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Survivorship: An Odyssey of Arrested Emotional Growth

A Thesis
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degree of
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By

Charles Lockhart III

School for Summer and Continuing Education
Georgetown University
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ABSTRACT

With the utilization of Erik Erikson's life span perspective on development, I have attempted to principally convey my own personal history. This history encompasses two generational life spans - the first generation relating to my family of origin, and the second generation focusing on my marital family. Through introspection and description of developmental tasks, the reader will become sensitized to the idea of simultaneous development along several dimensions. The psychosocial conflicts identify the tension between the needs and the social expectations that dominated my experiences.

The first generational life span is an in-depth examination of my experience of growing up in a household ridden with alcoholically induced denial. Denial over the death of a sibling and the inability on the part of my parents to express their feelings accompanying that loss contributed to my sense of abandonment, guilt, victimization, and lack of initiative. Surrogate caretakers made certain that my needs would be met while my parents remained only remotely available for loving and caring. I learned how "to stuff" my feelings in childhood and kept them buried in adulthood.
The second generational life span reflects upon my adulthood, my alcoholism, and how the family denial of that disease resulted in the persistence of the problem - a problem which affected each and every member within my immediate family. This period is hazily remembered for my unsuccessful attempts at abusively drowning fears and anger associated with my parents' suicides, marital dysfunction resulting from alcoholic unmanageability, and finally, descending to a spiritual bottom through which change could occur.

Automatic behavior associated with a struggle for survival could not be severed nor the links of the genetic chain broken until this turning point manifested. This blessing, disguised as horror, arrived in the form of a spiritual awakening. This new awareness, at the age of forty-three, was granted me following many years of struggle. It blossomed, not through any effort on my part, and provided relief from the bondage of self. Relief from the disease, which is better defined as dis-ease, transpired with my admission and acceptance that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable. A higher power, whom I choose to call God, now holds the reins of destiny for my life; and, through His hands, I can now act somewhat rationally instead of reacting blamefully.
Contrary to Jean-Paul Sartre's, *No Exit*, there is a way out of that hell where some are "linked inextricably." For many of us it takes excessive years and sometimes generations of suffering before we can humbly pray for assistance. Perhaps the message from the world's greatest lover describes the situation best: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." This prophetic connotation of the act of suffering signifying "allow" is the key to open the door to life. And once through this threshold we are freed from stepping and stumbling all over ourselves.

My thesis also focuses on my current life which seems to work best when lived in day-tight compartments, and my belief rests in the theory that God only gives us twenty-four hours at a time to manage. This approach to living is diametrically opposed to my former life of materialism and socialized "jet-setting." I have attempted, in this paper, to describe my progress from hurting to healing to helping, and to relate how I have awoken to a sense of wholeness that I never knew was possible. With the help of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, regular attendance at their meetings, and concentrating on not hoisting that first drink, the promises of a new and rewarding meaning for living comes to fruition. For every ending there is a new beginning,
and for me the journey commences when I humbly turn my life and will over to the care of God.
It is an understatement to assert that trepidation accompanies the task of reexamining my life—a life which many would consider to be one of arrested emotional growth. I will attempt to focus on facets of my life as they correlate, as pragmatically as possible, to the epigenesis of identity proscribed by Erik H. Erikson. Attempting not to stray too far afield from his eight stages of psychosocial crises and developmental tasks, I will deliberate and reflect on those issues and events which culminated in my decision to return to college with the goal of completing a Bachelor of Arts degree.

I realize that it will be necessary to be very selective as to what to use and what to eliminate when recalling events and reflecting on past history. There is a famous line in a song from the play Carousel which describes: "I let my golden chances pass me by." This perfectly depicts my situation with regard to schooling and personal relationships, but it is never too late to recapture that normally youthful experience. What led to this conversion? What was the payoff for not being a serious student 30 years ago? Why was so much time devoted to "treading water"? Why is it necessary for me to attend to unfinished business? This arrested emotional growth period reinforced my
inferiority, and the thrust of my project will be to discern those gray areas of suffering which eventually contributed to a depression. Paradoxically, from the depths of despair I found new life which eventually allowed me to take the risk of returning to unfinished business.

All stories can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.¹

My story is one of arrested emotional growth which emanated from family denial—denial resulting from the tragic loss of my brother at age seven and compounded by the suppression of that death imagery by my parents. They chose to use alcohol as a suppressant to arrest or drown that memory—naively unaware of the fact that booze is, in fact, a depressant. Their actions had devastating residual effects contributing to a totally dysfunctional family system. My story uniquely discloses through psychosocial crises what life used to be like, what happened, and what it is like today—an odyssey of arrested emotional growth.

Erik H. Erikson posits his concept of identity through eight distinct life stages of psychosocial crises. Psychosocial crisis refers to the person's psychological efforts to adjust to the demands of the social environment at each stage of development.² The word crisis in this context
refers to a normal set of stresses and strains occurring during specific periods of development rather than to an extraordinary set of events. Psychosocial theory offers a life span view of development—a patterned sequence of change. In contrast to random change, which is unpredictable, Erikson's theory of development follows a systematic course. Earlier behavior or sequences are the building blocks for later sequences, in other words, each higher stage incorporates the gains made during earlier stages.

With this foundation in place, I will attempt to research how my arrested emotional growth emanated from dysfunction within the familial pattern of beliefs and behaviors.

I Trust versus Mistrust

This life stage encompasses the period of infancy from birth to two years of age while I was growing up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is characterized by five areas of development: 1) social attachment; 2) sensorimotor intelligence and primitive causality; 3) object permanence; 4) maturation of sensory and motor functions; and 5) emotional development. In this stage "trust" is defined as an essential trustfulness of others as well as a fundamental sense of one's own
trustworthiness. Basic trust is a cornerstone of a vital personality since it must be present for mutuality with the caregiver. This mutuality constitutes the central process for resolution of the psychosocial conflict.

My cognitive recollection of this period is naturally very limited, if present at all, but certain events have been brought to my attention. My alcoholic Aunt Julia loved to remind me that she spent countless hours rocking me in her arms while my parents were off playing golf. I shudder to think that the critical period for my formulation of trust rested in the arms of a person who, during drunken stupors, delighted in kicking the cane out from under my lame Uncle Jamie. The setting was Lake Placid, New York, where my father and his two brothers loved to vacation in the 1930's until the outbreak of World War II.

During infancy the parent's physical presence remains a focal point of attention and concern.¹

Infants who have a secure attachment actively explore their environment and interact with a stranger while their mother is present.²

I clearly remember periods when I hid behind my mother's skirt while not trusting the presence of a third party. I suspect that my lack of trust contributed to disbelief
that my needs would be met or valued at all. It is normal for infants to seek warmth, consistency, and stimulation from their parents, and this was rarely experienced in my recollection.

In adults a radical impairment of basic mistrust is expressed in a particular form of severe estrangement which characterizes individuals who withdraw into themselves when at odds with themselves and with others.³

This withdrawal is an automatic response which hinders my ability to be assertive and confrontive and frequently interferes with my ability to say no. Promoting and controlling personalities have little trouble seeking out their target in a personality such as I display. In summary, it is not known during this period whether there is a point at which social attachments can no longer be formed so as to facilitate trust.

We do know in the absence of social attachments the child suffers serious emotional and cognitive deficits.⁴

If there was one major feature which stands out in my mind during this period it is the lasting impression that we didn't do things together as much as other families did.
II  Autonomy versus Shame, Doubt

Toddlerhood is the title given to that life stage from two to four.

When toddlers no longer have a large wad of padding between their legs, it is easier for them to make the transition from ugly duckling to swan.¹

Anal-musculature sets the stage for experimentation with two simultaneous sets of social modalities: holding on and letting go.... Thus, to hold can become a destructive and cruel retaining or restraining, and it can become a pattern of care: to have and to hold.²

Permanently embedded in my mind are the number of episodes when, with my mother's insistence, my caretaker, Helen, would force cod liver oil down my throat. Whether the means justified the ends I am not sure, but I suspect my withholding must have predominated by the repeated administrations of that dreadful mineral.

This is the sensitive period (that span of time during which a particular skill or behavior is most likely to develop) for the developmental tasks of: 1) elaboration of locomotion; 2) fantasy and play; 3) language development; and 4) self-control. The central process for resolution of the psychosocial conflict between autonomy and shame or doubt is generally derived through imitation.
Imitation and emulation were by and large bypassed during this sensitive period due to the birth of my brother Paul and continued distancing by my parents. Paul's arrival, exactly to the day three years after my birthday, was fraught with trauma right from the outset. My mother named him after her brother and devoted almost all of her time to him. Mother confided to me many years later that she had a maternal sixth sense that Paul's life would be limited. Meanwhile, my older sister Florence and I competed for his favor. We were constantly under the watchful eyes of surrogate mothers, better known as governesses or nannies. I can recall feeling much more constricted and subject to regimentation all through this period. Nonautonomy compounded by shame at having to be brought up by caretakers, other than my parents, is not a recommended initiation in the early school years.

III Initiative versus Guilt

Through the intermediary of the family, social patterns reproduce themselves in personality. Social arrangements live on in the individual, buried in the mind below the level of consciousness, even after they have become objectively undesirable and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{1} I was launched into the academic curriculum struggling with the psychosocial crisis between initiative and guilt. This
early school age period from years 5 through 7 is a time for establishing sex identification, early moral development, concrete operations and group play interaction. Self-identification is the hallmark for this life stage.

Feeling caught in the middle, I felt torn between the rivalry with my older sister and jealousy toward my younger brother who was now receiving care around the clock. Paul had contracted Rheumatic Fever and was flat on his back—the prognosis did not look good. My sense of vulnerability was so overpowering that even the school environment offered only temporary relief. That powerless position took its academic toll as learning deficiencies began to surface. Partial hearing loss from recurring ear infections was accompanied by inadequate reading skills which inhibited my ability toward class participation.

Erikson notes that the latter part of this life stage manifests in the child finding pleasurable accomplishment in "wielding tools and weapons" and in caring for younger children. Both of these became increasingly convenient for me as the American involvement in World War II coincided with my brother's diminishing health.

In 1942, we moved from our home in Pittsburgh to Narragansett, Rhode Island, which was convenient for my
father's Naval assignment. Since he had graduated from the N.R.O.T.C. program at Princeton his selection, which was to teach the brand new field of rocket warfare to Naval pilots at Quonset Point, Rhode Island Naval Air Base, was well suited to his capabilities. The uniform and the "macho" cocktail receptions at the base made him an idol in my eyes. Some of his student pilots would let me sit in the cockpits of their planes and these individuals, wearing wings above their breast pockets and on their caps, were instant heroes. Life had meaning and we all seemed to be united behind a cause—something more meaningful than self-existence—there was a war to be won. I was determined to pull my weight to accomplish whatever it took to achieve these ends.

IV Industry versus Inferiority

When I was eight years old, my brother was medically diagnosed as having Hodgkins Disease. In the 1940's, no known cure for this disease existed, yet his terminality was withheld from me and probably denied by my parents. Their new posture was undeniably perceived, however, and life became unsettling. My father was able to obtain a naval transfer from East coast to West in the anticipation that the California climate would be advantageous to Paul's
recovery—should such a miracle occur.

Florence, Paul and I were tutored and raised by an English tutoress by the name of Mrs. Turner for the next year. We all feared her strict approach toward academic discipline and missed our friends at school back East. Following this experience and after having spent two years in the Public School systems in Palm Springs and San Diego, California, my parents thought it best that I go away to boarding school.

When I was ten, Paul died at the age of seven and my parents were numbed by his loss, and some degree of disbelief persisted for many months thereafter.

There can be little doubt that much of the disturbance reported in the surviving children is a result more of the changed behavior of the parents towards them than of any direct effect the death may have had on the children themselves.¹

My sister being away at boarding school, I perceived blame and guilt for my brother's death being inadvertently cast on me by both mother and father.

Danger, at this stage, lies in a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. My concealment of these character defects were masked behind outrageous and bizarre deeds such as eating modelling clay in art class and worms during biology
lab. I was packed off to camp starting at age seven and then to Eaglebrook pre-preparatory school for three years at age thirteen. Invariably my arrival always preceded that of my trunk which proved upsetting since there was an absence of transitional objects for self-security. There was no hiding my homesickness though when I went away to camp and boarding schools at very early ages. This malady has never been evident in my children's experience, thus inadequacy and inferiority were unique to my situation and void of genetic endowment.

Indeed, the middle school age of years 8 through 12 was a traumatic experience highlighted by excessive relocation and inconsistent educational approaches. The central process for resolution of the psychological conflict of industry versus inferiority is education and my mental capabilities lay clearly in arrears. Physical endowment offset this deficiency, however and, although I was small in stature, I delighted in belting the hell out of brute football players and excelled in baseball and skiing. Fortunately, these outlets were available to me while attending all male institutions, but my naivete regarding the opposite sex remained unaddressed.
V Identity versus Role Diffusion

"We cannot be ourselves unless we know ourselves," states Thomas Merton in No Man Is an Island. Early adolescence is often associated with a period of rapid physical change. Physical maturation, emotional development, and struggle for accepted membership among peer groups are developmental tasks also associated with the early adolescent period of ages thirteen through seventeen.

Like most of my peers, in the form of classmates, I had not been well prepared by my parents for the maturation of the reproductive organs. Of course my peers would not admit this and feigned to have great knowledge in this field particularly when they perceived my naivete. In an embarrassing attempt to solve the mystery of spontaneous ejaculation, I struggled to gain information from friends and reading material or to puzzle about the meaning in my own mind.

Heterosexual relationships are developed during this life stage, and my awareness of being retarded in this area was quickly reinforced by my classmates. Many of their stories of conquests undoubtedly were highly imaginative, however, my emotions and imaginations regarding the opposite sex were non-existent. In seventh grade, I resembled
the classical Freudian case of "Little Hans" who didn't know that little girls and grown women didn't possess such an object as a penis (or "widdler"). This became very obvious in either a class or voluntary assignment when called on to draw a female nude.

The early 1950's was a nerve-racking and confusing period with the advent of polio striking all of our best athletes who had returned to school early, in August, to attend football training camp. It left such a deep impression on me that, to this day, I can remember both first and last names of each of those four individuals who were severely crippled.

My desire to be accepted by my peers resembled another character who struggled in the 1950's: Willy Loman, who was found wanting nothing more than to be "well liked." All in all, the exertion of peer pressure derived from the pre-prep school environment, although frequently humiliating, served me well for my subsequent test of survival.

Later adolescence (ages eighteen through twenty-two) was spent at Choate School in Connecticut, St. John's College in Annapolis, and a two-year hiatus in the U.S. Naval Reserve. Clearly at this life stage my thoughts were governed more by logical principles than by their own perceptions and
experiences, as Piaget proposes. My perspective on values and goals were constantly in conflict with existing family expectations which led to redefinition of family relationships. I had become very close to my maternal grandparents following my brother's death. My present recollection of the happiest moments of my youth centered around their residence in Southport, Connecticut. This mutual bonding continued through my adolescent years and will always be cherished.

It was during this period that alcohol usage began to manifest and become increasingly important in my social life.

The adult members of a community set the attitudinal and behavioral tone with regard to alcohol use, and adolescents are socialized to internalize that position. This communal acceptance of my drinking was encouraged by my sister's peers who were quite experienced from their college drinking bouts. Debutante parties were abundant during school vacations, and I was always invited to these drink fests earlier than many of my friends because I had a sister who was two years older and definitely on the circuit. My parents condoned my drinking at this time and did not question quantity or quality until some time later
when my behavior warranted it. After all, they had been
drinking excessively ever since my brother's death.

Role experimentation is the central process of the
psychosocial crisis of individual identity versus role diffu-
sion which characterizes this later adolescent stage. I not
only experimented with being a member of the drinking set,
but with being an established smoker of cigarettes, as well.
The "Great Gatsby" role was the pigeonhole that I plugged
into as the materialistic transient life held all the excite-
ment and risk of social accomplishment. This had a price
later on as I drank through successes and failures—just
as Kipling alludes to these two imposters being one and
the same in his poem *If*. In the manner of F. Scott
Fitzgerald, at first there were the drunken sprees that
seemed to be a celebration of youth and vitality, later
followed by the bitter, abusive drinking that many of my
friends had come to regard as sheer self-destruction. 5

While at Choate School my grades were consistently
below average since my priorities were severely deranged
with more of my time being devoted to athletic rather than
scholastic achievements. All three of my years there resulted
in having to attend Summer School in order to pick up lost
credits for failed grades. I proceeded to smoke cigarettes
on the sly which was a violation of school rules and was cause for immediate expulsion if caught. I did get caught in the summer session of my senior year, but it was after exams, and the Assistant Headmaster, who had known my father from Navy days, allowed me to graduate. I carried this guilt with me to college.

There was one rewarding incident during my last year at Choate. My parents made a very rare visit to the campus on parents day in the Spring of 1955. I was on the varsity baseball team and was slated to start in center field opposing our principal rival, Deerfield Academy. We were informed by our coach that Deerfield's pitcher possessed the best curve ball that we would see all season. I had three hits for four times at the plate that afternoon, all of them coming off of his curve; plus I drove in the winning run to win the game by the score of two to one. The father of our right fielder, who was also a friend of my parents, was much more congratulatory than my father. I know my father was proud and elated deep down inside, but, as in all matters, his inability to show and express feelings was hurtful.

Around twenty years of age, Erikson refers to an "ego-chill" or shudder which comes from the sudden awareness
that our non-existence is entirely possible. Depression and nihilism crept into my life during my senior year at Choate. Life suddenly began to get heavy and serious as I began suffering from emotional separation. Even when I would return home there was this feeling of being a visitor accompanied by a feeling of alienation from my parents. My sense of humor suddenly vanished while the meaning of life was a confounding issue. I had entered an "existential vacuum"\(^6\) where aloneness and boredom were by-products of not knowing what to do. I could relate to that line in Sartre's *No Exit* where Garcin professes to Inez: "Alone, none of us can save himself or herself; we're linked together inextricably. So take your choice."\(^7\) My choice, although the decision was made under duress because of my state of mind, was to go on to college. Besides, that was what all of my friends were doing and I hadn't totally opted out existentially.

In the fall of 1955 at the age of twenty, I entered freshman year at St. John's College. A small coeducational college after a large male prep school proved quite a culture shock. Most of my spare time was spent in the Annapolis bars; and, in a college environment that stressed student intellectual interaction, it didn't take long for the faculty
to figure out where I was coming from. I failed to share and contribute in the seminars, which were the keystones of their program; and cut music appreciation class altogether, which was a required course. My first experience with a drug presented itself when a female friend produced some benzedrine to stay awake for finals cramming. Needless to say, my final grades were not exactly up to desirable standards, and I was encouraged to seek some other field than academic pursuits.

Autonomy from parents is one of the developmental tasks of this life stage. Formal typewritten letters would arrive from my father which reinforced autonomy and they usually dealt with my irresponsibility regarding finances. He closed my checking account after I had several overdraft notes, and for that I am grateful because today I find myself fiscally responsible resulting from his curtailment of my line of credit.

Mandatory drafting was still in effect at this time; so, rather than being drafted into the Army, I decided to enlist in the two-year Naval Reserve Program. I rather enjoyed basic training which was conducted at (the now defunct) Bainbridge, Maryland Naval Training Headquarters. My tour of duty was Air and Sea Rescue at Cherry Point
Marine Corps Air Base in North Carolina. Assigned to the flagship of the five boat fleet, which was a sixty-three foot crash boat, my commission commenced. Duty was really quite boring and there were not any exciting places to go around there for liberty.

However, I was able to seek out some bars that were passable, frequenting them more than the average enlisted serviceman. I used to bend elbows with Corporal McCune, formerly Staff Sergeant McCune, the drill instructor who was court-martialed for marching the Marine recruits into the swamp at Parris Island.

Duty became so routine that we almost prayed for a plane crash to create some excitement. Those events happened from time to time, usually resulting from equipment failure, as the Marine pilots were relegated to flying second-hand Naval aircraft dispatched from Norfolk. One of the more exciting experiences occurred when a Navy blimp flying from Havana went down. The gondola was stashed with contraband items such as Cuban cigars and numerous liqueurs including Napoleon brandy.

I became a drinking buddy with a Chief Petty Officer by the name of Hockaday. One day the Chief and I took off in his car to the backwoods of North Carolina and procured
a stash of corn whiskey, better known as "white-lightning."
The Chief assured me, as we guzzled away, that you need
never fear of having a hangover from the stuff since it
is pure whiskey—no impurities. That very afternoon he
was arrested for driving under the influence, and the next
day I felt as though I was about to jump out of my skin.
This was the first of many subsequent fears arising from
overconsumption of alcohol.

I was due for discharge in August 1958 and had all
of the necessary signatures the eve before my departure.
The final signature to spring me had to be obtained the
morning of checking-out from the Headquarters Commandant.
Well, that very evening a dispatch from the Pentagon arrived
stating that no early discharges would be recognized due
to flare-ups in Beirut, Lebanon. I had one more month to
serve and my compatriots made sure that this "shorttimer"
got every dirty detail that there was to dish out. The
Marines were already packing up for combat in Lebanon and
we had two plane crashes. Sometimes you can be out on search
maneuvers for months with just one plane crash. Unfortunate-
ly, we found only one of the two aircraft and had to scuttle
the mission, but the good news was my discharge date was
at hand.
VI  Intimacy versus Isolation

Love is "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."¹ My negative identity, since no identity other than party guy had been formulated by my Navy experience, was thrust upon me heavily when I returned to civilian life. Intimacy with my parents seemed inappropriate, and this feeling was reinforced by their increased emotional distancing and alcoholism --my father's in particular. My isolation was further exacerbated when I moved away from home by renting an efficiency apartment in a sterile "brownstone."

My own alcoholism became more deeply rooted while experiencing a nihilistic attitude after completing one year of business school. In this state of mind, I jumped directly into the "choice phase"² for career decision making. The "exploration, crystallization, and clarification phases"² were bypassed and social convention, coupled with the circumstances of my life, dictated that a career was mandatory. My employment at Mellon National Bank and Trust Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was a natural choice since my father was a member of the board of directors. The process of being interviewed by the bank's personnel office
was greatly eased. Again, another paternal enabling act presented itself to steer my course and ensure at least temporary employment. After two years of what I considered productive although mostly uninspiring work in the Trust Department, my excessive drinking was detected by my boss. I was called onto the carpet in that very same Personnel Department, and, instead of being fired, because my Daddy was a director, I was transferred to the Commercial Department.

I had been working at the bank for four years and was enjoying the final week of my vacation in July of 1963, when trauma struck again. While visiting a girlfriend, whose parents had a summer home on a lake in Canada, a telephone call arrived from my sister announcing that my mother had committed suicide. She had carbon monoxided herself to death in the garage of our country home in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. I terminated my employment at the bank shortly after this episode because my drinking and attempting to drown my grief interfered with my employment.

Just about exactly six months later my father duplicated "the act" by blowing his brains out with a revolver in our newly built Southern home in Delray Beach, Florida. Father had grieved continually after mother's death,
evidenced by his having purchased a dozen black ties and wearing one every day for six months. He attempted to settle the affairs of the family estate, as best he could, and to put things in order prior to his final departure. Once again, I was thousands of miles away when the gory message was delivered by my sister. I had been seeking employment at a brand new ski resort known as Vail when everything came crashing down around me. The elicitation of testimony, in No Exit, returned this horror of death guilt to my attention. Garcin to Estelle: "You mean he blew his brains out? ....Nothing doing. Tears don't flow in this place."

Understanding was unconscionable and stuffed feelings of anger and fear were just barely staying down as I drove over the snowy mountain passes toward the Denver airport.

Both of my parents in quiet Socratic fashion made a decision that death was preferable to a certain kind of living. For my mother, despairing of living with a drunk for a husband became too unbearable, and for my father, despairing of living without a co-alcoholic wife offered no meaning for survival. Subsequently, I began experiencing the pangs of "Freudian narcissism" whereby loss leads to dangerously self-destructive impulses and is associated with fear of disintegration as well as with self-administered
annihilation.

What can best be described as the feeling that the rug had been pulled out from under my feet (feeling totally disoriented), I questioned my own existence. A thin thread of sanity must have remained in my psyche which steered me toward seeking help. I returned to Pittsburgh and admitted my helpless predicament to our family physician. Following his suggestion, I found myself in The Pennsylvania Institute of Philadelphia under the care of Dr. Joseph Hughes. This social conscious shrink diagnosed me as suffering from severe anxiety depression resulting from the loss of my parents. My alcoholism was never addressed; in fact, the denial was to such an extreme that he assured me that it would be a nice gesture to treat some of the off-duty nurses to cocktails on occasion. This incident occurred in 1963. When coincidentally sharing this story with a social friend sixteen years later I discovered that he also had been under Dr. Hughes' care shortly before my hospitalization and had been given the same assurance. It is amazing to me how far we have come in such a relatively short span of time with the recognition of the disease aspect of alcoholism. Doctors from the "old school" were required to devote exactly thirty minutes of study to this topic of "moral
affliction" during their entire medical school education.

After a few months in treatment I was released and allowed to travel overseas since my itinerary dovetailed with that of my Uncle Jamie's (and Aunt Julia's, who by now had become a totally reclusive closet alcoholic and who kept all of us in suspense because we never knew when the closet door would fly open). In reality, the only time we came in contact with one another was on the S.S. France en route from LeHavre to New York. Julia took full advantage of room service, never to be seen at mealtime, with Uncle Jamie assuring his daughter Susan and me that she was suffering from a bout of seasickness.

Shortly after my return from Europe in June of 1963, I met Sarah, my wife-to-be, during the rehearsal dinner prior to the wedding of our mutual friends, the Muses. We had a common link because she also had experienced the loss of her father at a very early age. He also had a problem with the bottle from time to time so we spoke the same language. Our marriage vows were exchanged on April 25, 1964, and it seemed my search for meaning had not been in vain.

Sarah was very pregnant in late '64 while we were vacationing in the Florida house, which at that time I jointly
owned with my sister, Florence. It was January 30, 1965, when Cynthia was born three months prematurely; her twin brother lived for only twenty-four hours. She was an adorable baby weighing just slightly over two pounds, and I remember how helpless I felt seeing this little bundle, with premature peach fuzz all over her body, laying in the incubator. We were correctly advised by the pediatrician that he would call every day advising us of Cynthia's weight; that she could go home when she reached five pounds. The Florida house was rented, as usual, commencing February 1st so we returned to Pittsburgh to set about preparing a room for Cynthia. A two-week duration of the doctor's punctually informing us of our daughter's condition elapsed, and then the exhilarating news arrived that she was getting close to the required weight for release. To this day I'm convinced that she was the tiniest traveller United Airlines ever handled.

One year later Sarah had a breeched stillborn male fetus which had to be extracted. Emily, nicknamed Lele, was born April 27, 1967, and was healthy right from birth. There was one last pregnancy which terminated with an aborted male fetus. This decision was advised by a consortium of doctors who were familiar with my wife's chronic high blood
pressure. Their feeling, based upon her previous childbirth experiences, was that there was a very probable chance of maternal death stemming from renal infection. This abortion resulted in Sarah having to undergo a tubal ligation, thus childbirth for us became history. Sarah and I are now divorced, but her contention that her failure to produce a son for me led to our growing apart is not accurate in my estimation. I am a very fortunate father, indeed, to presently have two lovely daughters attending the colleges of their choice.

When my daughters grew older there was a definite period of change in our marriage and the family. When the girls went away to school, the empty nest syndrome weighed heavily on Sarah. She could find no suitable identity after their departure, and this transition proved to be traumatic. It appeared that she viewed the loss of her mothering role as the loss of her only viable cultural role which left her bereft of self-value and experiencing acute depression. During this period, while I became increasingly discouraged by my own lethargy with regard to careerism, I sought to become more available and nurturant to Cynthia and Lele. I was extremely disappointed to find that this new affection was not sought after by either of my daughters since they
were bent on becoming independent. My own alienation from
the family increased just at the point when I went on the
wagon for sustained periods and wished to become more in-
volved in being a good father.

Intimacy and isolation were both prevalent during this
life stage which Erikson refers to as early adulthood encom-
passing the ages of 23 to 34. Outside of my daily drinking,
which Sarah couldn't tolerate, our marital relationship
was fused with intimacy, sexual trusting, and mutual sharing.
However, what I was totally unaware of during this period
was the fact that through practicing alcoholism, I was alien-
ating myself from my Creator. My spiritual growth had been
stunted and isolation, although unrealized at the time,
separated me from God. I was unable to create a stable
life structure during this period mainly because I chose
to take an early retirement at the age of 31. There was
suddenly plenty of time available to party and travel, and
for those pastimes, Sarah and I went at them with "gusto."

VII Generativity versus Stagnation

The commencement of this life stage cycle coincided
with the turning of a new decade, 1970. The major develop-
mental tasks, as the age of 30's transition come to a close,
are to build a second adult life structure and, within this framework, work toward the realization of one's youthful dreams. The task of terminating early adulthood involves a process of reviewing the past, considering how one's life has gone, as well as what the future will be like.

Subconsciously, this inventory process was occurring for me, and I felt that it would be desirable to live my remaining years in a different, more satisfying, way, but not knowing exactly how to achieve those ends. As our children grew up and started to leave home, our parental roles changed, and our self-definitions of husband and wife shifted as well. This introspective reappraisal and questioning involved a process of "de-illusioning" whereby I became aware that many of my adult expectations were based on illusions, rather than realistic assessment. The mid-life transition was a painful process since careerism had stagnated many years before, and I perceived myself only as an extension of my material possessions. Likewise, spirituality had been discarded along the way leaving an unclear definition of who I really was. My sense of individuation revealed a polarity with the rest of the world, and this conflict required some effort on my part to achieve some balance.
He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how. ¹

It became obvious that the major task for individuation to manifest in the second half of my life, I would have to come to grips with my obsession toward alcohol. My life and marriage were on the line, and a decision had to be made or I would end up in a padded cell somewhere.

On the advice of my psychiatrist I was taking Antabuse to abstain from consuming alcohol. This chemical has a non-reactive response until ethyl alcohol is ingested. If one were to experiment by drinking, the liver would react violently manifesting in nausea, shortness of breath, flushed face, and presenting the symptoms of an imminent heart attack. Self-destructively, I tested the validity of this prognosis by ingesting wine on one occasion and beer on another. My insanity at that time is conceptually hard to fathom today. After this experience I was successful, through self-control procedures, in abstaining from whiskey and any hard liquor for about six years. Meanwhile, my consumption of wine and beer had progressively increased with the accompaniment of a decrease in chemical tolerance. Being sick and tired of being sick and tired, I made a decision to attend meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. This moment of surrender became
a turning point in my life—the fulcrum for change and a second chance for renewed physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual growth.

I fulfilled the requirements for joining A.A. by admitting and accepting my powerlessness over alcohol. My attendance at meetings was fairly consistent, however it seemed like some foreign language or jargon was being communicated among those people. I did have two minor "slips" while attending meetings with the second one rendering me helpless. Suddenly the booze failed me as a form of escape medication because each drink exacerbated depression and reinforced feelings of guilt and remorse. Obviously by some form of osmosis the A.A. jargon had registered cognitively which resulted in my depressed state. Many friends in the program had suggested a residential alcoholic rehabilitation program of a form of recovery and some higher power was steering me in that direction in my veil of woe.

My "bottoming out" arrived while I was isolated in the Ligonier, Pennsylvania, country home (the same residence where my mother had committed suicide). In my quandry, I was equidistant between the kitchen telephone and a shot-gun resting in the gun case. Either alternative offered a way out from my self-imposed hell and fortunately I opted
for the former (again with the assistance from some higher source).

Two days later I admitted myself into a five-day detoxification and twenty-eight day rehabilitation program in Reading, Pennsylvania. The "Rehab" is known as Chit Chat Farms and was the vehicle for changing my whole raison d'etre. There was no fooling these people, they had heard every alcoholic con story that had been weaved. In this environment of experienced therapists to whom I turned over my trust, there was suddenly available some space for understanding my predicament. I had a disease, in common with all the other personnel on that campus, and I could arrest that disease one day at a time. The other sixty patients had the same doubts, fears, and worries and these could be shared in that safe harbor. I was able to separate the trees from the forest as long as I stayed detached from the familial dysfunction which I had inadvertently created. Slowly, I began to live my way into a new mode of thinking rather than thinking my way into a selfish mode of living.

While going through treatment we concentrated on the content of the A.A. program's nucleus—the twelve steps (see attachment A). Steps 1, 2, 3 and 9 reinforce our responsibilities; 4, 5, 8, 10 and 12 deal with dedication
to truth and devotion to restitution; and finally 6, 7 and
11 are concerned with the maintenance of balance. That
balance is contingent upon the spiritual maintenance of
our program on a daily basis.

Gradually, I was able to move from a space of fear,
doubt and resentments to one of courage, faith and love.
The catatonic paralysis of denial, blame, guilt and despair
shifted to active responsibilities of acceptance, forgive-
ness, courage and faith. No longer was I allowed to languish
in the role of victim and remain reactive to people, places
and things. It was now incumbent upon me to take action
and be accountable. I was no longer restricted by my inability
to choose, but responsible for my choices with the guidance
of a higher power. Today, it's okay to make mistakes and
be able to laugh at myself even though it still feels foreign
to me. Wearing the world like a loose garment is not an
easy task for me; but after all, I am still redefining my-
self through spiritual growth--one day at a time!

It was through forgiveness that I was able to make
amends with my parents as well as with my wife and daughters.
H. Richard Niebuhr, in The Responsible Self, states:
"...the past must not be forgotten but remembered, accepted,
and reinterpreted. What such analysis calls again to our
intention is related...to that understanding of themselves which Christians have had when they looked for newness of life not by way of forgetting the past but by the forgiveness of sin, the remembrance of their guilt, and the acceptance of their acceptance by those against whom they had offended."² Hannah Arendt reminds us that "The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth."³ For His miraculous gift, we should all be truly grateful.

Sarah and I went through a difficult two-year separation prior to divorce. The only winners in those negotiations seem to be the attorneys who leave the meter handle down as long as traffic will bear. Shortly after I moved to Washington, D.C., my lawyer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, informed me that the divorce decree had been granted; so another phase of my life had passed. Meanwhile my sister had just died of liver cancer at the age of 47. My entire family of origin had now passed away. My daughters remained in the custody of their mother who was now residing in Beverly Hills, California.

The two-year separation period was not only difficult for Sarah and me; it caused a great deal of suffering and confusion for my Cynthia and Lele, as well. Without regular
daily attendance at Lancaster A.A. meetings where I could share my feelings, my survival would have been at risk. I came close to risking my life while skiing in Aspen, Colorado, during this period when I met a young lady who was into cocaine. At a vulnerable time in my life, I decided to experiment with this new chemical and it almost proved to be my undoing. Just as they say for an alcoholic that one drink is too many and a thousand isn't enough, this was true for the "coke." If someone had covered a whole card table with the stuff, I could have asked for more. This instantaneous love affair with that drug bore witness to the fact that I was, in fact, "cross-addicted"--a denial of which I made to my therapists while in rehabilitation. I was again blessed by being able to get out from under the obsession of that mood-changing, mind-altering drug.

Shortly after arriving in Washington I started participating in the Lifespring trainings which deal with experiential processes to augment risk taking. Stagnation was no longer a part of this writer's life when venturing into that pursuit. While in the Leadership Program, which is a ninety-day process of cementing into place everything you have learned from previous trainings prior to that event, we were required to draft a letter of intent. My letter
of intention focused on ways in which I was determined to grow physically, emotionally and mentally. The latter developmental task took the form of risking going back to school as I had never completed my college education. This risk culminated with my acceptance into the Liberal Studies Program at Georgetown University. Further risking was experienced on a Colorado white water rafting trip with the Outward Bound team. My life abounds with risk today, and with that, I would like to conclude on the subject of risk with something from Living, Loving and Learning by Leo Buscaglia, Ph.D.

The person who risks nothing may avoid suffering and sorrow but he simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, live, or love. Chained by his certitudes or his addictions, he's a slave. He has forfeited his greatest trait, and that is his individual freedom. Only the person who risks is free.

The psychosocial conflict that needs to be resolved during this life stage is achieving a person/environment fit and creativity. I feel as though huge strides have been made in these areas, but there is still so much to be done. My fear of abandonment stymies my venturing into personal relationships, and my age will be a handicap as I seek to find meaningful employment during my twilight years.
However, there is no time now for stagnation as I find myself on an accelerated journey attempting to make up for a lot of downtime.

VIII Integrity versus Despair

[Today] I am still not all I should be, but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.¹

This life stage of later adulthood, from age 61 on, has yet to be experienced by this writer; however, the central process of introspection for resolving the psychosocial conflict occurring during these years is very much a part of my current ongoing process. The possessor of integrity finds himself ready to defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats. Erikson defines "ego integrity" as "a post-narcissistic love of the human -- not the self -- as an experience which conveys some world order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly paid for. Before this final solution, death loses its sting."²

The prospect of having grandchildren in the near future looms as great excitement. I believe that the job of grandparent is to reflect to their grandchildren the sequence of their involvements over the course of the life
cycle from nature to culture. Old and young are allies and playmates--free of the work culture and exemplars of ultimate thresholds, at the beginning and the end of existence. This has been applicable in many societies.

Trust (the first of our ego values) is here (Webster's Dictionary) defined as 'the assured reliance on another's integrity,' the last of our values. And it seems possible to further paraphrase the relation of adult integrity and infantile trust by saying that healthy children will not fear life if their parents have integrity enough not to fear death.\(^3\)

The aforementioned statement is applicable to the plight of grandfathers, as well, who may provide an important repository of the past. One whose life could be summed up and extracted to provide a model for the grandchild.

All persons feel some tension between integrity and despair, but those persons who have a greater sense of integrity than despair, while not minimizing the flaws and mistakes of their lives, achieve the final ego strength of wisdom. I have experienced enough despair throughout my life; and at this stage, I will not buy into that despair which expresses the feeling that the time is short, too short for the attempt to start another life or try out alternate roads to integrity.
As with other cross-era transitions, my late adult transition must reassess the life that I built during middle adulthood, a process which will include facing successes as well as failures, and assessing the degree to which dreams and aspirations were fulfilled during the previous era. This transition can also be a time when dreams are modified or new ones are formed and ceasing at a time when there is no further need for reappraisal. At this juncture, the time will arrive to form a foundation for late adulthood—the culmination of my search for personal meaning yet prior to senescence.

If the later years can be anticipated with eagerness for a new set of life experiences, then we are free at each earlier stage to experience our life in a more confident and accepting manner.⁴
Summary

A Zen story:

Two monks have been circling in the desert for a long time. Finally they sit down. Neither says a word. Sometime later, one speaks: "My brother is lost." The other is silent. After a long meditation, he says: "No, I am not lost. I am here. The Way is lost."1

I was lost in an enabling world of suffering whereby my withholding and despair were inflicted on everybody around me. I had become alienated from the world by my alcoholism—trapped in a hermetically-sealed existential vacuum. Hatred and distrust of society were by-products of my low self-esteem; and yet in my selfish world, control over my environs was all important. With my resentful and stubborn attitude I couldn't find my way out of the desert, and few understood my dilemma.

A false solitude is a point of vantage from which an individual who has been denied the right to become a person takes revenge on society by turning his individuality into a destructive weapon.2

True solitude is found in humility which was withheld from me and only channeled when the despair became unmanageable. From the bottom of that sickness until death I could humbly admit that I was powerless; and with that acceptance, the world of reality was revealed. So many years had been lived
from the standpoint of victim because I did not know that I had choices. With my distorted sense of responsibility I had become a reactor rather than actor, letting others take the initiative. I was a dependent personality who was terrified of impending abandonment.

Having witnessed abandonment and death in an inappropriate form, my most basic commitments and images concerning life's reliability and significance had been threatened. While suffering through this survival guilt it was essential to maintain accountability to the deceased and thereby to accept, in some degree, my own vitality; and, above all, to be able to connect my anxiety and responsibility to larger principles and meanings. Frankl's rendition of the meaning of suffering is to find meaning through change in our own attitudes.

We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement.3

The suicide survivor experiences along with survivor guilt, anger, rage, violence, chronic mourning, bewilderment, self-directed anger, and the necessity for the event being
a forbidden topic of discussion. Robert Jay Lifton accurately describes the form of suffering I experienced prior to my admission into the Philadelphia Institute:

Numbing and overall constriction in depression are so predominant that, among psychic disorders, it comes closest to organismic imitation of death, to what we might call a "mimetic death." This could be characterized by the "walking corpses" (Musselmänner) of the Nazi death camps.4

From this vulnerable juxtaposition, I became more conscious of my own death and what Jung refers to as "mythichygienic awareness"—"the primordial (mythical) persistence of symbolism of life after death."5 When sobriety finally manifested, I was greeted by a form of mid-life crisis. This crisis was characterized by my struggle intensifying doubts regarding validity of immortalizing projects while leaving me with the feeling that, whatever my difficulties and doubts, it was essential to make up for lost time. Today, this subconscious drive, that it is now or never, persists. Suffering will continue, but not the type of isolated suffering which constitutes absence of meaning.

The program of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) abounds with paradoxical situations. The notion of surrendering in order to conquer or win may seem disclamatory to some, but it is the foundation for our spiritual growth. This was gifted
to me by a higher power, whom I choose to call God, through no effort on my part. The only contribution which I put forth was the agonizing years of suffering which gives credence to that well-worn cliche, "no pain, no gain."

My mother and wife were comparably burdened by a sense of shame at not having been able to give birth to a healthy infant and/or guilt at having failed to care successfully for one who died. Lack of affectional bonding toward the remaining family members resulted from the inability to surrender and accept offspring losses. If anger had been allowed to erupt during "the phase of disbelief and attempts to reverse outcome"\(^6\) instead of turning away from the painful news, appropriate acceptance and healthy mourning would have dispelled blame and guilt, plus affectional bonding would have remained intact.

It is now generally agreed amongst psychiatrists that, if mourning is to lead to a more rather than less favourable outcome, it is necessary for a bereaved person--sooner or later--to express his feelings. "Give sorrow words," wrote Shakespeare, "the grief that does not speak knits up the o'erwrought heart and bids it break."\(^7\)

Conscious avoidance of feelings for fear of being overcome or going insane is no longer acceptable. Today there are many outlets and safe harbors for sharing, and thus
surrendering, stuffed emotional trauma.

Viktor Frankl shares his version of surrender through the process of logotherapy, in *Man's Search for Meaning*, thusly:

...pressure precipitates counterpressure. Again the symptom is reinforced! On the other hand, as soon as the patient stops fighting his obsessions and instead tries to ridicule them by dealing with them in an ironical way--by applying paradoxical intention--the vicious circle is cut, the symptom diminishes and finally atrophies.  

This confessional form of release from existential frustrations is the formulation of an A.A. meeting. Rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts, these meetings contribute to the individual's concern in fulfilling a meaning. Frankl implies:

> What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task.  

The task for all of us in A.A. is to not only sever the umbilical of chemical dependence but to grow along spiritual lines. Recovery is only attainable if we have the capacity to be honest and are ready to take certain steps (see Attachment A). In an honest, open, and willing manner we relinquish our strangle hold on self-will by turning it over to the God of our understanding, and only then can
spiritual growth manifest for the recovering addict.

Nihilism, which contends that everything is meaningless, no longer holds a place in my life. Neither does the form of existential freedom arising from the irreducible uniqueness of an ethical or religious situation— that same freedom which is founded on isolation and subjective experiences of individual anxiety, guilt, dread or anguish. Instead, my means of survival rest more on what I refer to as antithetic existentialism because without connecting with other people I am bereft of spiritual life. This newfound spiritual freedom has become the mainstay of my existence and has provided self-humility so that I may give to others. This entails some risk but the rewards almost always outweigh the shortcomings. But while extending myself to others in this second life, I attempt to remain forever teachable, even chancing chastigation in the process. Returning to unfinished business demanded high hurdles to be scaled with commitments to be risked. My decision to return to college was fraught with fear, but I found that I was well accepted within the community, and this acceptance demanded results stemming from my participation.

Currently, I have found results orientation a fleeting commodity experienced by my problematical approach to
completion of this final thesis project. It seems that time would have been better spent praying for guidance toward solutions and end results rather than leaning on my Creator questioning the source of the problems. This same approach for directed guidance has become increasingly obvious regarding my commencement from the Georgetown University Liberal Studies Program. Where does one go from here? Perhaps, just as the connotation of the word commencement implies, it would be more practical if focus were drawn toward the revelation that for every ending there is a new beginning. Indeed, the machinery must be continually oiled, or some form of rust prevention applied, so that generativity is maintained. Stagnation manifests few rewards unless one is into masochism. Having experienced the pain of coming out from extended hibernation, I do not choose to return, during my twilight years, to that form of existential hell. My survival continues to be contingent upon the maintenance of daily spiritual growth, and for this I am truly grateful.
Attachment A

Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1--We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.

2--Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3--Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

4--Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5--Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6--Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7--Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8--Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9--Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10--Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11--Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12--Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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Endnotes

INTRODUCTION


I TRUST VERSUS MISTRUST


2 Ibid., 100.


II AUTONOMY VERSUS SHAME, DOUBT


III INITIATIVE VERSUS GUILT

IV INDUSTRY VERSUS INFERIORITY


V IDENTITIY VERSUS ROLE DIFFUSION


4 Ibid., 309.


VI INTIMACY VERSUS ISOLATION


VII GENERATIVITY VERSUS STAGNATION


VIII INTEGRITY VERSUS DESPAIR

1 TLB Philippians 3:13, quoted in Liane Cordes, The Reflecting Pond (Center City, Mn.: Hazelden Education Materials, 1981), 27.


3 Ibid., 233.

SUMMARY

1 Peter Cleck, America's Quest for the Ideal Self (New York; Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1983), 236.


5 Ibid., 87.


9 Ibid., 127.

ATTACHMENT A

Bibliography


