

PAMPHLET 41

OURAY

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@2000

I knew I was in trouble. I had no idea why. I was a young special agent in the United States Secret Service. I was stationed in Chicago, Illinois, and I was assigned to the counterfeit squad. I spent my time investigating major counterfeit cases and traveling to other cities to protect the president, vice president, and other dignitaries. I was told I was good at what I did and had a bright future. Others respected and admired this exciting and glamorous life. Things are often not what they appear to be.

Life within me was different. I felt afraid, anxious, guilty, and angry. The burden of inauthenticity was heavy. I went to a doctor. He prescribed Valium--a quick fix. I thought a change in job and location would help me feel better--more quick fixes. I quit my job and moved my wife and two young daughters back to our hometown. I was running away from myself, and I took myself with me. I would soon learn that there are no quick-fixes or shortcuts to learning how to live (or lead).

The next two years were spent in the abyss of alcoholism--still unrecognized by everyone around me. If there is a hell on earth, I was there. I started drinking seven years before, and I was now a lost soul. I felt life ebbing from me. I asked my father for help. He probably saved my life. At that very time he was learning about alcoholism and saw the symptoms in me. The next day I was in an alcohol treatment center where I spent the next 30 days. That month was the most painful and frightening of my life. I was lost, and the first weeks of finding myself were terrifying.

On the second night, I sat alone in my hospital room and read a book about alcoholism. The reality of my life exploded before me as I saw the truth of what I had done to my life. I cried silently. I took responsibility for my life that night almost 27 years ago. I had a second chance at life. My intentional spiritual journey began.

The first two years after treatment were more difficult than the lost years before treatment. I worked to put my life together again. I felt humiliated and then humbled by working near minimum wage security jobs and delivering newspapers for a living. I was unemployed for a time and rejected for jobs many times. I was ready to give up when a man named Jerry Kane gave me an entry level job at a large Midwestern newspaper. Jerry, a caring and compassionate man, gave many people second chances at a career.

The newspaper circulation department was a culture shock. After two weeks I was ready to quit. But I had three small children and a life to put back together. I had to stay. I vowed to myself that I would live by my values and would do all I could to change an afflicted organization.

Eighteen years and nine promotions later, I was at the peak of my career in the newspaper industry. I never did go against my values despite ongoing pressure to do so. I did all I could to change the organization to be a more decent, honest, and productive place to work.

I led an industry leading change in a 4,500 employee business unit from 1990-94. Our success was more than a few senior executives could handle. I was threatened, scapegoated, and marginalized. The only healthy choice was to leave. No longer seeking quick fixes, I spent two years working on my personal vision, values, and purpose statement--a process I would follow in all major life changes in the future. When I left the corporate CEO said I had changed the company forever.

In 1994, at age 47, I began living a new vision for my life. I traveled to Africa for wildlife photography. I returned to the academic world and, at age 50, completed a Ph.D. in leadership and organizational change. I began to write. I hadn't written anything in 30 years, had never used a computer, and didn't know "its" from "it's." I hired a coach and went through the humiliations of the novice (and still do).

I began to consult with organizations. I've met wonderful people and more than a few who want to change the workplace. I feel proud of the authentic and courageous leaders I have worked with. But I feel frustrated with how slow real change occurs. I am disappointed in the quick-fix mentality of our world and the

reluctance of so many people with power to look in the mirror to see how they impact others. I feel a sense of urgency. I do not want to spend my life reading and talking about a new worldview. I want to live it while I am alive. Slowly I began to feel again old stirrings for something new.

In March of 1989 I was driving the “Million Dollar Highway” north of Durango in southwest Colorado. I rounded a mountain curve and found a small piece of western history nestled in the 14,000-foot peaks of the spectacular San Juan Mountains. At an elevation of 7706 feet, Ouray has no McDonalds or Burger King. Only the main street is paved. Summers are busy with tourists who come to enjoy the beauty and explore the mountains in jeeps on old mining roads. Ouray rests in the winter. This little town captured my heart.

I returned to Ouray many times in the next 10 years--to explore, to photograph, and to sit in the natural hot springs pool. For all of those years a part of me wanted to move to Ouray to write, to photograph, and to live a more natural and ordinary life.

My wife and I were married and had our first child at age 19. We worked hard, survived alcoholism, and raised our three children together. We lived decent and responsible lives that diverged more and more. Divorced after 35 years of marriage, we are transforming our relationship. The call to Ouray grew stronger.

My mother, a gracious and loving woman, died a difficult death seven months ago, and, as I grieved her loss, the lure of Ouray became real. I felt excited and ideas flowed as to what I might do and how I would do it. Then I realized what I would be leaving: my 86 year old father whose wife of 63 years had just died, my daughter, son-in-law, and three beautiful grandsons, my sister who is my trusted confidant, many friends and colleagues, and my consulting clients. Not a wealthy man, I began to feel great anxiety about ending up old, alone, and penniless. I did not trust life.

Imagining life in Ouray would not be enough. I had to visit and feel its lure. I had to pause and weigh the decision. My best friend and business colleague, Diane Olson, supported my emerging vision. She got sick just before my trip to Ouray (see Pamphlet 40). She wanted to travel with me but was too ill to go. She died unexpectedly the day after I left for Ouray.

At the time of her funeral a friend and I held our own service for her in the wooded Colorado Mountains. The day was beautiful--warm and sunny. The mountaintops had fresh snow on them. The aspen leaves were golden and symbolized a change of seasons. I sat on a fallen tree next to a rushing brook and talked to Diane. My friend played the violin next to a fire as the birds sang, and the wind blew through the trees--a natural choir. I felt guilty for being away when Diane passed. But I know she liked our saying goodbye in the natural world she loved.

My inner world was in chaos during my visit to Ouray. My soul and my mind battled over the decision. Inner freedom and a variety of possibilities distinguish us from machines. Possibilities also gave me great anxiety--without which there is no freedom. My soul said, "This is a no-brainer, move to Ouray." My rational mind said, "This is a no-brainer, stay where you have work, people you know, and routines you are familiar with." At mid-week I shook my fist at God and demanded and then asked for more information to help me choose.

Order began to emerge the next day. Through a series of serendipitous events I found, on my last night in town, the perfect place for me to live: a large loft--secluded yet only minutes from Ouray. My wall of windows greets the sunrise and opens in all directions to grand mountains, valleys, and ranch vistas.

I processed the changes before me on the drive home from Colorado. I knew I had to live in this spiritual community of seven hundred people before commercialism ruins another of nature's gifts. My vision was now real, and I put my anxieties behind me. I felt deep sorrow for leaving people close to me. I also felt that this change in my life transcended even my closest relationships. This change takes me to deeper levels of personal authenticity.

I went to talk to my dad. I love him dearly. Since my mother passed away, we are the closest we have ever been. He is a charming man of 86 years old. Confined to a wheel chair, his mind is sharp and his memory stunning. I told him that I feared he would feel abandoned if I left, and I wanted him to know that I love him and that he is very important to me. His reaction was instantaneous. "Go" he commanded. "You picked a great place. You need to live your own life as I have. Call me once a week." We are now even closer to one another.

I had a similar conversation with my daughter who lives nearby.

She and I began a new relationship after my divorce, and we feel good about our emerging friendship. She said, "I know you love us, and we love you. I admire what you are doing. Go." Two other children live in far-away communities. They are also supportive. I am committed to grow these relationships even as we are separated physically.

Death has cast its shadow over me the past many months. The awareness of death sharpens my focus and my desire to live fully and passionately. If not now, when? I leave for Ouray the day after Christmas. I will drive a jeep and pull a trailer west. From Ouray I will go off-road and explore and photograph the beauty of the American West. I will consult with those who want true and sustainable change. I will write, and I will make new friends even as I maintain my friendships in Minneapolis and those made around the world through my pamphlets.

All else will emerge from this vision. I've surrendered (again) to the truth that I cannot control outcomes. I go forward with no preconditions for life. There can be no failure--only experiences and lessons learned. I feel humble, scared, excited, and open to anything that comes my way. I will pay attention and am confident in my ability to find my way along the unknown road before me. I do not know for sure if I am doing God's will for me but that is my intent. I will strive daily to live a life of adventures, and to share my experiences and learnings with others. I hope each of you will journey to your "Ouray."

Already I feel new and deep stirrings that may demand expression when the time is right. I feel connections that may grow stronger and deeper. I do not know where the stirrings and connections will take me, but I will listen to them and heed their call because I believe, to the depths of my soul, that the greatest legacy I can leave my children is to live an authentic life.

RECOMMENDED BOOK: "I WILL NOT DIE AN UNLIVED LIFE"
by Dawna Markova (www.ptpinc.org)