

PAMPHLET 72

THE MOMENT OF MY LIFE

By

Tom Heuerman, Ph.D.

@September 2003

I see trees of green, red roses too
I see them bloom for me and you
And I think to myself what a wonderful world.

Louis Armstrong

August 16, 2003

I've waited forever....

I stood proudly and watched her walk down the aisle on the arm of her son. She was beautiful. My heart filled with tears of happiness, and I smiled. Melanie and I would commit our lives to one another in just moments.

I waited on the deck in front of the small chapel. My son and my two brothers and Melanie's best friend and two daughters were with me. My friend, the Reverend Doctor Steven Streed, stood next to me. The sky was blue and the temperature was 92 degrees in Kragnes, Minnesota. A gentle breeze blew through the trees. I looked at the 150 family and friends and saw my dad with tears in his eyes—Melanie's mom too. I watched as Melanie and Matt came down the aisle toward us. I thought how my life had changed over the past few years. My journey to this juncture had been arduous and its fulfillment was moments away.

I had divorced three and one-half years earlier. The decision was difficult to make at age 54 after a 35-year marriage, and I thought long and hard about the choice. I would divorce with no guarantee that I would ever find the kind of relationship I yearned for. I saw the possibilities for joy and for despair; I was not naive.

I felt filled with excitement and with anxiety as I ventured out onto my own. I was determined to make a good transition. I wanted to marry again, but also wanted to take the time to make a good transition and to learn more about myself. I was excited about new possibilities.

At the same time I felt sad and anxious about the losses in my life and the unknowns: What would happen to me? What if I had a heart attack in a month? Who would help me? Would I lose the love of my children? Was I crazy to give up financial security? Would I ever find the right person to be my partner in life? I

feared ending up old and alone. My mother died shortly after my separation and my mentor, best friend, and colleague, Diane Olson, died unexpectedly a few months later. The loss of my mentor meant I would face the unknown alone. I was ready.

I moved to Colorado where I spent 14 months in the San Juan Mountains. I went to the mountains to fulfill a long-time dream, to find a natural and spiritual place to grieve, and to spend time in the wilderness of my life where I could pause and reflect, ponder, and imagine.

For a time my heart felt filled with death: the deaths of people, the death of dreams, and the death of relationships, identities, and life patterns. I grew anxious about my own death. I feared death would rob me of the realization of my journey's completion. Such awareness of death forced me to confront my choices, my freedom, and my innermost fears—not always a pleasant chore. In the mountains I died to a new life. Love and death are interwoven. My deeper awareness of death would soon help me love more passionately.

The time of solitude in the mountains, away from conformity and on the edges of the systems of my life, brought forth new perspective and new possibilities for my life. I watched the evil of September 11, 2001, suffered the losses of stock market declines, and witnessed corporate corruption exposed. My commitment to my idealism grew stronger in the face of the noble heroism of 9/11, financial uncertainty, and the false leaders of Enron and others. This taking of time sowed the seeds of my next adventure. Renewed in the mountains, I moved to humble and alive Fargo, North Dakota.

This instant of commitment between Melanie and I was the most significant moment of the rest of my life. For me the ceremony represented so much more than the important ritual and celebration of marriage. This singular moment represented the culmination of an adult lifetime of disillusionments followed by new hope, endings followed by new beginnings, despair followed by deeper authenticity, and confusion followed by illumination. The more recent segment of this almost 30 year journey began 10 years ago with a major career change and concludes with the found love and intimacy sought for a lifetime. Our journeys often take us to unexpected places.

Spiritual journeys are not taken by the faint of heart. Personal freedom takes us down roads not traveled before. We cannot know ahead of time how our choices will turn out; we can only influence the larger forces of life—we cannot control them. Anyone who says they possess unquestioning faith and a clear path deceives themselves from the anxiety of choice and the vulnerability of authentic risk.

I chose my personal and professional journey intentionally as an act of authenticity and as an act of spiritual exploration. I found my quest to often be

lonely, painful, and anxious filled with doubt, vulnerability, and uncertainty as to the rightness of the path. At times I wondered if I had taken on more than I could handle, which is the only way to find out how much I can handle. I also found my odyssey to be filled with the excitement and aliveness that only courageous action can provide me. Beneath the anxieties I always felt a strong confidence. The challenge is to stay the course despite anxiety and uncertainty. I am glad I did not “settle.”

As Melanie came down the aisle toward me I thought “how I love her,” and I felt grateful. For Melanie has the greatest soul I have known. I was astounded when I first got to know her. She has wounds, she has imperfections, she is spontaneous, and she rings true. Her naturalness captures what I try to articulate when I talk and write about “A More Natural Way.” I soon said to Melanie, “You personify all I am trying to become (for about 30 years). You are not even aware of your perfect humanness.”

Her humble origins served her well: she grew up in a family of ten children. She began picking weeds in the bean fields at about 8 years of age. At ten she hauled garbage. As a teenager she worked as a waitress and then as a maid in several motels. Then she worked as an operator for the telephone company. Today she is a great executive.

A few weeks ago she began a new job. The leader of the organization interviewed her and before she returned to her office he called and asked her to come back. He offered her the job that day and could not believe he had found her. She does what great managers and leaders do: she creates conditions that allow the best in others to emerge and she leads them to outstanding business results.

Melanie joined me on the deck of the chapel. The service was simple: two songs, two spiritual readings, a brief sermon, and prayers. Melanie and I faced one another and made the vows we wrote together. We committed our lives to our relationship and to one another. Soon the service ended; Pastor Streed introduced us as “Mr. and Mrs. Tom Heuerman.” The church bell rang and Louis Armstrong’s voice moved us.

I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself what a wonderful world.

The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do
They’re really saying I love you.

We walked down the aisle and I saw Melanie's bright and talented children. I again live with teenagers and am happy for it. I saw my own beloved daughters and son and my innocent grandchildren. Melanie and I love and are proud of all in our family.

I hear babies crying. I watch them grow
They'll learn much more than I'll ever know
And I think to myself what a wonderful world
Yes I think to myself what a wonderful world.

I never thought such goodness would happen in my life. I am grateful to find love and intimacy at this stage of my life when it would have been so easy to accept less. Melanie and I will live a soulful life.

Melanie and I reveal our being with one another and feel enriched. We confide our hopes, fears, anxieties, and aspirations with one another. We sacrifice for the whole of our relationship. I am loved for who I am by the woman I love. This love heals and nurtures me. I found the intimacy I sought. I walked out of the wilderness of my life (a necessary place to spend time) and the moment of our marriage captured the inner work of a lifetime. What a wonderful world.