is built on our social network.

My relationships uplifted and sustained me while I was bed-ridden in the hospital.

I often think, “Where would I have been without the people who loved and encouraged me during those crisis-stained days? How would I have survived without the expert, around-the-clock care of the medical team which saved my life?”

As I lie on my back in a helpless state, barely able to move, I realized how utterly dependent we are upon others. How much we need vital contributions from others for our very survival! If nothing else, we need feedback from others. Who wants to live in a vacuum?

I was dependent upon the nurses and doctors for everything. I could do nothing for myself but keep trying to survive. We worked together as a team.

It’s a funny feeling, being helpless.

And it has much to teach you. I, a physically strong, independent individual, who was in

the habit of thinking and doing for himself, had to rely upon the efforts of so many people . . . completely relied upon them . . . to survive two terrible heart attacks, a week apart.

People I knew and didn't know took care of me and protected me and nursed me back to health. Strangers and loved ones. Those of every description.

And there was **the glittering possibility**, impossible to prove but, just the same, compelling, that I had a little help from the other side.

In any case, I didn't survive the "widow maker" by myself. I had help and lots of it. No one is an island.

We aren't just individuals. We belong to a gargantuan network which includes all life forms. Our greatest happiness comes from serving others. We were born to be a part of the earthly family. Our greatest achievements come by working together, as one.

Our relationships – all of our relationships – comprise the record of our activities and efforts on the planet.

Everything we have done to and with people, for or against them, is recorded in the *book of our relationships*.

Relationships form the record of our lives. They tell the story of what we have done and not done. They bear the fingerprints of our lives in total accuracy. It is through our relationships and alliances that we have made our contribution.

**And when we die** it is those relationships we leave behind that go on speaking for or against us, relationships through which our influence, either positive or negative, continues.

Our legacy is carved . . .

in the unique shape and configuration . . .

of our relationships.



Each of us has different relationships, and each of us does something different with people. Friend or foe, the people in our lives, and our reactions to them, have told the tale about who we are and how we have impacted the world.

Without relationships, none of us would ever make a contribution. We would never take a stance or position, for or against anything.

*Relationships are the conduit for our expression. Through our relationships we weave a telltale pattern, which shows our strengths and weaknesses, our vulnerabilities and talents.*

Our relationships don't lie.

They tell the truth about who we are, and what we do. They form the blueprint of our behavior. They reveal exactly how we know and live life. And that truth is there for everyone in our lives to see.

How we treat others and respond to their needs is written in the pages of our book of life.

The book, the diary that belongs to us, but which is shared with those who have crossed our path.

We create a lifetime of connections and liaisons, and we reap its myriad rewards or consequences. Life captures, like the lens of a camera, everything we do in our relations and endeavors. Nothing goes unnoticed or unobserved.

We are invisibly connected to everyone on earth. We may not see it, but every person who has ever lived is a member of our human family. Every child is our child. Every hungry mouth is a mouth crying for food in the human family . . . the one family to which we all belong.

## BIG, BIG, BIG LESSON

My heart attacks taught me that relationships are infinitely more important than I ever dreamed. Even the failed relationships. These relationships have affected us in very significant ways. In ways we often don't realize. Also, the people in our lives are far more important than we often allow ourselves to think.

But you see it when the chips are down. It's there, in all its radiant clarity, the reality of just how much these people mean to you.

You can go through life telling yourself that you really don't care about this or that person, but when you have a life-threatening experience, you suddenly realize you've been lying to yourself.

You do care.

You may have thought that a certain relationship didn't mean much to you, but all of a sudden you realize how wrong you've been! Every relationship assumes a new importance.

And you recognize that you really care about all those people with whom you have had relationships, even about those you may have written off your list.

There is no longer any need to protect yourself from the truth. It's staring you in the face. You are close to death and it's time to give up the games!

Sometimes we gradually let go of relationships in favor of things we think are more important things, like acquiring material goods.

Why must we so often ignore or disregard our relationships, choosing instead to concentrate on a bunch of distractions, none of which are going to amount to a hill of beans in the end?

Why do we assign our relationships a low priority status?

We forget. We think about the mortgage payment, the car we're going to trade in, the job, the vacation, the whatever. And the relationships take a back seat because we lose our awareness, get distracted and become preoccupied. Our busy schedules are partly at fault, I guess.

We eventually take our marriages for granted. I mean, you live with this same person every day for years and you get tired, perhaps bored.

You need a change of scenery.

So you start looking around. And the two of you drift apart.

You worry about things. You take care of business, but let the relationship slide. While you go through the motions, and keep up appearances, what happens to the real thing? The real love you once had, the love that shrivels up inside you?

Then reality hits.

*Perhaps you have a heart attack or another life-threatening experience. If you're lucky. It's a rude awakening. It forces you to reconsider your assumptions. It helps you to see what's really happening in your life. What you've really been doing. It shows you what is important. **Or reminds you of lessons learned long ago but, lessons you've forgotten.***

If you aren't so lucky . . . the rude awakening is called a divorce or separation.

Or a broken friendship.

Or severed ties with a once beloved family member. Someone you should have always been close to. Your own blood and kin.

But words were spoken and tempers flared. And egos got the best of you both. Pride took you for a fall.

And the two of you may not speak to each other for years, going out of your way to avoid each other. Punishing each other for ever having dared to disagree or argue.

It happens. In almost every family.

How silly.

You may not think you miss the person. You may pretend you don't care. You may tell yourself a long, tall story about how you never want to see or speak to that person again.

But the truth is another matter.

And you aren't going to fool yourself for long. You will live to regret your separation from your family member or friend. You will suffer silently. You will feel the stress. You will question your sanity. You will ask for forgiveness someday.

**So why not now?**

My encounter with death taught me that such separations are always folly. And what is truly sad . . . I've seen people die before they could reconcile.

The day is going to come when it is too late. And both parties will lose.

## **Flashback**

I want to take you back to my hospital bed. Let's go back in time to December, 2003. I want to give you a bird's eye view of what I was thinking and experiencing.

Now imagine what I saw before my NDE: I saw people with flaws and weaknesses, biases and problems. Some were good and others not so good. Some people disappointed me and others repulsed me. It was kind of a mixed bag. I didn't feel close to everyone. Sometimes I felt distant and disconnected.

But afterwards . . . that's not what I saw. Things were different. I was no longer critical of people. I felt a huge amount of compassion for everyone. A kind of deep, powerful compassion I had never known.

I literally saw something totally different than I had seen before. People were suddenly very beautiful to me. I no longer thought of their imperfections or saw any scars. I saw much more than their physical aspects. I saw something bigger and more inward. Every person in my field of view was more significant than I might have imagined. Even family members and friends whom I had known for years looked different, somehow more substantial.

All were light, radiant beings, full of personality and intrigue. Everyone had changed slightly. Their stature had grown larger. Their importance greater.

I understood people in a different light, feeling the power of a newfound respect for them. And I saw them as allies. Even strangers were seen as would be friends. As friends in the making. I felt closer to people than ever before.

And I was no longer putting up barriers. I was more open and accepting, and less judgmental I saw potential for good things in people's eyes.

Even the nurse from you-know-where was beautiful, in her own way. Somehow I understood her without having to be critical or needing to find fault. Something radical had happened in my perceptual framework to adjust my point of view. Yes, the nurse had upset me, but I still viewed her with interest and warmth. I continued to like her. Yes, I needed her, but I would have liked and appreciated her even if I had not needed her.

**How do you explain this change?** I have several possible explanations, but none are fully adequate. Even today I feel the same way. Years after leaving the hospital, years after my recovery, I continue to see and think of people differently. I have somehow been

able to retain the shift in perception gained as a result of my NDE. And the new way of seeing and being has helped me immensely.

The change in my relationships began with me.

**The ultimate relationship solution begins with each of us.** Amazing possibilities emerge on the horizon of our hopes and dreams as soon as we realize the power we possess when we embrace our relationships and build them to the power of ten. While others may look at a relationship without seeing its fullest potential, those who have become part of the relationship solution will see something totally different. We realize it is possible to perform miracles in our relationships . . . if we live with courage and heart and treat everyone BETTER than we would like to be treated.

Now we're getting close to capturing **the ultimate relationship** solution in words. We may start with the golden rule, and we may do the golden rule justice by our actions. You can't go wrong with the golden rule. But it is possible to go beyond the golden rule by making yourself an instrument of relationship bliss! How? That's simple. All you have to do is be an angel to everyone you meet!

I'm not going to reveal **the ultimate relationship solution** in its entirety quite yet. In fact, you'll want to keep reading because you'll discover the full formula between the lines of this book; and every chapter builds on the last, taking you closer to a realization of this powerful solution – a solution with the capability of transforming your life and the lives of those you touch.

The **ultimate relationship solution** is residing within each of us. All we have to do is unleash the fury of love and devotion written on the templates of our hearts and the world will begin to change before our very eyes.

That brings me to our next activity.

## **ACTIVITY**

**Take a close look at your life. And ask yourself: What relationships need attention?**

**Okay, now what can you do to give them that attention?**

**Why not begin by writing a few names down on your THESE RELATIONSHIPS NEED ATTENTION LIST?**

## **The Second Insight: Take Immediate Action to Mend Damaged Relationships**

If any relationship in your life is in a state of ill-repair, you'd better be fixing it pronto!

You can't wait around. You can't do it when you feel like it. You gotta act now. Because tomorrow may never come. Because tomorrow is too late.

Yeah, I know it's only human to put off doing that which we dread . . . but when it comes to relationships, it isn't right. It's like throwing money away. Or leaving a child out in a storm.

**My close encounter** not only inspired me to wake up and realize how critical relationships are, but to take immediate action to improve, repair and uplift *all* of my relationships.

I said, Immediate action.

I know. It's painful. But I'm telling you what I saw or what was given to me. I can't lie about it. I can't make it up. I must give you the ugly truth.

Take immediate action to rectify the problems in your relationships. No exceptions to the rule.

Immediate, not future action. Not mental action. Not would-be action. Not wishful thinking action. Not I'll dream up a million excuses action. Not I'll get to it when I can action.

But do it RIGHT NOW action.

Before you go to bed tonight.

If you gotta say you're sorry for something you did, do it. Don't let it fester. Get the juices flowing again, the love. Fix the broken connection. That connection will feed you with energy and power. It will make you stronger. It will inoculate you against failure.

If only we could see.

**I saw that we should celebrate the people we love, and celebrate our relationships by taking good care of them. If one is broken or in trouble, fix it before it's too late.**

The wisdom of this insight lies in a refusal to take our relationships for granted. And to have a little humility as we interact with people.

No matter how successful, smart or rich we might be, we are no better than anyone else on the planet.

Worldly status may give you relationships, **but it does not ensure their quality.**

Never take people for granted. Make your relationships a priority. Give your best. And take steps to fix them when they have been neglected or damaged.

We should never tolerate broken relationships or allow mediocre relationships to remain as such.

That is akin to leaving your paycheck out in the rain! Or your best leather shoes. Or leaving a hole in your roof and refusing to fix it.

A smart person won't drive a car without oil.

If you have a cut on your hand, you clean and bandage it. If you need stitches in your foot, you go to the doctor and have it taken care of.

If you have a glitch in a relationship, you simply take care of it . . . you don't let it bleed or get infected.

**And you take care of it properly so there are no scars.**

That means act swiftly, gently and assertively. In a way that saves face for the other person.

**BUT HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT?**

How do you fix a neglected or broken relationship?

Well . . .

1. Contact the person. Telephone is better than e-mail.
2. Tell him/her you care.

3. Say you want to mend the relationship.
4. Apologize for letting the person down or anything you may have done.
5. Offer to arrange a meeting or get-together. You know, spend some time together.
6. Avoid placing blame or criticizing.
7. Listen to his/her side and make every effort to understand their point of view.
8. Promise to do better in the future.
9. Thank him/her for their cooperation and support.
10. Take care of the relationship better.

We should take immediate action to rectify problems in our relationships. All kinds of relationships. No exceptions.

That's how important our relationships are, folks. That's what I saw.

If something is wrong, we should do something, take the first step. Never sit around and wait for the other person to make the first move.

This is never an easy task. It requires that you give up your false ego, pride, and self righteousness, and requires you to truly humble yourself. It takes guts.

Or it means you stop and think about how essential your relationship truly is, and you'll spring into action because you know it needs to be done. And because doing it will make someone you care about so darn happy! And because it will make you happy.

Leaving a damaged relationship to fester is like cutting off your nose to spite your face. That relationship is a vital part of you. That person is part of your psyche. Your life blood.

If you have to eat humble pie, do so.

The wise individual will take care of his/her relationships and go first class with them all the way!

Thinking like this . . .

is, well, a fundamental change for many of us. We can begin by admitting that we need people in our lives, and that our social relations are important.

That's a big change for some people, who like to think of themselves as being above relationships.



It involves an attitude change. We must stop using people and playing them like chess pieces. Players have to give up playing. It involves a subtle shift in thought. We must see our relationships for what they really are, which is hard for some of us to do.

Relationships do not exist as a means to get something. They are more than that!

While in Intensive Care it made sense to me. I felt it in my bones. My relationships were doubly important to me. These people were worth my best effort. They were veritable angels! How could I let them down? How could I ignore them?

I felt angry with myself for ever having let down a single person.

If someone was unhappy with me, I needed to take it seriously and do something to resolve the problem.

I realized that was the only way to live.

**We must confront and give up our myth of personal invincibility.**

We must shed our love affair with ourselves, and realize who we are here to love. It is our moral imperative to love others as ourselves, yet so few of us are doing it. It is an arrangement that works for us, too.

Love is a win-win scenario.

To love others as ourselves is the **Golden Rule**, and yet so few people even attempt to do it. We love ourselves first and others second. We habitually think of ourselves first.

Learning to reverse that habit and getting others into our hearts *first* is a tall order for some. And it was for me in some ways.

Looking death in the eye gave me a different perspective on things.

As I recuperated from my heart attacks, the urge to make changes coursed through me. I wanted to throw my PRIDE out the window forever. To erase all traces of haughtiness. To open myself completely to other cosmic beings with whom I share the planet.

So . . .

I began to take my relationship with my siblings, parents and wife more seriously. These

relationships were already in good shape, but I found ways to improve them. I wanted to give more to these individuals and to do more for them. I needed to acknowledge the importance of these relationships to me.

It was a natural step to look for creative ways of having fun with these highly meaningful relationships, to bring greater joy to all my essential relationships.

As I remained in the recovery process, I felt deeply pleased yet saddened to realize how much my wife loved me, as evidenced by the selfless way she supported me during my illness, while realizing how incompletely I had given myself to her. Also, my NDE showed me how much more fully I wanted to love her, how much more I wanted to give of myself.

Then I took stock of all my relationships and found several in need of attention.

## LIFE IN THE HOSPITAL

Life in Central Baptist wasn't easy. But it never is. If you're sick enough to be in the hospital, you aren't going to be having a good time.

**Relationships made it easier, though.** It's hard to lie there and get poked and prodded, strangers coming in and taking tests and giving you procedures. The pain of it all.

But, it's much easier if you feel a connection with the person who is administering the procedure. If they seem likeable, competent and interesting, and if you have formed a basic bond with them, it's a whole lot easier to let them replace your IV or give you a shot in the you-know-where.

If you get to know the person and have a nice conversation with him/her, it takes much of the pain and distress out of it.

I dreaded having blood work done. For one, they often had to poke me several times to find a vein. What should have taken a few minutes, often turned into a 20-minute ordeal. Because they had to do it over and over until they got it right.

As much as I disliked it, it never seemed as bad if the person who was sticking me was friendly and personal.

One friendly fellow always engaged me in conversation and brought a sense of humor

along with him. I called him by his first name and we got along famously.

Those sharp needles didn't seem as scary in his hands. And the ordeal went by quickly. After a few visits, I felt like I knew him. And he seemed to know me. We formed a bond.

And that bond made all the difference.

He could wake me up at three in the morning and draw blood, but I actually looked forward to it because we had a good time together. I remember accusing him of being a blood-sucking vampire, and he just laughed about it. He respected our relationship and made every attempt to make me comfortable.

Our relationship combated my anxiety and nervousness. Funny how a relationship can be an anecdote for FEAR.

**Funny how . . .**

**a relationship can be an anecdote for so many ills.**

## THE MARVELOUS POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

*Before my NDE*, I wasn't paying much attention to some of my relationships. And I was okay with some of the dysfunctional relationships I was carrying around in my life, not unlike burdensome baggage; although I had always wanted them to be better, I never did anything to improve them.

*After the experience*, I was shocked by my previous attitude. How could I have been so stupid and naive? So focused on myself? So blind?

Now I felt there was no excuse. No matter what the circumstances, I could not bear to neglect relationships that were important to me.

After I was back to work and back in the middle of my life again, I just had to take immediate steps to make all my relationships better.

**That single change (mending conflicted relationships) has improved the quality of my life immeasurably.** It was like fixing valuable furniture that had fallen into ill-repair – furniture that was about to break for good. I set about to repair my damaged and neglected

relationships – relationships I had taken for granted.

Immediately I felt better about myself and noticed that the emotional baggage I carried had been lightened. I felt great. And the individuals in those relationships were gladdened by the change in my behavior.

They were pleasantly surprised by the change in my attitude.

I reaffirmed my love for my family and communicated my deepest thoughts to my friends, with whom I had always been more guarded. I was letting it all hang out, all my thoughts and feelings, for the first time in my life.

**Adversity is expected as a part of the normal life cycle. It's what creates strength.**

Every problem facing a relationship can be approached with a level head. There is nothing to be gained from panicking. Patience and resolve will go a lot farther than an angry and demanding attitude.

Those who expect and welcome conflict will enjoy success. If we welcome our problems and setbacks, asking what we can learn from them, we will find the answers and grow stronger.

*Approach your relationship by accepting your problems. Work through them without working . . . insist upon having fun!* Whenever something goes wrong, you can fight back by making something right. **By doing something kind for your partner.** By staying clear of the *anger dragons*.

Forget about the problem or give yourself time to find the right solution, or to accept that there may be no solution for that particular problem. And in the meantime, enjoy yourself. Don't stop living.

**ANOTHER POSITIVE OUTCOME OF MY TRAGEDY**

I could not bear to hold my feelings in any longer. If I felt something for someone, I had to tell them.

And . . . for the first time, I was no longer afraid of what their response might be!!!

Wow.

I had to stop and ask myself what was wrong with me. Why was I acting this way? Never had I been so emotionally strong.

What in the world was I doing . . . going around making sure no one I loved went away without an affirmation of my love and respect for him or her?

Not normal.

In each neglected relationship, I set about confirming my concern for and interest in the individual. I talked to the person and told him/her how much I cared about him/her.

How much I admired him/her.

In some cases, I apologized for my past behavior. In another case, I simply told the person how much I loved and appreciated him/her. *As soon as I said those magic words, I felt lighter than air.*

Years of pain melted away.

I'm not sure I had ever said those words to some people before.

Speaking truth without mincing words, that was a beautiful thing to do on a REGULAR BASIS.

I started giving people **more hugs**, too. As I embraced those I loved, joy rippled through my body. A profound peace followed. I had turned a corner. I had made a powerful change.

I slept like a baby at the end of the day. For I had begun to work hard, giving more and loving more, yielding more. I had taken a big step. And I could go to bed with a totally clear conscience.

In every case, **I did the thing I was afraid of**, that which I wanted to do but had not found the courage.

I learned a powerful secret . . . the heart speaks more beautifully and clearly than the head. And it almost always gets understood.

GUESS WHAT?

When your heart starts doing the talking, other hearts come from miles around . . . to listen and flutter near you.

Soon, these hearts will speak. When hearts talk wonderful things happen. Butterflies sing. Bees tumble in fields of nectar.

When I stopped to reflect on how much each person mattered to me, and how indispensable each relationship was, I just jumped in and did what was necessary. I threw my old pride in the trash can. The courage was there, and the fear melted away.

The courage to celebrate people had given me a new pleasure, a new happiness. To give them credit. To support others like I had been supported was a real joy. ☺

On some level, ***we are all prodigal sons***, waiting for the wisdom and courage to go home and be reunited with our loved ones.

Relationships are like bridges. A damaged one, once repaired, helps us to cross troubled waters.

Fixing bridges is a wonderful way to spend your time. Getting all the bridges in our lives working properly means we can navigate the world more effectively. We can cross dangerous waters and find safe passage back home. We can see so much more of the world when our bridges are working for us.

A life without bridges is the life of an island, which is disconnected from the mainland, floating out in the middle of nowhere.

My NDE gave me the opportunity to repair many of my bridges. And to build many new ones.

That alone made it worthwhile. ☺

## **Welcome Changes**

As a result of my near death experience, I began to make small and not so small changes in my life, career and relationships. I was aware of wanting to make certain changes and not so aware of others.

**I became more understanding and patient, more sensitive and accepting, more positive and inspirational, more genuine and humane, more forgiving, and less critical and judgmental.**

The awakening taught me that we should take this approach in all our relationships.

It's difficult to love selectively. If one loves from the heart and loves passionately, it is almost impossible to love a select few. Love becomes a way of life. It infuses one's being with light. Love is a light you shine on everyone. You can't stop it.

Love illuminates the darkest of tunnels.

It is a light that must be shared. It is unconditional. One does not love with all his might and then turn around and hate. Love is a deep-seated philosophy of life, a faith that supercedes every culture and religion, a force that erases the small thinking of the ego. Love is what you do for the universe, our ongoing gift to life.

A gift that cannot be turned on and off.

Your love light must stay on all the time, 24-7!

### **Activity**

**First Step: Please review the list of names you noted (after the first insight) of relationships needing attention.**

**Second Step: Now write your plans for enhancing or improving each of those relationships.**

**How and when will you carry out your plans? Which one would you like to start on today?**

**Decide and write it all down in your planner or on your Do List.**

**Remember . . . a journey of a thousand miles begins with that all-important first step. ☺☺**

## **The Third Insight: Nurture Your Good Relationships And Turn Them Into GREAT Relationships**

Sometimes we forget to nurture our relationships. We take them for granted. We focus on other, seemingly more important matters.

If a relationship is a good one, we tend to stop there.

But it really pays off to give your good relationships a little extra attention, which pushes them forward and nudges them into greatness!

### **How An Inexpensive Bicycle Made A Difference In A Good Marriage**

This morning I rode my bicycle on a country road. I rode to the top of a hill where I could see for miles, stopped and admired the countryside, watched two spiders play a mating game on the velvety prong of a stick, listened to a bumble bee as it attended the wild flowers growing along the fence row, observed the habits of barn swallows and Red-winged blackbirds, ate blackberries, kept my eye on the swirling clouds as they swallowed the sun. I looked and listened in a most attentive way – a way that was unusual for me due to time constraints.

Wouldn't it be nice if we paid such close attention to our loved ones?

Life no longer seemed to pass me by. I was no longer stressed. I felt the sun fall on my hands and seep through the fabric of my shirt to warm my shoulders, and focused on the silence that cushioned my ears.

What does this have to do with relationships?

**This is the kind of experience that allows you to find yourself and succeed in your relationship with yourself and others.** This is the kind of experience it's nice to share with others. The kind that brings you closer to people and the world in which you live.

And if alone, it brings you closer to yourself.

It allows you to establish peace with yourself and your environment. It connects you with all living things, and makes it easier for you to open yourself to your loved ones. It impresses you with a quiet appreciation for what matters in life.

I wanted my wife to be able to ride with me next time, so we went to the store and bought



her a bicycle. The next morning we went riding *together*. Now that was something, and was it ever fun!

What a beautiful morning, and what a delight to share it with my beloved.

Do you remember to share that which you love with your loved ones?

How could we have done without our bikes for so long?

My wife and I ride together frequently now, and there is hardly anything that we enjoy more. We had ridden together earlier in our relationships, but had stopped. Years went by between rides.

I can't believe we waited so long to do something we loved again!

Plus, riding is such great exercise, too.

You see, even before my NDE, I wanted to ride with her, but I didn't do anything about it (other than think or talk). Afterward, I sprung into action. I went out and made it happen.

That's one of the *biggest differences* in the way I live now. I do things that I would have put off before. I try to act. To move forward.

Procrastination is harmful and painful in relationships.

I've stopped wishing for things, talking about them and regretting that they are so far away. Now I get to work and try to make them happen. I just get up and do what needs to be done.

Management guru and top flight consultant, **Tom Peters**, says effective managers have "a bias for action." They are DOERS.

*All great lovers have a bias for action, too. They make romance. They act on their dreams. They dare to envision a happier way, and they do whatever it takes to realize their possibilities.*

You can not be a good lover if you can't ACT, you know, make something happen. You can't sit around and wait. Or tell yourself you'll do something in a few weeks.

While sitting around trying to figure out the right time to act, your lover may get restless .

.. ☹

No one likes being with a passive person who cannot make things happen. It's easy to love a motivated, focused person who lives a life of action.

And all that begins with realizing how important your relationships are, and assigning a high priority status to them. It means to stop putting your relationships off, and start giving them the time and energy they need in the present.

➔ Why not carry a **BIAS FOR ACTION** into all your relationships? Why not let action be your new guide???

### **Grab More Life By Giving and Serving**

While in the hospital I realized that **we often place unrealistic and unfair expectations on others.** We expect the sky and give much less. Or we think our partner will lift us to lofty heights, which sets us up for failure in the end . . . when we blame him or her for not giving us our dreams.

Or we blame our partner for *a failed relationship*, which it took two people to create.

Relationships, as they are so often lived out, can be selfish or self-centered. Lying in my bed in ICU and, later in my private room, *I felt ashamed that I had expected so much from others and so little of myself.*

*And I was determined to give more and to expect less.* I was very attuned to the basic unfairness in asking another to do so much and not in demanding more from myself. I don't know how I was suddenly seeing this so clearly.

Yes, as a relationship professional, I could have identified unrealistic expectations as a typical problem in relationships but, once I was in the hospital, I saw it in a different way and in a different light. It was clear that people often did not feel the gratitude they should, and are loathe to express it.

### RELATIONSHIP MYOPIA

A central problem in relationships is our inability to recognize the good things others do for us, and our failure to acknowledge it. **But acknowledging all that others do for us**

**NOURISHES the other person and the relationship.**

I have worked with many children who are living with their grandparents because, for whatever reason, the parents cannot take care of the kids or provide them with the right kind of homes.

Invariably, those parents never seem to be thankful *enough* for what the grandparents are doing for them. The grandparents may be footing the bill financially and parenting the kids in every way, making huge sacrifices to raise the grandkids.

Yet, few parents seem to realize the tremendous effort their parents are making. They seldom say thanks, and they are often highly critical of their parents.

It seems all they think about is the faults and flaws of their parents. They often treat them like crap.

**The underlying problem may be our focus on resentments, faults and shortcomings. We'd rather talk about what's wrong. Not what's right. We'd rather be angry about something that happened 20 years ago.**

**Also, we expect others to make us happy and we believe it's their OBLIGATION to do so and, when they don't, we get angry at them.**

But that is a no-win expectation. It makes more sense to ask that only of ourselves. And not to place blame onto others for failing to do what only we can do in the first place.

When my life was shattered by my NDE, and all my relationships came to my aid, giving me love and support, I saw a new reality. I realized that . . .

we should be much more thankful for our relationships,

and less critical!

I saw that we need to see the good things that others do for us and our families, and stop being blinded by their mistakes. We are too quick to get angry or impatient with those we love, after they have done so much for us.

Seldom are we honest with ourselves about how much others do for us and what they mean to us.

We often portray a haughty attitude. We show little gratitude. We take our blessings for granted.

## TIME TO QUIT HOLDING BACK

If there is someone in your life (for me, there were several) who has endured the brunt of your criticism, and whose positive traits you have forgotten, maybe it is time to make amends.

Loving relationships heal us from all the worst insults life can hurl at us, and they are the bulwark of our defense against the tragedies that befall us.

What do loving relationships mean to war veterans or survivors of horrible atrocities?

Who could recover from the throws of drug addiction without loving and supportive relationships?

Without the love of a loyal and steadfast partner or loved one, who could recover from the loss of a son or daughter? Well, perhaps you never recover from the loss, but you can learn to survive it. Without relationships, we would never heal from our psychological infirmities and fears, or various kinds of trauma associated with growing up or dealing with past problems.

I know grown children who were loved all their lives by their parents, but who, for some reason or another, feel they did not get enough love. And they feel entitled. And they quietly live in resentment. They seldom acknowledge the many gifts their aging parents continue to give. They look down on their parents. They are ungrateful and tragically withhold their love and forgiveness.

Everyone loses.

Or parents who never quite accept a son or daughter. Parents who remain critical and unforgiving. Parents who try to control their grown kids.

It happens in all kinds of relationships, not just parental ones. My NDE helped me to see just how twisted some relationships have become. And to zero in on the hidden abuse in many relationships.

A tragedy.

Few of us realize how much our relationships mean to us, and how much our loved ones have done for us, how much they have given. It is so easy to remain insensitive, callous and hard. Too easy to never say thank you. To live without gratitude.

Too tempting to bite the hand that feeds us.

Too easy to be

**hard.**

Today it is a bit difficult to put myself back into the “hospital mind set,” these years afterward, yet I clearly recall feeling disappointed in myself for not having given more to my relationships, and for not having realized how wonderful and beautiful the people I know truly are.

I was angry with myself for having short-changed anyone or for not seeing them for their good points.

How many people had I failed to acknowledge? Underestimated? How many times had I not recognized a person’s beauty (inner and outer) while concentrating on their mistakes? How many times had I been hypnotized by what I thought were someone’s glaring weaknesses or problems? How many times had I not been honest with myself about how I really felt about others, perhaps in an effort to protect myself or keep the upper hand?

I watched the medical professionals work so hard to save the patients from this disease or that accident, and I came away with a new appreciation for the medical profession. The nurses and doctors who labored so hard to keep us patients alive and to work with our families gave me great inspiration.

The many wonderful nurses who touched my life and brought me their good cheer put me in awe of their profession.

My family earned my respect anew. What sacrifices they had made to be there for me, and how willingly they had done so. Suddenly it clicked. The imperfections of family members no longer mattered in the least!

A new, perfectly clear picture of the kind, loving people in my life formed in my mind. These incredible people would go to any length to help me! And they were doing it.

I realized the powerful influence family has on the individual. **I saw that my family was infinitely more important to me than I had allowed myself to believe.** My mother and father, and all three of my sisters were truly my angels. I could only thank God for their involvement in my life. What a great family I have. How fortunate I am!

I hope I never forget to keep telling them how I feel.

Everywhere I looked, my family was there, helping me get through the ordeal. And trying to ease my pain and ensure my comfort.

All over the hospital, I saw acts of courageous self-sacrifice and living examples of people serving others. What helpful and humanistic attitudes everyone had, and how very healing in nature. I felt a great respect for those who labored so hard to be of service.

### A POWERFUL **EYE-OPENING** EXERCISE

Over the years, I have led numerous workshops and seminars on various topics in the mental health and self-improvement fields. I want to tell you about one of the most powerful exercises I've used with participants.

It is something I adapted from Japanese psychotherapy. You don't need to come to one of my workshops to try this. You can do it at home. And I promise you, this will make you think, if nothing else.

You'll think about your relationships in a new way.

Be prepared to spend a good hour or more on this, although you can get the feeling for the exercise and its benefits in a few minutes.

### TRY THIS EXCEPTIONALLY REWARDING ACTIVITY

Sit in a comfortable chair with a notebook and pen. You are going to write names on your pad of paper. That's all. Just names.

This will tax your memory, so be prepared to think back and reflect.

Your instructions are to write down the name of every single person who has ever helped you in any way.

Anyone who has been helpful to you or has exerted a positive influence, or supplied you

with assistance of some kind. You must try to think of EVERYONE in your life who has contributed, in some way, to your well-being. Even though it may be impossible to think of them all, you must TRY.

Now, this isn't going to be easy. You'll have to concentrate and recall your past in detail. You can't name everyone, of course, because you don't know the names of all those who have been helpful to you in some way. But the object is to try.

Make every effort to name all those who befriended you or who touched your life in some way.

If you can't name a person, just put something. For example, you could write, "the stranger who pulled me out of the path of a speeding car when I was seven."

You can spend days doing this, but it isn't necessary to take that long. Just do your best.

I've seen people come up with over a hundred names. They spent a week wracking their brains. Of course, if our memories served us correctly, any of us could come up with a thousand names.

See how many you can put together.

The power of this exercise is in the painstaking process of trying to remember all the people who have helped you to live a happy life.

Just sit down and think and write names. As you go through the process, a new awareness will dawn upon you, guaranteed, assuming you take it seriously and take your time!

Try this wonderful exercise, and see if it doesn't open some doors.

One of the reasons for doing this is to see how much we depend upon others, and to gain a brand new appreciation for our relationships. Believe me, it will make an impression on you.

Once you realize the full extent to which you have been helped and aided by the good will and good deeds of others, it will be difficult to continue being a martyr to self-pride. This exercise will humble you.

When I did the exercise, I felt a huge debt of gratitude. I realized how fortunate I had been. It changed the way I saw myself and others.

## **Losing faulty expectations will lighten the load in your relationships and pave the way for nurturing your relationships more.**

My NDE gave me the insight to replace unfair expectations with a new expectation for myself. One which would soon have me spending more time nourishing and giving my relationships a little more Tender Loving Care.

### **Expectations that sink Relationships**

Unrealistic expectations create distress in a relationship. Let's take a look at some of the most common ones:

1. Expecting your significant other to do everything for you and spend the bulk of his/her time serving you. **Only one person wins that way.**
2. Another unrealistic expectation is that of **wanting your relationship or spouse to be perfect**, or feeling that it needs to meet the expectations of others.

No one is perfect, although many try to be. This is one of the underlying influences of anorexia. The need to be perfect and to have that perfect body.

Sometimes we think if we are perfect we'll be sure to win love. But why try to hide the fact that you are a human being? People will love you even if you are imperfect. In fact, they will love you more.

3. A related expectation is that of trying to uphold a certain image in the family or community. Many families feel they have to **project a successful image**. They cover up their family members' faults and shortcomings or failings. They invest so much energy in making a good appearance and waste so much time on looking good that they neglect the real relationships in the home.

Everyone in the community can see right through them, but they go on upholding their pristine, upstanding image.

4. Another is expecting too much too soon. Some young couples want to have it all and have it now: educations, jobs, the ideal marriage, the perfect children, the respect and admiration of everyone in the community.

**This is a twofold problem:** one, it doesn't work that way; two, you don't enjoy it if you get it all overnight.



The beauty of having a lofty dream is the effort it takes to work it out. And when you finally reach your goal, you are so much more grateful and you enjoy it so much more than if it had been handed to you.

If someone comes up to you and offers you a million bucks, all for nothing, SAY NO!

**5. Okay, one more faulty expectation.** This may be an extension of expecting someone to make us happy . . . some folks expect marriage to be pure bliss and their partner to be a total turn-on all the time.

Some people expect their partners to be forever exciting . . . and the relationships to be terribly blissful at all times . . . but it's always the other person's responsibility to keep it exciting for him/her.

The expectation is for the other person *to be spectacular and the relationship to win the everlasting bliss award.*

As soon as the relationship bogs down and gets a bit boring, the impatient partner disappears. Such a person's tombstone should say, "**Here lies a thrill seeker.**" A relationships roller coaster rider. When the thrill is gone, he or she is gone.

**If you get a flat tire you fix it, right? You plug the hole. What if you bought a new tire and discarded the old one every time?**

Such a person is becoming more prevalent in our society.

Contrast this type of person with one who has the courage to face the problems, do his/her share to improve the relationship and make it interesting and exciting again.

**Thrills are not the stuff of deep, soul-gratifying satisfaction.**

You want deep, abiding, soul-satisfaction? That's what enduring, committed relationships are made of. If you want that kind of joy you feel in your bones, that quiet but exciting sense of soul-satisfaction that you can only get from being with someone you know very, very well, you have to stay with your relationship *long-term.*

I didn't understand this when I was young, but the most wonderful relationships are the ones we keep for a lifetime, or a very long time. Every year we grow fonder of our relationship partner. Every hard time our relationship endures brings us into a deeper and sweeter abode.

The more intimately we get to know someone (and the more we can be known) the more the relationship can give us. If we can weather the hard times, we will settle into a mature and inwardly gratifying love. Something far greater than any temporary liaison can produce.

But we must keep our sense of humor. We must find ways to be creative and resourceful during the hard times, and go into troubled waters with the understanding that our perseverance will be rewarded in time. Our relationship will be strengthened.

If we develop an ethic of giving and serving more, we'll live more. It really is more blessed to give than receive.

When we give to others, we are giving to ourselves.

Giving nourishes us in unthinkable ways. Our relationships provide us with numerous channels for expressing our love, and they provide opportunities for giving.

Yet each of us must remain responsible for our own happiness. We must give, more than take. We must invest in our relationships, our careers and our own health and welfare. We must be responsible for making good decisions and keeping ourselves safe and sound.

### **The Lonely Hero**

In various spiritual traditions around the world, there is a version of the idea whereby the seeker goes off on a trek to be alone and seek union with God. Priests live in monasteries, cordoned off from society. Hindu holy men live in austere huts in the Himalayas, fasting and basking in silent reverie. Buddhist monks sit in the silence and seek nirvana through secret meditations.

When native tribes populated America, courageous braves climbed mountains and canyons to sit atop ridges and cry for visions, while fasting and sitting in the silence. They would not leave until their thirst for a revelation had been satisfied.

The archetype of the artist is similar. The artist leaves the community and goes off in search of bold and creative ideas, perhaps spending much time in solitude awaiting inspiration, then returns home as a brave hero whose art can shed new light on some aspect of life or humanity.

While this may be a time-honored tradition, one deserving of respect . . .

## **It is as if one has to leave his family and search for truth alone!**

While I find no fault with these time-honored traditions, I have envisioned another way to peace and enlightenment. A way that can be added to the first.

### A NEW PATH FOR THE HERO

Thanks to the painful efficiency of a near death experience, which produced almost instantaneous shifts in my typical ways of thinking about and perceiving the world, I have found another path to happiness and beyond. A path paved by relationships. **A human bridge spanning great divides.**

The path to which I was led is populated with other people – people who nursed me back to health and never left me alone. It is a path all too ignored in our society. An almost forgotten path, consisting of excellent relationships, close family ties and solid friendships, a path which acknowledges the significant role played by others in our lives.

It is a path which is never obscured by individual status or haughty, self-imposed isolation, a universal passageway to peace and harmony, a sacred route which unites people and does not divide them.

A path of heart, courage and honesty, it too can lead one to great awakenings and spiritual discovery, as it has in my case. I have taken many trips to the mountains or forest where I barricaded myself in a quiet cabin or remote lodge in order to seek attunement with my Higher Power and obtain revelations or visions. Almost always I made these journeys alone, or with a dog, but no human company. I did not want anyone to interfere with my meditation.

Isn't it ironic that I should have an experience which led me to a dangerous and distant peak, where I teetered on the razor's edge of death, only to discover the power of the relationships in my life to bring me back to life?

Yes, relationships. I have rediscovered and reaffirmed my relationships, and that has made all the difference in my life.

It is without question a spiritual path, one of truth, honesty and fairness in all our undertakings. It does not matter what religion, if any, we follow. All that is required is the desire for a life of peace and harmony, based on the unshakable conviction that we contribute and gain so much when we give unfailingly to all the people in our lives.

Ideological differences must not interfere. Differences of opinion, race and culture, should not matter. Love is what counts. The ability to love despite our differences and flaws.

Again, I am reminded of George Bailey in *It's A Wonderful Life*. He discovered the hard way that the path to enlightenment and joy may be right before your eyes.

## THE JOURNEY

How do we progress along the path, or move forward in our journey?

The real hero makes tough decisions and changes in himself/herself, and by putting others first and honoring them in powerful ways.

**By making each and every relationship the best it can be, within the scope of each relationship's purpose in our lives, we can wear the shoes of the hero.**

If we are at odds with a neighbor or family member, it means settling our differences and restoring trust. If we have cheated on our spouses, it means asking for forgiveness, making amends and assisting with the spouse's healing. It means vowing to never harm the relationship again.

If we have hurt or abused someone, it means righting the wrong by doing whatever it takes to seek forgiveness, correct the mistake and fulfill the harmed person's needs for recovery and healing.

If we have simply neglected important relationships, the path will lead us to the doors of loved ones where we will enter with a humble heart, seeking to restore old ties.

If we have lived arrogantly and led selfish relationships, it may mean surrendering to the need for personal change and for sharing our lives more meekly. **Whatever our particular situation, treading the path of relationships is no easy task, but one which offers irrefutable rewards for everyone concerned.**

Learning to honor our relationships and getting right with everyone in our lives is a courageous undertaking. But what a joy!

*By making our relationships right, and by devoting our time and energy to rebuilding broken relationships, we make immeasurable progress along the road of life.*

When we have restored or improved our relationships, and we are in the habit of keeping our relationships strong and vigorous, we will find that we have changed. A gradual reconstruction will have occurred. A transformation!

**The act of walking on the relationship path is a willful act of self discovery. It is every bit as powerful as any spiritual hermitage we can build in which to house our dreams for self-discovery and soul-satisfying fulfillment.**

Adventurers climb high mountains and sail dangerous oceans.

But not even Sir Edmund Hillary's conquest of Mt. Everest can rival the personal journey an ordinary person can accomplish by making a gallant effort to master his or her relationships. Conducting superlative relationships takes wisdom, skill and courage, unending effort and tireless persistence.

Yet it can be easy, too. All we have to do is start with one relationship. Make one simple change. Just do it. Don't wait for tomorrow. Don't ask for advice. Don't wait for the new year. Don't fall for any excuses.

Just git 'er done, as a popular comedian would say!

A NICE PLACE TO START NURTURING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS MORE

It can be a lot of fun to shake up your relationships. You can do this by doing something different.

Can you give a simple compliment?

Of course, you can, but that doesn't mean you will. Or you'll make the most out of it. If you're like me, you forget to give genuine compliments often enough. You forget about the power of touching someone in that way.

Let's say you decide to give more genuine and well-deserved compliments. You begin complimenting others more often, or expressing the good feelings you feel about them. So . . .

when you meet your neighbor at the mailbox you search for something kind to say, like, "By the way, Jim, it's great having you as a neighbor."

You don't need a drum roll, and you don't need to wait for the right time. You don't need

to wait for your neighbor to do anything. Just say something positive. Just let him know how you feel.

My neighbor always seems to have a smile on her face, which is pretty remarkable when you think about it. So, I made a point of telling her that I noticed her smile and I found it inspiring. I think she was going through a hard time, and it really cheered her up. I would not have told her that some years ago. I might have wanted to, and I might have thought about it, but I might not have done it.

What would happen if you practiced the art of giving genuine compliments to the point of excellence?

**How would people feel about you? What would they think about you?**

Adding a dose of thoughtfulness can help any relationship to prosper.

**Being a little more thankful in a relationship can make a big difference.**

*Think about this . . . Few people start their day by saying, "Gee, I think I'll work on being more thoughtful and considerate in all my dealings today!"*

But wouldn't it be great if they did? Because that is a goal that can take you somewhere fast!

Forget about taking advantage of people or cheating to get ahead . . . a better and faster way to improve your lot in life is serve and give, and to practice **EXTREME THOUGHTFULNESS!**

HOW does one practice extreme forms of thoughtfulness? By being thoughtful, and then thinking of more ways to be even more thoughtful. There. Simple, huh?

No, it is NOT simple!

Ya know why?

Being extremely thoughtful is a very difficult task, one which requires leaving arrogance, self-absorption and self-centeredness behind.

This separates the pros from the minor leaguers!

It's easy to step on someone's toes or to put yourself first. To grab what you want without considering anyone else. It's easy to be HARD. But it takes guts and class and nerve to be considerate of another, to be truly and fundamentally thoughtful!

## OH, BACK TO THOSE SCARY DAYS

After leaving the hospital in December of 2003, I resolved to tell everyone what I think, as long as it is helpful and positive in nature. I decided to be much more expressive, much more forward.

You can start your journey to developing the best possible relationships anywhere you like. Start where you think you need to start. You can decide what you need to change or do differently. Just do one thing differently at first. Keep it simple, and go for it.

## Self-Inventory

To do your best at nurturing others, you may want to begin by taking a self-inventory. What do you want to change? Where could you improve? How could you be more nurturing (concrete and specific ways)?

Try making a list of ways to nurture people.

Write a description of the kind of relationships you'd like to have. If you want to enjoy closer relationships with your children, then write that down. Decide a good place to start.

Set some basic goals for yourself. But . . . make them goals you might actually achieve!

How?

By putting your heart into them. Set goals that motivate you. Goals you really believe in. Set it high enough to be interesting, yet low enough to be plausible.

And make it a goal you can start going after RIGHT NOW.

If you have the guts . . .

## MAY I SUGGEST GETTING YOURSELF SOME FEEDBACK?

You could ask loved ones what they would like for you to do **differently** in relationships. Get input from those who will tell you the truth, not what you want to hear!

Listen with an open and receptive mind and an honest heart. And never, never, never defend yourself. Listen and say “thank you.” Don’t disagree with what anyone tells you. If you don’t like what you hear, express your gratitude and say, “I’ll take it under consideration.”

If something they said does not fit, that’s fine. Don’t argue with them. Ask people to come clean with you. Listen to their feedback and think it over. You want to use their information to help you assess your relationship habits and patterns.

Others always have meaningful insight. They know us better than we think. And we might not want to hear what they have to say, in case they are right!

Really, really give it some thought, even if you don’t agree with their thinking. You never know. Something they say may grow on you . . . in time.

If no one is straight with you because you know it all, defend yourself or lecture everyone, they will not likely tell you the truth. So, you’ll have to sell them on the idea that you have changed. And promise not to over-react or counteract their input!

The world is full of know-it-alls. It seems they are always in the role of teacher but never the student. (How does anyone get to be a teacher without being a student?) Their relationships are always interesting because of this little problem. It pushes people away and distances those who love the know-it-all the most.

If the shoe fits, you might try being quiet long enough to hear what others have to offer, to see what’s truly in their minds before you start spouting off. No, ensure that you do not spout off. Cultivate the art of listening.

**R** Real Listening!

Conduct all your relationships in a spirit of humility. Nothing can take its place.

Make it a habit. All or nothing.

Only when you are quiet and entrenched in a posture of listening openly will people consider trusting you. Only then will they feel they can safely tell you what they HONESTLY think or feel **without getting lectured or punished in return.**



Relationships require emotional intelligence or skill. This is not the same as intellectual functioning. High IQs do not necessarily equate with great emotional ability. What makes us successful in life and relationships is not intellect, but our emotional resourcefulness.

Being good with people is what it's all about. Yes, relationships! I've seen many brilliant people fail because they could not get the hang of relationships.

Once you've analyzed your past and current relationships, and identified your relationship patterns in need of change, you are ready to get going. Just start somewhere. Take one area in need of change and figure out how you can make a dent in it.

## COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

Sometimes people are reluctant to say what's on their mind for fear of how the other person may respond or because of a negative association from the past. Maybe communication was a problem in their family of origin.

Let's say you are pretty poor at communicating your feelings and this has been a bugaboo in several of your past relationships . . .

you've tended to flee when people asked you to be more expressive and forthright. Or you got mad so as to teach them not to bother you with further insidious requests.

Let's say personal and direct communication isn't your forte, unless it's used to disguise your true feelings or distract people from getting serious.

You could be a veritable master of communication, a well-educated, gifted speaker, yet if you can't deal with the tall order of talking about your true feelings, what good are the gifts of your tongue?

## THE SOLUTION

Speaking truthfully from the heart without playing games or resorting to double-talk is a skill not everyone has. And the lack of it in a relationship is akin to bread made without leavening. It is much easier when you keep your tone of voice even and calm. And you do not raise your voice.

If you ask me, expressing your TRUE thoughts and feelings is a feat of undeniable courage. It may be the single most important gift you can give another person. But, for

some, it is like tearing a chunk of bone out of your arm and giving it to someone.

That's why it takes a strong heart to speak from itself. ☺ A strong heart to speak from the heart.

And for those who have trouble with this, it is the heart which needs training, not the tongue.

Such a problem can prevent you from enjoying terrific relationships, so I'd suggest that you get busy practicing your personal communication skills.

### **SPEAKING FROM THE HEART IN A NURTURING WAY**

How do you speak from the heart when you haven't done it? Well, you just start doing it. Do the thing you're afraid of. Just say what's in your heart.

If you listen to your heart and you know what's there, all you have to do is let it out.

Here are a few simple suggestions:

1. Start by getting rid of fear. Fear never was good counsel. Never was reliable. Fear will only put the brakes on you. Put your peddle to the metal.

2. Focus on what you'd like to be able to say. Get that clearly in mind. Say it to yourself.

That is great practice. Say it to yourself until you like the way it sounds, and it captures exactly what you feel. Say it so your words win for you and the other person.

3. Say what you want to say, while keeping your tone of voice, volume and rate of speech under control, even and relaxed.

- Don't concern yourself with worrying about another's response.

- Don't second-guess yourself.

- Don't even think about failure!

4. Tell the truth. It's easy telling the truth. No need to anticipate the next question or think of a response that fits with all your other lies. Just speak from your heart and tell the truth. But say it in a gentle manner – you needn't throw your thoughts at someone.

– Don't worry about getting hurt, sounding or feeling foolish. You'll feel much more foolish when you can't speak from the heart and you're wondering what's wrong with you!

5. Give it a shot. Give honest, direct communication a chance.
6. Listen respectfully when the other person speaks from his/her heart. Be patient with him/her. Don't attack the other person verbally or defend yourself. Just listen and understand.
7. Give numerous positive and accepting messages to the other person. If you handle the discussion properly, both of you will feel nourished.
8. Should you find yourself getting upset, breathe deeply and evenly and stay calm.

For additional help, consult your local library or bookstore (online or one located nearby). There are tons of books on the subject. And there are coaches and counselors who can help. Get the help you need. Your future relationships will thank you for it.

**The ultimate relationship solution** requires us to shoot straight with people, but in an upbeat way. You are applying the ultimate relationship solution when you speak and live from the heart, and when you share what's in your heart with others. This is not a selective treatment we give to those we know and trust. It is a posture we take with everyone, including those who are working against us. In working for them – in treating them like royalty – we can begin to alter the path they are on. We make them think and possibly reconsider their approach. The solution is about making every single relationship in our lives the best it can be, or at least trying to make every relationship one we can be proud of. It takes courage and honesty. But what a beautiful way to live.

## **ACTIVITY**

**1. Most people are basically honest, yet few tell it like it is. Take a day and practice telling the truth in all your conversations.**

**Avoid any form of exaggeration or stretching the truth. Avoid trying to sell or padding the truth to make it seem more palatable than it really is. Increase your comfort with sticking to the facts.**

**2. Also, practice saying your message in a friendly and gentle manner. This will make it easier for the other person to hear you and give thought to your message.**

## **The Fourth Insight: Celebrate your relationships *now*.**

*Not* tomorrow, not next year, not in the next decade.

Now.

Tomorrow may never come. How easily we slip into the mental paralysis that leaves us feeling as though we will never die. Teenagers are not the only ones who feel they're invincible. When things are going well in our lives, and we feel like we're on top of the world, death seems so far away . . . a distant horizon . . . a reality that awaits us decades from now . . . a far off time when we are in our last years.

How foolish!

That kind of mythic thinking is not only self-deceptive, but it leads us to ignore our relationships, **and to put off doing what needs to be done right now.**

**Another self-deception is the human capacity for waiting for a problem to be solved out of the clear blue.**

So many people spend their lives waiting for something to happen, waiting for things to get better, waiting to address their disappointments.

Waiting for someone to come along and change their fortunes for them. This delusional thinking, better known as the Myth of Happiness, sends many to the dark side.

### LIKE CHARACTERS IN A FAMOUS PLAY

We are like the characters in, *Waiting For Godot*, the play by Samuel Beckett, when we stand around and wait for our lucky break. Beckett's two tramps wait by a tree for someone named Godot, who never shows up.

But the two tramps keep waiting and waiting.

Lucky breaks are made possible by hard work and goal-directed action.

Yet so many people go on waiting for their ship to come in. But nothing happens. And they become disillusioned.

Heck, some people won't even admit their disappointment, nor acknowledge their

relationship problems.

Yet they feel that something is wrong. Someday, they tell themselves they'll make things right. They'll change things. Someday.

**My NDE reminded me that our time together is limited. Tomorrow is no sure thing. We have to invest in our relationships now.**

**Because now is all we have. We no longer have the past. We don't have the future yet. So we must find the joy in our relationships in the moment.**

That's how you make a marriage succeed: moment by moment. You practice a bias for action, rather than inaction. You live and ENJOY each other in the PRECIOUS PRESENT.

**And why is the present precious?**

**Because you're having fun!**

That reminds me of a great book, which I think anyone who is in a long-term relationship or who is already married, should read. Anyone who wants to have good relationships of any kind should read it two or three times.

Heck, anyone who has relationships of any stripe should read it. It's a little gem of a book by Spencer Johnson, M.D. called The Precious Present.

*If you do NOW well, putting your all into your relationships, your life can be so much better. (But that is precisely what we so often fail to do – invest our all into our relationships.)*

**Procrastination  
is lethal  
to  
relationships.**

Many people put off getting help for their faltering relationships, and when they come in for counseling it's almost too late. They push away the voice of warning within. They don't want to deal with it. They hope it will get better. They tell themselves that they'll take care of it later.

What does that accomplish?

### **Do it NOW and Make It Fun**

If you have something to say to your spouse or loved one, say it. If you must do something for the relationship, do it. Don't keep putting it off.

Just say or do it nicely. Remember, relationships are best accomplished with humility and gratitude. It's a stroke of genius, really. If you approach all your precious relationships with humility and a clearly expressed sense of profound gratitude, you will win hearts everywhere you go.

Got anything against winning hearts? Well, I hope not.

*When I had my NDE, my wife was shocked to learn that I was in the emergency room of the local hospital, fighting for my life. She could not believe I had a heart attack. It seemed inconceivable, based on what she knew about me. I was in reasonably good shape, and I was not obese. I took my health seriously and lived cleanly. I was the last person she would have suspected. Even my family doctor was stunned when he learned of my condition.*

Sudden cardiac arrest claims the lives of many Americans every year. There may be little or no warning. Traffic accidents take the lives of thousands. The list goes on. You can't assume that you are going to live forever. Yet many act as if they will.

You know that you and your spouse will not always be together. Every good thing comes to an end. But we tend to tell ourselves the story that we have all kinds of time. Plenty of time. And there is always tomorrow. Time to make things work *later*. *Time to make things better tomorrow.*

*You know, "tomorrow" is a word you can love or hate, depending . . . on how you've lived today, and how you've treated others and yourself.*

*Depending on . . . you guessed it, your relationships.*

It is best to live with the awareness that all things come to an end, to keep an eye on the fleeting nature of existence.

If you remind yourself now and then of how short life is, even when you are young, you will be more likely to give her that extra kiss, or stop being so critical. Never to deceive

yourself. Keep it in front of you. And let the celebration of each and every moment be your revenge.

**It is not a downer to remain cognizant of death.** The downer is to deceive yourself, to try and forget, or to shower yourself with pleasure so you won't have to remember the hard facts, life's unpleasantnesses. The downer is to go on thinking you'll always be young.

The mystics of old taught the importance of keeping one's eye on death. Watch for death out of the corner of your eye. Keeping death in the awareness keeps us honest.

As long as we see that shadowy form around the corner, we'll be well guided in living.

### **An Easy Step You Can Take Toward Celebrating Any Relationship**

Pick one relationship and think of just one thing you could do to cheer that relationship on, to enjoy it more, to bask in its glow.

Go ahead. Take a moment and think. Is there something you'd like to do?

How could you celebrate that relationship?

Make some memories. Think of a way you can celebrate and honor the relationship and have fun with it. Spend time with that person. *Design an afternoon outing or get together that you will be able to remember for years to come.*

Do something memorable. Make it interesting. Or unforgettable, if you can.

#### **FOR A COFFEE LOVER**

I know someone who loves coffee.

So, to celebrate our relationship, and to let her know I feel our relationship is special, I could have a special coffee mug made – a five gallon cup!

I'd have the mug decorated with a floral design featuring hollyhocks, her favorite flower. And I'd have it put on our favorite little table at the Third Street Coffee Shop, but I wouldn't tell her what I was doing. What a surprise! And I'd have the mug filled with issues of her favorite magazine, *Plain and Simple*, and dozens of dark chocolate candy bars, which she adores, and I'd have a cake decorated with these words, "Celebrating Our Relationship."

We'd talk about all the good times. We'd drink coffee. We'd look at photographs from the past. We'd talk and laugh.

And I'm sure we'd arouse a great deal of conversation, which might be fun.

When our visit was over, I'd help her load that five-gallon tankard in her little VW. It would be a day she'd never forget.

A day we'd both go on cherishing for years to come.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Once you have something in mind – a way to celebrate a relationship of your choosing – it's time to decide when and how you can do it. Be CREATIVE. You can spend money or do it for free.

Just ask yourself, "How can you stand by someone and be their rainbow? Be someone's candlelight? Give comfort? Make someone feel good? How can you celebrate this relationship and give it the attention and respect it deserves? How can you have FUN with it? How can you make a memory?"

Get busy dreaming up something cool, will ya? Do it now!

Act on it . . . today.

#### Another Little EXAMPLE

Yesterday I wanted to do something for my wife. She was in the shower. I put on some coffee. The house smelled so good. It was cool out, so I opened some windows. Sounds silly, doesn't it?

But she likes that fresh air. I adjusted the blinds to let lots of light in. That's what she likes – sunshine. I went out and cut some flowers from our weedy garden, put them in a vase, stuck the vase on the kitchen table. When she got dressed and came in to get her coffee, I had a cup of the brew waiting on her, prepared just the way she likes it. Her face lit up like a child's as she discovered all my little surprises.

Surprise! the flowers shouted.

The flowers told her that I was thinking about her, that she was loved, that little things



mattered. The coffee said I am thinking of you, heck, honey, I am always thinking about you – in some way or another.

Picking the flowers myself was a critical difference. Much better than buying flowers.

*The joy for me was in tracking down the flowers, traipsing all over the meadow to find them, and cutting and arranging them in a vase or jar.* That took extra effort. That was more personalized. That was a special gift.

It took me 15 minutes, tops, to do all of that for her. And I enjoyed doing it. In fact, seeing her light up like that was all the reward I needed.

Before my you-know-what, I used to give her little surprises once in a blue moon. Now I make a habit of it. I call it my “surprise attack” plan. Everyone loves surprises.

They don’t have to be big. *Just something to bring a smile.* Something that says “I’m thinking about you and your happiness is important to me.”

Someday I’m going to plant a flower garden just for cutting flowers for all the women in my life – wife, mother, sisters and female friends. And how about the men? Men like flowers, too. I know I do. It’ll have to be a reasonably large garden to accommodate all those important people and to give floral gifts to all those relationships!

Small “thinking of you” gifts don’t have to be just for your partner, but can be for anyone in your life. Everyone likes to be thought of in that way.

## **TIPS FOR CELEBRATING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**

Remember: Often the best thing you can do for a relationship is to spend TIME with someone, making lots of precious moments. Having fun and enjoying yourselves. Forgetting about all your problems.

You may not have to do anything in particular, but enjoy each other’s company. Skippin’ stones or rockin’ on the porch. Just hangin’ out together.

You don’t need alcohol or drugs to FORGET!

You don’t need to engage in unlawful behavior.

You can escape in a productive way by letting go and having some good fun.

- #1 Plan FREQUENT “surprise attacks” for the people in your life.
- #2 Do something fun. Something cheerful. Something that will make anyone smile.
- #3 Keep your surprise gifts small, so you can do things for people more often. It’s the thought that counts, not the size of the gift.
- #4 Give of your time. Nothing says “I care” more than giving of your time to those you care about.
- #5 Send a little reminder of your care and concern. A card with a hand-written sentiment in it. Or enclose a lottery ticket, or gift card. Or take the time to write a letter. Letter writing is a lost art.

A note about writing old-fashioned letters: Snail mail letters are special and people love to receive them. It can also be fun to write a letter. Especially if you compose it on your own stationary. And you take your time and enjoy writing it.

Letters have voice. And it is a special treat to read them.

- #6 Send a personalized e-mail. Or call the person on the telephone. Whatever you do, let them hear from you. Keep your relationships current. Avoid letting them gather moss. Stay in touch.

#7 Take the time to repair the problem NOW. Initiate communication, if you’ve had a disagreement or falling out with someone. Explain what happened or offer an apology. A little effort on your part now can save the relationship a great deal of trouble and grief later.

#8 Be playful.

#9 Give your little gifts and mementos without thought of return.

#10 Speak a little magic from your heart and let people know you mean business. Let the good feelings from your efforts touch them in the depths of their being. Don’t be timid or shy.

Building great relationships takes courage!

And ain’t it a joy to live on the edge?

## The Story of A Great Sandwich

This morning I went to my favorite café to write and grab a bite. The cook took extra care in making my sandwich, and it was absolutely delightful. A small thing, a sandwich, but not so small when you think about it. The wholesome ingredients, lovingly prepared, and the lovely presentation, all make a sandwich more than a sandwich.

What can you do about a great sandwich? You can tell people about it. You can brag about the person who made it and the restaurant which served it. You can say THANKS!

Note: Saying thanks more often will get you **everywhere**. Extreme gratitude, like extreme thoughtfulness, are secret weapons in any self-respecting peaceful warrior's arsenal.

By the way, have you read Dan Millman's book, The Peaceful Warrior?

So . . . a few minutes ago, *I waltzed up to the counter and said to the waitress*, who had brought the sandwich to me in such a warm and friendly manner, I said, "Thank you. You're a great waitress and you make me feel special every time I come here."

That waitress was speechless for a moment, and she thanked me for being a "truly special customer."

*Then I went for the cook*. "Ma'am," I said, "I want you to know that the sandwich you so painstakingly prepared for me was simply one of the best sandwiches I've ever eaten. I savored every delectable bite." And I said it like I meant it!

That woman nearly cried. And she came around the counter and took my hand in her hands and looked into my eyes in a way that said thank *you* a thousand times!

I returned to my writing, and a little later the owner of the café came in and he spoke to me. I said, "Sir, may I have a word with you?"

"Of course, how may I help you?"

"You have a wonderful restaurant here, and your staff are beyond compare. I love this place and I spend many good hours here. It is truly a home away from home for me. The food is excellent and the service priceless."

He looked into my eyes and touched my shoulder. "That is one of the nicest things anyone has ever said to me. I try real hard to make this place work for people, but I rarely get any

feedback. Thank you for letting me know how you feel about us.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

Later, as I was hoisting the strap of my heavy computer bag on my shoulder, the owner said, “Richard, you will always be welcome here.”

Wow. Makes a person feel pretty good.

I left that place feeling like a million bucks. No, **feeling as though someone had given me a million bucks.** I felt blessed. And, for me, the world was and is a better place.

As I drove home, the grass looked greener and the sky bluer, the horses in the pastures were more handsome and the flowers that grew alongside the road were more brilliant and their colors more alive than I remember them.

When you touch others in a genuine and kind way, when you take the time and effort to reach out and extend a hand, *you make the world a better place*, one person and one life at a time. **And there is no better feeling in your soul.**

**Rather than being immersed in myself, my ambitions and miseries, I have found that it is infinitely more gratifying to be focused on the happiness of others.** And when I contribute to their happiness in some small way, my own **happiness quotient** skyrockets!

That is what I already knew and understood in some way before my near death experience. The difference is that now I see it much more clearly! And now I live accordingly. I don’t just think or say it, I live by it. And I allow it to inform my life in every action of every day.

I know this now in the core of my being and it’s ramifications are inescapable. Living this way is a labor of love and alters the very fabric of one’s being. Actually, it isn’t a labor at all. Living any other way is akin to laboring. This is like soaring effortlessly above the world in a joyful arc of being.

Giving feedback is essential. Often people are starving for feedback. But they’re afraid to ask.

**Peaceful warriors keep making deposits in their relationship bank accounts, even during the hard times, because they want their relationships to prosper.**

Some partners get mad at each other and stop everything. Oh, they avoid each other and try to punish each other and they run around with their tails tucked between their legs.

They are focused solely on the problem or hurt they have experienced, making it seem bigger and bigger. They have nothing positive to say to each other, can't even exchange a friendly glance.

But instead of getting mired in all that heavy-handed gloom and doom, it makes more sense to keep the relationship going and communication flowing, to the extent you can.

People who have had a disagreement can STILL enjoy their relationship. You can learn to keep having fun and enjoy being together during these times, if you practice.

Keep the relationship buoyant and you'll feel much better and go through much less STRESS.

The **ultimate relationship solution is the key to solving many of life's problems** and difficulties. It's amazing the good things that can happen once you give your ultimate, your best response to every situation in every single one of your relationships! The answers to questions of happiness, meaning and well being are found in relationships, in simple efforts to improve and make your relationships more dynamic. To put them in a more prominent place in your life. And, in so doing, to elevate yourself to a new level of awareness and enjoyment in your life.

While recovering from my life-altering near death experience, I did a lot of thinking (and contemplating), which allowed me to forge new roads of understanding into myself and others. I began to look at life anew. And, after much soul searching, I formulated a new vision for my life, a new passion and a new way of living.

### **Bottom Line**

*Communicate with the important people in your life. Do what you have to do to let them know they continue to be in your thoughts, to celebrate your love and affection.*

*Do it when you think about it, and don't put it off. Celebrate your relationship by listening and giving, and by acknowledging the beauty of your relationship.*

*And remember to give folks lots of positive feedback. A few minutes of your time can make a difference.*

## **ACTIVITY**

**Okay, let's say you are going to practice giving people a little more feedback today. Positive feedback only.**

**Who could you start with? Well, who is the next person you plan on seeing or coming into contact with? Why not start with him/her?**

**Make a plan to find something positive and complimentary to say to the next person you see. This can seem difficult. Sometimes it's hard to find something worthy of a compliment, right? Well, maybe not. If you LOOK for something good, you'll find it. Start looking . . . it will come to you.**

**Find it and say it.**

## **The Fifth Insight: Relationships Constitute True Wealth.**

*When one is faced with the end of one's life, amazing changes take place in the way one perceives the world.*

One begins to

- take life and the precious opportunities it provides more seriously
- think more deeply
- see relationships in an entirely different light
- see oneself differently
- realize that relationships are extremely valuable
- forget about the money in the bank or the status one left at the office

Some people may overcome their immediate crisis and beat death, only to slowly slide back into their former way of thinking. They feel intense gratitude and joy at first, but lose sight of it as time goes by, as old habits take over.

Some heart attack victims who survive are back in the hospital within one or two years because they failed to make lasting changes in their lifestyles. The diet remains the same. They don't exercise. Or they continue to smoke.

They refused to learn from the experience.

**The fortunate ones make lasting changes.** And they promise themselves to never slip back into their old ways.

When I was on the mend, I promised myself:

**One,** I would NEVER allow my relationships to get away from me again. That I would always keep the changes I had made.

**Two,** I would honor my new optimism, way of seeing and living.

**Three,** I would never allow my loved ones to go through life wondering how I felt about them. I would be there for others, and express how I felt.

**Four,** I would give everything I could give. For the rest of my life. Because that is the only way to live.

**Five**, it wasn't just about making changes in my diet, exercise program and so forth, **it was about having state-of-the-art relationships**. I would try to make all my relationships state-of-the-art.

**Six**, I would live my life like it was more than a read-through. Every day is show time! **Time to live the life I am capable of living.**

And that wouldn't be hard to do because the fifth insight paved the way. **Relationships constitute true wealth.**

Once you've had a near death experience, a perceptual shift may take place, propelling you to take action. You want to make changes that were not even a consideration before. You want to *make things right*, and live as good a life as possible. You may become more expressive and forthright. More considerate. More giving. More concerned about others.

In some ways, I thought I was here for myself. I saw myself as a rugged individualist. Sometimes a loner. I just wanted to be left alone: I thought that was often my ticket to happiness . . . avoiding people . . . staying out of trouble.

Today I draw a much wider circle around myself, and my private world, expanding my idea of being to include people.

Your relationships create a circle around your life. The more high-quality relationships you have, the larger the circle. These relationships are extensions of yourself, or spokes of the wheel of your life. And they are spokes of your influence. They can give you great reach into the lives of others, or they can restrict you. Your relationships ensure that you never have to be alone when you don't want to be, and you need not be an island.

I am here not only to serve others, but to be with others in a profoundly meaningful way. We were made to play on teams, all the teams merging into one grand team.

I already knew that, to a degree, since I was a professional helper, and I chose that profession because I wanted to make a real difference in the lives of others. But the NDE insight went beyond that.

It said, You should contribute to every person in your life. And to the community. You must give of yourself as a way of life, opening yourself to others, sharing yourself. Whether you are wearing your professional helper cap or not.

Life is all about relationships. Invest in your *relationship bank accounts* and you will be



a wealthy person someday. Wealthy in ways the world's richest people may not be.

But, to get TRUE wealth, you must stop thinking of yourself as being so independent. It is only an illusion.

**My NDE taught me that there are no truly independent operators. We are all a part of a magnificent and complicated network, and it takes cooperation and working together for any one person to achieve greatness or happiness.**

**The world is full of people who fail to reach their potential for happiness, and those who suffer from a deficiency of delight, or the inability to feel joy in their daily lives.**

I believe there is a shortage of DELIGHT in the lives of those who have isolated themselves and turned their backs on other people. Delight is a by-product of good relationships, and of living in their aura, the glow of knowing and of being known.

#### A CASE OF GRIEF

One of my clients lost her son. It was ruled an accidental death. He was a typical young adult, just out of high school. Their family was pretty normal, and they had the same kinds of problems most families have.

But they were not ready for this. Although he had made some poor choices in recent months, and although he wasn't perfect, and although his relationships with his parents were strained, Dan left a huge, gaping hole in the lives of family members, friends, church members, teachers and others in the community.

His mother said to me this morning, "Even though you know you love them, you never know just how much they mean to you until your children are gone."

Dan's family misses him.

Their lives will never be the same. Holidays are gone. Family rituals have been set aside. No one can bear to celebrate birthdays any longer. Celebrating birthdays reminds them of Dan because he really got into birthdays.

Every time it storms they are reminded. He loved storms and tracked them. He was thrilled by lightening strikes. His mother couldn't sleep last night because it was storming, and all she could think about was Dan.

Dan has left a hole that will never be filled. Just one relationship can leave a crater.

How important are your relationships?

*More than you will ever know.*

## **Tips On Turning Good Relationships Into GREAT Relationships**

*Tips on how to aim higher in your relationships.*

- *Visualize what your relationship would be like if it were to fulfill it's full potential.*
- **Give more of yourself to build stronger, more resilient relationships that stand the test of time.**
- **Share more of yourself with those you love.** Let them know what's in your heart. Put yourself out there. Say it. Reveal yourself. Don't be a mystery.
- **Take risks** in speaking from the heart and do so in a manner that NURTURES people. Allow yourself to be hurt once in a while. Don't worry about how the other person will respond.
- **Take the initiative to do the loving thing;** don't wait for the other person to do it.
- **Do the loving thing today, not tomorrow.**
- **Give up your fear of rejection.**
- Live with the understanding and conviction that relationships constitute **true wealth; keep relationships at the top of your priority list.**
- **Take care of your fortune.**
- **Invest in the relationships of those you love. Keep giving so your relationships will prosper.**
- **Grow your fortune – increase your relationship riches!**

**Another tip: Don't take your cues from friends who have miserable relationships** or whose lives are a blueprint for broken connections. Aim higher.

My near death experience made me a changed man. Or, I should say, I allowed it to change me. I, too, wanted to give more of myself.

After returning to my normal life, I was determined to do a better job of connecting with others. Determined to make more of a difference in the lives of others. I became more proactive and was able to put myself out on a limb more easily. I started going farther in helping others, giving less thought to myself and more to my loved ones.

**I said, "Here I am world. This is the real me. Come and get what I have to offer. No, I will come to you!"**

So many times in my life I had held back, like there wasn't enough to go around. It was as if I had to save myself for myself. I had to protect myself, to hold myself in reserve. I forced other people to come to me.

But, in some ways, I hid myself so well, people couldn't find me. And quite unintentionally I hid myself from myself. How absurd. How profoundly sad. How misguided.

### **Is There A Limit To What We Can Give?**

If we are talking about money or material matters, then, yes, there is a limit. And I suppose there is a limit to what we can give in other ways. Still, I wonder what would happen if you and your spouse decided you were going to give just a little more to your relationship?

Maybe you talked it over and decided to give more in just one or two ways. Maybe you wanted to be more mindful of the relationship, and a little less devoted to your career. What would happen? That small change could make a big difference.

Maybe you decided to take one more walk together per week. Do you have any idea what one walk can do? It could change a failing relationship, as long *as you refrained from arguing and committed yourselves to having more fun and beating the stress dragon.*

**Balance** is important. If you are spending too much time in one area of your life, cutting back a little and directing more energy to the marriage could be very helpful. You might feel happier and more fulfilled. And your marriage might benefit if you chose to involve

yourself in a community project, instead of spending every spare moment in the office.

### **A Woman Decides To Stop Holding Back In Her Marriage**

A woman I was coaching wanted to stop spending so much time in her career. As we talked about it, we soon discovered that she was feeling a sense of incompleteness in her life, which made her work harder, allowing her career to dominate her life.

But she was feeling incomplete in part because she was robbing her marriage to pay her job.

Once she realized it, she wanted to spend more effort on her marriage. But was afraid to because she felt her husband didn't want the same, she identified the real source of the problem: she was afraid to invest more in that relationship, afraid she wouldn't be able to keep her psychological distance or she would become lost in it, afraid she wouldn't be able to control the relationship *and keep herself from getting hurt*.

And there was something else at work. Through several discussions, we realized that she could not respect herself if she didn't over-achieve at work, that she had never wanted to make a marriage her claim to fame.

That had been her mother's downfall, she noted. And she had always told herself that she wasn't going to make the same mistake.

When she came to understand that her job alone could not make her happy, and no *prominent career could, that leading a balanced life was the solution, her marriage improved*.

She knew what she wanted to do. She decided to talk to her husband and reveal her heart. She began to open herself to her marriage. To allow a new relationship to grow.

She gave to the relationship in new ways. The quiet sense of reticence was gone. No more holding back. She recognized that she had been protecting her fragile sense of identity from the suffocating power of relationships. She told me she had been shielding herself from relationships all her life, that she hadn't felt qualified to conduct them.

My client overcame several pre-existing barriers to her relationships and opened herself to the emerging possibilities. Her life began to change. She felt different inside. She was finally free.

## **Giving Is Not Always About Writing A Check**

Let me return to our discussion on giving. Some people are good at giving from their pocketbooks or possessions. And that is good. But what is so many times better is to give of one's heart. **To share one's heart with others, and to share liberally, that is the essence of love.** Perhaps the ultimate is to do both, if you can, when you can.

**Yes, it takes courage.** But anything worthwhile does. Sharing courageously, taking risks, unveiling inner thoughts and feelings. Sharing one's wishes, deepest longings and regrets, aspirations and dreams, crazy ideas and meanderings, that's what our loved ones need from us; our children and parents, our spouses and friends, that's what they want.

**Pouring one's heart out is a wonderful way to share oneself, and it may be the single greatest gift you can give.** That's what it means to give people what they really need. To let them know us. To show them the truth about who we are. To let our loved ones see and experience us beyond illusion or myth. To be truly naked. To bare the soul. To be honest about our faults. To ask humble forgiveness where needed. To say what we feel without fear of getting hurt. Without concern for what people may or may not give us in return. It doesn't matter what they give back. Or if they give.

**We must strive to know our loved ones better.** Encouraging them to reveal themselves. Giving them the opportunity to walk in the limelight.

We must listen more. Give our FULL attention. Focus on our loved ones more completely while forgetting about ourselves. We must make time for heart-to-heart talks in which we do more listening so we can come to know those we love more fully.

And we need to acknowledge what others do for us more. Let them know we see what they are doing. That we appreciate their contribution to our lives. And let them know in no uncertain terms!

Saying thank you and truly being thankful! (There is a difference.)

**If each person in a relationship strives to share and give of himself courageously and fearlessly with the other, wonderful possibilities emerge for greater intimacy and happiness.**

*Strive to share yourself with others in the deepest, most meaningful way you can.*

*If only one person shares courageously and fearlessly, the other can learn to share in like*

*fashion.*

Tell your loved ones how you feel about them and say it often. *If they have a problem expressing themselves, be patient and show them how, instead of nagging.*

In the movie, *House Of Sand And Fog*, there is a heart-wrenching scene where a father loses a son, and he cries and wails and moans in utter despair, suffering such unmitigated anguish that he can hardly go on. When I saw that scene, I cried. It reminded me of the anguish my own father experienced at my bedside when I nearly died. And the terror felt by all my loved ones. That scene tore me up.

The scene demonstrates the power of love and the utter importance of relationships to our happiness.

Once we realize how much we are loved, it changes us. *Before my heart attacks, I didn't know how much I was loved.* I should have known, but I didn't. I didn't know how much I meant to my family. I could not have known how much was riding on the outcome, how much everyone would be affected by it.

When I saw and felt it, I soared inside. It touched me in ways I didn't know I could be touched. That is what love can do. Yes, it can move mountains.

*When you feel good about yourself, guess what happens to your relationships? That's right, they feel it, too.*

It pays to take care of ourselves and to give to our own development and growth. You may think that goes without saying. But I have spent almost three decades in the mental health business, and I can assure you that many professionals do not give themselves adequate care.

Maybe they don't see the need for it. Or they think it isn't gratifying enough. Possibly they are overwhelmed with the handling of their clients, trying to make their lives better. In any case, the sad result is always the same. Everyone suffers. Especially the person who is neglecting the relationship with himself.

As a result of my NDE, I had a newfound appreciation for the need to take care of myself. And to do it right. Not to neglect the job.

Neglecting one's health could be the last tragic mistake a person makes.

We must pay attention to ourselves. We must love ourselves. And that means, among other things, to be responsible to the self.

Not to ignore our duty. Not to cheat ourselves. Not to tell ourselves that others are more important. Yes, I want to give more to others, but I also intend to give more to myself.

### **ACTIVITY**

**Jot down a few ideas in your relationship notebook about how you can enhance your relationship with yourself. All your relationships are part of your total wealth. But so often we ignore this one.**

**Think of a few ways you can give yourself better care. They don't have to be lavish.**

**What could you do to take better care of yourself, lower your stress or improve your relaxation regimen?**

**If you start to give yourself more time, perhaps for being alone or exercising more, how exactly would you like to spend it? Jot it down in your planner. Make a date with yourself and make it happen.**

## **THE SECOND REVELATION: CHANGE BEGINS WITH ME**

I suppose it is human nature to point our finger at others when something doesn't go right. And to demand other people to give us what we believe will make us happy.

This is the story of relationships.

We get into a relationships to get something. If we don't get it, or the relationship goes awry, we immediately ask or tell the other person to change . . . assuming that if he/she changes life will get better.

In a marriage that is in trouble, two people are pointing their fingers at each other and simultaneously demanding the other to change and improve . . . or else!

And so change, when it comes to relationships, is usually about the other person.

But . . . that doesn't usually work.

What works is welcoming and bringing change about in yourself.

My Near Death Gift illuminated this idea. It made me want to be the first to change. It made me feel differently about my relationships.

I felt that blaming someone else for my unhappiness was no longer kosher. I naturally wanted to take the initiative to start the wheels of change turning in my life. And so the question was no longer, "What can the other person do for me?"

But what can I do to lead change in this relationship? How can I make a positive difference? Are there ways I can support my partner in any changes he/she wants to make?

Support, I said.

Not "are there any ways I can force my partner to change?"

My NDE helped me to realize that if I am unhappy with a relationship, then it is up to me to become responsible and start nourishing it more, to take those steps that will promote positive movement.

And so, I finally understood that change must begin with me.



## **The Sixth Insight : Push Yourself and Polish Your Relationship Skills**

Rather than focusing on the other person's need for improvement, consider yourself a work in progress. **Constantly seek to polish yourself and your relationship skills. This will benefit your relationships infinitely more than expecting others to change or trying to make them different.**

When we focus on the need for others to change, we become part of the problem. A critic. A judge. A superior.

No matter how much you may love yourself, or how stuck on yourself you may be, no matter how terrific you may think you are, or how superior or gifted, please, whatever you do, please save all your energy for improving yourself . . . and not other people.

### **The flaws don't matter.**

When I saw people after my NDE their flaws had melted away. I realized I needed to see people more positively ALL the time because that is the only way to live. People are far more beautiful than we realize. It's the good in people that matters.

I knew I needed to live with this kind of vision of others. It does no good to be critical, and it only takes the relationship down.

Because of my NDE I wanted to be kinder and more forgiving. I wanted to change the way I saw and approached people. I wanted to live with love in my heart for everyone

If you must . . .

Pretend that you have had a frightening and eye-opening near death experience, and that all of a sudden you realize the true meaning of all your relationships. As a result of your brush with death, you want to apologize to your friend, you want to love and give much, much more . . .

and you want to inject new life and energy into all your relationships.

Imagine that everyone you know sees a wonderful change in you. Imagine the possibilities as your relationships (and your entire life) become more gratifying and genuine. ☺

Make like George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) after his visit from the angel in the famous and fabulous 1946 movie, *It's A Wonderful Life*.

Talk about something that illustrates the power of human bonds, this movie says it all. George is saved from death only to discover the true meaning of his life. If you haven't seen this, by all means watch it as soon as possible. It's not just a holiday movie. It's one you can see any time of the year. Powerful, riveting stories about human redemption are great anytime.

#### ACTION STEP

Let's do a little relationship searching . . . in each of your relationships, ask yourself what you could do to be **a better relationship partner**.

You may be a great relationship person, but I bet you could find a way to improve a little.

My Near Death GIFT taught me to never rest on my laurels. Always ask what I can do to be a better person, and how I can better serve my relationships.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What can you give that you haven't?
- How could you do the relationship thing better?
- Honestly now, how can you improve yourself?

We should go through life this way, asking what we can do that we haven't done. Finding ways to enhance our contribution to the lives of others.

**What kinds of changes can you make in yourself that will make the people in your life happier?**

That is the question.

Raymond Carver and Anton Chekhov, two of the greatest story tellers of all time, rewrote their stories almost endlessly, cutting and paring down, trying to make the story pop, eliminating inferior language and misplaced words. Leaving us with a sense of sparkling clarity, beautifully chosen language and efficiently crafted sentences. Dazzling in their simplicity.

A few writers have been known to continue polishing their work even after it has been published!

Every great artist revises. Every great soul endeavors to improve. Every great lover is always improving his/her understanding and skills.

Without constant improvement you can't be great. Greatness in anything demands incessant effort to be the best you can be.

Great relationships don't rest on their laurels. No, they rest on us! ☺

**Great relationships consist of two individuals who are always seeking to be the best they can be!**

## QUIZ

Let's take a little quiz.

**Question:** *How do you make others better? What is the ONLY way in the world you can make someone else better?*

**Answer:** *By making yourself better, and being an example and inspiration.*

By constantly growing yourself you keep your relationship from becoming complacent, and you grow the relationship.

As soon as you stop improving yourself, your relationship is in trouble.

When your relationship is comfortable, you are in trouble.

Think about romantic relationships for a moment. As soon as you think you know your spouse and know how to please him/her, that's when trouble begins. Keep inventing and re-inventing. Learn new tricks. Experiment and innovate. Go to the extra effort to love in a more gratifying and elegant way.

Some couples slide into a rut and there they remain, with no idea how to get unstuck.

They resist changing anything in their lives. They attempt to hold onto the comfort level they have, which only causes it to slip away.

Remaining in that changeless position only leads to BOREDOM. Trying to hold onto what you have, keeping things the same, doing things the same old way . . . what you get is MORE BOREDOM.

We all know that variety is the spice of life, but how easily we forget.

Even highly skilled, devoted and loving mates can improve. EVERYBODY can! If you love yourself, as you should, you will want to grow yourself, constantly seeking to change for the better, and striving to be the best person you can be for your beloved.

**In other words, each of us should strive to bring the best person possible to our relationships . . . not second best.**

### TRUE SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Some people mistakenly think self-improvement is what you do when you figure out a new way of manipulating or controlling others!!!

Alas, that is not self-improvement . . . and it does nothing for your relationships.

As long as we are focusing our lens on other people and polluting our minds with thoughts about what they should do differently, we are not going to change ourselves. Self-change can only come when we are directing our energy to the real source of our angst, ourselves.

And self-change is the ONLY kind of change that leads to better relationships.

### SUCCESS STORY

After I left the hospital, I worked with someone who complained that his office mates didn't treat him well and gave him too little respect. He was focused almost exclusively on their shortcomings. He harped on the unfairness of the situation.

The more he complained the worse it got. The more isolated and alone he felt.

We worked out a plan for him to become more considerate at the office, saying thank you more often and stopping to acknowledge the efforts of his peers more often. We started small and kept it subtle, and worked up to larger things.

*I asked him to set aside his angry feelings while he was doing this and to focus only on*

*what he could do to be a more thoughtful and helpful employee.*

You know what happened.

Gradually he started to earn the respect and admiration of his office mates. Their perception of him began to change. They began to view him as a sincere and caring person. People started to include him more often and get closer to him. They gave him their trust. They confided in him. Soon he no longer felt left out.

In a short time, he became a popular and well-liked guy.

My client's situation changed because he had the courage to examine himself and make changes in himself that would make it possible for others to change, too.

Any time we are concentrating on someone's shortcomings, it becomes difficult to see the good in them. We are aiming low, rather than high. We are fixing their faults into a kind of mental cement.

**There is considerable** power and wisdom resident in *curbing the unfair and outlandish expectations we place on others, and in demanding more of ourselves and less of them.*

We often carry expectations into our relationships that we may not be aware of, expectations that pile responsibility onto others. Expectations that demand action of others. But do we ask the same of ourselves?

**When we let go of our expectations of others we can more easily begin to assume full responsibility for our own lives.**

After my NDE, I began to make a variety of adjustments in my way of relating to others, and in my relationship with myself, too. I wanted to be more responsible to others and myself.

*For example, I started having more FUN and being more POSITIVE, which had the effect of making everyone feel good. Although not always easy to do, both are very rewarding and they are synergistic.*

Along with being more fun-loving and relaxed, I worked to be less critical and demanding. They go hand-in-hand, you know.

I enjoyed each moment of my day more, and tried to make the most of every situation.

This was contagious, and it benefitted others. And me. More on this later.

*When you are making positive changes in yourself, you become more **awake** to the possibilities in your life. It's easier to find and enjoy the beauty of every moment of the day. You become more alive, and more fully invested in the potential of each and every moment to transform your life. You are not trying to change others, just yourself.*

*And does that feel good to give up the pressure of having to impose change on other people!*

***Awaken to the possibilities inherent in your relationships by looking at yourself and striving to be more giving and less selfish.***

The changes I made were so small, it seemed. But they had big impact.

If I went out for coffee, I tried to make the waiter or waitress laugh. If someone opened the door for me at the bookstore, I made double sure I thanked them in a friendly and courteous way. I went out of my way to be a more pleasant person.

If I had to do something unpleasant I did it with a smile. I found a way to make hard things more pleasant for others.

My experiences in the hospital left me feeling like a new man. And I had a new passion for life. Naturally, I wanted to share it. Sharing that sense of joy and beauty and gratitude enabled me to shine my little light everywhere I went. And it felt so good!

My experience showed me that it was possible to be this way all the time.

You don't have to have a NDE to wake up and make your life shine!

I became a kind of ambassador of good will to everyone. If I saw an animal confused by traffic and in danger of getting hit, I pulled my car over and went after him, as long as I didn't endanger him more. I wanted to be very careful not to do harm to others.

#### ONE OF THE COOL THINGS ABOUT MY NDE

That near death gift inspired me to try and be as helpful as possible, going out of my way, taking risks, if necessary, to help others . . . all of which flew in the face of my more passive approach earlier.

I knew that people and other creatures were worth it. Suddenly I realized it is as much my job as anyone else's. My NDE showed me it was my job.

It gave me a shot of old fashioned responsibility.

What a great way to live your life!

Without being RESPONSIBLE great relationships are impossible. Responsibility is often what separates the wheat from the chaff.

I saw the power in the old nun's motto: "Do good and disappear." What a great way to live your life.

And I began to apply that concept to ALL of my relationships. To stop and consider at length what people mean to me.

**Friendly Suggestion:** Stop and consider how you might apply the nun's motto to your relationships, the ones you have noted are in need of attention.

Write a list consisting of three relationships. Now think of a little something you could do for that person. Write what you'll do next for each relationship.

Now . . . be like a nun and do some good.

And disappear.

## **The Seventh Insight: Stop trying to change people.**

What happens when someone points his finger at us and demands that we change? If you're like most people, you'll resist. We don't like it when someone tells us what to do. Especially when someone tries to *force* a change upon us.

It is human nature to act the opposite of how someone attempts to make us behave. The harder they try to make us do something they want us to do the more we resist. We feel it is unfair, and we rebel or resist in all kinds of ways.

There are both passive and aggressive ways to resist. But, most of the time, resist we will.

If someone is trying to force us to change, we may question their love for us. We may resent them for taking such an underhanded tact. If they demand that we change, the relationship may be threatened.

Forcing change does not work. And it makes people feel inferior; they must not be good enough.

Chances are, we are not going to change until we want to change. Only then will our heart be in it. Only then will we be able to maintain the change and make it last.

When we are reduced to controlling the behavior of others, we aren't going to have a very good relationship. There will be dire consequences for this kind of behavior.

Forcing people always backfires. And it puts us in the position of enforcing or overseeing the changes. We end up placing our energy in the wrong direction; instead of being an equal partner, we become an enforcer, a supervisor or parent.

**The best relationships happen when neither person tries to control the other, and when each spouse accepts responsibility for making changes within himself or herself, there is no need to place demands on the other.**

In the spirit of making a relationship work, it is always best to be responsible for making the changes you need to make, and to give up policing your friend.

My NDE helped me to see the importance of relaxing the demands we place on people. There is no point in investing time and energy in getting others to change. Just take care of yourself. Do the best you can to be a responsible and fair person, and give up trying to change the other person. It isn't your job and it won't work.



The resentment you create will drive the relationship south.

In marriage, it is all too convenient to blame your spouse for your shortcomings or unhappiness – or whatever goes wrong. (And to expect the spouse to fix it. To rescue you by taking responsibility for *your* problems.)

Focus your attention on what you can do and not what your partner can do to make the relationship better. When you provide that kind of leadership, you open the door for change. When and if your partner wants to change.

If your relationship partner sees you making an effort to improve yourself, he/she will be more likely to embark on a self-improvement plan, as well.

By forcing someone to change, you close the door. So give it up. And save your relationships.

STOP controlling because controlling BACKFIRES!

And stop because it's the only decent thing to do. How do you like being controlled?

SEE THE BEAUTY

If you enter a room and find your spouse there and you immediately begin thinking, Oh, how I wish you were different, how I wish you weren't like that, and if only you were more like this or that, you will miss seeing who your spouse really is.

You aren't seeing the beauty.

Stop picking and remind yourself of what drew you to this special person in the beginning. **See the beauty that lies hidden there.** Think about the traits you admired when you first met him/her. Think of those good things. Think of the special love you have cultivated all this time.

Give up the need to make your loved ones conform to your perfect standard. Find the beauty that they have and let that be enough. Have the courage to accept their faults and stop trying to change them.

Otherwise, you will drive them off!

Throw away your bottle of PERFECT PILLS.

Perfectionism is so tedious. We can try to be perfect or demand that others be.

When we expect someone to be perfect, we are wanting them to meet our expectations for how they should be. OR HOW WE COULD NEVER BE.

To cry and complain, criticize and condemn (my Four Cs), is to drive our friendships away. To destroy relationships. We do that when we believe ourselves to be perfect. At least we act as if we are perfect.

## PROBLEMS ARE NOT WHAT WE THINK

So often our problems are not really problems, but hidden opportunities for change. Every problem in my life is an opportunity for change. By marshaling my resources and making a strong effort to solve a problem, I discover new strengths and build additional skills that help to make me a better, stronger person.

I may forge new alliances and find new avenues of self-discovery. New relationships may come my way. Climbing out of my shell and doing something about a problem will be a rewarding experience, if I allow myself to see it that way. If I succeed in combating the pessimistic attitude that can so easily dominate my thinking without my realizing it.

Something tells me I'm not a whole lot different than most other folks in this regard.

The trick lies in seeing your problematic situation in a different way.

And in building up your optimistic approach. Once you've stirred up your enthusiasm for tackling the problem, you're ready to begin.

**In every relationship there are those perfect opportunities for solving problems, lying in wait. If only we would sense their presence and seize them! If only we'd see them for what they are! Even the stubborn problems and challenges in our relationships are opportunities for new discovery and inner growth.**

Problems can stretch a relationship and make it better.

You may, for example, believe you've damaged an especially important relationship and so . . . you react by avoiding the relationship, and by not doing anything about it. You may choose to run or hide.

But, if you face the issue and go to the person you've offended, offering a sincere apology

and telling the person how very important the relationship is to you, you may just make that relationship BETTER than ever!

I've seen it happen hundreds of times.

The other person will respect you and forgive you. (But keep in mind, not all forgiveness happens overnight, and you wouldn't want it to be that easy. Sometimes we have to invest a lot of time and energy in making a serious problem better. And people need time to heal, if the hurt was deep enough.)

Why do we expect people to think exactly like we do? Why do we want our friends and family members to hold the same views? And why is it a problem when we disagree?

It's as if we think someone doesn't care about us if they think differently. But how absurd.

What was revealed to me is that we are being unfair to people when we hold them to such ridiculous expectations. **We should expect and appreciate differences in our relationships, not try and destroy them.** Differences are only normal, and they're good.

Just imagine how boring your relationships would be if you only had relationships with those who thought, and believed and acted just like you!

I used to try and convince people of my views on politics, religion and what-not. Now I don't care what they think about those hot topics. I'm no longer interested in getting them to agree with me. That's not the basis of my interest in relationships.

**What I saw while in the hospital is that only the similarities matter.** Our common ground. And this is where we should concentrate our energy.

We should use our likenesses to build bridges and solidify our connections. If we concentrate on the similarities, we will view the relationship in glowing terms. But if we focus our attention on the differences, we will unconsciously expand the perceived rift between the other person and ourselves.

The secret to forming enduring relationships is to stop letting the differences divide us. And to switch our attention from the differences to the likenesses.

To unite!

The differences are almost always smaller than we think, anyway.

When we focus on the regrettable differences between our mates, family members and friends, and ourselves, we automatically set it up in a way that emphasizes their shortcomings. It's like we are thinking, they're inferior to me because they don't agree with my views on things.

**If only they were more like me, myself and I!**

**To enjoy great relationships we must let go of our need to remake the people we care about in our own image.**

You'll find more about this in the seventh insight.

### **An Eye Opening Experience**

When I was undergoing my ordeal in the hospital, I was filled with the desire to make constructive changes in my life. I sincerely wanted to be a better person.

And I was frustrated with myself for not having done more to improve my relationships in times past. Really ticked off that I had actually neglected some. I didn't like the self-centered nature I found in myself, the selfish behavior I had manifested.

Oddly enough, I was no longer interested in changing the people in my life! How could I worry about them?

I found no pleasure in focusing on others' faults or mistakes. I realized how counterproductive that was. It felt underhanded, too.

☛ How much better to focus on yourself, and to give the very BEST effort you can give, and be the best friend you can be. Just trying to do that makes an amazing difference in the way you feel about YOURSELF!

Real love is about acceptance . . . pure acceptance . . . and the wisdom to avoid trying to change or control people.

Just let them be and love them the way they are.

As a result of your love, it will be easier for them to change and grow in stature . . . to change in so many ways.

But if you don't give them complete acceptance and unconditional love, you won't be helping them.

You'll only be controlling them. Those who are controlled are enslaved. Is that what you want?

☞ One of the best ways to love unconditionally is to love as much when you are disappointed in your partner as when you are not. Never handle your disappointment over something by taking it out on your partner or punishing someone.

☞ Another is to be darn sure you love people in spite of their faults. Withholding your love will not cause someone to change in a positive direction.

(You may get some change, but it ain't gonna be what ya bargained for!)

☞ And to love in a way that liberates a person, preserving their freedom of choice in all things. And never use power or privilege in relating to someone, but strive to be humble and real, meeting him/her in an equal place.

### **Activity**

**Ask yourself what you could do . . . what step you could take . . . to make your love for someone MORE unconditional.**

**Is there some small way you haven't exactly given unconditional love?**

**What might you do to practice loving in a more complete and unconditional way?**

## **The Eighth Insight: Focus on Likenesses (Not Differences)**

Number eight is an insight that is very dear to me. It makes such a difference in one's life to see how people are alike, rather than different. I should have seen it all along. I saw the fringes, but did not grasp the central truth until my NDE.

As long as you are trying to change someone, you are automatically focusing on differences. As soon as you switch your change focus to yourself, you make it easier to become aware of the many ways in which you and another person are alike.

Although people in a relationship often become fixated on their differences, and allow the differences to divide them, the differences should not matter.

We make a big deal of our disagreements and differences of opinions, yet that only degrades the relationship. And lowers each person's dignity.

I repeat, the differences between people are not important.

**When close to death, I had a novel thought: Differences? What differences? All that counts is our love for one another.**

The more different someone is, the more we should make an effort to understand and love him!

**Like Virginia Satir, world renowned family therapist, used to teach her clients, it's a person's differences that makes him or her unique.**

That's what makes him/her more lovable.

And beautiful. Families should honor the differences between family members and avoid pressuring members to be alike.

Differences really are good!

**It's the love we share that counts, not our differences. But you can focus your attention on either. That's a decision you have to make.**

We dwell on that which separates us, and become angry or critical, which separates us even further. It's as if we are looking for ways to split people apart.

*My **brush with death** showed me that differences in a given relationship are, for the most part, quite petty.*

They only matter because we think they do.

Our minds have been conditioned to divide and conquer. But the differences just don't matter.

The love we share does matter. Being there for each other matters. Accepting each other without judging and criticizing matters.

Learning to love despite the petty differences truly does matter.

For some, the ideal friend is an idealized self-image. It is an infantile expectation. Why do we need to have our loved ones just like us? The truth is, if they were just like us we wouldn't be attracted to them in the first place.

**We tell ourselves that we can't connect with someone unless they think, act and believe just like we do.** How ridiculous can we get?

If we find excuses for not connecting and reasons that our relationship can't work, the failure of our relationship will be a self-fulfilling prophesy.

## FATHERS AND SONS

My father and I do not always think alike. We line up on opposite sides of many issues. I'm right brain dominant. He's left brain dominant. He tends to be traditional. I gravitate toward the non-traditional, always questioning everything. I am a walking question mark.

Dad and I have argued about many subjects, gotten angry and frustrated over the smallest disagreements, each wanting the other to come over to his side! There have been times that we couldn't speak to each other without getting into an argument. I'm ashamed to admit it.

*When I had my heart attack* dad dropped what he was doing and caught the next plane to Lexington. He stayed with me until I was stable and ready to go home from the hospital. That cost him a lot of money and time. He was there for me, no matter what it meant.

And it meant a lot. It meant more than I can put into words.

As I saw him standing by my bed, as he put his hand on my arm reassuringly, as he tried to make me laugh, **I realized how much I loved that man.** And how much he loved me. It no longer mattered whether he was a republican or democrat, liberal or conservative, and it didn't matter who he thought was the best quarterback in the NFL or who made the finest sports car in the world. None of the things we had argued about over half a century had any importance.

All that mattered was that he cared enough to come to be there. He was my father and he would do *anything* for me. I saw it so clearly. And that was all that counted. It made me feel so good.

I cannot say enough about how his presence gave me great comfort. It settled me down, gave me reassurance and courage. I can't explain the psychic affect it had, just knowing my father was there. It was overwhelmingly beneficial. I *needed* him. You only have one father. And he is always special to you.

**As I lay on a narrow cot in ICU, wondering if another heart attack would strike at any moment . . .**

**wondering if I would live another day**

**listening to the cries of distress that ushered from the surrounding cots**

**all the disagreements and foolish disputes of a lifetime were suddenly rendered invalid.** None of it amounted to a hill of beans.

My heart was no longer full of pride, arrogance and righteous indignation. My heart was almost broken – literally and figuratively – and my father came to me as a frightened little boy who feared for his son's life, and who felt that nothing could be more important in the entire world than his son's recovery. As he had done many times before, *he was actually living for me.*

***What an amazing gift, a parent's love.***



Not only that, but he and my step-mother had the passengers in their plane praying for me on their way to Lexington. Just imagine. A jet plane full of people who didn't even know me, and they were praying for my survival.

Because of the love of my dad and his wonderful wife.

Heck, I found ways to be critical **before**, but not now I **am slow to** criticize.

There is no reason to criticize people. Certainly no reason to criticize my dad. He's wonderful! My dad and step-mom are truly wonderful people. They have real stature. They are great in my eyes.

In fact, as far as I'm concerned, they're *saints*.

I love, respect and adore them. They would do anything for me, and they made every effort to help me when I was facing the biggest challenge of my life.

When dad came to see me, it didn't matter if he expressed an opinion with which I didn't agree. All I saw in that man's face was LOVE.

While they were with me in the hospital, my father and step-mother comforted me in every possible way. They adjusted the pillow behind my head, got me whatever I wanted to eat. They supported me in the many decisions I had to make, all while enjoying themselves and going about everything in a positive way.

And that made a big difference.

Yes, they lifted my spirits and inspired me. Yes, they made me laugh. Yes, they pointed the way to a problem-solved future.

They kept a positive attitude and gave me HOPE. From where I was lying, fairly helpless and dependent upon others for care, their support meant a great deal to me, and helped me to get well quickly.

Sometimes we need to think about the good things that our loved ones give us, instead of thinking about what we wish they would give us or what someone else could give us.

Fathers should not be so hard on their sons, and sons should not be so hard on their fathers.

Also . . .

My NDE taught me that we should never allow anger to control our relationships.

For some months after my hospital stay, it was almost impossible for me to stay angry for long. I did not anger easily and I was quick to forgive. I still got angry, but it would be over faster than in the past.

Something about dying and coming back had changed me.

Grudges I had once held were gone. I was filled with forgiveness and gratitude. If something didn't go well, that was fine. If someone disappointed me, that was fine, too. I could accept disappointment without retaliating. I had only love to give. Only love had been given to me.

After the heart attack, one of my strongest realizations was about the petty disagreements we have for no good reason. How foolishly we treat one another and how easily we tear down our relationships! And for what?

All because someone said something to hurt our feelings. Or something didn't happen the way we wanted it to. Someone didn't do right by us. Or we failed to receive the recognition we wanted.

Or they voted for the wrong political candidate.

I mean, come on!

Whether you're a democrat or republican, a conservative or liberal, shouldn't matter unless you're one of those rabid talk show hosts. It takes all kinds of people to make up the world. And all kinds of opinions.

One isn't necessarily better than another.

**In my darkest hour, I saw how much my loved ones meant to me.** Loved ones of every stripe! And how much I meant to them!

The full realization of their love changed me.

Did I care what they believed about UFOs or ghosts, or what position they took on the various wars in the world?

No, I did not.

This was a shocking revelation! I realized there was no reason to do anything but to love and cherish people every day of my life.

I no longer had a quarrel with anyone. I no longer felt that those things which had divided a few of us amounted to anything.

I saw the truth about relationships. Relationships are godsend. Manna from heaven.

*To squander a relationship is to waste a precious gift.*

## PREVENTING ARGUMENTS AND UNNECESSARY DEBATES

Let's say you went home for the Thanksgiving holiday and you spend three or four days with your family of origin.

Let's say you want everything to go smoothly and you want the family to have a wonderful time together.

But when you least expect it, your sibling says, "What do you think of the President and the job he's doing?"

Now you realize that he is a supporter of the President's administration but you are a critic, that you have remarkably different opinions about the subject. So you want to avoid falling into the trap . . .

Because you know that previous attempts to talk about the subject ended in a terrible squabble.

So, your sibling or parent or whomever says, "It's about time we've got the right party in congress, don't you think?"

What can you do to avoid a needless argument?

Try being assertive.

### **Hypothetical example**

You could say . . . "You know, I don't think I want to get into a discussion on politics

right now. I'm concentrating all my energy on having a good time."

"Sure, I understand that, but don't you think it's important . . . what's going on in this country?" your sibling says.

"Yes, and I think it's important for me to take a break and enjoy myself. So let's not discuss politics on this trip."

"Oh, that's easy for you to say, but I'm concerned about what's happening right before our very eyes. We have the best darn President in office and all anyone wants to do is tear him down. I think it's a disgrace!"

Okay, now, you realize that this person is really trying to draw you in by hitting your triggers or sore spots, by pushing your buttons. If he makes you mad enough, you'll slip into the discussion, which will quickly escalate into an argument. Or big blow up!

So, you must remain centered within yourself and stay calm.

You might say something like, "I appreciate your passion for this subject. You've always had that. But I'd rather talk about how you've been. I haven't seen you in so long!"

"I've been fine, except for worrying about what's going to happen to this country. The world is in terrible shape and if we don't do something about it, it's going to be too bad!"

You might say, "It's Thanksgiving . . . let's talk about dinner or what we're going to do as a family afterwards. I was thinking we could all play a game of Trivial Pursuit or Yahtzee . . . I think we should make a special point to create a truly special holiday memory for the young and old members of this family."

"But I'd rather talk about politics. I think we should all get together and talk about world events. You know, have a serious discussion. Who wants to play stupid games?"

"I think we should have some fun together. And I don't want it to erupt into a major discussion. Let's just keep it enjoyable for everyone . . . for mom and dad, especially. Okay?"

I'll stop here, although this could be fun to take further . . .

When you are tempted to fall into the trap of arguing or fighting with words, you can resist. Put the relationships first. Don't let it turn into a battle of egos.

## EMOTIONAL THINKING

When we are controlled by emotional thinking, our relationships lose. There is no logic involved. Only reactions that get us into trouble.

Anger is a destructive force in relationships, and it always seems to flourish when we create a mental distance between ourselves and the other person. We think we're so different from that other person.

Whenever I am angry with someone I automatically begin to see them in my mind's eye as being very different from me.

When you are faced with death or something serious, you realize how unimportant what makes us angry is. It doesn't matter what you're angry about, since anger takes you over. And clouds your judgement.

Anger is anger. A problem of its own.

Instead of taking our anger out on others, we should learn to accept being hurt or disappointed without torturing others – being upset does not give us the right to wreck havoc on those we love and care about. If someone hurts us, fine, we can deal with and get over it. There wouldn't be so many relationship problems if people stopped allowing anger to damage their relationship. Abnormal anger can be damaging to the mental health of both parties.

In dealing with our anger, it helps to stop and realize how much more alike we are than we think.

When you are angry stop and ask yourself how your friend is feeling. What is his/her perspective? Chances are, he/she is feeling much like you are.

That's a good way to deal with anger. Switch points of view. Step out of yourself and try to see the situation from the other person's side, and **step into their emotions**. Are they angry, frustrated and upset, too?

And why?

See yourself as the other person sees you.

Explain their point of view to yourself, remembering how alike the two of you really are. It is a misnomer to think you are so different. He or she may be feeling very much like you are feeling about the relationship.

### **Why not love more completely?**

Why not stay with our relationships?

As a man who has been to the void, and looked down that long, dark shaft into the ultimate black hole that is the unknown, I have a new take on things. *I know now that the disagreements we often have are so often petty and meaningless.*

It's the love people have for one another which makes all the difference.

*Instead of complaining or criticizing, stop and realize how beautiful people are, despite their hangups or flaws. Love them for being different. Celebrate their uniqueness. Find comfort in knowing that you have found someone who is just as passionate about his or her ideas as you.*

Okay, I realize that by criticizing and complaining some people muster up a little self esteem at other people's expense. And maybe they need to feel good about themselves. I know they are hard-to-break habits, or should I say addictions? But what purpose do they serve? Seriously, how do they help?

Complaining is like nagging. And no one likes a nag!

In most situations where we would like to complain or criticize, it's best to ask yourself if there is another type of response that would be more pleasant and more useful?

*Wouldn't it be helpful if more people had the courage not to complain, criticize or nag?*

***Why complain about the differences in a relationship? Part of success in any relationship is learning to accommodate yourself to a different person, and to make the necessary changes.***

What will demanding the other person to be just like you accomplish? It is better to have the courage to see the overwhelming degree to which you and your friends are alike, and to see that the differences are truly small.

*Keep your mind centered upon the love and friendship you share. Be flexible and*

*understanding. Honor your relationship. Treat it like the precious cargo it truly is.*

Now, I respect my dad's opinions. I have no interest in trying to change his mind about anything. I love him just the way he is.

His opinions cannot hurt me. Our disagreement on various issues is a minor detail. It's not a problem. Not any more.

Because we don't let the small stuff get in the way.

We are far more alike than different. And where we are different I see it is good. If we disagree, it's okay. No harm done. We are letting go of the neurotic insistence that our loved ones must think just like us.

*Now I'm glad we disagree on so many things. It illustrates the strength of our relationship. Our relationship is strong because we are different.*

If you haven't read the book, Don't Sweat The Small Stuff, by Richard Carlson, PhD, you owe it to yourself to pick up a copy. It's theme is so powerful. It's all small stuff when you think about it.

## **Activity**

**Please answer these questions. Your answers will guide your behavior.**

- 1. What are a few of the small things you have allowed to get in the way of your relationships?**
- 2. Which relationships tend to get stuck on petty disagreements and insignificant details?**
- 3. What can you do to change the above tendency and make your relationships stronger?**
- 4. Name one way you'd like to be different so your relationships wouldn't be so affected by small stuff?**

## **The Ninth Insight: Fizzle A Foul Mood**

Not only did my “near death gift” reveal the error of cluttering the mind with petty emotions, like anger, resentment and greed, but it showed me the importance of fizzling foul moods . . . for your relationships and yourself.

**If you learn how to fizzle a foul mood you will have a MUCH happier relationship with anyone, including co-workers and friends, and especially your spouse or romantic partner.**

The NDE awakened me. And one of the strong impressions it left with me involved the importance of managing emotions better.

Today many people tend to think that being angry is okay, if not good, and they seem to believe that they have a god-given right to take their anger out on others. Our society has become an angry one, no doubt.

But an anger problem is a real downer for relationships. And it is not necessary.

Anger is a big, complicated subject, and is not the point of this Ebook. So, I will confine my discussion to bad moods.

All of us get into a bad mood now and then. It’s just life. We’re all human.

But if you let a bad mood linger, it can plunge others into an equally bad mood. No one likes to be around a grouch. When we are in a poor mood it’s like being under a dark cloud. Our responses become ill-sounding and impatient, and we are more apt to hurt our relationship partners’ feelings.

When under the dark cloud, it is harder to think clearly.

And it is tempting to become darker and more sullen, and the negativity seems to multiply, as if taking on an addictive quality.

Many people tend to take their general hostility out on their loved ones, particularly their spouses . . .

as if it’s always their fault.

Do you realize how harmful this habit can be to a relationship?



## **A Better Way To Handle A Bad Mood**

There is a simple and easy trick you can use to keep your relationship partner and relationship safe when you are in a bad mood.

The GOOD NEWS: We don't have to stay in a bad mood. Foul moods can be overcome quite easily.

It's a simple habit that anyone can acquire.

Set a rule for yourself. If you are in a bad mood, accept full responsibility for it and deal with it yourself.

Don't spill your anger onto family and friends. Don't involve your mate. Go and get yourself under control. Be responsible. Be an adult.

**First, begin by developing the habit of recognizing your own foul moods.**

And seeing how they affect others.

**Second, do something to end your bad mood, or go off alone until you feel better.**

Then you can be with people.

Your friends will thank you for it. No one likes to be in a relationship with a grouch. Your spouse will be most grateful, and will thank you tenfold, since there is hardly anything worse than enduring the let-down brought on by a grumpy mate.

Again, this is akin to taking stock of yourself and asking what kind of impact you have on people. Here is where we must be brutally honest with ourselves.

**Just because you may be an important or powerful person who happens to have a personality problem, doesn't mean that everyone in your life should have to put up with your foul moods!**

*And whether male or female, if you are a man, there is nothing which guarantees you the right to dump your foul mood on your partner.*

**If you're a natural grouch, try to make like a bear. Take your dumps in the woods – not in the house! ☺**

If you are grumpy enough to have auditioned for the movie, *Grumpy Old Men*, and you fit the part well, maybe it's time to reconsider your ways . . . and find a way to be less grumpy.

No matter how long you may have been this way, you can always change. Yes, you can teach yourself new tricks, even if you are an old grouch. ☺☺

I know I tend to avoid people who are pessimistic, mean spirited or negative. They put a damper on things fast. They're real show stoppers. And I suspect some of them enjoy the attention and sympathy they derive from their characteristic sully ways.

If you're like me, you "skidattle" when someone like Billy Goat Gruff appears on your horizon. No one wants to be with a person who is in a proverbial bad mood. Even if the person is brilliant or successful. That is no excuse to take advantage of people. Or make them miserable.

If you tend to be a sour type, and you want to have better relationships, you should really explore ways of lightening up and being more pleasant in your interactions with people. If your pets and children, co-workers or friends go scrambling when you're in a bad mood, that should tell you something.

Almost everyone could improve in this area, perhaps a little. Check out my suggestions below, and see if banishing a foul mood quickly doesn't help all your relationships!

### **Try these proven techniques for making a foul mood fizzle:**

- **When the next foul mood hits, take action immediately** – don't wait for the dark clouds to go away. Just take action. Do something other than complain. Pull some weeds. Wash the car. Walk the dog. Do SOMETHING. Engage in a constructive activity. Throw yourself into a hobby or something you enjoy. The dark clouds will likely disappear.
- **Do a good deed for someone.** Make someone's day. Be nice. Once you throw yourself into a good-will project, your blues will disappear. Take the elderly neighbor supper. Shovel your parents' driveway. Cut out an article and send it to someone.

Note: This is easy to do. You just start thinking of someone you love. You think of something you can do for him. And you do it. Those sickening feelings of despair will remit.

- **Go for a walk or jog.** A brisk walk will have you swinging your arms and breathing

deeply in a hurry. You can watch the birds and study the flowers. Exercise works wonders. Actually, physical activity of any kind will make you feel better.

Note: Usually, I have to walk alone – until I feel better, at which time I can walk with someone.

- **Write an entry in your diary or journal.** Writing about your feelings or observations gives you a mental break and externalizes the problem. I believe in journaling, and it works for many of my clients.

I know, almost as soon as I start writing, I feel better. Even if all I'm doing is describing my foul mood, or recording my thoughts.

- Expressing gratitude is a powerful tonic that opens the gateway to other positive emotions and experiences. **So, write a kind letter or thank you note.** I have written letters to people who needed cheering up, and I ended up feeling better.

Any time you can say thank you, you will feel a little glow in your solar plexus. And the gloomy world looks a little sunnier.

Note: This never fails to work for me. As soon as I say “thank you,” assuming that I feel it from the heart, my foul mood starts to lift. It's one of the most powerful, positive drugs I know!

- **Say something good about someone.** As I said, I have recently learned to appreciate other people by telling them boldly how much I appreciate them, and by bragging on them to others. Instead of complaining behind someone's back or criticizing, try complimenting them. It's a miracle method for putting yourself in a good mood. Afterwards, you just know that you have started something really positive and contagious, and you feel so good about it!

*You don't have to give in to a lousy mood. Why make your friends suffer? You can make a healthy decision. Choose to fight back with your own good medicine. You'll end up feeling so much better.*

Remember to be kind to yourself, too. Why place undue stress on yourself by feeling sorry for yourself or getting angry? Remember to take care of yourself.

**Live as free from that silent killer, *STRESS*, as possible.**

## **Activity**

**When we are in a bad mood, often there is something wrong, just under the radar of our awareness. If we can figure out what is making us unhappy, or what is causing our anxiety, we can take care of it.**

**The next time you find yourself in a bad mood, ask yourself to search for the cause. Then deal with it. Do something to help.**

**For example, if you are dreading going back to work tomorrow, stop and ask yourself what is wrong. Let's say you realize you are dreading an upcoming meeting because you feel unprepared.**

**The solution?**

**Drive to the office and prepare yourself.**

**Afterward, you'll be able to go home and enjoy your day without worrying about your job. And your mood will change.**

## **THE THIRD REVELATION: STOP THE SERIOUSNESS – LIGHTEN UP AND ENJOY LIFE MORE**

It has been almost four years since my NDE. Yet I still remember the day I awakened from a dreamy nap with a novel idea in mind.

I was in my second week at Central Baptist, on the road to recovery. It was becoming clear that I might very well survive. Oh, there was still a danger of having a third heart attack. And I feared it might happen *any time*.

On the streets there was a good snow, and I could see flurries spiraling down outside my window. It was cold and a bit blustery. All my company had gone home for the evening.

Lots of people in Lexington had come down with the flu. Many of the hospital patients had gotten it, as well. It was almost an epidemic.

Naturally, I did not want any part of the flu. Not after what I had been through! Well, as I lie in my bed, waking up from a late evening nap and rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I asked myself what else I might do to change my life.

I had already decided to improve my relationships. And I was convinced that I would live the rest of my life free from fear. Something new, a different idea, was breaking through consciousness.

I sat up with a loud groan. And got DIZZY!

The nurse came running. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, I just sat up too quickly,” I said while holding my chest with my hand. “I tend to forget how sore my chest is, and my ribs, too.”

“You’ll be sore for a while. Why did you sit up so quickly?”

“Well, I had this idea . . . and I wanted to write it down. I was reaching for the notebook—”

“Here, let me get it for you.” She handed me the notebook and pen. “Can I get you anything else?”

“Would you mind bringing me a popsicle, please?”

“Sure.” She went to the little freezer and looked inside. “Which flavor?”

“Grape.”

“Grape it is.” She gave me the popsicle and sat down near my bed. “May I ask, what kind of ideas do you have?”

“Well, you see, ever since I’ve been in the hospital, I’ve been thinking about life, and how people could live better lives. And when I awakened from my nap, I had this idea sort of tattooed to the inside of my brain.”

“Is it something you can share?”

“Yes, it’s very simple, really. Please don’t laugh. The idea is that people need to have more fun.”

She stared, as if she didn’t understand.

“We need to be more playful and joyful. We should have more fun in our relationships, on our jobs, everywhere, and not be so deadly serious.”

She nodded. “Okay.”

**“The often overlooked key to having good relationships is having fun.** And lots of it. The problem is, sometimes we think we’re too old to have fun. Or we’re too mature. Or we shouldn’t act like kids. (But who are we kidding? Who among us is not but a child?)

So we try to be too serious.

No matter how old we are, being overly serious or serious too often is a huge mistake. It can make us sick. We should have fun every day of our lives.”

The nurse smiled and patted my knee. She got to her feet and went to the deepfreeze and got me another popsicle. After all, they weren’t very big.

She handed it to me. “You deserve another one,” she said with a wink. “Do me a favor and tell my boss what you just told me.”

“Sure,” I said.

She left the room, and I was alone. I began writing. And the first thing I wrote was this: “When I get out of here, if I do, I’m going to have more fun than ever! And I’m going to keep on doing it for the rest of my life.”

**And then I wrote, “Life is too short not to be enjoyed!”**

The inspiration flowed, and I filled several pages with notes. And that’s how the third revelation was born. Here’s the final notation I made: “You can’t live well, truly well, without having a boatload of fun. I am not talking about a little fun, here and there, but a heaping helping! Fun that translates into unmitigated freakin’ joy!”

**Consider this, if you add fearless to fun, what do you get? Fearless fun!**

FEARLESS FUN

You can’t really have the kind of all-out fun kids know and enjoy without tossing your fear out the window.

Get rid of your inhibitions and fears, the ones that hold you back and those which keep you **GLUED TO YOUR CHAIR** watching life pass you by, and you will be well on your way to inviting **FUN** back into your life.

You are never too old to start having fun and enjoying your life more.

**☞ In the hospital . . . those who were having fun with their work and with one another . . . seemed to be the happiest, most well-adjusted people around!**

They were the ones I wanted to be nearest.

When you are enjoying yourself, **TIME** goes by quickly and does not drag. If you’re really having fun, **TIME FLIES!**

What do you want?

**You can read more about how to have more fun in your relationships in the next section.**

## **The Tenth Insight: Relax and Take It Easy**

Ten is about the great benefits in letting go and relaxing. When I was recuperating in the hospital, I was dealing with matters of life and death, and so were many other patients. My bed, IVs and other contraptions were quite uncomfortable. Occasionally I heard someone cry out or scream in pain. The hospital was not an easy place in which to relax.

One day, while lying in bed and reflecting on my NDE, the tenth insight hit me like a bolt of lightening. Startled, I sat up in bed.

There was a nurse writing on my chart near the entrance to the room. She gave me a glance. "Can I get you anything?"

"Yes, I'd love to have a soft drink."

She brought me a Coke and poured it for me. I was writing furiously in my notebook. It seemed so clear.

People are too serious for their own good, I thought.

There is too much stress in the world, and stress is a killer. Lighten up or be a stiff!

I saw it was wise to avoid **getting caught up in the rat race. Rushing around frantically doesn't pay. Trying to do too much in life, being greedy.**

**I saw how relationships suffer under the strain.**

I wrote, "We must learn to resist the greedy urge to have everything right this minute. We are really living when we take time to stop, relax and enjoy the moment without having to meet a deadline every five minutes."

This is another way of saying, Don't beg, borrow and steal to get where you are going. Take your time and enjoy the ride!

I told the nurse, "People need to relax and have more fun."

I remember her telling me how right I was, and if you couldn't do that in the nursing profession you wouldn't last long.

Relationships suffer from seriousness, too. When people are no longer having fun, their



relationship becomes forgettable.

## THE BIGGEST UNDERSTATEMENT IN THE BOOK

Happy couples invest in the **amazing potential** of goofing around, letting go and having fun. They KNOW how to have fun.

Fun is the HAPPY COUPLE'S modus operandi!

Let me say it again, happy couples invest in the amazing potential of goofing around, letting go and having fun.



You've got to let go of any hangups and inhibitions to have fun.

Letting go is critical to success because if you can stop TRYING you can just let Mother Nature do her work.

It sounds like a paradox. Quit trying and you'll succeed. But it's true.

When we are trying too hard, we aren't playing! And we aren't enjoying ourselves. Our bodies are tense, and our minds are in a state of disturbance.

When we are tense and not relaxed, we perform poorly.

Years ago, I was in private practice. People came to me to learn how to relax. Doctors referred their patients to me, if they had medical conditions that would be improved by scientific hypnotherapy and relaxation.

I'll never forget a client who came in for a nervous condition. Her physician had sent her. She said she needed to learn how to relax, or she was going to have a nervous breakdown.

So, I had her sit in an easy chair and do some deep breathing exercises, while listening to relaxing music. I delivered therapeutic suggestions and helped her to deepen her state of dynamic relaxation.

She had a delightful experience. She became very relaxed and she felt much better. I gave her some homework, which involved utilizing some of the relaxation techniques I had used with her.

The following week she returned, saying, “But I couldn’t make myself relax at all. The harder I tried, the more unrelaxed I became!”

I told her not to TRY anymore.

Forget about trying. Just allow it to happen . . . to put herself in the situation and to set up the likelihood of relaxation, but not to try. Trying creates tension, I explained, and we want to release tension and create a gentle state of ease.

Our next step was for her to relax in my office. She would make the effort, and I would simply coach her.

When she would get herself into trouble by trying too hard, I would point out to her what she was doing and offer a different strategy.

When you’re good at relaxing it’s all so effortless. But when you are a neophyte and just beginning, it seems impossible. You want to relax so you try. The more you want it, the harder you try. But that only courts failure.

Remember, it’s the easy and smooth swing that hits the home run. Not the killer swing. Killer swings usually end up striking out.

If you’ve ever played baseball or softball, you probably know that when you are up at bat, and you swing for the fence with all your might, chances are you’ll just make a big, fat strike! The harder you swing at the ball, the more likely you’ll whiff!

And if you are lucky enough to make contact with the ball, it usually doesn’t go very far.

But . . . *stand up there, relaxed, and make a nice, easy, smooth swing*, just make good contact, and you just might hit a home run, or at least get a hit. You’ll be more likely to get good wood on the ball.

#### THE LAW OF WHAT?!?

Have you noticed that many couples who are trying to have babies can’t? The harder they try, the bigger the stakes, the greater the pressure, the more unlikely it seems they will get what they want.

Then, as soon as they adopt a baby, the pressure is gone . . . and they relax and stop trying . . . and bingo!

They're pregnant.

It reminds me of the **law of reversed effort**.

**Now . . . let's get to some juicy stuff . . .**

### **Golf and Sex**

Too much effort, too much hard work can be counterproductive.

Same with golf and sex. Trying too hard only results in wasting energy, in creating tension and stress. It causes failure. And the fear of failure, in turn, breeds failure.

At the risk of repeating myself, *have you ever been to the golfing range and watched people try to over-swing and over-hit the ball?* They flex their backs and tighten their grip . . . knuckles white and necks straining . . . they wind up and really uncork a monstrous swing . . . but the little white thing they call a golf ball doesn't want to go that far! No, the little white round thing ends up getting cussed at and flogged into oblivion!

The awful little round thing goes nowhere, except it may hit the person standing next to the rabid golfer who hit it. Or it goes bowling straight into the ground or slices onto the adjoining highway.

The rabid golfer may beat the club into the ground, as if it's the club's fault. He or she may pick up the little white round thing and examine it to see if it is defective.

Then a really fine golfer walks up, as if lighter than air, tees the ball up with ease and takes a relaxed, smooth and gentle swing . . . and where does the little white round thing they call a ball go?

It sails into infinity. Or so it seems. And lands about 250 to 350 yards down the practice fairway. A thing of perfect beauty . . .

and a mystery to the misinformed golfer who tees up another, taking a ferocious swing at the little white round thing, which goes about fifty yards, peels into a terrible slice and pings off the hood of a car in the parking lot.

How did he do that?

You know the answer. He tried too hard. He tried to kill it, that little white round thing that never seems to obey those who are angry or outraged, vexed or stupefied.

Now the classy golfer, the skilled person, he or she can swing the club all day and not even get tired. Because they don't over-exert themselves.

But those folks who were swinging for the proverbial fence, now they will be exhausted in twenty minutes! And they won't get past 200 yards.

So, no matter what you are doing, remember not to try too hard, and don't focus on the results.

*Let your critic's mind go.* Just get into it, have some fun and enjoy being with your friends or your spouse, and things will take care of themselves.

Is it any different for sex? What about men who have erectile problems? If they *try* to have an erection, they may as well forget about it. The more they want it, the more they sweat it, the more likely they will not get it!

Pretty soon you have some version of *performance anxiety*.

I have coached men with this problem – most of us have had this experience at least now and then. The solution is almost always in learning how to relax fully or in thinking about sex in a different way. In paying attention to other aspects of the sexual experience, in focusing on just being there with your partner and feeling good (*sensate focus*).

To be successful, you've got to take it easy and stop interfering. Get out of the way of your mind and body, and let your body do what it's supposed to do . . . in a spontaneous manner.

Don't focus your mind on the end result. Just throw yourself gently into the arc of loving, pleasuring and being pleased, without worrying about what your body is doing or how it's reacting. Trust yourself. Stop fretting. Let go and float downstream.

Let nature take its course. You don't need to try! If you feel you have to try, something's wrong already.

Trust yourself and you'll know how much and what kind of effort to give. Just do your best, within reason, and refrain from evaluating the results. Instead, throw yourself into *enjoying yourself*.

## LEARNING EASES THE PAIN

My wrestling match with death reaffirmed the wisdom of letting go and trusting the power that lies within.

The point is to make the most from every experience, to have fun while we're learning. Remember, the journey is a process. Every journey is a learning and growing experience.

And an exercise in patience. ☺

Patience isn't always needed if you're having fun and you're fully alive in the moment. If your overall goal in life is to have fun, and you love to learn, you'll look at each new problem or encounter as a potential learning experience. Even the peskiest problems can be our teachers. That way, we stop resisting and start accepting. We can more easily work with the situation at hand.

To learn to live and live to learn is the way to go. And we learn far more when we are enjoying the process. Letting go of our tense bodies and feeling the joy of the moment, surrendering to what comes natural, that is beautiful.

## THE TWISTED HOSPITAL GOWN

My NDE impressed me with the belief that we can go farther IN LIFE by accepting who we are and by meeting our relationships where they are, and by working with them in a spirit of playful discovery, than by any other means.

I clearly remember lying in my hospital bed, and having that darn gown twisted around my body, which it was prone to do (and often I was unable to fix it), thinking, "What are we doing? Why are we so serious? Why do we make life so dismal? Why deprive our relationships of imagination?"

"We should play more, have more fun. We need to lighten up. Look how utterly important our relationships are . . . yet we snore through them! Make them drudgery.

If and when I get out of here, I am going to make a promise to myself and everyone I know. I will have more fun in my life, more fun than I have ever had!

And I am going to start right now!"

A certain peace settled over me, as a heavenly wave of feeling coursed through my

tingling backbone. I knew this insight was a powerful one and, if properly applied, could make a tremendous difference in my life.

Having fun with those you love, loving and giving of yourself, staying positive and focused on the good, reaching out to others in an I LOVE LIFE kind of way – and I ain't too bashful about it – that is the stuff that brings peace to a body and soul.

It takes courage to play.

And to love.

Being at peace with yourself is half the battle. Accepting and yielding, not fighting. Living in the moment and being as a child, that will get you everywhere.

The name of the game is playing through your stress – play kills stress. Letting go of tomorrow's worries, beating tension, relaxing and floating your way to success on a steady stream of healing thoughts!

### **Activity**

**In what situations do you find it hard to let your hair down?**

**Brainstorm ways you can relax more and improve your attitude.**

## **The Eleventh Insight: Play and Have Fun All Your Livelong Days**

You must be getting tired of all these **insights!**

Taking time for play is an essential stepping stone on the path to wisdom. We are all children at heart, and we were built for play. We become dull and unlovable when we stop having fun.

When we make a concerted effort to enjoy our lives more, and to find the humor in everything, we can build our lives around the idea of having fun. And many good things happen. For example, we become happier and healthier, and our relationships improve.

People and animals want to be around us. We exude an attractive energy that is contagious. We end up enjoying our daily activities more, and we learn to enjoy work more by lightening up in the workplace.

*Parents who make a regular habit of playing with their children* will raise happier, healthier children who will be more likely to succeed in life. They learn faster and develop more new skills.

*Couples who play together stay together.* They shrug off their mistakes and laugh at their ineptitude. They experience less stress and more pleasure. They laugh, and laughter makes them healthier.

*Playful supervisors help their employees to succeed and accomplish more.* Okay, I've lived this one. I've seen it a hundred times. Stiff, authoritative bosses are not nearly as effective at helping their employees accomplish goals as flexible, approachable and playful ones.

*Nurses who are playful help their patients heal faster.* I know. I was there. I will never forget my playful, positive and, at times, irreverently playful nurses.

When it comes to nurses, I would like to forget the overly serious, crabby, stiff-lipped, sour nurse I had when I spent two weeks in the hospital!

She had a derogatory impact upon me when I was in ICU. Just the sight of her was stressful. She had a real attitude problem. Thank goodness there was only one of them!

But those friendly, playful nurses who kept a positive attitude will always be my heroes. They made me feel good just by walking into the room. They had a definite therapeutic

impact on the patients.

I am convinced they helped to speed my recovery.

### **Read All About It: Big Tip!**

Anyone who wants to enjoy their relationships more can do so by simply laughing and playing more often.

Nothing keeps us young like smiling and laughing. *Nothing is sexier.* Right?

If you make other people look forward to being with you because you are upbeat and fun to be with, they will respond to you in positive ways, which will have you basking in a warm glow!

Imagine what life would be like if you took a warm glow with you EVERYWHERE. People would gravitate toward you. Admire you. Follow in your footsteps.

People often don't stop to think about it, but . . . strengthening your sense of humor, or relying on it more, can do wonders for your relationships..

### **Take this scenario for example . . .**

Let's say you work for a big bureaucracy. It gets bigger all the time. And sometimes you wonder about the so-called logic used by management in setting new policies and procedures that seem to make no sense at all.

Every time they develop a new form that will replace an existing form, to simplify matters, it ends up being more complicated. So you have more forms. Not fewer forms. And it gets harder, not easier.

You used to get angry when ridiculous things happened at work. And you'd cry on your friends' shoulders and complain about how foolish the company was. You developed a pessimistic attitude, and you remained highly critical of your employer. You were under a lot of stress.

But let's say you decide to laugh about the misguided bureaucratic slip-ups, instead of taking them seriously. Now you use your sense of humor to gain some distance from it all. When something stupid happens you let yourself have a good laugh over it.



You've decided to laugh rather than cry.

And it works.

You stop dwelling on the problems at work. You stop taking them so seriously. You stop getting so involved.

Now you're under less stress and you're having more fun. Your approach to the job is a more playful one.

**And now, instead of letting yourself get all bent out of shape over the problems at work, you are finding work to be a *source of entertainment*.**

You are stepping outside the fray and laughing instead of worrying or crying.

When you get a crazy memo, it tickles you. But before you got angry. Now you shake your head and give it a good laugh. You find it delightful that a company could be so mixed up. Fascinating and delightful. Their dramas are good for grins.

And you are no longer trapped in an ever increasing cycle of frustration, and a sense of little control.

You're no longer telling yourself that things should be different. You're accepting the ugly reality of the situation with a smile on your face and a gleam in your eye. And you're laughing all the way home about the latest fiasco!

You've turned your workplace into a place of amusement and fun.

Now you win.

You've created a better relationship with your job and your co-workers. And insulated yourself against harmful stress!

### **Mediocre Relationships**

**Some relationships take a lot out of you. They are often overly focused on what's wrong, or on finding fault, or having fights rather than fun.** They seem to exist just to tax your patience! You may, of course, have to be assertive with some people, but you can do that while retaining your positive attitude and keeping control of your emotions. You continue to love, even though you have to draw the line somewhere. You're doing your

best to apply the logic of the ultimate relationship solution, working toward making every single relationship in your life as good as it can be, while learning what each has to teach you. The more you learn the more you can give to other relationships. And you do it with a smile.

You may feel a great deal of pressure to resolve problems or uphold certain expectations, have everything and find time for your relationships, to have the perfect relationship or marriage, to look good and keep it all together for the sake of appearance.

Pressure, pressure, pressure.

Whereas an exceptionally good relationship, especially in today's mixed up, fast-paced world, is possible only for those who have a knack for having fun.

For those who approach their relationship naturally. They may set their goals high, but they don't push themselves to get there. They have fun along the way.

### **Dolly's Secret**

I heard an interview of Dolly Parton, and she spoke of her marriage of over 40 years to the same man. She said one of the biggest reasons they were still together is their **sense of humor**.

She said she thinks he's funny. And he thinks she's funny. Dolly said their sense of humor has helped them to stay together all these years . . . because they find each other so entertaining!

**The key to lasting relationships really is having fun and entertaining each other.**

You know,

making life interesting for the other person! That's what works! You don't get bored that way.

TRY THIS

TRICK #1: STOP GROWING OLD

Instead of becoming more serious and less playful over time, instead of settling into a drab and lifeless routine, try to become more playful and LESS serious.

Aim to entertain each other. Find ways of making everything fun. Cut up a little. Act like kids again. Approach a routine task in a new and creative way. Turn it into a playful activity.

**As you grow older, make a concerted effort to behave younger!** The older you and your partner get, the wilder you should act. I'm not kidding. Reverse the aging process this way.

If you've been acting your age, you're doing it wrong. Start acting younger. Start playing more. Start acting like the kid you used to be.

## TRICK #2: BECOME A COMEDIAN

Every day do something to crack your partner up. Make 'em laugh. It doesn't matter how old or sophisticated you've become, you can still be a comedian when you want.

Tell a joke or wear a silly hat.

Do something to mix things up and catch your friends off guard. Have in your bag of tricks some gags and jokes, and be ready to use them.

Instead of sweating it, when there are problems on the horizon, tackle the problems with a sense of humor. You can do slapstick or modern comedy, I don't care. It's making the effort that counts.

## MOUSE PROBLEMS

If you have a kitchen full of mice, what good will it do for you to get upset about it? Why not have some fun with it? While you are taking steps to get the mouse population under control, you could tell your friends that your place has simply gone to the mice, you could tell outrageous mouse stories and get everyone laughing.

Once when I had a mouse problem at my house, I told the true story of how I had fallen asleep in the easy chair in front of the boob tube and a mouse climbed onto my hand and ran up my arm to my shoulder . . . before I woke up and shook the darn thing off!

Everyone got a kick out of that story. I mean, the darn critter was scampering around on my shoulder like we were best friends! Even I could only laugh. I'm just thankful it didn't try to give me a big kiss!

The more absurd something is, the more you can laugh about it. So don't sweat it, laugh about it, whatever it is.

*Laughing is so good for your mind and body . . . and, you guessed it, your relationships!*

### **Secret Weapon of A Happy Couple Nearing Their Silver Anniversary**

My aunt and uncle have been together for going on fifty years. Married that long! Something, huh?

Want to know how they did it?

Well, it's no surprise to me that their relationship has lasted for so long. What I observe when I am with them is this: they are playful with each other. They tease each other. They laugh together. All in a good humor.

When I think about them and see them in my mind's eye, they are kidding each other and talking up a lot of nonsense.

She is a hoot. He is a hoot.

That man is one of the funniest people on earth. When I was a kid he kept me in stitches. You can't be with him for more than five minutes and not end up laughing about something.

Their relationship never gets old. It's always interesting and refreshing because they are so gifted at making things fun. They're in their seventies, but they're as playful as little children. They are people of faith. They have enduring values. They believe it is their sacred duty to do right by people.

Bottom line: my aunt and uncle are irresistible to each other. By the way, I don't know many irresistible people, do you?

**If you want to have happy relationships, a good place to start is making yourself irresistible.**

How?

Read on . . .

## **TWELVE WAYS TO BE IRRESISTIBLE**

### **1. Have loads of fun!**

Wherever you go, take your smile and a devilish sense of humor with you. You don't have to be a barrel of laughs, just lighten things up. Have a good time with people.

You'll be medicine and good will for everyone. You'll be a shot in the arm. And your relationships will never get tiring or old.

**2. Be a positive influence.** Think and speak highly of people. Treat people the way you'd like to be treated. Be an optimist. Find the good in the world and allow it to be reflected in your behavior.

**3. Be loyal and true.** Show people that they can count on you. You make a promise, then you fulfill it. Hang in there when times are rough. Be a rock, a slab of bedrock for people. Build trust and security, confidence and strength.

**4. Give more than you expect.** Over-deliver. If someone asks for your help, give more than they ask. Never accept the minimum. Give all you can give. Give unselfishly. Give like you are giving to a dear loved one.

**5. Be consistent.** Always be there for people. Don't let people down. You don't have to save anyone, just be consistently reliable in your companionship, support and caring response.

**6. Be understanding.** Accept people for who they are and do not attempt to change them! You don't need to agree with their philosophy on life, but you can be a good, trustworthy friend, despite any differences you may have.

**7. Be slow to anger and quick to understand!**

**8. Refrain from judging.** Judging others only puts you on a pedestal and sets you up as a judge, if not God. Don't be critical. Criticism is a form of judgement. People do not respond well to criticism.

Make a habit of staying at least 100 yards from the nearest pedestal.

**9. See the potential in people and let them know you see it.** Rather than talking about your accomplishments and lofty endeavors, spend time observing the qualities, skills and

talents that you see in others.

Then tell them what you see. Put it out there for them. Communicate your faith in them. Show them you see what they are capable of. Encourage them. Practice will help you to give really good compliments. Don't take them down in any way. Build people up. You know, up with people!

The people in your life will come to love you for making a difference in theirs.

**10. Tell the truth. Be honest.** I believe this may be the single best gift we can give anyone. Our honesty requires love and courage. It comes along with high ethics and strong moral fiber. Give the truth. Do nothing less. Give genuine feedback.

Sometimes it is very hard to be honest, but always worthwhile.

**11. Live by the golden rule.** Treat other people the way you would like to be treated and even better! That's the wisdom of the ultimate relationship solution . . . treat others even better than you would like to be treated. You'll be amazed at the results. It doesn't take that much effort . . . but it does take practice. And wisdom.

**12. Treat everyone like a member of your family.**

When you depart this world and your sojourn among the living is complete, you will leave mighty big footsteps for others to fill. The world will have known you were here. And the people you leave behind will have benefitted.

You will be able to walk through that door with a smile. Feeling pretty darn good about yourself. Leaving no regrets. Because if you can be honest there will be no regrets.

Even if you could say nothing else, if you can say you lived HONESTLY, you are saying a mouthful! And you will have lived a life of integrity.

Integrity: a rare quality in today's world. There . . . you have my Top Dozen techniques for making a splash in all your relationships.

**In a nutshell, the art of being irresistible.** Ten simple but powerful ways to generate success in your relationships. And this works with ALL kinds of relationships.

Got it?

Good. That brings me to . . . a plug for one of my other Ebooks. You may not know it, but I wrote an Ebook on how to solve relationship problems by having fun, as opposed to working at relationships and beating your head against the wall. It will be for sale soon.

That book was written primarily for couples who are encountering relationship problems. If you would like to find out more about the book, you'll soon be able to visit the stop-working-at-love website and get more information.

**Okay, back to the insight . . .**

**While I was in the hospital, those medical professionals who used a sense of humor with the patients (and with one another) were far more likeable than the others. And more fun to be around.**

**Their sense of humor contributed to the healing process.**

*They created a very attractive aura, a powerful energy that the patients found, well, irresistible. Their good humor conveyed their good will and delivered a healing message to us patients.*

My cardiologist made quite a few comments that were good for grins. One day my wife asked him what would happen if a procedure he wanted me to have didn't work.

With a pained look on his face, he said to her (as I listened), "Well, we'll just have to take him out back . . . and shoot him."

Everyone who was in the room really lost it. I was rolling in my bed. It was a great way to make light of a serious situation. Heck, without my own sense of humor, I'm not sure I could have survived the ordeal of my NDE.

So remember to laugh and have fun. Enjoy your relationships. Find the levity in the most serious and disturbing matters. *And in all your relationships.*

*Entertain others and yourself. You'll suffer from less stress and mental fatigue. And you'll be a beacon of light for everyone in your life.*

**Activity**

**Think of ways to make your office mates laugh. Cut up when you can. Add a little spice to any relationship by finding the levity in the situation.**

## **The Twelfth Insight: Do Little Favors and Give Small Gifts**

I know what you are thinking. What kind of insight is this? I already give people thoughtful gifts. What's new about this?

Hold on. Before my NDE, I did those things, too.

Only, if you're like me, you may not do it often enough, and you may be a little too selective about your giving.

This is one of the most surprising insights, as far as I'm concerned. What I found surprising was the way the insight emphasized continual giving, and the habitual nature of it, something like brushing your teeth or exercising on a regular basis.

Read on. I think it will surprise you, too.

I've always given small gifts, tokens of appreciation and the like. But I never did it on a regular basis.

**What the NDE showed me was the giving of small gifts should occur as regularly as you would tithe at your place of worship.** Not something we should do when we have time, but something we should make time for.

One of the best ways to enjoy great relationships is to make small contributions to the relationships or to give regular reminders of your interest, care and concern. It's the small things that count. People really appreciate them.

These "gifts" do not have to cost much (or anything) and need not take much of your time. How much effort does it take to shop for a thank you card while you are grocery shopping?

You need not give your spouse a new car. They may not appreciate it, anyway. But a cupcake with their name on it, that's a different matter!

All you do is request the bakery to write the name of your choosing on a spare cupcake. It will make a terrific surprise, no matter how old the recipient may be!

You could take your mother or father on a trip to Paris, France, but that won't be necessary to make them smile. A signed photograph of their favorite grandchild sitting on the Easter bunny's lap, now that's a thoughtful gift!



What people really like is to receive small but frequent reminders of your love for them. Let's say your sister loves cats and lives with five of them. You make nutritious cat cookies, you decorate the cookies and put each cat's name on several cookies. You stash the cookies in a specially prepared tin, which keeps to the feline theme.

You can have a lot of fun giving unique and thoughtful gifts. And you can make someone happy.

The right five dollar gift that can be opened in bed. A poem can be written on a 3 X 5 card, and is free. A paperback book by the person's favorite author, a sprig of wild rose blooming in a vase, or a baseball autographed by the family's star Little Leaguer, these are the kinds of gifts that mean so much to people.

It is truly the thought that counts.

You are not buying anyone. Or impressing them with your spending power. You are writing a thank you note after using the person's condo for the weekend, and leaving a dried four-leaf clover with the note. You are going the extra mile for people.

That requires a little thought and care. And it brings big dividends in return. Those kinds of thoughtful gifts deepen the value of the relationship.

**If you want to have and maintain an excellent relationship with your spouse – one that is affair-resistant, stable and enduring – do for your spouse lots of delightful small deeds each and every day.** Stop and realize how your spouse may be like the highway crew flag person, who labors unappreciated, in his or her relationship with you! Always doing for you, but getting little recognition in return.

#### A PAGE FROM MY CALENDAR

I picked Asian pears this morning. Instead of loading 'em up in storage, I gave some to the neighbors, my family and friends. They were all wowed by them.

Tonight I am inviting some folks over to help me pick apples. We'll have a good time and everyone will take some fruit home.

Before my heart attacks, I might have been content to pick my fruit trees by myself. Now I want to share more of myself with others. And I want to have more FUN!

I can't have nearly as much fun if I keep the harvesting of the fruit to myself. I want to

give them something.

No other human activity brings you more pleasure, or changes you so significantly, than giving little calling cards of good will.

Now I measure myself by the little gifts I give others. *Not by the gifts they give me.* Not by the paycheck I receive. Not by the possessions I stack up. Stockpiling things never made anyone happy.

You don't have to have a near death experience to realize the power of relationships in your life and to devote more attention to them. You can start giving more right now. Just share yourself in a different or small way.

Let people in. Trust them to know you in additional ways. Bring a tear to someone's eye through a genuine act of caring.

You don't have to send flowers. Just send a bit of yourself. Share a dream with someone. You could tell your mate your wildest dreams for your relationship. Have you done that lately? Have you even talked about the relationship? Have you shared your hopes about what it could be someday?

#### GIVE THE OLDER GENERATION A SMILE

Recount the old days and fond memories with a grandparent. Let them relish the warm, fuzzy memories. Bask in the glow of days gone by. You can indulge yourself long enough to bring joy to your grandfather's heart. Hear what they have to say. Let them ramble. Permit them to go on and on about the good old days. Allow them to tell war stories.

Don't concentrate on the stories, but on being together. Cherish the time you have together.

Someone sent me a card yesterday which said, "I just wanted you to know that I think you are special."

It made my day. I posted the card on the bulletin board in my office. I will keep it there for a long time.

This spring I planted a couple dozen blackberry and raspberry plants.

A neighbor asked, "Do you really need that many?"

“Well, I thought I’d better plant enough for you, too,” I answered.

He laughed and changed his tune. “Well, in that case, I’m glad you did.”

That same neighbor loves Rome apples. Personally, I think they’re insipid, as far as flavor goes. But he loves them. And he kidded me about not growing them.

“You grow all those varieties, but you won’t grow the best apple in the world,” he would say.

I told him that Rome was NOT a candidate for the best flavored apple in the world.

“That old processing apple will never compare to an Ashmead’s Kernel or Spitzenburg, a well ripened Jonagold or Braeburn, a Pink lady or Tydeman’s late Orange,” I said.

“You don’t realize how good Romes are,” he said.

So, one day I asked myself what I could do for my neighbor, just about the kindest man in the world, and the answer came like a bolt of lightning.

I purchased and planted a Rome tree in the front yard near the mouth of my driveway, just for my neighbor. I told him I’d take care of the tree, but he would have to harvest the fruit every year. He was dumbfounded. Really touched by what I had done for him.

He stopped by one morning to examine the tree. “That’s a big tree,” he said. “Must have cost you a pretty penny.”

Now nearly every time I see him he asks, “How’s my apple tree?”

And it always gives me great pleasure to tell him it’s doing fine and that, yes, he will have plenty of apples this year. ☺

It’s all about taking care of people.

**When we make a little effort or go out of our way to make someone’s day, our relationships grow stronger.** We gather light and shine it on others.

And our relationship fortune grows bigger and bigger.

I GAVE AT THE OFFICE

Not long ago, while vacationing along the Greenbrier River in West Virginia, I found a truly remarkable leaf. It was one of the first leaves to fall in August. I took it home when I returned to Kentucky. I made a card and put the leaf inside, and gave it to a friend.

He said, “Why this leaf? What made you think of me?”

“Because you are so colorful and alive, and your spirit in the office makes everyone feel so darn good.”

Tears came to his eyes. This is a grown man, mind you, a professional. A man with a career and a family and the whole nine yards.

I had caught him off guard, touched him. I had thought of him while on my vacation. And I had acknowledged his beauty and significance as a person. He couldn’t believe it.

It was such a small thing, a mere leaf, but something he will remember. Something that will let him know how important he is to us all. That leaf stayed on his desk for months! It was like a paperweight, a rare gift.

Something that says, ‘You are special to me, my friend,’ always works wonders. Such an enjoyable way to honor the many good people in our lives.

Do you know what joy I felt when my friend accepted the leaf? As I handed him the leaf, his eyes reached out and hugged me.

For a few moments, I became the richest, happiest man in the world . . . and the feeling lasted all day long! Imagine, incredible riches for you to enjoy all day long!

**As I lay on a cot in ICU, people gave me small gifts.** I savored each one. Kind words, uplifting words were spoken. People came together around my bed. Good memories were made. The love that I felt was real, not an abstract idea. But a very real energy that flowed through my body and touched my mind.

It’s the small things, the simple expressions of gratitude, that count.

I love to tell people how beautiful they are. Or to give them a compliment. I do this with strangers, too.

Strangers?

Yes, strangers. You have to be careful, of course, but it's a pleasure to see the surprised smile on a stranger's face when he realizes you went out of your way to do something nice for him.

Yesterday I complimented a young woman on her baby girl. The woman lit up like a Christmas tree and began talking about her baby. I listened. We were perfect strangers, but we had formed a small but real bond over her baby.

I left her with some positive words and I made the baby smile. On the way out, I said, "She is a lucky baby."

The words took the mother by surprise. And a big smile flowered on her face.

Okay, it wasn't much. But it felt good for everyone. I was able to spread a little cheer.

I love to say to people, especially those who are having a bad day, "My, don't you look good today?"

I love to see their pleasant and happy reactions.

And it's so easy for me to give that little gift to them. I never lie. Because people **are** beautiful. And I see something beautiful in them. They need to know it.

I cultivate the art of seeing beauty, or of seeing the beauty in the world and others. I do not try to sit around and think of all their faults, or to tell them what's wrong with them. Or depress myself by thinking of all the terrible events that occur in the world on a daily basis.

You know, the people in our lives need to know we think they're beautiful.

But what matters more is our telling them. They need to know we think so.

## **BIG TIP**

Cultivate the art of finding hidden beauty. In all people. In everything. When you search for beauty you do yourself a big favor. Others may be immersed in negativity, in seeing the faults, in bringing out the problems, but you are lifting yourself up. You are climbing onto the roof of the universe.

## **A Simple Wave Of The Hand**

This morning I drove through a highway construction site and waved at the flag person. It was a small way I could give something of myself in that particular situation. I could tell the guy was tired and bored. He may have been thinking, “What a thankless job!”

He had a hot, lonely job. People drove carelessly and dangerously through that area, and tended to give he and his co-workers no thought.

I thought about how I might feel if I had to stand on that dusty pavement all day long. So, I waved and smiled – smiled like I knew the guy – hoping to bring a small ray of sunshine and recognition his way.

He seemed startled, perhaps stunned. And then he waved back. And he smiled a wee smile.

Now that may be a small thing. But what I used to do was very different. Before my NDE, I might have ignored him completely. And, if I had waved and he hadn’t waved back, I might have gotten smug.

But now, if he doesn’t wave back, it’s okay with me. I can’t control his behavior anyway. I tried to be nice, and that makes me feel good about myself.

### **Consider This**

When someone is trying hard to impress me, I give them the attention they desire and find a way to give a genuine compliment. Their tune changes. They no longer need to impress me. We can now get down to the business of a real conversation.

### **When Relationships Fail**

So often, when relationships fail, they fail due to silence, avoidance and misunderstanding.

We forget to take care of things. We forget the care and feeding required. We forget to keep a balance in our relationships, and we spend less time with our relationship friends.

Or we hit a snag in the road and lack the patience to work it out, so we hit the highway. If things aren’t working flawlessly, why fool with it?

And it’s easy to think that way when we DO NOT realize how critical relationships are to our well being.

It seems we can afford to let a relationship go since we have many positive relationships in our lives. A given relationship may not seem important at the time, and we are so busy, so we forget about it. Or we put it off until another day, which may or may not ever come.

Eventually it becomes difficult to come back to the relationship. The longer we avoid it, the harder it is to re-establish contact, trust and communication.

## ACTUAL CASE

This is a true story. Versions of it happen all the time. Some more serious, others not so serious. They all have dire consequences.

I know of a couple who had a baby. The wife became depressed (post-partum depression). Her husband became frustrated with the situation and demanded change. When his wife did not respond, his intolerance grew and grew, until ultimately he found a girlfriend.

Naturally the wife became more depressed. The couple became estranged. The couple separated and the wife began to raise the daughter alone.

As of this writing, the couple is filing for divorce. The husband wants to reunite with his wife, but she wants nothing to do with him.

Sad, huh?

Relationships fail for many reasons. Sometimes a spouse is impatient or selfish. Sometimes the problems seem insurmountable, and we stop trying. We may stop being thoughtful or considerate, or inadvertently deprive our partner of attention and love.

Every plant in our garden needs watering, and all our relationships are worthwhile. We may get distracted or emotional, or we may get cold feet. We may be angry or preoccupied. We have all kinds of reasons for neglecting our relationships, for closing our psychic doors or barricading our hearts. But it rarely makes sense to walk out on a relationship.

How do you take care of the plants in your garden or house?

A little attention here and there, a little water and fertilizer. A little TLC goes a long way.

No matter how serious the problems may seem, it's wise to keep doing your part to bring sunlight, hope and joy into the relationship. You don't want to cut back on the oxygen just because the relationship is ailing. You want to have good experiences. You want to find creative ways to enjoy the relationship. You can't afford to just focus on the problems and allow them to magnify to the point they seem impossible.

So often we look back, after years have gone by, in disbelief and sadness, because we have allowed perfectly good and wonderful relationships to go by the wayside.

Don't do it. *Love your heart – give it away.* Every day of your life. Then no one will ever forget you. Even after you are gone to the next world.

***Give a little of yourself. Each small gift or thoughtful memento that you share with someone is a piece of yourself, a nugget of your heart going out to touch others. The world will not be able to forget you.***

And for the right reasons!

## **ACTIVITY**

**Think of ways you could give more of yourself to the people in your life.**

**If you already do this well, you may want to think of one person with whom you could share more of yourself. Maybe you can give in a different way.**

**If you are thinking of a business relationship, perhaps you could agree to mentor someone or offer your support in other ways. A closer alliance could mean a more successful collaboration.**



## **The Thirteenth Insight: Salute Your Family and Be There For Them!**

**Stop and realize how vitally important your family is to you. Let family members know you appreciate them and make every effort to get along. Give your imperfect family the respect it deserves . . . and don't expect them to be perfect!**

While in the hospital . . . my family gave me an outpouring of love. They were my foundation for recovery. Each of my relationships with family members was allowing me to hang in there. I needed them all.

I never felt abandoned. And I always felt deeply LOVED.

And that's the way it should work. If you give to your family your best, your family will be stronger, and it will always be there for you.

Criticize and condemn your family and you'll get what you asked for. Sit on THE GLORIOUS AND NOBLE THRONE OF JUDGEMENT AND CRITICISM and you are in for a fall.

I recall overhearing a discussion between two family members while I was in my hospital room. I was starting to feel better and my family was being more relaxed around me. One person brought up a politically sensitive subject, and I thought there was going to be an argument, which I didn't want. I remember thinking, Oh no. Let's not get into that.

Then something happened. The other person said, "I know how you feel about that. Hey, let's see how the patient is doing."

They came over to me and we started talking about another subject. A disagreement and potential argument had been avoided.

*Such matters can almost always be avoided if you have the presence of mind to try.*

### **Simple Tips for Saluting Your Family**

- 1. Be responsible toward your family by offering help when needed**
- 2. Assist your aging parents in whatever way you can**
- 3. Invest time in familial relationships**
- 4. Don't fall prey to the illusion that you are better than other members of the family**
- 5. Find ways to have FUN with your family (and don't let anything spoil it)**

6. **Participate in family rituals and celebrations**
7. **Discipline yourself to think of your family in positive terms (instead of thinking only of the problems and flaws)**
8. **Be proactive in keeping arguments or disagreements in their place**
9. **Give your love and do your part, despite disagreements**
10. **Recognize the achievements of family members and be humble about your own**
11. **Stop being competitive with family members and be supportive.**
12. **Explore and assume new, more helpful roles.**

Appreciate your family for what it is. As flawed as our families may be, we wouldn't get anywhere without them. Treat them respectfully, kindly and lovingly. Acknowledge the major contribution they have made in your life.

Think of it this way: without our flaws we wouldn't be very interesting and they anchor us to the human race. Without them we wouldn't stick around for long – we'd float away on a sea of blinding perfection.

Families of some kind give us our start in life. They support us through one crisis after another. They feed and cloth us. They impart values to us. They give us the wherewithal to become who we are.

We don't have time for our families any more. **Yes, maybe it's a cultural problem, but we need not accept it.**

**Our families are ten times more important to us than we think.** This is true for all of our families: our nuclear, extended, blended or whatever families.

The family provides the foundation upon which we stand.

The family is absolutely critical to our well being and functioning. It gets us off to a good start in life and sustains us as we grow. Our siblings and parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents and others are special to us and will always occupy a special place in our thoughts or lives.

Yes, we grow up and go out on our own to form our own new family. And no, we never actually leave. Once born into a family, we will always be a part of that family. Fortunately! What a wonderful thing a family is.

It's nice to have those ready made connections and relationships. They give us a sense of self-worth, belonging and identity. They buoy us in times of hardship and need. They

provide us with a rich variety of close, personal experiences. They present us with multiple opportunities for learning and growing.

If you don't feel like you have a family, develop one. Form close ties with dear friends and create a support system, or **troubleshoot problematic relationships with members of your family, no matter how estranged they might be.** Be close to your neighbors. Do whatever it takes to build a family for yourself.

## Do the loving thing.

If the other person isn't meeting you half-way in the relationship, be the strong one and provide leadership. Show that you care enough to keep the relationship moving on a healthy path.

### **Don't Relationship Hop**

As soon as something doesn't go the way they want, some people will look for a way out of a relationship. They get upset or angry, or they try and punish you for disappointing them. They'll punish you by leaving or finding friends elsewhere.

Try this . . . when something goes wrong . . . look at yourself first. Usually, when some problem pops up in my relationships, I had something to do with it. I may not realize it at the time, and I may feel like pointing my finger, but . . . I've learned it is far easier on relationships to examine yourself first.

And if you see that the other person has done something wrong, don't panic or go running with accusations in hand!

Discuss it in an UNDERSTANDING way. Learn to live with a little anxiety, until you can get things resolved. Resolution always come easier IF we avoid finding fault or acting hurt by what the other person has done.

Flying into a rage or panic NEVER helps a relationship.

Stay calm and deal with the relationship breach . . . the vast majority of problems can be dealt with successfully if you remain calm and keep your wits about you.

### ANOTHER TIP

Learn not to fight back. If you perceive the other person has done something to hurt you,

do not react by fighting or attempting to hurt that person. Give yourself some time and space. Step back and look at things. Deal with it in a calm and sensible manner. Try to repair the break. Don't trash the other person or relationship.

If a window is broken in your house, what do you do? You fix it, right? You don't burn the house down!

Yet with relationships, that's exactly what people will do!

## LEAVING A RELATIONSHIP OR BREAKING ONE OFF

I believe it is wrong to leave a relationship without sitting down with the other person and explaining how you feel. Give the other person some respect. Let them save face. Talk about what the relationship has meant to you. Thank the other person for their effort. End the relationship, if you must, elegantly . . .

Leaving with a clean conscience. Because you were honest and forthright. And you said what needed to be said. And you may have given the other person a chance to correct the problem.

There is a popular song about 50 ways to leave your lover. And while it is a cool song, there is only one way to leave your lover. That involves shooting straight and saying what needs to be said. Having a face-to-face talk. Giving the person the respect he/she deserves.

Give the relationship you've had some respect.

Be kind to the other person, even if you are angry at him/her.

All other ways are easy ways out. The coward's way. Unless, of course, you are in a violent or dangerous relationship, and you need to get out as soon as possible.

My NDE taught me how ridiculous it is to give in to resentment, jealousy and anger. Or to just take off and disappear because you're upset about something. How childish! Yes, we've all done it, and it takes time to learn another way.

## **Cancer Changed Her Life Forever**

Many of us do not recognize the importance of our families. Disconnected and distant from our families, or embarrassed by them, we go on living in a dream world until

something earth-shattering happens to jolt us back to reality. For me, it was a heart attack. For a friend of mine, it was cancer.

## AMAZING REAL LIFE STORY

Sharon's cancer was predicted to take her life. It was terminal, the doctors told her. She was given a few months to live. Family and friends were devastated.

But Sharon battled her cancer and somehow beat it. No one knows exactly how that happened. But Sharon came out of it with a stronger faith and a new lease on life. Every member of her family went through a type of transformation.

All were deeply touched and relieved to have Sharon back in their lives.

As a cancer survivor, Sharon saw her loved ones in a different light. The experience taught her how important her family was to her. She felt more thankful than ever to have another day of good health. She was thankful to be alive and to be loved. She was filled with **an overwhelming sense of gratitude.**

Oh, Sharon had always loved her family, but she had not fully understood how to express her love. Now she wanted to make an even larger contribution to her family than she had ever made. Now she wanted to express her feelings more clearly. She wanted to leave no doubt about how she felt about her loved ones. She spoke up and let people know. *No longer would she keep her sentiments to herself!*

As a result of Sharon's struggle with a deadly killer . . .

***she was left with a newfound resolve to live the best life she could live. She took her family even more seriously (she had always been devoted to family). She took a more active role in leading by example.***

She became more aware of her responsibility to herself, to do more with her life and to introduce changes that she had always desired. And she wanted to do it for her family, too, **to be the very best person she could be!**

The experience helped members of her family to appreciate Sharon more and to give her the space she needed to make the changes she wanted to make in her life.

It changed the entire family's lives. It made everyone face the reality that no one is

exempt from death, that all this will pass. She said it jolted her into facing the reality that she wouldn't have her family forever. She vowed to keep the realization that life is fragile and each day is a gift; she promised herself and God that she wouldn't take it for granted ever again.

Sharon became a **more giving person.**

Every day she tries to touch someone's life in a special way. She is more positive. She is friendlier to others. She is always aware of her responsibility to set a good example. She **keeps** a positive mental attitude.

She is an optimist who inspires everyone she meets. Of all the people I've worked with, Sharon is the most inspiring, and she lives her life in a way that challenges people to reach a high standard.

Sharon now sees family obligations as a pleasure.

Sharon has cultivated an unshakeable awareness about what is valuable in life. *She focuses on large issues and lets small things go.* She thinks about the purpose of her life everyday, about the importance of her **personal mission**. She thinks about death. It makes her more receptive to the beauty around her.

She remains aware of the precious moment as well as anyone I've known.

Sharon handles her aggravations differently than most. *She refuses to get upset over silly things.* **If something goes wrong, rather than wallow in it, she focuses her attention upon what's right.** When she feels like throwing her hands up in frustration, she catches herself and does something positive.

Sharon said, "My cancer made me want to get more out of life. To gain new experience. To get out of my rut and keep exploring the world. To change and grow, and stay tuned to what's beautiful – what's truly beautiful no one can take away from you."

I love that: what's truly beautiful is yours to keep.

Sharon has become a stronger, more courageous person as a result of what she has endured. **She makes it her duty to love and encourage people.** She works with other people who have been diagnosed with cancer, inspiring them not to give up hope, helping them to realize the importance of **not giving up**. She has a mission now – a quiet personal mission. *To make every day a special day for others and herself.*

Sharon is a true and skilled leader who gives 110% to others. She says little, in effect, but her actions, my, how they speak tens of thousands of words. How they inspire the rest of us.

Sharon's family has come to love and respect her more nowadays. They see in her a remarkable woman who is showing them how to live more joyfully, and how to celebrate one another in a more enthusiastic way. **Sharon gives all she's got to her relationships.** She is a mountain of integrity. A joy to be around. A beacon of light who lives in the real world. She gives us all hope.

And yet, she finds time for herself, and she enjoys her privacy and time alone. She is a picture of poise, balance and love.

She is an independent woman who puts her family first. *It is her heart-felt goal to salute her family in every way she can.*

**And what better way than to be an *inspiration* to her whole family?**

### **Activity**

**Identify some ways you could be more helpful or inspirational at home and work.**

**Find ways to show your family more respect.**

## **THE FOURTH REVELATION: THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR IN LIFE OR DEATH**

The movie, “Fearless,” starring Jeff Bridges, depicts the struggles of a plane crash survivor who risked his life to help other passengers to safety. After his heroic acts, he learns that he has changed. Remarkably, he is no longer afraid – of anything!

In one scene, he is teetering on the ledge of a high rise building, totally unconcerned about falling.

Having survived the horrific plane crash and bravely assisted others to safety, he has become fearless. It’s an interesting notion, but that’s not quite what happened for me.

Even after my NDE, I was still afraid of heights, fast moving cars and dangerous situations. As I should have been. I had no interest in living dangerously or taking foolish chances. I did not court danger.

But . . . as far as being afraid of death, that changed.

I have lost much of my previous fear of death. My NDE left me with a sense of fearlessness about death in that I saw there is no reason for the fear. We all have to go sometime. When the time comes it comes.

It also applies to the way I live my life. I lost my fear of failure, my fear of making mistakes and my fear of taking calculated risks. I see no point in being afraid and allowing fear to stop you from doing what you want to do.

### **MEDICAL SCHOOL**

Let’s say you want to be a doctor, but you’re afraid of going to school. But why let your fear stop you from doing something very worthwhile? Get over your fear of medical school or your fear of failure, and deal with it. Take the necessary steps to prepare yourself and GO to medical school. Do the difficult thing. Go after the ambitious task. Don’t let fear stop you.

If you don’t do what you truly want, the consequences may be worse than the hard work involved of doing it! And you’ll always have REGRETS.

You want to become a film maker or director?



Well, don't sit around dreaming about it. Start making your first movie. Need some money? Raise it. Need actors? Draft your friends.

Of course there are problems associated with making movies. Yes, it's a costly proposition. The sooner you get started the better.

You may want to begin at the beginning. Take some classes, read all you can and get some practice helping others make movies. Then make your own. Who cares if it's terrible? You'll get better.

In time, you may be one of the very best. Everyone has to start somewhere. Don't let fear stop you.

Who knows, you may be the next Hitchcock or Bergman.

CANCEL FEAR

Perhaps my greatest NDE gift was to have the burden of fear removed.

It was like taking a weight off my shoulders. And that's what this section is about: losing your unnecessary fear.

**In place of your fear of failure, insert faith. Put a positive spin on your hopes and dreams. Find a way to realize them, rather than talking yourself out of them.**

**Just believe!**

## **The Fourteenth Insight: Obliterate Fear And Do What You Love**

Not long ago, I traveled to Snowshoe, West Virginia to begin in earnest to think about what I had learned since my life-changing experience. I had been thinking about it for three years, sleeping on it and trying to find the right words to give it. I wanted to know what to do with it.

Would I write about it? Would I do workshops? Would I find some avenue to share the information with others?

While hiking in the rarified air of the Allegheny Mountains, I could feel the answer. Write about it!

The fourteenth insight came to me after we had dinner and I was looking out the window of The Bistro, watching people come and go, and keeping an eye on the cascading, cloud-enshrined peaks in the distance. The misty view was almost intoxicating.

The idea to write about my experiences had originally come to me right after my NDE but, for some reason, I had not really sunk my teeth into it.

One day while I was recovering in the hospital, one of the nurses came into my room and said, "There he is . . . the man who has been given a second chance."

I mumbled something like, "I guess so."

He stood at the end of my bed, nodding. "I envy you."

"But why?" I asked.

"Because you have been given a new life. If you messed up the first time, you can get it right this time."

"That's a nice thought."

The nurse checked my vital signs and made notations in the chart. "Most people don't get a second chance. You are a very fortunate man."

"I feel fortunate. I feel thankful."

He nodded. "I have the feeling you are going to do something special with your new life."

You are more fortunate than you can ever know.”

Okay, he wasn't the first person to say something to that affect. I began to think about his kind and hopeful words, and ask myself why so many people kept saying similar words to me.

And I certainly felt fortunate.

It was a feeling I wanted to keep for the rest of my life. When anyone feels that way, good things happen. ☺

Later that morning, as I walked down to the end of the hall in my hospital-issue gown and slippers, balancing myself against the wall with an outstretched arm, I reflected on those words, and they filled me with wonder.

Months later, I am still reflecting on the meaning of those words, thinking about how I want to live my “new” life.

In a nutshell, I learned that getting a second chance was a wonderful opportunity to make my life even BETTER. I can go for any dream that I dare. I can change my life in any way.

I am fearless now! I can say or do anything that is in my heart! I can!

Right after my near death experience, as I gave consideration to the idea of a second chance, I knew I wanted to go all the way this time. I wanted in the world's worst way to go farther, to stop holding back, to stop accepting less, and to reach for more.

A voice emerged from within, saying, “**To live the greatest possible life, to be your best, you must Eliminate doubt and fear, and the addiction of negative thinking.**”

Um, excuse me, did you get that? I said, “addiction.”

Yes, I thought, that makes sense. Fear and negativity would only hold me back. And negative thinking is a form of fear. An invasive shade of fear.

But the voice continued, “To reach your dreams, you must **build the greatest relationships possible. Make every single relationship SHINE.** Accept no barrier. Get off the track of mediocrity.

Put yourself on an accelerated track, one that springs from the heart . . . and winds straight through the high country of your wildest, truest dreams.”

OK, I thought. That makes sense, too. After all, I am a relationship therapist and coach. I know about relationships. It’s my business.

Then, it said, “Have you forgotten to do what you love, to be true to yourself? The Cosmic Father’s will for you is written in your heart. You need not look outside yourself. It is there, where it has always been, buried inside you, waiting to be activated.”

Interestingly, I had been living what I thought was an excellent life before my heart attack. But the words seemed to help me become aware of the need for fine-tuning my life, and facing an old problem, or two, and solving them.

I began to think critically about my life. Had I settled into a kind of mediocrity without realizing it? Had I accepted less than what I was capable of?

Duh, yes . . .

A lot less!

And so have others. Many people seem to suffer the affliction of a mediocre job, a mediocre relationship, a mediocre life.

Yet it is so unnecessary. One can confront the reasons for his unhappiness and deal with them in a constructive way, recover lost dreams and fulfill them. One can live the life he wants to live. If one will try!

I meet people who want to have a good relationship, but not a great one, and it breaks my heart. **They’re okay with mediocre, or too busy to go for great relationships.**

Willing to settle for less.

In fact, few people actually set out to have a great marriage or committed relationship. They have no clear goal to guide them, so they unconsciously emulate the relationships of their parents or friends.

Most who seek counseling simply want to repair their fractured marriages. Restore them to the status quo!

But I encourage them to aim higher. It's just as easy to reach a lofty goal than to flounder without one. And why aim for something less than what you can do?

Part of the problem lies in the way we tend to view relationships. **For one**, we like to see them through the lens of their flaws and problems. We think of what's wrong, not right.

**Two**, we seldom think of a **relationship's potential**. When I ask people what they think their relationship potential is, they usually tell me they have no idea. People don't think of relationships in that way.

Potential: a scary thought, huh? I mean, who sits around and thinks about the kind of potential their relationships have?

You do.

So why not talk about it with your relationship partner? Talk about the things you could do someday. Ways to get closer and be more fulfilled. How could you collaborate on important projects? Businesses you could start together. Dreams you could help each other to fulfill.

What kind of relationship could you have if you and your spouse did everything in your power to build the best possible relationship? Forget about what your relationship looks like now. Just imagine what it could be if you developed its highest potential. Do you have the slightest idea of what your potential is?

Never take your eyes off your lofty goals, even while you are trying to put out fires or resolve problems. Keep thinking about your potential.

Think about it.

### **Blueprints For Success**

When a couple designs a house, they assemble their best ideas and dreams, and an architect interprets them in a series of drawings and blueprints that will bring their plans to life. Then the construction process begins – a process the couple must contribute to and oversee.

In time, the house is built. And the couple begins to put in the finishing touches, rectifying any problems that may exist. Gradually, they decorate and furnish the house, making it more and more beautiful and functional. All along they have a set of plans to

guide them.

*We rarely draw up blueprints for our relationships, often leaving them to chance. We don't try to build the most beautiful relationship we can envision. And sometimes the spouses disagree on what they want, but they never really talk about it. This leaves the couple with divergent expectations – a problem that will show up in time.*

Fortunately, it is seldom too late to begin planning an exceptional relationship. If you've had a rocky marriage so far, fine. It can be seen as a learning situation. If you've failed before, that's okay.

☛ **Having failed before, and having learned from your mistakes, just means you're that much closer to success!**

*My NDE allowed me to revisit the decisions I had made with regard to all of my relationships, and to reexamine myself. It urged me to take action in any area of my life in need of change. It urged me to do it now. Not to put it off another day. What a gift, an incredible gift.*

As I found the hidden gift tucked neatly inside the ordeal, I understood that I had to go all the way this time around, or I wouldn't be able to live with myself.

**The first part** of my insight prompted me to live all out; I had to live a life I completely believed in, a life that constituted a labor of love. A passionate life.

One that would leave a legacy I would be proud to leave behind when I die. A life that says I have been here in a big way. A life of bold love and conviction.

**If, before, there was something I thought I couldn't do, it was time to find a way to do it now.**

To stop allowing myself to be overcome by the old, persnickety limits, real or perceived, and to make my wishes come true.

### **A Fortuitous Gift**

As I was wrestling with the fourteenth insight on top of Snowshoe Mountain, a book floated into my life. A great novel, Demain, written by one of the truly great modern writers, Herman Hesse.

A friend literally left the book for me where I was staying.

After a long trek on a lovely, cloud-enshrined mountain path, I returned to the camp and found the book on a little table on the front porch. As several ruby-throated hummingbirds battled one another for rights to drink at the feeding station, I sat on the swing and began reading Hess's book.

The novel is about Emil Sinclair, who wants nothing more than to live according to the prompting which comes from his true self.

But he finds it a rough road to hoe.

**After searching his soul, Sinclair finds that, "Nothing in the world is more disturbing than following the path that leads to himself."**

Wow.

That hit me hard. It was so powerful and true. Had I not been on such a path? Was I not wanting to accelerate my journey along that path?

And there I was struggling with the fourteenth insight. Only I had seen a glimmer of hope. According to my insight, nothing in the world could be more disturbing than NOT following your true path.

Nor more painful.

My traumatic experience had confirmed my prior (but somewhat inconsistent) belief that everyone (or almost everyone) *can* live an authentic life if they want to. You really can make your dreams come true. And you should.

I am not saying that your dreams should conform to the materialistic side of the American Dream, which is not necessarily possible for everyone, (or equally accessible). I am talking about more of a spiritual dream. An inner path that flows from the heart.

If I could meet the fictional character, Emil Sinclair, I'd tell him this, "Nothing, Emil, is more disturbing than NOT following the path to the SELF."

Yes, it is hard to be true to your inner self. But it is so much harder not to be.

NUCLEAR INSIGHT: OVERCOMING THE FEAR DRAGON

As I said earlier, my NDE showed me there was nothing to fear. Hence, nothing to worry about. What a waste of time and energy it is to worry about something that is manufactured in our heads.

I already knew this, but had not fully put it into practice.

Isn't it funny how we might spend twenty years learning something, but still may be unable to do it well, let alone flawlessly?

It takes a lifetime to get the hang of some lessons. Like overcoming the fear dragon. We are slowly conditioned to be afraid. Of course, the fear of death is built in. Fear messages abound in our culture. And sometimes religion adds to our trove of fear.

Yet dying is a natural part of life, and something we must all face. So why make it into something worse than what it is, a natural part of life, the end of our life cycle?

Somehow – please don't ask me to analyze it too much – my NDE gave me a glimpse into the unknown. And I came away from it with a very, very pronounced belief that . . .

life is so much more than we realize.

It completely defies our logic.

Despite zillions of theories and ontological viewpoints, I believe that we humans have no clue about what lies beyond.

All I can tell you is this: death and the hereafter are so much more peaceful than one can imagine. There, fear is not even possible!

That does not mean we should go there before we have to. Life is where we belong . . . until it's time.

**TODAY'S WORLD IS DIFFERENT**

**To live an authentic life is**, in some respects, both harder and easier today than ever. Emil's world was slower and simpler, and possibly less complicated.

Yet we face the same dilemma among many new distractions.

It's harder today to follow an inner-directed course because there are so many more



choices, and it's easier because there is so much more knowledge available and widespread opportunity. We live in a time of great knowing, a time of education and possibility. Technology has made this era more interesting than any before it. What a time to be alive!

Yet there is so much to do, so many opportunities, but so little time in our crowded schedules.

When we follow a true path, the guidance, help and support we need will come. If we just persevere. If we simply keep trying.

**The second part** of the revelation suggested that we need to stop dilly-dallying around and go for it! That we often take too long to decide. Or we put it off, fearing it will be hard to do, until it is nearly too late.

**The third part** of the insight emphasizes the power of relationships to help us realize our dreams.

If you do what you love, if you are honest with yourself about your unique gifts and visions, and you dedicate yourself to expressing and doing right by them, happiness will come to you.

You needn't wait until you are successful. The happiness is in the journey, remember?

This is akin to being true to yourself. It involves choices and courage. You possess certain aptitudes and gifts, and there is a special purpose for you. But it's up to you as to whether you want to believe it and fulfill it.

If you take the risk and trust yourself (and your higher power), you will not regret it. And your good relationships will provide you with plenty of encouragement and support along the way. You won't have to go it alone. Your good relationships will be money in the bank. They'll secure for you a solid support system.

The kind of support system that can make all the difference in the world.

**But, if you take the easy way out and do something "safe" with your life, you'll always wonder what you could have done . . . you'll always suffer for that unrealized dream.**

My vision spoke to the utter importance of looking squarely at yourself and asking

yourself what you truly love, and having the courage to make a plan and follow it until you reach your goal.

For example . . .

Let's say you always wanted to be a professional athlete, but you missed your chance or didn't make it. That's okay. At least you tried.

It ain't too late!

You can find a creative way of doing the next best thing, which may turn out to be the very best thing.

You can go to school and get training in a sports-related field. You can still have that sports career. **You may be coaching or training, marketing or broadcasting, or you may serve as the team physician, but you can fulfill your dream in some way.**

Don't walk out on that dream. Believe. You'll find a way.

And when you are living the life of your dreams, you will be fulfilling your ultimate mission. And guess what?

You will be happier and healthier. Your relationships will flourish. People will respond to the joy they see in you!

Everything works better in our lives when we are on the primrose path, seeking to do what really turns us on, what we truly love.

My NDE taught me that it isn't too late to start living that great life, even when we've lost the dream.

It doesn't matter how old you are. You can begin right now.

Maybe you'll have to tweak your goal, or find *a different version* of it than the original, but you can reach it. And when you put yourself on that road less traveled to your dreams, you will feel differently about yourself.

You will be more alive. You will be living your life wide open. Going full throttle.

**An Unforgettable True Story**

One of my former colleagues, Lisa, endured a terrible experience when she lost her husband and all her possessions due to a house fire. I cannot begin to imagine what anguish she went through, although I know something about it because she shared her thoughts and feelings with me on several occasions.

After she recovered from the shock of the experience and got her life back on track, which took years, she decided to fulfill a lifelong dream. She wanted to run a marathon. 26 miles, mind you!

She had never been an athlete and had no reason to believe she could do it . . . other than the will power and drive to take on a tough task.

She trained for the longest time, ran in some small races and gradually inched closer to her dream.

One day we passed each other on the stairway at the office. She told me she had done it. She had completed her first ever marathon, and her time had been a respectable one.

The look on her face was priceless when . . .

I told her she was my hero!

And she was.

Do what you love. It makes a huge difference in your life. Don't be afraid. There is nothing to fear, but a bunch of stuff we dream up.

Fear is the chain around our neck, or should I say yoke?

Get rid of it. Free yourself. Do what you love.

As Donald Shimoda pointed out in Richard Bach's Illusions: The Adventures Of A Reluctant Messiah, God's will for you is written in your heart, it's what you love to do, it's what you most desire (paraphrased).

Your dream is there for the taking. You simply have to ask yourself what you feel and desire. What you naturally want to do with your time.

Human beings make knowing themselves much harder than it has to be.

It's really simple. Just listen to the voice within. Although it won't always tell you what you want to hear, it won't steer you wrong.

The hard part is being honest with ourselves about what it says.

Then it can be hard to find the courage to do it. But what a joy it is to follow in the right direction!

Doing what you love, what you are most uniquely prepared to do, is a priceless path of joy and heart. It is the inner warrior's way. The seeker's way. It will lead you and those whom you love to the promised land on earth.

### Activity

**Begin living fearlessly by taking small steps. Pinpoint one fear at a time to address. Or one area in your life in need of change. Do the thing you are afraid of.**

**If you've always wanted to take acting lessons, call the local theater.**

**Would you like to go back to school, but you're afraid? Start looking into it. Just take the first step. Read an article or make a telephone call. Do something.**

### *Friendly Advice*

*If you have a dream, do something toward that dream every single day.*

**It doesn't matter how small your task may be. Get in the unshakable habit of doing something constructive. At least one small thing.**

**Don't be one of those *wishful thinkers* who simply talks about their dreams. Talking only gets you where you already are. And talking can give you the false sense you are doing something when you aren't.**

**Doing takes you a little closer. Develop a bias for action with your dream. Now you may get somewhere!**

That's part of the ingenuity of **the ultimate relationship solution**: doing whatever is in your power at the moment to reach out and touch someone, to give of your heart's desire to any person who crosses your path. To act on your convictions. Being bold enough to translate conviction and desire into action. The ultimate relationship solution is about action, not talk!

## **FIFTH REVELATION: RX FOR THE WOES OF A SPASTIC, KNEE-JERK, WHIRLWIND MODERN LIFE**

Almost everyone is going too fast today.

We live our lives at a maddening, frenetic pace. We are going so fast we feel dizzy much of the time. We sleep less and eat faster, trying to fit more hours of productivity into our already cramped days.

We don't have time for one another because we are biting off more than we can chew. Our eyes are bigger than our appetite! Like busy little bees we spend our time acquiring new things – and that's what they are, things.

We want so much and yet there is so little time in which to acquire it. Once we get the latest new devise, gadget or contrivance, we need time to learn how to use it. On top of that, we need time to enjoy it.

### **A GRIM STORY**

For example, I know a guy who sunk about \$20,000 in a boat for fishing and pleasure, but he only used it twice the first year, once the second year and not at all the third year.

That beautiful, sleek motor boat, which sported the finest engine ever made for its purpose, was supposed to be his newest, latest ticket to happiness. It was going to solve so many of his problems and give him a new lease on life!

Um, how can I put this?

It didn't work that way. It brought few, if any, ripples of happiness. Not even an inkling of the mythic stuff of glee . . . the stuff he had been searching for all his life.

Guess what?

After shelling out big bucks for gas and insurance, a trailer to haul the thing, and all the appointments and gadgets to go along with his new aquatic lifestyle, he sold the darn thing.

Did he make a big profit on the sale? Not really. He sold it at a HUGE loss!

And the thing was in mint condition.

What a familiar story, huh? If not a boat, it could have been a thousand other things.

OK, so you already knew that. Everyone I talk to says they already know that. So why are so many people out there forgetting it? Or not adhering to it? We may know something, but we may fail miserably in living by it. Sure, I know money doesn't buy happiness, I know it well, as I spend more and more money on happiness.

#### NEWS BULLETIN: THE DAY HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO 28 HOURS

People are trying desperately to pack a lot of living into their day. One of the problems the boat guy encountered was the lack of time to go boating. He spent half a day packing his car and boat for the trip to the lake, then he had to drive a fairly long ways to the lake and wait in line to put the boat in the water. Then he had to spend hours on the water to justify all the time and money he had already expended in search of a good time. And something always seemed to go wrong and cause him to spend even more time trying to fix it. By the time he got home, late at night, he was exhausted.

Not only had his ticket to happiness been quite an ordeal, but it was costing lots of precious time.

I don't know if you know this, but there are still only 24 hours in a day!

Many people don't know this. They really don't. They are suffering under a delusion that the 24-hour day is nothing but a myth.

Once upon a time (back in the 1960's or 1970's), a rumor was sent out to the citizens of the modern world. A rumor that changed modern life.

That rumor, in effect, said that there were now 28 hours in a day.

As a result of modern technology and scientific breakthrough, every man, woman and child living on the planet automatically received four additional hours per day in which to live their lives and accomplish their goals. That was the rumor.

No one remembers exactly when it happened, but it happened. This rumor went out and everyone believed it. In time, they bought into it. Perhaps because they wanted it to be true so much they believed it!

So now people labor under the mistaken idea that there is more time in each day than there really is. That must be why they try to do so many things, even though they end up

not doing any of them especially well.

They don't get to savor anything. Or to stop for even a second.

They rarely step off the treadmill for a break.

Even vacations are work.

Marriage has become work. Serious, artful lovemaking has been reduced to a series of quickies. And lovers are so tired when they get together that they fall asleep in the middle of the process.

But it has its convenient side. We can blame our busy schedules for our failures! We're even too busy to be responsible.

Has it dawned on us that we have become too busy for living?

Certainly for living well . . .

or really enjoying life.

**What is the result of all this rushing around?**

- A decreased capacity for experiencing delight and joy.
- A reduction in overall happiness and contentment.
- Limited capacity for enjoying our relationships.
- The failure to fulfill ourselves.
- Feelings of sleep deprivation and chronic stress!
- Numbness, dizziness and feelings of depersonalization.
- Too little time for spiritual exploration
- Etc., etc.

## GOOD NEWS

There is something that can be done about it.

That's where the fifteenth insight comes in . . .



## **The Fifteenth Insight: Slow Down and Live More Contemplatively (Every Day of Your Life)**

It may seem like an alien idea to some, but we really can slow down and seek less in order to live a more satisfying life.

We can start by seeing that less is actually more.

When we have less to contend with, fewer obligations, and fewer things to keep up with, there is more time in which to enjoy the important aspects of our lives. More time for savoring the moment.

**More time and space in which to enjoy one another's company . . . without hurrying!**

We can adjust our mammoth appetites. We can take a deep breath and stop for a second. Get off the merry-go-round. Think about what really matters to us!

We can put what matters first and stop wasting so much time chasing our tails. Turn the cell phone, game system and TV off. And sit in the silence.

The **silence** will nourish you as nothing else can.

We will take time to stop and smell the roses. That old saying takes on new power today, as it has never been more meaningful.

We can take time to enjoy what we already have!

Gosh, what a novel idea . . . if we were to do that, we wouldn't think we'd have to have more and more.

**Conspicuous consumption** would be a thing of the past.

What does all this boil down to?

It means adjusting our lifestyles to accommodate true happiness and joy.

For some, this might mean staying in a smaller house or driving an older car. Keeping up with the Jones' doesn't get you anywhere. It may mean taking steps to lead a more active spiritual life . . . a rich interior life or spending more time in prayer and meditation.

Leading a contemplative existence while in the hospital made me realize how much I needed and wanted to *continue to live contemplatively when I got out of the hospital.*

But I knew that would not be easy to do.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

In addition to making lifestyle changes, which would allow you to make room for contemplation, you can and should take time on a regular basis for listening to your inner self. Take time to engage in relaxation, yoga, meditation and prayer, or artistic efforts which transport you to another place or zone.

Most people simply do not spend enough time doing this, and they yearn to find the time.

You can spend more time in nature. Go for walks and count butterflies, hummingbirds and dragonflies. **Immerse yourself in a garden** or spend more time on the beach or in the mountains. Watch sunsets. You know, sit in the garden. The perfect place to enter a quiet repose. To be still, watch and listen. To let your eyes close.

My aunt and grandmother shared a garden for many years. They built a tall wooden fence around it, which created a sense of privacy. When you entered through the creaky gate you entered another world.

You could sit out there under the apple tree for hours. You could think, read or play a musical instrument. You could be at peace. And you could work in the garden, which wasn't like work at all. Even as a teenager, I loved being in the garden. I loved soaking up the wonderful and quiet alone time. I loved sitting on the grass and watching the plants grow, the nuances of light shifting throughout the day.

There are many ways to slow down.

Do those simple but relaxing activities you haven't had time for lately. Like hoeing the garden, playing catch with your kids or going on a hike. Walk the family dog.

And find some alone time. You can sit in the silence of a little wood lot and watch wild birds feed on seeds you have left out for them. If you live by the water you can sit by an open window and watch the waves come in and go out. Do nothing else for a while.

I used to do water meditations all the time at Virginia Beach. The Edgar Cayce Center (the Association For Research and Enlightenment) has a fabulous meditation room

looking out to the ocean. I have spent hours there in quiet reverie.

Make time for contemplation. Time to attune yourself with your Higher Power.

Stop thinking all the time! Stop stressing! Take a badly needed break from all your usual activities by engaging in quiet reflection or mindfulness exercises.

That's what came to me by way of the fifth revelation. **The Rx for our modern woes is leading a contemplative life.**

You can do this by spending time in the silence, perhaps in a home sanctum or your study. Take responsibility for managing your relationship with yourself seriously. Give yourself the time you need to repair from life's busy demands.

Contemplation will give you clear guidelines for action. It will help you to think clearly about life. It will clarify your purpose. You can use contemplation to simply relax and unwind, or to obtain insight or direction.

Sit in the silence each and every day, or at least a few times a week. Participate in a regular devotional practice by reading inspirational literature and allowing it to guide your meditations.

Whatever you do, don't shirk your responsibility to yourself for making time for inner healing work, exercise and development.

For years, I put off regular meditation because there just wasn't enough time. Yet, my "awakening" moved me to change all that. "Make time," something said. "You cannot afford **not** to do this!"

No excuses. Just do it. Be creative about it. You can fit it in, if you try.

## **SMALL MIRACLES**

During my stay in the hospital, many small miracles happened. Not only did I recover, but I found the keys to living abundantly and fearlessly. Locked doors in my relationships flew open. Blocked visions were set free.

One of the most astounding and far reaching little miracles concerned a vision for leading a truly contemplative life. I had little choice but to live such a life for the two weeks I was "incarcerated" in the hospital.

And boy, did it teach me something!

All my adult life, I had courted such a life, but never actually made it happen. It is so hard to change old, established behaviors; and all my attempts to change my whirlwind, rush-around lifestyle, and to slow down and lead a simpler, more meditative life failed in the end or were met with nothing but a disappointing partial success.

Two weeks in the hospital changed all that . . . for good!

### A CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Late in the evening, the hospital was a different kind of place than throughout the day. Mornings brought a non-stop hustle and bustle that lasted until the end of the day's visitation hours, around 9:00 P.M.. Then the hallways, rooms and surgeries became a quiet and more restful place. Fewer procedures were done at these hours, the hospital staff was smaller and the patients slept or tried to sleep.

A gentle quiet meandered through the hospital, a perfect time for thought and contemplation.

I enjoyed these special, late-night and early morning hours, and spent much of my time in quiet relaxation, listening to beautiful music or meditating. I enjoyed staying awake and allowing my awareness of the surroundings to become keener, and to flourish in a deliberate way. The quiet, meditative time furnished my hungry mind with information about the life that ebbed and flowed all around me.

My awareness became a beautiful thing. What I saw and felt I could hardly put into words.

*This quiet, reflective time was rejuvenating.* I would close my eyes and allowed my mind to be carried away by the beautiful music I heard on the arts television channel.

Feelings were conjured, which lifted me above my medical problems, and nudged me into inner states which were delightful.

It was as if the soothing classical music was my greatest medicine, reaching inside the molecules of my damaged heart and arteries, stirring my inner consciousness in a way which can only be described as incredibly restorative. Sometimes the music transported me to a trance-like realm.

Certain kinds of music can affect us deeply.

The combination of music, a veritable river of celestial sound, and the quiet, undisturbing hospital environment late at night, along with my sincere desire for confronting the truth and opening myself to universal reality, shaped my hospital experience in positive and fortuitous ways.

My world had been shut down, nearly destroyed. Yet, ever since entering the hospital, my life had been extremely contemplative. I began to look forward to the thoughtful, reflective evening hours. This quiet time really began to work for me.

## A LOST WORLD

Everything I had left behind, or lost . . . in the way of material goods and cherished belongings, as well as my work and career, and all my earthly desires and associations, had been robbed of their power over me.

As I struggled to live, all of it had been temporarily discarded. What did it matter? I could have cared less about my farm, my HD TV, my four wheeler, or my CD collection, for example.

It had **ALL** been rendered meaningless . . . for the moment.

My material possessions now amounted to so much glittery stuff which had lost its luster. I didn't even think about my **stupid stuff**.

Now I was stuck in the hospital, tethered to the machines which hummed beside my bed, a captive of four tight walls.

And I was going nowhere. Why not take the opportunity to make the most of my situation by courting the silence, the lovely and profound inner state of being that connected me to the unknown, and to a world of spiritual discovery and exploration that awaited me.

## OUT OF THE BODY EXPERIENCES

So, if my mind wanted to leave my body and float above my bed, I did not stop it.

There was no longer any fear that would stop me from penetrating the veil that concealed the unknown. I had cast off the ugly mantle of fear days ago.

If my mind wanted to move from one reality to the next, I wasn't going to stop it by being afraid.

In fact, I wanted to keep my newfound contemplative habit going **after** I returned home from the hospital.

In the meantime, as I lie in a relaxed state between medical procedures and brief periods of sleep, I wanted to yield to the quiet that awaited me.

If I found myself entering a magical trance state whereby I felt infused with the divine presence, and my entire being wanted to tingle with an indescribable joy, I wasn't going to interfere.

*Spirals of shimmering energy and bursts of color cascaded over and through me,* bringing me into contact with powers of healing and delight which I found tremendously liberating.

Nurses would barge into the room, take a glance at me and say something like, "Well, you certainly look relaxed. You've got a nice thing going on in here, don't you? What nice music. I wish the other patients would listen to soothing music."

If only I could tell them the full extent of my inner meanderings.

I had always benefitted enormously from insight meditation. Answers to difficult questions, direction for my life's work and solutions to quandaries had always been provided. It was a way attuning myself to a steady stream of never-fail guidance and deep-seated inspiration. Every meditative experience had proven to be an exercise in inner bliss.

Why had I been so inconsistent in my practice?

All of my days in the hospital, except for those where my condition was most critical, were spent **immersed in the contemplative life.**

If not, I would not have been able to find the insights and revelations I've written about here. I would not have realized a vision for how to live the rest of my life, for how to build my relationships along new lines.

HOW MY NDE HELPED ME TO GET REAL

Like many people, I have had a hard time changing old habits and learning new, better ways of doing things in my life. My new year's resolutions almost always ended up on the metaphorical trash heap exactly two or three weeks after making them.

A fortunate aspect of my NDE is that it forced me to take stock of myself and to confront my stubborn refusal to change.

It caused me to detach myself from reality so I could see my life in a new light. In a totally new light.

Seeing things differently was critical.

That may not be possible for most people, *under normal circumstances*. Something has to happen to knock you out of our normal mode of perception and thought.

If something happens to allow us to see the true nature of things, we see with new eyes. And we see the cosmic connection in all things.

**My experience ripped me away from the material world I had known, and put me on a journey, a quest at the speed of sound.**

I saw and understood death in a new context. My relationships appeared larger than life. People were far more beautiful, noble and important than I had ever envisioned.

Along with this sparkling new view of people, I saw the beauty of having more fun and enjoying life more, which is a way of celebrating relationships.

I saw things I could not see before. My spiritual cataracts were removed and suddenly I could see. My NDE became a quest for touching the ultimate reality, the ultimate nature of existence. Plunged into darkness, I found a glimpse of the light, and was able to perceive without distraction.

It took a certain amount of courage to go on with my transformation, though. I tried to be true to my new, bold perceptions, and to face them for what they really were. I saw tremendous good in almost everything and everyone. It was shocking.

My perception of death was the most shocking of all. I saw death as a place or condition beyond fear. I saw life in glorious new terms.

In some ways, my near death ordeal was a kind of initiation, an opportunity to remain in

an altered state of great mental clarity for an extended period of time.

## DAILY WORK IN SILENCE

Some of the greatest experiences of my life involved my lifelong practice of meditation, but that practice had at times been inconsistent. While I was strapped to a hospital bed, I realized that I could not allow that inconsistency to continue.

I promised myself that I would make time for regular, if not daily, meditation practice. Nothing could be more restful, yet invigorating. Nor more profoundly uplifting and enjoyable. Nor more meaningful.

The trance experience is difficult to describe. On one hand, it is always an adventure and, on the other, it is reliable and comforting, a means of contacting the unchangeable, unalterable reality. For some, it is a method of worship.

Before leaving the hospital, I promised myself I would make it a daily habit, and I would never again go months without meditating.

Long hours spent in contemplation in my hospital room led directly to the last insight.

In some ways, this last insight was the most coveted one of them all. It hinges on the desire so many people have to reconnect with their true and authentic selves, and to enjoy a closer and more meaningful relationship with the God whose love resides within them.

## **Leading A Contemplative Life As A Spiritual Quest**

Many of my clients want to be able to be more contemplative. They are talking about how contemplation can make a difference in their lives. They want guidance on how to turn within.

I believe it is a universal need. Men and women have always wanted to connect with something beyond and greater than themselves, and to search their deepest selves for hidden wisdom.

Your church, parish, mosque, synagogue or other place of worship can be an excellent source of help in your effort to lead a more contemplative life. They have resources and traditions which you may find helpful. Dialoguing with others of like mind is very helpful, too. You may want to start a discussion group or join one.



Get and give input. But mostly just start somewhere and find time for contemplation.

## **SIMPLE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE**

You can start by simply taking steps to **simplify your life**.

Reduce clutter. Get organized. **Eliminate unnecessary obligations!!!**

Say NO to time wasters, such as watching too much television.

Reduce the number of trips you make to the market, combine errands and avoid spending too much time running around.

Car pool or take the bus.

Cut back on spending so you can get by on less money and fewer hours of work, freeing up time for engaging in a simpler life.

### **Add a contemplative component to your life.**

For example, set aside 15 - 30 minutes each day for immersing yourself in silence. Sit in your room or a quiet study, free from distraction and noise. If you can't find a quiet and private place in your house, go to the library or a nearby place of worship.

Read an inspirational book. Close your eyes and reflect on the meaning of the passage you read. Or listen to peaceful music through headphones.

You may want to take a quiet walk in the park every day. Sit on a bench and enjoy the music of the singing birds. Get lost in the movement of the clouds.

Do some yoga exercises or simply concentrate on your breathing. Listen to the sound of your breath, as it goes in and out.

Pray or meditate. Turn your thoughts away from the world. **In other words, sit still and do something.**

Relax your racing mind. Be still. Attune yourself to the river of inner joy.

Make it a daily priority. Each time you return to your private room or sanctum, you will be more prepared for the contemplative journey.

### **In two or three weeks . . .**

you'll notice a difference in yourself. Your stress level will decrease and you'll feel subtle improvements in your outlook, disposition and overall quality of life.

### **INCREASE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS**

Next time you buy a book, look for one on simplifying your life, spirituality or contemplation. Read some of the great writers, like the Trappist monk and priest, Thomas Merton. He advocated a contemplative life, a close relationship with God and a deep connection with nature.

Merton was a prolific writer and thinker. A true philosopher, poet and artist. Merton wasn't satisfied with the quiet life he lived as a monk in the Abbey at Gethesemane. He wanted more solitude. So he obtained permission to build a small hermitage a short distance from it. And it was there he engaged in many hours of quiet reflection, meditation and prayer, attuning with his Higher Power.

By the way, visitors can arrange to spend a weekend (or more) at Gethesemane, leading a quiet and thoughtful life, brushing shoulders with the monks. And it is possible to visit Merton's hermitage.

For more information on retreats, go to [www.monks.org/thomasmerton.html](http://www.monks.org/thomasmerton.html)

Thomas Merton was a tremendous advocate for the contemplative lifestyle.

My favorite Merton book is Thoughts in Solitude, first published in 1956. A handy and poignant little gem, it is a book of meditations, which can help you to learn how to live more of your life in solitude.

If you don't know where or how to start leading a more contemplative life, try reading one of Merton's meditations each week. Spend a little time in solitude reflecting on the many thoughts, feelings and ideas which the meditation opens up for you. You'll be on your way to leading a more contemplative life in no time.

Merton lived his life as a spiritual quest. His life makes for fascinating study. What a courageous and deep thinker. I don't care what faith you follow, a book by Merton is a worthwhile companion for anyone. Try The Seven Story Mountain, Merton's classic autobiography. Or read Zen And The Birds Of Appetite, another classic by Thomas Merton.

Give Merton and other gifted writers who write on solitude and contemplation a chance. A few I may suggest are: Thoreau, Picard, Buber, Lao Tze and Jung.

There are many from which to choose.

Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychologist who studied the human psyche, the unconscious and internal spiritual states. His techniques, such as “active imagination,” are valuable resources to anyone seeking to do inner work. Jung is close to my heart. He was a deep thinker, tireless investigator and prolific writer for all times. His life works take up many volumes, and represent some of the most profound and imaginative ideas ever developed.

#### A SURE-FIRE TIP

**You may want to look into Jung’s writing on dreams. By taking your dreams seriously and keeping a dream log, you can take another step toward living a more contemplative life.**

Keeping a dream log can be helpful and great fun. Get into the habit of writing your dreams in a dream notebook before you do anything else, upon waking each day. Otherwise you’ll forget them.

After a few weeks, read what you have and look for themes of particular areas of meaning in your dreams. You can interpret your own dreams with a little practice. Your dreams will reveal much about your hidden life and not so hidden life.

#### YOUR VERY OWN SANCTUM

Why not create your own contemplation spot or personal sanctum, rearrange a room to accommodate your inspirational reading and inner work? This one step could make a big difference in your life.

One of my previous clients was a Native American woman whose mother had **an outdoor sanctum** where she went to be alone whenever she encountered a problem or wanted to find solace. She prayed and meditated there frequently.

On many occasions my client spoke fondly of her mother, whose practice of contemplation set her apart from others and made an indelible impression on her daughter, who later went on to build her own outdoor sanctum.

My client's description of the sanctum reminded me of **a beautiful Zen garden** where rocks and plants are carefully combined and placed in a special way to elicit feelings of tranquility and reverence for the sacred and profound. When you travel, why not go to places which are conducive to the contemplative life?

Explore resources on the Internet, as well. Spend a little time searching, and you will be able to find many organizations and publications of interest and value to your quest for the contemplative life.

You may want to look into the eastern traditions of thought and spiritual practice. We in the west may be a little biased against these traditions, which causes us to miss the many doors they can open for us.

You need not discard your own religious inclinations for any of the eastern ways, just learn from them. Learn from everything you can. Let your mind be a magnet for knowledge. That's what Merton did. He explored numerous traditions of philosophical and pious thought, and used them to broaden his thinking and enrich his inner life.

By reading about and experimenting with various spiritual traditions, I have added to my own and deepened it immeasurably. In addition, I have discovered seemingly countless similarities and points of intersection, which the world's religions have in common.

It is my experience that there is much to learn from all philosophical, religious and mystical teachings and belief systems . . . if we can keep an open mind . . . and if our thirst for knowledge is great enough to overcome the limits of our background and personal biases.

The revelation I had during my encounter with death dealt with universal truths and matters of universal application. It took me above and beyond my usual thought patterns. Soaring above any man-made or arbitrary divisions of ontological belief, my revelations were truly non-denominational and non-sectarian!

A contemplative life can be enjoyed by **all**.

### **Activity**

**If you can find 30 minutes in your schedule for contemplation, try the following: Begin with a few minutes of breath control. Breathe in slowly and hold your breath for a few seconds, then exhale . . . slowly . . . while concentrating only on your breath.**

**It will be easy to concentrate if you follow this count: 7-4-8. Exhale over a period of seven seconds, inhale for four seconds and hold it for eight seconds 7-4-8. Begin with the exhalation.**

**Do this for five or ten minutes, or until you feel like quitting. You may want to hold your breath longer or change the times as you experiment, but the above ratio is a good one. The important thing is that you do some breath work and focus exclusively on your breathing.**

**This will lead to a quiet period of relaxation. Once you are finished with your breathing exercises, allow yourself to sit in repose and let your eyes close. You may sit in the yoga posture or in a chair with good back support. You may focus your thoughts on a single theme, like love, and invite your inner mind to supply you with thoughts and ideas about love.**

**Or you may do an open contemplation where you sit and wait in the silence for inspiration or solutions to problems to come to you. Resist the temptation to become distracted. Brush away distracting thoughts with an inner broom. Practice “inner listening” and waiting for inspiration as you remain in silent relaxation.**

Just as being at peace with yourself is part of **the ultimate relationship solution**, having the guts to give to everyone who crosses your path from the bottom of your heart will transform mediocre human interactions into inspired, love-filled meetings-of-the mind. When you apply the techniques of the ultimate relationship solution, which I have discussed in this book, you will begin to transform your life, one relationship at a time. You will become a relationship expert, a consummate giver and lover, whose light shines on everyone in your life with equal luminosity and passion.

And you will make the world a better place to live for many people who are fortunate enough to have encountered you on the path to their future. You will change the futures of many. Your kind, elegant way of working with people will inspire others to love more fully. **The ultimate relationship solution** is all about loving others as yourself. It is about conveying unconditional love through every action and reaction, through every thought and word, through every interaction you have with others, and it is about giving everything you've got to give fearlessly, and holding nothing back. That, in essence, is the ultimate relationship solution.

## **ADDENDUM**

In the next section, I will share information about my particular NDE, and compare it to the common types of experiences found in the near death literature.

Many people have asked specific questions about my experience, and they have wanted to know what it was like for me. This information, which was not covered in the rest of my book, will answer most of those questions and give you a bird's eye view of how my NDE was both different and similar to other near death experiences.

In the epilogue, I will outline my honest impressions of the experience I had and provide you with a personal account of my recollections. I can only tell you what I remember, as I doubt few remember everything that happened to them.

In addition, I will speak briefly to the lessons I learned from my near death gift.

## **ADDENDUM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MY NEAR DEATH IMPRESSIONS**

A few people have asked me what it was like to die, or experience the near death phenomenon. One person in particular wanted to know if I saw a bright light, went through a tunnel or met a heavenly being . . . like many others have done.

In other words, did my experience coincide with the average account of the NDE?

Raymond A. Moody, Jr., MD coined the term “near death experience” in the late 1970s. He mentioned in his seminal book, Life After Life, fifteen basic components of the near death experience. Components such as meeting a guide, seeing a review of one’s life and an out of the body experience. Although other books about near death experiences have been written since then, I like Moody’s original book the best.

I will cover Moody’s fifteen components shortly.

Of course, every NDE is unique. Moody interviewed numerous people, none of whom had exactly the same experience. Yet there were, and are in current accounts, strikingly similar aspects to these experiences.

Regardless of occupation, religious training, or beliefs about the afterlife, people who undergo NDEs tend to report similar experiences. None seem to have all the 15 characteristics, but all have at least a few of them. I recall encountering some. I’ll get to that in just a moment.

First, let me summarize the 15 common traits of NDEs, as reported by Moody in his original work, Life After Life.

### **THE BIG FIFTEEN**

1. Ineffability - there are just no words to express what happened
2. Hearing The News - people remember hearing the doctor or someone pronounce them dead
3. Feelings Of Peace And Quiet - overall people report have intensely peaceful feelings
4. The Noise - the hearing of unusual noises/ringing/music that has great power/force

5. The Dark Tunnel - the sensation of being pulled through a dark corridor of some kind
6. Out Of The Body - people float above their bodies and view them from a certain distance
7. Meeting Others - seeing deceased relatives or friends
8. The Being Of Light - an intense light being which some think of as Jesus, God or an angel
9. The Review - a rapid video or movie of important scenes from the person's life
10. The Border Or Limit - a type of barrier beyond which the person cannot go if they wish to return to earthly life
11. Coming Back - the desire to return to this life, although he/she may not want that at first
12. Telling Others - the desire to tell others about the very real experience but the tendency to not speak of it for fear of rebuke
13. Effects On Lives - the experience tends to quietly improve or deepen the person's life
14. New Views Of Death - changes in one's view of death and removal of one's fear of death
15. Corroboration - in many cases, the reports given by those who experienced NDEs have been corroborated by other independent persons

## CONCLUSION

Moody concluded that these accounts do not prove the existence of life after death. But they still provide us with valuable information.

And he opened the door to a new generation of inquiry and study, bringing the subject matter out of the closet, so to speak.

Other researchers, such as the eminent death researcher, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, MD, have reported similar findings. Despite what people may think NDEs mean, it certainly seems to be a phenomenon of great magnitude and universal application.



The purpose of All About Relationships is not to prove anything about life after death, but to offer some idea of what I learned from my NDE and suggestions on how you can apply these ideas to your own life. The focus of my book is on the revelations, not the NDE itself. Yet I will tell you something about my experience in this section.

Several books have been published about near death experiences since Moody's landmark book, Life After Life. In fact, Moody and Kubler-Ross published a book together called, Life After Life: The Investigation Of A Phenomenon - Survival Of Bodily Death (2001, HarperCollins).

Amazon.com sells many NDE books. I think this shows how much interest has increased since the release of Moody's first book.

## **MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

You've read about the insight and inspiration I gained from my NDE. You've learned how the experience changed my life and influenced my dealings with people. And now you know, after reading All About Relationships, something about the day of my NDE and what it was like for me, the patient who almost died from a brutal heart attack.

You know more than any single person I've told about it . . . because this book says it all.

Still, you may ask, What else did I experience? Did anything else happen?

I can only tell you a little about what it was like for me, and discuss the characteristics of my personal experience. I cannot speak to anyone else's experience.

### **Here is an overview of my near death impressions:**

**Impression #1:** I have always had a real sense of the **ineffability** of my experience. Many, many times I have tried to think of ways to express a feeling or sensation which I recall from that remarkable December day, only to give up without finding an accurate way to put it.

So a lot happened that I cannot recount here. If I could show you the pictures and images that remain in my mind, I would.

And maybe you'd understand. But there is no way to do that since I am not a visual artist. Even if I were, I doubt it could be done. There is simply something indescribable about

the experience, something larger than words.

On several occasions, I have tried to impart a thought or feeling associated with the encounter to a friend over dinner, but I never felt that I was able to communicate it to my satisfaction. That always leaves me in an odd sort of place.

Wishing it could be otherwise.

**Impression #2:** Another critical part of my NDE was **an astounding feeling of peacefulness**. Ineffable peace. A peaceful DNA carved into the cells of being.

It reminded me of a structure of the universe, phenomenal in nature. A deep, abiding peaceful quality imparted to all there is, a foundational element of the cosmic fabric of death.

Again, the problem I'm having, as I sit in my study trying to find the right words to use, is the ineffable nature of it all.

And equally inexplicable.

So I won't try to explain it. Because I can't. Here are the words that come to mind: every breath you take in that ephemeral body is soaked in the plasma of peace. I know this is a bad metaphor, but it's all I can come up with.

**Impression #3:** I think I heard **lots of noise or what I would call celestial music**, a ringing like no other, a river of sound that literally had the power to move me from one place to another, not unlike a system of transport.

Honestly, I have heard the wild, musical ringing before . . . many times. So this was no surprise.

As I reflect back on it, there were times the ringing felt like it was coming from inside my head – a ringing that seemed to explode in my skull. Other times, the ringing seemed to carry the entire body from one place to another like a swift current or a white water river.

Some people have described the noise as being uncomfortable. Although I don't think of it in that way, I understand what they mean. It can be frightening or like being carried away on a rampaging current of hypnotic sound.

Incredible, that's all I can say.

When I say I think I heard these sounds, what I mean is, I feel like I did, but cannot be 100% sure.

**Impression #4:** Yes, I recall **leaving my physical body**. Fleeting glimpses or threads of memory involve a sense of floating. Of moving about like a bird or balloon. It seems like I returned to my body at various times, only to leave again. Somehow that seems to make sense since several attempts to revive me were only temporarily successful.

I must admit, the sensation of leaving my body is not new for me. I had experienced this on numerous occasions before my NDE.

There have been certain times in my life where this activity was at its zenith, such as during late adolescence and early adulthood. As a junior and senior in high school, I would often wake up from an afternoon nap only to find myself (my mind or awareness) hovering near the ceiling of the bedroom. I was looking down at my body, as though completely detached from it.

I assure you this was a completely natural phenomenon. I did not use drugs or alcohol and there was nothing unnatural in my system. These experiences appeared to have no explanation. And I was a picture of health and vigor.

I have met lots of people who have reported similar experiences, and I have worked with numerous honest and reliable clients who have had out of the body experiences. I regard this as something quite normal.

**Impression #5:** I recall having **an intense desire to return to life**. I wanted to live. I wanted to come back, and I fought like crazy to live.

**Impression #6:** During the weeks and months after my NDE, I was not sure what I wanted to do about it. But soon **I felt a keen desire to tell others**.

As you may recall from an earlier section in the book, I presented a seminar for my colleagues, a group of therapists and helping professionals. I told them a great deal about what I had learned and how I was attempting to apply it in my own practice.

Later on, I developed a sincere desire to write about my NDE. The idea for this book germinated and I began writing the first draft about three and a half years after leaving the hospital.

**Impression #7:** **The effect of my NDE on my life** has been utterly profound.

It has given me a new lease on life, and a new guide for all my endeavors and activities.

A template for a wonderful life.

A prescription for terrific relationships.

A sure-fire formula for success.

A shot-in-the-arm for my career.

A day seldom goes by without my thoughts turning to the experience or some aspect of it. I am always thinking about how I can better apply what I learned to my daily life.

It serves as a constant teacher and guide. It is nearly an oracle.

If I don't know what to do in a given situation, I can put myself in the mind set of my NDE and the answer is forthcoming.

It is a gift par excel lance.

**Impression #8: This experience transformed my views on death.** It left me with a sense of utter fearlessness.

Fear can block or obscure our vision. It's like a dark cloud or a set of dark glasses. Once the fear was gone, my vision grew brighter and clearer. It was as if I had been accustomed to seeing everything in the dark, with my night vision, through the thick, tar-like goggles of fear.

But after my NDE, my eyes began to see in the clear, beautiful light of day.

This has been the greatest single outcome of my NDE.

Things that used to scare me don't now. Oh, I still have my share of healthy survival fears, but so many areas of my life have completely opened up because I no longer feel afflicted by acquired and unnecessary fears. And since I no longer fear dying like I used to, that has left an incredible sensation of lightness and well-being in my soul.

Life has become a rainbow of opportunity and joy.

A spectacle of radiant and luminous sunlight.

Glittering, wide-bodied streets have opened up for me, inviting me to travel their length and breadth. The way I interact with people is easy and free, as though I am gliding through my days. Unencumbered and untethered, I am light enough to fly.

### **Impression #9: Gratitude.**

Uh, huh. Old fashioned gratitude. Pure essence of thanksgiving. Thankfulness beyond compare.

Maybe this has come about because I endured such a long and grueling battle with death. I never knew for certain what the outcome would be. There was so much pain and misery involved, I could only feel the most intense and enormous sort of gratitude.

An outpouring of gratitude has been helpful and instructive. It has shown me that to live life in an attitude of thankfulness is to enjoy life at its fullest.

If you are not grateful you will never know this delightful pleasure. You will never soar to these heights.

There you have it. The nine principle impressions of my NDE. I wish I could tell you more, but I think you know why I can't.

That's right. There are no words.

### **FURTHER LESSONS FROM MY NDE**

My NDE taught me more than I could ever account for in a single book. I'm not sure I know myself the various ways it affected me. I know there is more, but I haven't been able to grasp it all yet.

There is a definitive mysteriousness about what happened to me. No matter how well I may think I understand it, there remains so much that eludes me.

Before my NDE I thought life was mysterious. Now that sense of mysteriousness has quadrupled. I have the stark impression I know things on an inner or unconscious level which I do not know consciously. Some of it may not make sense to my logical mind.

Yet I feel I have it together more, as if I have a sense that everything is going to be alright in my life. I carry a "feel good sense" everywhere I go.

I, like many other recipients of near death experiences, feel that I have a real purpose in life, and my life has meaning and value precisely because of my wonderful relationships, without which I'd be a lonely son-of-a-gun. It is a strong sense of purpose, and it coincides with the fundamental purpose we all have for being here.

And that is love.

**Love, the verb**, as opposed to love, the noun. They're like two different words.

I believe now, more than ever, it is our duty to love with all our might and to teach others to love. If we have children we must teach them how to love. We must love our neighbors. We must treat everyone we meet with dignity and respect, and we must understand that they too have a job to do, a reason to go on. We must do nothing to impede the progress they are making toward their goals.

Each of us must strive to be of selfless service.

*I fully believe there is no higher calling than to be an inspiration to others.* We should touch as many lives as possible. Not with sermons but with kind and caring actions. If someone is hungry in our community it is our job to feed him/her. And to do so quietly, without calling attention to ourselves.

It is not uncommon for people to come back from death with a sense of the dire importance of love, and the conviction we should love tirelessly. It is as though they feel they have had a special knowledge imparted to them. A knowledge of spiritual secrets. They return with a newfound seriousness about their lives, and a new dedication toward living their lives in the best possible manner.

***They strive to rid themselves of selfishness and other self-serving characteristics.***

Most want to make changes in their lives – changes for the better. They want to make their lives count. They want to be better citizens.

It does not matter what their religion may be, their place in life or how large their bank account, almost all those who suffer NDEs want to do right by people. They want to lead beautiful lives.

Certainly I, too, came back with a similar altruistic sense. And I wanted to correct my weaknesses and be a better person, too.

## TRUSTING

And there is more. There is one last caveat I have not told you about.

Prior to my NDE I would often have intuitive feelings, which I would ignore. My intuition would tell me something or lead me in a certain direction, but I would dismiss it. Given to doubt, I was quick not to trust those intuitive glimmers that come from within.

But my NDE changed all that.

Time and time again, my intuition warned me of impending problems, guided me through difficult mazes and led me in making hard decisions. During and after my recovery, I trusted my intuition on a daily basis. Along with rational thought and reason, intuitive processes became a splendid and accurate tool for dealing with life's problems.

All my life I had intuitive impressions. Sometimes I had trusted or believed in them, but other times I had questioned and flatly disregarded them. I allowed logic to hijack my intuition. And many times it had come back to haunt me.

Still, I went on, trusting only in hard-core reason and logic.

My NDE showed me **how valuable intuition can be**. And it literally saved my butt a time or two. So, I promised myself I would never turn my back on my intuition again. I promised myself I would trust my gut when the time seemed right. And I would pay close attention to inner stirrings.

I wanted to have the courage to rely on my intuitive powers and to live that way for the rest of my life.

And so I made a pact with myself to give my intuition a chance.

And I believe you should, too.

Think of it as going part 'n parcel with living a more contemplative life. Looking to answers that may come from within. Not being too quick to dismiss the knowledge that comes from a different part of the brain. The wisdom resident in your body.

## SUCCESS

Since I left the hospital almost four years ago, I have relied upon my intuitive skills

without fail. And it has been a delightful way to live. ☺ My intuition rarely, if ever, disappoints me, and I rely on it all the time. In fact, I can no longer imagine living in a way that would involve turning a deaf ear to my intuition.

Don't be afraid of your intuition. And don't let someone talk you out of it. Trust it.

I hope this information will inspire you to develop your intuitive abilities and to use them more fully, to live your life with more power, grace and beauty.

### **A SPECIAL THANK YOU**

**I wish to offer my heart-felt thanks to all those special people who came to my aid during the difficult days of my near death experience. You taught me the true significance of relationships. Thank you for caring and giving. For your love and devotion, I will always be grateful.**



## **EPILOGUE: Fine Tuning Your Relationships and Putting The Ultimate Relationship Secret To Work For You**

Once you take that first step toward improving your relationships, you'll be well on your way to a newfound success in your life. And one good thing will lead to another. Every improvement will bring about a surprise and happy reaction from others, which will serve to reinforce your efforts.

When you need a little motivation, you can reread my fifteen insights. And think about how my transformation, as a result of a sudden and shocking near death experience, can guide you in your own progress. Also, you can look for inspiring stories of people working together in times of crisis in your own family or neighborhood, and try to become an inspiration to others by being your own kind of angel to someone.

For extra motivation, read an inspiring book. There are thousands. May I recommend [The Five People You Meet In Heaven](#), by Mitch Albom This book deals with the issue of relationships in an interesting and compelling way.

It's about:

1. The importance of finishing unfinished business in our relationships.
2. Making our relationships right.
3. Learning the lessons relationships have to teach us.
4. Giving people the respect they deserve.
5. Seeing our relationships for what they truly are, and what they have meant to us.
6. Understanding the powerful influences people have had on our lives.
7. Doing what we can to fulfill our obligations to others.

Among other things.

Then ask yourself what kind of unfinished business you may have in the relationship sector of your life. And what you might want to do about it.

You may want to see a wonderful movie about relationships, *The Straight Story*, in

which two brothers allow anger and ego to separate them for ten years! Finally, one brother makes a daring and very long journey by lawnmower to visit his estranged brother, who has become quite ill.

One of the characters mentions that the story is as old as the Bible, and it truly is. It is time for we citizens of the earth to learn from this “Cain and Abel” story.

By managing our relationships wisely we become stewards of peace and love. And we make the world a better, more peaceful place for everyone, regardless of their beliefs and differences. There will never be real peace until we have harmony in our relationships.

Good relationships serve to increase understanding, empathy and cooperation among different peoples . . . and cooperation is the name of the game.

Progress in your relationships amounts to small steps, which you can take at any time. It’s the small steps that sometimes make the biggest difference, and give you time to acclimate to the changes you are making in your life.

Keep making little changes and improvements, and you’ll notice your life becoming lighter and more buoyant. Tasks and situations you once dreaded will suddenly seem tolerable and then enjoyable.

Do some fine-tuning in your relationships, even if they are quite healthy and good. In time, you’ll get used to expecting more from yourself in regard to your relationships . . . as those relationships become better and better, promoting your happiness in new ways . . .

and you’ll never go back . . .

to mediocre or neglected relationships.

**Some people regard relationships as a necessary evil**, a responsibility they would rather not have, a cross to bear, a complication in an otherwise carefree life.

But my NDE taught me just how wrong, how myopic, that conceptualization of relationships really is. If you remember any one big truth from my book, I hope it is this: relationships are not a burden, and have every potential of being the most wonderful part of anyone’s life. I hope you’ll remember that my near death experience brought that reality home to me like a fiery vision from the other side.

Since then, my relationships have gradually become more of a pleasure and a valuable gift, a tremendous benefit in everything I do, the world's greatest investment paying the highest possible dividends.

***I have learned, through the experience of my clients, young and old, and my own personal experience, that relationships are the key to the kingdom on earth, to boundless happiness, joy and pleasure, and the key to continual learning, growth, prosperity and self-rejuvenation!***

If we would only become true masters of our relationships, the world would truly be our oyster. When we take excellent care of our relationships – all of them – unimaginable rewards come our way. My life, and the lives of my clients, are living proof.

If you just start working with the **ultimate relationship solution** in your everyday life, I promise you will start seeing a small but significant improvement – and a bright ray of hope – in just a few days.

Don't try to do it overnight. Just a little at a time . . . and you'll be amazed at the wonderful changes you'll find trickling into the various spheres of your life . . .

Remember . . . slow and steady will get you there sooner than fast and furious!

Even dealing with problem relationships can be a pleasure, once you get the hang of the **ultimate relationship system**, and you have developed a fair amount of self-confidence. If you realize, as I did, while lying on my back in the hospital bed, that every relationship in your life has its purpose and hidden gift to give you – perhaps in time – and every single relationship in your life has a hidden nugget of gold waiting for you in its outstretched hands, you will start to apply the strategies of the **ultimate relationship solution** to everything you do.

This system will improve your success on the job and in your professional life, at home and in your personal life, and give you an advantage in every single social situation you ever encounter . . . for as long as you live!

Every relationship has a nugget of truth to teach us, whispered words of wisdom to share with us, if only we will look and listen for those buried opportunities in the small and great successes, as well as, the disappointments . . . and by looking and listening in the proper spirit we will begin to mine their surprising depths.

A few of your relationships, like mine, may seem paltry at times, or even second-rate, but

we must muster the courage to think of them as *great relationships in the making* – relationships that will fulfill our every hope and dream because we are going to nourish them into reaching their full potential – and actively expend effort in improving them.

It's a matter of ***full potential living***. Of getting the most of your life and the unique opportunities it affords you. All you have to do is apply the **ultimate relationship solution**

. . . and you can make it happen!

For the solution to work you must remember that change is your best friend. And you must remember to initiate change, that it must come from you. You cannot occupy a position of advocating that others change, but of *demonstrating change in your own life*. There is always room for change, no matter how strong we become. The stronger we are, the quicker we realize that change is a desirable and joyful process.

When we stop blocking or resisting change we open the door to a problem-solved future with enormous opportunities for happiness!

Unlike what some may think, change is the ultimate way of life, and when we cooperate with it and willingly throw ourselves into the powerful energy of change we can reach new heights. The ultimate relationship is all about self-initiated change, and the willingness to lead by making changes in ourselves.

I read a lot of mumbo-jumbo in certain management books about getting other people to change. **You know what I say to that? Bah, humbug!**

**The best way on earth to motivate others to change is to lead by changing ourselves . . .** and to immerse ourselves honestly and purposefully in change, casting all vestiges of resistance aside, and embracing change for the rush and sheer satisfaction it brings. When we are growing and changing in dynamic ways, we are living at the top of what it means to be human, we are riding the crest of the wave.

And when we bring change into our relationships we are triggering an avalanche of positive changes that can follow us into our relationships.

Sometimes what a lagging relationship needs is for someone to see the potential in it, and to work to reach that potential, someone who will not give up or discard the relationship in favor of some newfound glittery glory that waits in the wings, vying to replace our troubled relationship.

Patience is part of the ultimate relationship secret, for it takes patience to stay with the journey and to resist urges to jump ship.

*Ultimately, the best relationship solutions begin with re-envisioning our relationships and giving them the status they are due* – and by recognizing that our relationships anchor us to all that is good in life. And rich relationships, full of delight and wonder, give us a down-to-earth riches beyond compare.

As I write these words, the Christmas holiday is upon us. And for me, this has always been a special holiday, and yet how could I possibly enjoy it if it were not for my friends and loved ones? And where would I be without the wonderful people in my life to help me celebrate the special moments, the holidays, the good and hard times, the sowing and reaping, and all the endeavors of mankind?

My attainments and successes are not individual in nature. Everything I have ever accomplished (or will accomplish) is made possible by teamwork and cooperation. Other people, the unsung heroes in my life, make my success and happiness possible.

Without good relationships our successes would be devoid of pleasure. Without good relationships all holidays would be meaningless.

Without my loved ones, my friends and families, without my colleagues and associates, without my teachers and mentors, without my students and trainees, where would I be? Where would you be without yours?

I know what I'd be. And it isn't pretty. **I'd be a lone wolf.** I would trod the frozen tundra seeking my next meal. I would have no pack affiliation and no social group to which I could belong. I may be a strong wolf, yet as a wolf, I was not cut out to be a loner. A wolf is a social animal, and the best wolves are highly sociable and highly successful on a social level.

Do you know what happens to the lone wolves of the world? Their days are numbered, for they cannot live long without the help of a strong pack for food and protection. And belonging.

If a wolf has lost his pack, or lost the right to associate with his pack, and he cannot gain admittance to another pack, he will soon wither and die.

Yet, when one is the master of one's relationships, all of the world's riches, inner and outer, are at one's disposal. If you apply diligence in following the **ultimate relationship**

**solution**, you will find yourself the master of your relationships.

Yet some people glorify the **lone wolf syndrome**, that pernicious line of thought responsible for seducing people into behaving as loners, when, in reality, lone wolves simply do not survive for long . . . and their lives fail to achieve their full potential.

Recognize that you belong to a pack, and take care of your pack, do your part to keep it strong, and I assure you . . . the sky will be your limit in all you do.

## **More Ebooks by Richard Hamon**

**If you are interested in learning about my other eBooks . . .**

Or, if you need more help with your relationships, especially your intimate relationship or marriage, go to my website:

[www.happy-relationships.com](http://www.happy-relationships.com).

## **Relationship Therapy or Coaching**

If you're having relationship problems and need additional support, you may want to inquire about relationship counseling and therapy services. My office is in Lexington, Kentucky, where I do face-to-face sessions. Or, you can ask about Coaching services, available to anyone around the world.

This special form of coaching is done via the telephone and is helpful, motivational and rewarding for those who do not need traditional therapy.

You can learn more about these services at [www.happy-relationships.com](http://www.happy-relationships.com)

## **Thank you!**

I want to thank you for purchasing my e-book. And I wish you success in all of your extremely important relationships. That includes every last one of them!

Sometimes our most important relationships are those we have not yet built. They're the ones we need to build, or may be afraid to build. Maybe you feel it is time to take that step. Forming new relationships is always a great joy.

One of the greatest joys of life!

We may never know what opportunities await us, just around the corner, if we treat every person we meet as though he or she is truly special. If we take care of our relationships as though they are *special cargo*.

And they are.

**Each and every relationship is a gift. A hidden treasure!**

And it has something special to show you. It provides a ladder to help you advance along life's path.

So, always strive to make the most of your relationship gifts.

Strive to see the hidden beauty in all your relationships. And, in seeing the beauty in others, you will find it in yourself.

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